



# HYBRID WORKING

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## Introduction

A Hybrid working model can be described as 'blended working', where some employees are able to split their time between working remotely and attending the workplace. There are different interpretations of what hybrid working is and some organisations describe it as dividing teams into those working from home and those working in the workplace, others describe it as flexible working from home and/or in the workplace as the business/organisation allows.

The pandemic introduced many workers into working remotely because they were forced to work from home. This meant that jobs that were wholly workplace jobs could now be carried out from home as well. This has also been called 'Agile' working, but this was generally at the employer's desire and included 'hot desking'.

This paper addresses a hybrid model of working both at home and in the workplace for some of the working time and is sometimes referred to as 'blended working'.

In a recent survey by the UK Hazards Campaign with 375 responses, 80% of those surveyed said they were working in a workplace before the pandemic of 2020 hit, with just 4% working at home, 13% working a combination of at home and in the workplace and 4% working in another environment.

40% of those surveyed said they did not expect this to change after, but at least 25% said this would not be the same after work returned to normal.

The survey highlighted a number of issues affecting work activity at home including:

- surveillance of workers activity by their employer when they worked remotely,
- the challenges of combining caring responsibilities with work activities in their home,
- the lack of equipment or IT support for work carried out in their home,
- lack of risk assessments and safe methods of work
- increased workload and lack of work down time for work carried out at home.

# Benefits and Challenges of hybrid working

## What are the benefits and challenges for employers and workers?

There are many benefits and challenges to both employers and workers from a hybrid work model and the paper aims to identify those and then provide some recommended solutions to these challenges. What is clear from the list below, which is not exhaustive, is that there are generally more challenges than benefits for workers from a hybrid work model.

### Perceived Benefits to the Employer:

- Save money on premises, infrastructure, support such as cleaners, maintenance of buildings, offices et.
- Less workspaces needed, so hot desking more accepted
- Less paperwork and improved electronic documents
- More acceptance of new remote working practices, ie zoom conferences
- More flexible staff and work activities
- Reduced sickness absence
- Reduced absence for visits to doctors, dentists, consultants etc.
- Workers able to work around sudden caring responsibilities
- Workers collective strength may be weakened
- More employers control over individual working patterns
- More surveillance and monitoring available
- Money savings on printers, telephones, photocopiers etc
- Fewer Health and Safety consequences

### Perceived Challenges for Employers:

- Less control over work standard and quantity
- Workers under less supervision
- Security issues over work information
- GDPR issues
- Managing work equipment in people's houses as well as the workplace
- Assessing and controlling the risks in both settings
- Providing suitable training
- Providing suitable equipment
- Display Screen assessments in all settings
- Additional financial demands for utilities needed at home
- How to manage hours of work, times of staff working, absences for sickness and holidays and medical and other appointments

- Maintaining communication with workers off site
- Ensuring workers mental as well as physical health
- Security of computer systems being used
- Insurance and other costs

### **Benefits to Workers:**

- Save money on travel, work clothes, refreshments
- Less time on travel
- Reduces pollution exposure because of reduced travel
- More flexible work patterns to suit personal circumstances and preferences
- Flexibility around caring responsibilities
- Flexibility around disabilities
- An improved life-work balance
- Improved mental and physical health
- Working without distractions
- More contact with family members

### **Challenges for workers:**

- Excessive workload
- No cut off times for work to finish
- Increased mental health impact of work-related stress
- Policies and procedures not appropriate for blended working
- Increased costs of working from home on utility bills, equipment
- Overtime not being paid
- Time off to attend doctors, dentists, opticians not being paid
- Feeling isolated and proving worth by increasing workload
- Where flexible working ensuring correct hours and time off in lieu
- Ensuring resources available to you to do the job
- Increased costs of utilities and resources
- Insurance of equipment and working at home
- Reduced access to Trade Union support and loss of collective strength
- Loss of facilities provided at work such as free drinks or subsidised canteen
- Loss of contact and support from colleagues
- No separation between work and home life
- Loss of privacy of home life because of intrusive surveillance
- Young and new workers not as supported
- Caring responsibilities distracting from work
- Networking with other colleagues
- Not aware of informal conversations about promotion opportunities

- Getting employer to make reasonable adjustments
- Risk assessments
- Support for mental health and work-related stress
- Making space for office equipment

## What are the Health, Safety and Welfare issues associated with hybrid working?

### Employers Legal duties:

The Health Safety at Work Act places duties on employers to ensure the physical and mental health of their employees and under the Management of Health, Safety at Work Regulations employers must carry out 'suitable and sufficient' Risk Assessments to identify and control the risks – wherever they work.

An employer with 5 or more employees must have a written health and safety policy which is accessible to all staff.

Employers also have duties under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee (SRSC) Regs and should consult safety reps about health and safety issues including risk assessments.

### There are a number of health and safety issues around hybrid working:

1. IT equipment / Display screen equipment (DSE):
  - a. Employers must conduct DSE assessments which include considering the whole workstation, equipment, furniture, and work conditions
  - b. Employers need to know what work is being done, to ensure equipment is fit for purpose and in safe condition
  - c. The employer should assess if there are any reasonable adjustments needed

See Working with a computer at home: <https://qmhazards.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Working-with-a-computer-at-home-.pdf> for more information

2. Equipment safety
  - a. The employer has a responsibility to ensure any work equipment is suitable for use and safe to use so there should be an initial inspection of the equipment and then periodically to maintain it in a safe condition
  - b. Anyone using the equipment must be trained in its safe use

- c. Any electrical equipment must comply with the electricity at Work Regs and be maintained in good working order and replaced if necessary.
  - d. There should be a reporting policy to report any breakdowns or concerns on equipment
- 3. Equipment should be fit for purpose
  - a. Audio equipment should be high quality so that voices are clear and include noise cancellation. They should also be fitted with safety devices to stop loud noises which could cause hearing loss.
  - b. Screens should be clear to read and at the correct resolution
  - c. Work being carried out online must be able to be done without constant interruptions on the internet or poor bandwidth
- 4. Homeworking and domestic abuse
  - a. Employers should publish information including contact information for staff to raise any concerns and seek appropriate support
  - b. Flexible working hours may help support individuals
  - c. Enable individuals to access support during working hours
  - d. Maintain strict confidentiality with individual staff members about their working arrangements
- 5. Lone working
  - a. For workers who live alone or who are working alone for long periods of time employers should put in place procedures to maintain contact during the working day.
  - b. Staff must be able to access support and know procedures to gain it
  - c. Employers must assess their mental and physical health to determine additional support needed preferably via expert independent services
- 6. Security
  - a. There must be safe and secure premises for individuals to meet 3<sup>rd</sup> party, other staff, in the workplace or in a public area/building and not in their homes for the purpose of their work
  - b. Any meetings outside the home or their workplace must be recorded and assessed to ensure safety during the meeting and returned home reported.
  - c. Individuals should not use personal phones, social media accounts, personal emails or provide home addresses or information for work purposes
- 7. Work related stress or work related mental ill health

- a. All work activity should be risk assessed. This could be by using HSE Management standards to identify work related stress factors and controls needed to remove them.
- b. If reasonable adjustments are needed, then this should be recorded in a disability passport and periodically reviewed.
- c. Management should ensure regular support and contact

#### 8. Life work balance

- a. Staff should be clear about the hours they are expected to work and the times they are required to be available to work and this should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are able to cope with the workload in the times available.
- b. There should be clear times when staff can turn off computers, phones, and other devices to ensure a complete break from work activities.
- c. Also, the working time regulations apply to home working and must be adhered to. This includes uninterrupted rest breaks.
- d. Caring responsibilities should be accommodated, as should medical appointments.

#### 9. Monitoring

- a. Employers must be clear about what and how staff work will be monitored.
- b. This should be done by negotiation with trade unions

#### 10. Data protection

- a. There must be clear instruction and controls to ensure that information used for work purposes is secure and confidential and only accessed in accordance with your organisation's rules. This will need to be reviewed for each home working environment to ensure that individuals are able to comply

#### 11. Sickness, absence, holidays, and flexible working

- a. All the same procedures should apply to home working as it does to workplace working.
- b. Clear policies and procedures must be known and available

### Safety Reps Checklist:

No.	Description	completed
1	Ask your employer about their use of hybrid working and a copy of their hybrid policy	
2	Ask for a copy of the hybrid workers risk assessment	
3	Check that all risks have been identified including physical and mental health risks	
4	Ask for a copy of the DSE assessment	
5	Ask what equipment has been provided and ensure that it is being used in a safe environment. Has the employer provided all costs associated with the physical workstation	
6	Check the hours that the hybrid workers are working	
7	Check what health and safety training is needed and what has been provided	
8	Check with those working from home how they are managing their hours and workload	
9	Check with management how often and how they are communicating with staff	
10	Check what the increased cost of homeworking is and how much the employer is providing? Does it include contributions to heating, lighting, electricity, phone calls, internet access, any insurance costs for equipment and business at home	
11	Check if the worker has had an individual risk assessment and if a disability passport has been completed or needs to be completed including reasonable adjustments being made	
12	Ensure there are policies on and Check that the worker knows about work policies on: Lone working Bullying and Harassment Online bullying Hours of work and breaks Safe use of DSE How to access occupational health help and support Workload Sickness and absence Employee security Data protection and data security	
13	Check that the worker knows how to report health and safety concerns, what should be reported and who to report them to	
14	Check how the employer is ensuring the premises are safe to work in and that the working environment has suitable space	
15	Check that IT support is in place, what times, and including providing additional training	



16	Check if the employees work is being monitored and how?	
17	Check how often the worker will attend the workplace	
18	Check if the hybrid working arrangement is subject to review	
19	How is travel and attendance being claimed in expenses	
20	Check that Long-Covid absence is being viewed as a disability with reasonable adjustments and not treated as any other sickness	

**Key principles for healthy and safe hybrid working:**

1. Employers must ensure the health, safety and welfare of workers wherever they work.
2. Hybrid working must be voluntary and agreed by the worker and can be ended by the worker
3. Employers must provide health and safety reps with full access to workers where every they work, including inspections
4. Employers must maintain communications and relationships with hybrid workers
5. Hybrid workers are entitled to rest periods, time of for sickness and hybrid working must not undermine working conditions
6. Hybrid working must not lead to increased workloads or longer hours and hybrid workers must be able to switch off devices at the end of their working day
7. Hybrid working must not weaken collective bargaining
8. Hybrid workers must have the right to form and join a trade union with full consultation, wherever they work and for reps to have time off with pay for all trade union duties
9. Hybrid workers must have the ability to work safely and healthily in either the workplace or in their home.
10. Hybrid working should be reviewed regularly to ensure workers are not suffering detrimentally.

**See further information:**

Working with a computer at home: <https://gmhazards.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Working-with-a-computer-at-home-.pdf>

Safety reps guide: <https://gmhazards.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/safety-reps-guide.pdf>