

## Hybrid working a passing fad or here to stay

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Acas Chief Executive Susan Clews has worked in Acas frontline operations and as Director of Strategy and Chief Operations Officer.

A new [YouGov survey](#) commissioned by Acas has found that more than half (55%) of employers in Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) expect an increase in staff working remotely or from home part of the week. The findings are published as new [Acas guidance on hybrid working](#) aims to help put this type of flexible working in context and identify some of the ground rules for consideration and implementation.

### New Acas guidance on hybrid working

The guidance makes it clear that hybrid working – typically a mixture of working in the workplace and working remotely, usually at home or another office hub – is just 1 form of flexible working. All forms of flexible working are concerned primarily with either where you work (such as homeworking), and/or when you work (for example, start and finish times).

The extent of hybrid working remains to be seen, but no doubt the shift in ways of working for many during the pandemic presents us with a good opportunity to think more about the third essential ingredient of flexible working – how you manage work. By this I mean everything from job discretion to performance management, and health and wellbeing to employee engagement.

### Perceptions and opinions

Everyone has their own view of hybrid working and what it means for them. This is likely to be determined by the sector, organisation, specific roles and responsibilities, and individual needs and circumstances.

For some, hybrid is viewed as more of a necessary pitstop while restrictions are in place, while for others it represents a potential transformation in how we interact, how we manage and what we value.

For me personally, hybrid working makes sense. I will continue working from home some days, but also look forward to collaborating face-to-face with stakeholders and colleagues when appropriate and safe.

Whatever the long term holds for hybrid working, there are some fundamental actions that need to be taken for it to work.

## Listen and talk

Opening up the discussion around what hybrid working looks like for the organisation and employees is a key first step. Managers, individuals and teams need to know what the options are – both in terms of the law and good practice – and discuss a way forward that balances everyone's needs. In many cases, consultation with employee representatives will play an important role in setting the parameters.

What we are hearing from our advisers on the Acas helpline is that there continues to be a low level of awareness around rights and responsibilities around flexible working, so some shared understanding in this respect is needed too.

## Have the right support systems in place

It was concerning to see [a recent survey from the Work Foundation and the Chartered Management Institute](#) (CMI) which found that two-thirds of managers (65%) have not received training on how to manage remote working staff. Training is core when responding to any change, and that's why at Acas it was one of our first priorities at the start of lockdown.

Hybrid working brings a host of challenges which will demand a strong set of people management skills. We are right to be worried about creating 2-tier workforces. The same survey of CMI members found that more than half of managers think that increased remote working will decrease access to progression opportunities for women, disabled people and those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Out of sight should obviously not mean out of mind.

Managers will need to be supported to carefully rethink how they approach communication, team collaborations and employee wellbeing. And employees should be clear about how they will engage with their line managers and colleagues. More attention and effort are undoubtedly needed to secure engagement, collaboration and embed cultures which promote inclusion.

## Remember where you want to get to

It helps me to project the future of work up into 3 distinct zones – returning (to the office in our case), rebuilding and reimagining. Hybrid working is arguably flavour of the month because it helps manage the first part, easing the transition back to COVID-secure working life.

A hybrid model also clearly has its benefits as we rebuild, allowing individuals to continue working and businesses to stay open in response to the changing trajectory of the pandemic. It also presents opportunities for building the kind of autonomy known to be associated with greater job satisfaction. When we carried out our own survey with Acas staff, most felt they could work just as well if not better from home.

What about the longer-term future? There is an opportunity to think carefully about what building back better means for all. Hybrid working may well offer some new opportunities in the longer term to think about how we rebalance work and home life – and stimulate us all into thinking again about the way jobs can be designed for the future. Working from home is not an option for everyone, however, and we must think more broadly about other aspects of flexible working and how they can be integrated into practice.

I hope our new guidance and forthcoming policy insights help to address the immediate challenges organisations face and take a look through the long lens at flexible work for the future.