COVID-19 AND CONTACT/CALL CENTRE WORKERS: WORKING FROM HOME (April- June 2020)

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Covid-19 and Contact Centre Workers – Working from Home Report

1. Introduction and Background

This report is based on findings deriving from a wider study of Covid-19 and Contact/Call Centre Workers in the UK. The research was supported, in the first instance, by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) and by national trade unions, including the Communication Workers Union (CWU), Unite the Union (Finance and Legal) and Transport and Salaried Staff Association (TSSA). The research centred on an on-line, self-completing survey distributed to contact/call centre workers across the UK, albeit with a prominent Scottish dimension. Support in disseminating the link - https://phil.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/covid19-call-centre-back-office-workers_savelives - was given also by Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) and Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) in Scotland. Others promoting the link were Regional TUCs in England and the key health and safety campaign, Hazards. Many individuals contributed by stressing the research's importance and sharing the link.

The survey link opened on 6 April following UK Government's 'lockdown' decision on 23 March, formalised on 26 March when Health Protection Coronavirus Restrictions Regulations (2020) came into effect. Completed responses were received in large numbers during the period when the numbers of confirmed cases and mortalities escalated. For example, the number of UK cases exceeded 100,000 on 16 April and deaths passed 16,000 on 19 April. It is within this context that completed surveys from contact/call centre workers were received; by 10 April 2,062 and by 20 May 2,760 were submitted. An Intermediate Analysis of the UK findings was published on 1 May 2020 (Taylor, 2020a) and a detailed report, based on the Scottish findings, was published on 6 June (Taylor, 2020b), the latter drawing on 510 completed surveys. These reports are of call handlers reporting on their experiences of working in contact centres.

A section of the survey was directed at those who relocated from the workplace and now working from home. This report, 'Covid-19 and Contact Centre Workers–Working from Home Report' is thus an analysis of the 714 respondents (of the total of 2,951 submitted surveys) who reported on the experience of working from home. The report includes many quotes from the workers. Each quote is appended by a brief bio, based on the following protocol – gender, sector, age and length of service[i].

2. Profile and Demographics

2.1 Contractual Status
Of the 708 respondents who provided an answer, 76.6 per cent reported that they were on permanent full-time contracts, 21.6 per cent that they were permanent part time, 1.3 per cent that they were temporary full time and 0.6 per cent were agency workers.

Table 1: Contractual Status (n=708)

	Number	%
Permanent Full-time	542	76.6
Permanent Part-time	153	21.6
Temporary Full-time	9	1.3
Agency Workers	4	0.6

2.2 Length of Service

Of the 705 who answered the question, 6.4 per cent had been employed for less than 1 year, 18 per cent for between 1 and 2 years, 22.3 per cent for between 3 and 5 years, 12.5 per cent for between 6 and 10 years and 40.3 per cent for more than 10 years.

Table 2: Length of Service (n=705)

	Number	%
Less than one year	45	6.4
From 1 to 2 years	127	18.0
From 3 to 5 years	161	22.8
From 6 to 10 years	88	12.5
More than 10 years	284	40.3

2.3 Gender

Of the 697 who responded, 60.3 were female, 36.6 per cent were male and 0.6 were non-binary, while 2.6 per cent preferred not to disclose their gender.

Table 3: Gender (n=697)

	Number	%
Female	420	60.3
Male	255	36.6
Non-binary	4	0.6
Prefer not to say	18	2.6

2.4 Sector

Of the 694 who provided information of the sector they worked in, a small majority (52 per cent) reported financial services. Next in terms of frequency of response was telecoms (21.3 per cent), outsourcing 15.4 per cent) and the civil service (4.8 per cent). Smaller numbers reported working in education (1.4 per cent), retail (1.4 per cent), local government (0.9 per cent) and utilities (0.9 per cent). In addition, 1.9 per cent reported working for sectors including publishing, market research and technology.

Table 4: Sector (n=694)

	Number	%
Financial Services	361	52.0
Telecommunications	148	21.3
Outsourcing	107	15.4
Civil Service	33	4.8
Education	10	1.4
Retail	10	1.4
Local Government	6	0.9
Utilities	6	0.9
Miscellaneous	13	1.9

Taking outsourcing as a category, it is possible to drill down further to identify the sector for which the outsourcer is responsible. Of the 107 who reported that they worked for an outsourcer, The largest number (38.3 per cent) worked in financial services, followed by

telecommunications (20.6 per cent) and 14 per cent who did not state the particular sector. Retail (5.6 per cent), travel (4.7 per cent) and utilities (4.7 per cent) were the next numerous sectoral clusters.

3. Dates of Homeworking – When Moved, When Wanted to Move

Table 5 presents data on the distribution of, firstly, the dates on which this sample of contact centre workers left the workplace to work from home and, secondly, the dates on which they believed they should have moved from the centre. As evident from the overall profile, illustrated also in Diagram 1, there are differences between the two dates in aggregate.

Explaining the differences requires consideration of the interplay of the contradiction between workers' sense of urgency of the need to be removed from a hazardous workplace and managements' refusal, reluctance or inability (perceived or real), to facilitate homeworking.

Table 5: Date moved from workplace, date should have moved by the week (n=684; 683)

	Day Move	Day Wanted
17 Feb -23 Feb	0	1
24 Feb - 1 Mar	3	27
2 Mar - 8 Mar	7	35
9 Mar - 15 Mar	33	104
16 Mar - 22 Mar	147	228
23 Mar - 29 Mar	240	211
30 Mar - 5 Apr	136	55
6 Apr - 12 Apr	74	12
13 Apr - 19 Apr	24	7
20 Apr - 26 Apr	8	1
27 Apr - 3 May	9	0
4 May - 10 May	1	0
11 May - 17 May	2	1
18 May - 24 May	0	0
25 May - 31 May	0	0
1 Jun - 7 Jun	0	0
8 Jun - 14 Jun	0	0
15 Jun - 21 Jun	0	1
	684	683

Figure 1: Date Wanted to WFH and Date Moved - Backdrop - UK Covid-19 Cases and Fatalities
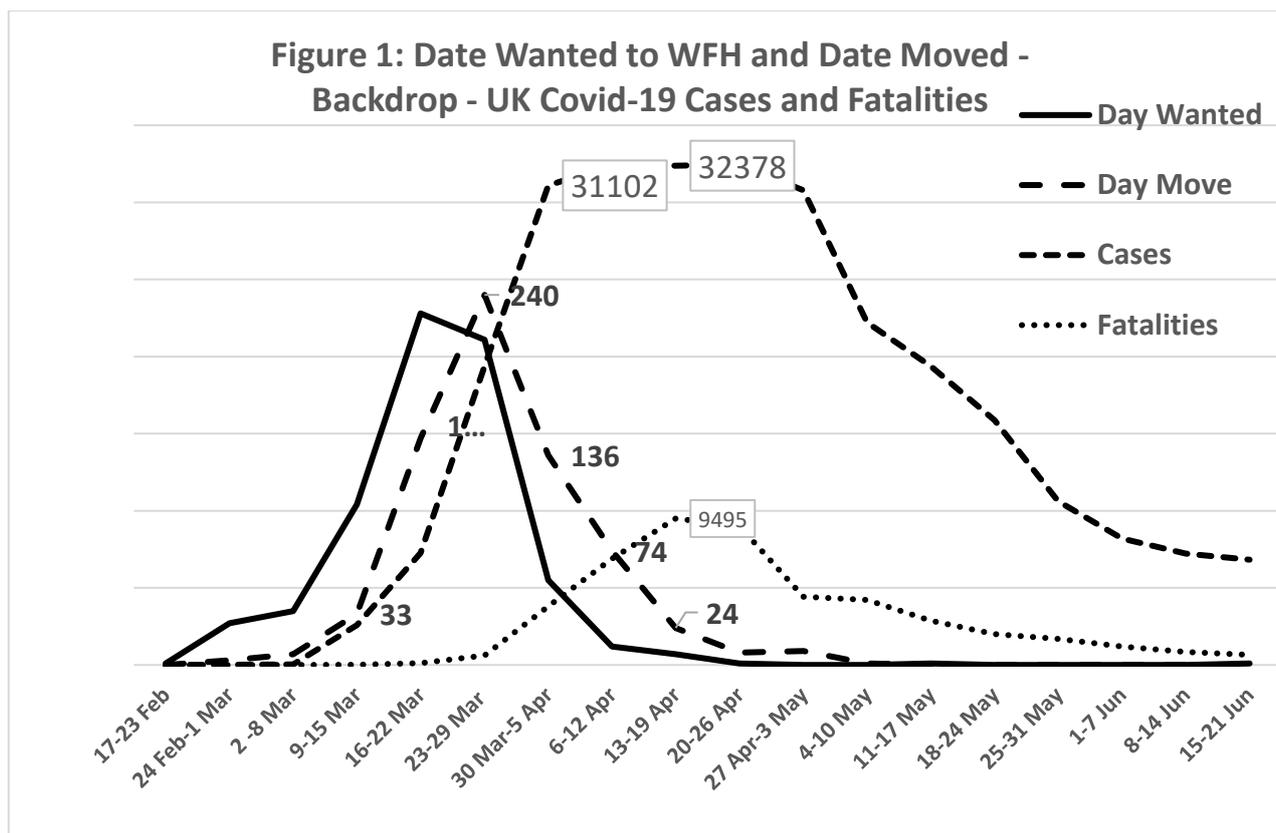
Workers' desire for and insistence on exit were grounded in fears arising from the growing incidence of Covid-19 in the general population (ONS, 2020), made tangible and immediate by the increasing numbers of colleagues exhibiting symptoms and being sent home or voluntarily self-isolating or receiving treatment. Thus, heightened awareness of the risks – even dangers – faced at their work station, on work floors and throughout buildings grew commensurately and ran up against management indecision or delay

4. Delays in Moving to Homeworking

4.1 Difference in Days – Extent of Delay

It is possible to calculate the numbers experiencing delay and length of the intervals between the date workers believed they should have been homeworking and the date they commenced homeworking. Of the 679 who responded to this question, 200 (29.5 per cent) reported no difference between, the two dates, while 479 (70.5 per cent) stated that there had been. The mean number of days for those expressing a difference, that is experiencing a delay was, 11.7 days. The distribution of the differences is shown in Table 6.

More than 7 in 10 (71.2 per cent) reported a difference of less than 2 weeks between the date they did move and the date they believed they should move. Breaking this down further, 37.7 per cent stated a difference of a week or less, and 33.5 per cent stated between 1 and 2 weeks. While these time frames might seem relatively short, such was the intensity of workers' fears of infection from SARS-CoV-2 during this period that a delay of even a day or two was sufficient to deepen anxiety.

Table 6: Distribution of the difference in number of days between moving from the workplace and believing they should have moved (n=480)

	No.	%
1-7 days	181	37.7
8-14 days	161	33.5
15-21 days	80	16.7
22-28 days	44	9.2
>28 days	14	2.9

4.2 Reasons Given for Delays in Moving to Homeworking

Call-handlers answered an open question, asking for reasons for any delay that they might have experienced in their organisations in the move to homeworking. Although a challenging exercise, it is both possible and desirable to categorise responses according to similar themes. In total there were 593 responses, of which 87 were 'none' or 'n/a' and are excluded from the calculations, that presented in Table 7. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive and the statements may include more than one reason, but the logic pursued through examining each response is to categorise according to the dominant theme.

Table 7: Reasons given for delays in moving to homeworking (n=538)

	No.	%
Technology/systems/connectivity/VPN/set up	125	23.2
Laptops/PCs/Software	108	20.1
Management - awaiting decision/delays/reluctance/money before health	88	16.4
Home without homeworking	41	7.6
Delay by the government	32	5.9
Phases/stages/batches/tiered/high risk people first	27	5.0
Homeworking not possible	25	4.6
Management not taking Covid-19 seriously/refusing to acknowledge risk	20	3.7
Key/essential worker	20	3.7
Logistical/process/governance/security	15	2.8
Don't know/no information or communication	14	2.6
Had to push/make it happen	14	2.6
Outsourcing	9	1.7

The two most common responses relate to technological reasons, effectively divided into reasons relating to systems and connectivity on the one hand and to laptops and PCs on the other hand, reported by 23.2 per cent and 20.1 per cent respectively. For the former, the majority experience was of remaining in the centre until such time, frequently a lengthy period seen above, that systems had been installed and connectivity tested. Yet this was not always straightforward:

'My employer needed to test network capability and gradually released colleagues to establish stability of the network. There continues to be a delay as colleagues' roles

prevent them working from home or the employer send roles/technical equipment to colleagues to enable them to log on'. (M, FS, 46-55, 6-10 years)

Equally, homeworking could be complex because of difficulties arising from the absence of personal PC or laptop ownership or, in larger organisations, the sheer scale of the transition:

'I had to move to my sister's house because she has broadband and a lap top that I can use and I don't.' (M, Trav, 56-65, 6-10 years)

'The department had to sources somewhere in the region of 2,000 laptops and set them up for remote access. Most staff were placed on gardening leave for the final week of March before the laptops were sent out'. (M, PS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

The next most frequently reported reason related to management action or inaction, the delays experienced while decisions were taken, which often reflected a reluctance of organisations centrally or locally to facilitate homeworking:

'Senior management wouldn't allow it and various excuses were used to justify refusal for home working, one of which, probably the most honest response, was fearing that productivity would fall'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Because management wanted to keep us in the building to make sure they could control us. [The] call centre was only closed when cases were confirmed'. (M, Tel, 36-45, 3-5 years)

Management delays were perceived by some, most notably in the Civil Service, to be intertwined with the Government's slowness to impose lockdown and weak guidelines.

'Government did not react fast enough. Once homeworking was announced the organisation did it immediately, but as my organisation is the government, then NOT FAST ENOUGH'. (F, PS, 56-65, more than 10years)

'Lack of government guidance. There was a person in my office that was sent home with corona type symptoms. This was hushed up by management and immediate measures to clean the centre were not put in place'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Government's advice rather than the Bank's advice. I actually think that the Bank was slightly ahead of the government'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

It might be helpful to consider at this point additional responses that relate to management (in) decision. So, relatively small numbers made specific reference to management homeworking the workforce in tranches (5.0 per cent), most often according to risk criteria. The following quote is typical:

> 'The staff were moved on a phased rota. The original intention was to move only a smaller number of staff circa 10 March and everyone else after'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

Although fewer reported on management's refusal to recognise the threat from Covid-19 (3.7 per cent), their comments were particularly critical:

> 'Management were downplaying the risk of the virus and wouldn't have shut down if the government had not been strict'. (O/S, M, 25-35, 3-5 years)

> 'Incompetent management from the top all the way to the bottom! Management too scared to stand up for the workers and top management thinking the grunts were expendable – no regard for our safety. Line a scene from Black Adder Goes Forth'. (M, Tel, 46-55, 6-10 years)

Around one in thirteen were home – either sent home or self-isolating – without working. Some had been furloughed, some were shielding and some were waiting to be connected or for a lap top. A cluster stated that the delays they had experienced stemmed from an initial view that homeworking was possible, but later conceded and implemented it. For example,

> 'The higher management advised it wasn't possible to do our role from home. This turned out to be untrue'. (M, FS, 36-45, 3-5 years)

Another cluster reported that delays were caused by their designation as key or essential workers which management interpreted as necessitating their attendance at their centres. Related to this reason were those reporting on the importance of security or governance restrictions. One minor, but distinct theme, relates to the experience of those working in outsourced contact centres, where 'clients did not want it' because of a desire to maintain close control.

> 'The company I work for is still waiting for sign-off from the client to allow around 250 of its call centre workers to work from home'. (M, Util, 46-55, 1-2 years)

Finally, a number referred to the circumstances where management delays had prompted workers to push to make homeworking happen but then not always successfully.

> 'They told us on a Monday night that we had to go into the office and people put their foot down and said no. They then proceeded to act like it was a privilege to work from home. They set me up in two days. My friend had asked for weeks to go home working and they had refused saying she wasn't vulnerable and they did not have access for her'. (F, FS, 26-35, 6-10 years)

A supplementary question sought to evaluate the extent of risk workers perceived as resulting from delays in being homeworked. The results can be seen in Table 4.

4.3 Perceptions of Risk from Delays in Moving to Homeworking

Table 8: Perceptions of the degree of risk resulting from delays to homeworking (n=499)

	No.	%
A great deal of risk	161	32.3
Some risk	192	38.5
A little risk	120	24.1
No risk	26	5.2

Almost one-third (32.3 per cent) believed that the delays they experienced had caused them to be exposed to 'a great deal of risk', while an additional 38.5 per cent thought that the gap between homeworking and the date they believed that should have been homeworked exposed them to 'some risk'. Clearly, there is a relationship between the length of delay experienced and perception of the degree of risk, which can be illustrated by the following descriptive statistics; those who reported 'a great deal of risk' experienced delays of 15.38 days on average, those who reported 'some risk' experienced 12.27 days on average and those who reported 'a little risk' experienced 9.12 days on average.

5. How Quick in Moving to Homeworking

An additional question explored contact centre workers' perceptions of the speed with which management moved to implement homeworking. Notwithstanding the fact that so many of the sample (70.8 per cent) believed that delays had led them to be exposed to 'a great deal' or 'some' risk, a greater number believed that their organisation had been 'quick' or 'very quick' (48.1 per cent) than 'slow' or 'very slow' (38.4 per cent). Most obviously, a relationship can been discerned between perceptions of their organisations' speed in moving to homeworking and the length of the delays experienced. So, those reporting that their organisation was either 'quick' or 'very quick' (n=328) experienced 5 days delay on average, while those reporting either 'slow' or 'very slow' experienced 13.18 days delay on average.

Table 9: How quick was your organisation in putting in place homeworking arrangements?

	No.	%
Very quick	161	22.9
Quick	177	25.2
Neither quick nor slow	95	13.5
Slow	156	22.2
Very slow	114	16.2

6. How Effective was Move to Homeworking

A similar question asked how effective was your organisation in putting in place homeworking arrangements. A clear majority (52.8 per cent) believed that their organisation had been either very effective (23.5 per cent) or effective (29.3 per cent). More than one in four (26.6 per cent) were of the view that their organisations had been either ineffective (16.4 per cent) or very ineffective (10.2 per cent).

Table 10: How effective was your organisation in putting in place homeworking arrangements? (n=707)

	No.	%
Very effective	166	23.5
Effective	207	29.3
Neither	146	20.7
Ineffective	116	16.4
Very ineffective	72	10.2

The answers to this question, considered alongside those to the previous question, provide interesting insight into the WFH transition process as perceived and experienced by employees. While organisations might prior to Covid-19 have resisted widescale homeworking, the urgent exigencies of the crisis have demonstrated generally that many employers can move quickly and can put WFH arrangements in place effectively.

7. The Three Most Important Actions Managers Took to Help the Transition to Home Working

An open question asked respondents to report on the three most important actions managers took to help the transition to home working. A total of 1,347 responses were given by 553 homeworking call handlers, giving an average of 2.4 reported actions per respondent. The results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Three most important actions managers took to help the transition to home working (n=553)

	No.	%
Check-in calls, zoom talks, team calls, daily/frequent contact, communication	243	43.9
Equipment/kit provided, allowed to take home/dropped off	229	41.4
Tools, hubs, cloud, systems, VPN access, tech support, set up	158	28.6
H&S considered/implemented, well-being, DSE equipment	121	21.9
Allowed to WFH, stopped us being infected, vulnerable workers sent home	119	21.5
Supportive managers, availability, always available, team leader contact	79	14.3
Successful transition, guidelines	57	10.3
Reduced hours, flexibility, timings, shifts, breaks	46	8.3
Sanitisation, cleaning, social distance arrangements	42	7.6
Negative comments	41	7.4
Check domestic circumstances/acknowledge/accept Covid-19 absence	40	7.2
Pay for quarantine, furlough, re-assurance re pay	36	6.5
Changed processes, organise workload, customers	32	5.8
None/nothing	29	5.2
Acted swiftly	25	4.5
Training	21	3.8
Reimbursement	15	2.7
Reduced targets, lesser pressure	12	2.2
Working with union	2	0.4

As with analysis of the responses to other open questions, the answers have been categorised according to common themes in descending order of frequency. Clearly, the themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive. So, for example, managers ensuring frequent and contact and communication with employees is closely related to answers relating to managers' availability and support. Also, answers highlighting the provision of kit and equipment might be closely associated with those reporting on connectivity and tech support and set-up.

7.1 Check-ins, Zoom, Team Calls, Daily/Frequent Contact and Communication

The most frequently reported category, by 43.9 per cent, concerns managers conducting check in calls with teams by video or audio platforms, maintaining frequent contact and communication. The following selected quotes are typical of responses that highlighted both the frequency of communication and use of technologies and platforms to maintain contact.

> 'A lot of team calls are made to keep us updated and communicate as a team'. M, 25-35, Tel, 1-2 years)

> 'Regular huddles to communicate with isolated staff'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Set up a daily call with team to discuss solely any COVID 19 issues from working from home and keeping everyone in touch'. (M, 56-65, Tel, more than 10 years)

> 'Rolling out Microsoft Teams to connect colleagues and help them ask questions'. (NB, Less than 25 years, FS, 3-5 years)

> 'Set up a WhatsApp group to keep in contact with all of the team'. (F, 36-45, FS, More than 10 years)

> 'Use of social media via Workplace so people can keep in touch, update and raise questions about day to day company-wide issues/concerns'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 6-10 years)

While communication was mainly for work-related reasons, some referred explicitly to the managers who implemented communication for social and bonding reasons and in order to combat isolation and compensate for the loss of workplace socialisation.

> 'Arranged a 10 am coffee break via zoom every day'. (M, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Social check ins daily at 2.30 just for water cooler chit chat'. (M, 46-55 years, Edu, 1-2 years)

> 'Setting aside time each day for 'team chat' - a time to talk about pretty much anything'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

> 'Staff and managers are being inventive about keeping in touch and social activities to stave off loneliness, such as virtual coffee chats, quizzes and photo competitions'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

7.2 Equipment Provided, Allowed to Take Home or Dropped Off

The second most frequently reported action management took, by 41.4 per cent, related to their successful provision of equipment of various kinds. In this respect, some commented on how this had involved a major undertaking:

'Sourced and deployed hundreds of pieces of equipment in a few weeks'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Arranged for PCs, monitors etc. to be sent out to 250 staff at home'. (M, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

A common and positively regarded action by management was to enable staff to pick up equipment from the office and to take it home.

'Provided equipment (laptops, mobiles etc) & also we took monitors, keyboards, mouse etc from the office to make homeworking easier'. (M, 36-45, LG, 1-2 years)

'Allow people who don't have PC's to take home a computer from the workplace'. (NB, 25-35, Util, less than one year)

'They contacted the majority of us individually to organise coming in to collect a computer, and to make sure we had all the software and appliances that we needed'. (F, Trav, less than 25 years, 1-2 years)

The provision of particular equipment, such as phones and ergonomic furniture, was highlighted by a number of respondents.

'Giving us a mobile phone to take calls from customers so that we don't have to use our own'. (F, 25-35, Trav, 3-5 years)

'Ensured that specialist equipment is provided, e.g. Chairs, while ensuring everyone in the team had access to monitors, keyboards, etc. (where these were not otherwise available to us), so we can work as easily and normally as possible'. (Gender not given, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

Others reported the ways in which individual managers had been particularly helpful.

'One particular manager helped some employees move their equipment to their home as they do not drive, I do not believe this was company policy though, he just did it off his own initiative'. (M, 25-35, Util, 1-2 years)

7.3 Tools, Hubs, Systems, VPN Access, Connectivity, Tech Support and Set-up

Next in terms of frequency, were the 28.6 per cent, who reported that managers had acted to ensure call handlers were connected, had access to systems and were provided with tech support. Again, a range of responses was given, including the following typical comments.

'Access to work software through remote access'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Sourcing a cloud telephony solution to allow calls to be taken from home'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Setting up VPN access which is an added layer of security enabling work systems and applications to be accessed from home'. (F, 36-45, Tel, 1-2 years)

7.4 Health and Safety, Well-being, DSE Equipment, Considering Domestic Circumstances

More than one in five (21.9 per cent) reported on the actions taken by management in relation to health and safety, a broad category encompassing diverse issues including guidance, risk assessments, provision of appropriate equipment and mental ill-health. There is evidence of good management practice, at least in formal terms, in respect to the provision of advice and guidance for employees and particularly in terms of the potential mental ill-health consequences of isolation.

'Providing information and guidance on staying healthy whilst WFH and sharing employee assistance program'. (M, age not given, Ret, 3-5 years)

'At a senior company level there is good practice: including a lot published on the intranet about staff mental health and wellbeing, and a general acceptance that home working can be isolating. There are good news stories, and a culture of asking staff to share their experiences'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Managers are very aware of peoples' mental health and other things going on at home at this time so constantly there for support'. (F, 25-35, O/S, less than one year)

'Frequent emails providing advice and support to staff to avoid/mitigate potential mental health issues'. (F, 65+, CS, more than 10 years)

Some reported on how managers paid attention to individuals and to their particular conditions.

'Spoken to staff with underlying health conditions'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Wellbeing checks to make sure you coping with the adjustment'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

Others indicated how their organisations had undertaken assessments of various kinds.

'Reasonable adjustments rolled out for disabled staff and other workplace equipment procured and delivered to other non-disabled staff (on request). All staff have a laptop anyway and could if they were allowed to work from home anyway. So the job for our department was not massive'. (F, 46-55, PS, more than 10 years)

'Self-Assessment Questionnaires distributed but done after Work from Home started'. (M, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Active health and safety manager offering advice and guidance, including a risk assessment for home working'. (NG, 36-45, LG, 6-10 years)

It is appropriate at this stage to consider also the 7.2 per cent who reported that managers checking on domestic circumstances, acknowledging the impact of the diseases and accepting Covid-19 absence were actions they had taken. Taking individual circumstances fully into account, might include: those who have no suitable home working environment are not forced to undertake work but are paid fully; considering mental health and wellbeing needs and

reacting appropriately; educating leaders about signs of domestic abuse and how to support, or how to approach conversations appropriately. The following comments provide insight:

'Checking individuals home set up is suitable for homeworkers'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 6-10 years)

'My manager & team were very accommodating with my home situation - a toddler & both my wife & I are expected to complete a day's work at home'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Very understanding with individual circumstances at home'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Honest conversations had regarding how intended to work from home'. (M, 36-45, O/S, more than 10 years)

'Has been good at corporate level for applying fair practice - recognising inevitably of reduced effectiveness of workers at home with child care responsibilities etc'. (M, 56-65, LG, more than 10 years)

'Understanding of childcare needs to support parents WFH and to look after and home school their children'. (M, 46-55, FS, 6-10 years)

7.5 Allowed to WFH, Vulnerable Workers Sent Home

More than one in five (21.5 per cent) stated that the most important action that management had taken was to actually enable homeworking to occur.

'To permit it - until recently homeworking was not allowed'. (F, 36-45, LG, 6-10 years)

'Made decision to wfh not optional if you can wfh you must'. ((M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Have gone from 80 homeworkers 5 weeks ago to over 1100 now'. (M, 46-55, Ret, more than 10 years)

Many described the process by which workers were sent home, the most vulnerable and at greatest risk being re-located first.

'Allowing those classed as "high risk" due to medical conditions work from home first'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Those shielding told to go home at earliest point'. (Age, gender and service not given, PS)

'Prioritize people who were part of a risk group and/or self-isolating during the transition'. (NB, 25-35, Util, less than one year)

'Ensuring vulnerable people worked from home as soon as possible'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Home working compulsory for those with underlying health conditions'. (F, 36-35, FS, more than 10 years)

> 'Ensuring those who are vulnerable or have caring responsibilities to be at home straightaway until equipment to work from home was available'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

> 'Contacted employees known to be at higher risk for the employees' preference about participating in the initial contingency plan (since modified)'. (Gender not given, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

A few respondents stated how they had been instructed to self-isolate as a priority and had subsequently commenced actually working.

> 'Allowed me to self-isolate for 12 weeks as per NHS guidelines, due to me being in the at risk category'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 1-2 years)

7.6 Supportive Managers or Team Leaders, Availability

Next in terms of frequency of response are the 14.3 per cent who reported on the support and availability of managers or team leaders. These responses might be seen as closely related to those who commented positively on the close contact and communication with managers and team leaders, but they should be considered separately because call handlers make specific reference to the support they received.

> 'Providing managers with work iPhones to help them be specified points of contact'. (NB, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Regular comms for actions TMs - this helps us understand that something is being done/ considered, even when it feels like no movement'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

> '1-on-1 when set up to ensure everything was OK. Both inside and outside of work'. ((F, less than 25, FS, less than one year)

> 'All team managers and the operations manager have been available for support in all aspects of work or for personal support'. (F, 56-65, O/S, more than 10 years)

7.7 Successful Transition, Guidelines Provided, Changed Processes/Workloads, Customers

One in ten (10.3 per cent) stated that the most important action management took in was in ensuring a successful transition to homeworking, providing effective guidelines and reconfiguring processes.

> 'The creation of guidance document to help working from home. They have created a pack that is not just practical it also offers advice on how to stay mentally well and where we can get support'. (F, 25-35, FS, less than one year)

> 'Once the decision was made they have been very helpful moving to home environment'. (M, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Managers were available in the office to personally set up remote access with me and I was then sent straight home'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'New systems implementation to redirect customer's enquiry from phones to online'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

It is appropriate to consider at this point the additional 5.8 per cent who reported on how managers had changed processes, re-organised workloads and had considered homeworkers interactions with customers.

'Obtained sanction from quality assurance to allow remote working'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

'To amend the way we operate to permit homeworking. Closed 'helpline' and moved all enquiries to we chat and email'. (F, 36-45, Leg, 6-10 years)

'Prioritised customer services staff to get laptops to reduce pressure on staff that could work from home already'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Offered workers option of not having to come into the office if they did not feel comfortable doing so, allowing them to stay home waiting for equipment to work from home on full pay'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Made changes to workflow to reduce volumes coming into the team'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Creating home working solutions whilst handling sensitive data'. (F, less than 25, FS, 3-5 years)

'Work flow management to ensure staff get time away from front line roles'. (Gender, age and length of service not given, FS)

'Managing expectations of clients as to limitations due to lockdown'. (F, 36-45, FS, less than one year)

'As outsourcer the company we were working for weren't willing to help so my employer found another campaign for us to work on'. (F, 25-35, O/S, 1-2 years)

7.8 Flexibility Regarding Hours, Shifts, Timings, Breaks

One in twelve (8.3 per cent) reported that the most important actions that management had taken were in relation to work timings, shifts and breaks. Some emphasised the flexible arrangements that management has put in place. The following are representative of the comments given.

'Suggestion on being flexible with working hours when it is convenient for me'. (F, 56-65, Edu, more than 10 years)

'Allowed flexibility with working times'. (F, 36-45, CS, more than 10 years)

'Allow flexible working, unlimited paid special leave for a variety of scenarios such as caring responsibilities and looking after and home-schooling children. People are allowed to do only as much as they can do and are not expected to work into the night to make up hours'. (F, 46-55, CS, more than 10 years)

'Reduction/adjustment to working hours without loss of pay (due to health/reasonable adjustments/dependants)'. (F, 36-45, PS, 6-10 years)

'Allowing us to flex our hours around childcare now that schools and nurseries are closed'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Allowed more flexitime as we have different work-home life demands when WFH with school closures, also changed opening hours'. (NG, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Removal of 'core work times' to allow people to work at various times throughout day/week as family commitments dictate. We already had a flexible working policy, but it has been considerably expanded. Flexi credits being offered to 'top up' hours of staff who need to stop working due to childcare'. (M, 25-35, PS, 1-2 years)

7.9 Pay for Quarantine, Furlough, Re-assurance re Pay

A small number (6.5 per cent) of respondents reported on how their organisations had acted to support their furlough or quarantine or had provided reassurances regarding pay. The following comments provide insight.

'Protecting full pay when I had to stay home with my son for a week when school closed, and I didn't have an alternative childcare option and didn't have full understanding of my key worker status'. (F, 36-45, Tel, less than one year)

'Allowed me 14 days paid leave until my paperwork arrived NHS'. (NG, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

7.10 Acted Swiftly

While, as we have seen, 21.5 per cent stated that management had acted to send people home, an additional 4.5 per cent commented specifically on the speed with which management had acted.

'Speed in which they moved people out of the work place'. (F, 56-65, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Risk assessed the business impacts weeks before significant number of cases materialised in UK'. (M, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Sent us home first and worked out the business technicalities afterwards'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Very quick in ensuring all 3,000 people in my office were provided with the right equipment to work from home'. (F, 56-65, Util, more than 10 years)

'Action taken quickly when agreed for all staff, contract and outsourced to be paid in full for duration'. (Gender, age, length of service not given, PS)

Some did add the qualification that the swift move to homeworking occurred only once the organisation decided that it was essential, in some cases following government instructions.

'Line manager allowed and encouraged team to work from home as soon as government was implementing social distancing and before it advised if you can do, to work from home'. (Gender, age, length of service not given, Tel)

'Sent everyone home quickly when decision eventually taken'. (M, 56-65, CS, more than 10 years)

'They realised it had to happen and when that realisation hit they moved to make it happen'. (M, 36-45, Util, more than 10 years)

7.11 Training

A small number (3.8 per cent) highlighted how management had acted to implement training that facilitated the transition to homeworking.

'Training on how to connect remotely to systems'.

'Provided essential training for new equipment and practice time'. (F, 25-35, Tel, 1-2 years)

7.12 Reimbursement for Payments on Equipment

An even smaller number (2.7 per cent) stated that one action that management had taken to facilitate the transition to homeworking related to the reimbursement of the costs incurred by employees when they themselves had purchased equipment that was necessary for them to work satisfactorily from home.

'£30 allowance to purchase mice/keyboards etc'. (F, 36-45, CS, 6-10 years)

'Allowed us to buy a second monitor, and claim back on expenses. Decision 3weeks into homeworking!'. (M, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

'Reimbursement of expenses for IT equipment purchased to facilitate homeworking'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Allowed staff to claim got office furniture and computer parts (monitor, keyboard etc.)'. (M, 25-35, CS, 3-5 years)

'Allowed us adequate office furniture - allowed to take chairs home or buy one. Allowed us to order software to talk to each other online. Allowed us to order any equip (e.g. screens) to use at home'. (F, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

7.13 Reduced Targets, Lesser Pressure

An even smaller number (2.2 per cent) commented on how their experience of management having acted to reduce targets and to lessen the pressure on them.

'Less micro-management'. (M, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Have been more understanding regarding KPIs'. (M, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Acknowledgement that with suspension of our service call volumes are reduced so no requirement to be tied to desk throughout rostered hours'. (M, 46-55, Trav, more than 10 years)

'Making clear that they're not expecting presenteeism'. (M, 36-45, CS, 1-2 years)

7.14 Working with Unions

A mere two respondents made reference to their management having worked with their unions to facilitate homeworking.

'Unite the recognised union has been in weekly contact calls with the company HR partners so there is definitely open dialogue and the opportunity to ask questions/raise concerns/get answers'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Understanding that the change is not always easy and requires give and take from employer and employee'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

7.15 None/Nothing, Negative Comments

To conclude this section, the negative responses of 11.6 per cent are considered. These consist of two types. First, there were the 5.2 per cent who stated 'none' or 'nothing', sometimes adding comments such as:

'None that I can think of, poor training, and high expectations'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 1-2 years)

'They are trying to accommodate the situation. It's hard to find 3 positives that have done'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

Second, there were the 7.4 per cent who, in reporting the actions that managers had taken, appended criticisms or caveats, and delivered essentially negative judgements. Some commented negatively on communication or contact with managers or team leaders.

'Very slow contact to each employee'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'No regular communication'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Lack of communication'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'They have not checked on those most vulnerable'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

Most of the critical comments, though, reflected on delays that employees had experienced in the transition to homeworking.

> 'There was a delay in separating workers within the office two thirds of the workforce was out of the office in self isolation before the office workers were separated'. (F, 56-65, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Allow 2nd/3rd phase, or back office, staff to move to home working when the delays initially experienced prevented the planned phasing of staff working from home'. (M, 56-65, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Eventually getting us out the office'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

> 'Making the decision eventually'. (Gender not given, 25-35, 1-2 years)

In some cases further delay was only prevented and workers sent home after protests and lobbying by workers.

> 'Made the RIGHT decision but only after being challenged on conference calls which they hosted FROM HOME!'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

> 'They eventually agreed to let me leave the office - after a lot or arguments!'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

> 'Finally allowed us to homework after much asking'. (M, 36-45, Tel, more than ten years)

> 'Reacting to my very direct email holding the organisation accountable'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

Others reported on the problem of, and delays with, ensuring workers were supplied with equipment of various kinds.

> 'Having laptops ready, there's seemed to be a great rush at the end and it's only because of redundancies that there was spare equipment, it should have been gotten quicker'. (F, 36-45, Tel, more than 10 years)

> 'I had to beg for a computer as I am a student and I use a laptop to complete my studies, which is already in poor condition, but they told me i have to use my laptop for work'. (F, 36-45, Tel, more than 10 years)

> 'EVENTUALLY supplying kit'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Eventually getting old decommissioned laptops for those who don't need to be in work'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Eventually got desktop computers for some workers'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Spoken up for staff to get equipment - a second screen which again the Higher grades already have. 7 weeks in and we are now only getting this next 5 days or so. some other colleagues still working from tiny surface pro'. (Gender and age not given, CS, 1-2 years)

'Took 10 weeks to supply pc on special leave for that 10 weeks'. (M, 56-65, PS, more than ten years)

'Not ensuring equipment is good to provide same or similar service. For example screens on laptop too small'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Mid management and senior management are allowed to work from home, purely because they are laptop users. The rest of the workforce (500 heads plus) seems to have been forgotten. They have done virtual training sessions with management so we can process back office work'. ((F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

Others still reported on how, in different ways, workers had been exposed to risk from Covid-19.

'Why send our team to another part of the building thereby exposing ourselves and the colleagues who work there to infection, and then to send another team to our department a week of so later and having one of that team sitting at my workstation were I was sitting for the week prior'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

'Had to go collect myself when I am high risk'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'I have not been able to work from home, as work have advised I would have to go into the contact centre to collect equipment, and I cannot do this as I would expose myself'. (F, 36-45, Tel, more than 10 years)

'People like myself who get public transport in should have been prioritised. Instead it seemed to have been done by pay grade! Unfair in my view as we were taking most risk getting to office'.

'They did not know I was at a high-risk category until I made a fuss even though most managers know my situation'. ((F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Also the new department we were sent to there were colleagues side by side packed like sardines. Though our team and the DPRMs applied the 2 meter rule. Also there were several team leaders huddled very close together speaking to each other right by the toasters were we all sit'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

A few respondents referred to procrastination in establishing whether employees were able to transition to homeworking on the grounds of suitability.

'I have had a call to see if my home is suited to home working but have had no update since. My special leave finishes on 16th April'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Not considering providing alternative work for those whose home environment is not good to work a call centre environment from home'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

There were single complaints on a number of issues, including micro-management, inadequate guidance and managers being unhelpful.

'Time us on every piece of work we process. Our client, BBC are not happy as we're not fast enough so targets are being introduced which is nice'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

'No clear guideline on key worker status'. (Gender not given, 25-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

'Some managers [not all] very helpful if you call into the office'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

8. The Three Most Important Actions Managers Did Not Take to Help the Transition to Home Working (n=396)

A complementary open question asked respondents to report on the three most important actions managers did not take that would have helped the transition to home working. A total of 919 responses were given by 396 call handlers, giving an average of 2.3 reported actions per respondent. The results are presented in Table 12. As with analysis of the responses to other open questions, the answers have been categorised according to common themes in descending order of frequency. Clearly, as above, the themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive. So, for example, the responses reporting managers being slow and should have acted sooner to implement homeworking are related to those believing that managers did not prevent employees being exposed to risk in the call centre environment. So too might not offering homeworking to all employees be related to perceptions of exposure to risk.

8.1 Provision of Equipment

The most frequently cited action that management did not take was concerned with equipment issues, reported by 40.7 per cent of respondents. Evidently, there are diverse aspects to the responses in this general category. First, there are those who bemoaned the fact that they had had to go to the office to pick up equipment which proved problematical.

'After closing the office, asked people to come in to collect laptops to then be told they weren't there and to log on the computers to do work'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Misadvised by management regarding equipment I would be collecting to work from home. When I went to pick up equipment trying to avoid using any form of public transfer when picking up the equipment was put in taxi to bring me home'. (M, 36-45, O/S, morew than 10 years)

'Refused to send necessary equipment to my home; I had to drive 21 miles twice to collect equipment from my office'. (M, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

Second, there were those reporting delays in the delivery of or receiving equipment'.

'Delays in providing equipment to staff to enable safe home working environment'. (M, 36-45, CS, 1-2 years)

'Delays in getting RSA tokens to staff, instead insisting on including a laptop'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Supporting equipment has been slow in becoming available, if at all. Some colleagues had to wait weeks to home work as they were waiting for the company to provide laptops/Chrome Books. We with our own were set up quite quickly using tech available from our smartphones. Telephone technology has been an issue. The company have told home workers we must put our personal mobiles on the intranet so we can be contacted by any colleague, for example. I refuse to do that as I am a union rep and never divulge my personal mobile. I bought a cheap phone that I case use purely for business use and I can turn off when my shift ends. Other colleagues have been upset about their phone numbers being shared in this way but have gone along with it'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

Third, a cluster of employees reported on managers failing to provide particular items of equipment, particularly lap tops, phones and screens.

'All staff do not have work mobile phones'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 6-10 years)

'Availability of laptops etc to allow home working'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'We use two computer screens to perform our job, as we use a lot of windows, for some strange reason we were allowed to take our PC but only 1 screen. Have no idea why this restriction was in place'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Supply a working headset having to use speakerphone and have been told to purchase my own and claim back from expenses'. (M, 46-55, 1-2 years)

'They didn't order a work mobile for me. I refuse to install software on my own mobile as that's my personal lifeline to medical services and my family'. (NG, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

Table 12: Three Most Important Actions Managers Did Not Take to Help the Transition to Home Working (n=396)

	No.	%
Equipment - lack of/inadequate - difficulties in obtaining	161	40.7
Clear understanding, instructions, guidelines, advice in setting-up, training	117	29.5
Preventing delays, slow, should have happened earlier, BAU	113	28.5
Communication or contact, slow or inadequate response to queries	98	24.7
H&S, DSE, RAs, Mental Ill-health	72	18.2
Protecting employees from risk	63	15.9
Pay and conditions issues/furlough concerns	51	12.9
Not relaxing targets, performance management, discipline, trust	41	10.4
Reimbursement of expenses	40	10.1
Managers' understanding, taking account of domestic circumstances, WLB	37	9.3
Hours, breaks, working time, flexibility	36	9.1
Job roles/workloads/structure	21	5.3
Offering everyone homeworking	19	4.8
None/can't fault	17	4.3
Issues regarding key workers	16	4.0
Managers' capability	9	2.3
Positives	8	2.0

Fourth, some employees experienced managers not permitting them or enabling them to use their own equipment at home.

'Allowing me to work from home with my own equipment, as initially promised'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 1-2 years)

'WFH relies on us having our own IT equipment - lap top, PC, Wifi. Not everyone has this'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

'Needed a printer on Dyslexia grounds which was refused. Other time taken to get equipment to them, and change of systems regarding these in first two weeks'. (Gender, age, length of service not given, CS)

Lastly, there are those who reported problems with the functioning of the equipment provided.

'Lap top given blank with instructions on how to download details to access business systems'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

8.2 Clear Understanding, Instructions, Advice in Setting-Up, Adequate Support. Training

Next in terms of frequency were responses in a broad category that included clarity of instructions or guidelines, advice in setting up, adequate support and training, as reported by almost three in ten (29.5 per cent). Manager's unwillingness or inability to provide clear instructions or guidelines was cited by many.

'Clear instructions on how to handle calls'. (M, 36-45, Vol, 3-5 years)

'Clear understanding of my duties whilst working from home'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'I felt that the move to home working was executed quickly with no I formation given. It felt rushed'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Proper instructions created to help us. The ones that they did send were - excuse the language - shite'. (F, 26-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Advise on how to set up all the equipment before leaving the office'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Didn't feel confident working from home with a leaflet to help me'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

Others stated that the support given was inadequate.

'Support given on the face of it but actually when you drill down even a little it's superficial and they care more about being seen to operate 'as normal' even though a) there's no customer demand for it and b) we don't think we can deliver this without severely compromising staff wellbeing'. (F, 25-35, CS, 3-5 years)

'Providing proper clear communication on new processes and procedures. We're bombarded with several emails and a handful of word documents to work from, not

actual streamlined procedures. Figure it out yourself is the attitude but we'll be penalised for getting it wrong. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

Others, too, referred to the inadequacy of training.

'Training in how to set up and use'. (M, age not given, FS, less than one year)

'Training was incredibly poor, it took 4 hours, and the next day we were put on phones to take and handle calls, when we didn't even have systems working, and we didn't know what to do, and we didn't have experience with the systems'. (F, 36-45, FS, less than one year)

'Not enough training in use of homeworking IT equipment - we are not all young and IT-savvy! I still cannot get my headset to work, and I can only hear my iPhone on loudspeaker'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'Poor training, high expectations, threw us on the phone, because it costs outsourcer more money to train us properly than for us to be poorly trained and uncertain, but to take calls'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

'Quick training given to undertake video appointments with customers, then objectives set the following week of how many we should undertake per week and how many needs met we should achieve. Not enough time and training in place to undertake this effectively'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

8.3 Preventing Delays, Should Have Happened Sooner, BAU (Business as Usual)

Almost one in three (28.5 per cent) stated that management should have implemented homeworking sooner, were slow to make the transition or did not act to prevent delays.

'Action had been slow - this should have happened much sooner'. (Gender not given, 36-45, Dist, more than 10 years)

'After intimating it would happen it was quite slow getting to the reality'. (M, 56-65, FS, less than one year)

'Took FAR too long to implement home working, causing great stress at the thought of returning into building with a vulnerable partner at home'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Taken too long to allow remote working. Even staff with access to remotely work they wouldn't allow to work remotely. They made they come in the office. This made the office over crowded for social distancing'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

'Not realising sooner that we could actually set up home working ourselves'. (F, <25, FS, 1-2 years)

'Not being prepared when other call centres round about us closed down we were still expected to go in I'm not entirely convinced that had it not been for people pressure we would still be going into the office'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Too slow in suggesting it would be good for those already set up to work from home to do so regularly'. (Fl 56-65, Legal, 6-10 years)

'Any positive action to reassure employees they were being thought about. Should not have constantly said the businesses needed us to carry on. We only have certain roles ie technical such as mast maintenance which are critical'. (M, 56-65, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Kept being told to come in 'business as usual' until the day before the office closed with no information that this was an option they were looking into'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Seemed overly committed to follow govt guidance but refusing to go beyond that, at least initially. Used arguments of "fairness" to refuse allowing vulnerable workers to homework early'. (M, 56-65, LG, more than 10 years)

8.4 Effective/Regular Communication or Contact, Adequate or Speedy Responses to Queries

One in four (24.7 per cent) reported that managers did not communicate effectively with, or have sufficient contact with, their employees or did not respond quickly enough to their queries.

'Communicate actively and properly with us about any aspect of the whole situation'. (NB, 25-35, Util, less than one year)

'Communication from my line manager has been hardly in existing'. (F, 46-55, O/S, more than 10 years)

'Had regular team video conferences, even just to chat. (We're not busy)'. (F, 46-55, Trav, less than one years)

'Line management not holding regular team meetings to let the team touch base which gives more of a sense of isolation and detachment'. (F, 46-55, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Not spoken to me at all. Just SMS. Disgrace'. (F, <25, FS, 1-2 years)

'No consistent contact/updates from management'. (M, age not given, FS, 1-2 years)

'No contact asking how I'm getting on. I have been speaking to colleagues instead about workloads and asking for support'.

'No-one contacts us to engage unless we ask for a call to discuss a work-related problem, and then only if they actually spot the message in the messenger type of environment we have to use for communication'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'Staying in touch with those at home to give reassurance and updates'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

Even when managers did set up communications, they did not necessarily engage successfully, or their methods were perceived as inappropriate.

'Setting up pointless whats app groups - I'm in 2 and get over 400 msgs a day per chat!!'. (F, 36-35, O/S, more than 10 years)

'My line manager has scheduled two team video chats during hours where I am not working (I am part-time) which is leaving me a bit cut off from my team'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

8.5 Health and Safety, Display Screen Equipment Regulations, Ergonomics, Risk Assessment, Mental Ill-health

Slightly fewer than one in five (18.2 per cent) believed that managers had failed to act satisfactorily with regards to health and safety matters (including mental health), ergonomic provision, DSE regulations and risk assessments. Taking the last two subjects first, a plethora of criticisms of managers' inaction was made.

'Risk assessments for colleagues, checking that everyone has the right equipment at home I am still working from a laptop without keyboard which means the screen is too low really'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'NO RISK ASSESMENTS DONE ON STAFF WELFARE AMID THE CRISIS AND WORK WHILST LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN ELECTRONICS AS BABY SITTERS'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Completed work station assessments for working from home'. (M, 25-35, Util, more than 10 years)

'They have not done a DSE. And haven't even asked are we sitting comfortably. But have told us to do double the amount of emails we would normally do'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Did not complete risk assessment properly saying 'just tick anything as no one will look at it anyway'. (F, 26-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'No risk assessments done around working from home including those with disabilities'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Did not use risk-based approach so not sure why we had a health discussion with manager'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'Chased up DSE reports AFTER home equipment has been provided - to ensure everyone has a satisfactory workstation'. (M, 56-65, CS, more than 10 years)

Others highlighted managers' failures or inadequacies in relation to providing ergonomic equipment for the workstation, with a number reporting on the pains they were suffering from because of the inappropriateness of the furniture.

'Providing enough equipment - a lot of people using laptops and dining room chairs. Not suitable for full time work'. (M, 26-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Provision of adjustable chairs for healthy all-day working'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Providing suitable workspace i.e. desk chair. Resulting in back pain'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Proactive provision of other ergonomic equipment, e.g. chairs, standing desks, keyboards, mice, phones'. (M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'Ensure have correct equipment. I am ok using a table but I have bought my own office chair to stop neck pains'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Providing forms so we could collect desk chairs with orthopaedic cushions etc'. (F, 25-35, FS, less than one year)

'All staff do not have ergonomic equipment at home'. (F, 36-45, Health, 1-2 years)

'Had to argue to get office chair to use from home. Have pre-existing back problem'. (M, 46-55, O/S, 6-10 years)

Then there were those who made specific reference to managers' deficient actions in relation to mental ill-health. Those facing potential problems or mental ill-health and those with actual problems made were critical of managers' lack of concern or attention.

'Very little outreach and support for mental health sufferers, we are given a number to call if we have issues. That's about it'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Was a bit delayed and I think some people for example with anxieties or medical conditions should have been given this option before others'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Lip service is paid to looking after staff mental health at this time but there has been no proactive offer of stress tests / counselling'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

In addition, others made observations regarding managers' neglect of health and safety generally.

'Checking on staff wellbeing: My own line management is useless. They do not follow any of the good practice the company is encouraging, particularly in terms of mental wellbeing. Myself and 2 other colleagues in particular are struggling with individual personal issues that our line knows about but she never calls, and does not follow the practice the HR tell the union is being encouraged by the business. Instead she frequently sends us passive aggressive team e-mails'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Prioritize our health and well-being during a effing pandemic'. (NB, 25-35, Util, less than one year)

'Dedicating a member of staff to the cause to implement safety measures in-line with government guidelines'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

A final concern of considerable significance for the protection of women call handlers when working at home is the existence and effectiveness of policies on domestic violence. One complained:

'We still do not have a domestic violence policy and this has been conveniently forgotten about. No help for victims from our department'. (F, 46-55, CS, more than 10 years)

8.6 Protecting Employees from Risk

Slightly fewer than one in six (15.9 per cent) reported that managers had failed to protect employees from the risk of infection from SARS-CoV-2. If those comments in the previous sub-section (6.5) related to managers neglect of employees' health when working from home, those in this section were concerned with the inability to protect employees in the workplace. Thus, most of the comments are from workers who experienced exposure to risk prior to being sent home in the period of delays as elaborated in 6.3. One strong theme related to 'at risk' staff not being sent home sooner.

> 'Although "at risk" staff were identified no apparent moves taken to include these individuals in the originally-planned first phase'. (M, 56-65, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Didn't prioritise those who needed to work from home urgently due to self-isolation or childcare'. (F, 36-45, Vol, 3-5 years)

> 'Slower than necessary to recognise risk, particularly to those with underlying health conditions. Colleague in that group signed off sick after having homeworking refused'. (M, 56-65, LG, more than 10 years)

> 'Didn't understand that I am in the high-risk category and have to stay self-isolated for 3 months'. (M, 36-45, Vol, 3-5 years)

> 'Not prioritising everyone who is vulnerable, some were sent home immediately but others like myself were not. Some people who had to stay were suffering with cancer so direct line managers had not fed back everyone's health condition to those who were making the decisions to send people home as a priority'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Could have saved me and others a lot of stress by not making me attend an unsafe building. My records clearly show I have COPD and heart problems'. (M, 56-65, Tel, more than 10 years)

A second theme to emerge from the responses concerns workers who had been sent home to self-isolate, but were then required to return to the workplace where they were exposed to risk, prior to being sent home again to WFH.

> 'Was pressured to go back into work for about a week and they only backed down after advice from HR and union'. (M, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

> 'Made to come back after isolation despite risk before being allowed home a week later'. (M, 26-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

> 'Forced to put my safety at risk to log on to take calls with and unsafe work environment for several days. Simply advised if not working would not get paid for time off. Had been off 13 days as supposed self-isolation until issues started'. (M, 36-45, O/S, more than 10 years)

A third theme was managers' failure to send home workers in centres even though they were displaying Covid-19 symptoms.

'They still allowed those that were showing signs of coughing and sneezing to still come to work. We expressed out safety concerns but these were ignored'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Did not take concerns regarding ill employees seriously and did not clean the area after sending one employee with Covid style symptoms home'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

A fourth theme concerned the risk workers had been exposed to while remaining in the contact centre and its hazards (including sanitisation, hot-desking) before being sent home.

'We could have worked from home and sent letters while system access to phones was being sorted, but this was not approved so our health I feel was put at risk during this time'. (F, 25-35, FS, more than 10 years)

'We shouldn't have been asked to hot desk. People were off ill but asked to sit in their desks'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Social distancing not introduced as quickly as it should have been.   Had to go back into the office to receive trading on laptop in groups'. (F, 56-65, O/S, more than ten years)

'No sanitizer available on site over 1000 employees open-plan. Told to wash hands, but no soap at times'. (Gender not given, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Did not check how people travelled to work - people travelling on public transport network to attend work were not prioritised putting them at possibly more risk'. (F, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'Monitoring and enforcement of new policies to ensure compliance. Some staff, even high-risk staff, are still making the choice to attend offices, and some senior staff are still making demands that require other staff to do paper-based work (and therefore attend at offices). Not all staff with childcare commitments are being allowed to avail of their rights under the new policy'. (M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'More preparation, certain areas of businesses was able to work from home before the rest. We were exposed to more risks'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

Two final comments are insightful. The first highlights an additional source of risk and the second illustrated a critical observation made by a number of respondents, that their organisation sacrificed the health of workers for business imperatives.

'Sent somebody round to our houses to sign off equipment that had been taken - not a good idea when there is a pandemic!'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Failed to properly scrutinise the validity of Covid 19 critical orders. My GM encouraged us to accept customer claims for urgent orders as the engineers were not busy! (negligence to staff safety in favour of Business needs)'. (NG, 56-65, Tel, 3-5 years)

8.7 Pay and Conditions

More than one in eight (12.9 per cent) referred to actions that managers had not taken with regards to pay, conditions and contractual matters. Diverse issues and (in)actions are referred to.

'They stated they wouldn't probably not pay you for self-isolation. This in turn forced people who should have gone home to stay. This was overturned eventually'. (M, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Still no idea what am being paid'. (F, 46-55, Trav, 3-5 years)

'Not thought about our drop in wage'. (F, 25-35, Trav, 3-5 years)

'Not paying the £6 HMRC allowance, but asking staff to apply for it individually from HMRC'. (F, 36-45, CS, 6-10 years)

'Not receiving commission as sales line is closed, so earning 50% of usual wage'. (F, 25-35, Trav, 3-5 years)

'Have not clarified what will happen with our pay for isolating or when weren't able to work'. (M, 36-45, O/S, 1-2 years)

'The company have paid us for two weeks, which we are all VERY grateful for, but anything outside of this comes out of our holiday allocation. Tomorrow is the first day of us using our holidays because of the above two reasons, and we don't know how much longer this will go on for. I have even been given the opportunity to go back to the workplace until laptops arrive. I'm sure precautions will be taken but it makes me uneasy'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 1-2 years)

'Staff are not on full pay or furloughed. Capita and BBC cannot make a decision. Staff are worried'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Did not pay me after I refused to go in on Wednesday after lock down. They also made me load everything up on my day off without payment'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

Call handlers were also critical of managers (in)action in relation to issues of leave or holidays.

'Told me I had to take unpaid leave or holidays to be at home when others were off'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Unresolved issues over annual leave. Staff are expected to take it or risk losing it (everyone has a different annual leave end date based on the date they join) even though they may be completely on their own and the only interaction might be through work. This is being pursued but yet unresolved'. (F, 46-55, CS, more than 10 years)

'They said I should take the day as unpaid leave or from my holiday allowance when my home broadband went out for the day. They haven't appreciated what they are asking if us and that goodwill is a 2-way street'. (M, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

'Not letting me cancel holidays'. (Gender not given, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Capita have decided not to follow government guidelines regarding annual leave. If we don't take it this year, we lose it'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Our hours have changed to Monday to Friday, 9-5 for the time being (we are usually open every day, weekdays up until 10PM) and our shifts are being updated to this new pattern on a rolling week by week basis. This is making it difficult to book leave, we're asked to book leave as if we were going to work our normal hours and then email our Service team if that week we will actually be on 9 to 5 hours. It is very unwieldy, however this is a general feature of our leave system'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Reassurance that would not have take unpaid leave or have to make hours up which were missed due to juggling working from home'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

Working from home or going home to avoid risk prior to working from home provoked other complaints. The first, cited here, concerns workload, working time and overtime payments and the second refers to a general fear that workers would be penalised financially or would face disciplinary action for having self-isolated.

'Due to call volumes when we work time over due to a lengthy call at the end of our shift we cannot claim the time back, it needs to be paid back as standard rate overtime, in 15 minute increments. (e.g. if you work 20 minutes over you only get paid for 15 minutes).' (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Confirmed that no one will be penalised for staying away if they show symptoms i.e. lose sick pay or face disciplinary proceedings'. (F, 25-35, FS, more than 10 years)

8.8 Not Relaxing Targets, Performance Management, Discipline, Trust

Slightly more than one in ten (10.4 per cent) made reference to managers' inaction in reducing targets, relaxing performance management and associated disciplinary action. The category can include also those citing managers' unwillingness to trust their employees. The following comments provide insight into the widespread criticism of management in relation to target setting and implementation.

'Additional needs for the transition like addition time off or relaxing of targets for calls'. (M, <25, Tel, 1-2 years)

'Adequate reduction in targets and hours'. (M, 25-35, FS, more than 10 years)

'They continue to audit our work relentlessly when we have been stretched to the limit line management not recognising that wfh is slower and tasks take longer so unrealistic expectations set'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'Reports of staff that were unwell with coughs and temperatures being told going home would affect their attendance targets'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Sticking to FTE reduction targets set out in the AOP rather than scrapping them due to the emergency'. (M, 25-35, FS, more than 10 years)

'I was emailed by my manager for my not hitting my targets in one week. She has never sat with me and told me my targets and expectations since I have returned from maternity leave. I have a one year child at home to look after with my husband who is also working from home we have to take it in turns looking after her I had to email my manager to remind her of my challenges of working from home and childcare'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'They say they understand the transition is difficult and not easy but they still expect targets to be hit when hours are reduced due to childcare needs etc and this is not factored in. Targets should be void until normality resumes!'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

'Still being challenged on productivity'. (F, 46-55, FS, 1-2 years)

'Haven't advised us of whether our work objections have been frozen'. (F, 25-35, FS, more than 10 years)

Some respondents were more explicit in their opposition to management pursing pre-Covid targets and disciplinaries arsing from ostensible under-performance.

'Department is ploughing ahead with disciplinaries virtually including for under performance, even though our perm sec said that doing your best in the circumstances is good enough. There does not appear to be any consideration given to the isolation and extra and stress and anxiety in these unprecedented times. As the lead department dealing with the response to COVID19 it should be all hands-on desk, and yet we are content to continue to persecute people for minor perceived under performance issues. The situation for probationers is even worse'. (F, 46-55, CS, more than 10 years)

A recurring theme was managers' unwillingness or refusal to trusts their employees.

'Still don't trust us to actually work - targets are increased weekly and staff are under pressure to produce stats and updates and are continually quality checked - it's hard to argue on quality fails on messenger type aps'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'Not being trusted to carry on with work - lot of micromanagement and Teams Meetings every day when not needed!'. (F, 56-65, Hous, more than 10 years)

'Treat people like children. As they working from home they expect them to not work. No trust'. (F, 36-45, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Putting faith in staff and not allowing for the fact they are using new systems which are not reliable - staff feeling victimised if they have system issues which they have no control over'. (F, 46-55, CS, 6-10 years)

8.9 Reimbursement of Expenses

For the previous question in which respondents were asked to indicate the actions that managers had taken to facilitate homeworking, 2.7 per cent referred positively to the fact that employees had been reimbursed for expenses incurred in purchasing equipment or for

telephony or utilities' costs. In contrast, more than one in ten (10.4 per cent) were critical of managers' failure to reimburse employees

'£30 not enough to purchase reasonable adjustment equipment and no alternative arrangements to get that set up if not already in place at home'. (F, 36-45, CS, 6-10 years)

'Allowance for the right kit'. (F, 46-55, FS, 1-2 years)

'Unable to claim any expenses for home working, ie electric, paper, printer inks'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'There are now currently 3 of us working from home. We live with parents. 3 of us using computers for 8 hours a day will cost electricity. Work have not mentioned it costs will be covered'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Subsidising home broadband'. (F, 56-65, CS, more than 10 years)

'Calling customers on own mobiles if you have unlimited minutes and asking us to use own broadband no suggestion of help'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Offered anything in forms of payment for internet or electricity'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Given advice on any rebate for working at home for using own broadband etc'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Have not provided cable for us to add additional monitor much needed and asked us to purchase one'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'I only have a small house I have my wife and child at home I had to buy my own desk and buy a cable for the internet so I can run it up the stairs they not paying my electricity bill. No help log on to Skype quick 5 minutes in morning with manager that's it'. (M, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'No financial support provided to cover electric costs of working for home... I am now using much more electrics to charge work phone, laptop and run monitor'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Unable to provide other equipment such as screens etc for an easier working life from home and are also not paying for broadband'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

8.10 Managers' Understanding, Taking Account of Domestic Circumstances, Work Life Balance

Slightly fewer than one in ten (9.3 per cent) reported that managers had failed to understand or had taken into account employees' domestic circumstance. This category includes those who criticised managers' inaction in relation to work life balance.

'A lack of understanding from my own line that home working has its struggles. While I was on compassionate leave I missed a team meeting where my colleagues were told by our manager that she expects a higher output from people working from home as they will have less distractions. I did raise this comment (anonymously) with HR and

they agreed that there is a severe learning curve for some managers in the business who are not displaying the company's values'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Accept that all workers may not have a place to shut away completely from family and pets'. (F, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

'All my other family isolating'. 9F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Didn't take our concerns seriously from the start - most first line managers were in it with us but senior managers preaching from the comfort of their safe houses did not go down well at all!'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

'I have been told need to work my full hours and logged in as per schedule which is hard as also have 10 year old at home so need to make sure I am also available for him told would only get paid for hours worked'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Very little consideration for home work/life balance - staff are being asked to make up hours when children are in bed or at weekends'. (F, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Taken into account individual circumstances i.e. in house trying to provide schooling and care for children while working'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Support to help those with children or those who care for elderly etc. Some managers were quite nasty about it and stated we had to work out full shift no matter what. This was escalated and now there is support'. (F, 25-35, Tel, 1-2)

'But because working from home and the family balance with kids being off can't work full hours. And force you to take unpaid leave or put your child at risk in a hub. There is a policy to take paid leave provided by the company but some managers not enforcing it'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Lack of support for single parents unable to work from home or centre these are unpaid and 8 week policy is only if managers deem acceptable no guidelines on this'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 1-2 years)

'Lack of clarity or compassion to covid19'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Acknowledging issues in home working (e.g. Many colleagues are now dealing with terminal illness calls at home)'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Considered our individual working from home environment - desk, chairs, rooms, ability to function properly from home'. (F, age not given, FS, 3-5 years)

'Not supporting the appropriate work/life balance during an already stressful time. I'm now working 10-hour days to manage'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'For first-time homeworkers, enquired about any reasons that might prevent homeworking e.g. no table or desk to sit at, disturbance from neighbours etc- it was just assumed that we could'. (M, 46-55, FS, more than ten years)

'No support for single parents. I've had to argue to be off the phone and do admin work'. (F, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

8.11 Hours, Breaks, Working Time, Flexibility

As the sub-sections above indicate, many respondents have touched upon issues of working time whilst mainly raised managers' inactions or failure to act with regards to a range of other issues. In addition, 9.1 per cent made explicit reference to hours, breaks, working time and managers being inflexible in relation to these. Some made straightforward complaints relating to breaks, that managers had not adjusted or extended them to take account of the demands and challenges of WFH.

'Told to stick to 2 X10 min breaks no more   No extra breaks allowed'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'MORE REGULAR BREAKS .PHONE NEVER STOPS'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'Not enough free time of the phone'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 1-2 years)

'Still have to stick a monitored schedule for breaks lunches etc. Which may be hard to follow for some people at home e.g. People with kids or uncomfortable work set ups'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Time off the phone with team to do a game or whatever to bring the team closer together like we used to once a week'. (F, 25-35, O/S, less than one year)

Others reported that managers had not changed hours and shifts (re-arranged or reduced) to take account of domestic demands, including childcare.

'Adjustment to hours to enable flexibility with child care. I have requested that I could start early and finish early to accommodate the mental and physical wellbeing of my children. I glue been offered the same length working day but starting at 7, which effectively results in my children only getting an hour of my time a day. This is somewhat contradictory to the guidance where it is advised that paid leave and reduced hours should be considered'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

'Flexible working hours'. (M, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years0

'Reduced working hours when children at home to avoid stress however still providing full pay'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

'Put in place a suitable working shift pattern that suits everyone'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Rota for working hours because contact centre closed so our hours was animated to mirror. This was done too late and without the normal working notice period'. (M, 36-45 years, FS, 3-5 years)

'Not expected us to work full time while we had family concerns and new /sudden work situation'. (F, 46-55, CS, more than 10 years)

'Not changed opening hours so still working until 8pm'. (F, 25-35, Trav, 3-5 years)

'Increased working hours if you work at home and keeping working hours reduced if you're still in call centre - both groups are paid the same and therefore creates an incentive to not work from home'. (F, 25-35, Tel, 1-2 years)

'Offering us Flexible working hours e.g. allowing us to work days shift, while working at home. We have been told we work the same hours and breaks to what is on IEX and out login and log out report will be checked!!!'. (M, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

8.12 Job Roles, Structure of Work

Five point two per cent indicated that managers had not acted to ensure employees were able to stay within their job roles or provided appropriate alternatives. Others made general criticisms of the way that managers had not acted to structure work processes at home.

'Allowed people to stay in their known/trained for job roles.' (M, <25, O/S, 1-2 years)

'Was phoned and asked about alternative redeployment, agreed to do it, heard nothing more'. (F, 46-55, Hol, 1-2 years

8.13 Offering Everyone Homeworking

As seen above, 28.5 per cent reported on management's failure to have prevented delays in moving to homeworking and 15.9 per cent reported that managers had neglected to protect employees from risk in the workplace. In addition, and similarly, 4.8 per cent stated explicitly that managers had failed to ensure that all employees were offered homeworking.

'The fact that the company is still operating during a lockdown'. (F, <25, Ret, less than one year)

'Department-wide approach to covering essential in-office duties - some staff need to go in more frequently than they should because they are the only 'low-risk' individual in that team, while other teams have a surplus of individuals considered 'low-risk', some of whom report not having enough work they can do from home'. (M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'Still there are some staff left working in the offices who other companies with staff of the same job role are WFH'. (F, 36-45, Tel, 6-10 years)

8.14 Issues Regarding Key Workers

Four per cent were critical of managers' inaction in relation to the question of key workers, a complex issue that has arisen because of the ambiguity of the government's definition of key or essential workers and organisations' interpretation of the guidelines. One recurring theme has been managers' definition of who constitutes a key worker when their activities are perceived by workers as not key or essential.

'As key workers site not closed'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Using key worker status to keep making profit from sales and retention'. (M, 25-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

'They initially said my team were key workers but not critical workers (key means we have to work, critical means you are entitled to a work laptop), they have now apparently ordered laptops for those of us without our own equipment at home but as we are not priority I don't know when I will get one'. (F, 46-55, FS, 6-10 years)

'My role is absolutely not a key worker, yet I had to go to office daily until a laptop could be sourced for me'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years)

'Concentrating on the important jobs e.g. customers with no service faults etc. instead we continued with sales and complaints which are not service effecting'. (M, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'We get a sense of the frustration management have with us being home on full pay doing no work'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10)

'They asked us to volunteer to come into work 01/04/2020 giving us a window of only 1 hour to respond and were refusing to state what the work was. This was essentialy a trap as this work was 'CRITICAL' and would make us key workers without our knowledge meaning we would be forced into work each day with no choice'. (F, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Identify which key workers are actually critical for the business to continue operating. Referring to all employees as key workers by job title and not by tasks carried out'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'They have stated since that failed drive to get people to volunteer and i quote the following from a message. "She did explain that even though PPI is on pause, other areas of the bank that are classed as critical are still working and it may come to us having to go in and support these areas"'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Why shut PPI when you are going to bring the entire department back into the building under the guise of a critical workstream. They may as well re-open PPI if we as an entire department are forced back in'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

8.15 Managers' Capability

A small number (2.3 per cent), made the significant claim that managers have failed to act because of a general lack of competence or capability. These three succinct comments are representative.

'Not all managers are good at this'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Being clued up on self-isolation government timescales'.

'Lack of management skills'. (Gender not given, 56-65, O/S, more than 10 years)

8.16 None/Can't Fault/Positives

It is reasonable to consider together those who reported that they did not feel that managers had failed to take actions (4.3 per cent) alongside those who made comments that contained positive view of managers' actions (2 per cent).

'As I am at home on full pay I cannot ask for better. I work in a bank contact centre taking calls direct from customers so it is unprecedented that the company have to arrange working from home taking calls from customers'. (Gender not given, 56-65, FS, 3-5 years)

'Got laptops in a timely manner'. (M, 25-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

'Let me work from home straight away'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'No actions not taken, however it is important to note, the actions taken were only as a result of the CWU getting involved. We had 4 weeks of refusal for home working, within a week of our team involving CWU, home working was agreed'. (F, 36-45, Tel, 1-2 years)

'Nothing else required'. (F, 65+, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Not sure there is anything I would want my company to do that they haven't done already'. (M, 46-55, Educ, 1-2 years)

8.17 Multiple Inactions

Finally, it is necessary to consider the responses in which call handlers report not merely one area where managers have neglected to act but where several aspects are combined in the one statement.

'Listening to concerns. Example. I don't have suitable work space nor desk or chair. This is my problem so I'm having to work on a sofa with a table. Causing back pain. My systems were not working properly, this is my issue to fix somehow, though the software belongs to the company'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'They constantly text other members of staff, not management, for help and this is distracting and time consuming. It could very easily have been done in the office if they had not delayed'. (F, <25, FS, 6-10 years)

'Relied on team managers to set up Facebook groups/ what's app group to communicate with the agents. Not provided any equipment though. Team managers are expected to do this on their own personal phones'. (F, 36-45, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Not embracing legislation and work arounds - no payslips for example. There are no voluntary updates on anything'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'Not communicated well what was happening next but then there was leaders saying it's not a requirement and can still work from office as we are key workers which was not correct...we were not required to work at the office as it was possible to work remotely not taking the foot off the pedal re stats, targets, listening to calls etc - immense pressure on advisors'. (F, 36-45, FS, 6-10 years_

9. How Did the Transition to Homeworking Occur?

Examining the process by which transition occurred, Table 13 presents the responses to a question asking workers to indicate the circumstances of their move to homeworking. Respondents could select more than one answer, where these were not mutually exclusive, and the frequencies of response have been placed in descending order.

Table 13: How did the transition to homeworking occur? (n=689)

	No.	%
I was given an instruction by management to homework	371	56.3
Management gave me a programmed lap top and/or PC which I took home	325	49.3
I was given the option by management to homework	259	39.3
I requested management that I should be allowed to homework	117	17.8
Management delivered a programmed lap top and/or PC to my home	78	11.8
Workers got together to ask for homework	47	7.1
The trade union negotiated homeworking	45	6.8
Management pays for broadband	15	2.3

Agents 'given an instruction by management to homework' is the most frequently cited response by 56.3 per cent, a transition more common than workers being 'given the option by management to homework' (39.3 per cent). Less than one in five (17.8 per cent) transitioned following a request to management that they should be allowed to homework. Only 7.1 per cent and 6.8 per cent reported that their trade union had negotiated homework or that workers had got together to ask for homeworking respectively. In terms of equipment, almost a half of respondents (49.3 per cent) stated that management had given them a programmed lap top and/or PC which they had taken home, while 11.8 per cent reported that management had delivered a programmed lap top or PC to their home. Only a tiny minority said that their transition had been facilitated by management paying for their broadband use at home.

The next set of questions relate to the experiences of call handlers working in the home. The first question asked workers to indicate whether certain conditions, applicable in the contact centre environment, were extended to the home. The evidence from the first of the conditions listed – 'I am expected to work the same hours and shifts at home as I would at work' – is that two-thirds of respondents (67.8 per cent) were subject to the same temporal patterns of work. A small majority (52.1 per cent) reported that they encountered the same qualitative and qualitative targets at home that they had faced in the workplace. A related item related to whether team leaders monitored agents to the same degree at home as they had in the workplace. In this respect, 41.3 percent of respondents said they did.

Considering the prevalence of targets and the extent of monitoring by team leaders together, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the transition in location from workplace to home appears to led, for many, to a diminution in the mechanisms of control. Certainly, technological or 'algorithmic' forms of control might operate, especially with regard to the real-time statistical generation of performance data, prompting intervention by team leaders in the form of email

or message alerts. Equally, supervisory intervention might take the verbal form of phone contact. However, direct and immediate visual surveillance and real-time verbal intervention are not possible in the domestic sphere as opposed to in the workplace. Finally, regarding breaks, the majority of respondents indicated that breaks that agents took at home differed from those experienced by workers in the workplace. Less than one third (29.3 per cent) said that their breaks were the same.

Table 14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My managers make allowances for me as I've children at home (n=648)	10.6	12.7	59.0	8.0	9.7
It is difficult to combine homeworking with childcare (n=645)	17.8	15.3	59.4	4.2	3.3
My managers make allowances for me because I have caring responsibilities (n=644)	9.5	14.0	61.2	7.5	7.9
I miss the social interaction with the colleagues in the workplace (n=690)	37.7	37.0	13.3	7.4	4.6
I find there are too many distractions working at home (n=681)	9.8	16.4	22.5	31.3	20.0
The technology works as well at home as in the call centre (n=685)	23.5	23.5	12.4	25.4	15.2
After Covid-19 the danger I would prefer to go back to the centre (n=706)	19.7	23.4	23.9	18.6	14.4
I have enough space to work in when at home (n=711)	31.4	35.6	7.6	13.8	11.7
My home work station and space are quite uncomfortable (n=686)	19.1	24.1	14.9	24.8	17.2

10. The Three Most Positive Aspects of Working from Home

An open question, asking workers to say what were the three most positive aspects of working from home, produced 1,406 answers from 563 respondents, an average of 2.5 answers per respondent. As with analysis of the responses to other open questions, the answers have been categorised according to common themes (Table 15) in descending order of frequency. Clearly, the themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive. For example, not having to take public transport is closely related to feeling safe while working from home. Or, feeling more relaxed or less stressed at home may be related to less scrutiny by management or supervisory pressure and the ability to manage time more effectively. However, it is necessary to make heuristic distinctions in order to identify the regularities and patterns and, notwithstanding some porosity between categories, the totals for each compounded item do convey a genuine sense of the relative importance of the positive aspects of homeworking as experienced by this sample.

10.1 Not Having to Commute

By far the most frequently reported positive aspect, reported by three-quarters (75.1 per cent) was related workers no longer having to commute. This category includes those many respondents who made specific reference to not having to take public transport, the risks associated with which were receiving growing attention during April when the large majority

of the surveys were completed and submitted. Workers emphasised differing facets as exemplified in the following, sometimes pithy, responses:

'I walk about 20 steps to my PC. No travel in rush hour on a crammed train with standing room only. When I switch my PC off, I'm home straight away. No commute!' (F, FS, 46-55, More than 10 years)

'The commute is shortest I've ever had'. (M, Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'More time for my partner and dog as no traveling. As you can see traveling is a big one for me as it takes unnecessary time away from what already little time I have in a day.' (F, O/S, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'No getting stuck on call/chat therefore getting home often an hour+ later due to bus times after 8pm'. (M, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

Table 15: Three most positive aspects of working from home (n=563)

	No.	%
No commuting/travel to work/no public transport	423	75.1
Feel safer/social distancing/avoid Covid-19/workplace air con/hotdesking	167	29.7
Less distractions or interruptions/can concentrate better/more productive	166	29.5
Work Life Balance/More time with family/children/caring/can do chores	164	29.1
Relaxed/less stressful/better mental health/better or better sleep	91	16.2
More comfortable/better environment/cleaner	86	15.3
Time management/flexibility hours-shifts-breaks	74	13.1
Can behave in ways not possible at work (TV/ radio, clothes, appearance, make-up, pets)	48	8.5
Saving money	44	7.8
No/none/N/A	38	6.7
Less scrutiny/micro-management/supervisory pressure/targets	37	6.6
Own food/healthier/no canteen	29	5.2
Full salary	27	4.8
Good communication with colleagues and supervisors/managers	12	2.1
Equipment better	12	2.1

10.2 Unsafe Workplace Environment, Safe WFH Environment

The second most frequently cited reason related more directly to the contrast between unsafe and unhealthy conditions in the workplace and safe and healthy working at home, as reported by almost three in ten respondents (29.7 per cent).

'Not in a call centre where we are open to catching Covid-19 Virus'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Staying away from other people who may carry the virus (some people are still not adhering to 2m distance i.e. break areas'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'We are no longer in a high-risk building. There was a lot of us [with Covid-19] on the one floor and that risk has now gone'. (Transport, F, <25, 1-2 years)

'Avoiding illness- I am susceptible to bugs and the work environment is poor due to air conditioning and people being forced to work when ill'. (F, FS, 36-45, 3-5 years)

10.3 Fewer Distractions or Interruptions

A similar number (29.5 per cent) reported variously that they faced fewer distractions or interruptions at home when compared to working in the centre, a sizable number commenting additionally that this had led them to be more productive. Some respondents with children even reported that distractions were less and levels of concentration were superior at home.

'No distractions from colleagues means I feel more focussed and productive'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Peace and quiet to get on with tasks I find I am more productive at home'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

'Call volumes have dramatically dropped during Covid lockdown so at present only office-based colleagues are answering calls. A large part of my job is writing detailed reports and this allows me to concentrate on this without interruptions'. (F, Tel, 46-55, 3-5 years)

'Less distraction at home (even with kids as they know boundaries'. (M, Tel, 36-45, 6-10 years)

10.4 Improved Work Life Balance

Only slightly fewer respondents, 29.1 per cent, made explicit reference to improved work life balance or to the ability to spend more time with family or to undertake domestic responsibilities.

'Incredible work life balance and instead of trying to fit life into the 2 hours on a night time after I get in from work, it can happen around me all day. Better quality meals, better use of time and more enjoyable personal space. Far less stressful environment'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

'Can get on with bits for dinner during lunch break'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Childcare and seeing my 2-year old for breakfast lunch dinner and getting her up on the morning and putting her to bed'. (F, O/S, 36-45, 1-2 years)

A clutch of other positive aspects of homeworking may contribute to or are associated with the improved work life balance. Slightly less than one in six (16.2 per cent) reported that working from home was 'relaxed or less stressful or better for mental health' and slightly more than one in seven (15.3 per cent) stated that working at home was more comfortable or was a better environment than work. A better work life balance relates also issues of working time, shifts and hours, where one in eight believed that their ability to exercise more effective time management and time flexibility were a positive aspect of homeworking.

'Being able to be more flexible, i.e. I was able to start early one day at short notice, I couldn't have done this if I had to travel in'. (Non-binary, Tel, 56-65, 3-5 years)

'I do not feel so bound by the clock in particular with start and end times as I am no longer bound by public transport'. (F, FS, 56-65, 3-5 years)

'Absence of a 'workspace' is pretty liberating'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

10.5 Less Scrutiny or Supervisory Pressure

Two other issues can be considered together, an ability to behave in ways that would not be possible at work and the perception that they were subject to less scrutiny or supervisory pressure at home were welcome aspects. The former, reported by 8.5 per cent, might include being able to have the TV or radio on or surf the internet during breaks or enable workers to determine their appearance as they pleased. Nine respondents made specific reference to the satisfaction of having their pets around them.

> 'Can shout and swear at the laptop when manager emails another pointless efficiency programme they have plagiarised from a more talented colleague'. (M, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

> 'Can watch things between calls whereas I'm not allowed to use the internet at work'. (M, O/S, <25, 1-2 years)

> 'Mentally a lot calmer due to pets being near. Less stressed due to more sleep'. (F, Tel, 25-35, 1-2 years)

> The latter, reported by 6.6 per cent, agree that the home environment has brought a welcome easing of tight managerial and supervisory controls.

> 'Ability to provide more measured responses rather than having to be aware of, and judged on body language'. (F, FS, 36-45, 3-5 years)

> 'Feel less stressed, monitored and micro managed as leaders are managing from a distance'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

10.6 Saving Money, Consuming Own Food

In addition to the 7.8 per cent who report on the money saved, 5.2 per cent make specific reference to the advantage of being able to cook and consume their own food and drinks.

> 'Ability to eat healthy meals, as prior to being sent to work from home the Canteen facilities including microwaves were out of bounds'. (F, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

> 'Access to my own food and better drinks. (The tea from the machine at work is tasteless!)'. (M, Utilities, 46-55 years, 1-2 years)

10.7 Successful Communications with Colleagues

Small numbers (2.1 per cent) reported on how homeworking had led to successful communications between colleagues and with management and on superior equipment in the home when compared to the workplace.

'Being able to communicate with my colleagues in a digital / virtual way'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Communication--Management keeps in touch by email phone & Zoom'. (F, FS, 56-65, more than 10 years)

10.8 Multiple Positive Aspects

A number of respondents combined several overlapping *positive* aspects to form insightful fairly lengthy narratives.

'The peace and quiet, no meaningless banter, no radios, no bickering, and knowing that I am the only person using facilities (all facilities) makes me feel much safer. Breaks can be combined into an hour at lunch time instead of 3 shorter breaks throughout the day so the mid-day break is much better, and there is at last the facility to move away from the screen for the required time every hour as we can make drinks when we want and have a walk around the flat when we need to - no-one can see!'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

11. The Three Most Negative Aspects of Working from Home

Similarly, an open question asked workers to say what were the three most negative aspects of working from home, which produced 1,147 answers from 479 respondents, an average of 2.4 answers per respondent. As with analysis of the responses to other open questions, the answers have been categorised according to common themes (Table 16) in descending order of frequency. Again, the themes overlap and are not mutually exclusive. For example, missing social interaction with colleagues in the workplace is closely associated with the lack of work interaction with colleagues through teamworking or work-related matters. Workers reporting IT/connectivity or systems issues can be seen to be related to equipment problems. However, in these cases and in others our understanding of workers' perceptions is enhanced by heuristically separating the responses into these distinct (albeit closely related) categories. As with the analysis of the positive aspects, the totals for each compounded item do convey a genuine sense of the relative importance of the negative aspects of homeworking as experienced by this sample.

Before examining the reported negative aspects, let us consider initially the 9.2 per cent who do not believe that there were any negative aspects of homeworking. So just less than one in ten regarded homeworking as a wholly positive experience. One worker expressed their satisfaction with homeworking by reporting as a negative aspect, 'The looming prospect of returning to the office'. Others reported no negative aspects, given the serious threat of infection posed by Covid-19: 'None - when the expert advice is "stay @ home & be safe"'.

11.1 Missing Social Interaction, Isolation

The largest category of response reported by one in two related to missing the social interaction with colleagues or, relatedly, feelings of isolation from having to remain at home. Specific comments reveal a recurring experiences and emotions, including the relief social contact provides from the relentlessness of work demands and call queues, the difficulty of sustaining friendships or quite simply, the humour, the banter ('No banter', F, Travel, 46-55, less than 1 year). From the evidence of call handlers' statements, organisations' attempts, however well-

intentioned, to overcome the sense of social isolation through social media, especially What's App groups, appear to have been largely unsuccessful.

'Feeling isolated with only the same 4 walls every day'. (F, FS, 36-45, less than a year)

'I miss the social interactions with work colleagues.' (M, Tel, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'The social engagement of work is missed providing little respite between calls'. (F, O/S, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Not seeing colleagues and having a laugh'. (F, O/S, 25-35, less than a year)

'Miss seeing colleagues and the social side of working in an office'. (F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

Several indicated that to date they had not experienced loneliness or isolation, but believed that this would change should homeworking continue e.g. 'I think it will eventually get lonely and boring'.

Table 16: Three most negative aspects of working from home (n=479)

	No	%
Missing social interaction/social aspects of work/isolation/lonely/stuck at home	241	50.3
Lack of or less support or structure or assistance/communication issues	117	24.4
Uncomfortable/unsuitable/work station/space issues/ergonomic problems	97	20.3
IT connectivity/systems issues	86	18.0
Lack of work interaction with colleagues/teamwork/consult with colleagues	80	16.7
Distractions/interruptions (kids, family, pets, neighbours)/motivation problems	80	16.7
Work Life Balance - difficulties in achieving/can't separate work from home/boundaries	78	16.3
Equipment problems (lap top, screen, PC)/printers/paper	77	16.1
Hours/longer/same - no flexibility/shift times/working time issues/issues with breaks	72	15.0
Targets/micro-management/discipline/monitoring/control/intensity/pressure	57	11.9
n/a, none	44	9.2
Costs - equipment, utilities, broadband, phone, furniture	42	8.8
Lack of exercise/health concerns/food	21	4.4
Mental health impacts	18	3.8
Customer service affected	10	2.1
Different skills/difficult to do job at home	10	2.1
Boredom/monotony	8	1.7
Management exploiting lockdown/homeworking - redundancies, contracts	5	1.0
Missing development opportunities	2	0.4
Miss commute	2	0.4

11.2 Insufficient Guidance or Communication

The second most commonly reported negative aspect, by almost a quarter (24.4 per cent), related to employees complaining that they were not receiving sufficient support or guidance from supervisors or managers or that communication was inadequate. A range of difficulties are revealed by the specific responses, not least delays in management responding to requests for 'guidance and support…for escalation or complex queries'

'I have had no guidance of what is expected of me at home and during this time. A lot of people are off on my team and I do not know how to work some of the tasks. I am therefore worried if I will be penalised if my efficiency is low?'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than ten years)

'I am unsure as I have had no contact from a manager yet however i have received group emails asking to complete the productivity tool therefore I assume I am expected to do as much work on slower systems/working with 1 screen that I do in the office'. (F, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Team briefings via Skype are a nightmare'. (F, Ent, 36-45, more than 10 years)

11.3 Discomfort of Work Station

The third most commonly reported negative aspect is the unsuitability/discomfort of the home 'work station'. This category includes those reporting problems with workspace and health and safety arising from ergonomic deficiencies, compounded by neglect of risk assessments. The following comments show the seriousness of some concerns and, it has to be remembered, the reported complaints stem workers' experiences of brief periods, weeks, of homeworking.

'Not got my ergonomic work chair and adjustable desk'. (Gender not given, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'Very uncomfortable working station leading to pain'. (F, FS, <25, 3-5 years)

'No office chair! Beanbags, it transpires, are not that comfy for longer periods'. (F, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Not enough space for home office set up, asked for smaller space saving equipment but have been denied multiple times'. (M, FS, 25-25, 3-5 years)

'Chair isn't HSE correct - dining room chair - didn't take one from work!'. (F, FS, 46-55, 1-2 years)

'I don't have a proper desk so a new RSI is a real possibility'. (M, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

'I don't have a proper workspace. Pregnant sitting on the couch with my laptop on a dinner tray for 10 hours a day is extremely uncomfortable and causing great stress on my back'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'We were not allowed to take office chairs home with us, my back has suffered from pains as my chair at home is unsuitable. I mentioned this in a WFH risk assessment, have had no response. What was the point in even filling it in? even though they made a big deal about completing it'. (M, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

11.4 Connectivity, Systems and Equipment Problems

It is helpful to consider the two sets of negative aspects – IT connectivity/systems issues and equipment problems – together as technology related problems encountered and reported by

more than one in three (34.1 per cent) of the sample. Some respondents complained of both systems and equipment problems.

> 'Personally, I require either a new laptop or for my existing one to be rebuilt as I'm also stuck on an old operating system which stops me from doing all aspects of my job. I have to rely on colleagues to undertake some basic tasks on my behalf as my equipment can't support them. This would be required regardless of homeworking however I'm not able to get a rebuild slot at present'. (F, Tel, 56-65, 3-5 years)

Almost one in five (18 per cent) reported IT or systems difficulties, including some for whom WiFi bandwidth was incapable of delivering connectivity for all household members. The frustrations of call handlers are evident, especially when the inability to deliver expected levels of productivity might impact on target achievement and performance management.

> 'Broadband connection is very poor and is struggling with whole family using it to work and stream etc'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

> 'VOIP connection isn't strong enough'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years).

> 'Systems do not work well, connections to work servers drop several times per shift'. (Retail, F, 26-35, 6-10 years)

> 'Still being set the same targets without consideration of the IT effects of home working'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

Almost one in six (16.1 per cent) were explicit in complaining of the effectiveness of their lap tops, PCs or equipment which, additionally, might have health and safety consequences.

> 'Equipment: In the office I have two screens which makes work much more efficient in my back-office role. Having only one screen on my laptop is less efficient and makes it harder to work. In the office I have my work station set up correctly to prevent backache etc (raised screens, adjusted chair, footrest etc). The same level of comfort is not possible at home, though I do have a decent sized desk with a pleasant view out of my window'. (F. FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

> 'A key board and elevated screen would be better than the laptop on its own'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

> 'No 2nd or 3rd screen to work effectively'. (M, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

A cluster of agents reported the absence of printing facilities at home which made it difficult to execute their tasks.

> 'No printing facilities, to begin with had laptop with tiny screen, no mouse and they expected normal work to resume which is hard for a call centre'. (F, FS, 25-35, 6-10 years)

11.5 Diminished Work Interaction

Closely related to a strong sense of the loss of *social* interaction, reported by one in two of the respondents, are grievances related to diminished *work* interaction, as reported by 16.7 per cent. Many reported on how remote working undermined the collective dimensions of contact centre working, principally not having 'Colleagues to bounce ideas off and discuss work'. In addition, though, comments provide tantalising glimpses of how call handlers utilise teamworking and collaboration with colleagues to counter management control and, in labour process theory terms, to defend a frontier of control, and how the ability to do so has been undermined by the move to homeworking. A sense that peer collectivism has been eroded by homeworking, well illustrated by one worker who regretted the inability 'to collaborate with colleagues to ease workload' because workers were now physically atomised. Their attempts to maintain contact by social media or phone calls with colleagues could not compensate for the loss of immediacy and collective, interdependent work activity.

> 'Not having someone next to me that I could speak to ask for advice if I was unsure of what to do'. (F, PS, 56-65, more than 10 years)

> 'No colleagues to ask for help and advice, and to 'vent' to'. (F, Tel, 46-55, more than 10 years)

> 'Less peer support for problems- hard to know if you're being picked on, or if a colleague is being singled out for something'. M, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

> 'Difficulty communicating with teammates…Much harder to split work fairly between us, as we do not have the same sense of when one person is struggling or has a lighter load. Much harder to tell when is a good time to have a private meeting with somebody. Difficulty establishing current departmental priorities and whether everyone is on the same page'. (M, PS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

11.6 Distractions, Interruptions and Motivation

It is instructive to consider the two next categories in terms of frequency of response – distraction or interruptions and motivation problems (16.7 per cent) and negative consequence for Work Life Balance (WLB) (16.3 per cent) – together, accounting for one in three (33 per cent) of the sample. Inevitably, there is overlap between, but they are sufficiently distinct to justify separate categories, not least because many made specific references to distractions/interruptions or to WLB. Clearly, the demands of childcare and (at the time of the survey) home schooling were experienced by many as disruptive and pressurising, as illustrated by the following:

> 'Easily distracted as I have young children who can't understand I need to work'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

> '3 year old doesn't understand he can't walk in to office wanting attention'. (M, Tel, 36-45, more than 10 years)

> 'As children off school atm a lot of distraction as screaming & fighting'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Emptying the potty at break time, never need to do that in a contact centre'. (M. Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Children are also in the house, they have their own schoolwork to complete so calls could be a problem at times'. (M, Tel, 36-45, more than 10 years)

Integral to the difficulties of organising childcare and schooling are the challenges of co-ordinating schedules with partners who may or, alternatively, may not be homeworking, and additionally there are the specific demands faced by single parents.

'Working around husbands shift pattern that rotates so feel like a single parent then working so lack of time for each other and trying to run a house so it's stressful'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6- 10 years)

'My husband is doing the home schooling however it's hard when my daughter (8) asks me questions and wants to talk to me. I feel I am prioritising work'. (F, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Difficult juggling WFH and home schooling as a single parent and still maintaining productivity and targets'. (F, O/S, 36-45, more than 10 years)

Many made explicit reference to the collision between, or incompatibility of, work and domestic life. Some emphatically opposed this 'intrusion' of work into the domestic space and of how their 'privacy has been invaded', believing that these spheres should be kept separate.

'Can be difficult to mentally differentiate between work and personal life'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Sometimes hard to separate work and home'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'Home environment starts to feel like a work environment, especially with quarantine it's feeling more difficult to switch off and relax after work'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Home and work life often overlap as even though I've converted a bedroom into an office, I can't just 'leave work and forget about it' as I have the laptop here and my team keep reaching out to me out of hours'. ((F, FS, 25-35, more than 10 years)

In a minority of cases, respondents reported on major disruptions that homeworking that had causes in respect of physical space or location.

'I had to move home to carry on working because my home was not suitable for home working'. (M, Tran, 56-65, 6-10 years)

'Superimposition of working environment onto home environment makes maintaining healthy work/life balance increasingly difficult. A room in my own home that was previously mine has effectively been requisitioned by my employer'. (M, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

Finally, included in this category were responses that alluded to the tensions, or even conflict ('arguments' and 'rows'), that have arisen between themselves and their partners as a result of

homeworking. One raised the wider concern of circumstances where people working from home 'may be living with domestic abuse'.

11.7 Hours, Working Time, Breaks

Fifteen per cent of respondents made explicit reference to issues associated with hours, working times and breaks. A common theme that emerged from the evidence was the expectation of rigid stipulation that agents should be working the same shifts, times and breaks, the temporal patterns of work that prevail in the workplace being superimposed on the home. The consequence, though, as many reported was of working extra hours and being unable to take the scheduled breaks.

> 'Tend to work more hours than normal'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

> 'You work harder for longer - too easy not to look up from your desk, also email traffic has increased from 30ish a day to 90+ per day so you loose an hour and a half straight'. (M, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

> 'Work are expecting BAU [Business As Usual] hours, breaks and lunches but this is not realistic for many people'. (M, FS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

> 'My day has not been adjusted for home working. I am expected to work 9 to 5 just the same, and eventually to take Helpline calls once the tech is set up. My line manager would prefer me to do exactly the same role as I do in the office, at home. There are no compensatory factors other than avoiding a packed, uncomfortable commute, and not having to meet her in the office'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

Issues relating to working time unavoidably become part of the new contested terrain of the employment relationship, that will require negotiation and agreement between unions and employers in circumstances where collective bargaining arrangements exist. In addition to matters of regulation, questions of fairness and equity emerge as salient concerns, a glimpse of which is provided by reference to this complaint.

> 'Those who have chosen to remain in the office are working Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 with no weekends. Those of us at home are still working late shifts and weekends which is grossly unfair. Justification given was that those in the office have travel time and costs while those at home save on time and costs so the office 'remainers' are getting extra perks. They are also getting free lunches every day. Those in the office have chosen not to work from home, so not sure why they're given these perks'. (F, tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

Those reporting concerns with hours and working time might also make references to the pressure and intensity of work. Frequently, respondents commented on either the transposition of targets to remote working or the imposition of tighter forms of control, captured in their use of the term 'micro-management' to describe their organisations' efforts to ensure that productivity levels are maintained. Intensive monitoring is seen by respondents as reflecting and the outcome of a pervasive lack of trust on behalf of mangers.

11.8 Targets, Micro-management, Discipline, Control, Intensity, Pressure

It can be suggested that the Covid-19 wave of homeworking has important characteristics that contrast with previous characteristics of teleworking or remote working. In the main, although not universally, the ranks of teleworkers pre-Covid-19 could justifiably be said to have been be composed of professional, technical, higher skilled workers involving the exercise of some degree of discretion and relative autonomy. The homeworking of large numbers from the front and back office is quite unprecedented in terms of scale – *en masse* - and that these workers are thus lower grades workers whose labour process is characterised by integrated forms of technological, bureaucratic, emotional labour, temporal, cultural and direct forms of control. The comments illustrate provide insight into workers' experience of the transfer of these controls, with some evidence suggesting a tightening of control and discipline as management explicitly or implicitly fear some loss of control over workers' ability or willingness to perform to prescribed (KPI, SLA) standards. If homeworking implies an additional (spatial, remote) indeterminacy of labour, the evidence here suggests concerted managerial efforts to overcome it through metrics, monitoring and micro-management, which many believe is unfair given the challenges of delivering equivalent levels of productivity at home.

> 'Feel too micromanaged and not trusted to get on with work - this is for everyone in our team not just me!' (F, Vol, 56-65, more than 10 years)

> 'Being made to send emails about log on and log off times when there are other ways to show it'.(M, PS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

> 'The continual pressure and threats of disciplinary action to be taken when ever increasing targets aren't met and quality falls behind what is expected of us. Standards and levels of work checks carried out by staff working are lower then they have ever been to process more work than ever and quality framework checks on our work have tripled'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

> 'Quicker response from managers when referrals sent...as this is impacting on productivity which I'm still targeted for'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

> 'Not enough understanding that it's not the same as being in work and there are major obstacles with systems and mentally - can't expect same output straight away'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

> 'Generally very negative emails about going over breaks or lunch (threats of disciplinary or dismissal despite very small amount of instances). If there is an outage, have to amass large amount of screenshots and camera pics to try to prove I'm not deliberately going offline. Feel like I have just taken someone hostage and I have to prove they're still alive by showing a picture of today's paper, next to a clock next to an image of someone. Have to send an email after I take a comfort break to use the bathroom. There is no trust from management at all'. (M, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

> 'Burdensome check point calls, that show a lack of trust in employees'. (M, FS, 46-55, 3-5 years)

> 'Too many emails telling us what we are doing wrong'. (F, Trans, 26-35, 3-5 years)

'Management being unappreciative that colleagues are actually working at home and constantly checking on colleagues through the day regarding work being completed'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Expectations to deliver the same despite the fact that the you are more tired doing Skype type calls all day'. ((F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Uncertainty when systems down and how manager may not be able to see I am in work during these issues'. (F, Ret, 25-35, more than 10 years)

The comments made by some provide fascinating glimpses into the ways in which new or variants on existing forms, of control might be emerging in the conditions of Covid-19 homeworking. These include new controls associated with the novel use of video customer contact and an intensification of presenteeism.

'Instead of face to face appointments have to now use video appointments. These are restrictive in terms of ways we can help and recorded- which I feel uncomfortable with. They are kept on file for a long time and fear could be used in performance management'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'More likely to work when unwell as in comfort of own home'. (F, Ret, 36-45, more than 10 years)

11.9 Mental Ill-health

While many described their feelings of pressure and their experiences of intense working in the challenging conditions of isolation, lack of social and diminished work interaction and of the stressors arising from the dissolution of boundaries between work and home life, a small number (3.8 per cent) explicitly mentioned suffering from mental ill-health as a consequence of homeworking.

'Isolation impact on my mental health'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Mental health has been impacted'. (F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Comes at the cost of mental health'. (F, FS, 46-55, 1-2 years)

'Difficult on mental health, starting to feel like all I do is sleep and work'. (F, O/S, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'The stress of having to explain I cannot be on the phone all day whilst having two kids on my own to look after'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'I got up early anyway to get exercise in prior to work start time. Expectation to work beyond normal hours. Speed and quality expected to be same. I've gone off work with stress now. Bombarded with skype, what's app, emails. System issues'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

11.10 Increased Costs of WFH

While in the examination of the most positive aspects, 7.8 per cent expressed their satisfaction at saving money, principally through saving on commuting and travel, slightly more (8.8 per cent) were dissatisfied that homeworking had increased their costs:

> 'Using own electric, gas, water, internet more than normal, I'm on a meter for electric and already seeing it run down quicker than normal'. (M, FS, 25-35, more than 10 years)

> 'I had to spend my own money on desk/chair...electric/internet and everything is being paid for by myself which does impact as I am a single mum and every penny does count'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 6-10 years)

Studies of interactive service work that give workers a voice invariably refer to the nature of customer contact. In responses to this question a small number did so, commenting on the fact that homeworking had caused a decline in the quality of customer service.

> 'Can't hear our customers on the phone causing frustration on stress on us and more importantly the customers'. (F, FS, 25-35, 6-10 years)

> 'Bad customer service, the customers can't be enjoying the over 1 hr hold time, then because we can't hear them well it's causing the calls to go on longer because we ask them to repeat themselves and sometimes having to hang up and calling them back which makes the people in the queue waiting even longer'. (F, FS, 25-35, 6-10 years)

11.11 Multiple Negative Comments

Concluding this section on the *negative* aspects of homeworking, it is helpful to present some of the most general and reflective comments. First, there are those where respondents do not highlight one aspect but bundle together several in the one longer narrative. The following is a good example, where the worker signifies the importance of the combined effects of childcare, having their partner also working at home, work-life imbalance and constraints of space.

> 'Sharing a home with other people can make work difficult. Obviously caring for/home schooling children is a big difficulty, but even sharing a space with someone else who is also working from home can be fraught, if you both have to have confidential phone conversations and stay out of one another's hair, or if one finishes work early but needs to spend hours sitting quietly so as not to disturb the other. (M, PS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

Second, several respondents commented on how management in their organisations were exploiting Covid-19's crisis conditions to recast elements of the employment relationship to the disadvantage of employees.

> 'Management taking liberties in lead up to lockdown in staff matters knowing they may not be held to account'. (PS, gender, age and length of service not given)

> 'Management used our isolation to keep everyone in the dark whilst pushing for redundancy'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Management uses it as an excuse to attack pay and please shareholders'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Management holding Skype meetings with staff outwith agreement, despite saying that if the staff member disagrees this will not happen'. (PS, gender, age and length of service not given)

12. The Three Most Important Measures Management Should Take

Before looking at the measures that respondents believed that management should take in respect of homeworking, it is helpful to consider the small minority (8.0 per cent) who reported 'none'/'nothing'/'not much'. The majority of these reflected a sense that management had been successful in the measures that they had taken, as indicated by the following quotes:

'At this point I think they're pretty much doing what they can. It's obvious some of the managers are a bit at a loss without the physical connection at the office but I think they're getting used to it'. (F. FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'I don't feel there's much else that can be done here, most possible measures have been taken already'. (M, Tel, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Nothing, line manager has gone above and beyond to make sure we don't feel isolated'. (Tel, gender, age, length of service not given)

A few reflected on the serious risk to that Covid-19 had posed in March and April 2020 and how homeworking, for all its imperfections and contradictions, had fundamentally ensured the safety for themselves and colleagues. This sentiment was captured succinctly by one agent:

'None, I would rather be lonely than sick/dead'. (F. FS, 56-65, 6-10 years)

Table 17: Three measures management should take (n=336)

	No	%
More/maintain communications/catch-ups/updates/feedback/point of contact	118	35.1
Remove/reassess targets, no micromanagement, relax Performance Management/trust	94	28.0
Equipment - better/more - chairs, laptops, PCs	84	25.0
Flexibility on times, hours, shiftworking, shifts/more breaks	86	25.6
Zoom/video/Skype/virtual team meetings	58	17.3
Ergonomic issues/HSE/DSE	49	14.6
More Homeworking/extended post Covid-19	47	14.0
Pay/reimburse for utilities/broadband/phone bills/cables/monitors etc	44	13.1
Update processes/systems/connectivity/IT contact	52	15.5
Acknowledge difficulties/recognition/assess domestic circumstances/listen	33	9.8
Clear instructions/guidance/expectations	30	8.9
None/nothing/not much	27	8.0
Training/development/upskilling	15	4.5
Social activities/events -in-work hours or outside	13	3.9
Don't know	5	1.5
Back to the office/get equipment	4	1.2
Attention to customers	4	1.2

Turning to the answers to this additional open-ended question, a similar analytical method to that employed with the previous two questions was adopted. A total of 763 responses were given by 336 agents, an average of 2.3 per respondent. Once again, the themes that emerge from this multitude of responses inevitably overlap, so there is not a Chinese wall between the categories. For example, the responses that highlighted the need for management to improve communication and interaction is closely related to those specifically emphasising the importance of management providing clear instructions and guidance to employees or those stating that management should introduce or extend Zoom/Skype/video team meetings. Similarly, that management should permit greater flexibility in matters of work time and shits is closely associated with the belief that targets and monitoring should be reformed, relaxed or removed. However, in both these cases and others, the categories are sufficiently distinct as to justify being considered separately.

12.1 Need to Improve Communications and Contact

The most commonly reported response related to the view that management needed to improve communications with their employees and within teams and that there should be more frequent catch-ups, updates, contact and feedback. More than one in three cited these as measures that management should take. The specific comments reveal nuances in perceptions, ranging from employees' beliefs that they should be kept informed of wider business developments, to blunt requests that communication should be restored, to a widely-held view that intra- and inter-team communication should be facilitated to overcome isolation and that managers should become visible and available as points of contact. Consistent with the need for management to improve communication and overcome isolation, a small number (3.9 per cent) were of the view that management should introduce on-line social activities.

> 'I'd like more regular updates on what's happening in the business - to do with CV-19 as well as how the business is coping in the current climate and the impact this is having on the business'. (M, FS, 46-55, 6-10 years)

> 'There is no communication now - messages are passed down the chain of command and watered down if they are passed out at all. We do hear about the naughties that we do, but very little on the positives or updates on situation. We need, more than ever, to feel included, not like social pariahs'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

> 'We normally have a buzz meeting where we have 20 minutes to discuss changes and to a lesser extent socialise, but these have been pulled due to call volumes. More pragmatic agent focussed approach would be appreciated'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

> 'Provide better intra-team communication tools and training on their use. In particular, a decent means of cross-training/job shadowing while working remotely is a must. But teams also need to have a place to just chat with one another'. (M, PS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

> 'Keep in regular contact to keep morale up and ensure staff don't feel isolated'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

> 'Ensuring communication is focused on more deeply to avoid feelings of loneliness in teams'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Check on how we really feel, not just drop an email when they have something negative to say to us all - we're all doing the best we can in a bad situation that none of us would have chosen'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

'More virtual visibility of managers - Ops Mgrs have been invisible, TL is in huddle meeting on phone once a day'. (F, FS, 46-55, 1-2 years)

'A manager assigned to work on Microsoft teams so always receive a prompt answer'. (F, FS, less than 25, 3-5 years)

'Do quizzes etc to keep us more engaged'.

Alongside the desire for greater communication from management, 17.3 per cent requested specifically that Zoom, Skype or other forms of video team meetings be introduced in order to overcome isolation by establishing visual contact. This finding is not surprising given the previous discovery that one in two respondents reported missing social contact and the experience of isolation was a negative aspect of homeworking.

'Zoom calls and lighthearted calls'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'Zoom meetings to allow colleagues to catch up and physically (sic) see one another'. (F, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'Daily 10 minute "huggle" with the team to keep in touch & check all is ok'. (F, FS, 56-65, more than 10 years)

'Create What's App interaction within team as very isolating being at home' ((M, FS, 56-65, less than 1 year)

Even then, as a few respondents indicated, however welcome frequent, visual, remote contact may be, it is insufficient to overcome distance and loneliness. In the words of one, 'Using Skype or Microsoft teams program is not enough'.

Taking this theme of the need to improve communication on step further, an additional 8.9 per cent, more precisely and firmly urged managers to provide clear instructions for home workers, ensuring that employees were fully aware of what was expected of them.

'When we worked in office, supervisors and above didn't work weekends for my scheduled hours. Since we started WFH the policy is the same. Before, in the office I might not able to ask supervisor for help but I could go to a tenured colleagues desk and ask him/her a question if I needed help with a call. The only way I can do that from home is to send them an IM, often times they miss it or ignore it, feel like i'm on my own when it comes to troubleshooting. I set up active alerts for when people to ask questions in a dedicated chatroom so I always try to help others, my other colleagues do not do the same thing. I am lucky that I am experienced enough that I often do not need help but for newer colleagues this would pose a larger problem. Also, in an office you can overhear a troubleshooting session that's going on and take steps and learn it, can't do that at home'.

'Communicate what is expected re workload as we are being told do what you can but then also being told it's not enough because there's x amount of team members in/comparisons across departments and sites'.

'Open and honest conversation regarding full guidelines regarding expectations to work from home to allow informed choice to set up accordingly'.

12.2 Need to Revise, Relax or Abolish Targets

The second most frequently reported responses, by 28 per cent, related to workers' conviction that targets were too rigid or unachievable and that, in the changed and demanding circumstances of homeworking they should be moderated, revised or even removed. Quite simply, the metrics that applied in the workplace should not be imposed on home workers, on the grounds of lack of fairness and the demands of childcare, domestic commitments or unsuitability of home working arrangements. Management should also not only avoid micromanagement and reduce the pressure and stress that result from close monitoring and the fears engendered by Performance Management. Instead, respondents stated explicitly that management should trust employees and their ability to perform as productively and effectively as their circumstances permit.

'Targets etc to be void until normality resumes to take away this added stress when trying to work what can in these current already stressful times'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Establish new targets aligned with the home working'. (M, IT, 46-55, 6-10 years)

'Change the KPIs to take this new reality into consideration'.

'Allow support on some room with targets as not everyone is comfortable in being able to perform at same level as can in office'. (M, Tel, <25, 1-2 years)

'Get rid of targets! We are still expected to hit targets and performance on hours per case but at the same time tell us family comes first. Yet it's still documented in PD performance is off track etc!' (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Take away stats and call monitoring'. (F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Regular health checking but respectful of privacy and agreed by staff not enforced micromanagement'. (M, PS, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Stop emailing us constantly that there is calls queuing when there are staff shortages, adds further pressure'. (F, FS, 36-45, 6-10 years)

'Manage peoples' expectations better and ensure staff don't feel pressure or that they are being watched'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'We already worked in a very stressful environment, and there isn't any let up, adding more pressure'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'Remove the fear factor by removing the performance aspect of our performance and development system, so that people are not fearful of poor performance procedures in these unprecedented times'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

'Trust in employees more, deal with bad apples who abuse working from home instead of putting collective blame on whole shift. Having an outage can be completely outside of your control but management see it differently and are quick to suspect you of call avoidance. Burden of proof is on you'. (M, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Trust us to be doing our best instead of constantly whining about targets not met etc'. (F, FS, 46-55, 1-2 years)

'Managers should not suspect advisors who are having technical issues -- they are stressed enough and need support'. (F, Tel, 46-55, 3-5 years)

'Stop trying to transpose the abuse, screaming and pressure from the workplace to the Whatsapp group'. (N-B, Util, 25-35, less than 1 year)

It is helpful in this context to reflect on the experience of transnational call centre value chains to understand how management ensures that levels of productivity and service quality standards are achieved by 'remote' workers. The evidence is that through KPIs and SLAs (Taylor, 2010; 2015) all manner of quantitative and qualitative targets are rigorously imposed in an integrated system of controls to overcome potential indeterminacies and the transformation of labour power into concrete labour. Some evidence here suggests a default to micromanagement in the context of remote working, irrespective of the extent to which degrees of relative autonomy had been practiced or tolerated in the workplace.

'One thing I've noticed is that I think some managers have over-corrected a bit towards some micromanagement as we're so far from each other but I think that will calm down. For example, my boss messaged me to check if I knew I was in a certain code on my phone and if it was correct. As I said previously, when we were first getting set up you could often get four different managers on the phone to you in one day but that's because they were all running all over the place. In general the centre is very relaxed and we don't have KPIs, we get our calls marked based on the KPMG six pillars, and this is the same at home'. (F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

12.3 Need to Introduce Flexibilities in Hours, Shift Timings and Breaks

Workers' insistence that management relax targets, lessen stringent monitoring and reduce the pressure of Performance Management is closely connected to strongly-held views that they should introduce flexibilities in shift timings, breaks and schedules. More than one in four (25.6 per cent) raised issues in relation to working time and shifts that management should implement. In some case, workers were urging their employers to reduce formal hours because of, again, the incursion of domestic demands on work.

'Should shorten our shifts as there are horrific time's to be working in a call centre environment alone isolated at home'. (F, FS, 25-35, 1-2 years)

'Consider single parent family's during this time and allow us to reduce hours -paid as it's affecting my child's mental health'. (Gender not given, Tel, 36-45, 3-5 years)

'Need to allow possible reduction in hours for those with children as 35hrs on top of providing schooling and care is leading to increased stress levels and long term this is going to have a very negative effect'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

'Allow flexibility if not to work the weekly contracted hours - with no impact to salary'. (F, FS, 36-45, more than 10 years)

Then, there were employees who proposed that management should introduce flexible shift structures and timings, based in large part on what suited employees and took account of domestic and family demands.

'Should allow me to work 7.5 hours, but perhaps split so I can tend to my parents and child through the day, allow me to work my own schedule, I have my own workflow after all'. (F, Tel, 36-45, 1-2 years)

'Shifts could be changed a bit. It I am working 12-8 it means my whole day and night will be in my bedroom room from Monday to Friday'. (M, FS, 25-35, 3-5 years)

'More flexibility: Be willing to allow flexed hours rather than insisting on 9 to 5 norm. It isn't just for childcare. I would probably cope better myself if I was working an earlier shift, but I have not been given that opportunity, and if I asked I am confident I would be turned down as my team mans a phoneline and several colleagues have pre-existing flexed contracts. For line management this is all BAU at home so my measure would be for management to change its attitude. HR claim they are offering managers training in home working management but I haven't seen evidence of changed views from my line yet'. (F, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

'Relax the times you need to work. If you need to do 8 hours a day working, it shouldn't matter when those 8 hours are. It should fit into home life a little better'. (Gender not given, retail, 46-55, more than 10 years)

Some emphasised how constraints on ability to achieve productivity levels in the same period as in the workplace should be acknowledged and adjustments made.

'Make sure staff only doing hours they should, technology slows processes down its too easy to work extra hours at home'. (F, FS, 56-65, more than 10 years)

'Allow for the fact that the work takes longer to complete from home when allocating work to the team'. (F, O/S, 46-55, 3-5 years)

As part of the overall category of workers requesting that management take measures over working time, 6.3 per cent made specific reference to breaks, that they should be longer and/or more frequent or that well-being breaks be introduced. For example,

'Allow extended lunch breaks - it's harder to wind down and most of us now need to cook on our breaks. This would be helpful'. (F, FS, age not given, 3-5 years)

'Provide a well-being hour for staff. Cut working hours. Research has shown staff are more productive on less hours'. (Gender, age, length of service not given, PS)

As Table 9 showed, 15 per cent believed that, sometimes excessive, working times were a negative aspect of homeworking. Foregrounding the evidence below on the measures employees believed management should take in relation to health safety and well-being, several commented on the pressure being experienced through working extended hours, conditions which required urgent attention.

> 'Make it clear the number of hours EVERY person should be working. In the back and middle offices (managers and clerical) are close to burn out. I know I am'. (M, FS, 25-35, more than 10 years)

12.4 Need for Managers to Change Their Behaviour and Attitudes

Allied to those who requested management to be more flexible in relation to hours and sifts and targets and work demands, was the one in ten (9.8 per cent) who made a general request that management behaviour and attitudes should change towards them. Organisations and managers needed to acknowledge the difficulties of working from home and should take into consideration the challenges of their domestic circumstances. Such recognition should entail managers listening more carefully and being responsive to employee reports of their conditions.

> 'Managers need to have some tolerance when staff are unable to fulfil full hours but are doing what they can - managers also have a duty of care to staff and ensure they take some down time to relax'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

> 'Understand that we're now in a different environment and it's unfair to have same expectations as if we were in office. We have less resources at home'. (F, ,25, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Understand that parents will need to go AWOL now and again to juggle kids!'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Stop behaving like everything is exactly the same - they WFH regularly but don't have to juggle multiple systems and spreadsheets on one laptop screen'. (M, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Not group every member of staff together. Be more understanding of people's home life whilst working from home instead of being target driven and putting staff under pressure'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

12.5 Need to Improve Equipment and Connectivity

It might be helpful to consider equipment issues, reported by 25 per cent, and IT/connectivity issues, reported by 15.5 per cent, together, although of course they are related. The first category contains quite diverse responses, ranging from employees' beliefs that management should provide better lap-tops or monitors to chairs, tables or other appropriate furniture.

> 'Quicker to provide laptops for home working'. (F, 56-65, FS, 3-5 years)

> 'Get 17-inch laptops for all. I'm visually impaired'. (Gender not given, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'If working from home were to be permanent proper furniture and equipment should be provided'. (F, 65+, CS, more than 10 years)

'Provide more assistance in having my connectivity issues resolved'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Have better and more up to date laptops (the one I'm using is 8 or 9 years old) and have the systems more flexible so they work exactly as they do in the office. Some of the features are missing when working remotely'. (M, 36-45, O/S, 1-2 years)

'Ensure processes and forms are clear, up-to-date and relevant. To avoid mistakes through isolation'. (M, 36-45, O/S, 1-2 years)

12.6 Need to Improve Health and Safety

Clearly, some of these responses meld with actions management should take in relation to health and safety. Specific requests for management to take action over health and safety matters were made by 14.6 per cent of respondents. These include ensuring that effective ergonomic measures are implemented, particularly DSE (Display Screen Regulations) and the required adjustments undertaken, that appropriate furniture is moved from the office to the home and, resonating with the responses relating to shiftworking and hours above, that hours should be reduced in order to overcome potential ergonomic problems.

'Anyone who has DSE equipment at work should have this supplied to their home because at home as they may not have a need for this usually in their own home under normal circumstances'. (M, 25-35, O/S, 3-5 years)

'Do DSE. Ask at least are we comfortable and make adjustments to working hours. It's hard sitting for 7 hours with strict targets'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Roll out a programme of structured DSE assessment rather than ad hoc'. (M, 36-45, LG, 1-2 years)

'Provide more equipment to make working from home comfortable. 'i.e desks and chairs'. (M, 25-35, FS, 6-10 years)

'Provide an adjustable desk chair'. (M, 25-35, Util, more than ten years)

'Chairs should have been dropped off - after a deep clean'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than ten years)

'Proactive purchase of equipment to support those that work on laptops (external mouse, keyboard and laptop riser). Optional ergonomic chair and desk if needed (and space!)'. (Gender not given, 46-55, Educ, more than ten years)

'Reduce hours as it's uncomfortable sitting in the one position - don't have the appropriate desk/chair'. (F, 25-35, O/S, 1-2 years)

Several went further, forthright in their view that full risk assessments of domestic work stations needed to be conducted in line with HSE guidelines and' in some cases, being critical

of the lack, or inadequacy, of such measures to date. In a few instances, workers complained that management had not engaged sufficiently over health and safety with unions where agreements were formally in place for consultation or negotiation.

'Full home working risk assessment done, making & paying for any required adjustments'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'Risk based approach which went totally out of the window although we all completed health questionnaires with managers complete risk assessments for all employee, I hear that it is a bit hit and miss'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'My colleagues who didn't work agile before and have systems not working properly are very stressed'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than ten years)

'Full risk assessments should be taking place with managers re-addressing any reasonable adjustments especially for those who already have them in place or have raised concerns'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than ten years)

'We are in our own homes, but my home is not HSE adapted. I have had a lot of falls - something the management are aware of - both in the office and in my home. No-one has checked out working conditions here to see whether they are ok - they've never asked if it works ok and is satisfactory or do I need to have any changes to equipment. I have a chair as I've had surgery on my back, and I was left to lift the chair into the car at the office and get it out again at home - someone should have been responsible for arranging delivery of the chair and setting up the equipment in the flat. They made me sign a waiver that I had the equipment and would replace anything that got broken'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'They need to organise and comply with legal requirements - just because I'm not in their office building doesn't require them to take less care of me. HSE still applies and is probably a bigger nightmare than ever to monitor'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'Ask each individual for their daily at home work set up - Many of us don't want to raise this as an issue but some of my colleagues are working from the bed in their family home due to lack of space/ home set up'. (F, age not given, FS, 3-5 years)

'Reminding staff there is a partnership agreement in place and union assistance'. (Gender, age and length of service not given, CS)

A number made specific references to the potential mental health consequences of homeworking in isolation and how it was important that management acknowledge the risks and take appropriate actions.

'Take mental health and isolation more seriously'. (M, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Make sure staff have all information they can on where to go to helplines for mental awareness'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

'Allow paid time for wellbeing activity - such as an afternoon or an hour a week to have a break as it is so tempting to just sit at pc from morn till night'. (F, 56-65, CS, more than ten years)

Finally, some respondents made reference to the actions management should take in a post-Covid period, a theme that will be more fully explored below.

'Once it's safe to return to the office, proper assessments of homeworking environments for those who wish to continue'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

12.7 Importance of Extending WFH

In circumstances of the virulent transmission of SARS-Cov-2 in society and risks were most acute in call centres, when workers were completing their surveys, 14.0 per cent of respondents stated their conviction that management should extend homeworking both in the immediate terms and in post-Covid-19 conditions.

'Allow people to home work. I have Crohn's disease and this measure was recommended by occupational health yet it was denied stating it wasn't possible. It shows it was possible they just chose not to'. (M, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'Provide all staff with the opportunity to work from home - sometimes if not all the time'. (F, 56-65, Educ, more than ten years)

'I think that it's been proven now that we can work just as effectively remotely as we can in the office. As such I think much more flexibility to work from home should be allowed. Ideally. I would say a 50/50 split. As such physical office space could be reduced we could lower office costs and the need to commute is reduced'. (M, 46-55, Educ, 1-2 years)

'Not roll back the measures implemented to facilitate remote working, and adopt more 'user friendly' procedures that had otherwise restrained operations because of legacy and unimaginative tick-box practices'. (Gender not given, 46-55, FS, more than ten years)

'Take a view that when back to work full time after lockdown that people should be able to work more frequently from home if they wish'. (F, 46-55, Educ, 1-2 years)

'When this is over formalise a WFH by default policy with office presence 2-3 days per week if required'. (M, 46-55, PS, 3-5 years)

'Allow permanent home working'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years_

'Allow working from home permanently therefore worthwhile to invest in a better home set up'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Remove the negative perception of home working once we return to normal. Lots of us are being flexible to continue serving customers'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'Invest into home working solutions. Other call centres do it, why don't the "market leader". (M, 36-45, Tel, 3-5 years)

'Following Covid, staff should be allowed to combine home and office working to most effectiveness and personal wellbeing/work life balance'. (Age not given, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years0

'When returning, I'd like my employer to consider asking if you'd prefer home based/ office based or a mix if this could be accommodated. Under normal circumstances my dept use laptops for contingency so we can work from home in extreme weather. It'd be nice to be offered the same consideration for our work/life balance'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

12.8 Need to Reimburse Employees' Expenses

Consistent with the fact that 8.8 per cent of respondents regarded paying for utilities, telephony or equipment was one of the negative aspects of homeworking, it can be seen that a somewhat larger number (13.1 per cent) believed that management should pay or reimburse employees of the expenses that they have incurred.

'Pay additional allowances to cover expenses incurred while working from home using my own property, such as phone, heating, electricity, and broadband'. ((M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'Pay towards Broadband and energy costs'. (F, 46-55, O/S, more than 10 years)

'Offer of reimbursement for additional expenses (utilities - electricity/broadband/ heating). 2 members of staff who do not have a broadband connection in their home (apparently this meant they did not have the requirements to work from home according to the checklist management were using) were provided with £600 5G routers (x2 due to one Ethernet connection per box) and data sim to work from home where we have had to provide our own connections. I had to purchase a longer Ethernet cable than the one offered due to the location of my router to where I was able to set up but have been told I cannot be refunded for this'. (M, 36-45, Tel, more than ten years)

'Provide the cost of upgrading the broadband, at my home if the option exists as we have a rural exchange'. (M, 46-55, FS, 6-10 years)

'Buy us printers if they expect us to work from home'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

12.9 Other Actions Managers Should Take

Some other measures that employees believed that managers should adopt were advocated by smallish numbers. Four and half per cent were concerned that lockdown and working from home had led to a situation in which management had suspended training, development and upskilling activities. For example, as this male advisor at a education sector contact centre said, management should 'Maintain the impetus for digital upskilling and make it much more explicit in PDR's'. As interactive customer service workers, a few urged management to implement measures that prioritised service quality.

'Processes should be put in place for us to still be able so service customer correctly'. (F, 36-45, Tel, 6-10 years)

'Be clear on how we can get support and what we need to do to make sure that we can support our customers'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Relaxing targets and doing what is in the best interest for the customer not the business'. (F, 36-45, Tel, 6-10 years)

12.10 Multiple Actions Managers Should Take

A cluster of respondents incorporated several themes in lengthier contributions requesting management to respond to them simultaneously. The following three integrate, respectively: communication and training and overcoming distance; SLA targets, timing flexibility and WLB; targets and systems.

'Provide better intra-team communication tools and training on their use. In particular, a decent means of cross-training/job shadowing while working remotely is a must. But teams also need to have a place to just chat with one another'. (M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

'Change department SLAs to fit the homeworking model. Why do we have to have a phone helpline when emails can be used instead, if that would mean that staff could have more flexibility in when we log in and out, for example? What difference does it make if a piece of work is processed at 9pm rather than 10am the next day, if "odd" shifts would help colleagues achieve a balance at home, now that work/life 'balance' is nigh on impossible at home'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'New targets were also brought in from April so expected to get more cases worked in less time per case type. Old ones were bad enough but now new ones to try and hit are harder. Listen to staffs concerns like this and take appropriate and reasonable action. Get us all on the same systems and same access. Should only be one way to remote work but seems there's different ways to access/work and not all work the same for others'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

Others used the space to respond to reflect more generally on the longer terms actions that management should take in what might be termed a post-Covid scenario or at least in the context of a return to work.

'Ensure workstation equipment properly cleaned and hot desking should not be allowed desks should be allocated and all staff should be social distancing'. (F, 46-55, FS, 6-10 years)

'Having a static desk in future instead of having to hot desk.' (F, <25, FS, more than 10 years)

'Enforce social distancing when we return to work and stop hot-desking (to allow contact tracing). Reduce density of open plan offices'. (M, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

13. Comments

One indication of the importance of the issues raised by the survey can be seen by the number who responded to the final question asking them to comment on any aspect of the questionnaire and the extent of their testimony. No fewer than 188 volunteered contributions, ranging from a brief few words, or a single sentence, to essay-length narratives. These comments amounted to a total of 12,162 words.

When reviewing this extensive testimony, it is instructive to keep in mind the fact that the call-handler respondents were composing their comments at a particular conjuncture, the high point of the Covid-19 crisis (see Figure 1) during which contact centre workplaces were reported by very many who worked in them as profoundly hazardous. It is not necessary to repeat in detail the evidence presented in the Intermediate and Scottish Reports (Taylor, 2020a; b), which emphatically confirm the deep concerns, bordering on genuine fear, that many workers expressed. Perhaps two statistical findings illustrate their perceptions of the profound risks they were facing; almost four in five believed that they would catch Covid-19 from their workplace and 90 per cent agreed with the statement 'I'm worried that I will give Covid-19 to family or friends'. At the same time, all too may respondents reported widespread infection amongst their work colleagues and, in some cases, serious illness with individuals having died or in Intensive Care.

Consequently, it is not surprising that many comments reflect this sense of peril and, even though call handlers were now working from home, their testimonies refer to their recent experiences of the risks experienced in the call/contact centre environment. The following quotes dramatically highlight these fears:

> 'There has been a confirmed case in our office. The information that came out was not clear and colleagues have mentioned there was more case at the same time but we have not been told otherwise. The lack of transparency on the situation from higher up is negligent on their part. The office is part [UK finance sector company] and part [outsourcer] and I don't believe they have been working together enough to ensure the safety and well-being of colleagues. Also, a person in our office died. She was in her 30s and went off to self-isolate before we closed the office. They did not say how she passed and it was our manager who told us'. (F, 25-35, FS. 1-2 years)

> 'I have probably said too much, but the 10 days before the office closed was scary. Someone was actually ill on returning from holiday in a hotspot and we just carried on working as normal'. (F, 56-65, FS, more than 10 years)

> 'Prior to lockdown they should have relaxed the use of performance attendance plans. People were coming into work ill and there was no social distancing between desks. They could have also relaxed shifts to avoid peak time public travel. It was so scary the days before we closed the office'. (F, FS, 56-65, more than 10 years)

> 'Management know from my past medical history and OH I am high risk and need to be shielding but did not give any support until the GP got involved and said I am not allowed out of the house, even then it was made clear this would go as sick, they do not care the days prior to me going into shielding when I did go to work there were no 2-metre rules or wipes and hand gels, nothing was in place, very unsafe and quite scarey for someone like me'. (M, 36-45, Tel, 1-2 years)

This final comment gives a terrible reminder of the human tragedy that Covid-19 has brought to so many. In this case, the expectation, perhaps obligation, to attend work seems inhumane , compounding the distress this individual felt at the death of a parent.

> 'My father died of Covid, mother hospitalised. so much emphasis was on complaints at my workplace that I did not take time off and was not ordered to take time to grieve. I took the day he died and that was it'. (F, 46-55, IT, more than 10 years)

Nevertheless, given the focus of this report on workers' experiences of, and attitudes towards, working from home, this discussion of some of the principle themes identified in the collected comments will largely eschew consideration of the workplace-centred issues. A partial exception is when respondents reflect on the tardiness of management's implementation of homeworking measures, a frequently occurring theme which, of course, is heavily affected by the worries prompted by their resent experience of exposure to risk.

13.1 Approval of Company or Organisation

It would be mistaken to presume a universal litany of critical views on the part of respondents towards their companies or organisations in respect of the speed with which homeworking decisions were taken, the transition process or the experiences workers had of their management once working from home.

Some of the reported experiences would certainly seem to constitute best practice, in terms of support for workers, avoidance of strict performance rules, flexibility with breaks or sickness absence and an awareness of and responsiveness to the childcare or caring responsibilities homeworkers might have.

> '[Insurance company] has been great so far. We were given the choice to begin working from home long before we had to. Child care has been taken into account, those with young children are no longer phone based. Work flow has been managed so that those who are still on the phone have adequate time away from this, ie I was phone based last week but this week I am working on non-phone activities. This has meant I have only done three hours work but am still being paid for the full day'. (F, 36-45, FS, 1-2 years)

> 'Some of my responses feel a little negative but I really can't speak too highly of the way my organisation has managed this. We have had regular updates from the CEO on developments, changes to sick leave have been postponed (they are the right thing to do - I sat on the body overseeing these) but there was a feeling that it sent out the wrong message. There are probably some minor things that were not got totally right but the general direction of travel was absolutely spot on IMO. The CEO said right at the start if we though there were things that weren't being got right we should let him know (and he is genuinely good at responding to stuff). Our quality standards etc are still monitored, call recordings listened too etc - but this is (a) difficult to avoid (financial advice sector and regulatory compliance issues) and (b) is always a fairly light touch regime. Work conditions are technically unchanged but there is a general 'take breaks when you need to' approach and I'm not aware of anything being done that was overly draconian (again even pre-Covid this is generally a light touch approach). I had a day off technically as sick leave as the pressures of non-working systems got to me - but my manager said they wouldn't treat that as a formal sickness absence - so again a

pragmatic and very supportive approach. I personally continued going into the work place until told not to - that's a personal thing as I live alone and was conscious of the isolation working from home would bring. Other colleagues were very supported to work from home or with time off for caring responsibilities (neither of those apply to me so I've not got a first-hand experience.   You'll probably get a lot of bad reports - but if you want an example of 'doing it right' I think this would be an organisation that has done that'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

'[Insurance company] have been very proactive, immediately following government guidelines and encouraging all to work from home where possible, then sourcing laptops to help more work from home'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

Undoubtedly, for some, the swiftness of their organisations in moving to homeworking was most important.

'I just want to commend the Management at [the bank] for what they have done to ensure 90% of the staff have been able to work from home in a short space of time'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'I think [insurance company] overall as a company have handled working from home brilliant - not one agent is working from the branches or call centres unless they have requested they want to as of 31st March which I believe is brilliant considering there is so many other call centre in this area still bringing people into their building'. (F, 25-35, FS, 1-2 years)

'[The bank] have worked hard to get us all working from home as quickly as possible which is very much appreciated - however felt well vulnerable going to work each day whilst this took place'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

Some also welcomed their organisations' guaranteed protection of pay and conditions:

'[Insurance company] have been brilliant. My colleague who works for rivals [insurance company has been furloughed even though the Financial Conduct Authority says we are keyworkers, so we're really lucky not to have lost 20% income. Furthermore, [our company] have promised NOBODY will be made redundant or furloughed as a result of the lockdown. I'm very proud to work for [my company] as a result of this'. (Gender not given, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

13.2 Support for Working from Home

While respondents had only had a few weeks experience of working from home, several expressed their support for this changed work situation and loci, albeit involuntarily compelled by the unprecedented exogenous factor of Covid-19.

'I don't have a physical disability but do have a life-long disease, where I am at more risk than a healthy person even with a simple tummy bug/cold never mind Covid [which] can kill me as I don't produce cortisol to fight illness. Now I am working from home and how easy it was to set up I believe I should of been offered this years ago. I have asked in the past, but was told it was just not possible. There is no difference to the work I do at home to being in the office'. (F, 36-45, FS, more than 10 years)

'I have never worked from home before in 50 years of working but I am now convinced that where it is possible this should be the way forward'. (F, 65+, CS, more than ten years)

'I think that all workers in call centres should be allow to work from home it they are saying to their management that they can. If work cannot accommodate them then they should not have to attend an office and put their family at risk of infection'. (M, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'I would love to work from home permanently because I find my mental health has improved and it has taken a lot of stress of me as I don't need to travel to go to work and I find I am more productive at home'. (M, less than 25, FS, less than 1 year)

'This will all be rolled back as we return to 'normal'. Having made the investment to achieve this point, it appears perverse to spend more reversing this to accomplish an idea of a societal norm that is more negative for some'. (Gender not given, FS, 46-55, more than 10 years)

13.3 Management Delays, Not Taking Covid-19 Seriously

In contrast to these upbeat comments, perhaps the most frequently reported theme was negative. Many were critical of managements' delays in implementing homeworking, whether through tardiness, organisational inertia, not taking the risks from Covid-19 sufficiently seriously

'Although I am aware of what a mammoth task moving so many workers to home working must have been, I feel that this took far too long and that the company hid behind 'key worker' status to carry on as far as possible with little regard to my safety. With the best of intentions, the office, with its air conditioning and hot desking, was a very scary place to be during a pandemic'. (F, 36-45, Ent, Less than 10 years)

'Employer should have acted sooner as it was aware of the risks. If restrictions are eased and infections start increasing again, then employers must act immediately. Initially I wasn't doing anything but a couple of weeks ago was asked if I could work from home. I'm told it was put together in 18 days but I have been away from work for twice as long so it looks as if nothing was done at the beginning. Everyone has worked hard but it has been a bit of a shambles. Employers must seek feedback from employees and act on it then have procedures in place for the next group'. (M, 46-55, FS, 3-5 years)

'I was really disappointed in the slow response from [telecom company] during this crisis - at the start of lockdown, sales advisors were still being targeted to sell products, knowing full well this would cause the need for service advisors to have to follow these up - sales should have immediately been stopped and the move to home working or even furloughing employees should have been implemented MUCH sooner - guidelines re vulnerable people and those with vulnerable people in their homes was slow to be acted upon also, causing incredible stress'. (F, 46-55, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Whilst they shut down on March 27th, everyone could see it coming, so why wasn't it done earlier? Easily said after the event, but nevertheless still relevant'. (M, 56-65, Tel, more than 10 years)

'Only thing the top-level management lacked during this crisis was a red nose and clown shoes. The workers shall not forget the disregard they have shown for our families and our safety. Shame shame shame on you all'. (M, 46-55, Tel, 6-10 years)

'I was the first in my office to have their WFH request granted, but there are STILL people who canWFH, waiting for equipment & training and having to run the gauntlet of infection. There were delays caused by a lack of trust of staff, coupled with low levels of MI to be able to monitor staff and a lack of willingness to learn new methods of management'. (F, 36-45, FS, 3-5 years)

'As I've said, the company put us at risk to stop the general call centre population almost rioting because they still say it isn't possible for call taking employees to work from home. I find it impossible to believe. There must be a way to do it, but the company doesn't trust CSRs enough'. ((M, 36-45, Tel, 3-5 years)

'Apologise to us for risking our lives for profit'. (F, FS, 25-35, 6-10 years)

'My employer is only worried about their profit and cares very little for staff or public alike. They are trying to make out that nothing has changed and its just a flu outbreak. Not sure I can work here much longer'. (Gender not given, Est, 25-35, 1-2 years)

13.4 Dislike of Homeworking, Loss of Social Contact

Several commented more generally of their dislike of homeworking, stemming from their reported lack of support from management, the loss of socialisation with colleagues or the erosion of the boundary between work and home life.

'I hate homeworking. Companies will see this as a massive cost saving exercise. I am in charge of a team of 30 and supporting them at a distance is hard. 2 have had total breakdown due to isolation'. (F, 46-55, LG, more than 10 years)

'There is little encouragement for office friendships so we don't have a support network from there at times like this, and my closest family is 52 miles away. My employer knows this, but still makes no effort to make sure that we are physically and mentally coping with it all'. (F, 65+, FS, 6-10 years)

'As for those that will be working from home, no additional pay has been addressed regarding the additional responsibilities we have taken on board and how this can affect our home life. My home is now going to my office, this is stressful at times, as my home was a sanctuary away from work, but this will no longer be the case'. (M, 25-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

'Hobbies have flown out of the window - gyms and bands went before we left for home working so for those of us living alone there is no real social engagement at all. The nearest family is too far away to visit, and the care home my mother is in was in a

draconian lock down which kept every resident truly safe until last week when 3 cases of Covid 19 appeared in the home (possibly hospital discharges, I don't know?) and it's hard not being able to see mum on my usual weekly visit day. It has also impacted on the cat - she is very stressed in the new regime and the vets are awful - I understand their problem, but to make me drive 12 miles to pick up a prescription for a cat they have diagnosed by emailed photos and then tell me that the cat needs to be admitted as they need to carry out an examination and she is too feisty so they need to knock her out - £400 and another 12 mile drive and 3 hours off working time - didn't happen'. (F, FS, 65+, 6-10 years)

13.5 Equipment

Reprising evidence presented above (8.1, 11.4, 12.5), several made general comments on the difficulties they had experienced in relation to availability or quality of equipment.

'After multiple smaller equipment request have been denied, I've given up and will have to settle with what I am given. I got my union involved but so far no success. I have expressed great concern about the cleanliness of equipment, especially the keyboards, as the older style has gaps between the keys which trap dirty suck and dead skin, fingernails and other disgusting thing I do not want to bring into my home. I had to fight at every turn to make sure I will be given the right equipment, it shouldn't be this hard. Preferably I'd like a laptop, as this would be more space saving and convenient to work with'. (M, 25-35, Tel, 3-5 years)

'The biggest issue currently that I am finding is a lack of support for those working from home, or attempting to work from home, as equipment is not provided with adequate instruction and IT support is flooded with more queries and requests for help than they can manage'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

13.6 Health and Safety Concerns

Following call-handlers' reports of health and safety difficulties (8.5, 11.3. 11.9), whether mental ill-health or physical problems caused by poor ergonomics, several committed additional reflections on these issues in the concluding sections. Even after only a few weeks WFH the reporting of mental ill-health issues is a matter for concern.

'My concern is that so many colleagues are struggling working from home as we are not getting the support from an empathetic, people-person manager, that they will go back into the office at the first opportunity, after a period of poor mental health. Going back into work quicker than necessary seems to me a bad idea when lockdown measures are required for a long time, and the wider company has embraced home working. My own situation is a bit different as I have had a bereavement and I've had a grievance against my line manager for months now, so obviously I am not feeling myself mentally. As a union rep I speak to HR and know that my own department is letting down colleagues, and it is quite a large department. A bit of understanding would go a long way. We are used to touchy feely communications being published, but the reality of work falling far short of the soundbites. To reiterate, my concern is that colleagues' mental health wellbeing is not being nurtured as well as the company itself tells us it should be; and a side affect is people will return to the office quicker than necessary'. (F, 46-55, FS, more than 10 years)

'Our systems haven't been delivered yet , I have ergonomic chair at work , dining room chair at home using my dressing table in the bedroom . Working until 9pm isn't very good for me as my grandchildren live with me ages 6 and 8 . Also starting at 8am will be difficult. I'm hoping that my hours will be adjusted . I'm aware it's office equipment from any place in the call centre, how will I efficiently clean it all before coming into my house, my bedroom actually'. (F, 46-55, Tel, 3-5 years)

'The organisation in which I work, in my opinion, moved too slow in relation to Covid-19, both in respect of welfare of colleagues and also the processes for front line staff to enable their role to be completed on a day to day basis. The reaction time to allow colleagues to work from home is a concern as there are individuals who have had positive testing for Covid-19 and have been hospitalised after being in the building. Reaction time to business policies to allow colleagues to do their job has resulted in a general struggle with mental wellbeing due to the nature of calls then being held with customers and the high number of complaints as a result. All of which have an impact. Working from home, and potentially being on your own, after a difficult call / customer is extremely hard and emotionally draining of which I do not feel companies are aware or appreciative of'. (F, 25-35, FS, 3-5 years)

'Please pay attention to staff struggling every day with home working'. (F, 46-55, FS, 6-10 years)

13.7 Importance of a Union

Some used the comments section to talk about the role their trade union had paid in facilitating the transition to WFH and/or in ensuring their interests were protected once WFH. This following comment from a worker at a non-union outsourced call centre implicitly raises the important role a union could play in conditions of the unilateral exercise of managerial prerogative and the absence of consultation with the workforce.

'There is no trade union in my call centre. As far as I am aware there has been no talk of bringing one in. If it's decided someone is to be moved department (collections, business, fraud) your contract is not changed to reflect this and stays as the original contract received on being offered a job. When I was moved team, I was told the day before the move. My shifts were changed from the 10-hour rota to the 8-hour rota. A colleague has been disputing this with the operations team for over a year and has been told the only job title recognised by the company is customer service advisor. He has tried to escalate this further but has received no response. The operations team did not look at homeworking until March. Business policy was changed first, so we knew what to tell customers who were affected by corona virus. When the UK went into lockdown, everybody received a text in the morning to say we were essential workers and to go into work as normal. That afternoon a spot check by the police resulted in the building being closed and everybody being sent home. The next day, people were called in to collect computers so they could work from home'. (F, less than 25 years, O/S, 1-2 years)

13.8 Broader Reflections

The final highlighted comment provides an appropriate conclusion to the report. Here the call handler reflection on the possible post-Covid-19 future, which may mean homeworking becoming established as a permanent condition. However, rather than being seen as an

unmitigated benefit for employees, this respondent raises important issues of managerial control and flexibility, casting the future relationship between employer and employee in terms of a newly created and contested 'frontier of control'.

> 'Thanks for doing this. I think it is clear that whatever status quo emerges from this lockdown, it won't be business as usual. Either employers are going to grab parts of our personal lives and hold on to them, or we are going to demand and hang on to increased flexibility in how we work. How the situation is framed is going to be vital. The employer has not done workers a favour by "letting" us work from home; workers have done the employer a favour by "lending" our homes to the business, because offices currently cannot safely be used. The future is going to have to be flexible - and that means whoever wants to work from home should be allowed to, but also that there must be a desk readily available for anyone that wants one. I don't want to see "owns a house with a lockable office" become a requirement on job adverts'. (M, 25-35, CS, 1-2 years)

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[i] Gender – M=Male, F=Female, NB = Non-binary. Age – Less than 25 years, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55. 56-65, more than 65 years.
Sector – CS=Civil Service, Educ=Education, Est=Estate Agents, FS=Financial Services, Leg=Legal Services, LG=Local Government, O/S=Outsourcer, PS=Public Sector, Ret=Retail, Tel=Telecommunications, Util=Utilities
Age – Less than 25 years, 25-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, more than 65 years.
Length of Service – Less than one year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-10 years, more than 10 years.