

FUTURE WORLD
OF WORK

Business (not) as usual

Future World of Work – one year on

Research conducted by Afshan Iqbal, Dr Matthew Davis
& Dr Mark Robinson - [Leeds University Business School](#)

WALKER
MORRIS



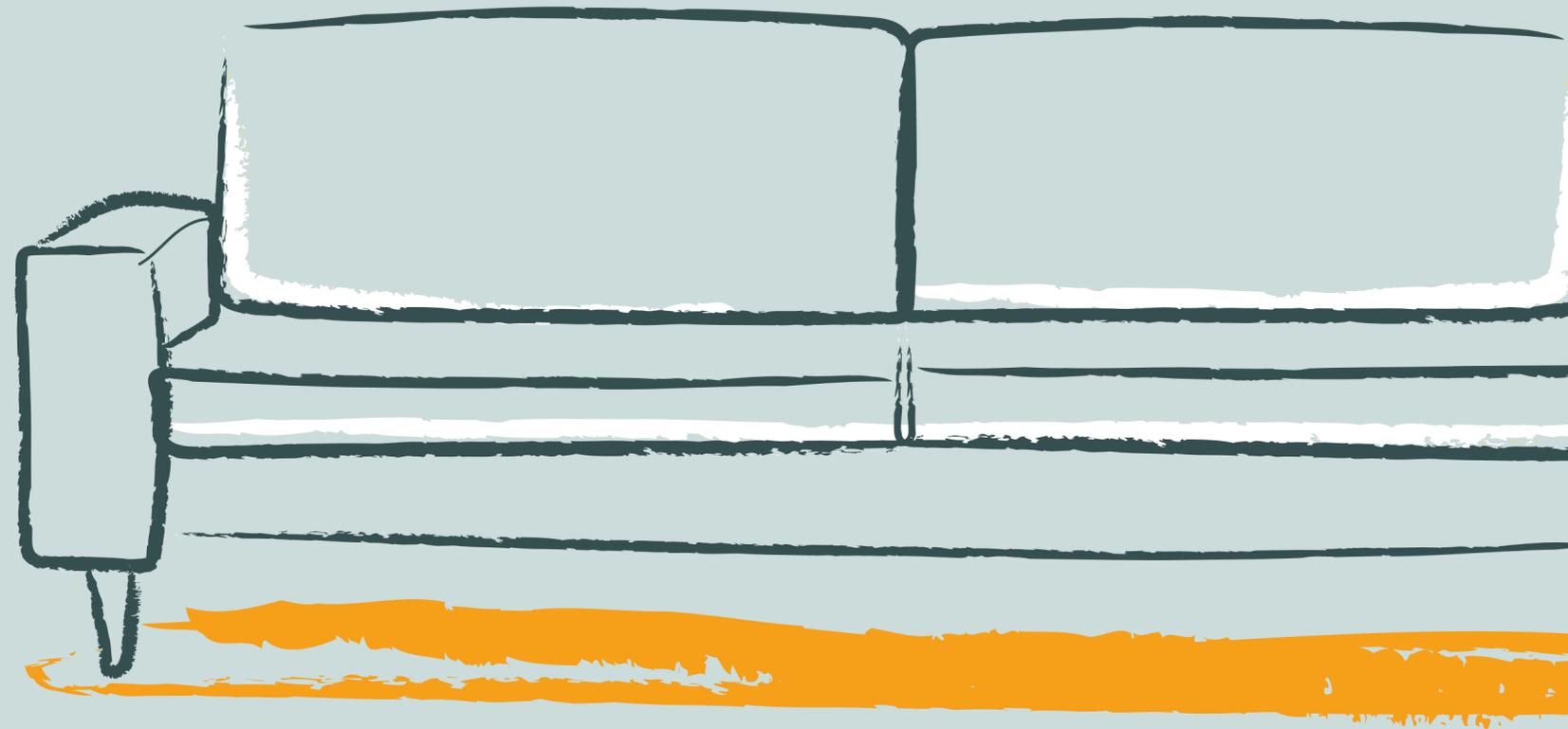

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Business (not) as usual

The pandemic brought sweeping changes to the way we work. Many employers were forced to implement new practices or policies, giving staff the flexibility that they may never have considered prior to the pandemic.

Over the last 12 months we've been investigating how new business models, can work effectively. What does this mean for our working and living environments? And how do organisations best manage their employees to maintain a happy and productive workforce?

Welcome to the Future
World of Work - one year on.



Our survey

At the start of the pandemic we partnered with Leeds University Business School to carry out a quantitative and qualitative survey covering a range of issues relating to home working and the return to work. Initially we set out to understand how our own people are dealing with current situation. However the survey results extend across a wide range of companies, sectors and regions.

We ran the survey again nine months later to measure how attitudes had changed.



Industry	Response
Accommodation or food services	9
Admin, support, waste management or remediation services	11
Arts, entertainment or recreation	24
Construction	65
Educational services	68
Finance or insurance	52
Forestry, fishing, hunting or agriculture support	3
Healthcare or social assistance	20
Information	42
Management of companies or enterprises	9
Manufacturing	16
Mining	2
Other	65
Professional, scientific or technical services	302
Real estate or rental and leasing	4
Retail trade	19
Transportation or warehousing	12
Utilities	11
Wholesale trade	6
Total	740

What we
learned

Going it alone

We looked at a range of factors affecting their day-to-day lives. While working from home is not without its challenges there are many positives too.

As with the first survey, many respondents enjoyed a greater sense of autonomy. Having control over their work tasks and deciding how and when certain tasks are done increased performance and wellbeing.



“It has been less stressful working from home as I have more time to prepare.”

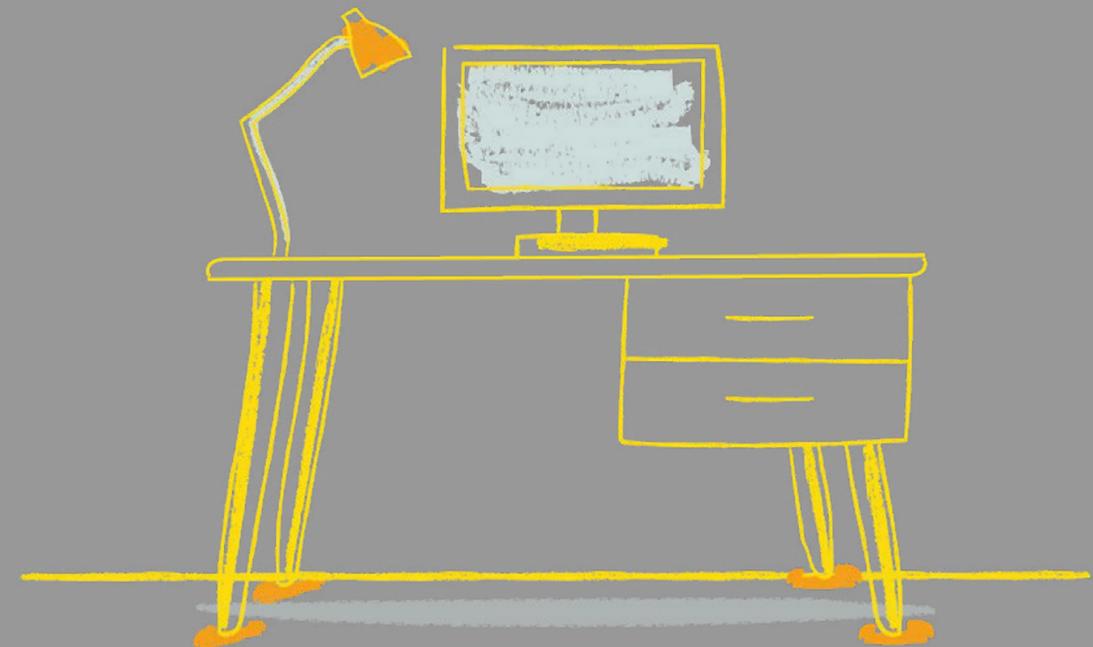
“I felt really happy to work from home while I had a lot of desk work to do.”

Technostress

In our last survey we noticed that across all industries frustrations over sluggish broadband, increased email traffic and adapting to new technology and ways of working, all contributed to increasing 'technostress', which had a negative impact on both performance and wellbeing.

In our second survey, although the technostress is slightly weaker, it is still statistically significant, indicating that while some challenges have been overcome, technostress is still very much there.

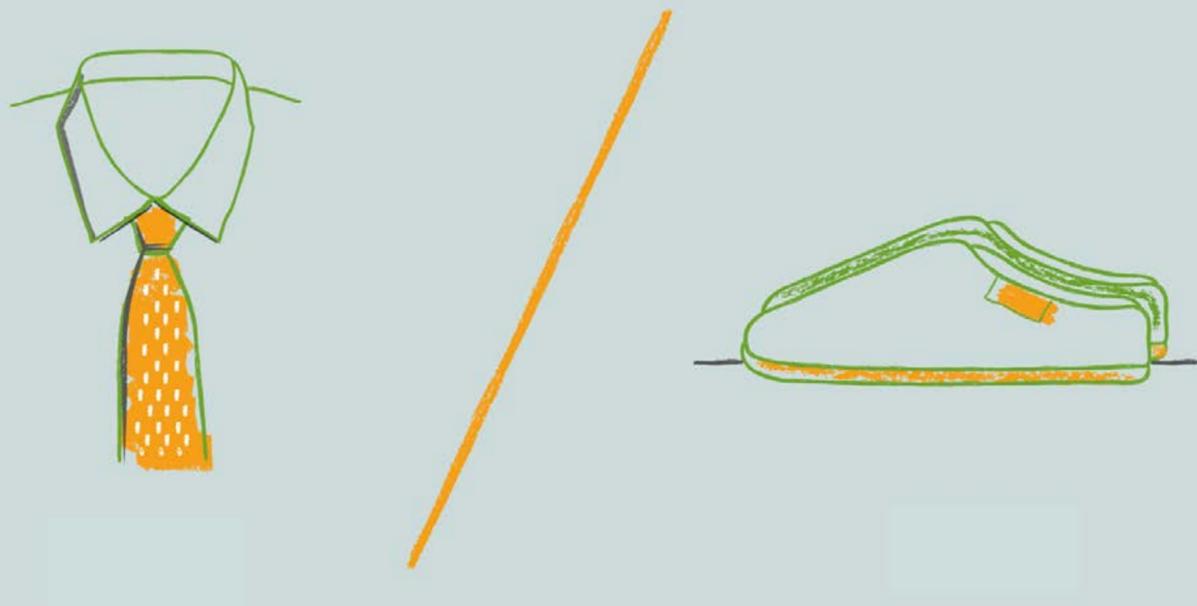
“When there is a problem
it's much more difficult to
solve it by phone calls or
video calls or even e-mails
and it makes me stressed”



Work/life unbalanced

As working from home and living in lockdown became the norm, many respondents reported difficulties separating their working lives from their home lives. This blurring of the boundaries meant that many ended up working longer hours and found it hard to switch off at the end of the working day.

Others reported increases in workload which squeezed the benefits of increased leisure time seen in the first lockdown and led reports of feeling like they were 'living at work' rather than 'working from home'.



“It has been very hard to set boundaries between work and home life, with the temptation to keep working long after you would have done in the office.”

So long commute

For others, not having to spend a significant proportion of the day commuting provided more time for work, family and leisure. This 'extra' time gave them a greater sense of control over their lives and increased their wellbeing.

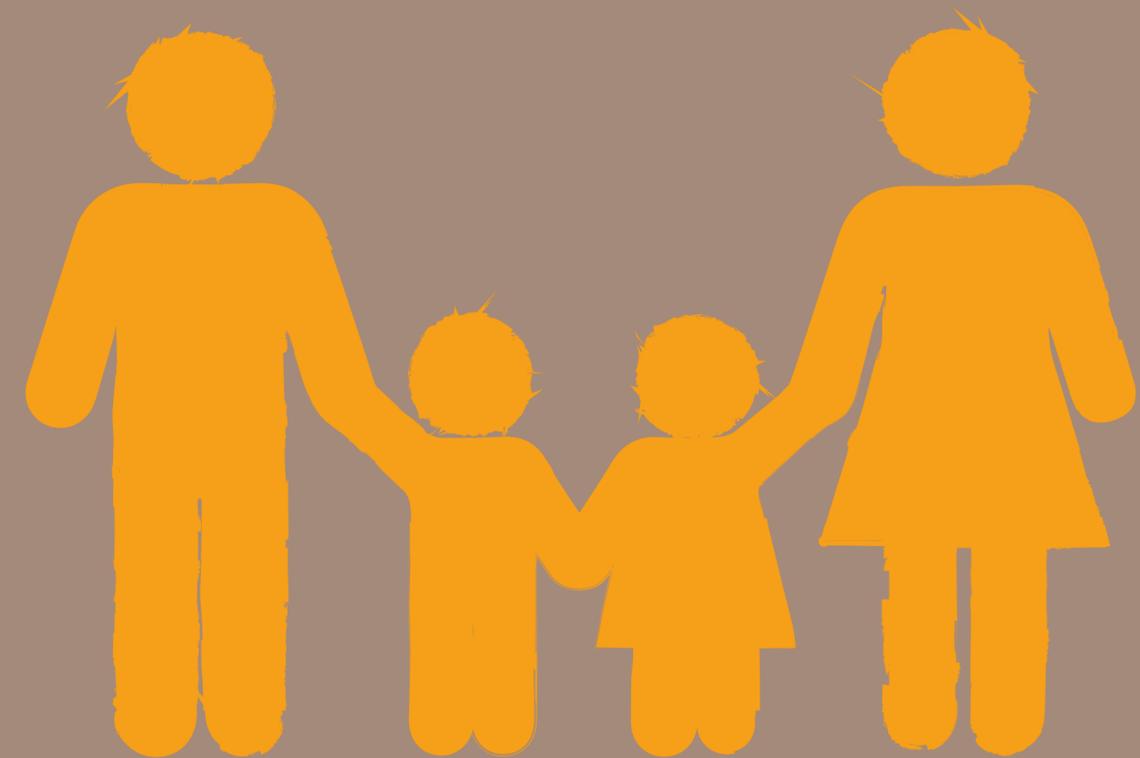
“I get to spend time with my family and get to sleep more (I am a night shift worker) – I get an extra hour a day due to not travelling to work.”



The family factor

Around a third of the respondents in both surveys had children. And as schools went into lockdown yet again over the winter, juggling the demands of work and homeschooling, coupled with shorter days and less opportunity for children to play outside, left many with greater sense of work family conflict.

“It has allowed me to spend more time with my children which is a positive thing. The flip side is that it is often difficult to concentrate fully on my work with my children in the house so I find I have to work more on a night to catch up.”



Mental health and wellbeing

The impact on mental health and wellbeing while working from home was a varied picture with individuals having very different experiences.

Some respondents found the shorter days and cold weather of the winter lockdown more difficult than the summer and reported feeling isolated and lonely.

Some of the younger respondents were worried about their career development and tended to live in apartments with no outdoor living space or in shared living arrangements which made working from home difficult.

Many respondents had taken steps to manage their mental health and wellbeing. Putting routine and structures in place, taking regular exercise, improving their diet and making efforts to keep in contact with friends and family. Others struggled to find a work life balance because workload demands were so high or struggled to find methods of managing their mental health and wellbeing



“It has made me a little more anxious about progression and whether I am learning enough from remote working.”

Tips for employers

Respondents were asked what employers could do to help manage mental health and wellbeing while working from home. Communication from managers was key with a positive correlation between wellbeing and perceived supervisor / peer support.

Employees welcomed financial contributions towards equipment for working at home. Other suggestions included treats or pick me ups delivered to home or providing wellbeing and incentive programmes.

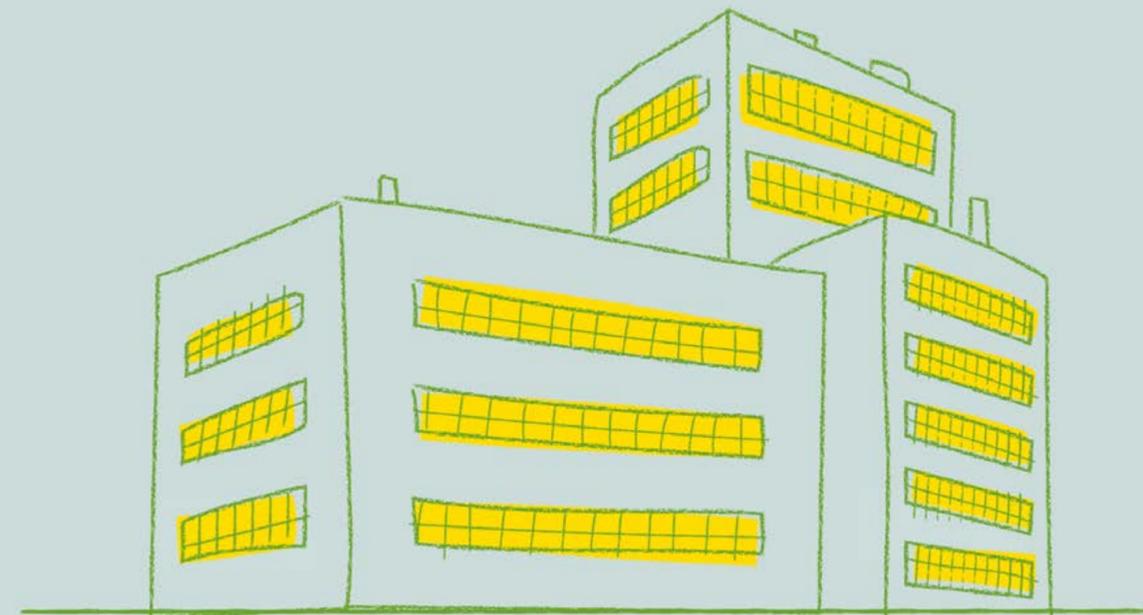
“Provide little boosts. These were previously provided a treats in the office. Perhaps little perks like Just Eat vouchers or online exercise classes.”



Remember the office?

When asked what they are looking forward to about returning to the office, some respondents were looking forward to a return to a more structured working day, the ability to interact and bounce ideas with colleagues rather than the seemingly endless video calls and emails.

Others were more cautious about returning and preferred a more phased approach to returning. Some had anxieties about transitioning from a Covid-safe home environment to the office with perceived higher risks of transmissions (regardless of how safe the measures in place are) and many were dreading a return to the commute.



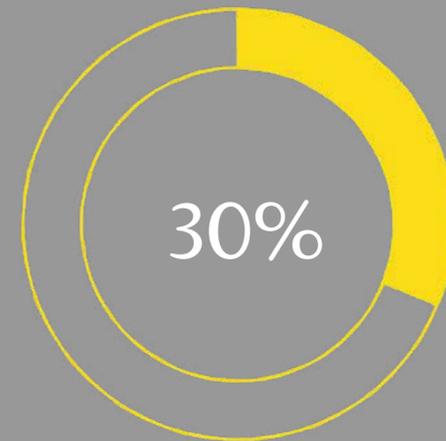
“I’m very much looking forward to getting back more regularly, but worry that it will never have the same buzz and that I’ll be working in a very quiet environment whether I’m at the office or at home.”

The return to work

It is clear that while some workers may welcome a return to the physical workplace, others may feel understandably anxious and unsure of what to expect. Effective communication and open dialogue will be key.

Across all responses there was still a strong preference to spend at least part of the week working from home. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents wanted to spend three days or less in the office per week.

Preferred number of days in the office
across all respondents



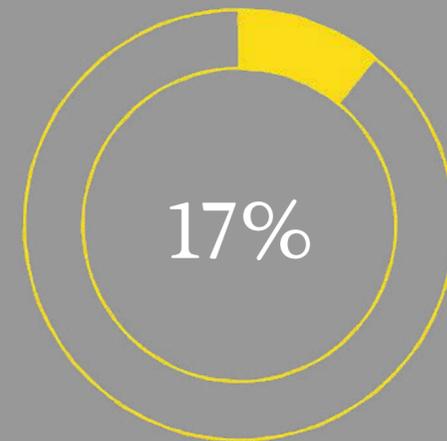
0 - 1 day



1 - 2 days



2 - 3 days



3 - 4 days



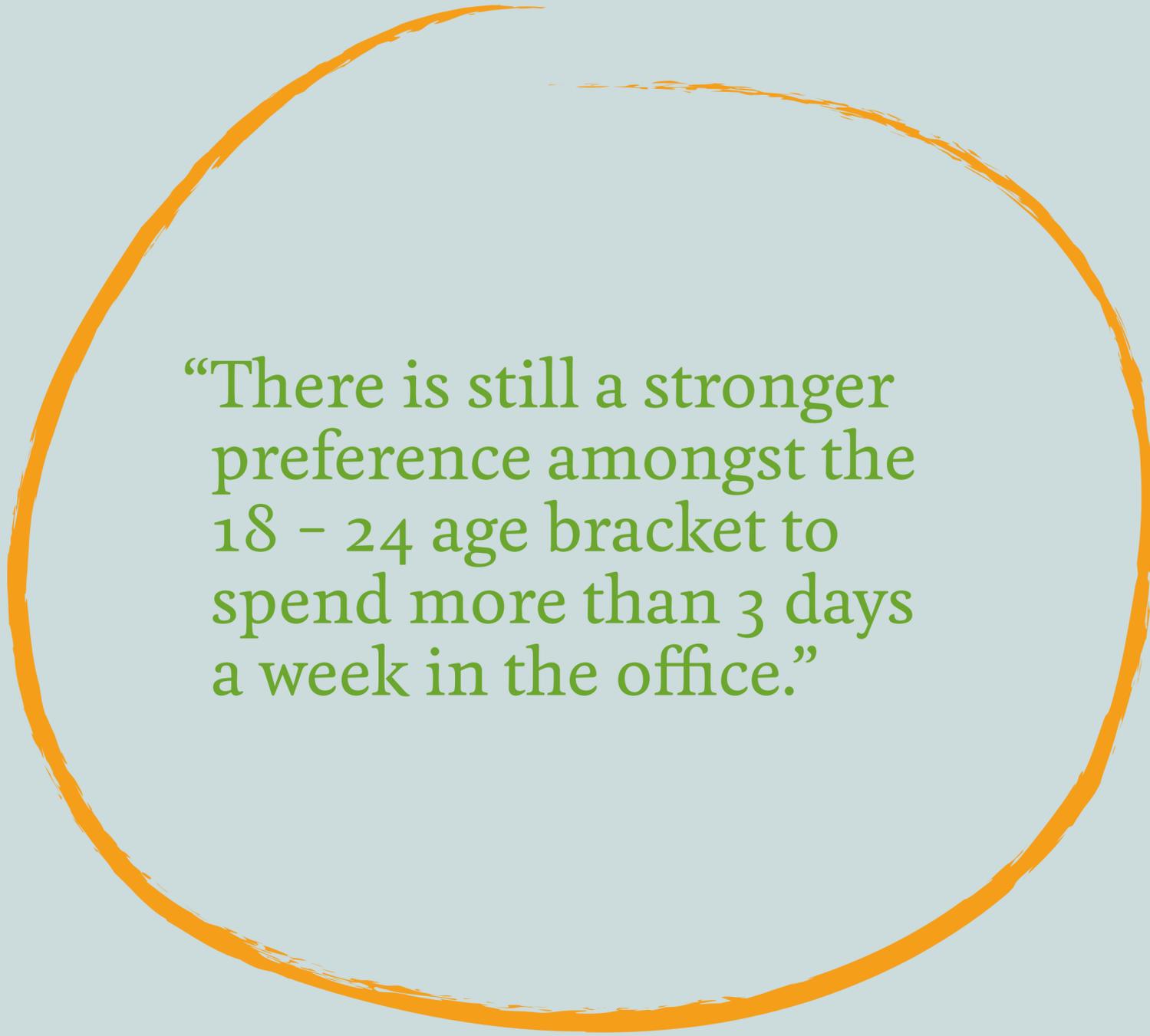
4 - 5 days

The return to work – by age

There are some differences by age. There is still a stronger preference amongst the 18 – 24 age bracket spend a greater proportion of time in the office.

In the 18 – 24 age bracket 53.6% still want to spend more than 3 days a week in the office. Representing only a marginal reduction of 6% from the first survey of 60%.

Although only 27% of 18 – 24 year olds would prefer to work from the office 4 – 5 days a week, compared to 31% in the first survey. Perhaps indicating that they have adapted to working from home, altered their routines or improved their living arrangements.

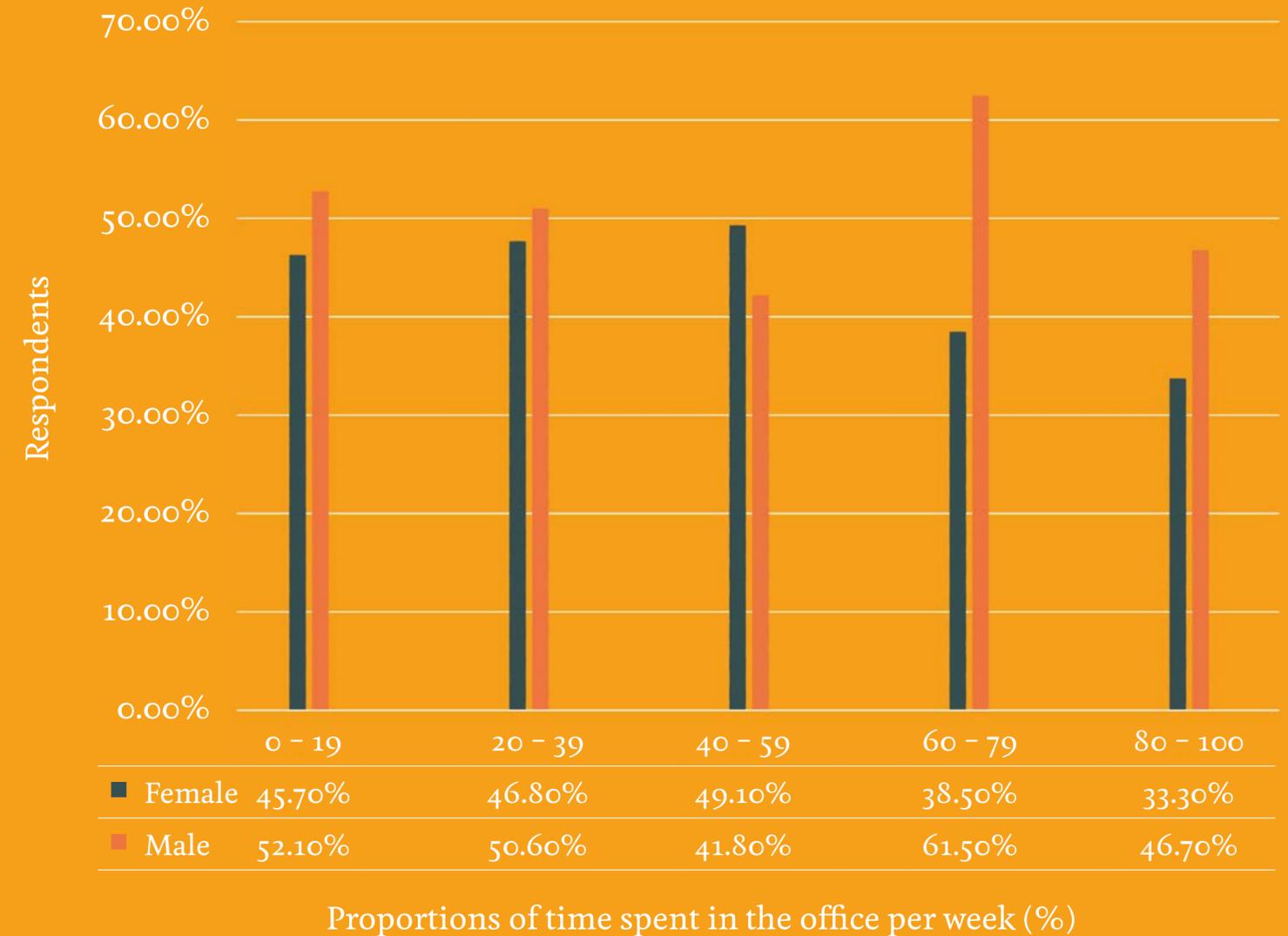


“There is still a stronger preference amongst the 18 – 24 age bracket to spend more than 3 days a week in the office.”

The return to work – by gender

In summer 2020, 66% of men reported a preference to work from the office for 4 – 5 days a week, (compared to 47% in the second survey). Whereas there is no change for the women – a third of women stated a future preference to spend 4 – 5 days in the office in both surveys.

A cross – industry preference to work from the office in the future, by gender.



Some discrepancies may occur due to participant attrition between the two surveys and undisclosed respondent preferences.

The return to work – by gender

Out of the respondents who stated their future preference is to work from the office for 4 – 5 days a week:

47%
were male

33%
were female

However, the male percentage has reduced slightly since the first survey.

The return to work – the family factor

Over the two surveys the preferences for spending time at the office for those with children and those without children were surprisingly similar.

Proportion of respondents that would prefer to spend three or more days in the office:

First survey

35%

without children

34%

with children

Second survey

27%

without children

25%

with children

The shape of the future

Predictions and questions

HR

- How do employers manage employees who are anxious about returning to work? And how do HR managers deal with new challenges around mental health?
- What employee benefits are still suitable in the new world of work? How can employers retain and motivate employees in a new working culture?
- How can new business models, particularly those using new technology effectively work? Are workers correctly classified?
- How will changes in working patterns affect the culture of organisations?
- Do employment policies need to be updated to accommodate flexible working practices? Will there be an influx of flexible working requests and how should these be managed?
- Is it reasonable to require employees to come into the office for certain meetings or on certain days?

Real estate

- What do the trends in future working mean for how we design and use the office in the future?
- How do these trends affect commercial real estate and do we need to look at different forms of leases?
- Does the new flexibility in planning laws mean that there are new opportunities for conversion of commercial real estate?
- Can tenants withhold rent or terminate leases?
- Are there more flexible lease options available?

Living

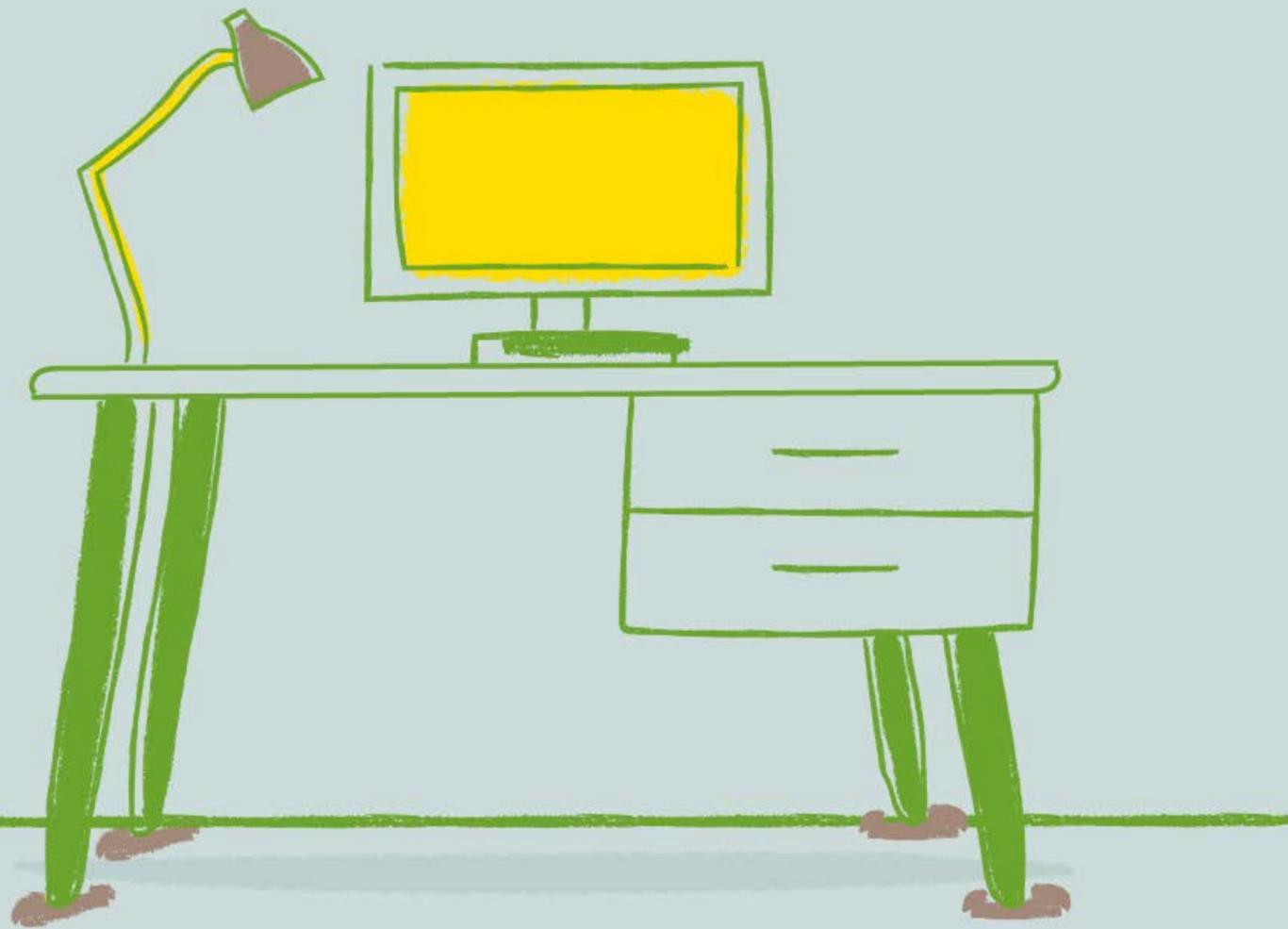
- How will the long-term trend for home working affect the design and location of our homes and offices?

Health & safety

- What are my responsibilities for employees whilst working from home from a health and safety perspective.

Data security and protection

- Can employers monitor employee working practices? What is acceptable and how far is too far?
- What processes do employers need to put in place to ensure compliance with data security standards?



These and other questions we'll be addressing in upcoming articles and webinars dedicated to the Future World of Work.

Visit our Future World of Work hub [here](#) to make sure you don't miss out.

Alternatively, contact one of our specialists on the next page if you'd like to talk about any of the issues raised by this report. We're here, for your future.

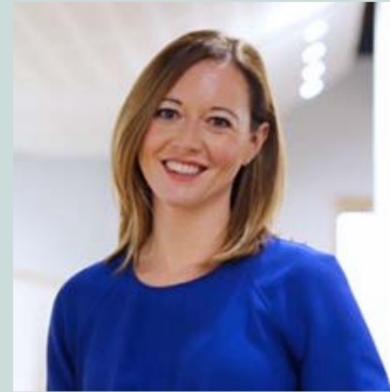
FUTURE WORLD OF WORK



Karl Anders
Housing Management
& Litigation
karl.anders@walkermorris.co.uk
+44 (0)113 283 2631



Aqeel Adnan
Planning & Environment
aqeel.adnan@walkermorris.co.uk
+44(0)113 283 2588



Lucy Gordon
Employment
lucy.gordon@walkermorris.co.uk
+44 (0)113 283 4552



Daniel Lyon
Construction & Engineering
daniel.lyon@walkermorris.co.uk
+44 (0)113 283 2635



Mark Byrne
Real Estate
mark.byrne@walkermorris.co.uk
+44 (0)113 283 2662

Afshan Iqbal
Doctoral Researcher
Leeds University Business School
A.Iqbal1@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Mark Robinson
Associate Professor
Leeds University Business School
m.robinson@lubs.leeds.ac.uk

Dr Matthew Davis, C.Psychol. AFBPsS, CMBE
Associate Professor
Leeds University Business School
M.Davis@Leeds.ac.uk

