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# **A Research Report for the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Inquiry on Homeworking**

**A Review of Research Evidence on the  
Impact of Homeworking**

**March 2022**



**Cardiff Council**

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### 1. Executive Summary

The Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee is currently undertaking a Task and Finish (T&F) inquiry on homeworking to support the development of Cardiff Council's current policy and operational work in supporting homeworking arrangements for its staff members. The PRAP Committee Chair and T&F Members commissioned this review of literature on the impact of homeworking. This research specifically examined the pre-covid pandemic and the most recent evidence on the impact of homeworking on productivity and on the well-being of staff. More specifically, this research reviewed the evidence on the impact of homeworking on the following areas: individual and team performance, work-life balance, job satisfaction and attitudes, work relationships with peers and manager, social isolation, well-being, mental health, career aspiration and progression, access to technology and the role of managers in supporting homeworking arrangements. The literature that has been reviewed for this research have relied heavily on documents and publications including academic literature that are available on-line.

#### Increasing number of homeworkers

Prior to the Covid19 pandemic working at home was often promoted as part of the 'flexible working scheme' and was often an arrangement that was requested voluntarily from the employer. In 1981, only 1.5% of those in employment worked mainly from home and this was estimated to have increased up to 5.7% in the two months before the lockdown restrictions in March 2020. During that period that figures have been increasing gradually each year but still comprise a small percentage of those in employment. It was also estimated at that time only around 17.7% sometimes work from home and around seven out of ten (70.6%) reported that they worked either in their employer's premises or elsewhere.

Current evidence suggests that homeworking before the lockdown was more prevalent amongst those in higher skilled and professional and managerial occupations and in older age groups. Only around 10% of those with low level qualifications or in elementary occupations work from home. Younger people below the age of 30 were less likely to be doing work at home. On the other hand, older workers 30+ were more likely to either occasionally or always using their home as their place of work.

As a result of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions there was a dramatic increase in homeworking. The percentage of workers who reported that they mainly or exclusively worked from home rose from 5.7% of workers in January/February 2020 to 43.1% in April 2020. Although there was an increase in the numbers who worked from home across all occupational groups, the most dramatic increases were seen in those working as managers, professionals, associate professionals and administrative and secretarial staff.

### Impact on productivity

The positive impact of homeworking on productivity has been well documented in many academic and practitioner research from the late 1990s and early 2000. Most of the people who engage in homeworking prior to the lock down were doing so by choice and voluntarily and have reported increase in their productivity. The data on productivity during that period were based on self-report data and it is possible that homeworkers may have been motivated to prove that the homeworking arrangement is not detrimental to productivity.

The more recent evidence (after 2010) on productivity using self-report data continue to support the view that homeworking has a positive impact on productivity. More rigorous research undertaken has not only relied on self-report data but have also used supervisor rated assessment to provide evidence that productivity of those working from home increased. The quantitative assessment has found that productivity increased significantly and at least in one case by as much as 13%.

Various reasons were cited in different research literature on the reasons for increase in productivity. Generally, this is attributed to an increase in work hours made possible by time saved from not commuting. The productivity gains can also arise from the lack of office-related distractions present in the home setting e.g. frequent phone calls or impromptu conversations with colleagues can be avoided. Another reason cited is work intensification. Individuals increase effort while working, putting in more discretionary effort taking fewer breaks and, in some cases, working longer hours when homeworking. It was suggested that workers are often grateful for the opportunity to WFH, and so exert greater effort, or workers who are motivated to prove that this alternative working arrangement is successful.

There is limited information on the effect that the widespread growth of enforced homeworking has had on productivity levels during the lockdown and recent research findings have differing results. Research conducted in the Netherlands reported that productivity has slightly decreased, however Canadian research reported the opposite.

The employee survey undertaken by CIPD in 2020 and by calculations made Felstead 2020 using Understanding Covid Society data found similar results. More than a third stated that homeworking did not have any effect on productivity. A lesser proportion (in both cases) stated that this has either increased or decreased productivity. The main reasons cited for the decrease in productivity include the following: having less work to do, having to provide care or home schooling, a lack of motivation/focus/concentration, limited access to workplace resources, less frequent interaction with colleagues, and changes to how work was carried out.

There is some evidence that team productivity can be affected to some degree by homeworking in cases where work involves a high degree of task interdependence. This can be true in cases where there are limited avenues for communication and coordination between team members. However,

evidence suggests that when homeworkers themselves proactively available to their colleagues, team performance can be enhanced.

Perceptions that homeworking can threaten knowledge transfer between homeworkers and office-based staff and potentially affect the quality of relationships among workers is quite well documented in research. However, research evidence demonstrate that homeworking does not significantly affect the quality of information exchange between homeworkers and other organisational members. Instead, it was found that a key factor that affects team productivity is organisational attitude to homeworking. Team performance does not suffer in organisations where homeworking is regarded as a normative practice. The development of new processes, communication routines, schedules to accommodate homeworkers maximise the benefits that can be derived from homeworking and the work of the team.

### Impact on work-life balance

Homeworkers acknowledge that their work can occasionally interfere with their personal lives, however research evidence have shown that they are also generally satisfied with their work-life balance. Individuals who work at home have been found to have lower their work-to-life conflict. This is particularly true for employees whose jobs allows them higher levels of job autonomy and scheduling flexibility. These lower levels of work-to-life conflict generally leads to higher job satisfaction, reduced intentions to leave the organisation, and decreased levels of job-related stress for homeworkers. It must be noted that the ability to effectively manage and balance work and home commitments could be affected by gender and caring responsibilities. Research evidence have shown that those individuals with heavier caregiving responsibilities for children or adult may experience higher levels of work-to-life and life-to-work conflict.

To effectively deal with work-to-life and life-to-work conflict, it has been documented that homeworker deliberately develop specific boundaries between their work and their personal lives. Many homeworkers develop

spatial and temporal boundaries between work and home life. These include restricting family members' access to home-based workspace, dressing for the office even when working at home, taking breaks at specified times in order to replicate the timekeeping and physical sensations. Employers can further support employees in maintaining work home boundaries by make arrangements to help employees feel connected closely to the organisation via communication and peer relationships. Another critical element that can helping maintaining boundaries is ensuring that the home environment is adequately set up for work. However, it must be recognised that some employees may not have sufficient space in their homes to have a separate space for work-activities and materials.

### Impact on job satisfaction

Research evidence suggest that those who participate in homeworking arrangements have increased employee job satisfaction, compared to their office-based counterpart. This stems from perceptions and feelings of autonomy. Homeworkers are likely to feel greater freedom and discretion over how and when they perform their work tasks. This gives the feeling of “less control from management, less judgements and interference from co-workers”.

There is variable evidence on what levels of homeworking promotes or results in increased job satisfaction. It has been noted that ‘high-intensity’ homeworkers (those who worked at home three days or more per week) reported higher levels of job satisfaction than office-based staff. However, the positive relationship between homeworking and job satisfaction appear to diminish when homeworking approaches 20 hours per week. Research evidence have shown that this does not apply for those who undertake independent instead of interdependent work. Their job satisfaction levels remain high and not linked to the number of hours worked at home.

Higher job autonomy among homeworkers is also associated with more positive attitudes towards their employers and frequently translates into



greater commitment to the employing organization. Employees feel loyal to their employer for accommodating their working arrangements. However, research evidence has shown that the level of organisational commitment appears to be dependent on the degree of homeworking performed. Partial homeworkers showed significant increases in organisational commitment compared to an office-based workers. Whereas the levels of commitment of those employees who worked exclusively at home were no different to those of the office-based staff. Other reports have shown that home working has helped to retain employees who may otherwise have left the employer if such arrangement has not been made available to them.

### Impact on co-worker relationships

Research have highlighted concerns that homeworking can have a detrimental on the quality of relationships that homeworkers have with their colleagues. The spatial distance that homeworkers have from others could translates into psychological distance. And for homeworkers this could mean “out of sight, out of mind”. However more recent research evidence cited in ACAS (2013) indicates that homeworking is unlikely to exert any negative effect on their relationships with colleagues for individuals who work at home for only part of their working week. However, for those who work exclusively homeworking may be linked to decreased quality of co-worker relationships.

### Communication

Employees who work mostly at or from home have less frequent communications with their co-workers. The research evidence however suggests that there are no links between type and amount of communication with isolation or job satisfaction experienced by homeworkers. As the number of communications increases, perceptions of job control, positive well-being and work-life facilitation decline, and work-to-life interference increases. The study found that the quality rather than the quantity of communication with others that is important to homeworkers.

The view that organisational culture will be weakened as homeworking becomes more prevalent has been refuted by research. This largely dependent on the organisation. The evidence suggests that organisational cultures can easily be kept alive and well, even when there is reduced constant communication among employees. This is particularly true in jobs that have some degree of the autonomy, where interdependence is very low and frequent communications with work colleagues may not be essential.

### Impact on social isolation

Social isolation was identified by full time homeworkers and partial homeworkers as one of the challenges of working from home. This is defined as the sense that one is out of touch with others in the workplace, both physically and in terms of communication. Research evidence confirms that social isolation is experienced by employees who spend at least minimum of 20 per cent of their working time at home. However only a very small percentage of homeworkers reported that they frequently or very frequently feel socially isolated. Furthermore, partial homeworkers appear to be the group that is less likely to experience social isolation compared to fulltime homeworkers.

The degree of social isolation experienced by the different of homeworkers also vary. Partial homeworkers are less likely to miss the emotional support from co-workers and informal interaction with others compared with full time homeworking employees. In terms informal interaction with others regarding work, fulltime (72%) homeworkers are more likely to report occasionally missing this type of informal interaction with others. In comparison a significantly lower proportion (40%) of partial homeworkers feel the same way. The evidence suggests that partial homeworkers appear be the homeworking category that experience lower levels of social isolation. Their working arrangement split their working time between home and office and allows them to communicate face-to-face more frequently with office-based colleagues and home-based colleagues.

To avoid feeling socially isolated, some full-time homeworkers and partial homeworkers take proactive measures to stay in contact with their work colleagues. Managers can also support and put arrangements in place to reduce social isolation amongst home workers and encourage social interaction amongst colleagues. The organisation should also consider the suitability of a given individual for dealing with the social isolation associated with homeworking.

### Impact of worker and manager relationship

Various early research (undertaken during the early 2000) highlighted the potential for homeworking to degrade the quality of manager and subordinate relationship. Some managers fear reduced control over their subordinates, while employees fear isolation and information impoverishment. It is recommended that managers might have to change their strategies for monitoring employees from behaviour-based to output-based controls to effectively manage homeworking. Managers who are unwilling to or who lack the training to change their management and control styles, are likely to experience a deterioration in the depth and vitality of their connection with their homeworking subordinates. It is suggested that managers should also put arrangements in place to stay in close contact with homeworkers. This contact should emphasise information-sharing rather than close monitoring of work processes.

### Impact on well-being

The positive impact of homeworking on employee well-being is well documented. Various research literature confirm that homeworking is associated with significantly lower levels of work-related stress than those experienced by office-based staff. In particular, the stress associated with control over the work environment and work schedules is reduced amongst homeworkers. In terms of minimising of stress and improving well-being the research evidence show that moderate levels of homeworking i.e., at least 3 days a week yields the best outcomes for employees.

In terms of positive measures of employee's emotional well-being, a substantial proportion of (51.9%) partial homeworkers are more likely to feeling content compared to full time homeworkers and office-based workers. The available evidence also show that significantly low proportion of homeworkers confirm that their working arrangement has negatively impacted their well-being.

Although work intensification can be an issue amongst homeworkers, research evidence has shown that homeworking professionals did not experience negative outcomes from work intensification. The individual's choice, or autonomy in extending the working day and in intensifying work effort may serve to counteract any potentially stressful effects of longer work hours. Furthermore, an examination of how 'burnout' affects the well-being of home working employees have shown that show that those employees who are predominantly home-based tend to report some degree of work burnout. There is a significantly higher percentage of full-time homeworkers and office workers who report some degree of work burnout compared to partial homeworkers.

Other issues that affect the homemaker's well-being such as 'presenteeism' i.e., working while sick or in 'absenteeism' i.e., frequent or habitual absence from work have also been noted in research literature, however there is little evidence to what extent these can affect homeworkers well-being.

### Impact on mental health

There is limited research available on the specific impact of homeworking on the mental health of employees. The available evidence from early research have shown that a greater percentage of teleworkers (homeworkers) compared to office-workers experience negative emotions of loneliness, irritability, worry, resentment and guilt, frustration. It was noted that the experience of loneliness amongst teleworkers (homeworkers) was particularly evident but was not experienced at all by the office-workers. The feeling of

stress was the only negative emotion, wherein more office-workers have reported experiencing than homeworkers. Research evidence have also shown that female home workers are likely to experience higher levels of mental and physical ill health than male homeworkers. Working women are required to cope with job-related demands which affect their role in the family thus resulting in increased levels of work-family conflict. Furthermore, male homeworkers experience more emotional ill health and experience of physical symptoms of stress than male office-workers. This is more likely to be true for those who take on the dual responsibilities of work and home life. This can also arise a perceived loss of status arising from being invisible to company members and its effect on their social position.

Recent research has noted that sudden and dramatic movement of work into the home due to Covid lockdown restrictions had a significant effect on employee's mental well-being. The evidence has shown that this has taken a toll on the mental health those all who worked at home in the three months of lockdown. This effect was even more pronounced especially for those employees who have always or often worked at home.

### Impact on career aspirations and progression

Homeworkers' concerns that working away from a central location could hamper their career prospects has also been documented. These concerns are based on the belief that working arrangements limits opportunities for them to demonstrate high performance in a face-to-face and in highly salient context. They are also concerned that others might view them as less committed and less loyal to the organization and prioritizing personal life over professional obligations.

More recent research evidence is available on how homeworking affects the employee's aspirations and options for career progression. Partial homeworkers are more likely to be ambitious i.e., feel that career is important to identity (83%), have the ambition (67%), and have the ability (87%) to advance their careers. In comparison, full time homeworkers are less likely to

have the ambition and the willingness to advance in their careers (30%) and to state that having a career is important to their sense of identity (61%). Homeworking employees who work mostly from home were more likely to feel that their career is not a priority in their life. The most important things in their lives and the areas that they derive most satisfaction from come from their life outside work. However, there is insufficient evidence to establish whether participation in full time homeworking contributes over time to lower levels of career ambition or whether employees with pre-existing low levels of career ambition.

### Impact on professional isolation

Professional isolation is defined as the experience of remoteness from the ongoing activities in the workplace. The views of homeworkers on how professional isolation affects their career prospects have also been noted in research literature. Research evidence have shown that homeworking employees do not believe that do not miss out on activities and opportunities that that could enhance their career and opportunities to be mentored. Most partial (60%) and full time (67%) homeworkers believe that working from home has no impact on their opportunity to advance in their careers. A much smaller proportion felt that their working arrangement had a negative impact on their career advancement opportunities. It was noted from qualitative evidence that homeworking employees make proactive efforts avoid any potential damaging effects of professional isolation. Additionally, managers can also set up various arrangements that to help professional isolation among homeworking staff.

### Role of managers in supporting homeworking

Managers have a key role in making homeworking a success and in creating successful homeworking environment. Research evidence have shown that a substantial proportion of managers (40%) confirmed that managing homeworkers is more difficult than managing office-based staff. It is recommended that managers must relinquish traditional notions of how best

to manage performance and adopt new ways of motivating and monitoring their staff. It is important that management exhibit some degree of trust in employees and adopt of output-based controls to assess performance instead of assessing performance based on the employee's observable actions. Managers must also stay in close contact with homeworkers, but that this contact should emphasise information-sharing rather than close monitoring of work processes. In having this approach managers are able to support staff in achieving lower work-to-life conflict, better performance, and higher rates of helping their co-workers. Furthermore, specific manager training is also recommended in homeworking literature.

### Impact of technology on homeworking

Research evidence confirm the central role technology has in ensuring success of homeworking. Technological issues experienced whilst homeworking been associated with significantly higher levels of isolation and negative measures of well-being. Homeworkers are significantly more affected when technological issues arise as they are in their own environment without the immediate support of other colleagues or alternative technology to rely on. The speed and reliability of internet and network as well as readily accessible information and support on common technological issues that arise whilst homeworking are some of the most common issues encountered. Homeworking literature highlighted the need for enhanced access to technology and support for homeworkers compared to office-based workers. Overall research evidence has shown that homeworkers who receive adequate technological support are more satisfied with their working arrangements than those receiving insufficient levels of support.

### Future of homeworking

## **Appendix 1**

It is predicted that the current pandemic its associated social distancing measures will have a long-term impact on working arrangements. It is likely that there will be higher levels of homeworking in the future. Recent research evidence has shown that as many as nine out of ten (88.2%) of employees who worked at home during the lockdown would like to continue working at home in some capacity.



### 2. Introduction

The Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee is currently undertaking a Task and Finish (T&F) inquiry on homeworking to support the development of Cardiff Council's current policy and operational work in supporting homeworking arrangements for its staff members. The PRAP Committee Chair and T&F Members commissioned this review of literature on the impact of homeworking.

This research specifically examined the pre-covid pandemic and the most recent evidence on the impact of homeworking on productivity and on the well-being of staff. More specifically, this research reviewed the evidence on the impact of homeworking on the following areas: individual and team performance, work-life balance, job satisfaction and attitudes, work relationships with peers and manager, social isolation, well-being, mental health, career aspiration and progression, access to technology and the role of managers in supporting homeworking arrangements. The literature that has been reviewed for this research have relied heavily on documents and publications including academic literature that are available on-line.

### **3. Background of homeworking in UK**

'Homeworking' is defined as "an arrangement in which employees perform their usual job-related tasks at home rather than in a central workplace and do so for a regular portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to communicate with others both inside and outside the organisation (ACAS, 2013).

Working from home is not a recent phenomenon. There has been a long and documented history of this type of working arrangement in the UK. This type of working arrangement was documented from as early as the sixteenth century, wherein the wool industry relied upon homeworkers. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the manufacture of cutlery around Sheffield and the production of nails and chain in the West Midland depended heavily on the "domestic system" of working from home. However much of that type of homeworking disappeared following the Industrial Revolution and the growth of factories. In current times, home working in the manufacturing sector continues to be a significant force with up to a million homeworkers primarily working for the clothing industry in the UK.

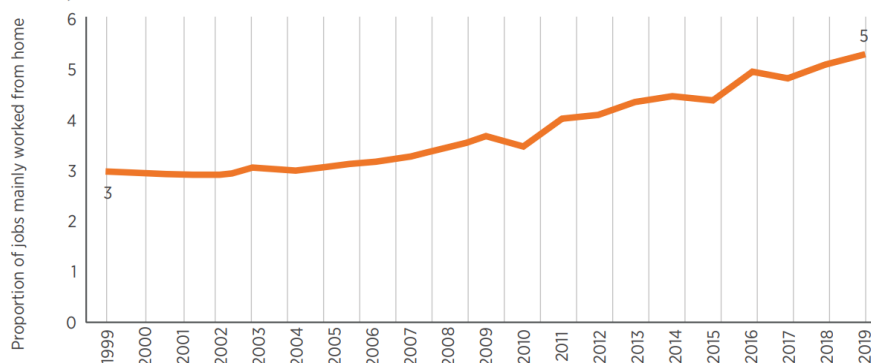
#### **3.1. Homeworking before the Covid 19 pandemic**

Before the Covid19 pandemic working at home was often promoted as part of the flexible working" scheme. This was promoted as a way of readjusting work-life balance and raising job-related well-being. This was also based on a conscious decision made by organisations to offer greater flexibility to their employees as well as cost savings on office related overheads. More often this was a voluntary arrangement requested by employees. In recent years the growth homeworking has been largely facilitated by changes in technology that enables the workforce to connect remotely to the workplace.

The CIPD (2020) report and the research report by Felstead (2020) provided the most recent evidence on the significant increase in the number of people who have worked mainly from home.

The Labour Force Survey in 1981 was cited in showing that only 1.5 % of those in employment worked mainly from home. It was noted that the increase in the number of individuals working from home over the years has been gradual rather than dramatic (see Figure 1). By 2019, the number of individuals who work mainly from home has at least tripled. Although the figures have been increasing, these still comprise a relatively small percentage of employees.

**Figure 1: Home as the main place of work is on the rise (%)** (proportion of jobs worked mainly from home, 1999–2019)



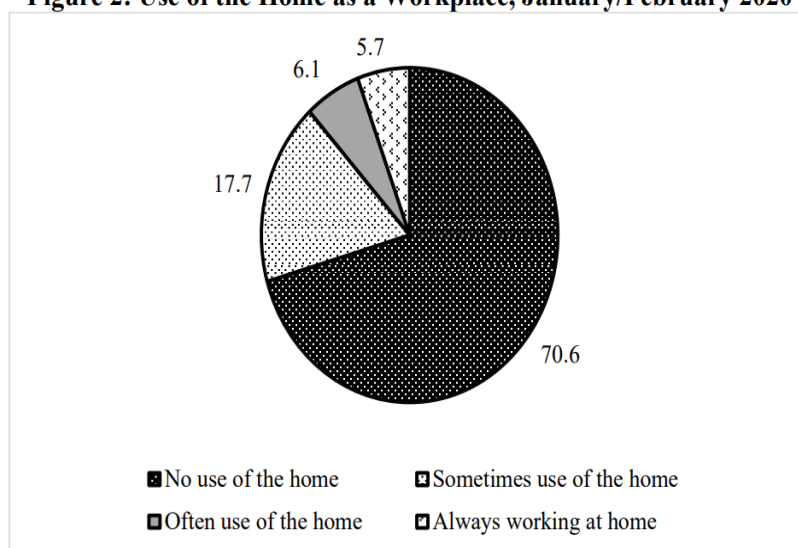
Source: *Labour Force Survey, April–June 1999–2019*<sup>2</sup>

Using the Labour Force survey figures, Felstead (2020), cited that **in 2019**, one in twenty (4.7%) of those employed, worked mainly at home. In comparison Felstead’s calculations using data from Understanding Society COVID 19 study found that in January/February 2020 – well before the lockdown March 2020 – 5.7% of the employed population were exclusively working at home. This figure is one percentage point higher than those cited in the 2019 Labour Force Survey (LFS). It was suggested that difference in figures could be due to the differences in the questions and response scales

used in the two data sets. It must also be noted that the figures cited above do not include those individuals who occasionally work from home.

Before the lockdown only a small proportion of employees confirm that they occasionally work from home. Felstead's (2020) own calculations estimated that 17.7% sometimes worked from home. Around seven out of ten (70.6%) reported that they did not work at home which suggests that they were either doing work at an employer's/client's premises and/or doing work elsewhere.

**Figure 2: Use of the Home as a Workplace, January/February 2020**

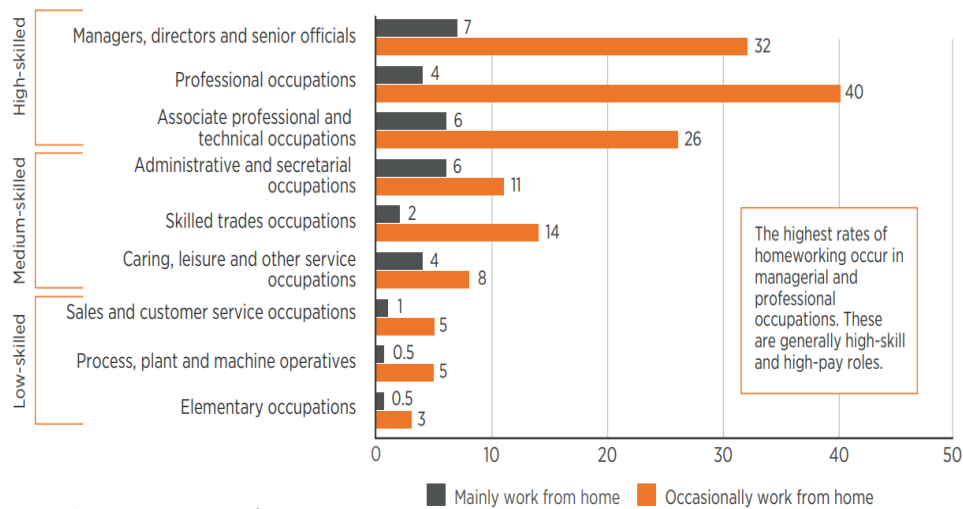


*Source: own calculations of the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, waves 1, 2 and 3, see Table A1.*

### 3.2. Characteristics of people working from home

The evidence cited in CIPD's (2020) and Felstead's (2020) reports have shown that homeworking before the lockdown was more prevalent among those in higher skilled and professional and managerial occupations.

**Figure 4: Homeworking is most prevalent in high-skilled professional and managerial occupations (%)**  
 (proportion of all workers who mainly or occasionally worked from home in their main job, by occupational group, April–June 2014)

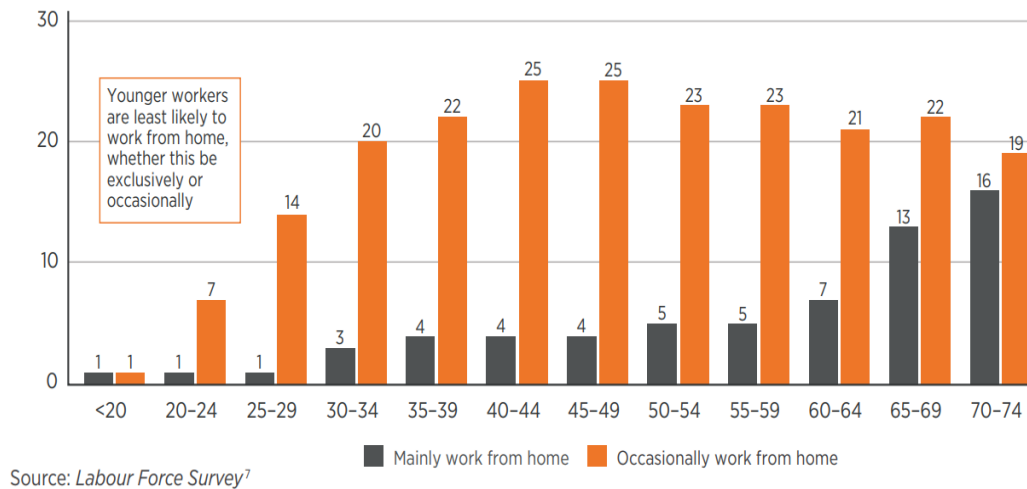


Source: Labour Force Survey 2014<sup>9</sup>

Many of those who either mainly or occasionally home working are senior officials, directors or managers, in the information and communication sector, in professional, scientific and technical occupations or in work educational establishments.

According to Felstead (2020), before the lockdown, nearly nine out of ten workers (89%) with no qualifications and just over half (51%) of graduates were not making use of the home for as the workplace. He also found that a similar pattern existed between occupation and work location. Only 1 out of 10 of those working in elementary occupations such as office cleaners, freight handlers, garden labourers work from home. Whereas those in managerial positions (50.8%) confirm make use of the home as a workplace.

**Figure 3: Older workers are more likely to work exclusively from home, whereas occasional homeworking peaks in middle age (%)** (proportion of all workers who mainly or occasionally worked from home in their main job, by age group, April–June 2014)



The results of the CIPD's (2020) research noted a striking relationship between age and working from home. More specifically the percentage of those working mainly from home rises with age. In comparison the percentage of those occasionally working from home peaks at middle age. The data also show that younger workers, particularly those below the age of 30 are least likely to mainly or occasionally work from home.

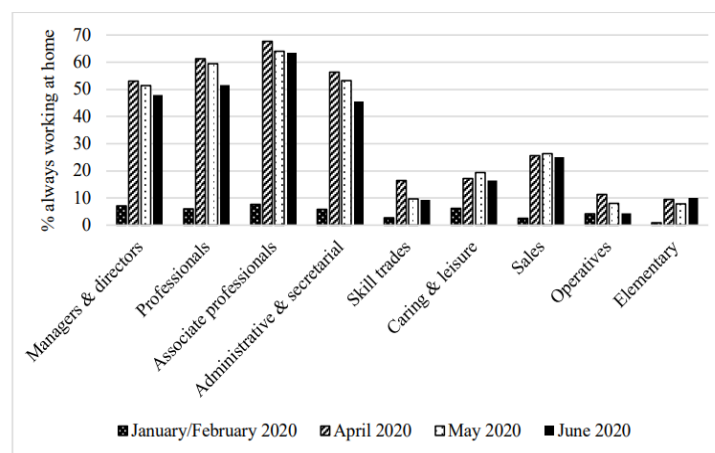
Felstead (2020) stated that the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study found similar results. Immediately before the lockdown younger people were less likely to be doing work at home. In comparison, older workers were more likely to be always using their home as their place of work. Around one in ten (9.3%) of those 60-75 years old reporting that they did all of their work at home compared to 2.7% of those aged 16-29.

### 3.3. Homeworking during COVID 19 pandemic

As a result of Covid 19 lockdown restrictions and promotion of working at home as part of the 'stay home' message, there was a dramatic increase in homeworking. Felstead's (2020) calculations show an eight-fold rise in the percentage of workers who reported that they mainly worked from home. The

proportion of those worked exclusively or mainly at home rose from 5.7% of workers in January/February 2020 to 43.1% in April 2020. The figures remained high until June 2020. The surge in homeworking triggered by the lockdown in the UK was concentrated amongst those who are higher paid, better qualified and the higher skilled.

**Figure 8: Exclusive Use of the Home as a Workplace, Before and During Lockdown by Occupation**



Source: own calculations of the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, waves 1, 2 and 3, see Tables A1, A2a, A2b and A2c.

The proportion of employees who worked from home increased across all occupational groups during lockdown (see chart above). The chart also illustrates that there is dramatic increase in homeworking in certain occupational groups. According to Felstead (2020) during the first two months of lockdown, the majority of those working as managers, professionals, associate professionals (e.g., computer assistants, buyers and estate agents), and administrative and secretarial staff (e.g., personal assistants, office clerks and bookkeepers) stated that they did all of their work at home. In contrast, the increase in the number of those who are homeworking in occupations that require no, or low-level qualifications is significantly lower. For this group of workers, their workplace would have remained the same regardless of the lockdown.

The succeeding sections of this report will identify highlight some of the opportunities and issues that Cardiff Council would need to consider in developing its homeworking policies and processes.

### **4. Impact on individual productivity**

#### **4.1. Increase in productivity based on self-report data**

Prior to the lockdown restrictions, the impact of homeworking on productivity has been quite well documented both in academic and practitioner research. The work of Sandi Mann and Lynn Holdsworth (2000) and Gajendran and Harrison (2007) cited various reasons for this advantage in performance. The increase in productivity was attributed mainly to doing tasks remotely also means fewer disruptions while working; increased work hours made possible by time saved from not commuting. It was also noted that homeworking provides individuals the opportunity to tailor or modify the work environment to better match how and when they do their work most effectively i.e., flexible work scheduling. Furthermore, it was cited that most people engage in telework or homeworking by choice and would tend to be more motivated to prove that this alternative mode of work is successful. It is important however to note that most of the accounts and data cited on the positive impacts of homeworking on productivity were based on self-report data.

More recent evidence on productivity relating to homeworking has been noted in the ACAS (2013) report. The first one was a study of IBM's alternative workplace programme where 87% of employees in the programme reported their productivity and effectiveness have increased significantly since they began to work from home. The second one was a UK study of homeworkers, where 75% of those interviewed declared themselves to be more or much more effective when working at home than when working in the office.



### **4.2. Productivity based on manager's performance assessment**

The concerns over the self-reported data on increased productivity in homeworking has been largely refuted by the result several rigorous research presented below:

In the US, the longitudinal study Butler et. Al. (2007) of call centre workers made use of supervisor rated performance. The research found that over a five-year period, the homeworkers' productivity increased by 154%, whereas the office-based staff's productivity fell by 13%.

In an attempt to assess staff productivity beyond self-reports of performance, the ACAS (2013) research also made use of supervisor ratings to assess and compare productivity of homeworkers vs office-based staff. The results of the research found that the average performance is slightly higher for mobile and partial homeworkers.

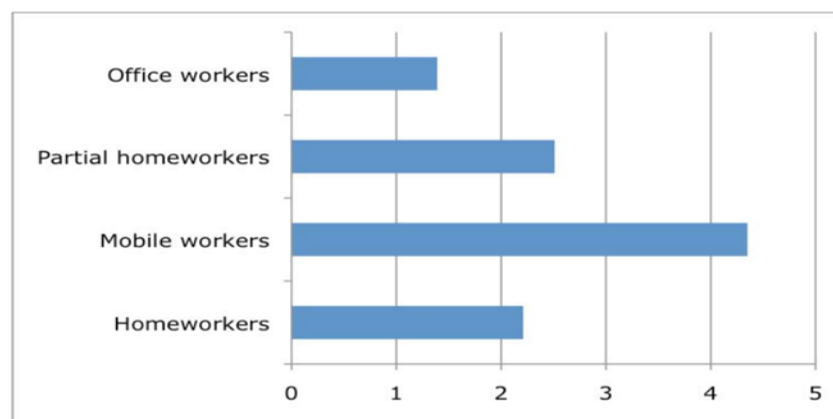
The most recent and rigorous study that has been undertaken to evidence increase in productivity from homeworking was the work undertaken by Bloom et. Al. (2015) as cited in the CIPD report (2020) and in Felstead 2020. The findings of this study was a result of a 9-month randomised controlled. The results found a highly significant increase in productivity of 13% amongst homeworkers.

### **4.3. Reasons for increased productivity**

Early and recent research attributed increase in productivity to increased work hours made possible by time saved from not commuting (in Gajendran and Harrison (2007) and ACAS (2013). The ACAS (2013) research provided further evidence on the increases in number of hours worked amongst those who are working from home some or all of their contracted hours. The quantitative survey involving 515 staff compared hours worked vs contracted hours provided evidence to support this. Homeworkers, partial homeworkers

and mobile workers were significantly more likely to work in excess of their contracted hours than their office-based colleagues. Mobile workers on average worked more than 4 hours extra per week whilst partial home workers on the average worked >2 extra hours per week.

Figure 1: Average difference between 'How many hours per week are you contracted to work by Acas?' and 'On average, how many hours per week do you typically spend working?'



(Base: N=508, Employee survey respondents)

However, it must be noted that longer working hours should not be conflated with increase in productivity or increase in the actual amount of work and outputs produced.

With homeworking individuals have opportunity to tailor or modify the work environment to better match how and when they do their work most effectively. According to the ACAS 2013 report working from home can mean fewer disruptions. The productivity gains stem from the lack of office-related distractions in the home setting e.g. frequent phone calls or impromptu conversations with colleagues can be avoided. Furthermore, the evidence from their qualitative study, found that this is particularly true for employees working on tasks that require extended periods of concentration such as writing documents and analysing large volumes of data were identified as tasks. These tasks appear to have benefited the most from being performed at home rather than at the office. Similarly, the evidence from the follow-up

interviews the home workers in Bloom's (2015) study explained their increased productivity workers was made possible by the greater convenience of being at home (e.g., the ease of making a tea or coffee, or using the toilet), and the relative quietness of the home environment.

According to CIPD 2020, this increase in productivity amongst homeworkers are can often be attributed to work intensification which is regarded as a commonly reported side effect of WFH. Individuals often increase effort while working, putting in more discretionary effort (beyond job expectations), taking fewer breaks and in some cases working longer hours when homeworking. An explanation provided for this, is that workers are grateful for the opportunity to WFH, and so exert greater effort, although this effect may decline over time. As previously noted prior to the lockdown restrictions, homeworking was by choice/voluntary, and individuals could be more motivated to prove that this alternative mode of work is successful (ACAS 2013). With this evidence, CIPD (2020) recommends that employers who implement homeworking will need to manage the long-term effects of such behavioural changes i.e., work intensification, and particularly their impact on workers' wellbeing and work–life balance

#### **4.4. Productivity during Covid 19 lockdown**

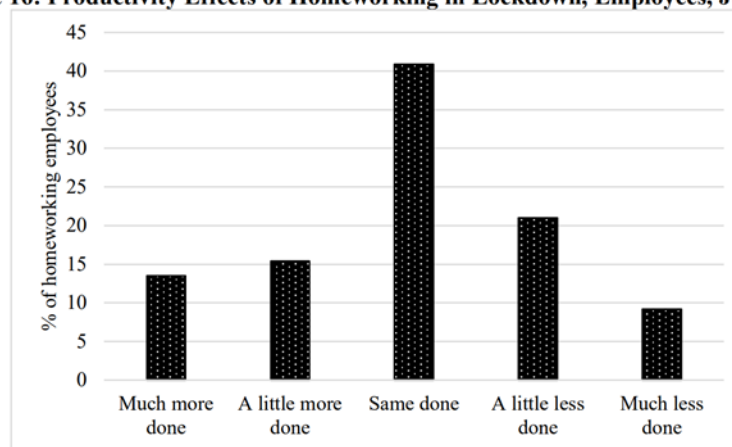
According to Felstead (2020) there is limited information on the impact of widespread growth of enforced homeworking on productivity levels during the lockdown. Some of the research he cited had contrasting results. The research he cited based on an online survey of workers in the Netherlands found that respondents were 'slightly less productive' working at home during lockdown than they were before restrictions were introduced. In contrast the Canadian research he cited found that a third of respondents reported that their productivity had increased since having to work at home.

The CIPD survey (2020) of 1,046 employers also show that, overall, employers believe people working from home are as productive as other

workers. More than a third (37%) of employers did not believe that homeworking has any effect on productivity. A smaller proportion (28%) of employers believing the increase in homeworking has increased productivity or efficiency while 28% of organisations that report the opposite effect.

The work by Felstead (2020) using the data from 'Understanding Covid 19 study found similar results as the above. Please see chart below:

**Figure 16: Productivity Effects of Homeworking in Lockdown, Employees, June 2020**



Source: own calculations of the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, wave 3, see Table A8b.

The chart above shows that homeworking during the lockdown did not appear to have had a significant effect on productivity levels. As many as 41% - of homeworking employees reported that they have been as productive. A smaller proportion have been more productive (in total 29%) while 30% have been less productive.

Respondents to the Understanding Society Covid-19 Survey who reported a fall in productivity while working at home identified various reasons. Three out of ten employees (28.6%) said that they had less work to do, and a similar proportion (26.8%) said that they had to provide care/home schooling. A fifth (20.1%) identified other reasons, these included a lack of motivation/focus/concentration, limited access to workplace resources, less frequent interaction with colleagues, and changes to how work was carried out because of Covid-19

### **5. Impact on team performance**

The concerns of managers and co-workers on the impact of homeworking arrangements has also been documented in the ACAS (2013) research. These concerns are based on the perception that teamwork will suffer when one or more team members is not office-based. The report found that team productivity can be affected to some degree by homeworking in cases where teamwork involves a high degree of task interdependence. Work tasks involving higher levels interdependence were associated with lower productivity among homeworkers. This was seen to be particularly true in cases where there are limited avenues for communication and coordination between team members. However, there was also evidence which indicates that when workers with reduced 'face time' make themselves proactively available to their colleagues, team performance can be enhanced.

#### **5.1. Professional interaction/knowledge transfer**

Academic research by Taskin and Bridoux (2010) as cited in the ACAS 2013 highlighted that homeworking can have an impact on organisational knowledge base. This can threaten knowledge transfer between homeworkers and office-based staff and potentially affect the quality of relationships among workers and between workers and supervisors. The same report also found that some homeworkers have the perception that reduced communication with colleagues can result in reduced information acquisition.

However, the report by Fonner & Roloff (2010) in ACAS (2013) provides specific evidence to demonstrate that homeworking does not significantly affect the quality of information exchange with other organisational members. Their research involved 192 office-based workers and 'high-intensity' homeworkers who worked at home for at least 3 days per week. The research confirmed that homeworkers have significantly less frequency of

information exchange with their colleagues compared with the levels of communication amongst office-based staff. However, their research findings also found that homeworking might not necessarily have a detrimental effect on knowledge transfer.

### **5.2. Organisational attitudes to homeworking and its impact on teamwork**

Organisational attitude to homeworking is one of the key factors that have an effect on team performance. The research by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) have found that in organisations that view homeworking as an idiosyncratic matter and not an accepted norm, homeworkers may be compelled to conform to existing practices adopted by other team members that are office based. Homeworkers may be obliged to synchronise their work schedules with their office-based colleagues, or to work longer hours or put in extra effort in order to overcome perceptions from their colleagues that they may not be as committed to the job as office-based staff. These homeworkers may also experience a greater sense of psychological remoteness from their team members, because they are absent from formal and informal interactions within the team.

In organisations however where homeworking is regarded as a normative practice, teams are generally required to develop new processes, and will have created team communication routines, schedules, and ways of working that will not only accommodate homeworkers but actively maximise the benefits to be had from the autonomous nature of homeworking. In this scenario, homeworking will benefit team performance and homeworkers are more likely to feel like legitimate, valued members of the team.

In ACAS, homeworking has been accepted as a normative practice for several years and schedules, communications and technology have developed to support this practice. The qualitative evidence from the staff

research on this subject area have found that there were few concerns relating to the impact of homeworking on team performance.

### **6. Managing work-life balance**

Many organisations offer homeworking and flexible working options to support its workers with achieving work-life balance. When working from home, the employee has to manage and deal with whole range of work life conflict. These are work activities that can contribute to conflict with home activities and home activities can contribute to conflict with work.

The results of the ACAS (2013) survey of 454 professional level employees found that full time homeworkers, partial homeworkers, mobile workers were generally satisfied with their work-life balance even when they acknowledge that their work can interfere with their personal lives and vice versa. The survey found that of those who divided their work time between an office and home, and the more often individuals work at home, the lower their work-to-life conflict. This is particularly true for employees reporting whose jobs allows them higher levels of job autonomy and scheduling flexibility.

#### **6.1. Lower work to life conflict than life to work conflict**

The evidence from the ACAS (2013) qualitative research further helps to explain why homeworking has such beneficial effects on work-to-life conflict. Homeworking saves employees time, because it reduces or eliminates commuting time that cannot be used for work, family, or leisure activities. It also allows employees to arrange their work tasks or determine task completion in such a way as to accommodate their family or other non-work commitments. Their interviews with 47 dual-earner couples with children found that many of the participants chose to work at times when their children would be busy with other activities or already asleep for the evening. By doing so, participants could complete greater amounts of work without having

job-related obligations interfere with their family time. This has knock-on effects on family relationships. Furthermore, the lower levels of work-to-life conflict experienced by homeworkers generally leads to higher job satisfaction, reduced intentions to leave the organisation, and decreased levels of job-related stress for homeworkers.

### **6.2. Impact on those with caring responsibilities**

The individual's ability to effectively manage and balance work and home commitments could be affected by their gender and caring responsibilities. The ACAS (2013) report cited the work of Bibby (1999) which had noted that female workers are especially vulnerable to work life conflict as they often have to cope with job related demands which affect their role in the family. Women are often expected to combine other roles when they work from home more than men do. Women are more likely to be expected to fit domestic responsibilities when working from home more so than men are. The work life conflict and stress can potentially increase for homeworkers with caring responsibilities. Those individuals with heavier caregiving responsibilities for children or adult may experience higher levels of work-to-life and life-to-work conflict. These responsibilities intrude upon work activities more easily when the workplace is also the family home.

### **6.3. Maintaining work-life boundaries**

One of the key challenges that homeworking employees have is maintaining clear boundaries between work and non-work domains. The separation between home and work that exist for office-based workers do not arise as naturally for homeworkers. Homeworking makes it easier for one domain to intrude upon the other.

The evidence has shown that men who worked at home more than one day a week reported having more trouble enjoying their personal and leisure time,



as they found it difficult to stop thinking about work. (This effect was not found for women.) The homeworkers in the ACAS qualitative study expressed similar sentiments.

### Boundary management tactics

Mann and Holdsworth (2000) research report provided evidence on how many homeworkers deliberately develop specific boundaries between their work and their personal lives in an effort to avoid 'blurring' between the two. Many attempt to develop spatial and temporal boundaries between work and home life. For example, this can involve family member's restricting access to home-based workspace, dressing for the office even when working at home, taking breaks at specified times in order to replicate the timekeeping and physical sensations normally experienced in an office setting. However, maintaining the separation between the two roles when working from home could be a challenge the homeworkers and also for family members.

To support employees in maintaining boundaries it was suggested that employers should make arrangements to help employees feel connected closely to the organisation via communication and peer relationships. Their research found that those who work more frequently from home and are more connected with their colleagues tend to believe that they have the less life-to-work conflict, compared to those who were primarily office-based and worked at home only one or two days per week. These connection manifest in terms of strong social bonds, frequent information exchange between employees.

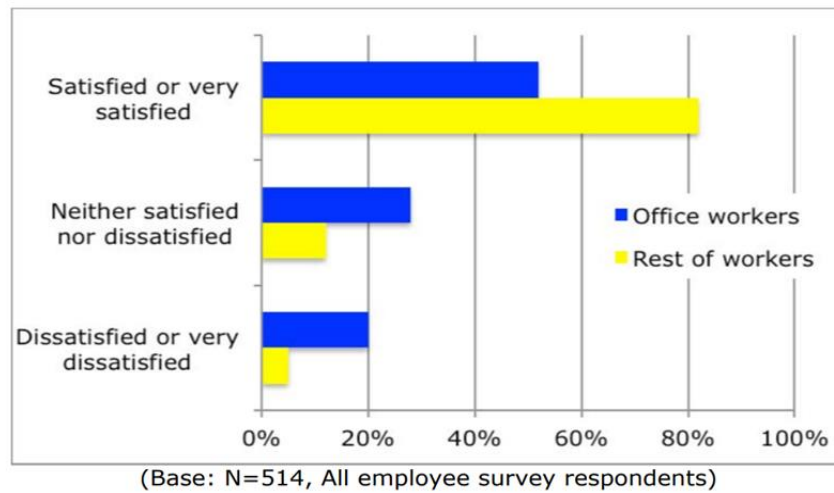
Another critical element that helps homeworkers in maintaining boundaries is ensuring that the home environment is adequately set up for work. Having a separate room for a home office is perceived by homeworkers as essential in enabling them to establish a boundary between work and home, with the physical separation appearing to contribute to a psychological one. However, it needs to be recognised that some employees may not be as fortunate to have a separate space for work-related activities materials.

The qualitative study by ACAS (2013) further highlights various other tactics that employees use to establish a boundary between work and home. These can involve having separate phonelines for work and personal purposes or setting personal rules about answering emails and phone calls after regular working hours, including turning off the ringer to their home office phones. Some turn off the computer completely rather than just logging off workers while others stated that they keep computers used for work purposes out of sight of the main 'family' areas of the home. The role of the homemaker's self-discipline in not allowing work to encroach upon personal time has also been noted as crucial in maintaining a clear boundary between work and home.

### **7. Impact on job satisfaction and attitudes**

The ACAS (2013) research have shown that homeworking has a positive impact on job satisfaction. Those who participate in homeworking arrangements reported increased employee job satisfaction compared to their office-based counterparts. These results were consistent with the other homeworking research literature. Their employee survey found that office workers were significantly less satisfied with their current working patterns (i.e., the balance between time spent working at home and time spent working in the office) than their co-workers. A greater proportion (>80%) of homeworkers and mobile workers were satisfied or very satisfied with their current homeworking arrangements compared to around 50% of office workers expressing the same view. Twenty per (20%) cent of office workers reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their working patterns compared with just four (4%) per cent of partial homeworkers or full-time homeworkers

Figure 2: From responses to 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with current working patterns'



The greater satisfaction generally experienced by homeworkers stems from perceptions and feelings of autonomy. Homeworkers are likely to feel greater freedom and discretion over how they perform their work tasks because they do not experience direct, face-to-face supervision. They benefit from some degree of 'invisibility from managers and co-workers'. This gives them the feeling of "less control from management, less judgements and interference from co-workers". This allows them some of freedom to manage their own time and schedule the hours that they work to meet commitments. Working at home also permits them to control their breaks from work, the clothing they wear, the layout of their workspace, lighting and ventilation levels, music, and other elements of the work environment which contribute to increased perceptions of autonomy. Additionally, it can help also help them to manage demands between work and family and, potentially, reduce work–family conflict. The ACAS (2013) report suggests that to some extent office-based employee's lower levels of job satisfaction can be attributed to their perceived lower levels of autonomy and control over their working arrangements.

### Factors that affect job satisfaction

There evidence on what levels of homeworking promotes or results in increased job satisfaction varies. One of the cited studies in ACAS 2013 found that 'high-intensity' homeworkers (those who worked at home three days or more per week) reported higher levels of job satisfaction than office-based staff. Another research found that when employees work at home for up to 12 hours per week a positive relationship emerges between homeworking and job satisfaction. However, this tails off when homeworking approaches 20 hours per week.

However, the link between longer hours of homeworking and diminishing levels of job satisfaction does not apply for those who undertake independent instead of interdependent work. For these types of workers, job satisfaction levels remained high and not linked to number of hours worked at home.

### **8. Impact on organisational commitment**

ACAS (2013) report cited that the homeworker's perception of higher job autonomy not only leads to increased job satisfaction but is associated with more positive attitudes towards their employers. This sense of work autonomy often translates itself into greater commitment to the employing organization. Employees feel loyal to their employer for accommodating their working arrangements. Those with highly individualised working arrangements have expressed the belief that they would have difficulty accessing a similar arrangement with another organisation.

The report also highlights that level of organisational commitment appears to be dependent on the degree of homeworking performed. This was the findings of a study involving 5 hospitals in the US, which found that, participants in partial homeworking arrangements showed significant increases in organisational commitment compared to an office-based control

group. However, the levels of commitment of those employees who worked exclusively at home were no different to those of the office-based staff.

Results from other academic research as cited in ACAS (2013) also found that the facility for home working has helped to retain those employees who may have otherwise left the employer if such arrangement has not been made available to them. These employees were less likely than office workers to express a desire to leave their employer or, in some cases, to change jobs within the same organisation.

According to Gajendran and Harrison (2007) offering the facility for homeworking provide employers with a competitive edge in attracting and keeping the best talent. Organizations that allow employees with the flexibility to work from home are providing a positive signal and visibly demonstrating their trust and support for employees' well-being. This signal from organizations could in turn, generate greater psychological commitment to the organisation and a lowered tendency to quit.

### **9. Impact on co-worker relationships**

Early research on homeworking cited in Gajendran Harrison (2007) suggested that this arrangement can potentially have a detrimental social impact in the workplace. Concerns were noted on how homeworking can impact on the quality of relationships that homeworkers have with their colleagues. As homeworking reduces face to face communication and this can affect the frequency and quality of communication and potentially have a negative effect on the homeworker's interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. Reduced social presence and face-to-face interactions with colleagues could weaken interpersonal bonds between homeworkers and their co-workers and managers. The spatial distance that homeworkers have from others could translates into psychological distance. And for homeworkers this could mean "out of sight, out of mind".

The results of the ACAS (2013) research have shown that homeworking is unlikely to exert any negative effect on their relationships with colleagues for individuals who work at home for only part of their working week. However, for those who work exclusively from home the results indicate that homeworking may be linked to decreased quality of co-worker relationships.

### Impact on communication

Homeworking does not seem to have a negative impact in terms of frequency on the communications of employees who work from home. Those who work from home confirmed that they have reduced face to face contact and communication with their colleagues. The ACAS (2013) research have shown that part time homeworkers who divide their working time between home and office appear to be the group of employees best connected with their colleagues – even more so than office-based staff.

Furthermore, the ACAS (2013) research suggests that there are no links between type and amount of communication and isolation or job satisfaction. On the contrary, as the number of communications increases, perceptions of job control, positive well-being and work-life facilitation decline, and work-to-life interference increases. These results were further substantiated by the findings from the qualitative study which found that the quality rather than the quantity of communication with others that is important to homeworkers.

ACAS (2013) also refutes the view that organisational culture will be weakened as homeworking becomes more prevalent. It is argued that this impact is largely dependent on each individual organisation. The evidence suggests that organisational cultures can easily be kept alive and well, even when there is reduced constant communication among employees. Within ACAS this is particularly true in jobs that have some degree of the autonomy, where interdependence is very low and that frequent communications with work colleagues may not be essential.

The type of communication between homeworking staff and their managers is an important consideration in ensuring effective homeworking. The same research found that effective communication approaches require managers to stay in close contact with homeworkers, but that this contact should emphasise information-sharing rather than close monitoring of work processes. Homeworkers who have managers using an information-sharing approach have been found more likely to report lower work-to-life conflict, better performance, and higher rates of helping their co-workers.

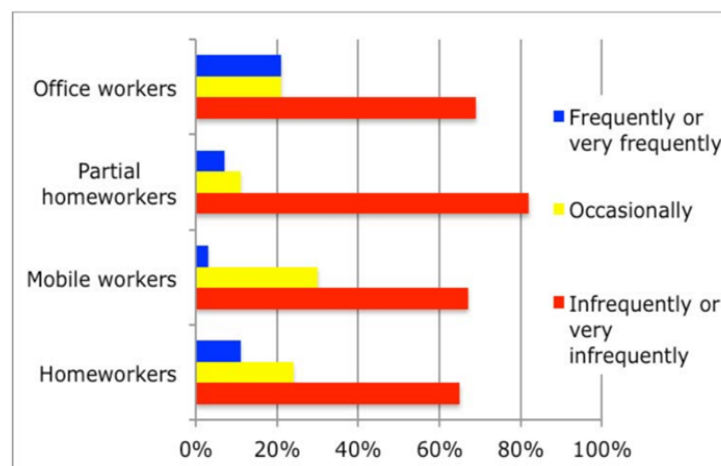
### **10. Impact on social isolation**

The term social isolation is defined in the ACAS (2013) report as the sense that one is out of touch with others in the workplace, both physically and in terms of communication. Early research from the 1980s cited in the same report, found that 60% of homeworkers identified social isolation as the greatest disadvantage of homeworking. The absence of a traditional workplace experience when working from home contributes to a sensation of being 'out of the loop'. First-hand accounts of homeworkers feeling isolated from the social environment of the workplace describe this as "feeling like an outsider when they come into the office for meetings or other work-related purposes". The qualitative study undertaken by ACAS 2013 confirmed that full time homeworkers and partial homeworkers experienced social isolation. However, it must be noted that social isolation is not a phenomenon that is specific to homeworking. Employees can experience social isolation even when working in the same physical location as their colleagues. Conversely, some employees experience sustained connections with colleagues despite regular absences from the workplace.

### 10.1. Frequency of feeling social isolated

The ACAS (2013) report provides one of the most recent evidential confirmation that social isolation is experienced by employees who spend at least minimum of 20 per cent of their working time at home (averaging out at one day per week). When asked how frequently they felt isolated, the survey results show that the average homeworking employees experience social isolation 'infrequently'. Only a very small percentage of homeworkers reported feeling socially isolated frequently or very frequently across the different groups

Figure 7: From responses to 'Please indicate how frequently you experience the following with regards to your work: I feel isolated'



(Base: N=225, Employee survey respondents who work 20% or more of the time at or from home)

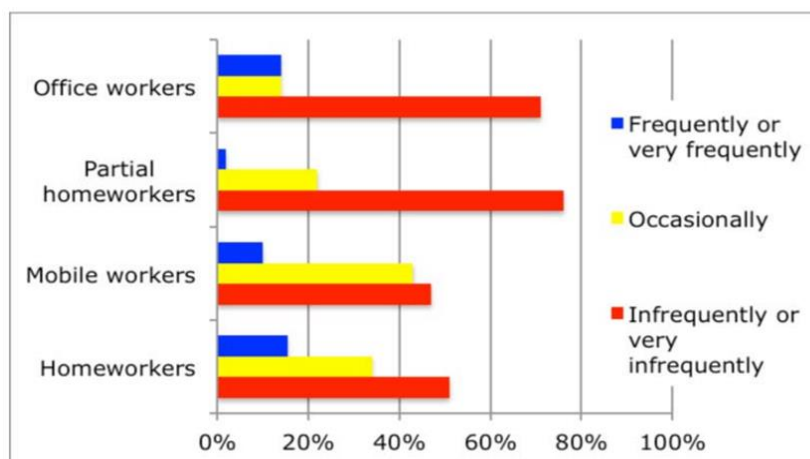
The results also show that partial homeworkers appear to be the group that is less likely to experience social isolation compared to fulltime homeworkers and mobile workers. As many as 82% of partial homeworkers report that they experience social isolation infrequently or very infrequently compared with 65% of full-time homeworkers.



## 10.2. Access to emotional support from co-workers

The ACAS (2013) employee survey found that the degree of social isolation experienced by the different of homeworkers vary. Partial homeworkers are less likely to miss the emotional support from co-workers and informal interaction with others compared with other categories of homeworking employees. The results show that the vast majority (70%) of partial homeworkers 'infrequently or very infrequently' miss emotional support from their co-workers. Only 2% of partial home workers felt that they 'frequently or very frequently' miss emotional support from co-workers. In contrast, as many as 16% of fulltime homeworkers reported feeling the same way.

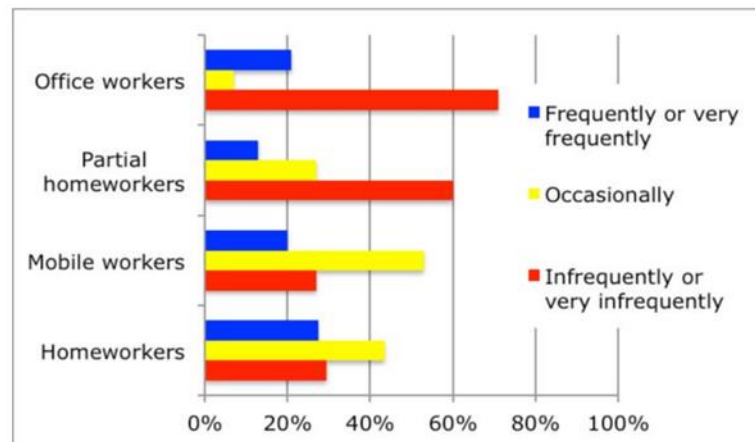
Figure 8: From responses to 'Please indicate how frequently you experience the following with regard to your work: I miss emotional support from co-workers'



(Base: N=225, Employee survey respondents who work 20% or more of the time at or from home)

The findings of the same survey also provide data on how frequently homeworkers miss informal interaction with others with regard to their work. The results have shown that as many as 73% of mobile workers and 72% of fulltime homeworkers report that they miss informal interaction with others at least occasionally. A significantly lower percentage (40%) of partial homeworkers report feeling the same.

Figure 9: From responses to 'Please indicate how frequently you experience the following with regard to your work: I miss informal interaction with others'



(Base: N=225, Employee survey respondents who work 20% or more of the time at or from home)

These results seem to confirm that partial homeworkers have more frequent informal or ad hoc face-to-face than do any other type of worker. These also suggest that partial homeworkers experience lower levels of social isolation than other workers at ACAS. as their working arrangement split their working time between home and office and allows them to communicate face-to-face more frequently with office-based colleagues and home-based colleagues.

### 10.3. Strategies for avoiding social isolation

The ACAS 2013 qualitative study found that some full-time homeworkers and partial homeworkers take proactive measures to avoid feeling socially isolated from their work colleagues. These include making an effort to phone colleagues and managers in order to discuss work-related issues and also to communicate on a more social basis and catching up with co-workers when visiting the office. Others mentioned scheduling informal meetings with homeworking peers in local coffee shops or each other's homes, if they were living close enough to one another for this to be convenient.

### **10.4. Role of managers in reducing social isolation**

Managers can support and put arrangements in place to reduce social isolation amongst home workers and encourage social interaction between colleagues. Suggestions in the ACAS (2013) report include: scheduling regular staff meetings that encourage attendance of homeworkers to ensure that relationships between homeworkers and office workers can be built and maintained; setting up arrangements to improve communication between homeworkers and office-based staff; organising team social events and other informal activities at which homeworkers and office-based staff can interact. Other practical examples include creating virtual 'watercoolers' online where employees can post jokes and photos, and comment on workplace social events, football matches, or television programmes, disseminating top tips for homeworking, providing virtual team activities and other social activities.

In dealing with the issue of social isolation it was also recommended that organisations should also consider the suitability of a given individual for dealing with the social isolation associated with homeworking. The results of their qualitative study found that (based on a few workers' accounts) some people may be more intrinsically suited to coping with social isolation than others. Thus, during the recruitment and appointment of individual who might be partially or permanently homeworking, their suitability for these types of homeworking arrangement should be explored.

### **11. Impact of worker and manager relationship**

The report by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) stated that homeworking can affect the quality of manager and subordinate relationship. Some managers fear reduced control over their subordinates, while employees fear isolation and information impoverishment. In some cases, those who choose

homeworking arrangements may find their loyalty and commitment being questioned by managers.

To effectively manage homeworking, it is recommended that managers might have to change their strategies for monitoring employees from behaviour-based to output-based controls. According to Gajendran and Harrison (2007) managers who are unwilling to or who lack the training to change their management and control styles, experience a deterioration in the depth and vitality of their connection with their homeworking subordinates. The same report recommends that managers should have arrangements in place to stay in close contact with homeworkers. This contact should emphasise information-sharing rather than close monitoring of work processes. Homeworkers who have managers using an information-sharing approach have been found more likely to report lower work-to-life conflict, better performance, and higher rates of helping their co-workers.

### **12. Impact on well-being**

One of the most documented and important outcomes of homeworking is its positive impact on employee well-being. There is general consensus in various research literature cited in Mann and Lynn Holdsworth (2000) and in Gajendran and Harrison (2007) that homeworking is associated with significantly lower levels of work-related stress than those experienced by office-based staff. The stress associated with control over the work environment and work schedules is reduced amongst homeworkers. Homeworking reduces the stress associated with getting ready for work as it can reduce or eliminate commuting times, it avoids the distress of being late and its negative reputational consequences in the workplace. In contrast, this research found that office-workers appeared to experience additional stress due to transport and office politics. Those who commute to work on a daily basis are likely to experience increasing negative emotions such as anger and

hostility that related to the stress of transport and travel. They also worry about lost time whilst commuting and fear being late for work. Furthermore, homeworking allows employees to effectively manage their time and have greater participation in recreational social or sports activities that could mitigate negative physiological consequences of role stress experienced on the job.

### **12.1. Negative impact on well-being and stress levels**

The employee survey undertaken by ACAS (2013) looked into the levels of homeworking that yields the best outcomes for employees in terms of minimising levels of stress and improving well-being. The survey findings suggest that a moderate level of homeworking yields the best outcomes for employees. More specifically homeworkers who work at least three days a week at home have reported less of the stress generated by frequent meetings and interruptions by colleagues, and from exposure to office-based politics.

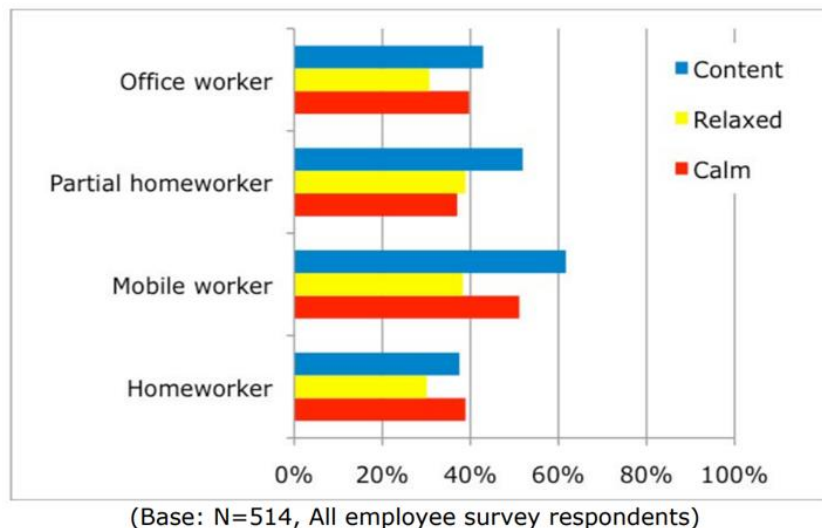
The survey also found that a significantly low percentage of mobile workers and the partial homeworkers confirmed that their working arrangements have negatively affected their well-being. However, the report has noted there is some evidence that homeworkers experience greater mental health problems, compared to their office-based colleagues.

The qualitative study by ACAS (2013) found that not being present in the office can contribute to other types of stress experience by homeworkers. Homeworkers expressed concern over the perception that they are potentially less available than their colleagues. They also believe that working from home could potentially diminish their ability to share challenging experiences and get immediate support when “needing an outlet” from their colleagues.

## 12.2. Positive impacts on wellbeing or contentment

The ACAS 2013 survey also looked into the impact of homeworking on positive measures of employee's emotional well-being. The results show that 51.9% partial homeworkers (reported all or most of the time) are significantly more likely than full time homeworkers and office-based workers to report feeling content. These results suggest that those who mix office and home-based work tend to have the best outcomes in terms of their emotional well-being.

Figure 11: From responses to 'Thinking of the past few weeks, how often has your job made you feel the following?' (% all or most of the time)



## 12.3. Impact on presenteeism

According to Mann and Holdsworth (2000) another issue that could affect the homeworker's wellbeing is presenteeism or working while sick. In the current climate of job insecurity many employees and not just the homeworkers feel that they are unable to take time off work because of sickness. This can be an issue for homeworkers as no one can see how ill they are. Many homeworkers may feel compelled to work even when sick in order to dispel their employer's doubts regarding their productivity or to maintain the

'privilege' of homeworking. This then can affect productivity and quality of work employees work whilst sick.

### **12.4. Impact on absenteeism**

Furthermore, it was also noted a drop in absenteeism or frequent or habitual absence from work could be an issue amongst homeworkers. The homeworker may, for example, take a morning off when ill rather than a full day, return to work when not fully recovered—or take no time off at all. Managers may see this as an advantage, however this not in the best interests of the employee to work through illness or not take enough time to recover properly.

## **13. Homeworking impact on mental health**

### **13.1. Mental health before the lockdown**

There is limited research information and evidence available on the impact of homeworking on the mental health of employees. One of the most detailed research relating to this subject area was undertaken by Mann and Holdsworth (2000). This study identified that negative emotions such as loneliness, irritation, worry and guilt were more apparent in homeworkers (teleworkers) compared to their office-based workers. This research did not make a distinction between full time homeworking employees or part time homeworkers.

*Table 1: The percentage of the teleworking and office-working participants who acknowledged experiencing the emotions specified in the questions*

	Office-working	Teleworking
Stress	83%	67%
Loneliness	0	67%
Enjoyment	100%	100%
Irritability	83%	100%
Worry	17%	67%
Resentment	67%	67%
Guilt	50%	67%
Frustration	100%	100%

The results in the Table above show that a greater percentage of teleworkers (homeworkers) than office-workers experience the negative emotions of loneliness, irritability, worry and guilt. The experience of loneliness amongst teleworkers (homeworkers) was particularly evident and was not experienced at all by the office-workers. The feeling of stress was the only negative emotion, wherein more office-workers have reported experiencing than homeworkers.

The section below summarises some of the findings of Mann and Holdsworth (2000 research on this subject. This provides further insight of the various negative emotions experienced by homeworking employees:

#### Loneliness and isolation

The research found a significant number of homeworking staff reported experiencing loneliness. They highlighted the lack of social support available to talk things through which consequently resulted in other negative emotions such as feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence in their abilities. The lack of face-to-face communication also further contributed to these negative feelings. It was noted that the increased use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) can reduce the feeling of belonging, or affective bonds, which creates feelings of loyalty to colleagues and the organisation.



The research also highlighted how important it is for teleworkers (homeworkers) who are socially isolated from work colleagues to have social contact to remain mentally healthy and therefore work efficiently.

### Irritability

The research found that homeworkers experience more negative emotions of irritation and anger than office-workers. The feelings of irritation and extreme anger can arise as a result of failures that are attributed to the obstructions other individuals. Homeworking can restrict the ability to sort out issues, leading to frustration, and prevent emotional support from fellow workers to help deal with the situations. Another cause of irritation identified by homeworkers is the intrusion of family members into work time. This leads to blurring of boundaries between work and home life, as other family members have difficulty in distinguishing the work role from the family role, may lead to feelings of frustration, anger and stress.

### Worry

It was noted that homeworkers worry mainly about the lack of support. This may leave them feeling worried, panicky or fearful regarding their ability to complete a task effectively. Their worry may be exacerbated by a perceived lack of emotional support arising from limited social interaction and physical distance from work colleagues.

### Resentment

Homeworkers can also experience negative emotions due to the spill over of work into their family and leisure time which can then affect their levels of satisfaction with the organisation. The ability to effectively manage time can be a great source of stress for particularly for individuals working independently.

### Guilt

Homeworkers experience the feeling of guilt when balancing work and family responsibilities. This can create feelings of guilt and worry on whether the homeworker is giving enough attention required by family members as well as feelings of stress caused by prioritising work over family issues. Employers who have expectations of greater productivity from homeworking can create feeling of guilt amongst homeworkers where they have control over how they schedule their work. This can also further lead homeworkers to worry about achieving deadlines.

### Frustration

Lack of readily available support is the main underlying theme causing frustration for homeworkers. Most homeworkers experience frustration from the use of technology. The homeworker's frustration arises from the lack of control over technology and processes that they can't control and limited contact from work colleagues. This may decrease feelings of loyalty towards the employer or organisation a reduction in psychological well-being. (

### **13.2. Mental health impact and gender differences**

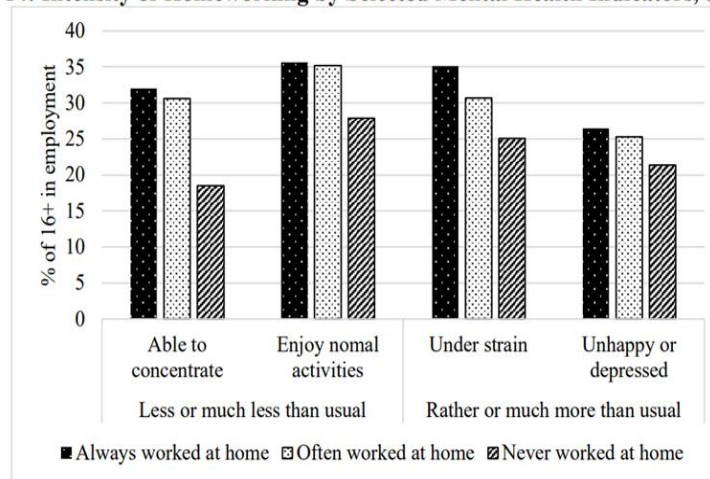
The results of the quantitative study by Mann and Holdsworth (2000) found that female home workers are likely to experience higher levels of mental and physical ill health than male homeworkers. This is because working women are required to cope with job-related demands which affect the performance of their role in the family resulting in increased levels of work-family conflict. Ensuring a balance of the work-family role conflict has been noted as a source of stress for the homeworker and has also been correlated with negative experiences of emotional and physical ill health. As female homeworkers usually retain responsibility for the majority of the domestic chores, this can lead to feelings of frustration, inadequacy and stress in balancing the demand of family life and work.

The same report also found that male homeworkers experience more emotional ill health and experience of physical symptoms of stress than male office-workers. Men are not traditionally involved in these day-to-day responsibilities. Male homeworkers who take on the dual responsibilities of work and home life experience more stress. This may explain why male homeworkers experience more mental and physical ill health compared to male office-workers. Their experience greater mental and physical ill health issues than male office-workers could also be related to their loss of status arising from being invisible to company members and its effect on their social position.

### **13.3. Impact on general mental health during the lockdown**

The research by Felstead 2020 confirms that the sudden and dramatic movement of work into the home due to Covid 19 lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on employee's mental well-being. Their analysis of the data from Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, found that this has taken a toll on the mental health of those who worked at home in the three months of lockdown. They also found that the negative impact on mental health was even more pronounced especially for those employees who have always or often worked at home.

Figure 14: Intensity of Homeworking by Selected Mental Health Indicators, June 2020



Source: own calculations of the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, wave 3, see Table A4c.

Felstead (2020) research found that those who have 'always worked at home' and have 'often worked from home' were able to concentrate less or much less than normal during the first three months of the lockdown period. A significant percentage these types of homeworkers reported having difficulties enjoying the normal day to day activities and have felt much more 'under strain' and 'unhappy or depressed'. The report suggested that there could be other factors such as the health threats and uncertainty, that would have contributed to generating these feelings from these types of homeworkers.

According to Felstead (2020) the fall in mental health at the beginning of the lockdown was more pronounced amongst those who always, often or sometimes worked at home compared to those who never worked at home. The new home-centred workers also experienced a fall in mental health compared to established home workers at the start of lockdown, although this difference wore off as the months went by. This suggests that after a shaky start new homeworkers got accustomed to their new situation or those who had a negative experience of homeworking returned to their former places of work more quickly.

## **14. Impact on career aspirations and progression**

### **14.1. Impact on career prospects.**

The findings of early research Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that homeworkers believe that their working arrangements can significantly impact on their longer-term career prospects in the organisation. There was a suggestion that “face time,” or visibility, at a central location is deemed to be critical in achieving outstanding performance evaluations. Working away from a central location could hamper their career prospects as they have fewer opportunities to demonstrate high performance in a face-to-face and in highly salient context. They are also concerned that others might view them as less committed and less loyal to the organization and prioritizing personal life over professional obligations and such perceptions can hamper their prospects for advancement.

Homeworkers fear that they can become ‘politically disadvantaged’ as they become ‘out of flow’ in the political activities such as resource allocation, evaluation, compensation and advancement within their organizations (Sandi Mann and Lynn Holdsworth 2000 p 198)

### **14.2. Impact on career aspirations**

The results of the ACAS (2013) survey provide recent evidence on how homeworking affects the employee’s aspirations and options for career progression.

Table 5: From responses to 'career ambition' employee survey questions

Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed	Home workers	Mobile workers	Partial homeworkers	Office workers
I have the ambition to reach a higher position in my line of work or organisation.	30%	43%	67%	65%
I have the ability to reach a higher position in my line of work.	64%	81%	80%	69%
I like to be challenged in my work.	73%	89%	93%	85%
Having a career is important to my sense of identity.	61%	81%	83%	68%
I want to achieve the highest possible position in my line of work.	21%	51%	56%	50%

(Base: N=514, All employee survey respondents)

The results in Table 5 above suggest that full time homeworkers are less likely to have the ambition and the willingness to advance in their careers (30%) and to state that having a career is important to their sense of identity (61%). Partial homeworkers are more likely to be ambitious i.e. feel that career is important to identity (83%), have the ambition (67%), and have the ability (87%) to advance their careers.

The results also found that homeworking employees who work mostly at or from home were more likely to feel that their career is not a priority in their life. The most important things in their lives and the areas that they derive most satisfaction from come from their life outside work. The survey results show that majority (81%) of homeworkers confirmed that the most important things that happen to them involve their life outside work. In comparison just over half (>50%) of partial homeworkers felt the same way. It should be noted that the difference in their views cannot be attributed to differences in family structure between homeworkers and partial homeworkers.

ACAS (2013) further added that there is insufficient evidence from their employee survey to establish whether participation in full time homeworking contributes over time to lower levels of career ambition or whether employees with pre-existing low levels of career ambition have deliberately chosen full time homeworking arrangements. The results of their qualitative study did not provide conclusive evidence either on the impact of homeworking to careers

aspirations. Most of the homeworking employees interviewed did independent work and have signified that they would like to continue the type of work they do as they enjoy it and the flexibility that it provides. The reluctance to make major lifestyle changes for the sake of career advancement was not limited to homeworkers or partial homeworkers, Similar views were expressed by number of office-based workers who perceived that the trade-offs required for a more senior position, in terms of travel time, responsibility, or longer work hours generally, were too steep.

### **14.3. Impact on professional isolation**

Professional isolation is defined by as the experience of remoteness from the ongoing activities in the workplace. The ACAS (2013) report have noted homeworkers views on how professional isolation can affect their career prospects. A common fear that homeworkers have is that when they are 'out of sight', they can be also 'out of mind' when the time comes for managers to allocate key assignments or nominate candidates for promotion.

The results of the ACAS (2013) survey found that homeworking employees felt that they do not miss out on activities and opportunities that that could enhance their career and opportunities to be mentored. Most partial (60%) and full time (67%) homeworkers reported that working from home has no impact on their opportunity to advance in their careers at ACAS. Only a small proportion felt that their working arrangement had a negative impact on their career advancement opportunities. Less than a quarter of homeworkers (22%) felt that it has a negative impact, and a much lower proportion of partial home workers (9%) felt the same way.

Table 6: From responses to 'Do you feel that working from home has a positive impact, negative impact, or has no impact at all on your opportunity to advance in your career at Acas?'

	Positive impact	No impact at all	Negative impact	N
Homeworkers	11%	67%	22%	136
Partial homeworkers	31%	60%	9%	45
Mobile workers	23%	53%	23%	30
<b>All respondents</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>211</b>

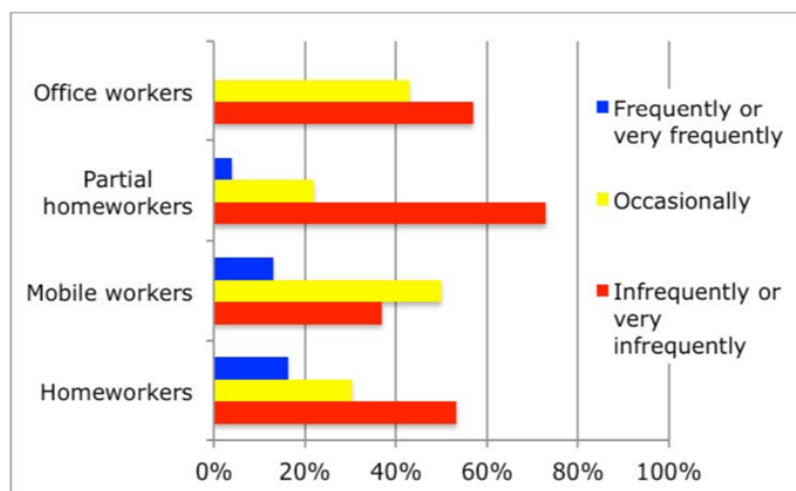
(Base: N=211, Employee survey respondents who work 20% or more of the time at or from home)

It is worth noting from the results above that a higher proportion (31%) of partial homeworkers felt that homeworking had a positive impact on their careers when compared to full time (11%) homeworkers who felt the same way.

#### 14.4. Preventing professional isolation.

The results on the Table below show the frequency that homeworkers feel that they are out of the loop.

Figure 19: From responses to 'Please indicate how frequently you experience the following with regard to your work: I feel out of the loop'



(Base: N=225, Employee survey respondents who work 20% or more of the time at or from home)



The result above show that full time homeworkers and mobile workers were more frequently likely to feel out of the loop compared to partial homeworkers.

However, the qualitative study by ACAS provided evidence on how homeworking employees make proactive efforts avoid any potential damaging effects of professional isolation. Homeworkers stated that one of the most important reason for going to the office to be able to “to gain and share work related information with colleagues” as well as engage in social interaction. Other strategies used are similar to those that are used to avoid social isolation. This can involve reaching out to colleagues by phone, email, and in person. Some homeworkers make sure that they had a visible presence in the office on a regular basis in order to maintain connections with colleagues and subordinates and to raise their own profile.

The ACAS (2013) report also highlighted various ways on how managers can prevent professional isolation among homeworking staff. These include: the scheduling of regular staff meetings to ensure that homeworkers and office workers receive key work related information at the same time and in the same way; providing access to an intranet systems which allows homeworkers and office-based staff to communicate with one another and keep up to date with relevant information and access to information bulletins to keep all employees informed of work-related news. Another ways is to make best use of communication technologies to substitute for face-to-face interaction, such as telephone conference calls, video conferencing, and web-enabled meetings.

### **15. Role managers in supporting homeworking**

It is recognised that managers have a key role in making homeworking a success and in creating successful homeworking environment. It has been argued in literature that the success of homeworking is a more function of leadership rather than of technology. Managers must be willing and able to

relinquish traditional notions of how best to manage performance and adopt new ways of motivating and monitoring their staff.

The ACAS (2013) report cited 4 key themes that are important in effectively managing homeworkers. These are: trust, performance management, communication, and training.

### **15.1. Trust and role of managers**

Two of the key barriers to homeworking success is management trust and the traditional managerial attitudes that employees need to be seen to be considered productive. Such attitudes can often be quite resistant to change. Many organisations continue to value and reward 'face-time' and operate under the assumption that visibility equates to productivity and commitment despite the availability and access to communications technology that enables individuals to work anywhere, at any time. It remains a challenge for organisations to take the time to develop new management approaches that will effectively support homeworking arrangements.

To have success in implementing homeworking, management must exhibit some degree of trust in employees. This will be particularly challenging for managers who prefer to have their employees in sight and engage in direct supervision of their staff. Management concern on homeworking staff arises from their loss of direct control over homeworkers, and not being able to detect whether an employee is experiencing difficulties, is working too much, or is not working enough.

Linked to the issue of trust is the notion of reciprocity between employees and the organization. The expectation of flexibility 'goes both ways' between homeworkers and the organization. Employees who have access to a range of flexible working options to meet their needs are also expected to be flexible in order to meet changing organizational needs.

### 15.2. Managing performance

To enable organisations to adapt effectively to a homeworking programme, it is recommended that managers need to change their monitoring strategies from behaviour-based to output-based controls. The adoption of output-based controls will involve assessing performance based on output, products, or other deliverables of the work rather than an assessment of employee performance based on the employee's observable actions.

The results of the ACAS (2013) employee survey confirmed that most managers (59%-62%) do not consider monitoring of homeworkers performance as a challenge. The majority found it easy to monitor the quality (58.6% strongly agree or agree) and amount (61.5% strongly agree or agree) of work performed by homeworkers. However, a substantial proportion (40.4% strongly agree or agree) acknowledged that they find managing homeworkers is more difficult than managing office-based staff. The research recommended that one-to-one meetings between homeworking employees and their line managers are held on a monthly basis in order to review performance, work progress, health and safety or career development issues.

### 15.3. Communications with managers

Homeworking can also affect the frequency, format and content of manager's communications with their employees. The ACAS (2013) research confirmed that managers have less more frequent communications with homeworking employees than with their office based counterparts. Those managing homeworkers are much more likely to utilise telephone discussions and use email is across homeworking and office based staff. Additionally managers were more likely to use informal, ad hoc communications than formal, planned communications with both groups of workers.

### **15.4. Subject and focus of communications between manager and staff**

Type of communication between homeworking staff and their managers is also an important consideration in ensuring effective homeworking. As mentioned previously (communication section), managers must stay in close contact with homeworkers and should take an information-sharing approach rather than closely monitor work processes. Managers using this approach found that homeworkers were more likely to report lower work-to-life conflict, better performance, and higher rates of helping their co-workers.

### **15.5. Need for manager training**

The need for specific manager training on managing homeworkers was also noted in the ACAS (2013) research. It is recommended that this should be part of the manager training programme. In ACAS managers are trained on how to perform a Health and Safety assessment for employees who are transitioning to homeworking.

## **16. Technology to support homeworking**

The ACAS (2013) report highlighted the central role that technology plays in ensuring success of homeworking. This study has shown how much homeworkers rely on the phone and computer technology. On days when technology fails or when they experience difficulties connecting, homeworkers reported significantly higher levels of isolation and negative measures of well-being (such as feeling tense, worried or uneasy). Homeworkers would generally feel a sense of guilt and negative emotions. This is particularly true for those who are working as part of a close team as they may feel that they are letting their colleagues down or somehow they fear that could be perceived as not pulling their weight within the team. When they are unable to make contact with co-workers they can feel isolated and dependent on others

to be updated on any work issues or developments and to have the technological problem resolved.

Homeworkers are significantly more affected when technological issues arise as they are in their own environment without the immediate support of other colleagues or alternative technology to rely on. A common technological issue experienced by homeworkers relates to speed and reliability of internet/network connections. Another area of concern is communication when IT issues arise. While employees in the office might share information verbally relating to a particular system being down, those working at home are not always notified, which can add to the stress of the problem. Another common issue encountered is difficulty in managing more complex IT issues and updates in the home environment. The need was also highlighted for having readily accessible support through remote connection where IT can demonstrate how things are done so that homeworkers can learn how to subsequently deal when same issues arise

### **16.1. Need for enhanced IT support**

The ACAS 2013 qualitative study also highlighted need for homeworkers to have enhanced access to IT support. This was confirmed by IT support workers who have noted significant differences in the types of issues and duration of support required by homeworkers versus the office based workers. The duration of calls are generally longer if it's a homeworker. Apart from main issue raised, homeworkers would also often ask advice on other related technological issues. This would involve seeking "support or advise on issues that they could otherwise get from their co-workers or colleagues within an office environment."

### **16.2. Access to technology and workspace at the office**

Another aspect of support that should be considered for homeworkers is their access to technology and workspace on days that they come to the office. It has been noted that some homeworkers have experienced difficulty accessing the technology they need in the office. As part of best practice ACAS 2013 recommends making use of a desk booking facility that allows employees to pre-arrange a place to sit and work prior to coming in to the office.

### **16.3. Satisfaction with technology and support**

The access to reliable technological equipment and support have is key in predicting homeworkers' satisfaction with their working arrangements. The ACAS (2013) research found that homeworkers who receive adequate technological support stated that they were more satisfied with their working arrangements than those receiving insufficient levels of support.

### **16.4. Optimising the use of new information technology**

The benefits of using more recent communication-based technologies such as video conferencing and the use of group messaging system to facilitate and enhance communication between office based and homeworking staff have also been noted in research literature. Employees confirm that camera enabled communication facility adds value to internal communications in enabling employees to see facial expressions of colleagues they work with. Furthermore the use of this facility would enables them to simulate the ad hoc face-to-face interactions that might occur between colleagues in an office-based environment.

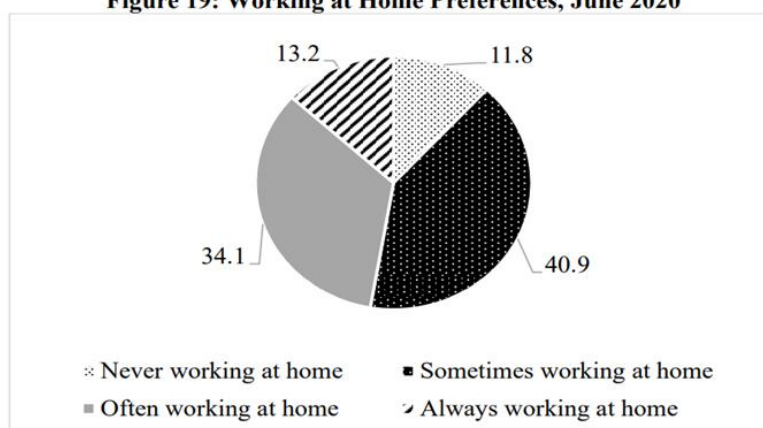
## 17. Continuity of homeworking - the future

With the current pandemic it is likely that social distancing will continue in the future and will have a long-term impact on working arrangements. Prior to the pandemic large open-plan offices were the norm and with the onset of the pandemic this has changed. Felstead (2020) cited the UK government advise that 'workstations should be assigned to an individual and not shared'.

Furthermore, if sharing must be done, it should be 'among the smallest possible number of people' with the use of hot desks avoided, if at all possible (HM Government, 2020: 19). This means that the return to the changed office will be muted with the home becoming the main workplace for many previously office-bound workers.

It is predicted that the new normal in the UK will be characterised by much higher level of homeworking compared to the period before the pandemic if employers allow this to happen. According to Felstead's (2020) report, as many as nine out of ten (88.2%) of employees who worked at home during the lockdown would like to continue working at home in some capacity.

Figure 19: Working at Home Preferences, June 2020



Source: own calculations of the Understanding Society Covid-19 Study, wave 3, see Table A11b.

Nearly half (47.3%) of these employees want to work at home often or all of the time. Their findings suggests that employees with little previous

experience of homeworking had not been put off by the experience of working at home. As many as half (50%) of new homeworkers would like to work at home often or always even when Covid-19 restrictions permit a return to 'normal' working.

Felstead's (2020) also suggests that upsurge in interest in homeworking is unlikely to be detrimental to productivity. Most of the employees (65.5%) who reported that they produce much more per hour while working at home during lockdown have indicated that wanted to work mainly at home in the future. In comparison, just 6.4% of the employees with higher productivity stated that they do not want to work from home in the following the lockdown. Thus it is more likely that allowing employees to work at home, if they want to, may increase not reduce productivity.

It is argued that the massive return to working patters pre-Covid-19 is unlikely to happen. Many employees are possibly used to – and may even have experienced the benefits of – working from home. The positive impacts of homeworking on productivity and on employee's well being is set to continue where adequate resources and support are in place.



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