

# Has COVID-19 changed the way we work forever?

Reigate & Banstead  
**WORKS**

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# Intro

In September 2021, we asked 500 respondents of working age (selected at random from the general population in the South East of England) five key questions about their working lives, pre-COVID and during COVID.

In this report, we explore changes in routines for commuting and new-found opportunities for remote and flexible working, alongside employers' attitudes to alternative ways of working.

Where applicable, we've also segmented our data by industry sector, to add an additional layer of interest and context to our survey.

## Foreword by Cllr Humphreys

We wanted to understand changes to employment resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic and how often staff were now commuting to work.

Companies initially offered remote working out of necessity during lockdowns. This has now, in many instances, turned into more permanent flexible/hybrid working.

From a Council perspective, we are reviewing our flexible working policies and practices for all staff, taking into account learnings from the pandemic.

Has Covid 19 changed the way we work forever? This whitepaper aims to examine the issue in more detail.

Cllr Eddy Humphreys



# Working life pre-COVID

“

We've had flexible working practices for many years, allowing staff to create a great work/life balance whilst delivering the best service to our residents. This includes flexible working patterns and for desk based staff, flexibility about where they work.

When Covid hit, this made it easy for desk based staff, used to working from their laptops, to make the practical transition to remote working during lockdown.

”



Kate Brown  
Head of Organisational  
Development & HR  
Reigate & Banstead  
Borough Council

# Working life pre-COVID

**46.5%**

commuted to work five days a week

**19.2%**

worked entirely remotely

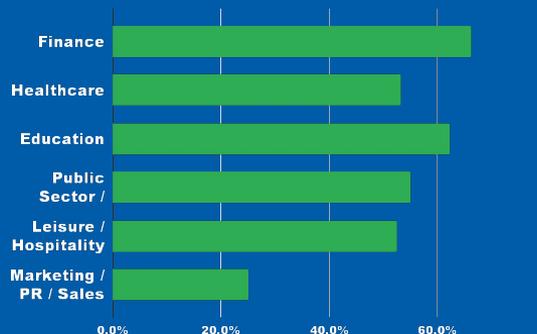
**9.3%**

commuted to work only one or two days a week

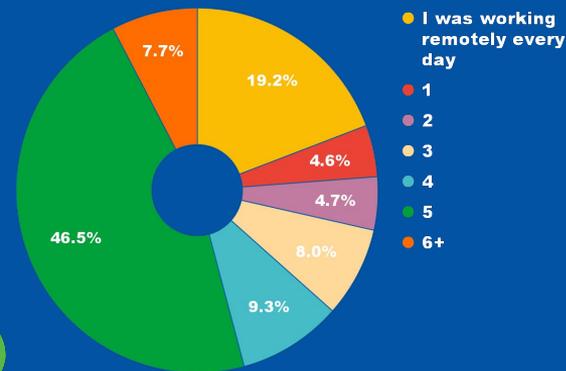
## Pre-COVID

Pre-COVID, nearly 50% of people surveyed travelled to work five days a week. A five day working week was still common over 100 years after first being popularised by Henry Ford in 1908, when, after research, he discovered working any more yielded only a small increase in productivity.

## Pre-COVID, the industries most commonly travelling to work five days a week



## Number of days travelling to work Pre-COVID



## Industry insight

Finance is a key employer in the South East and, according to our survey, was the industry with the highest proportion of people (two-thirds) travelling to work five days a week.

Marketing and PR had the lowest proportion of people commuting five days a week, with nearly one-third (31.9%) working entirely remotely.

# End of the daily commute?

“

The consistent feedback we see from those who have made the switch to working locally, is the ability to save money, arrive at work relaxed and return home less stressed.

The time saved on commuting has improved people's quality of life, as they spend more time with family and eliminate commuter fatigue.

”



Adam Wooldridge  
Director  
Volt International

# Working life in a COVID world

**41%**  
decrease in respondents undertaking the traditional five day a week commute

**42%**  
increase in fully remote working

## During COVID and beyond

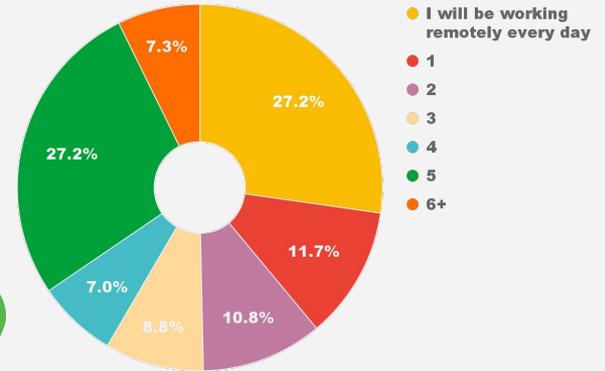
Could the five day commute be on its last legs? The pandemic has illustrated the growing feasibility of working from home, for both employers and employees alike.

The results of our survey showed a 41% decline in the traditional five day a week commute. Pre-COVID, nearly half of all respondents were commuting every day (46.49%), in comparison to just over a quarter after COVID hit and during the following period, at 27.20%.

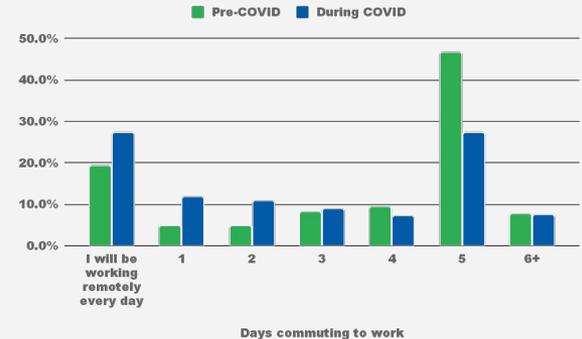
There has also been a 142% increase in people working from home for one or two days a week (from 9.28% to 22.45%).

The proportion of people working remotely every day has increased 42%, from 19.23% to 27.24%.

## Number of days travelling to work during COVID



## Days travelling to work Pre-COVID vs during COVID



# People commuting every day of the week



## Pre-COVID



Finance



Local Govt / Public Sector



Marketing



Healthcare



Education

## During COVID



Finance

↓ 84%

66.4% → 10.7%



Local Govt / Public Sector

↓ 69%

55.1% → 16.9%



Marketing

↓ 40%

25.2% → 15.0%



Healthcare

↓ 39%

53.4% → 32.8%



Education

↓ 20%

62.4% → 50.1%

### Finance

Saw the biggest decrease in five day commuting, from 66.4% down to 10.7%

### Education

Had the lowest change in commuting behaviour, with online teaching used mainly during lockdowns only

# People remote working every day of the week



## Finance

Following the start of the pandemic, nearly 50% are working remotely every day

## Marketing

Minimal change to working habits shows marketing was already ahead of the curve pre-COVID

## Pre-COVID



Finance



Local Govt / Public Sector



Education



Healthcare



Marketing

## During COVID



Finance



Local Govt / Public Sector



Education



Healthcare



Marketing

↑ 282%

12.5% → 47.7%

↑ 78%

9.1% → 16.2%

↑ 55%

13.1% → 20.2%

↑ 45%

8.7% → 12.5%

↓ 4%

31.9% → 30.8%

# Hybrid working People commuting one or two days



## Pre-COVID



Local Govt / Public Sector



Healthcare



Finance



Education



Marketing

## During COVID



Local Govt / Public Sector



Healthcare



Finance



Education



Marketing

↑ 257%

10.0% → 35.7%

↑ 231%

5.2% → 17.1%

↑ 43%

6.7% → 9.6%

↑ 35%

11.4% → 15.4%

↓ 46%

27.8% → 15.0%

### Local government

Embraces hybrid working, with  
a 257% increase

# Employers appear more open to flexible working

“

We recognise the many benefits of having the ability to work more flexibly and are driven to look after the work/life balance of our people and the way they work. We nurture a culture that encourages innovation and have created a working environment where people thrive and strive to do a great job for each other and our customers.

”



Sarah Brown  
Head of People  
SES Water

# Employer flexibility & returning to work

**25%**

were worried about returning to their workplace

**75%**

indicated no active concerns about returning to an office environment

**Our research suggests COVID has created an environment in which employers have discovered a new openness to flexible working. More than half of respondents said their employers are now open to it.**

Industries, such as healthcare, education and hospitality, had less prevalence of flexible working, born out of necessity for people to be present on site.

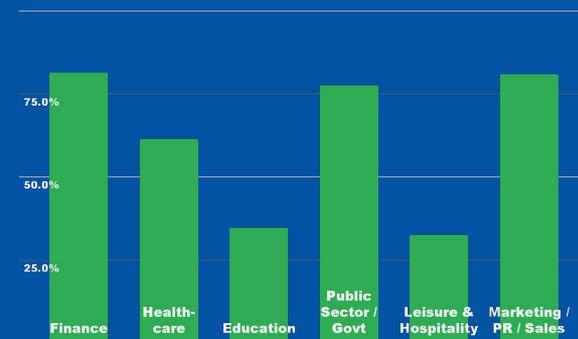
According to our survey respondents, 81.3% within the finance sector said their employers are open to the concept of flexible working, the highest of all the sectors.

## **Returning to the workplace after furlough / time away**

Our survey results found 75% of respondents were not worried, or indicated no active concerns, about returning to their workplace.

Our data also showed 25% were concerned however, highlighting that a significant proportion of people have legitimate health & safety (H&S) concerns about returning to a workplace environment in the midst of a pandemic.

## **Employers open to the concept of flexible working**



# Employer flexibility – here to stay?

**56%**

said their employers were open to flexible working

**24%**

of employers surveyed by ONS intend to use increased home-working as a business model going forward

## Flexible and home working here to stay?

Over half of respondents to our survey (56%) said their employers were open to offering ongoing flexible working and work from home. For those industries not intending to adopt increased remote working going forward, this may be because it is not possible to adapt to home-working.

This is supported by data from Adzuna job advert data, as cited by the [Office of National Statistics](#) (ONS), showing that since lockdown, the proportion of job adverts mentioning home-working has increased substantially (up three times on pre-COVID levels)

## Do businesses and employees see homeworking continuing?

Our survey results indicate substantial increases, proportionally, in the number of people who said they will be working entirely remotely, or hybrid working (going to the office one or two times a week) from now on.



The ONS' Business Insights and Conditions Survey indicated that 24% of businesses intend to use increased home-working as a permanent business model going forward, while 28% were not sure.

# Summary

Our study shows that COVID-19 has shaped the new working world, with a greater emphasis on remote and hybrid working.

While initially born out of necessity, our data suggests the end of the regular commute and a more formal adoption of working from home practices, in the coming months and years. This sentiment is echoed by our respondents confirming they will be working remotely more prevalently, throughout the pandemic and beyond.

It is clear that while the majority respondents we surveyed (75%) gave no active concerns about returning to the workplace during COVID, 25% were worried, meaning the way in which employers cater for their employees' health & safety requirements and mental wellbeing will be a vital part of ensuring a

smoother transition to new ways of working, for the long-term.

The workplace during COVID has presented all of us with many challenges and will likely continue to do so in the coming months and years; but with it, come opportunities to evolve potentially improved working practices and to enhance employee satisfaction in the long-term.

