

As businesses adopt new working models post pandemic what must you consider as an employee



As many businesses adopt hybrid working models, where their employees split their time between working from home and attending the workplace, we're seeing those employees question whether they want to return to the office and the concerns they have about new model. We're assisting employees with the challenges (both legal and practical) they face which we'll be discussing over the coming weeks.

To start, we're going to consider whether your business can force you back to the office setting?

What is your place of work?

Start by checking what your contract says about where you are required to work. Often the workplace is identified as a particular address or the premises of your employer or another company in the Group. This may not be up to date and should have been changed during lockdown when you worked from home.

Many employees fear that returning to work will put them (or those they care for) at greater health risk. Where you have concerns that your workplace is seriously unsafe or dangerous, the law protects you if you decide not to return to the workplace. The key issue will always be whether your employer has taken steps to ensure that you are safe at work – ensuring good ventilation, arranging regular cleaning of the workspaces etc.. Many employers are publishing their risk assessments or communicating the steps they are taking to keep their people safe. Few are including the travel to work, which is often the source of concern. Before declining to return, you should ask for the assessment and raise concerns with HR.



Agreeing changes

Where you work should always be agreed with you. It's important to raise any concerns and costs you have in any surveys or consultation meetings and explore them and your reasons for them with your team lead. People's circumstances differ – whether it's working at home full time or working in the office full time, or hybrid working between the two – and the arrangement your business is planning may not work for you. If you have moved out of town, or flat share, or have caring responsibilities, you can bet that a “one-size-fits all” approach, won't work for you.

You do not have to agree to a change in your workplace and to negotiate with your employer for a more convenient arrangement (at least on a trial basis). You can also apply for your employer to formally consider a request to change your hours, so the request cannot be ignored. You need to set out that the business will not be affected by the change of hours or workplace you are proposing. Many employees have demonstrated that they are equally productive during lock down, so it is more difficult for your employer to refuse. If you have caring responsibilities, or a health reason for the request, it is even more likely that you will secure a concession as your employer will not want to be seen as treating you unfavourably if it could be discriminatory.

Things to consider when moving to a hybrid working model

1. Hidden costs

Many household bills will have increased over lockdown and it is reasonable for your employer to contribute to those if you continue to work remotely. Think about the amenities used and additional costs like insurance, equipment and stationery and the possibility that your employer may want to remove the additional pay for working in the city. If you want to work from another country, check what tax and social charges you will face before you sign up to the new arrangement.

Be aware of your own mental health. If you have felt less connected to colleagues, isolated, or finding it harder to switch off, working for home may not suit you long term.

2. Impact on training and visibility

Many businesses will expect supervisors and managers to be more physically present in the office, with other colleagues. You can prepare to discuss this by considering the technology available for remote meetings and supervision. Look for opportunities to collaborate and planning regular sessions to check in with staff. Asking for any training you need to host blended meetings and ensure you are giving equal opportunities is a quick win.

Say yes to opportunities to contribute and take on new projects. This becomes essential if you intend to work (mostly) from home so that you keep yourself front of mind for promotions and rewards. You'll still need to show your output and your commitment.

3. Consider what you miss from being “at work”

Many of us have missed the buzz and entertainment of working in vibrant cities. We can socialize with colleagues and entertain clients and the virtual alternatives don't compare. Many businesses have re-designed their workspace to offer a greener, more collaborative space for us to enjoy, complete with gyms and yoga and as much fruit as you could want. If that enjoyment has been lacking then working in the office and at home may be the answer.



4. Create boundaries

You need to preserve the time which you save by not commuting, to rest and pursue your life outside of work. Taking regular breaks and adopting a cut off time from work, are better for your health (and your productivity for employer in the longer term). Ensure that your working pattern fits with your colleagues so that you can still “meet” without discounting the impact on those who share your living space.

If you have any questions about remote or hybrid working, please contact [Melanie Stancliffe](#).



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