Supporting working carers in COVID-19: Recovery and return

Employer survey report

About us

As the UK's only national membership charity for carers, Carers UK is both a supportive community and a movement for change

At some point in our lives every one of us will be involved in looking after an older, ill or disabled relative, partner or friend.

Over six and a half million people in the UK are caring now but while caring is part and parcel of life, without the right support the personal costs can be high.

Carers UK supports carers, provides information and advice about caring, delivers training and consultancy services and campaigns to make life better for carers.

To find out more visit carersuk.org

Employers for Carers is an innovative and growing service for employers

Informed by business and supported by the specialist knowledge of Carers UK, its key purpose is to provide practical, 'hands-on' help to employers to support the carers in their workforce.

Launched in 2009 as an employers' membership forum, Employers for Carers now has over 240 member organisations representing around 3.7 million employees across the public, private and not for profit sectors.

Member services include a dedicated web platform with a range of practical resources including e-learning, toolkits, model policies and case studies, access to expert training and consultancy and employer networking events. EfC's UK-wide employer benchmarking scheme, Carer Confident, launched in 2019, now has over 40 accredited employers who are building a supportive and inclusive workplace for staff who are or will become carers.

To find out more visit employersforcarers.org

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Foreword
from Helen Walker

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One year on from our 2020 report on this theme, COVID-19 has continued to shine a spotlight on caring in the workplace. As we move to recovery and return, supporting the ever-increasing number of people juggling work and care has never been more vital.

At Carers UK we have been aware of the substantial additional challenges faced by working carers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to economic uncertainty and the impact of COVID-19 on care support services, working carers have faced unparalleled pressures.

In addition, with the government's furlough scheme having now ended but many care services still impacted, increasing numbers of working carers are having to consider reducing their hours, or even leaving work to care. Supporting carers in employment remains a critical workforce issue.

Throughout the pandemic, we know that our Employers for Carers members have been striving to support and retain their staff, including the growing number of carers within their workforce.

Following on from our research last year, this report highlights the challenges that employers have faced and examples of how they have been recognising and addressing the specific needs of carers in their workforce. It also looks at how employers have been adapting such support as we move towards recovery and return.

We are pleased to see that, as last year, our member organisations have continued to step up to the plate to support carers through the pandemic – and are aware that others have too. The challenge for the coming year will be to ensure these arrangements become embedded good practice and 'business as usual'.

We are delighted to have the support of Centrica, one of the UK's leading employers in supporting carers within the workforce, in delivering this report. We hope that, where employers responding to this survey have gone to enhance support for carers in their workforce, others will be encouraged to follow!

Helen Walker, Chief Executive, Carers UK

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Introduction

Last year an additional 2.8 million workers[1] took on caring responsibilities in a matter of weeks after the outbreak of COVID-19. Huge numbers of working people started caring unpaid for family members and friends who would otherwise have managed on their own, but were either vulnerable to COVID-19 or at risk because care and support services had been reduced or closed.

Even before COVID-19, one in seven employees were caring for an older, disabled or seriously ill family member or friend.[2] However, since the pandemic, many employers have been talking about one in four or one in five of their employees being carers and the NHS Staff Survey 2020 has identified one in three in its workforce.[3]

Before the coronavirus outbreak, 600 carers were already leaving work every day,[4] at a huge cost to the economy and to their personal finances. Throughout the pandemic Carers UK has also been aware, through our helplines and other sources, that many workers have had to choose between their job and protecting the person they care for.

Carers UK research[5] last year showed that, soon after the first UK lockdown, carers were struggling to juggle the pressures of work and caring – trying to balance giving practical and emotional support, managing appointments and keeping an eye on the loved ones they were supporting alongside their job.

Unsurprisingly given these circumstances, we have heard from carers that, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 9% have given up work and 13% have reduced their hours to care.[6]

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1   Carers Week 2020 Research Report, The rise in the number of unpaid carers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (Carers UK, June 2020)
2   Carers UK and YouGov, Juggling work and unpaid care: A growing issue (2019)
3   Carers UK briefing on NHS Staff Survey (2020)
4   ibid
5   Carers UK and YouGov, Caring behind closed doors: Forgotten families in the coronavirus outbreak (April 2020)
6   Carers UK, State of Caring report 2021

Throughout the past year carers have been noticeably continuing to report problems with support services being closed or reduced, and caring responsibilities becoming more demanding. Our 2021 Carers Week research[7] revealed that 75% of working carers who responded were exhausted, 55% were overwhelmed by their caring responsibilities and 72% of carers overall had not had a break during the pandemic.

The potential impact on carers' ability to work over the coming months is also clear. Most recently, a fifth of working carers have said that, without affordable or accessible care services, they may have to reduce their hours or give up work altogether.[8]

During the past year the challenges of supporting and retaining valued employees who are carers have also continued to be reported by employers.

A 2020 Carers UK survey[9] showed that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, employers in England were seeing the health, wellbeing and productivity of their workforces adversely impacted by a shortage of support from social care services. Two-thirds surveyed said there needs to be more practical assistance from care and support services to ensure their staff with caring responsibilities are able to stay in work.

Throughout the pandemic EfC members have also been reporting an increase in requests for flexible working arrangements and leave to accommodate caring responsibilities, along with higher take-up of health and wellbeing support.

Last year our research survey of EfC member organisations *Supporting working carers in COVID-19* provided some practical insights and recommendations to assist employers in future workforce support and planning. To follow up on this study, EfC and Carers UK conducted a research survey of EfC member organisations one year on to help us understand the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working carers, current workplace support and latest plans for recovery and return.

75%

of working carers who responded to our 2021 Carers Week survey reported being exhausted

7   Carers Week 2021, Breaks or breakdown

8   Carers UK, State of Caring report 2021

9   Carers UK and Employers for Carers, Supporting Carer health and wellbeing in the workplace: Employer survey report (April 2020)

Whilst the pandemic has continued to present major challenges to both carers and employers, we also recognise that some excellent support and innovative responses have been developed by some organisations and individual managers to deal with the situation. The purpose of this survey was therefore to gather further evidence about how EfC members have been supporting carers in their workforce as we move through and out of the pandemic.

We recognise that employers have had to deal with a prolonged period of change and uncertainty in extremely challenging circumstances. We are therefore very grateful to those EfC members who took the time to participate and share their insights and experience in both surveys.

The follow-up EfC survey was conducted online during July – September 2021. In total, 66 member organisations took part in the survey, from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. This was a smaller sample than in our earlier employer report (which received 114 responses) but this may reflect the pressures on employers currently implementing polices for return, and does not detract from the rich data we gained.

Sectors represented include the public services and administration (31%), healthcare (27%), accountancy, banking and finance (11%), training and education (9%) and smaller numbers from law, transport and logistics, information and technology, retail and consumer goods, security, science and pharmaceuticals, social care and charity and voluntary work.

We hope that the insights from this survey will help illustrate examples of good practice in the workplace and ideas that can assist employers in the preparation of workforce support and planning both in the short and longer term. We are also aware that many other employers (who are not EfC members) have been responsive to carers' needs within their workforce while others have not reacted so positively during the pandemic. We hope therefore that, following this research, further examples of supporting working carers will be identified and shared over the coming months.

Key findings

8 out of 10 employers (80%) said that they had offered additional flexible working arrangements for carers

A slight increase from 75% of respondents last year

Over 7 in 10 employers (73%) said they had a carers network or support group
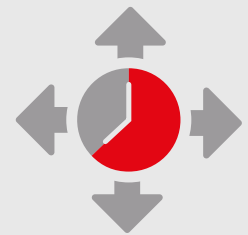
An upturn from 44% last year

70% of employers said that they had put additional arrangements in place to support carer health and wellbeing

Compared with 90% last year

Over 6 in 10 employers (63%) said that flexible working and flexible leave arrangements had become more embedded generally in their organisation since the start of the pandemic.

A similar number (62%) said that they had offered additional leave arrangements

An increase from 42% last year

Almost 4 in 10 respondents (38%) said they had incorporated new/enhanced support for staff who are carers at key stages of their employment journey (e.g. staff induction, training and reviews)
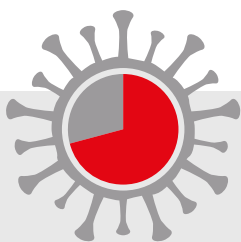
A relatively high number of respondents (71%) said they had key workers in frontline roles that may place them at greater risk

Similar to last year's figure of 72%

Specific additional support for frontline workers since Autumn 2020 was in the form of COVID secure working practices such as **regular cleaning**, **social distancing**, **provision of PPE**, **ongoing risk assessments** and some mention of **further access to wellbeing/mental health support**

Remote working

Around 7 out of 10 employers (71%) said they were able to offer (or continue to offer) remote working for all staff when the UK went into lockdown in Autumn 2020

3 in 10 (29%) said they were able to offer this for some staff, **so in total all respondents (100%)** offered remote working to some or all staff

Compared with a total of 74% respondents last year

Looking to the future, almost all respondents (96%) said that they will either provide remote working for all staff, some staff or in particular circumstances once the pandemic is over

Of these employers, two thirds (67%) said they would do this for some staff

Just over a quarter (27%) for all staff and a very small minority (2%) for staff in particular circumstances

Recovery and return – current and future plans

Over 8 in 10 employers (83%) said they had plans to accommodate both flexibility of location and flexibility of hours in their proposals for staff returning to the office/place of work

The most commonly reported plans for carers returning to the workplace were:

- social distancing measures
- extending remote working for any staff member able to do so
- staff policies/action plans should an employee be in contact with/caring for someone who is showing symptoms
- staff policies/action plans should an employee begin to show symptoms

The most common forms of communication about returning to the workplace were:

- communication with line managers/ managers meetings
- internal newsletters/e-bulletins
- staff surveys
- appraisals/catch ups

Around 4 out of 10 employers (41%) said that they were currently developing additional organisational/HR policies or procedures

A further quarter (25%) said they had provided this support and **another 15%** said they were planning to do this, with several mentioning 'hybrid working'

Over 3 in 5 organisations (63%) said that they had learned new practical lessons that they thought would help support carer employees in the future

An increase from 37% who reported this last year

Recommendations

One year on from our 2020 report on this theme, this survey of EfC member organisations shows that there has been much that has been done by employers during the pandemic and as we look towards recovery and return.

However, it is crucial that lessons continue to be learnt from this experience, that recent enhancements of policies and provisions become established practice, and that carers are supported in the workplace more widely.

This is particularly important now as carers are likely to face continuing challenges during the winter and as organisations implement plans to return to the office/place of work.

We have a number of recommendations arising from this survey:

• That employers, if they have not already done so, need to swiftly introduce and implement carer-friendly employment practices building on the experience in this report. This could be essential over winter as we transition from working arrangements during COVID-19 towards a wider return to the office/place of work. We would encourage employers to join Employers for Carers.

• That employers as a start, if they have not already done so, should include a question about caring in their staff surveys, and/or hold a separate survey to help identify carers in their workforce.

• Employers should continue to use trusted and valued channels and sources of information and advice to keep carers up to date with changes as we move out of the pandemic.

• Employers should review their flexible working policies and/or practices including flexibility of hours and location where possible, with a view to how they support carers.

• The Government should also bring forward proposals to introduce the Right to Request Flexible Working as a day one entitlement following the current consultation.

• The Government's pledge to introduce five days Carer's Leave is welcome and should be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. Employers should also consider, as good practice, offering 5 – 10 days paid leave to support working carers.

• The Government should ensure that there is sufficient baseline funding for social care over the next three years, and through the winter. This has never been more important for both employees and employers; a fifth of working carers are at risk of reducing their hours or giving up work altogether if they cannot get affordable or accessible care services.

• The Government should consider offering support for employees who are unable to manage without the return of care and support services and also provide returners and skills programmes for carers seeking to come into the labour market.

Centrica Case Study: Flexible First

Centrica, the owner of British Gas, continues to evolve flexible working for its 6,000 contact centre employees and, in doing so, will transform how it serves customers.

'Flexible First' responds to colleague feedback, polls and focus groups that revealed that most people working for Centrica want the best of both worlds – valuing the flexibility of homeworking while still being able to get the team together in the office for collaboration. As a result, Centrica colleagues will not return to working permanently in offices once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

The new way of working will enable those working at one of Centrica's sites across the country to enjoy flexibility and choice about whether to work from home or an office. This flexibility provides the opportunity for contact centre colleagues to focus on customer service whilst benefiting from an improved work-life balance to do things like manage caring responsibilities, childcare, or getting fit.

With more people choosing to work flexibly, the company is adapting to ensure the safety and wellbeing of colleagues, as well as responding to colleague feedback. Centrica is committed to putting wellbeing first, focusing on caring for one another, raising awareness of the tools in place to support mental, physical and financial wellbeing – and how colleagues can make the most of them.

To make sure there is a smooth and safe experience when coming into an office, Centrica has developed an app that makes the process as simple as booking a seat on a plane. The app will meet the needs of colleagues with disabilities and those with equipment requirements, enabling them to select a desk that best suits their personal needs.

This new approach has been welcomed by members of Centrica's Carers network, including Marie McCann, a Customer Service Advisor based in Scotland who has worked for British Gas for 20 years – Marie explained:

"My caring role is for my 13 year old son Jamie who has moderate learning disability, epilepsy, and autism. Jamie's condition means he always needs 24hr care and someone with him as he takes seizures and can have challenging behaviours when there is any break in his routine.

"The Flexible First approach has really transformed what I am able to do, before, I always found it difficult to balance work and caring however, giving me the option to work at home has meant that I am now able to work without the stress of being away from home too much. As I have more time and no commute, it means I have had time to really focus on work and access development opportunities that would have been difficult to access before. Currently, I am stepping up as Acting Manager and loving every minute of it. Flexible First has been a game changer for me and it was a relief when this was announced as it means I can balance being a full-time carer and working full time.

"Flexible First is the way forward, it is a new way of working that people should embrace and for Centrica to offer this along with Carers leave to support those trickier days is an excellent step in the right direction and a model that all businesses in the UK should adopt."

> **"**
>
> Flexible First has been a game changer for me and it was a relief when this was announced as it means I can balance being a full-time carer and working full time.
>
> **"**

Good practice points

Here are some key areas of carer support which EfC member organisations, large and smaller, have been providing during COVID-19 and in their plans for recovery and return:

1   Conducting **staff surveys** to raise the visibility of caring and gauge what carers would like to see in any plans to return to the office/place of work.

2   Engaging with **individual employees** to find a personalised solution that works for them and as circumstances change (every caring situation is unique).

3   Offering carers more **flexibility of location** where possible and **flexible hours and leave** arrangements.

4   Improving the **induction process** to include more information and support for carers at the start of their employment journey.

5   Introducing/using a **Carer Passport** to enhance support throughout the caring and employment journey.

6   Providing **guidance for line managers** to help them disseminate support to carers in their teams including through **1-1 communications** with staff about future plans to return to the office/place of work.

7   Using a staff **Carers Network** to communicate with carers about any planned changes to working arrangements and location.

8   Increasing **health and wellbeing/mental health** provision for carers, including linking up to specialist sources of support (eg Carers UK) and promoting this regularly.

9   Engaging with **external stakeholders** to provide different types of support, and proactive **signposting** to this (eg to local care and support services and carers organisations).

10 Embracing **hybrid working** where appropriate as a new or transitional way of working and introducing policies to bring this into the workplace.

11 Being prepared to **test and trial arrangements** for return to the office/place of work to see what works and what needs to be improved upon.

12 Doing **regular review and risk assessments** of policies, practices and circumstances affecting carers in the workforce, especially for frontline staff.

"
The benefits of hybrid working and working more flexibly have been clear, which will mean staff members who are carers will not (in most circumstances) need to request flexible working patterns anymore, this will just be part of normal working.
"

"
The benefits of flexible working are far reaching for both individuals and the company. There is great technology available which can support hybrid and connected working that crosses both workplace and home workers effectively. It's mainly about thinking differently and bringing that lens to discussions to ensure we have considered how we include people in different situations.
"

"
The blended working is here to stay because it is proof that carers can be productive if allowed to work in that way as and when they need.
"

Detailed findings

In general, EfC member organisations who responded to this survey seem to have continued to adjust quickly to the changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many appear to have embraced some form of hybrid working where appropriate and are looking to continue to facilitate a mix of working remotely and from the office/place of work for those who can do so.

Arising from the pandemic there seems to be a greater awareness of carers' needs and several organisations have been introducing new/enhanced policies to address these and improve their support for carers.

One year on from our last survey, the agenda has moved on as flexible working and other support for carers has become more embedded in members' workplaces.

Plans for return to the office/place of work are also more advanced than last year but in many cases are still evolutionary as new hybrid (or other) working arrangements are tried and tested.

The situation remains very nuanced as work environments, sectors and individual roles vary enormously, and employees' personal situations will also all be different. Hybrid working, for example, can therefore be quite complex to implement in practice as by necessity such arrangements will need to be tailored to individual teams and employees.

Support for carers

- **8 out of 10 employers (80%) said that they had offered additional flexible working arrangements for carers (a slight increase from 75% of respondents last year).**

Many employers commented on implementing flexible working hours and patterns and the flexibility to work from home where possible:

" We have allowed a greater degree of flexibility, allowing people to "timeshift" for example."

" Ours is primarily a customer facing organisation but during the pandemic we adapted our processes, working practices and provided equipment to allow people to work from home, while offering safe space for those who preferred to continue to work in the office. There were also more flexibilities around hours of work."

" Have been happy to permit very flexible hours (early morning/late evening/weekend working) to give carers the time they need during the week days. There has also been an option to temporarily reduce hours or take a sabbatical."

Several employers commented on the way that arrangements were planned and implemented on an individual case-by-case basis, reflecting the fact that caring situations are all so different, as also are work environments.

" All staff who are carers complete the my profile sheet this allows them to agree flexible working with their line manager directly. Examples include early/late starts, flexibility in location of work, flexible working."

80%

of employers said that they had offered additional flexible working arrangements for carers

- **Over 7 in 10 employers (73%) said that they had a carers network or support group (an upturn from 44% last year).**

The important role of staff carers networks or support groups is reflected in employers' responses to this question and to a further question about how their organisation had ensured that carers had continued to be engaged. Similar to last year's survey, key comments were that this had been through a carers network, forum or support group, and through a range of internal communication channels including intranets, social media, virtual coffee sessions and other awareness raising activities.

" We have organised frequent Care for Coffee sessions (video calls) open to all members, digital information via internal social media and emails – these were available to all staff members regardless of whether they were furloughed or not. Reached out to staff network members to understand needs and support that the organisation could provide."

" Use of internal platforms – Intranets, SharePoints, Yammer. Use of MSTeams and Zoom calls/meetings. Emails."

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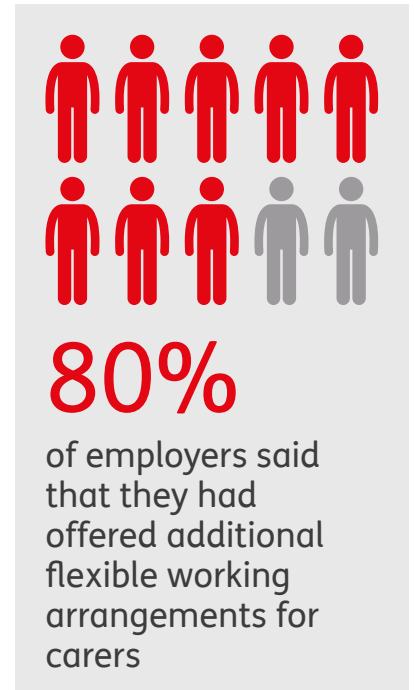
- **A similar number of employers (70%) said that they had put additional arrangements in place to support carer health and wellbeing, with a minority of respondents (23%) saying that they had not.**

This compares with 90% of employers reporting that they had put such arrangements in place last year. The somewhat lower figure in this survey may reflect the fact that these provisions have become more embedded over the past year whereas they were more of an immediate priority earlier on in the pandemic.

However, it is clear that carer health and wellbeing remains an important form of support offered by employers. The most commonly reported additional arrangements were:

- signposting to support from carers' organisations (92%)
- counselling/mental health/wellbeing support (89%)
- access to an Employee Assistance Programme (89%)
- signposting to online support and information (89%)

Three out of these top four options for support were also in the top three percentages last year, showing that they remain a clear priority for organisations.

Several respondents mentioned counselling and therapy services and, as last year, promoting and tailoring health and wellbeing resources for carers within the organisation.

❝ The Wellbeing team will tailor or find support for unusual instances."

❝ Carers have access to EfC resources as well as our in house Employment Assistance Programme."

- **Over 6 in 10 employers (63%) said that flexible working and flexible leave arrangements had become more embedded generally in their organisation since the start of the pandemic.**

A further third of respondents considered that these arrangements were already established before COVID-19 and only 4% said that this had not happened or that they were unsure. This strong response demonstrates the central role of flexible working and leave arrangements in workplace carer support.

❝ Already had loads of arrangements in place, but there was more acceptance that people could work from home effectively."

70%
said that they had put additional arrangements in place to support carer health and wellbeing
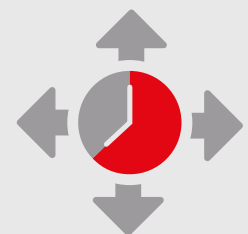
63%
said that flexible working and flexible leave arrangements had become more embedded generally in their organisation since the start of the pandemic

- **Over 6 in 10 respondents (62%) said that they had offered additional leave arrangements (an increase from 42% last year).**

  Several organisations mentioned that they had introduced special leave or increased the number of days offered. There were a number of interesting adaptations to leave arrangements including shorter notice periods to allow flexibility and a wider set of circumstances under which special leave can be awarded.

  " Our special leave policy was revised to give more flexibility in awarding it e.g. individual can now apply for special leave to cover routine medical appointments with those they care for – previously only emergency appointments were covered."

  " 35 hours of emergency paid leave in addition to various other forms of paid leave. Increased information to support them under our 'Smart Working' policy so people can work their hours not necessarily in a 9 to 5 pattern."

  One employer had also provided a mechanism to capture the impact of COVID-19 on carers' ability to fulfil their work to ensure that they were not penalised by being unable to complete their contractual hours due to caring responsibilities:

  " Introduced a 'covid code' that people could charge time to if they were unable to complete their contractual hours due to caring responsibilities to alleviate pressure on individuals during this time. This was very well received by our staff."

62%
of employers said that they had offered additional leave arrangements

- **Almost 4 in 10 respondents (38%) said they had incorporated new/enhanced support for staff who are carers at key stages of their employment journey (e.g. staff induction, training and reviews). However, reflecting these still challenging and unpredictable times, around a half (49%) said they had not done this and a further 13% were unsure.**

  This area of support is clearly something that employers are starting to think about and address although many still seem to be at the planning rather than implementation stage with one saying, for example, that "this will be an element of the new carer policy in development."

  Of those who said that they had incorporated new/enhanced support for carers in this area, the main activity identified was introducing or enhancing this during the induction process:

  " We are trialling a new staff induction in one part of the business."

  " Revised induction process incorporating remote access and virtual meetings; pre-retirement courses planned; improved access to EAP package through online app."

  " Carers are included in induction discussions and other conversations. We have a mid-life MOT but haven't started to deliver it across the business yet (though have done a pilot)."

38%
of employers said they had incorporated new/ enhanced support for staff who are carers at key stages of their employment journey (eg staff induction, training and reviews)

Frontline workers

- **A relatively high number of respondents (71%) said they had key workers in frontline roles that may place them at greater risk. This was similar to last year's figure of 72%.**

  Specific additional support for those in frontline roles since Autumn 2020 was in the form of COVID secure working practices such as regular cleaning, social distancing, provision of PPE and ongoing risk assessments. There was also some mention of further access to wellbeing/mental health support and enhanced special leave and sickness policies.

  > Risk assessments for those that are vulnerable or at greater risk and also risk assessments for those that are caring for vulnerable people outside of work."

  > Yes, they have all received the necessary PPE and training required. There has been changes to our special leave and sickness policies. They have also access to our employee counselling service."

  > Branch employees have continued to have maximum protection since the start of lockdown. There are no plans to remove any PPE, social distancing or hygiene factors across our branch network just yet."
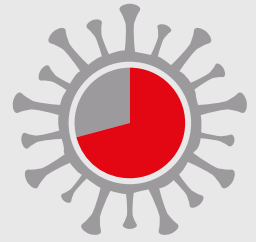
71%
of employers said that they had key workers in frontline roles that may place them at greater risk

Remote working

- **Around 7 out of 10 employers (71%) said they were able to offer (or continue to offer) remote working for all staff when the UK went into lockdown in Autumn 2020.**

  Additionally, around 3 in 10 (29%) said they were able to offer this for some staff. There were no respondents who said that they could not offer this to any members of staff.

  In total all respondents (100%) therefore reported being able to offer remote working for some or all of their staff, compared with a total of 74% respondents in 2020. This year's higher percentage may reflect the fact that remote working has become more accepted as a practice in more organisations as the pandemic has progressed.

- **Looking to the future, almost all respondents (96%) said that they will either provide remote working for all staff, some staff or for particular circumstances once the pandemic is over.**

  Of these employers, two thirds (67%) said they would do this for some staff and just over a quarter (27%) for all staff. Several employers talked about introducing, further developing or continuing hybrid working arrangements in their organisations (including working from home for two or three days a week as part of these arrangements) as we move out of the pandemic.

  The range of comments from employers in response to this question reflect the nuances of this issue as working environments and roles and the personal circumstances and preferences of individual employees vary so enormously.

> " Depending on individual roles; as not all would be suited to remote/ home working. However, our staff have benefited from working flexibly, and the business has continued to meet its objectives, so flexible working will remain for some time."

> " We will have a 'blended working' arrangement for most employees. Some employees prefer to be in the office and so this will be arranged (and has been throughout the pandemic)."

> " We have developed a hybrid working policy regarding remote/office working; encouraged managers to have conversations with staff regarding working arrangements."

> " The organisation is currently implementing 'New Ways of Working' and 'Hybrid Working' that will provide more flexibility for all office-based staff."

There was also a clear differentiation between roles (or aspects of roles) which can be performed remotely and those which for operational reasons need to be carried out at the place of work.

> " When it has been agreed by their line managers, they are free to do this, where they have a 'safe' working environment which protects our customers data and privacy; those colleagues have signed a work Attestation. Remote working roles existed before, so it was business as usual for them."

71%
of employers said they were able to offer (or continue to offer) remote working for all staff when the UK went into lockdown in Autumn 2020
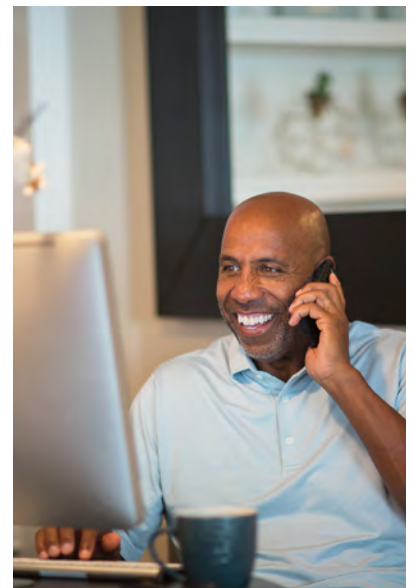
" Some staff here are site critical and their jobs can't be undertaken outside of the workplace but for those who can we are planning an agile working / hybrid system of work going forward."

" All staff who can work from home will be offered hybrid working. Some staff cannot work from home, eg security staff. Staff members can discuss the amount of time they spend at home and in the office with their manager to decide on a balance that is best for the employee and business needs, for example they may need to come in to the office once a week for a meeting but can work from home apart from that, or they may need to be in labs for half of the week but can conduct other research and meetings from home."

" Flexible working from home will become the norm for many employees, although Branch based employees will be required to be in their branch location to support customers face to face."

The need to consult and discuss arrangements not only at organisational level but also at individual and team level in order to return from lockdown arrangements also came through strongly in employers' comments.
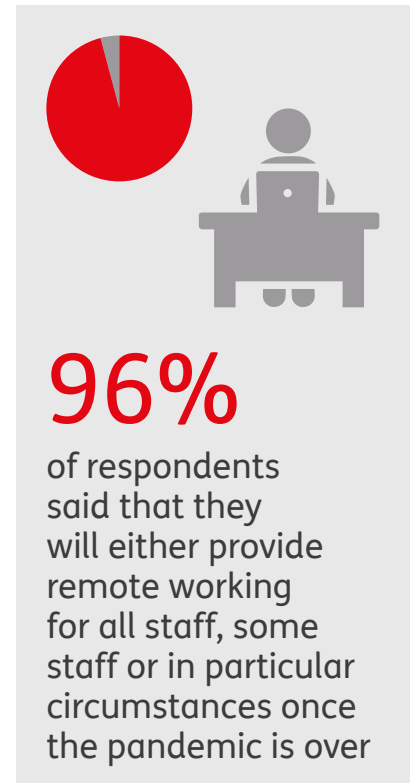
" Recently a survey was carried out to get an idea where colleagues would like to work in the future."

" When planning a return to the workplace all staff have had a one to one conversation with their line manager to discuss their specific situation, including caring responsibilities. Wherever possible these have been taken in to account in planning a face to face return."

For some organisations there were practical challenges around being able to provide enough space for return to the office/place of work either because of social distancing considerations, or because their workforce expanded in response to the pandemic. Others, however, were in a better position to accommodate staff who wished or needed to return from working remotely all of the time.

" We are looking at hybrid working models – there is currently not enough space in our offices to accommodate all staff owing partly to the high volume of additional staff we have needed to recruit for the pandemic and also the fact that we still maintaining social distancing so some work stations are out of use. We are looking to bring in a solution that will suit most people."

For most respondents the priority was ensuring business continuity in the immediate/short term, although some were also beginning to think about the medium to longer term. However, on the whole, respondents were looking to trial arrangements in the short term initially so that these could be refined and developed further once they had been tested.

" We are currently trailing hybrid, flexible working for all staff that are able to work from home. Risk assessments and social distancing guidelines are still in place. Guidelines are in place should staff or those they care for show symptoms. Manager guidance is available to ensure staff needs are being listened to and support is available for both managers and staff having return to work conversations."

" Plan is for people to return to the office for at least 2 days a week in the immediate term."

96%
of respondents said that they will either provide remote working for all staff, some staff or in particular circumstances once the pandemic is over

Recovery and return – current and future plans

- **Over 8 in 10 employers (83%) said they had plans to accommodate both flexibility of location and flexibility of hours in their proposals for staff returning to the office/place of work.**

  Hardly any respondents said that they were only planning flexibility of location or hours (4% and 2% respectively). This probably reflects the fact that the vast majority of organisations include staff who are in frontline roles where adjustments in terms of working (numbers and patterns) can be the most practical way of offering flexibility rather than of location.

  " As a manufacturing site we have worked all through the pandemic so all Covid secure measures are already in place and as mentioned before, where possible staff will have more flexibility of hours and location."

- **The most commonly reported plans for carers returning to the office/place of work were:**

  - social distancing measures (73%)

  - extending remote working for any staff member able to do so (69%)

  - staff policies/action plans should an employee be in contact with/caring for someone who is showing symptoms (67%)

  - staff policies/action plans should an employee begin to show symptoms (65%)

  These were similar to the top four plans reported by employers in our 2020 survey (except for the inclusion of 'having PPE available' last year) suggesting that these activities remain a high priority for respondents.

- **The most commonly reported forms of communication with staff about returning to the office/place of work were through:**

  - communication with line managers/managers meetings (96%)

  - internal newsletters/e-bulletins (87%)

  - staff surveys (60%)

  - appraisals/catch ups (58%).

  Other activities mentioned included "dedicated pages on the organisational intranet", "work with Occupational Health to support effective returns to the workplace", health and wellbeing champions, focus groups, Slack Channels, webinars and organisation wide messaging.

  " Firmwide communications and livestreams to all employees from senior leaders and information on our dedicated Covid information site"

  " Consultation with carers before we start to return to the office and individual EIA and one to one with line managers. Wellbeing workshops including managing stress."

  " We always encourage that managers are flexible with staff who have caring responsibilities … Supported staff to complete risk assessments if they are caring for vulnerable family members/friends etc outside of work."

83%

of employers said they had plans to accommodate both flexibility of location and flexibility of hours in their proposals for staff returning to the office/place of work

- **Interestingly, only around a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they had communicated specifically with carers about this, with the majority either saying that they had not done this (58%) or that they were unsure (15%).**

The relatively small proportion of employers who reported that they had specifically communicated with carers may be due to the fact that their organisations have been more active in running all-staff communications during the pandemic so may not have felt the need to communicate with carers directly.

" All employees have received the same information. It is expected that managers will discuss with individuals their needs and work out a way forward with them."

Those organisations who said that they had communicated explicitly with carers reported that they had done this through the staff carers network and one to one conversations with their line manager.

" When planning a return to the workplace all staff have had a one to one conversation with their line manager to discuss their specific situation, including caring responsibilities. Wherever possible these have been taken in to account in planning a face to face return."

- **Around 4 out of 10 employers (41%) said that they were currently developing additional organisational/HR policies or procedures. A further quarter (25%) said they had provided this support and a smaller proportion (15%) that they were planning to do this, with several mentioning 'hybrid working'.**

Several comments from respondents mentioned plans for hybrid working both in the short and longer term. In many cases this appears to have been (and remains) an evolutionary process, with employers having implemented this type of arrangement in practice as an immediate response to the changing circumstances of the pandemic without this necessarily being a formal policy. Unsurprisingly different organisations appear to be at different stages in this process depending upon their work environment, sector and culture.

" Some of our adapted working practices will now become formal policy as we had shown that we can operate efficiently in a more flexible way."

" Our policies continuously evolve. We are introducing hybrid working on a long-term basis."

"Everyday flexibility approach to informal flexible working has evolved, into a programme of Empowered flexibility where our people are trusted and empowered to work in a way that works for them, their clients and teams, including when and where they work."
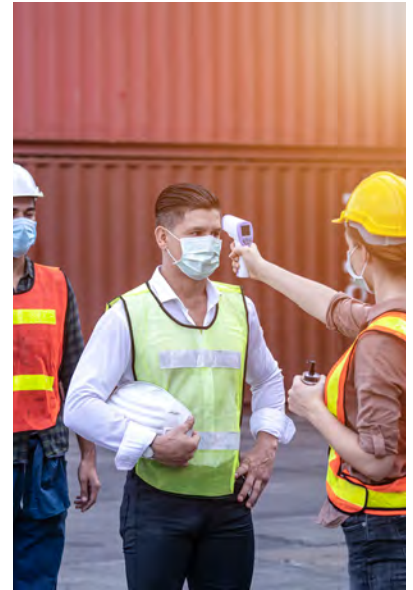
25%
of employers said they had provided additional support via additional organisational/ HR policies or procedures

- **Strikingly, over 6 in 10 of organisations (63%) said that they had learned new practical lessons that they thought would help support carer employees in the future (an increase from 37% who reported this last year.)**

" Our Smart working policy was developed as a result of pandemic."

" It has been proved that many more roles can be carried out from home or partly from home than previously thought without having a negative effect on the business."

Many respondents talked about evolving hybrid working arrangements (or other smart/flexible working arrangements) with the idea that they will be long-lasting.

" Some of our adapted working practices will now become formal policy as we had shown that we can operate efficiently in a more flexible way."

" Our policies continuously evolve. We are introducing hybrid working on a long-term basis."

" Everyday flexibility approach to informal flexible working has evolved, into programme of Empowered flexibility where our people are trusted and empowered to work in a way that works for them, their clients and teams, including when and where they work."

- **Long term changes: paid carers leave, signposting to support and manager training.**
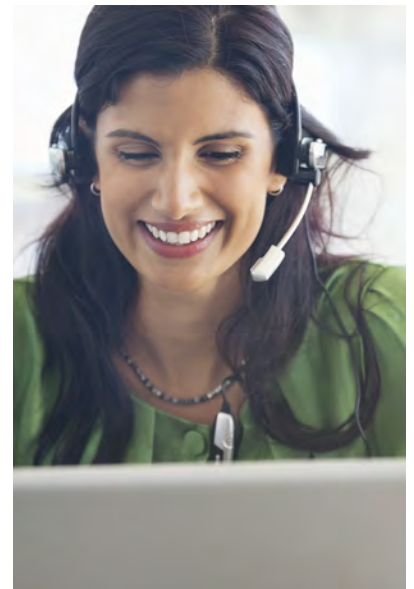
When asked about changes as a result of the new practical lessons that organisations envisage to be long-term, some interesting comments were made by respondents about implementing paid carers leave, plans to signpost carers to appropriate support on an ongoing basis and supporting and training managers.

" We have seen the benefits of having where roles allow, employees that request flexible working having this permitted. That by having as example 35 hours paid Carers leave, time off was managed to support our customers and business better, rather than having to manage sick leave. So being adaptable to flexible working is something we will continue to bring forward."

" Highlighting the issues working carers have and signposting them to appropriate support, this will be on-going now"

" Supporting and training managers to understand the demands of caring and look for ways they can support staff"

During these continuing changing and unpredictable times we hope that further examples of supporting working carers in COVID-19 will be identified and shared over the coming months.

63%
said that they had learned new practical lessons that they thought would help support carer employees in the future

efc employers for **carers**

Employers for Carers

Carers UK runs Employers for Carers, providing practical advice and resources to help employers support carers in their workforce.

in /showcase/efc-employers-for-carers

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