

Article

# Business and individual attitudes towards the future of homeworking, UK: April to May 2021

Analysis of the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on office working and of business and individual attitudes to future working practices.

Contact:  
Abi Casey  
economic.advice@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1633 455121

Release date:  
14 June 2021

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Current homeworking practices](#)
3. [Future remote working practices](#)
4. [Perceptions of homeworking](#)
5. [Homeworking data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Data sources and quality](#)
8. [Collaboration](#)
9. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

- The proportion of working adults who did any work from home in 2020 increased to 37% on average from 27% in 2019 with workers living in London the most likely to homework.
- When asked about homeworking, working adults stated work-life balance was the greatest positive, while challenges of collaboration were the greatest negative.
- Of businesses not permanently stopped trading, 24% stated that they intended to use increased homeworking going forward, with the Information and Communication industry recording the highest proportion (49%).
- Online job adverts including terms related to "homeworking" have increased at a faster rate than total adverts, with homeworking adverts in May 2021 three times above their February 2020 average.
- Of working adults currently homeworking, 85% wanted to use a "hybrid" approach of both home and office working in future. However, there was some uncertainty among businesses, with 32% stating they were not sure what proportion of the workforce will be working from their usual place of work.

## 2 . Current homeworking practices

Responses to the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey](#) (BICS) cover the period 5 April to 2 May 2021 while responses to the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#) (OPN) cover the period 21 April to 16 May 2021. The differences between sources are explored in a [recent blog](#).

The results of the future of homeworking questions reflect the expectations of businesses and individuals at the time the surveys were taken. Further detail on methodology can be found in [Section 7](#).

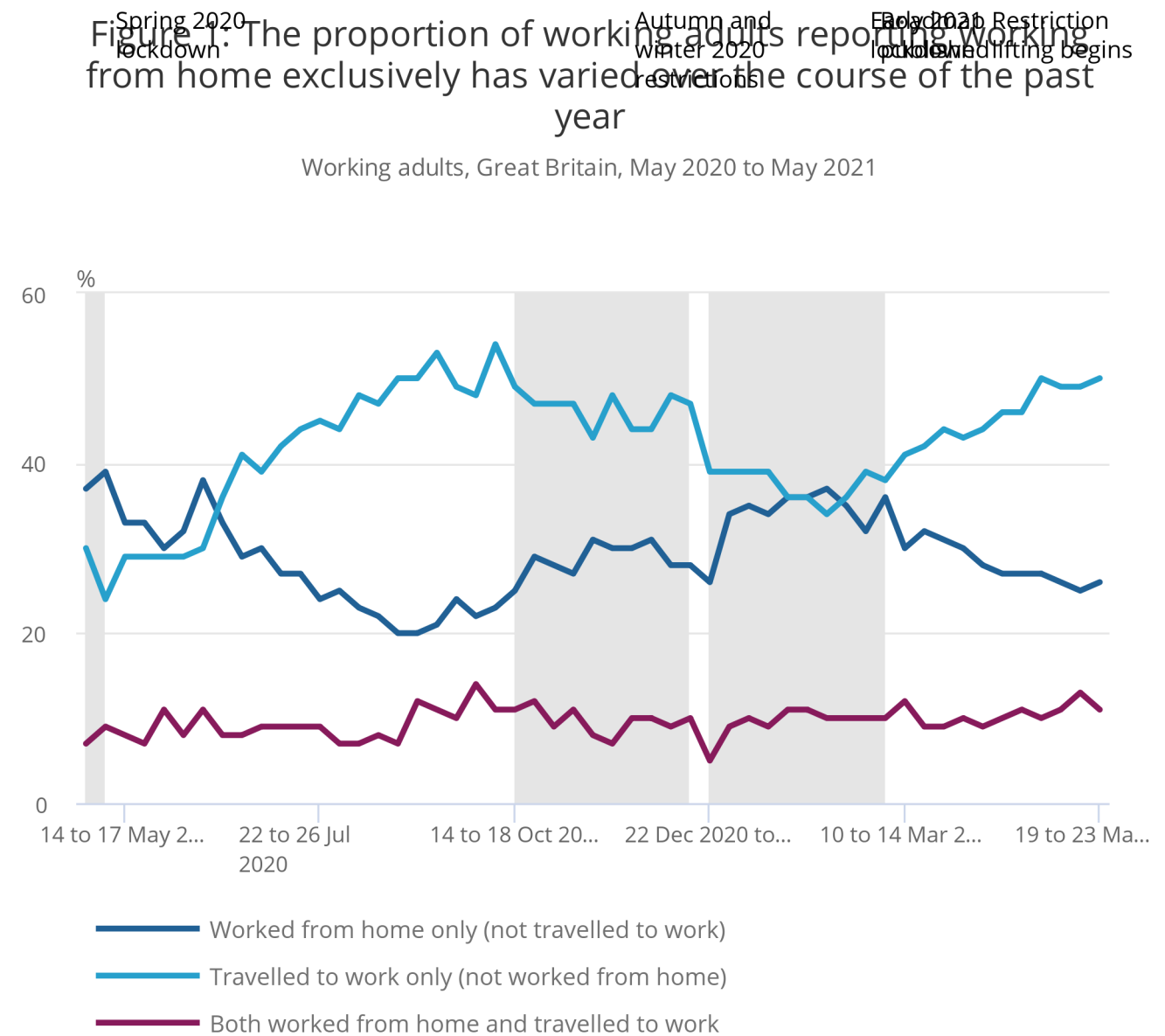
On average in 2019, 27% of the workforce worked from home at some point according to [Annual Population Survey \(APS\) data](#). This increased to an average of 37% in 2020, following government guidance to work from home where possible.

Data collected from the OPN shows the proportion of individuals working remotely has been declining since March 2021, as restrictions began to ease (Figure 1).

While the proportion of workers both working from home and travelling to work has remained relatively stable, evidence from the OPN and the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) suggests individuals and workplaces anticipate increased levels of hybrid models of working after the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 1: The proportion of working adults reporting working from home exclusively has varied over the course of the past year**

Working adults, Great Britain, May 2020 to May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
2. “Spring 2020 lockdown”: 23 March 2020 to 13 May 2020. “Autumn and winter 2020 restrictions”: 14 October 2020 to 4 January 2021. “Early 2021 lockdown”: 5 January 2021 to 8 March 2021. “Roadmap for England published”: 22 February 2021. “Restriction lifting begins”: 8 March 2021.
3. Further detail can be found in [Section 7](#).

Workers living in London were most likely to report working from home in the previous seven days. Those aged 30 to 49 years were most likely to report working from home, with almost half (45%) saying so compared with around one-third of those aged 16 to 29 years (34%) and 50 to 69 years (32%).

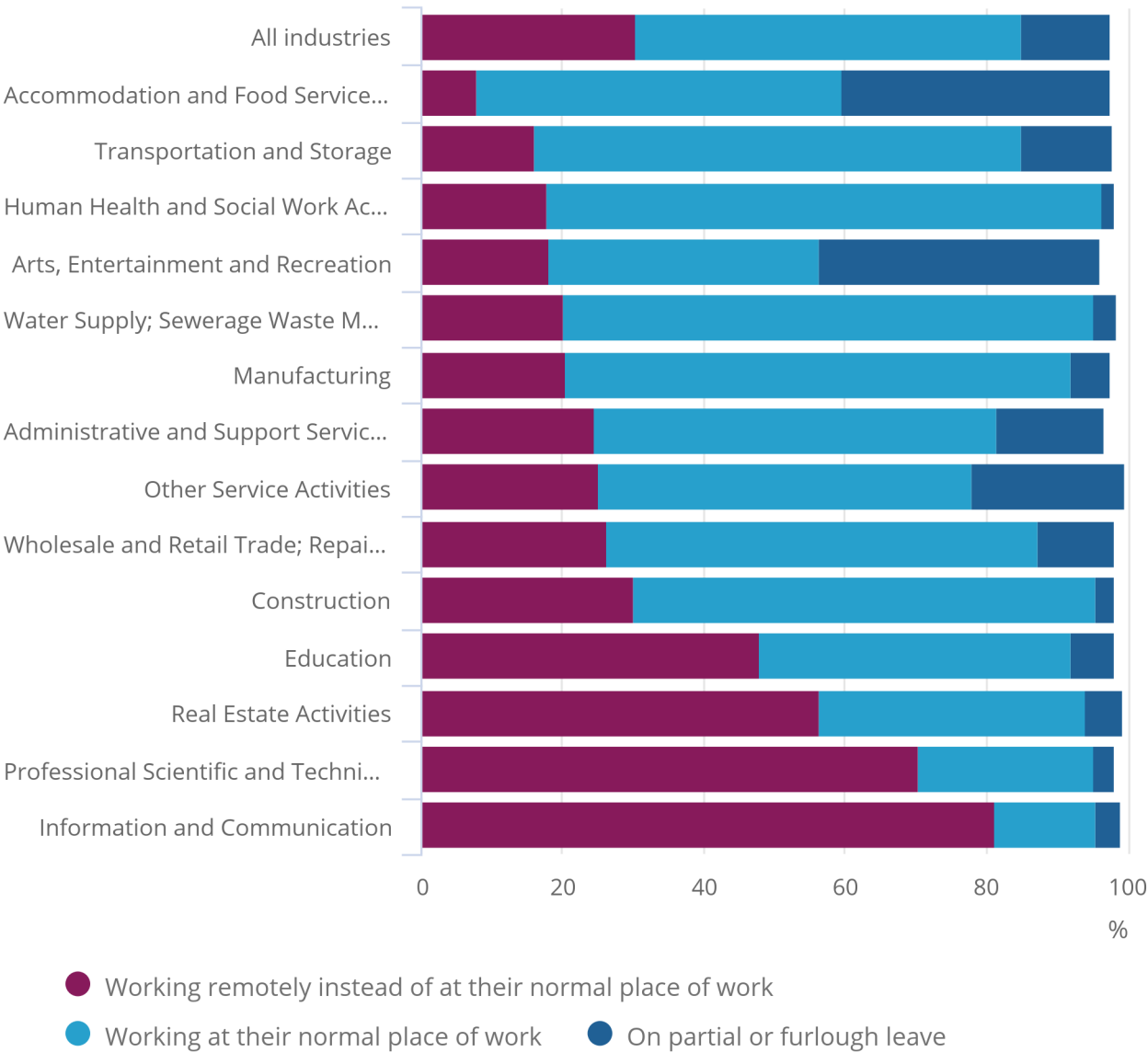
A similar proportion of businesses (31%) reported that their workforce was working remotely as restrictions eased in April and May 2021. There were large differences between industries, with the majority of the workforce in businesses in Information and Communication; and Professional, Scientific and Technical activities industries remote working (81% and 71%).

**Figure 2: Information and Communication and Professional, Scientific and Technical activities industries have the highest proportion of remote working**

Working arrangements, businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by employment, broken down by industry, UK, 5 to 18 April 2021

Figure 2: Information and Communication and Professional, Scientific and Technical activities industries have the highest proportion of remote working

Working arrangements, businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by employment, broken down by industry, UK, 5 to 18 April 2021



Notes:

1. Final weighted results, Wave 29 of BICS.
2. Industries will not sum to 100% because of rounding, percentages less than 1% removed for disclosure purposes.
3. Mining and quarrying has been removed for disclosure purposes, but its total is included in “All industries”.
4. Not all categories have been shown for presentational purposes.

## Online job adverts

This article uses experimental data from Adzuna looking at trends of online job adverts that include homeworking wording comparing pre-pandemic levels of homeworking vacancies to current levels. Homeworking adverts are defined as those that include any reference to homeworking, such as homeworking only or hybrid.

When lockdown restrictions began in March 2020, total UK online job adverts fell and did not return to pre-pandemic average levels until the end of April 2021, according to [experimental estimates](#) provided by Adzuna, an online job search engine.

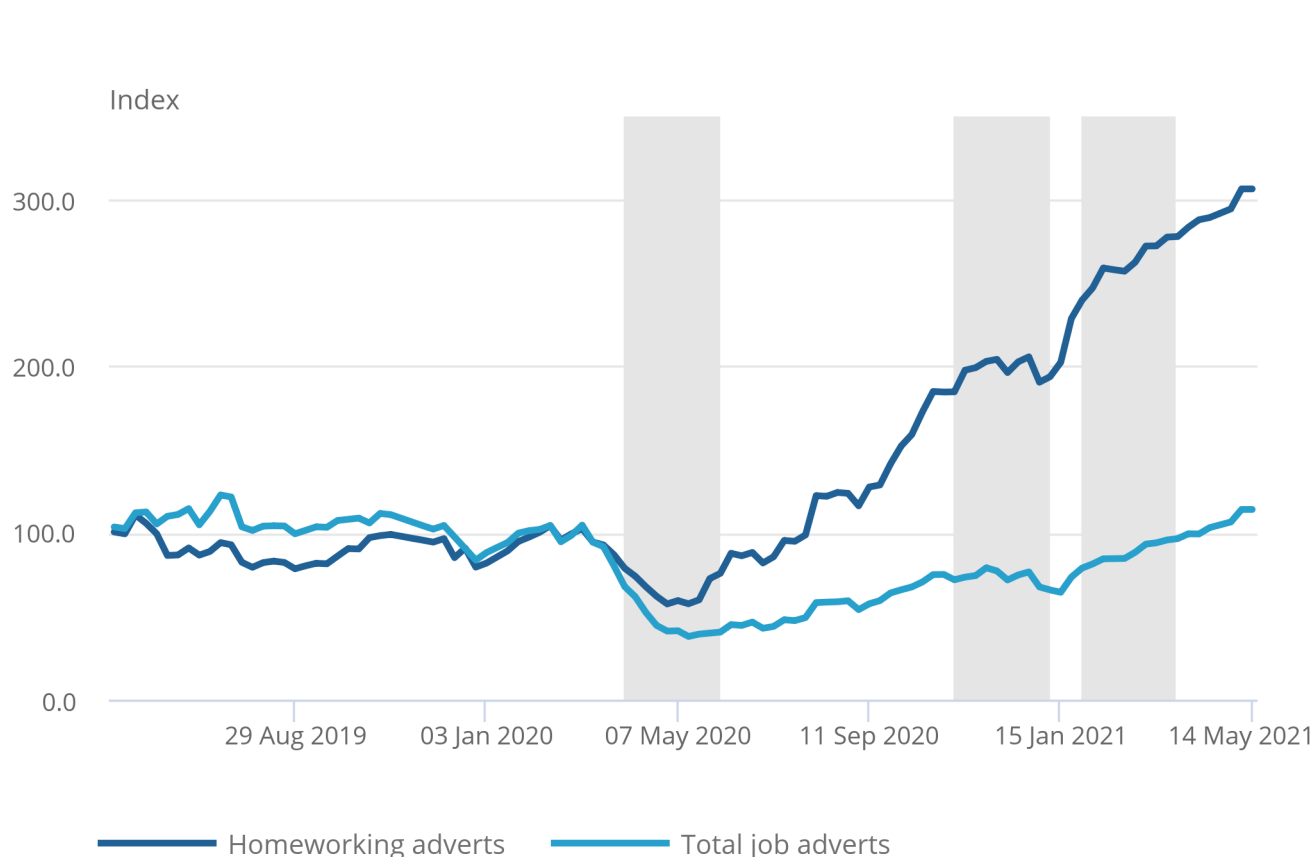
However, online job adverts including terms related to "homeworking" reached pre-pandemic average levels by July 2020. By May 2021, such adverts were being posted at 307% of their February 2020 average level. However, remote working adverts still only account for 8% of total adverts.

**Figure 3: Since lockdown, adverts mentioning homeworking have risen faster than total adverts**

Index of job adverts on Adzuna by category, 100 = average job adverts in February 2020, 2 May 2019 to 14 May 2021, not seasonally adjusted

Figure 3: Since lockdown, adverts mentioning homeworking have risen faster than total adverts

Index of job adverts on Adzuna by category, 100 = average job adverts in February 2020, 2 May 2019 to 14 May 2021, not seasonally adjusted



Source: Adzuna

Notes:

1. Further category breakdowns are included in the Online job advert estimates dataset and more details on the methodology can be found in Section 7.
2. "Spring 2020 lockdown": 23 March 2020 to 13 May 2020. "Autumn and winter 2020 restrictions": 14 October 2020 to 4 January 2021. "Early 2021 lockdown": 5 January 2021 to 8 March 2021. "Roadmap for England published": 22 February 2021. "Restrictions begin to lift": 8 March 2021

Again, trends varied substantially, in the Charity and Voluntary category adverts including terms related to "homeworking" increased to 23.4% of total adverts in March 2021.

As restrictions then began to ease in spring 2021, homeworking vacancies remained high across many categories. In the Charity and Voluntary category, the proportion of homeworking adverts fell slightly between March and May 2021 but were still 12.3 percentage points above their February 2020 average level. In the IT, Computing and Software category, remote working vacancies only fell 0.1 percentage points.

### 3 . Future remote working practices

#### Do businesses and individuals see homeworking continuing?

Data from the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) showed that of businesses that had not permanently stopped trading, 24% intend to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward, while 28% were not sure.

Businesses in the Information and Communication industry were most likely to intend to increase homeworking in the future (49%), but this proportion was still far lower than the proportion currently homeworking (81%).

**Figure 4: There is a positive relationship between current remote working practices and future homeworking intentions**



Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Notes:

1. Final weighted results, Wave 29.
2. Mining and quarrying has been removed for disclosure purposes, but its total is included in “All industries”.

For those industries not intending to adopt increased remote working going forward, this may be because it is not possible to adapt to homeworking. [Previous ONS analysis](#) assessed which jobs can be done from home, providing a "homeworking score". This was based on the technological capacity to work from home and survey data that asked employees themselves if they thought they could carry out their tasks from home.

Both businesses and individuals preferred a "hybrid" working approach (a mixture of both office and homeworking) in the future. However, while nearly two-fifths (38%) of businesses expected 75% or more of their workforce to be at their normal place of work, a large proportion (36%) of those currently homeworking thought they would spend the majority or all their time homeworking in the future. Businesses had some uncertainty of when they would return with one-third (32%) not sure.

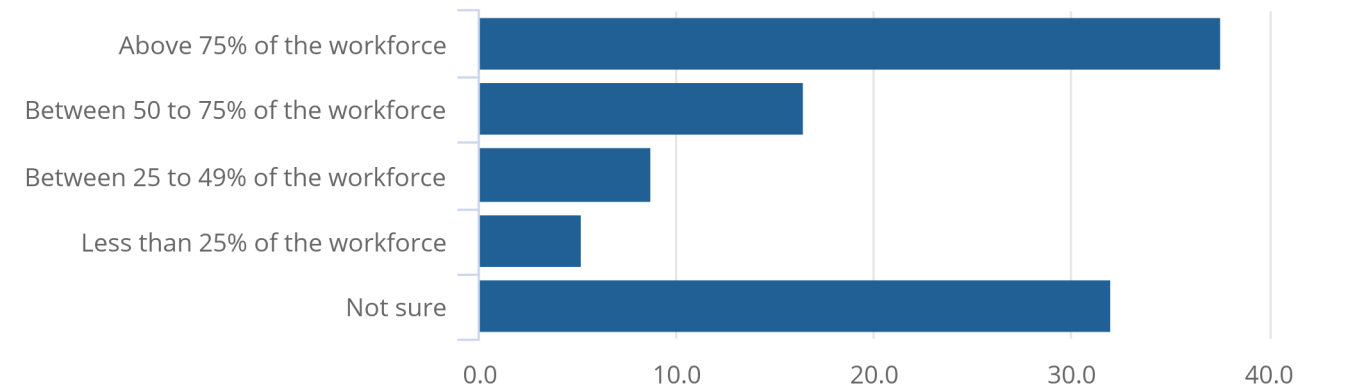
However, responses differed by industry, only 15% of the Information and Communication industry expected 75% or more of their workforce at their normal place of work while this was almost half (49%) for the Accommodation and Food Service Activity industry. The difference is likely linked to an industries ability to homework currently and in the future.

**Figure 5: Nearly two-fifths of all businesses expect 75% of their workforce to be at their normal place of work going forward**

Estimated percentage of workforce to return to their normal workplace on any given day, weighted by employment, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021

Figure 5: Nearly two-fifths of all businesses expect 75% of their workforce to be at their normal place of work going forward

Estimated percentage of workforce to return to their normal workplace on any given day, weighted by employment, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Notes:

1. Final weighted results, Wave 29. Total will not sum to 100% because of rounding.
2. Of businesses not permanently stopped trading and specified either when their workforce would return to their normal place of work or stated were not sure.



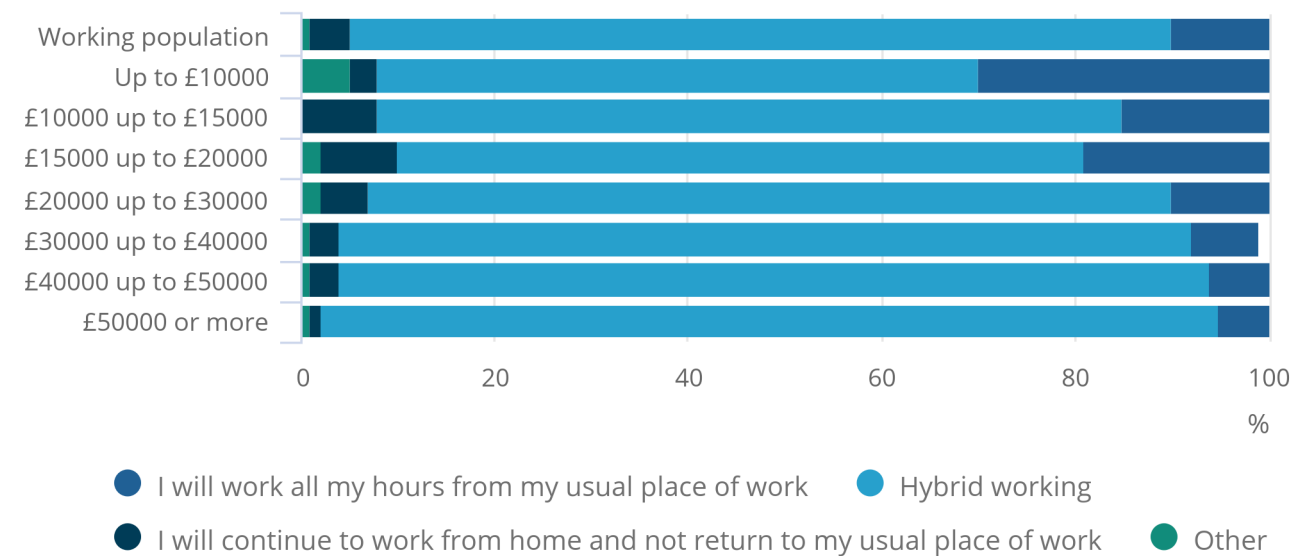
Of those currently homeworking 85% expected to share their time between their usual place of work and remote working in the future. Workers with higher incomes were more likely to expect a hybrid form of working, while those on lower incomes were more likely to expect to work exclusively from either their usual workplace or home.

**Figure 6: Those with higher incomes mostly expect a mix of homeworking and returning to their usual workplace**

Where working adults think they will work once they are able to return to their usual place of work, personal annual gross income, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021

Figure 6: Those with higher incomes mostly expect a mix of homeworking and returning to their usual workplace

Where working adults think they will work once they are able to return to their usual place of work, personal annual gross income, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

Notes:

1. 'Hybrid working' is a combination of "I will mostly work from usual place of work and sometimes from home", "I will split my time evenly between my usual place of work and home" and "I will mostly work from home and sometimes from my usual place of work".

When asked when they expect their workforce to return to their usual place of work, businesses most reported (37%) expecting this to happen within three months, or by early August 2021 (Figure 7). This aligns with [The UK Government's roadmap out of lockdown for England](#) which includes a review of social distancing measures in June 2021.

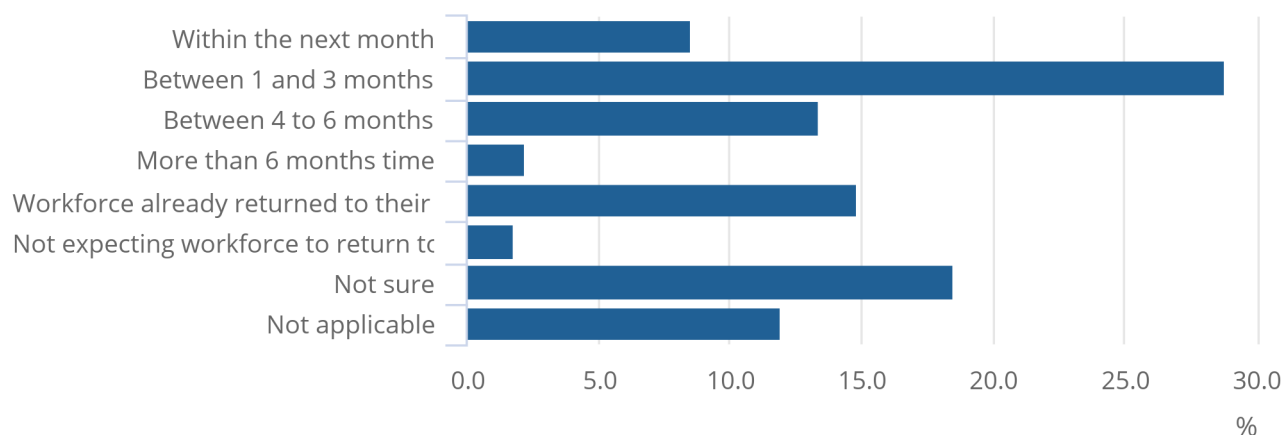
Very few businesses (2%) reported that they were not expecting the workforce to return to their usual place of work at all. However, around one-fifth of all businesses (19%) were unsure, reflecting remaining uncertainty around where employees will be working in the future.

**Figure 7: Of businesses not permanently stopped trading, 37% expected their workforce to return to their normal place of work within the next three months**

Expected time for workforce to return to their normal place of work, businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by employment, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021

**Figure 7: Of businesses not permanently stopped trading, 37% expected their workforce to return to their normal place of work within the next three months**

Expected time for workforce to return to their normal place of work, businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by employment, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021



**Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey**

**Notes:**

1. Final weighted results, Wave 29. Total will not sum to 100% because of rounding.
2. Date ranges are taken at the time of survey completion between 19 April to 2 May.

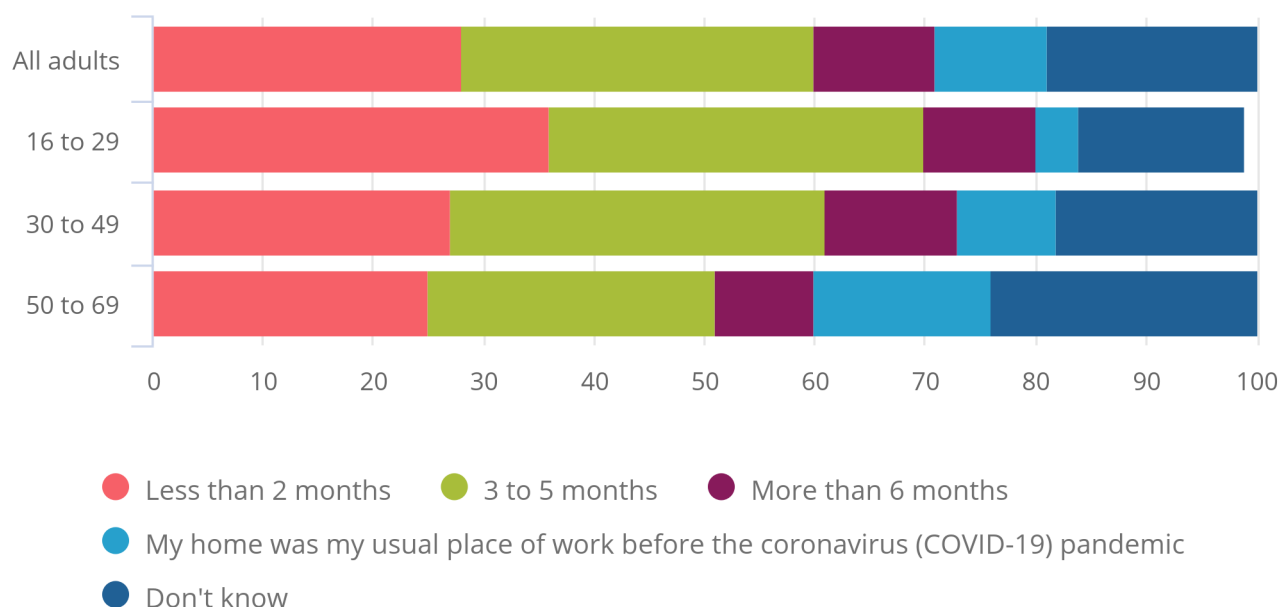
Data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) suggests individuals expect to continue working from home longer than businesses, with most individuals reporting expecting to return to their normal place of work within the next three to five months or by October 2021. Younger workers tend to expect to return to their normal place of work sooner than older workers, 36% of respondents between 16 and 29 years expecting this to happen in the next two months compared with less than 30% in all other age groups.

**Figure 8: Most individuals expect to return to their normal place of work by early autumn**

When working adults think they will return to their usual place of work, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021

## Figure 8: Most individuals expect to return to their normal place of work by early autumn

When working adults think they will return to their usual place of work, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

### Notes:

- Responses were recorded between 21 April and 16 May 2021. Therefore, "Less than 2 months" can be inferred to be the period between 21 June and 16 July 2021.
- Further detail can be found in [Section 7](#).

Both businesses and individuals would like to have protective measures in place when they return to their normal place of work, with increased cleaning measures and "social distancing" being a top priority for both groups.

Furthermore, 40% of individuals said they wanted a COVID-19 vaccine to be required, compared with only 20% of businesses have or intend to put this in place for people returning to their normal place of work.

## Figure 9: Safety measures such as “enhanced cleaning procedures” and “social distancing” are a top priority for businesses and individuals when returning to their normal place of work

Safety measures being used or intended to be used by businesses, businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by count, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021 and Safety measures wanted by working adults when returning to their normal place of work, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021

#### Notes:

1. BICS question: 'Is your business using, or intending to use, any of the following safety measures in the workplace?', asked to businesses not permanently stopped trading.
2. OPN question: 'Which of the following measures do you want when you return to your usual place of work?'
3. Not all categories are included for presentational purposes. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

[Download the data](#)

## 4 . Perceptions of homeworking

### How do individuals and business perceive homeworking?

Using Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) data, individuals' perspectives of advantages and disadvantages of homeworking have been explored. Responses of individuals stating whether something was a positive or negative were combined to show an overall view. For example, work-life balance is shown (Figure 10) as a positive, meaning more individuals stated it was an advantage than a disadvantage.

Overall, individuals reported the main advantage of homeworking being "an improvement to work-life balance". Another positive was "a reduction in the time taken to complete work" which may be linked to most individuals finding there were fewer distractions when working at home compared with in the office.

The main disadvantage was a feeling that it was harder to collaborate with others on work with "fewer job opportunities" also reported.

### Figure 10: Younger workers were the only group that had more distractions when working from home

Net sentiment towards advantages/disadvantages of homeworking, Great Britain, 21 April to 16 May 2021

#### Notes

1. Questions: "Which of the following advantages/disadvantages have you experienced since working from home compared to your usual place of work?" Net sentiment is calculated by subtracting "disadvantages" percentage points from the associated "advantages" percentage points.
2. Further detail can be found in [Section 7](#).

[Download the data](#)

Younger workers were less likely to report an overall positive view of homeworking than older workers, with fewer respondents aged between 16 and 29 years reporting "improved work-life balance" or "completing work in a shorter time" than those aged over 30 years. They were also the only age group to overall report more distractions working from home.

Women were more likely than men to report homeworking gave them more time to complete work and fewer distractions, while men were more likely to report better wellbeing. For men, homeworking aided the creation of new ideas, while for women this was more likely to be seen as a barrier.

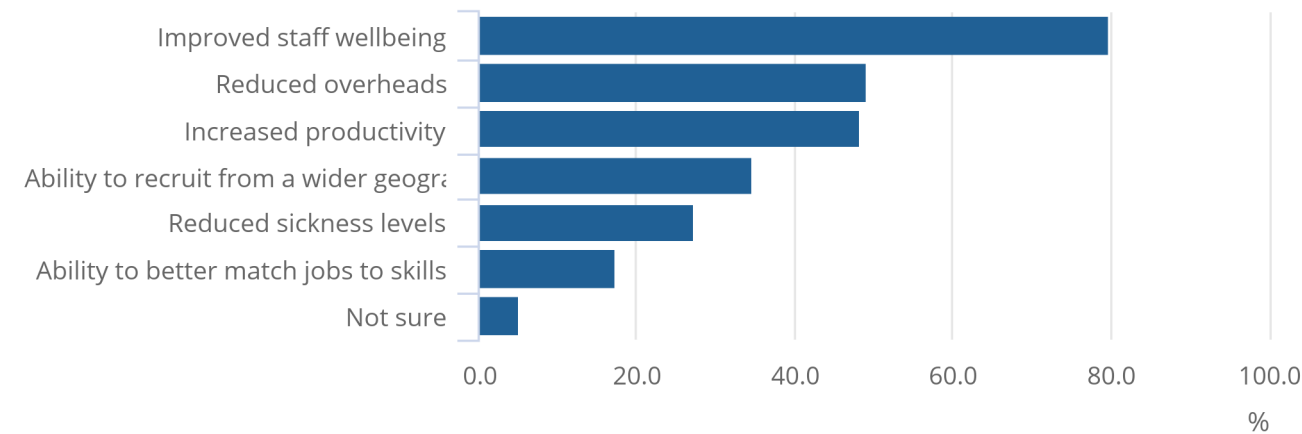
In comparison, when businesses were asked why they intend to use increased homeworking in future, improved staff wellbeing was the most common reason provided, with four in five businesses citing it. Reduced overheads and increased productivity were also common reasons (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Improved staff wellbeing was the main reason for businesses intending to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model**

Reasons why businesses plan to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021

Figure 11: Improved staff wellbeing was the main reason for businesses intending to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model

Reasons why businesses plan to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward, UK, 19 April to 2 May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Notes:

1. Final weighted results, Wave 29. Reasons will not sum to 100% as businesses could select multiple options.
2. Responses only from firms who answered that they intended to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward.
3. Businesses not permanently stopped trading weighted by employment.

[External evidence](#) suggests a connection between these benefits, with staff wellbeing linked to higher levels of productivity. Similarly, "reduced sickness levels" may also be associated with the productivity of businesses. [The sickness absence rate for workers](#) doing any work from home was 0.9% on average in 2020, compared with 2.2% for those who never worked from home.

The only category of businesses where "improved staff wellbeing" was not the most cited reason to use homeworking going forward were ones with less than 10 employees, the main reason cited here was "reduced overheads".

For businesses who did not intend to increase homeworking, the main reason was that remote working was "not suitable for our businesses" with 83% of businesses reporting this.

Around 20% of businesses reported "reduced communication", "negative impact on working culture", as well as "reduced productivity" as reasons for not intending to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model. Responses across industries were similar, however businesses in the Real Estate Activities industry reported these problems most often. This is similar to results from OPN where individuals associate "harder to work with others" and "fewer job opportunities" as the main disadvantages of working from home.

## 5 . Homeworking data

[Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 6 May 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 6 May 2021

Responses from the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 11 June 2021

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) covering the periods 6 to 30 May and 2 to 6 June 2021 to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households, and communities in Great Britain.

[Online job advert estimates](#) (Adzuna)

Dataset | Released 27 May 2021

Experimental job advert indices covering the UK job market.

## 6 . Glossary

### BICS

Business Insights and Conditions Survey.

### OPN

Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

### Hybrid model of working

A hybrid model of working allows employees to blend working from different locations such as home, office or normal place of work. For businesses, this may result in some of the overall workforce at their usual place of work with some then working from home.

## 7 . Data sources and quality

## Adzuna data

These figures are [experimental estimates](#) of online job adverts provided by Adzuna, an online job search engine. The number of job adverts over time is an indicator of the demand for labour.

To identify these adverts we have applied text-matching to find job adverts which contain key phrases associated with homeworking such as "remote working", "work from home", "home-based" and "telework". The data do not separately identify job adverts that exclusively offer homeworking from those which offer flexible homeworking, such as one day a week from home.

More details on the methodology can be found in [Using Adzuna data to derive an indicator of weekly vacancies](#).

## Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)

This article draws on data from the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\)](#), which captures businesses' views on financial performance, workforce, prices, trade, and business resilience in the UK. For analysis of [BICS](#), we have used Wave 29.

The following industries are excluded from the survey:

- agriculture
- public administration and defence
- public provision of education and health
- finance and insurance

Caution should be taken when interpreting the results presented as the specific routing of some of the questions means that only a small number of businesses responded. Estimates from BICS are not official statistics.

Table 1: Number of responses for BICS homeworking questions

<b>Industry/Size Band</b>	<b>Does your business intend to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward?</b>	<b>Why do you intend to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward?</b>	<b>Why do you not intend to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward?</b>	<b>When do you expect your workforce to return to their normal place of work?</b>	<b>What percentage of your workforce do you expect to return to their normal place of work on a given day?</b>
<b>Information and communication</b>	645	315	86	645	511
<b>Real estate activities</b>	113	34	44	113	88
<b>Professional, scientific and technical activities</b>	1358	588	340	1358	1007
<b>Education</b>	290	113	64	290	237
<b>All other industries (sum)</b>	7515	1361	4217	7515	5220
<b>All businesses</b>	9642	2307	4696	9642	6831

Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey

#### Notes

1. Businesses includes within BICS only cover the private sector, for example the education industry covers the private education industry only.

## Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

This article uses indicators from the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#) to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain. Further details on the OPN relating to the data in the above figures are:

- over the Christmas period, there were fewer adults who said they had either travelled to work or worked from home in the last seven days; this was most likely because of changing work plans over the Christmas break (Figure 1)
- A person is "working" if they had a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed; or they did any casual work for payment; or they did any unpaid or voluntary work in the previous week (Figures 1, 6, 8, 10)
- Personal annual gross income is self-reported on the OPN survey and therefore should be treated with caution; a respondent's income information does not represent equivalised household income, which takes into account all income from all household members, and adjusting for that fact that households with more people will need a higher income to achieve the same standard of living as households with fewer members (Figure 6)



## Annual Population Survey (APS)

Data from the [Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#) looks at the percentage of the workforce working from home between 2015 and 2020.

## 8 . Collaboration

This article was produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in collaboration with our research partners at the University of Warwick who have supported our work in identifying online homeworking adverts. Of particular note are the below:

Mirko Draca, Emma Duchini, Roland Rathelot, Arthur Turrell, and Giulia Vattuone. The University of Warwick team will be publishing an academic paper on their work on 30 June, titled '[Revolution in progress: the rise of remote work in the UK. CAGE Working Paper \(2021\)](#)'

## 9 . Related links

### [Which jobs can be done from home?](#)

Article | Released 21 July 2020

Study analysing the ability of occupations to work from home

### [Working from home: comparing the data](#)

Blog | Released 17 May 2021

Comparisons of homeworking data sources

### [Homeworking hours, rewards and opportunities in the UK: 2011 to 2020](#)

Article | Released April 2021

Working from home in the UK between 2011 and 2020, including the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Looking at indicators of productivity and work success such as pay, hours worked, bonuses, promotions and more, with industry, region, and demographic breakdowns.

### [Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK labour market:](#) 2019

Article | Released 24 March 2020

The extent to which different people in the labour market work from home, either on a regular or occasional basis