

The Civil Service Remote Working Survey 2021

GLOBAL
government
FORUM

In partnership with

DELLTechnologies



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2021 Civil Service Remote Working Survey

Nobody could have foreseen the revolution in working practices that has taken place over the last year. All over the world, millions of commuters suddenly found themselves confined to their homes – instructed by their governments not to go out unless they absolutely had to. Almost overnight, frontline services switched from in-person to online, meetings and events took place virtually or not at all, and day-to-day desk-based functions were delivered from people's living rooms, bedrooms and gardens.

Organisations faced a multitude of operational, technological, and cultural challenges in navigating this huge experiment. The UK civil service not only had to manage the massive HR challenges attached to its position as one of the country's largest employers, it also had to ensure the effective and secure rollout of tools and systems to a workforce that was managing the response to a national emergency. Impressive feats were achieved in remarkably tight timescales, from designing a suite of financial support packages to building a portfolio

of vaccines – and all while managing the UK's exit from the EU. Civil servants were lauded by FDA union leader Dave Penman for displaying a fine example of "Blitz spirit".

This survey, which gathered responses from more than 900 civil servants in more than 75 organisations, suggests that civil servants have adapted well to remote working. Most respondents feel their employer handled the transition successfully, and it is apparent that the new way of working is highly popular. The vast majority confirmed that it is entirely possible for them to do all or most of their job from home, and most asserted that remote working has had a positive impact on their work/life balance and their sense of wellbeing.

We hope that our survey's findings will be useful to civil service bodies managing remote workforces in the months ahead. The government is currently asking people to work from home where possible, and will complete a review of social distancing measures – providing new guidance on working from home – before moving onto the fourth and final stage in its reopening roadmap.



Tariq Hussain

Senior Director, UK Public Sector
Dell Technologies

“
...essential
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and agencies...”



The results should also prove valuable as organisations shape their post-pandemic working practices, helping leaders to bring their staff with them. Early last autumn, as the country was emerging from a summer of low infection rates and Covid deaths, the government wrote to permanent secretaries urging them to encourage staff to return to the office on rota systems. It said it wanted 80% of civil servants to be back at their desks at least once a week by the end of September, apparently in a bid to build business confidence and revive city centre economies.

But the move was condemned by unions, who warned that the imposition of targets was unsafe and urged ministers to recognise that workplace practices have changed for good. In the end, the instruction was shelved as infection rates began climbing again. Fresh guidance is awaited pending the aforementioned review, but it is clear from the results of our survey that any new diktat from ministers for civil servants to get back to their offices as soon as possible will not be universally popular. And civil service leaders are well aware that all their best staff have other options: those with an interest in recruitment will find our results useful in understanding how best to attract and retain employees, reshaping their offer to recognise how expectations have shifted during the pandemic.

Indeed, the findings of this study are essential reading for senior managers in all departments and agencies, not just HR and workforce planning professionals. They have implications for those determining future property requirements across the estate, for example, as well as those in charge of IT and digital strategy and cyber security.

The findings are useful for us at Dell Technologies as they underpin our ambition that everybody should be able to work and learn from anywhere at any time. These results demonstrate that technology can be effectively harnessed to support flexible working in all civil service business units, with corresponding benefits for employees' mental health and wellbeing.

We want to express our sincere thanks to everyone who participated in the survey; the fact that 906 of you took the time to answer the questions provided a really robust sample. We hope you find the report of interest, and we'd love to hear your feedback. Do get in touch to tell us what you think – you'll find my contact details at the end of this report.

Tariq Hussain, Senior Director, UK Public Sector
Dell Technologies



... these findings underpin our ambition that everybody should be able to work and learn from anywhere at any time...



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A mass experiment in new ways of working

On 23 March 2020, the UK government implemented a national lockdown to try to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus. Offices closed all over the country and millions of workers began working from home, including the vast majority of civil servants – over 400,000 employees.

This was quite a culture shock for the UK civil service, where long-standing efforts to expand flexible working practices had made slow progress. Responding to the emergency, civil servants found ways to work together remotely, maintaining essential operations while delivering a host of new policies and services to protect and support the public through the pandemic.

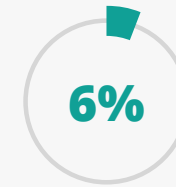
A year on, Dell Technologies has worked with Global Government Forum to run a survey asking civil servants for their views and experiences of working remotely. How far could they carry out their roles effectively?

Were their communications tools secure and high-quality, and could they access technical support when required? How did these new working practices affect their wellbeing and productivity? And how would like they to work in the future? More than 900 civil servants responded.

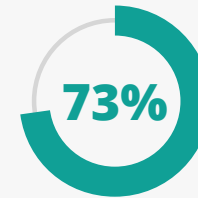
Survey findings

The coronavirus and associated lockdowns have transformed the working patterns of the overwhelming majority of the civil service workforce. Before the pandemic, just 6% of those that responded to our survey worked from home all the time. Around a quarter never worked from home (24%) and another 29% only did so occasionally.

But almost three-quarters of respondents – 73% – found they were able to carry out their full role working remotely, and a further 22% can do most of their work from home.



of respondents worked from home all the time prior to the pandemic



of respondents found they were able to carry out their full role working remotely



It was clear that most respondents felt their organisation handled the transformation successfully, and that this new way of working is popular with civil servants.

In response to the statement: "I would like to work remotely/from home more frequently in the future", 54% strongly agreed and 28% agreed.

Do civil servants have the right tools for the job to work remotely?

The vast majority (93%) said they were provided with the devices they needed to work remotely, and 79% claimed to have access to the same applications and databases at home as they did in the office. Just under three in five said speed of access and use was comparable to the office, and 15% said their speeds at home were faster. Seven in ten were satisfied with the level of IT support provided remotely.

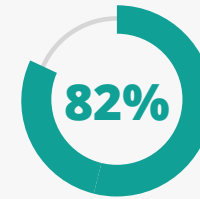
There remains room for improvement in giving people the necessary support for optimal teamworking, however. While two-thirds of respondents agreed

that the collaboration tools and systems were in place to enable their team to work together as closely as they did in the office, one in five said this was not the case.

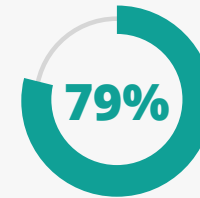
Is security and compliance of remote working practices being effectively managed by civil service organisations?

Confidence was high in the security of most software, hardware and infrastructure, as well as in the actions of people's co-workers. In general, only 3% thought their organisation had not taken appropriate security steps to enable secure remote working. And most staff (72%) said they were confident that they had sufficient training and guidance to ensure secure remote working.

However, fewer than one in five respondents confirmed that their organisation had checked that their personal wifi network settings were appropriately secured with adequate levels of encryption. And just 34% said their employer had checked whether their home working arrangements were compliant with data protection rules.



of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: 'I would like to work remotely/ from home more frequently in the future'



of respondents said they have access to the same applications and databases at home as they did in the office



What has mass remote working meant for workforce productivity and effective delivery of public services?

Our study showed that more than four in five respondents (81%) agreed that they can perform their job functions – either internally or externally to citizens – just as effectively from a remote location as in the office. And almost three in five (59%) say they are more productive when working remotely than when working from the office.

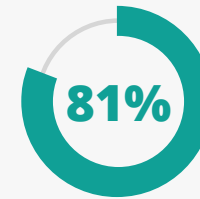
How has civil servants' perceived wellbeing been affected by home working?

Some 62% reported that their work/life balance had been improved by working from home, and 72% agreed that their wellbeing would be greatly improved if they were able to continue to work remotely. More than four in five said they wanted to work from home more often in the future.

Key messages

It seems clear that most civil servants feel that their organisation has handled the transition to mass remote working very well, and the majority of civil servants have welcomed the opportunity to spend less time in the office. Most respondents believed that their productivity has not suffered, and reported an improvement in their work/life balance and wellbeing.

These results may surprise leaders across the civil service, given previous resistance to flexible working practices, but can be seized upon as a positive and sound basis for designing a different kind of working environment going forward. Used wisely, this important feedback can open up a multitude of opportunities to help the civil service to rationalise property requirements, inspire staff loyalty, and support the government's 'Levelling Up' agenda.



of respondents agreed that they can perform their job functions just as effectively from a remote location as in the office



of respondents reported that their work/life balance had been improved by working from home



TOPICS & PARTICIPATION

Work is what we do, not where we go

The civil service had been attempting to foster a wider take-up of flexible working for some time, and had made good progress in rolling out the technology and tools to support this effort. But it always encountered barriers to widespread adoption: many managers suspected that people working remotely might do fewer hours, for example, and people worried that they might lose influence if they weren't present in ministerial offices and informal office meetings.

But COVID-19 changed all that. For the last year, most MPs have participated in parliamentary debates from their homes, and many ministerial briefings have taken place online. Whitehall has been largely deserted.

Survey objectives

With this in mind, we wanted to find out how civil servants responded to the imposition of home working, and to learn how they'd like to work going forward.

We set out to find answers to the following questions:

Do civil servants have the right tools to work remotely?

Is security and compliance in remote working practices being effectively managed by civil service organisations?

What has mass remote working meant for workforce productivity and effective delivery of public services?

How has civil servants' wellbeing been affected by home working?



Participation and segmentation

The survey was open for four weeks to 1st March 2021 and attracted responses from 906 people. Some 7% of respondents were members of the senior civil service (SCS) and a further 38% were Grade 6 or 7 – between them, groups that make up the top 13% of the civil service workforce. The department with the largest sample size was the Department for Work and Pensions, at 19% of respondents.

Among the different professions, the largest single group of respondents – comprising 20% – were those in operational delivery roles. The next largest group was policy staff, at 15%.

A large majority of participants were aged over 40 – just 13% said they were 40 or younger, whereas the latest data on the age of the civil service workforce (2018) suggests that 35% are under 40. Over half of our respondents (54%) were in the 41-56 age group, and a further 28% were 57 or older. Across the whole civil service, 65% of employees are aged above 40. Slightly more women than men took part, at 55% – broadly representative of the civil service itself.

Where relevant, we have drawn distinctions between senior grades and others, and in some instances we have

segmented the data where we had large responses from particular departments or professions.

We have also differentiated some findings according to whether the respondents regularly worked from home or not prior to the pandemic, doing so where their previous experience has led them to answer questions in different ways.

Readers should note that the findings on segmented data should only be seen as indicative: while the whole-group findings are statistically robust, these sub-groups are relatively small and their data – while interesting and, we hope, useful – should be used to guide future research rather than as the basis for decision-making (see also Research Methodology).

Because the survey was carried out online, those civil servants with ready access to a computer or a smart device were more likely to have taken part – and are also more likely to be working from home during the pandemic. It should be noted, therefore, that there may be a disproportionately small sample group among the small minority of officials who haven't been working from home at all.



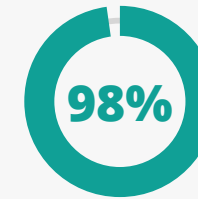
of respondents were in the 41-56 age group



of respondents were women



SURVEY FINDINGS



of senior civil servants can carry out all or almost all of their job from home

A revolution in working patterns and practices

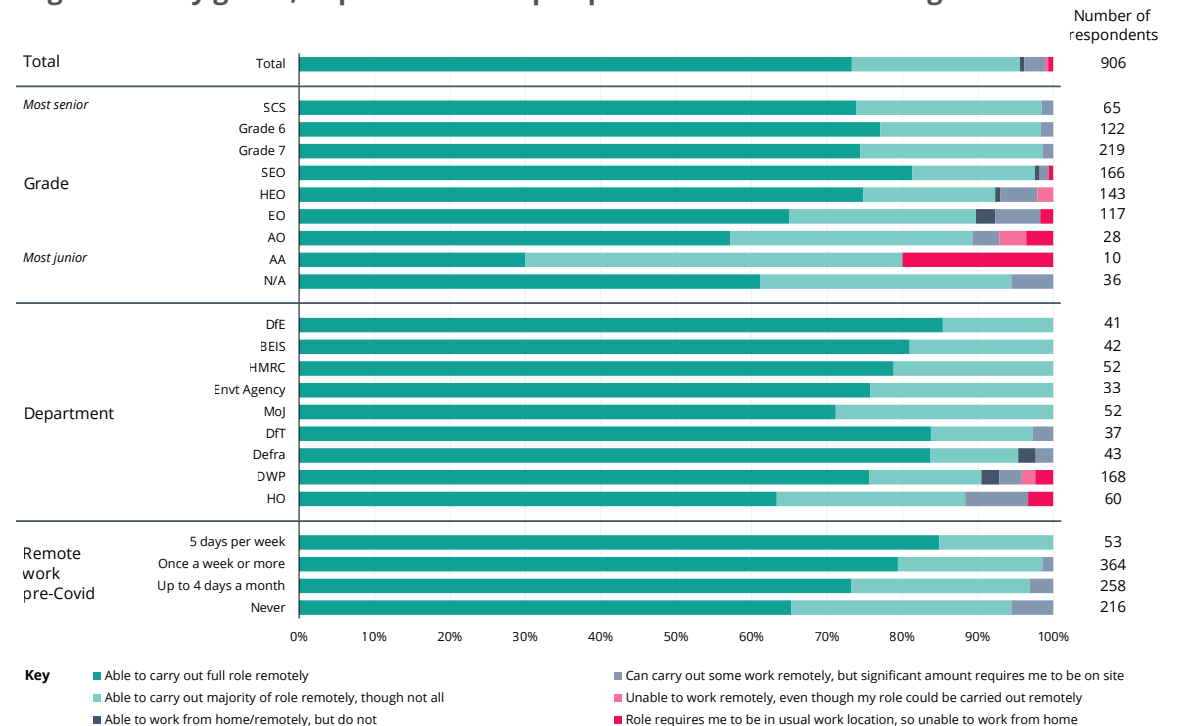
The pandemic has transformed working patterns in the UK civil service. Before the spring of 2020, a quarter of our respondents had never worked remotely. Now, 95% say they can do all or most of their job from home – and four in five want to carry on doing so.

Overall, 73% of respondents are able to carry out their full role working remotely, and a further 22% can do most of their work from home (see graph, right). Fewer than 1% – just six respondents – reported that they have not been working remotely during the crisis because their job function requires them to be on site all the time. All of these were junior grades working for DWP or the Home Office.

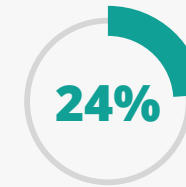
Some 98% of senior civil servants (SCS) can carry out all or almost all of their job from home, and even among more junior roles (up to SEO), the score was 93%.

Within the Department for Education (DfE), Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), HMRC, the Environment Agency and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 100% of staff said they could do all or the majority of their work remotely.

Which of the following best describes your ability to work remotely? Segmented by grade, department and pre-pandemic remote working situation



SCS = Senior Civil Service, SEO = Senior Executive Officer, HEO = Higher Executive Officer, EO = Executive Officer, AO = Administrative Officer, AA = Administrative Assistant. HMRC = Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, DWP = Department for Work and Pensions, Defra = Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DfE = Department for Education, BEIS = Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, MoJ = Ministry of Justice, DfT = Department for Transport, Envt Agency = Environment Agency, HO = Home Office. Only departments with 30 or more responses are included.



of respondents never worked from home before the pandemic

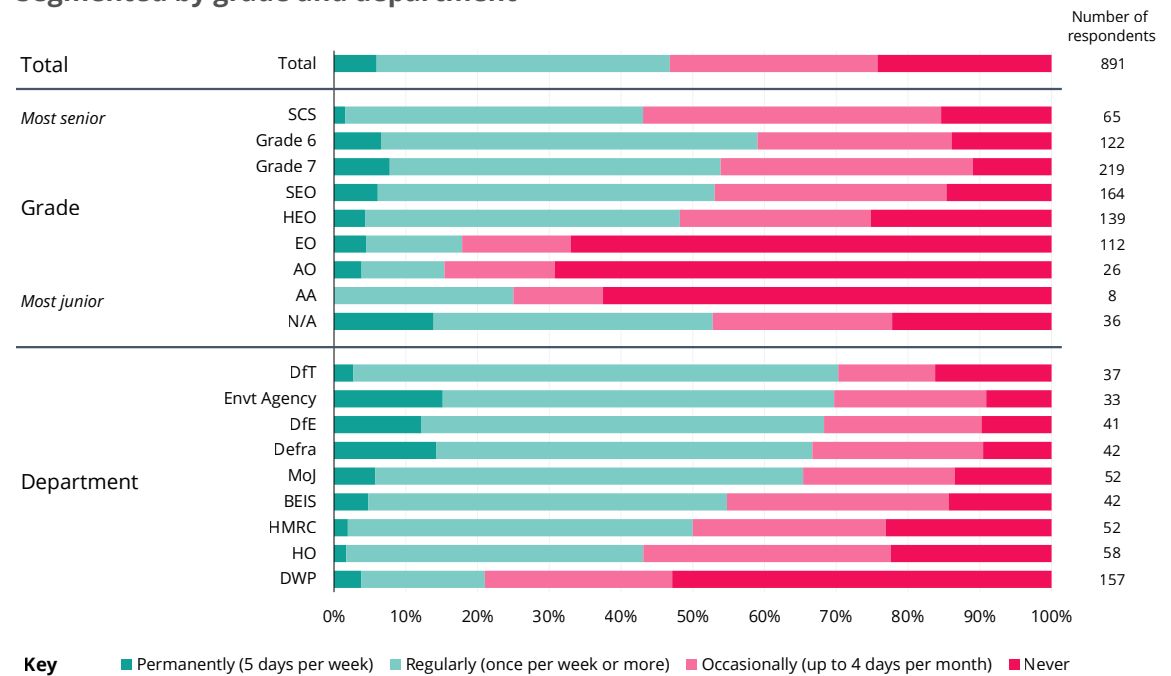
Before the pandemic versus now

Before the virus, just 6% of respondents worked from home all the time. These were evenly split between senior and junior roles, but were more likely to work in Defra, the Environment Agency or the Department for Education than other organisations.

A further two in five employees (41%) had regularly worked remotely (one day a week or more), and 29% spent the odd day at home – about a day a week. In both of these groups, the workers were more likely to be senior than junior. Just under a quarter (24%) of respondents never worked from home before the pandemic. These were predominantly junior staff: those at SEO grade and below were more than three times as likely as Grade 7 and above to say they never worked remotely before Covid.

Among those that never worked from home previously, 65% said that they are able to carry out their full role away from the office, with a further 29% saying they can do most of their job from home.

Working patterns before the pandemic Segmented by grade and department



SCS = Senior Civil Service, SEO = Senior Executive Officer, HEO = Higher Executive Officer, EO = Executive Officer, AO = Administrative Officer, AA = Administrative Assistant. HMRC = Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, DWP = Department for Work and Pensions, Defra = Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DfE = Department for Education, BEIS = Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Moj = Ministry of Justice, DfT = Department for Transport, Env Agency = Environment Agency, HO = Home Office. Only departments with 30 or more responses are included.



of respondents said they are more productive when working remotely than in the office

Productivity and effectiveness

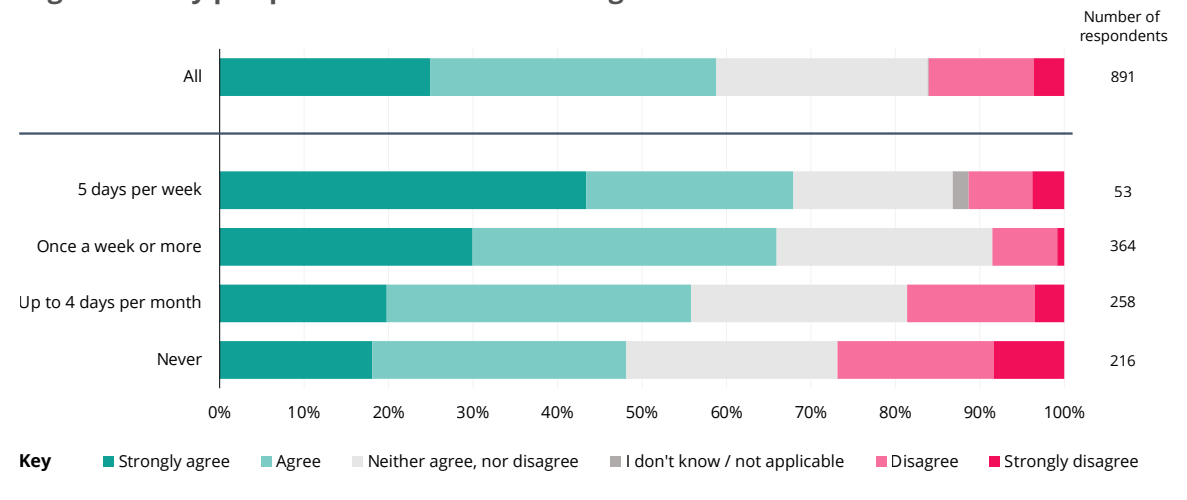
At the heart of considerations around remote working is the fundamental question of whether people can do their jobs just as well outside the office. Our study shows that more than four in five respondents (81%) believe they can perform their job functions – either internally or externally to citizens – just as effectively from a remote location.

Moreover, almost three in five (59%) said they are more productive when working remotely. A quarter neither agreed or disagreed, while 16% said that they are less productive at home.

Among those who never worked from home pre-Covid or only did occasionally, over half said they are more productive at home. But nearly a quarter (22%) said that they aren't, and another quarter declined to make a judgement. The more people had worked remotely prior to the pandemic, the more likely they were to say that they're more productive at home (see graph, right).

Overall some 13% said they cannot deliver their role's functions as effectively from home; these individuals were most likely to be doing jobs in science and engineering (19%); operational delivery; project delivery; or digital, data and technology (14% each). They were also most likely to work at the Home Office: 19% of Home Office respondents said they couldn't do their job as effectively from home, compared with just 5% at the Department for Education.

'I am more productive working remotely than when in the office/my workplace'
Segmented by pre-pandemic remote working situation





of respondents felt it wasn't hard to communicate and collaborate effectively while working from home

Teamwork and collaboration

As the first lockdown took hold, many organisations had concerns about the impact that a lack of face-to-face interaction would have on teamwork. Could video-conferencing really be as productive as meetings on site? Could online quizzes build the same rapport as water-cooler chats?

Collaboration and communication among colleagues

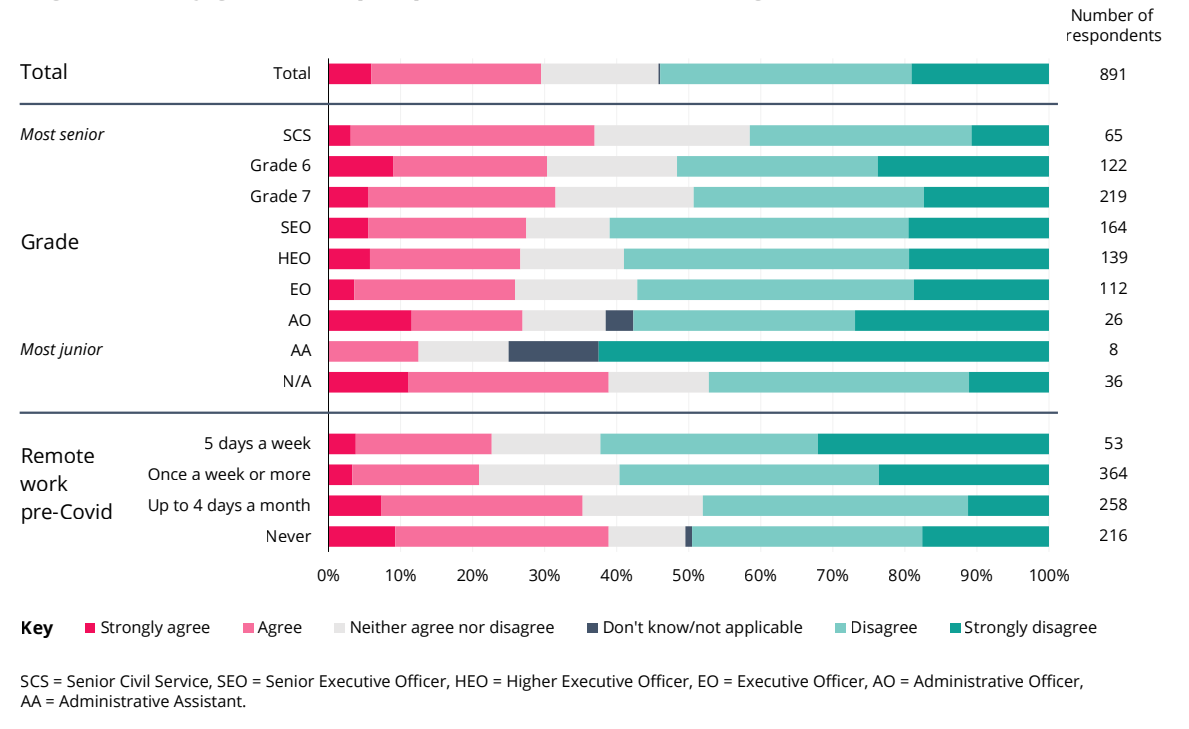
In our survey, there was no clear consensus on how remote working affects collaboration and communication with colleagues. A total of 54% felt it wasn't hard to communicate and collaborate effectively while working from home, but nearly 30% agreed or strongly agreed that it was a struggle. And a higher proportion of senior civil servants – 37% – found it a problem (see graph, right).

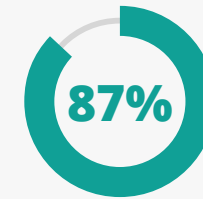
Team identity and purpose

There was also a split in responses to the question about team identity and purpose: overall, 52% said this is just as strong as in the office, but 35% disagreed and 13% did not have a view one way or the other. Among those at Grade 6 and above, slightly fewer – 49% – said team identity and purpose remain as strong.

Perceptions also tended to be affected by people's previous experiences of home working. Of those that previously worked from home either regularly or permanently, 58% agreed that team spirit has stayed strong, against 47% of those that never or occasionally worked remotely.

'Collaborating and/or communicating effectively with colleagues is a struggle when working remotely'
Segmented by grade and pre-pandemic remote working situation





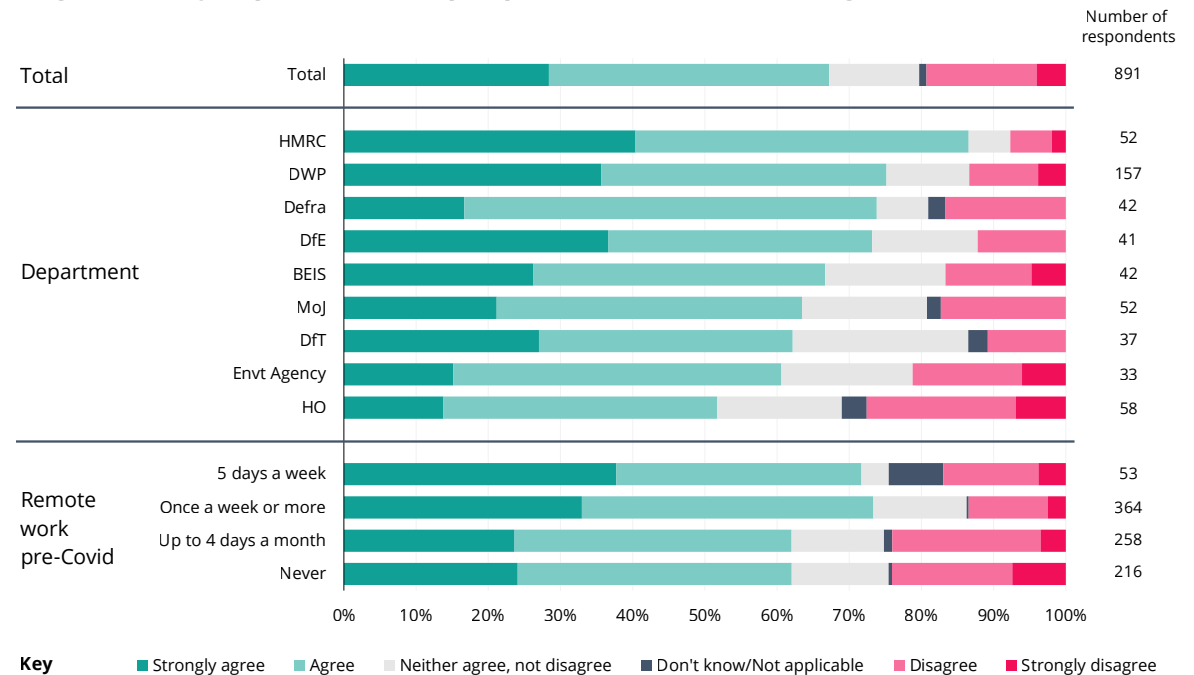
of HMRC respondents agreed that the right tools and systems were in place for teamworking

Collaboration tools and systems for teamworking

There is room for improvement in giving people the necessary support for optimal teamworking. While two-thirds of respondents agreed that the collaboration tools and systems are in place to enable their team to work together as closely as they did in the office, one in five said this is not the case and a further 13% were on the fence (see graph, right).

Home Office employees were least satisfied on this point, with just 52% of staff in agreement and 28% actively disagreeing. HMRC scored highly, with 87% of respondents agreeing that the right tools and systems are in place – an outcome, no doubt, of the department’s decision to move all its staff onto laptops and tablets many years ago, and its pro-active efforts at the start of the pandemic to expand support for home working. According to a report by the Institute of Government, prior to the pandemic HMRC had capacity for up to 9,000 people to work from home at one time. But by rapidly building new networks and deploying third-party infrastructure to expand flexibility and network capacity, the department was able to massively expand support for home working in just four days, enabling all 55,000 staff to work from home – including some 30,000 call-centre staff.

‘I feel that we now have the collaboration tools and systems in place to work as closely together as a team as we did in the office’
Segmented by department and pre-pandemic remote working situation



HMRC = Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, DWP = Department for Work and Pensions, Defra = Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, DfE = Department for Education, BEIS = Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Moj = Ministry of Justice, DfT = Department for Transport, Env Agency = Environment Agency, HO = Home Office. Only departments with 30 or more responses are included.



Dell Technologies comments:

At Dell Technologies, we have long leaned into flexible work: by the time the pandemic arrived, two thirds of our staff were already working flexibly – with 30% working remotely on any given day. When we first introduced these policies, we found that the biggest challenge wasn't technical; it was cultural. The teething problems were around collaboration: how do you do workshops, whiteboard sessions, training, teamworking? Online brainstorming sessions simply aren't as impactful and productive as physical ones: potential distractions

are greater, focus and engagement are lower, and it's just not as natural.

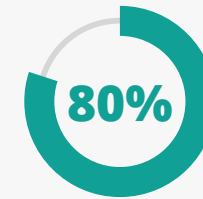
But what happened was that our offices evolved into workshop areas – fluid, creative hubs that people could drop into for meetings, workshops or training. We also found that people gravitated back to the office when they wanted a break from being at home. We can draw parallels with town centres: today they aren't so much where people go to shop, but where they go to socialise. And sure enough, once our staff were able to combine doing the more administrative tasks

from home with getting together in a physical space for the things that required team working and collaboration, productivity improved again. When the pandemic arrived, we were in a position to move 120,000 staff to home-working over a weekend.

One key lesson is that you can never have too much communication from the centre. It's so important that remote workers feel that they are part of the team, so they need constant communication from their head office or department.

Tariq Hussain, Senior Director





of respondents said they can access the same applications and databases at home as they could in the office

Organisational support and capability

Participants were asked about their employer’s ability to support remote working. Asked whether they felt that organisational budget constraints have prevented them from getting the support they need to work remotely, 9% agreed or strongly agreed. A further 13% neither agreed or disagreed, but three-quarters of respondents said they haven’t found budget limitations to be a problem.

Technological support

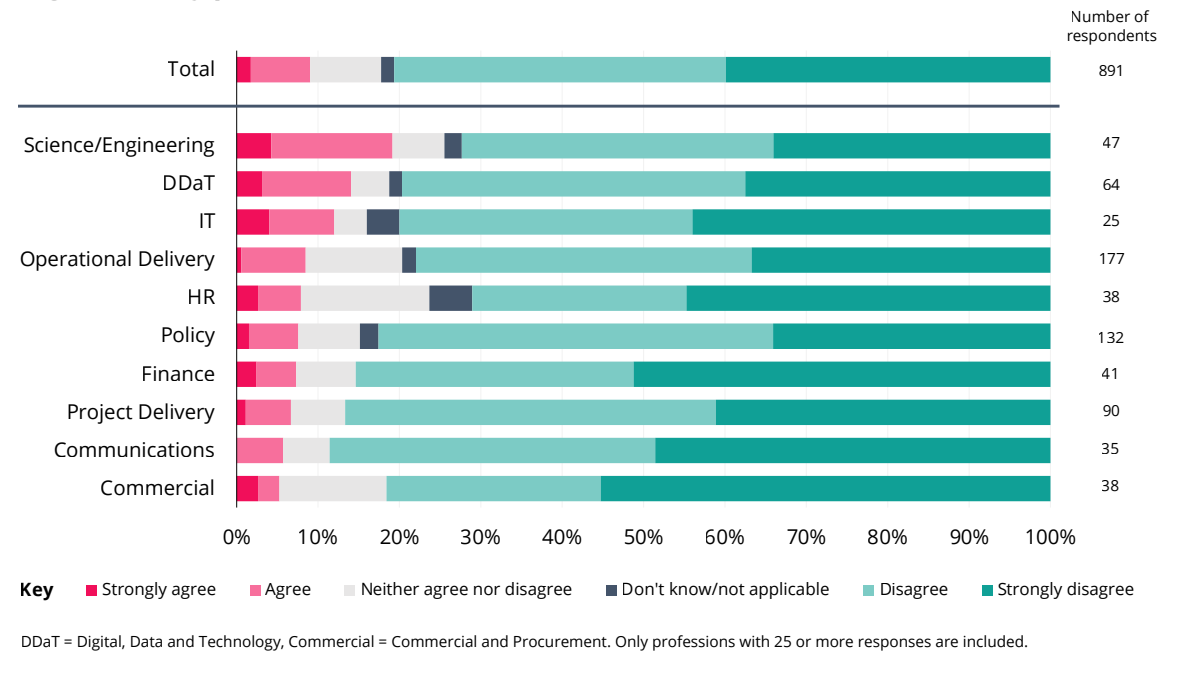
Some 93% said their organisation has provided them with the devices they need to work remotely; less than 4% overall said this isn’t the case.

The majority of respondents are also happy with the level of IT support they’ve received when working remotely. Nearly seven in ten said support is as timely and effective at home as it is in the office, with 17% disagreeing and 11% neither agreeing or disagreeing. Those who previously worked from home were more likely to be satisfied with the support provided (75%) than those used to being in the office (63%).

Access to and speed of tools and technology

A large majority of respondents (80%) said they can access the same applications and databases at home as they could in the office (see graph, right), with just one in ten

**‘I have less access to databases and applications than I had in the office’
Segmented by profession**





saying they have more limited access to these tools. BEIS scored highest here, with not a single employee saying that they have less access from home. The professions that were more likely to find access more limited tended to be high-tech functions: IT; digital, data, and technology; science and engineering.

Around three in five respondents said that the speed of access and use of their organisation’s services, applications and databases is comparable to that in the office. Another 15% said speed of access and use is faster than they experience in the office. But a quarter complained that accessing and using tools and services from home is slower; among those who never previously worked from home, lower speeds were noted by 31%.

Bandwidth

Seven out of ten respondents agreed that their employer’s network and data centres have sufficient bandwidth to allow full access as required to all staff working remotely.

Confidence in IT infrastructure

Overall, most participants (68%) said they have confidence that their organisation’s IT infrastructure is equipped to cope with the surge in employees working remotely. But around 17% did not share that confidence, and another 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

VPN, video-conferencing, cloud-based storage and clocking-in software

Four in five of those surveyed make use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection to access their workstation, and the majority (76%) have found it very or somewhat effective. Just 4% said it is not very or not at all effective (the rest do not require or have access to a VPN, or didn’t know).

An even greater proportion have used web-conferencing or virtual meeting software (99%), and cloud-based storage or file-sharing software was used by 86% of respondents. There was very high satisfaction with the effectiveness of these tools.

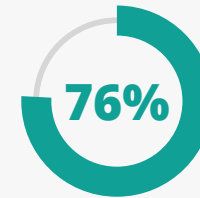
Line management

Management effectiveness doesn’t appear to have suffered badly from the lack of physical contact: 76% of respondents said they feel as well managed by their line manager as when working in the office, though 12% disagreed and 10% neither agreed nor disagreed. Responses were broadly similar across all grades.

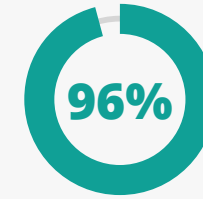
However, those who never worked from home previously were much more likely than others to report that they don’t feel as well managed, at 20% (versus 8% of those that always worked remotely before Covid).



of respondents said speed of access and use of their organisation’s services, apps and databases is faster than they experience in the office



of respondents have found a VPN connection to access their workstation very or somewhat effective



of respondents working in IT agreed that their employer had taken appropriate steps to ensure secure remote working by staff

Security and compliance

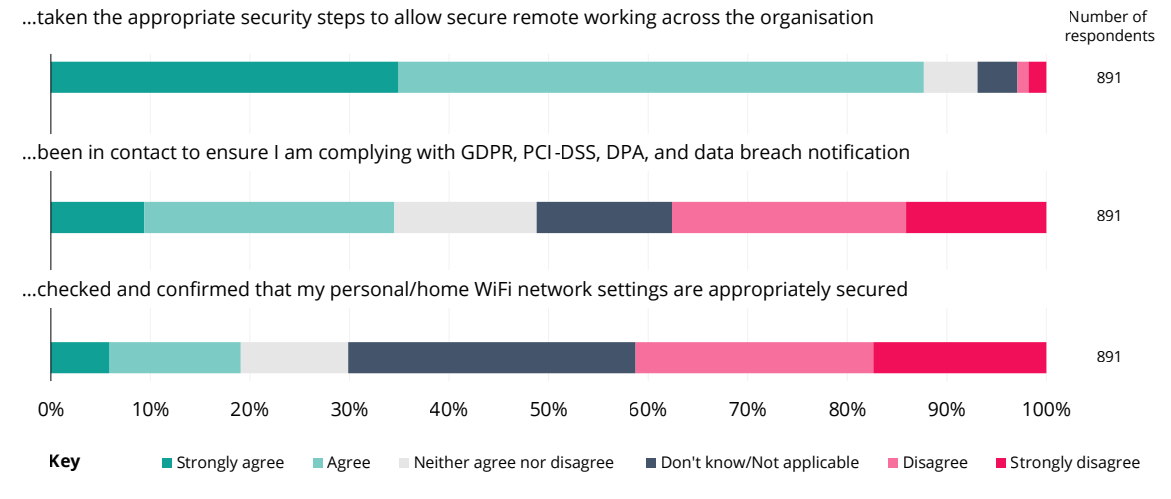
Participants were asked about their confidence in the security of the tools and technology they use to carry out their work. Threats to the security of public sector technologies and information had taken on heightened prominence even before the pandemic, with high-profile ransomware attacks on the NHS and local authorities. But the scramble to remote working by millions created huge opportunities for cyber criminals looking to exploit vulnerabilities in servers and endpoints.

Our survey revealed that confidence levels are generally high in the security of most software, hardware and infrastructure, as well as in compliance by co-workers.

In general, only 3% believed that their organisation has not taken appropriate security steps to enable secure remote working by staff (and 4% didn't know). Confidence in this was highest among IT professionals (see graph, right), 96% of whom agreed that adequate steps have been taken.

However, all organisations could do more to check the security of their employees' home internet connections and to ensure that people's home working practices are compliant with data protection rules.

'My organisation/employer has...'





of respondents said that their employer has checked that their home working arrangements are compliant with data protection rules

Connectivity and security of home internet and wifi

Nearly 15% admitted that their home wifi/internet connection makes it hard for them to work remotely, and another 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.

That said, over 90% were highly or moderately confident that their home wifi network is secure, and 80% had at least moderate confidence in the security of their personal internet service provider when using it for work purposes.

However, fewer than one in five respondents confirmed that their organisation has checked that their personal wifi network settings are appropriately secured with adequate levels of encryption. Some 23% didn't know and 41% suggested that theirs have not been checked (see graph, p17).

Information sharing and compliance with data protection regimes

There were similarly low levels of agreement with the statement that their employer has checked that their home working arrangements are compliant with data protection rules such as GDPR, PCI-DSS, the Data Protection Act and data breach notification. Around 35% said this has occurred, but 38% said it has not, and 24% either didn't know or did not agree or disagree.

That said, only a small proportion of respondents voiced concerns about the security of sharing information with colleagues and third parties. Less than 8% were concerned that data is less secure than when working in the office, while almost three-quarters had no such concerns.



Security training

Most staff (72%) said they are confident that they've been given sufficient training and guidance to ensure secure remote working, but 11% disagreed and 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Device security

Some 83% reported "high" confidence in the security of the devices supplied by the civil service to employees for remote working; a further 14% had "moderate" confidence. Just two individuals said they have no confidence at all in the security of the devices supplied to them.

Security of tools

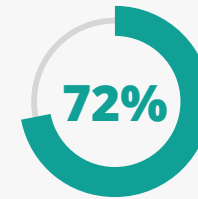
Around 58% had high confidence in the security of their VPN; another 18% were moderately confident. A large majority (91%) had high or moderately high faith in the security of their video-conferencing platform.

However, respondents were not so sure about the security of cloud-based storage services. Some 55% had high confidence and 25% were moderately confident, but 5% had only slight confidence and 11% didn't know.

Confidence in the actions of colleagues

Staff had pretty solid confidence in the security of the actions and activities of colleagues working remotely: 56% said their confidence in their co-workers was "high"; another 32% had moderate faith in them.

Confidence was highest among those that worked from home all the time prior to the pandemic: 70% of these respondents had high confidence in the security of their colleagues, against 50% of those that never worked from home previously.



of respondents said they are confident that they've been given sufficient training and guidance to ensure secure remote working



of respondents had high confidence about the security of cloud-based storage services



Dell Technologies comments:

For all organisations that moved their workforces to home working, there was a scramble to get people set up quickly. This exposed the lack of security that exists around lots of systems. Some of this is down to budget availability – security has historically always been a ‘nice to have’. Everybody knows it’s important, but when budgets are being laid out, security is almost always at the back end.

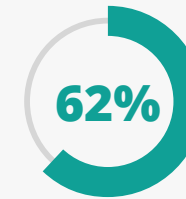
What we saw in the public sector was a rush to buy laptops and computers and the tools to allow people to work remotely. Intense competition for equipment saw many organisations

buying whatever they could get their hands on, with some having to buy equipment that would not have been their first choice. Then there was a rush to expand the digital infrastructure to support the rollout of devices. And while security should obviously have been at the front of all those conversations, it wasn’t. Yet the threat is ever more prevalent when everybody is working remotely because there are so many more touchpoints and so many more threat actors in the world. I don’t think enough is being done at a local level to stop some of the ransomware threat actors.

On a more positive note, I think security has moved from been seen as under the ownership of the IT department to being under the purview of the heads of departments and organisations. Technology is now fundamental to everything everybody does. If you consider how our government interacts with its citizens, we’ve seen everything move online, from collecting your waste to getting your prescriptions. And because of that the security element has to sit with every single senior member of staff.

Tariq Hussain, Senior Director





of respondents agreed their work/life balance has been improved by working from home

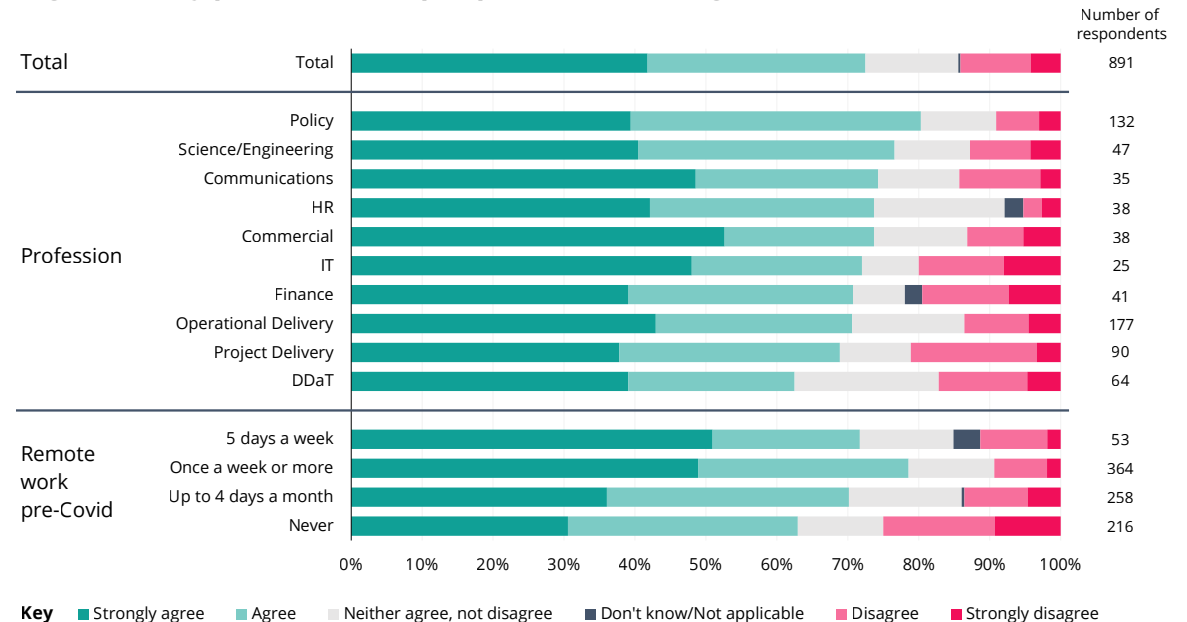
Work/life balance and wellbeing

Happily, most respondents to our survey reported an improvement in their work/life balance: 62% agreed theirs has been improved by working from home, and 72% agreed that their wellbeing would be greatly improved if they were able to continue to work remotely. Just 15% did not believe this to be the case, while 13% were ambivalent.

Enthusiasm for ongoing homeworking was highest among policy professionals, with 80% agreeing that their wellbeing would be greatly improved were they to continue working remotely (see graph, right). Staff at the Department for Education were most taken with the idea, with 85% agreeing that their wellbeing would be boosted and only 7% disagreeing.

The prospect of more home working in future was more important to those that already worked from home regularly before the pandemic: 78% of these agreed their wellbeing would be boosted by continuing to work remotely, against 67% of those who never or occasionally worked from home previously.

'I feel that my wellbeing would be greatly improved through the opportunity to continue to work remotely'
Segmented by profession and pre-pandemic working situation



DDaT = Digital, Data and Technology, Commercial = Commercial and Procurement. Only professions with 25 or more responses are included.



Dell Technologies comments:

There is a danger with working from home that some employees find it hard to switch off, both literally and metaphorically, and can end up working much longer hours at home than they would normally do in the office. This can lead to mental and physical health setbacks, higher stress levels and burnout, causing avoidable problems for both the employee and the organisation. Managers must be

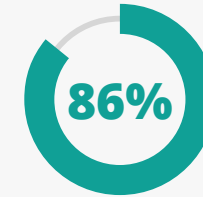
cognisant of this risk and find ways to manage it.

One thing I've started doing in my regular one-to-ones with my team members is for both of us to don earphones and get away from our computers. We walk and talk. It's so easy to sit at your desk or kitchen table from 8am and suddenly find the day has gone and you've barely moved. People need to force themselves to get out, because we've been doing this

for a year now and we've all formed these new habits, some of which are not very healthy. We don't yet know the full consequences, mental and physical, of this year-long experiment, but if widespread remote working is going to continue into the future – and these survey results suggest that it is – then it is really important that we all create healthy habits to complement it.

Tariq Hussain, Senior Director





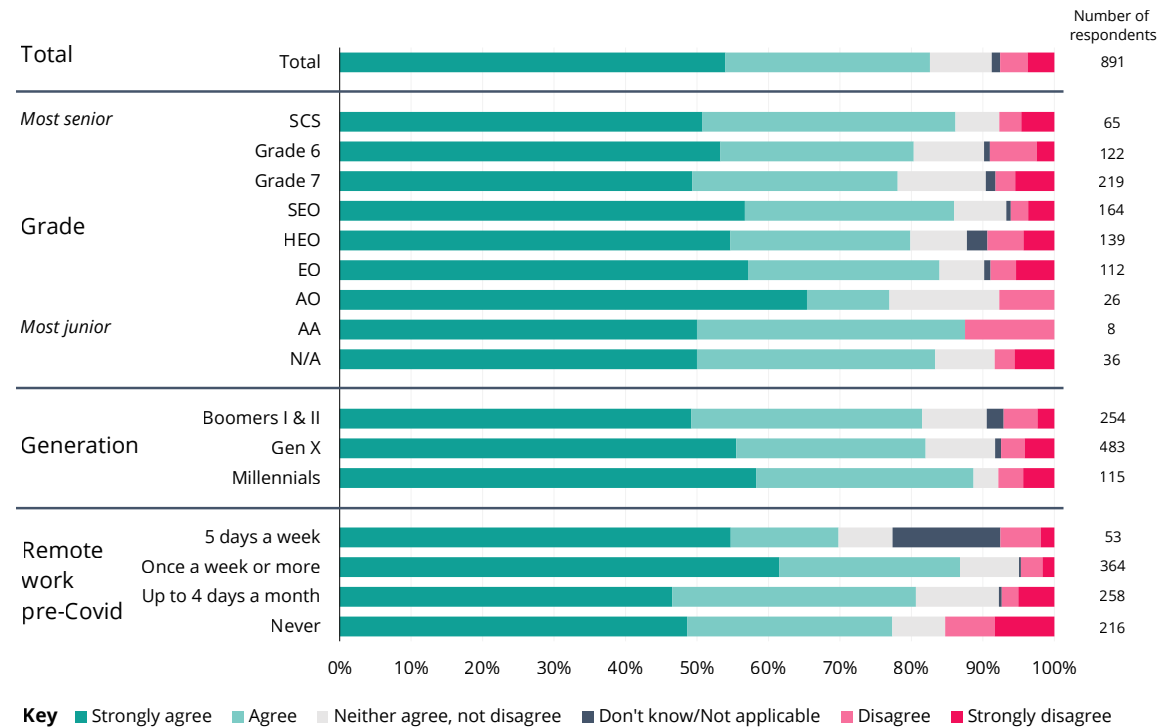
of senior civil servants say they want to want to work from home more frequently in future

Looking ahead

So, is working from home here to stay? It seems likely that the proportion of staff working remotely will remain elevated long after the pandemic risk has passed. In response to the statement: "I would like to work remotely/from home more frequently in the future", 54% strongly agreed and 28% agreed. Millennials are the most likely to want the opportunity, with 89% saying they want to (although it should be noted that this group made up just 13% of respondents to the survey). SCS grades are also eager, at 86% (see graph, right). And among organisations, staff at the Department for Education and the Environment Agency were keenest, at 93% and 91% respectively.

Overall, just 8% of civil servants do not wish to work from home more often than they did pre-pandemic, and 9% aren't bothered one way or the other.

'I would like to work remotely/from home more frequently in the future'
Segmented by grade, generation and pre-pandemic remote working situation



SCS = Senior Civil Service, SEO = Senior Executive Officer, HEO = Higher Executive Officer, EO = Executive Officer, AO = Administrative Officer, AA = Administrative Assistant. Gen Z excluded due to a small number of responses.



CONCLUSIONS

The future is hybrid

This study has shown that large numbers of people believe their lives could be improved by having more choice and flexibility over the way they carry out their work. It has also shown that in general, productivity is not negatively affected by allowing greater flexibility – surely a win-win for both the civil service and civil servants.

In the private sector, a number of large employers have already declared permanent changes to their working practices. Technology giants including Facebook, Twitter and Salesforce have all told staff they will have the option to work from home in the future. Outsourcing firm Capita is planning to close more than a third of its UK offices.

These announcements are important because as the economy recovers and recruitment picks up again, it is entirely possible that organisations' flexible working policies will take on new significance in the competition for talent, as candidates re-evaluate their priorities in the post-Covid world.

Extremes at either end of the spectrum – working all the time at home or spending all the time in the office – are probably not ideal for most individuals. Most people will accept that spending some time in the office is beneficial for social interaction, building organisational culture and loyalty, optimal teamworking and good mental health. That said, ongoing anxiety around the virus will mean some people are reluctant to rush back to commuting, and social distancing rules are likely to remain in place for a while yet.

So, going forward, it seems most likely that a hybrid of home and office-based working will emerge. This is certainly the view of Steven Boyd, chief executive of the Government Property Agency – the Cabinet Office team leading the creation of the Government Hub Network. At a Global Government Forum webinar in March, Boyd said the agency is “taking this opportunity to move much more towards a hybrid working approach with people

“
...large numbers of people believe their lives could be improved by having more choice and flexibility over the way they carry out their work...”



working some of the time in the office and some of the time at home”.

The fact that civil servants are in no rush to return to Whitehall plays neatly into the government’s ‘Levelling Up’ agenda, too: its stated plan to de-centralise the workforce by moving 22,000 civil servants out of London by 2030 will work much better if people are confident that they can pursue their careers and retain influence at the centre while living and working outside the South-East.

And the resulting environmental benefits, as carbon emissions are reduced by lower amounts of travel,

can also help the government to lead by example in efforts to achieve its target of net zero emissions by 2050.

However, given the sensitive nature of much of the work that the civil service does, security is a key factor to consider. Cyber criminals are increasingly looking to exploit weaknesses in systems that have been hastily assembled to support distributed workforces. Our survey suggests there is room for improvement in giving people the necessary support, tools and training for optimal secure homeworking, and this is something that all departments should be exploring as we look to the future.



Our survey suggests there is room for improvement in giving people the necessary support, tools and training for optimal secure homeworking...



Dell Technologies comments:

By and large, civil service organisations appear to have done a great job of managing the transition – virtually overnight – from what has traditionally been very much a ‘work-on-site’ culture to one of remote working. Civil servants themselves have discovered that it is entirely possible for most of them to do their jobs from home and most have found that they enjoy doing so. The perceived impact on people’s mental health and wellbeing has been largely positive.

Going forward, the civil service can capitalise on workers’ preferences for more flexible working, helping both to maximise cost savings across its real estate, and to realise its ambitions to ‘level up’ across the UK – whether that’s digitally, geographically or economically. The past year has proved

that with imagination, determination and technology, the business of government can be effectively delivered in all sorts of new ways. The challenge now is to build on the gains made, to bake in the cultural changes and to identify even more opportunities for success.

With growing numbers of private sector employers making public pronouncements about changes to their working practices in the future, greater flexibility is likely to become a significant factor in the battle for talent and skills. Employees may expect much more choice and control over their own work habits.

Of course, all organisations should be wary of making major decisions based solely on the evidence of the last 12 months, as we still don’t know

what all the effects of this mass remote working experiment will be. There are many unknown unknowns.

But we can certainly take some real positives from this study. The underlying theme to come out of the survey is that what didn’t seem possible before has proved to be absolutely achievable, and the prospect of much greater hybrid working going forward could be very positive. If we get it right, then productivity will increase, people’s mental health and wellbeing will improve and the balance between work and family life could be much more in kilter. We need to keep monitoring and measuring progress, adjusting our practices accordingly and making sure that both sides are getting what they need.

Tariq Hussain, Senior Director





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



The survey was designed and carried out by Global Government Forum – the publishing house for civil servants around the world – in partnership with Dell Technologies.

Fieldwork commenced online from 4th February 2021 to 1st March 2021, and attracted 906 responses.

The survey was disseminated via email invitations to Global Government Forum's UK readers, and respondents were self-selecting. Unavoidably, respondents may be skewed towards those civil servants whose roles involve heavy computer use – a group also more likely to be working from home during the pandemic – and we may have a disproportionately small sample group among the small minority of officials who haven't been working from home at all.

Survey participation was incentivised through a random prize draw, with three £100 online shopping vouchers offered by Global Government Forum as prizes.

The survey was anonymous, and appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that no individual can be identified based on their responses to the survey.

The results have not been weighted, and percentages have been rounded. The findings are statistically significant with a margin of error of +/- 5 points for the full dataset. Statistical calculations use the 95% confidence level, which means that we can be 95% confident that the results are within five points of the value given.

The survey findings section analyses sub-groups such as grouped Senior and Junior grades – the former including the Senior Civil Service and Grades 6/7, and the latter junior staff below Grade 7. These are also statistically significant at +/- five points at the 95% confidence level.

Data on smaller segmented groups (for example, individual departments and government professions) will have a larger margin of error due to small sample sizes, and care should be taken in making direct comparisons.

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