

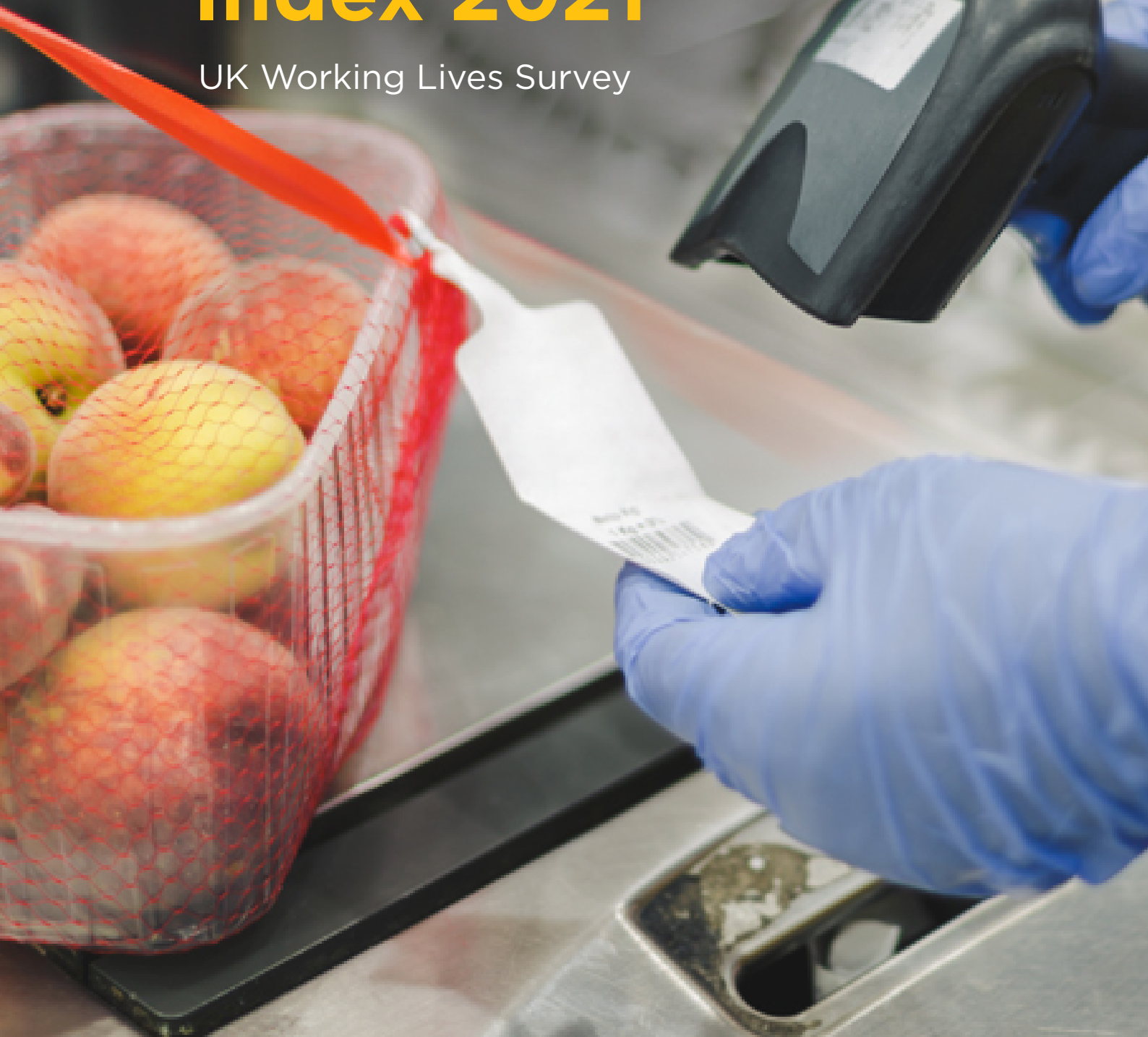
# CIPD

Championing better  
work and working lives

RESEARCH REPORT | *June 2021*

# CIPD Good Work Index 2021

UK Working Lives Survey



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

## Research report

# CIPD Good Work Index 2021

## Contents

Introduction	2
Furloughing, job security and employment contracts	5
Working from home and work-life balance	7
Health and wellbeing	10
Job design and the nature of work	12
Workplace relationships	15
Employee voice	16
Conclusion	18

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# 1 Introduction

## COVID-19 and the changing world of work

The COVID-19 pandemic left little untouched in 2020: it has led to disruption on an unprecedented scale in many aspects of society, the economy and workplaces. While the impact of the pandemic looks different across industries and sectors, all organisations have experienced challenges, change and uncertainty.

Alongside school closures, social restrictions, illness, and difficult personal circumstances, we've all had to adjust to working differently too. For some workers, 2020 meant taking part in the largest ever move to homeworking, while key workers continued to attend their usual places of work to keep essential services running. Some were furloughed for large portions of the year or faced job loss. All of our working lives have been impacted in different ways.

This report explores the findings from the *CIPD Good Work Index 2021*, our annual benchmark of good work in the UK, to understand how our working lives, and job quality, have changed in the past year (see Box 1 for more details on the survey methodology). We also provide recommendations and reflections for employers on how to take action to improve job quality now and in the future as we continue to navigate the changes brought about by the pandemic.

## Importance of good work in times of crisis

The CIPD's purpose is to champion better work and working lives. Work can and should be a force for good. It's not just about more jobs; it's also about better jobs and making sure that work is good for everyone. Our view is that good work:

- is fairly rewarded
- gives people the means to securely make a living
- gives opportunities to develop skills and a career, and ideally a sense of fulfilment
- provides a supportive environment with constructive relationships
- allows for work–life balance
- is physically and mentally healthy
- gives employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives
- should be accessible to all
- is affected by a range of factors, including HR practices, the quality of people management and by workers themselves.

Taking action to make this a reality, through better-quality people management practices, is vital for a fair society, and also for productive, healthy work. The CIPD's [viewpoint on job quality](#) details our perspective and includes our calls to government and employers, as raised in our discussion paper, *The Road to Good Work*.

Understandably, much of the focus this year has been on limiting job loss, most notably through the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), also known as the furlough scheme. Although the scheme may have saved millions of jobs, job quality remained a challenge for many – with poor wellbeing and stress, lack of development, high workloads and lack of work–life balance being just some of the issues at play. In fact, this year's data highlights that existing inequalities in job quality have remained, while remote working and furlough have introduced new challenges and complexity. Therefore it's so important that government and employers ensure that good work and job quality are a reality. As organisations plan for the future, they need to consider job quality across their workforce. A strong recovery is not just about more jobs; it's about better jobs.

### Box 1: Background to the *CIPD Good Work Index*

Since 2018, the CIPD has published the *Good Work Index*, our annual benchmark of job quality in the UK. It consists of a detailed set of measures on seven core dimensions of good work:

- pay and benefits
- employment contracts
- work–life balance
- job design and the nature of work
- relationships at work
- employee voice
- health and wellbeing.

The *CIPD Good Work Index* shows differences across occupations, industries and groups of people, and trends over time. The data comes from the CIPD/YouGov *UK Working Lives* survey, which draws on a nationally representative sample of UK workers, and is available for further academic research. This year's survey of 6,000 workers was carried out by between January and February 2021.

For more about the development of the survey and the calculations behind the *CIPD Good Work Index*, see:

- the [CIPD Good Work Index 2021 survey report](#) and accompanying appendices of [data tables](#) and [methods](#), which report on each of the seven dimensions of job quality in detail
- our archive of [CIPD Good Work Index](#) reports since 2018, which include data from previous years and details on how the survey was developed (please note, as the report was formerly know as *UK Working Lives*, the 2018 and 2019 report titles reflect this).

### Good work isn't evenly distributed across the workforce

Our data, collected in January 2021 – almost a year on from the onset of the pandemic – paints a nuanced picture. We haven't seen a dramatic transformation in our job quality indices across the board. Rather, specific aspects of good work – like work–life balance or job security – have shifted for some, depending on the type of role they do or occupation they are in. In particular, we look at the experiences of furloughed workers, those working from home, and key workers, as these groups have experienced different challenges in the past year.

**Figure 1: Distribution of furlough and remote working across occupational class (%)**

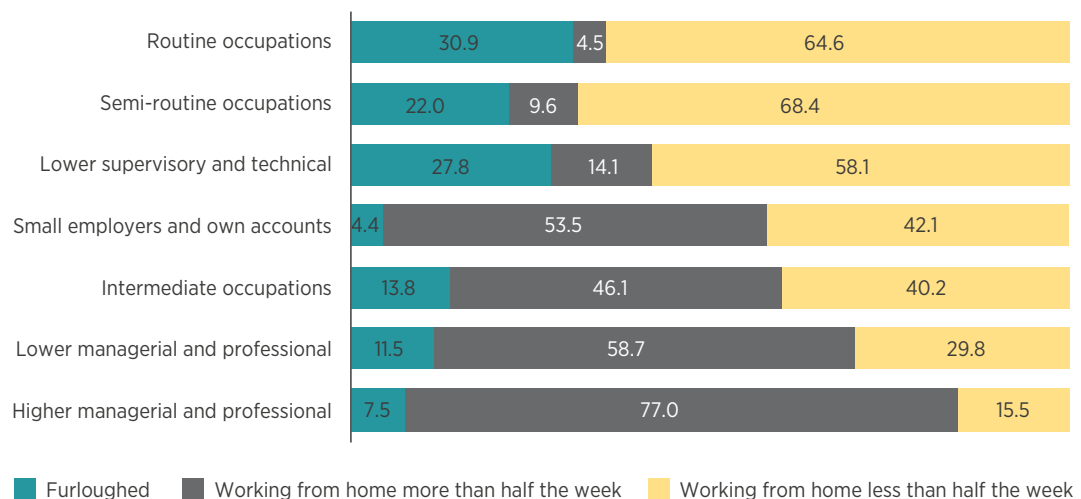


Figure 1 shows the distribution of remote working and furlough across different occupational groups. Respondents in routine, semi-routine and lower supervisory and technical roles were most likely to be furloughed. Managerial and professional occupations were most likely to be working from home more than half the time.

We already know from our previous *Good Work Index* reports that occupation also influences access to good work, with higher managerial and professional roles often having higher job quality – this is still the case in 2021. It's therefore important that we pay attention to these existing inequalities, as well as the new complexities the past 12 months have brought, to avoid exacerbating the disparity between occupational groups.

We find that some of the disparities in job quality this year are still best explained by occupational differences, but there are some key findings of note where remote working, furlough or key worker status influences job quality outcomes; we give a high-level overview of these in the following paragraphs. Namely, key workers fare badly in many aspects of job quality. While this is a broad group – 42% of our respondents said they were a key worker in line with the government definition<sup>1</sup> – it's concerning that many roles critical to our society, and that have kept us going through the pandemic, experience worse job quality.

On the whole, those working remotely score more highly on several aspects of job quality, such as autonomy, workplace relationships and flexible working arrangements. But, remote workers suffer a trade-off with higher workloads and more blurring between work and personal commitments. With remote and hybrid working likely to become commonplace for some organisations and job roles in the future, there are important lessons to learn about changes to job quality for those working remotely.

Furloughed workers have particular concerns about job security, and the past year appears to have negatively influenced their voice and workplace relationships, meaning organisations need to think carefully about reintegrating previously furloughed staff back into the workforce.

### **A calm before the storm?**

Despite the massive impact of COVID-19 on our working lives, on the whole, we find that for those who have remained in work, job quality has remained steady thus far through the pandemic; we haven't seen large-scale transformation for all workers. On the face of it, this may be surprising, but there are several potential explanations for this:

- We are seeing a 'calm before the storm', with many people kept in work and sectors supported by the CJRS. Organisations will continue to adapt and change their business models in the coming months; changes in job quality may not yet have come to bear.
- Despite the changes to where people have worked, the underlying design of jobs has remained similar, therefore it's unlikely that we should expect a shift.
- Some organisations were already investing in job quality and people management practices before the pandemic or during the pandemic, which has protected against some of the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

It should also be noted that the *Good Work Index* covers those currently working. In a year of economic difficulty and job loss, those still in work are likely to be faring better than

<sup>1</sup> Respondents selected whether they were a key worker according to the UK government definition: 'a job role is essential and critical to the COVID-19 response and falls under one of the categories listed by the government. This includes health and social care, education and childcare, key public services, local and national government, food and other necessary goods, public safety and national security, transport and utilities, communication and financial services.'

those who have experienced redundancy and may be aware of this when thinking about their own perceptions of work. For example, [research shows](#)<sup>2</sup> that being in employment during the pandemic, even for fewer hours than usual, is linked to better wellbeing outcomes, so the relatively unchanged wellbeing scores in this year's report don't tell the whole story of wellbeing in the UK.

In this report, we share the key findings from the 2021 survey and explore what job quality looks like for different groups of workers in the wake of the pandemic. We focus on job security, work-life balance, wellbeing, job design, workplace relationships and employee voice, areas where we have seen some shifts in the past year. We reflect on what this means for planning for the post-pandemic workplace and make recommendations for employers and people professionals.

### Explanation of terms used in this report

We refer to mean scores and percentages in this report. When we report mean scores (a figure expressed as 0.x), this refers to the mean average response a participant has given across a range of survey questions. The mean score ranges from 0 to 1, and a higher score tends to relate to more positive responses.

We also refer to occupation throughout this report, which can be measured in a number of ways. We use National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) here.

## 2 Furloughing, job security and employment contracts

Contract type is never long out of the headlines, in particular the minority of workers who are in the 'gig economy' and those on zero-hours contracts. But job security can be a pressing issue for all workers, including the vast majority who are on permanent contracts. The recession over the last year has unquestionably put this issue front and centre. Furloughing through the CJRS has been an *en masse* intervention, extended several times since March 2020, in a fight to protect employment from the largest contraction in the UK economy since 1709.

This shake-up of the labour market is evident in [government statistics](#). A total of 11.5 million jobs have been supported by the CJRS since its inception, meaning many workers have been in employment but not working for large periods of the last year. At the time of this survey in January 2021, 14% of respondents were furloughed. Furloughed workers are concentrated in hospitality, arts, entertainment and recreation, and charities, industries hit hardest by the pandemic.

Despite the protection offered by the CJRS, job security is a real concern for furloughed workers: 34% thought it was likely they'd lose their job in the next 12 months, compared with 13% of non-furloughed workers (a comparable figure to perceived job security, across all respondents, prior to the pandemic).

We can also see differences in actual job losses – according to job type. Figure 2 shows government figures on the numbers of jobs according to occupational class, alongside the numbers of unemployed. It shows that the longstanding rise in managerial and professional

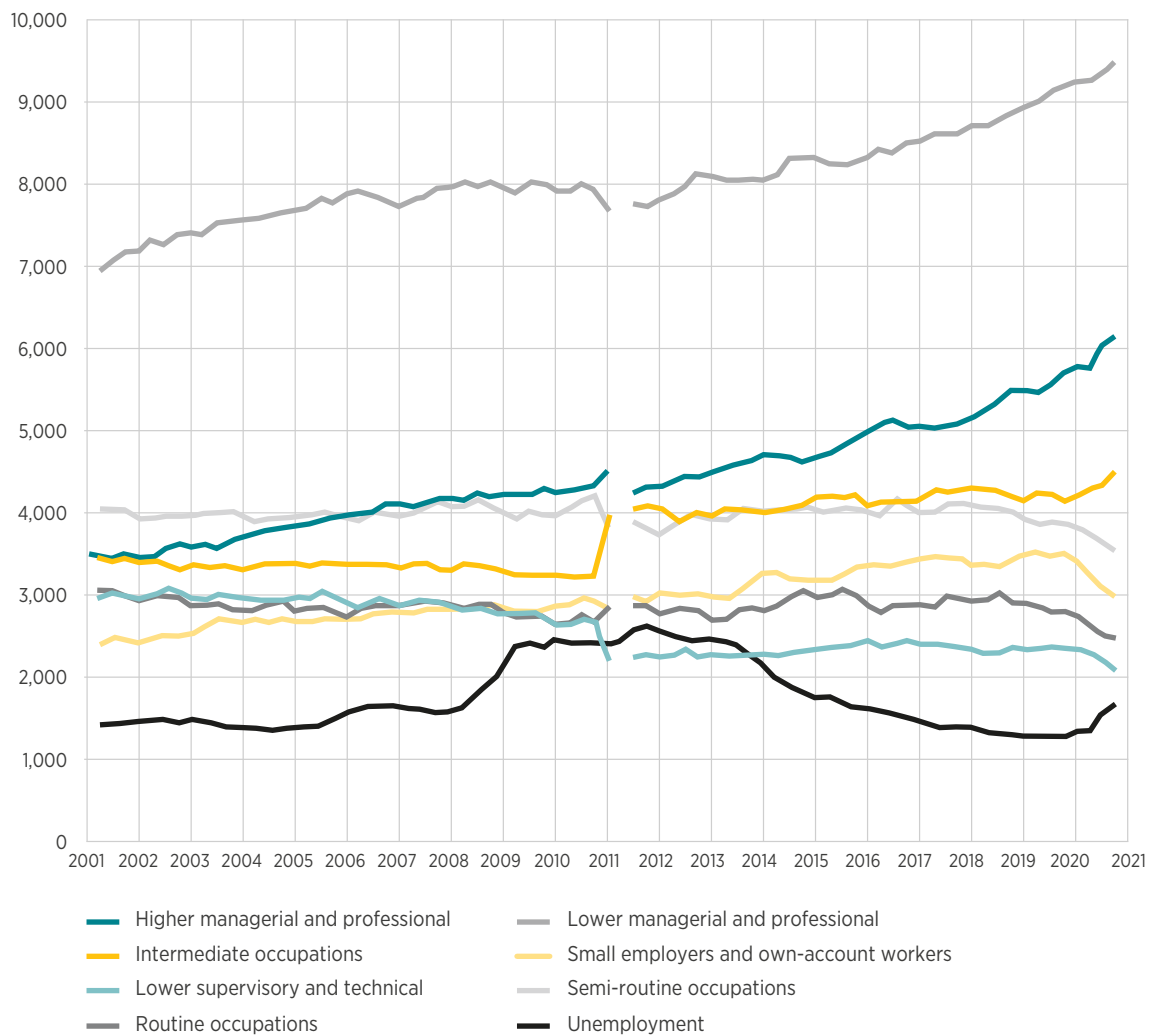
<sup>2</sup> Burchell, B., Wang, S., Kameråde, D., Bessa, I. and Rubery, J. (2020) *Cut hours, not people: no work, furlough, short hours and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK*. Colchester: Understanding Society – The UK Household Longitudinal Study.



roles continued last year, whereas routine jobs, junior supervisor roles, junior technical jobs and ‘own account’ or self-employed workers have all declined in number through 2020, following long periods of relative stability. These drops in numbers broadly correspond to the rise in unemployment.

In short, these figures suggest a ‘tale of two cities’: the workers who have faced the brunt of job insecurity the last year are also disadvantaged in other ways, being in lower-paid, less skilled jobs, which tend to have less autonomy.

**Figure 2: UK adults in work ('000s) by socio-economic classification (NS-SEC)**



Source: UK Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.  
 Note: The gap and jump in figures around 2011 is due to a change in the classification of jobs from Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2000 to SOC 2010.

**What can employers do?**

The past year has been tumultuous for the labour market and economy, and the coming years are likely to be ones of further change. Government policy, amongst other factors, will influence the impact on employment opportunities in different occupations. In the immediate term, our data highlights that job insecurity, a knock-on effect of this labour market and economic unrest, is a real concern for furloughed workers. Below, we set out our recommendations for organisations to support workers:



- **Recognise that furloughed employees will be concerned about job security.** Regularly keep in touch with employees still on furlough and be transparent about what a return to work could look like.
- **Provide support for financial wellbeing.** Many employees who have been furloughed over the past year may have experienced financial difficulties alongside fears about job security. Organisations should think about [financial wellbeing](#) as part of their overall wellbeing strategy.
- **Support furloughed employees back into work.** Employers should think about how they [support furloughed employees back into work](#) after long periods of absence; this could include re-inductions.
- **Look at retention and redeployment across the workforce.** With data indicating that there is a continued rise for managerial and professional jobs, identify deployment or retraining opportunities internally to fill vacancies and upskill existing workers.

### 3 Working from home and work-life balance

As the *CIPD Good Work Index* consistently shows, work-life balance is mainly about the potential for work to interfere with our personal lives, but it can also be the reverse. It's an area in which the UK fares especially badly, with about one in four workers working ten or more hours than they would realistically like to every week.<sup>3</sup> So even before the pandemic, it was a hot topic in people management.

Since the lockdown, the mass move to homeworking has raised additional concerns about how long people are spending at their desks – for example, are employees simply transferring their usual commute time to working longer hours and, as work-life boundaries have eroded, have we developed 'always on' work climates? At the same time, the closure of schools has put added pressures on many working parents, who have needed to home-school children for large portions of the year. So how has work-life balance shifted in 2021?

Although we identified a marginal increase in our work-life balance dimension in this year's survey, this increase is relatively small and not distributed equally across the workforce, with key workers particularly likely to be dissatisfied with work-life balance. There appear to be trade-offs for remote workers too, who have better access to flexible working arrangements, but struggle with balancing work and non-work commitments.

While we've seen a rise in remote working (albeit an enforced one due to pandemic restrictions), other flexible working arrangements are still less widely used with little movement from previous *Good Work Index* reports, especially for those in roles that can't be done from home. This is in line with [CIPD analysis of the Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#), which found that use of other forms of flexible working like flexi-time or compressed hours have dropped in the past year. The findings discussed here are based on analysis that accounts for occupational differences. We know, for example, that managerial and professional roles tend to have more flexible work arrangements, and are also more likely to be working remotely due to the pandemic. We therefore controlled for occupation in the analysis to better determine whether occupation or remote work can better explain the differences we see.

<sup>3</sup> Wheatley, D. and Gifford, J. (2019) *UK Working Lives 2019: survey report*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

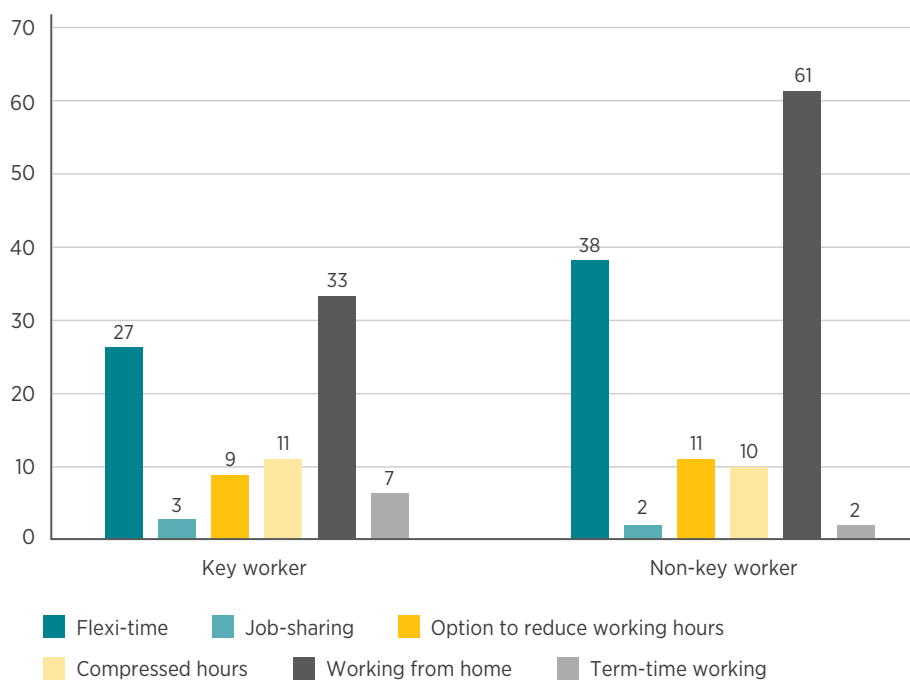
With a [CIPD employer survey](#) finding that 40% of employers expect more than half their workforce to work at least one day a week from home post-pandemic, it's very likely that we'll see hybrid ways of working become the norm post-pandemic. Many workers also want to work from home, with the *Good Work Index* finding that 20% said they would like to work fully from home, while 38% said they would like to partly work from home. That being said, a further 36% said they couldn't do their job from home, so it's important that other forms of flexible working are considered in addition to homeworking. However, as we note above, LFS data on flexible working uptake shows that access to other forms of flexible working isn't commonplace. This is also reflected in our data, which we discuss below.

This raises interesting questions for organisations that have roles that can and cannot be done from home, and the impact of perceived fairness for workers in roles that can't be done from home.

### Key workers less likely to have access to flexible working arrangements

Compared with non-key workers, key workers reported they have less access to flexible working arrangements, more overspill between their work and personal responsibilities, and are less satisfied with the hours they work.

**Figure 3: Availability of flexible working arrangements between key workers and non-key workers (%)**



Although 34% of key workers said they have worked from home in the past year, many more (60%) said working from home is not available to them. This is unsurprising given the roles undertaken by some key workers. There are, however, other options other than location flexibility, and our data suggests that other forms of flexibility are not widely used by key workers either. Key workers were particularly unlikely to have access to flexi-time (57% didn't have access to this, compared with 43% of non-key workers). In addition, they are less likely to have informal flexibility – defined in our survey as the ease workers have in taking an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal issues. Thirty-one per cent of key workers said they would find this difficult, compared with 13% of non-key workers.

Traditional flexibility may be more challenging for certain front-line roles, where shift patterns are fixed, so organisations should think creatively about what flexibility could look like.

### Remote workers struggle with overspill between work and life

Those working from home report more positive overall work–life balance, especially those who work from home all the time. However, when we look more closely at the specific aspects of work–life balance, we find that remote workers report better access to flexible working options, but not better balance between work and non-work commitments. For example, those working from home all the time, or part of the time, were more likely to say they found it difficult to relax in their personal time due to their job (29% and 27% of those working fully or partly at home respectively, compared with 18% of those going into work).

While those working from home are more likely to think their hours are aligned to what they'd like to work, and have better flexible working options, regardless of occupation, the overspill between work and personal life hasn't abated. In particular, occupations that experience a bigger overspill are also likely to be working from home.

Organisations that are planning for hybrid working should prioritise extra support for work–life balance, to help remote workers manage the blurred lines between work and home life.

### What can employers do?

Our data highlights that work–life balance is still a real issue for many workers. For those in managerial and professional roles, there appears to be a trade-off between better outcomes on other aspects of job quality, like autonomy and pay, and being able to balance their work and personal life. For others, particularly those in routine and semi-routine occupations, and some key workers, a lack of flexible working availability is an issue.

These occupational differences in how work is designed is a big issue, but one that deserves attention as we reflect on how to build back better following the pandemic. When it comes to work–life balance, organisations should:

- **Take a holistic approach to work–life balance.** Flexible working arrangements, alignment between hours individuals want to work and the hours they do work, and the ability to manage the boundary between work and life are all important aspects of work–life balance. Flexible working arrangements can help, but there are other important factors too. In the wake of remote working, supporting employees to have time away from their work and recharge, even when their work and home are separate, will be important. We discuss boundary-setting in our report [\*Flexible working: lessons from the pandemic\*](#).<sup>4</sup>
- **Maintain trust and fairness when making decisions about hybrid working.** With many organisations concerned about creating a 'two tier' workforce where some can work from home and some can't, organisations should have an open dialogue with workers about what is and isn't possible or desirable. For more support, use our [hybrid workforce planning tool](#).
- **Review flexible working across the workforce.** Linked to the above, our research finds that working from home (both before and during the pandemic) is still the most popular form of flexible working, and it's not available for all. Flexibility is not just about location but also working patterns. Read our [guidance on flexible working across sectors](#).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gascoigne, C. (2021) *Flexible working: lessons from the pandemic – from the 'nature' of the work to the design of work*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

<sup>5</sup> McCartney, C., Donaldson-Feilder, E., Peters, R., Godfree, K., Lewis, R. and Yarker, J. (2019) *Cross-sector insights on enabling flexible working*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

## 4 Health and wellbeing

From our conversations with HR leaders, it has been interesting to see that during this health pandemic, the wider question of work-related wellbeing has also risen up the agenda of many organisations. Closely related to work-life balance (see above), many leaders have been concerned about pressure from large workloads, as well as social isolation in lockdown leading to poor mental health.

Since the inception of the *CIPD Good Work Index* in 2018, we've noted a downward trend when it comes to workplace wellbeing. In particular, we note that there has been a decline in the proportion of workers saying work positively impacts their health. In this year's data, this trend hasn't continued, although it's too early to say whether this is a genuine halting of a trend or a temporary plateauing. But either way, there are some concerning figures. A quarter of workers say work negatively impacts their mental health, and a similar amount say work negatively impacts their physical health.

The wellbeing differences between groups aren't straightforward, with key workers faring slightly worse on wellbeing outcomes, and remote workers coming up against specific challenges on physical wellbeing.

### Key workers experience excessive pressure and exhaustion at work

With many key workers – especially those in healthcare settings – working under intense and sometimes distressing conditions in the past year, many will be concerned about key worker wellbeing. Our data, almost a year into the pandemic, shows that there isn't a dramatic difference between the wellbeing of key workers and non-key workers, but key workers do report slightly less positive physical and mental health.

After almost a year of working through crisis, key workers are more likely than non-key workers to say they always or often feel exhausted at work (26% compared with 17%), and feel under excessive pressure (25% compared with 18%). How best to alleviate this pressure and ensure time for physical and mental recovery should be front of mind for employers, especially in hard-hit sectors like health and social care.

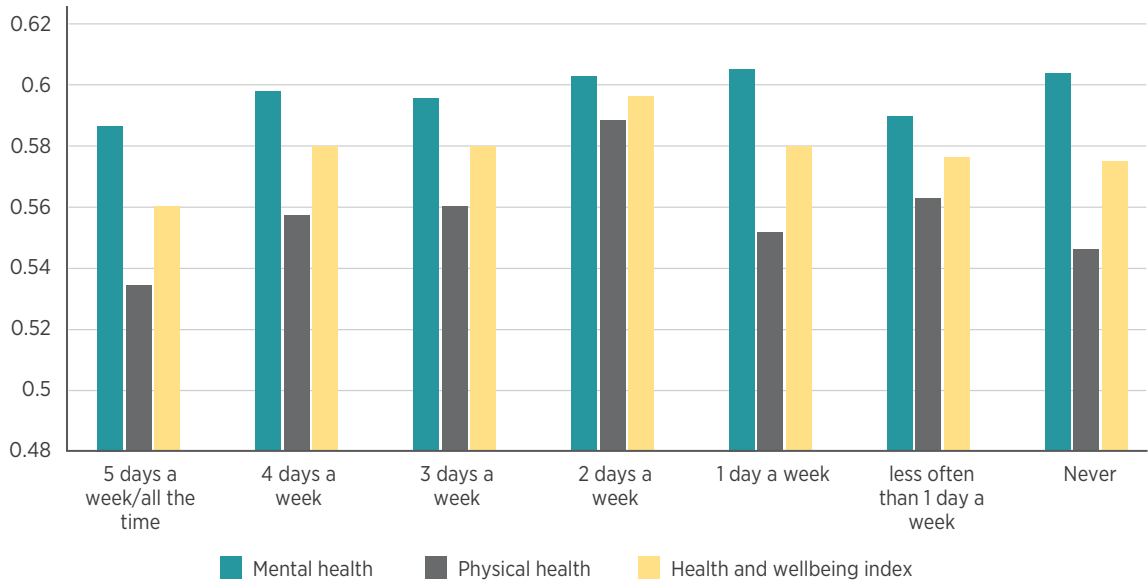
### A hybrid approach to remote working appears to benefit wellbeing

Remote working comes with wellbeing challenges; a more sedentary lifestyle brought about by homeworking could be a concern, for example. Indeed, only 19% of respondents working from home all the time say work has a positive impact on their physical health, compared with 29% of those working from home part of the time, and 38% of those who don't work from home at all. They were also more likely to say work had a negative impact on their physical health (27% said this) than those working partly from home (20% and 21% respectively).

We see a similar pattern for mental health, albeit less pronounced. Thirty-seven per cent of those working from home all the time say work positively impacts their mental health, compared with 44% of those working partly from home and 41% of those not working from home. Remote workers were no more likely to say that work negatively impacted their mental health than other workers.

This suggests that some of the concerns about the negative impact of homeworking on wellbeing have not come to pass (although this of course depends on personal circumstances).

**Figure 4: Health and wellbeing and frequency of remote work (mean score)**

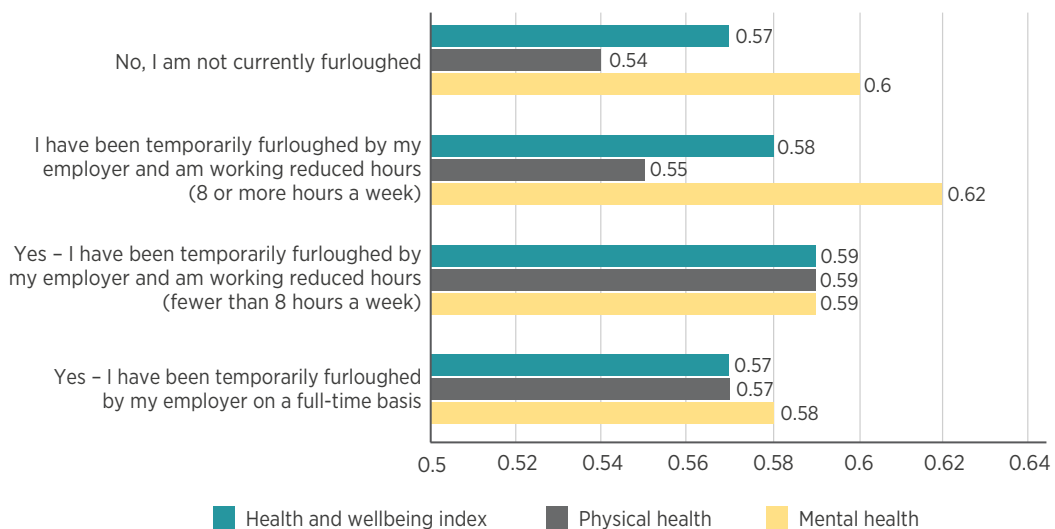


And, looking at the overall health and wellbeing dimension, our data suggests that a middle ground is most beneficial when it comes to wellbeing, with those never working from home, or always working from home, reporting lower overall wellbeing than those who work from home some of the time.

**Part-time furlough is linked to better wellbeing**

The impact of furlough on mental health appears to be more nuanced. Workers on flexible furlough and working more than eight hours per week report better mental wellbeing than those not furloughed, or those furloughed full-time. And, workers not currently furloughed fared worse on physical health than those furloughed in any capacity.

**Figure 5: Health and wellbeing and experiences of furlough (index score)**



When controlling for occupation, it seems that those on flexible furlough (that is, working some but not all of their usual hours) have generally higher scores on health and wellbeing than those fully furloughed, or those not furloughed at all. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind this relationship, but it certainly aligns with the notion that both too much and too little work is bad for our wellbeing.

### What can employers do?

Work can and should have a positive impact on our health, although we've noted that this hasn't always been the case across the past four years of the *Good Work Index*. In this year's report, we see emerging signs that new ways of working, like hybrid working, need to take a 'middle ground' to be most beneficial for wellbeing. For furloughed workers too, a 'middle ground' of part-time furlough appears to have been most beneficial for wellbeing.

In addition, we've highlighted that key workers, perhaps unsurprisingly, have not fared well when it comes to health, wellbeing and work pressure in the past year.

This raises interesting questions about how best to support and value key workers, many of whom have been under sustained pressure during the pandemic, and how we can better balance where we work and the amount we work for better wellbeing.

For employers, we make the following recommendations to support workplace wellbeing:

- **Don't stop prioritising wellbeing as COVID restrictions ease.** Our *People Profession Survey 2020* highlighted that employers are putting wellbeing at the top of their people priority list.<sup>6</sup> This focus should be maintained during and post-pandemic, with work still having a negative impact on many.
- **Take an individual approach to wellbeing.** The wellbeing challenges faced by furloughed workers are quite different from those of key workers. The role of line managers in having open and supportive conversations and not making assumptions about the needs of workers can't be understated.
- **Support line managers to support workers.** As noted above, line managers have a key role to play in promoting wellbeing, but our latest *Health and wellbeing at work* survey identifies a decline in workplaces offering manager training on this important topic.<sup>7</sup> With more workers likely to continue to work in a dispersed way or have less regular 'face-to-face' contact with a manager, helping managers to identify signs of poor wellbeing is as important as ever.
- **Account for hybrid working in your wellbeing strategy.** Our data suggests that a mix of remote and non-remote work is associated with better health and wellbeing outcomes. While more research is needed to track the impact of hybrid working on wellbeing over time, it's important to recognise that choice and flexibility in where people work can be beneficial for wellbeing, but there are also challenges to contend with, such as sedentary lifestyles and temptation to work longer hours.

## 5 Job design and the nature of work

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly had a dramatic impact on where many of us work and/or how we use personal protective equipment (PPE) and social distancing to ensure safe work environments. Despite this, we find that, in general, the nature and design of our jobs<sup>8</sup> show little sign of change. The exception to this – in line with our findings on work-life balance and wellbeing – is an increase in workload or the intensity of work, which we discuss below.

<sup>6</sup> Peters, R. and Houghton, E. (2020) *People Profession Survey 2020: UK and Ireland*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

<sup>7</sup> CIPD. (2021) *Health and wellbeing at work survey 2021*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

<sup>8</sup> The following components make up job design and the nature of work dimension in the Good Work Index: workload (whether one has the right amount of work); job autonomy (the level of control over the content, speed, method and time of work); resources (whether one has enough time, equipment and suitable space to work effectively); purpose (the feeling of doing useful work for the organisation or the wider society); job complexity (whether the job involves interesting, complex tasks or requires learning new things and solving unforeseen problems); skills (the level of person-job match in skills and qualifications); career development (whether the job provides opportunities for skill development and career progression).



On the face of it, this overall lack of change in the nature of jobs might seem surprising. However, the way jobs are designed – for example, the tasks they involve and the skills they require – hasn't fundamentally altered because of the pandemic. In the coming years, we will continue to track these changes as businesses continue to adapt, evolve, and evaluate job design. In addition, organisations that prioritise good job design are likely to continue to do so through the pandemic.

And, as identified in previous years, there are already disparities between occupational groups when it comes to job design. Autonomy is a good example of this: managerial workers have more influence over things like the pace of their work, and how they do their work, in comparison with routine and semi-routine occupations. Higher occupational groups also tend to fare better in terms of job complexity, skill match and development opportunities.

### Rising workload for remote workers and key workers

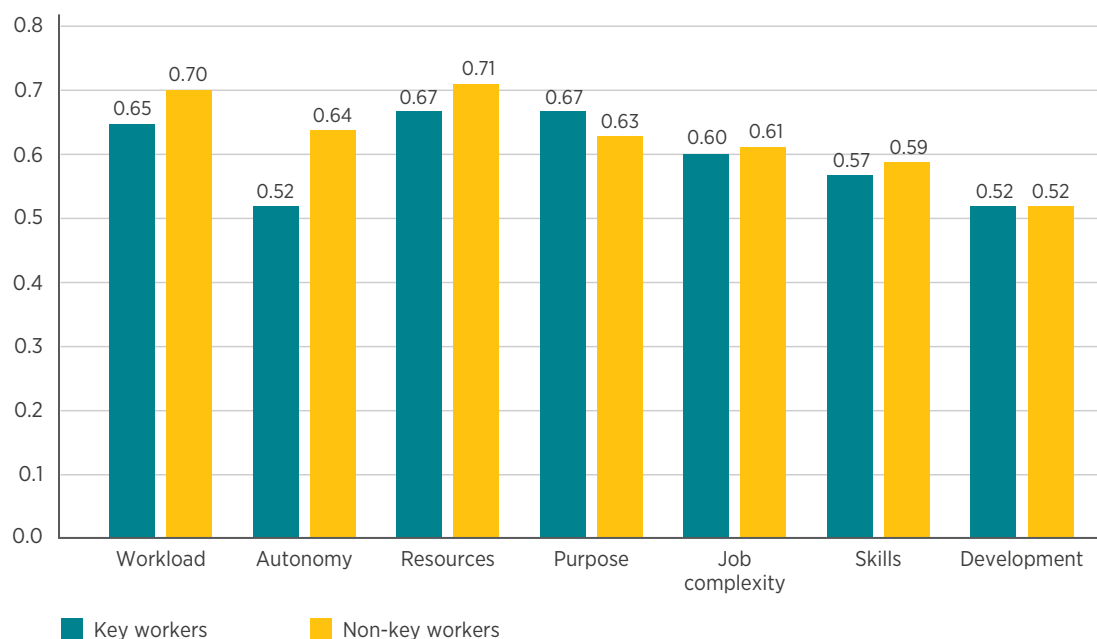
Those in higher managerial and professional occupations report higher workload than those in semi-routine and routine occupations (for example, semi-routine occupations and routine occupations scored 0.73 and 0.74 respectively, compared with scores of 0.65 for higher and lower managerial and professional workers). Previous *Good Work Index* reports revealed a similar difference, but the divide has grown this year.

While those who work from home tend to report more positive views on job quality, compared with those who don't work remotely, workload is an exception. Remote workers are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their workload – regardless of their occupation.

### Key workers find purpose but have higher workloads and lower resources

Key workers report a higher sense of purpose in their work – doing useful work for society, their organisation, and deriving a sense of meaning from their work (a mean score of 0.67 compared with 0.63 for non-key workers). This is what we'd expect, given the nature of key worker roles.

**Figure 6: Differences in job design by key workers and non-key workers (mean score)**





However, they also fare worse across other aspects of job design, in particular they have lower satisfaction with their workload (36% of key workers say their workload is too much, compared with 25% of non-key workers). They also report less autonomy in how they do their work and lower resources (like the right space or amount of time to do their work), although experiences are likely to differ across groups of key workers, given the government definition of key worker is so broad.

### Remote workers enjoy more autonomy but higher workload

Those working from home enjoy greater autonomy in their work (mean score of 0.46 for those never working from home compared with 0.69 for those working five days/all the time at home). They also report better job design on other measures like development and skills, and resources. The only job design indicator that remote workers fare worse on is workload, even when controlling for occupational differences. In other words, there appears to be a trade-off between generally good job design for remote workers, with the exception of workload.<sup>9</sup>

### Furloughed workers need better opportunities to develop skills

Workers who are furloughed appear to experience less positive job design than those who haven't been furloughed. This is particularly pronounced when it comes to opportunities to develop skills in their job, and how aligned their skills are to their work. This is likely in part due to the nature of jobs still furloughed; they tend to be routine or semi-routine occupations that often have lower skills match and opportunities for development.

Nevertheless, this represents a missed opportunity for skills development while on furlough; indeed, just 6% of furloughed employees said they were undertaking training while on furlough. This is especially important to future-proof jobs – as we noted earlier in this report, ONS figures suggest that routine and semi-routine jobs are on the decline.

### What can employers do?

Job design and the nature of work has not greatly changed in the past year. Instead, we see a continuation of previous trends, particularly around occupational disparity in job design. That being said, there are areas of change that reflect new ways of working or demands of the pandemic, like higher workload for key workers and remote workers. Organisations should consider these changes, as well as wider job design across the workforce:

- **Reflect on job design in your organisation.** As we plan for post-pandemic recovery, it's important that we understand what jobs look like now, and how good job design is distributed across the workforce to ensure fairness and good working experiences for everyone. Engage with employees, look at workforce data and think about how job design can be adapted in the future.
- **Examine potential trade-offs in job quality.** Linked to the point above, it's important to understand what trade-offs are made on different aspects of job quality, and whether these are necessary. It doesn't need to be inevitable that lower-paid occupations have fewer opportunities for skills development, or managerial roles struggle with workload.
- **Prioritise better skills development and alignment.** With many furloughed workers also reporting lower opportunity for development and a mismatch between their skills and their job roles, organisations need to think about how to make skills development more readily available, especially for those in routine and semi-routine roles.
- **Monitor workload.** With remote workers and key workers reporting higher workloads, consider how work is distributed across the workforce, and ensure enough resource is in place to avoid overwork and negative implications for wellbeing.

<sup>9</sup> We have discussed 'trade-offs' on different aspects of job quality in previous *Good Work Index* reports through the lens of occupational differences.

## 6 Workplace relationships

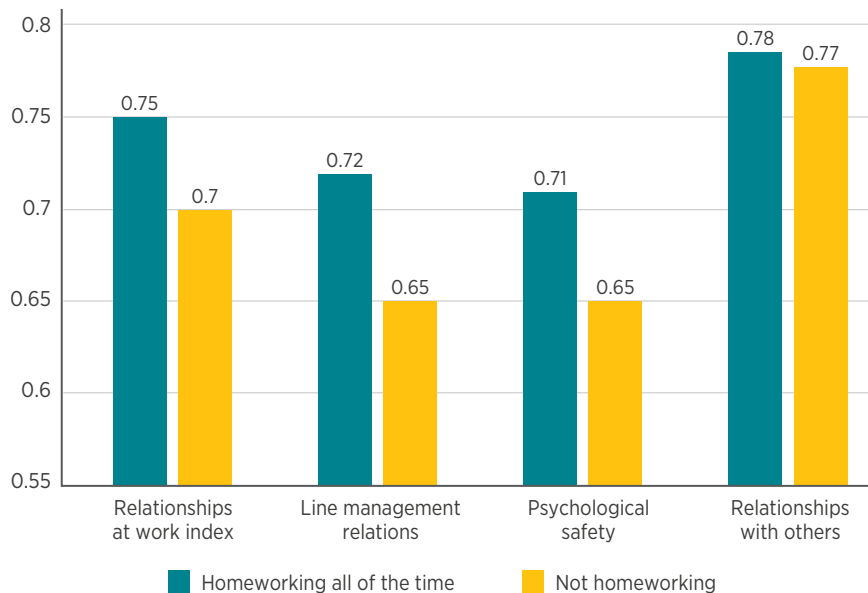
The relationships that we make, maintain, break or repair are intrinsic aspects of our working lives. The positives, such as social cohesion, support and psychological safety, are important factors not only for wellbeing but also performance. The negative side of conflict, harassment and other ills is not only personally very harmful, but also a major legal risk. In a period of such flux as the last year, how have our work relationships fared? Have they been put under greater strain, or have they been galvanised by the challenges we've faced?

### Remote workers report better workplace relationships

First, and perhaps surprisingly, we see that those working remotely reported better workplace relationships than those not working remotely. In particular, those who worked more than two days a week or more reported better relationships with line managers. For example, 82% of those working from home all the time said their manager is supportive if they had a problem, compared with 70% of those never working from home.

There are also differences on psychological safety; for example, 23% of those never working from home agreed people in their team were sometimes rejected for being different, compared with 14% of those working from home all the time – perhaps in part due to better relationships with line managers and colleagues in this group, but further investigation is needed to understand this.

Figure 7: Work relationships and remote working (mean scores)



Both of the findings above control for occupational differences, so the distinction does not seem to be a function of the types of occupations people have, but rather, an effect of working from home. However, there are other factors that could also play a role, like seniority, or increased efforts from managers and workers to prioritise maintaining supportive working relationships while homeworking. Further research will be needed to understand this.

### Occupation still impacts perceptions of workplace relationships

Overall workplace relationships (for example with colleagues or clients) were also higher for remote workers, but this was better explained by occupational differences than homeworking – in other words, those working from home are more likely to report better working relationships because of the occupation they are in, rather than working from home per se.

This reflects previous findings from the *Good Work Index*, which continue this year: managerial and professional workers have more positive perceptions of their workplace relationships overall, with routine occupation and self-employed and own-account workers having the least positive perceptions, although the difference between groups is relatively small.

### Psychological safety and manager relationships have suffered while on furlough

Second, and perhaps unsurprisingly, those furloughed full-time were less positive about their workplace relationships, especially in relation to psychological safety and, to some extent, line management relationships (relationships with colleagues were not impacted), suggesting that managers and organisations can do more to maintain relationships with furloughed workers.

#### What can employers do?

- **Think about workplace relationships when planning for hybrid working.** Our data suggests that remote working need not negatively impact workplace relationships. Organisations should reflect on how they have successfully maintained workplace relationships remotely and take forward these learnings. How can formal and informal social interactions be supported in a workplace where employees may be working at different locations and times?
- **Engage with furloughed workers about the return to work.** Those on furlough will likely have had less contact with their colleagues and managers while on furlough. As the furlough scheme comes to an end, consider how to keep communication open. This could include reflecting on how managers or another organisational representative can best support furloughed employees with questions about workplace changes, and facilitating an open dialogue about what the return to work looks like.
- **Reflect on what has worked well in remote working.** Our survey highlights that workplace relationships don't appear to have reduced due to homeworking. Consider what has worked well to create social support and cohesion in the past year.
- **Examine workplace relationships across the organisation.** As with other aspects of job quality, workplace relationships differ across occupation, with routine occupations having the least positive perceptions (alongside the self-employed). Identify where there are inconsistencies in the quality of line management in the organisation and ensure manager training and upskilling is available across the board.

## 7 Employee voice

Employee voice can be considered intrinsically important as an aspect of working life in its own right – like democracy, an essential aspect of what it means to be human. But our previous analysis of the *Good Work Index* points to it being more important as an instrument for workers to tangibly influence other aspects of their job quality.<sup>10</sup> With so

<sup>10</sup> Gifford, J. and Sarkar, S. (2018) *UK Working Lives: the CIPD Job Quality Index*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

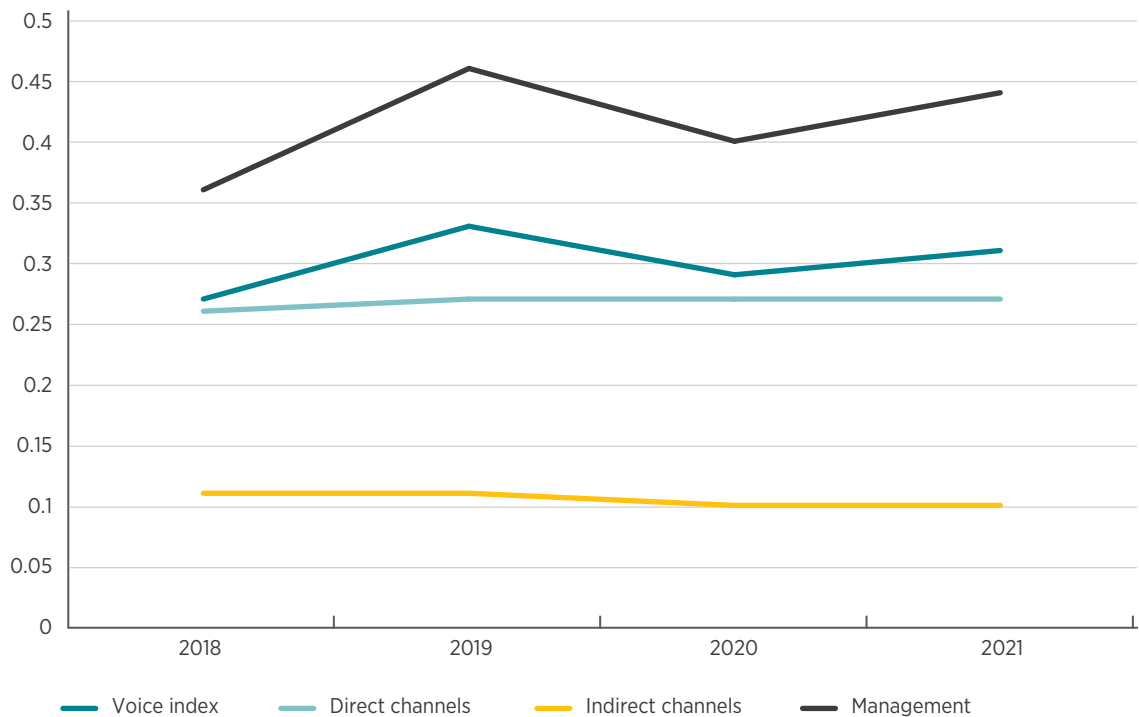
much at stake in the last year – from job security to rapidly changing work practices, to concerns about wellbeing and the return to the office – how have UK employers fared in keeping their employees informed and consulted?

### Employee voice effective through the pandemic but could be improved

Consultation and active dialogue between workers and management has been crucial through the pandemic to raise concerns and meaningfully engage with workers on organisational change. This is reflected in our data, with a higher proportion of respondents saying managers or employee representatives are effective at channelling their views than was the case in 2020.

For example, close to half (49%) said managers were good at keeping employees informed about management discussion and decisions in 2021, up from 40% in 2020. Employee representatives were also seen as more effective in seeking employee views, with the percentage of workers rating employee representatives as good or very good in this regard rising from 41% in 2020 to 51% in 2021.

**Figure 8: Changes to employee voice 2018–21 (mean scores)**



Whether this represents a temporary boost due to the pandemic or will continue beyond the pandemic is unclear. And, while there has been a slight boost to employee voice since 2020, the overall index measure for voice remains lower than it was in 2019, and there has been a slight increase in those reporting no channels for voice in their organisation. This is especially noticeable in private sector organisations, where 23% of respondents said there was an absence of voice channels in their organisation.

Furloughed workers are also slightly less likely to have positive perceptions of voice, suggesting organisations could do more to actively seek the views of furloughed workers. In addition, existing disparities between perceptions of voice and influence for higher and lower occupational groups (both channels for voice and ability to influence management decision-making) haven't abated, meaning workers with the least positive perceptions of voice are also the ones who tend to fare worse on other aspects of job quality.

## Key workers more satisfied with opportunities for voice, but don't have more influence on management decisions

Interestingly, while key workers tend to fare relatively badly on many dimensions of job quality, they tend to have more positive perceptions of voice than non-key workers, with the exception of management openness (the extent to which managers are good at seeking employee views, responding to them and allowing them to influence decision-making). This association holds when controlling for occupation.

This highlights that while key workers may have more positive perceptions of the voice channels available to them, this doesn't translate to more satisfaction with the influence that they have on management decision-making.

More can be done to ensure key workers have influence in their organisations – particularly important if organisations are to take meaningful action to improve job quality for this group.

### What can employers do?

Our findings highlight that many organisations have been taking steps to keep their workers informed of organisational change through the pandemic and ensuring there are channels for workers to raise their views. That being said, furloughed workers may have felt like their voice was limited during the past year, and while key workers may have positive perceptions of their opportunities for voice, they aren't more likely to feel they are influencing decision-making at work.

Finally, occupational differences in opportunities for voice still exist, especially for those already likely to experience lower-quality jobs. Employee voice should be harnessed to better understand workplace issues and make improvements in job quality, and should be available regardless of occupation. To improve voice, employers should:

- **Meaningfully engage with employees on organisational change.** Our *COVID-19 Working Lives* survey identified that those who felt like they were consulted on returning to work were less anxious about doing so. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, continuing to consult with staff about health and safety, returning to the workplace, and hybrid working, among other issues, will be important, especially with 41% of workers feeling anxious about returning to the workplace.
- **Ensure employees have opportunities for voice, including furloughed workers.** Read more on employee voice and find case studies on organisational approaches to voice in our *Talking about voice: insights from case studies*<sup>11</sup> report.
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of voice channels.** Our data suggests that although workers are more satisfied with their ability to give their views, this hasn't necessarily translated into influencing decision-making, especially for key workers. Employers should review whether voice channels are adequate and available for all workers (including those on furlough), and whether they meaningfully influence decision-making.

## 8 Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on all our lives, it doesn't yet appear to have had the same impact on the fundamental nature of the jobs we do. The longer-term impact remains to be seen, and we'll continue to track this in our annual *CIPD Good Work Index* reports.

<sup>11</sup> King, D., Shipton, H., Smith, S., Rendall, J. and Renkema, M. (2021) *Talking about voice: insights from case studies*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

As organisations look to the future, navigating the complexities of hybrid working should be just one priority. Employers will also need to think about supporting furloughed employees back into work, how to manage potential issues of fairness when it comes to those who can work remotely and those who cannot, consider and address the impact of the pandemic on key workers, and look to improve job quality for this group who have been vital through the pandemic.

Importantly, inequalities in job quality that existed before the pandemic still exist today, and will likely be exacerbated if organisations and policy-makers don't take action on key issues like opportunities for skill development, availability of fairly paid, stable work opportunities and access to flexible work arrangements that allow more equitable participation in the labour market.

For organisations wanting to take action to improve job quality as they plan for the coming months, this means:

- considering job design and the nature of work across the workforce, and ensuring good-quality jobs are a reality throughout the organisation
- engaging with employees on organisational change and identifying where improvements can be made to job quality
- prioritising wellbeing – taking an individual approach that recognises wellbeing challenges will look different for each of us, and will partly be influenced by job quality
- recognising the work-life balance challenges not just for remote workers, but for those working in their usual workplace who may not have the same access to flexible working
- taking a human-centred approach when reintegrating furloughed employees back into work, recognising the challenges of the past year, and the sense of insecurity about labour market prospects that many furloughed workers may feel.

This is not an exhaustive list, and each organisation will have specific contextual challenges. Improving job quality in the UK is a complex task, and will require wide-scale change, with collaboration between workplaces, policy-makers and other bodies. However, it is a task that we should embrace to ensure better jobs, workplace fairness and positive outcomes for all in a post-pandemic world.



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