



# Report to Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Meeting Date: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021  
Portfolio: Finance, Governance & Resources  
Key Decision: No  
Within Policy and Budget Framework: Yes  
Public / Private: Public

Title: Emerging Agile Working Policy / Findings of Staff Survey

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive  
Report Number: CS.38/21

## Purpose / Summary:

This report provides the Panel with findings of the staff survey and provide information on developing approaches to agile working following the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Recommendations:

To consider and comment of the information provided.

## Tracking

Executive:	n/a
Scrutiny: BTSP	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
Council:	n/a

## 1. BACKGROUND

The 2021 Staff Survey – Flexible Working Arrangements was conducted between 27<sup>th</sup> April and the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021. 223 responses were received which equates to a response rate of approximately 75% of office-based staff. This is considered a sound response rate and a summary of the information gathered is as follows;

- 216 of the respondents stated they were eligible to work from home (WFH)
- 144 full-time and 73 part-time staff responded to the survey
- Both full-time and part-time staff stated, on average, they would prefer 60% of their week to be WFH.
- 65% of part-time staff and 83% of full-time staff would prefer the flexibility to choose the days worked from home rather than having set fixed days.
- Colleagues were asked to rank various priorities. Using weighted averages the most important was 'connection between managers and colleagues', and the least important was 'Reimbursement policies for home-office set up.' However, all were perceived to be important at above with rankings above 3/5.
- Colleagues were also asked to agree or disagree with a selection of statements. The area of least agreement was: 'Working from home will improve my connection with colleagues in my team.' The area of highest agreement was: 'WFH has allowed me to spend my commuting time better.'

A full overview of the survey responses is attached at Appendix A.

After the further lifting of restrictions in August 2021 consideration was given by Senior Management Team (SMT) as to when colleagues should return to work in the Civic centre. It was determined that the return should coincide with the opening of the contact centre in the new ground floor accommodation. This decision was largely based on the effects of the general disruption that inevitably comes with significant building work including health and safety considerations. Further this prudent approach would allow the council to monitor the infection rates prior to a general return in order to best protect both service delivery and colleagues.

Given the success of homeworking which had been demonstrated throughout the pandemic along with the results of the survey, SMT were keen to continue to support colleagues to work from home if they so wish. However with a return to normal service delivery, the top priority is to ensure that delivery of services is not compromised and productivity is maintained. Further it is recognised that the Civic Centre is a focal point for the community and the footfall from colleagues is both of visible and economic benefit to the high street.

In order to best manage the return of colleagues to the Civic centre (and other locations) managers were requested to have conversations with affected employees and to agree

future working arrangements, taking account of service demand and delivery requirements, team dynamics and colleague preferences. Changes in working arrangements need to be documented using the appropriate documentation.

It was recognised that some colleagues will feel anxious regarding a return to the workplace and everyone has been reminded of this fact and of the various support mechanisms which are in place.

Under different circumstances the council may have taken the opportunity to fully review its agile working policies, procedures and associated forms to better reflect the new era of work which we are now entering. However in light of local government reorganisation it was determined that the most pragmatic approach is to continue to use the existing policies etc., which the council already has and which although somewhat dated are still fit for purpose in terms of managing the employment relationship and defining expectations. The future approach to work, including agile working, will be a key design principal decision for the new Cumbria authorities.

In line with most other local authorities in the North West region, there is no proposal to offer any form of additional payment towards working from home at the current time. The council will consider any individual request in line with current policy and any equipment is provided in line with current health and safety policy taking account of costs associated with any request.

In terms of now, the key to success in embedding the new ways of working will be the approach taken by the leadership and managers over the coming weeks and months. The approach needs to be consistent both in terms of supporting effective service delivery and the opportunities for colleagues to work in an agile way. To support the successful embedding of new ways of working and ensuring effective outcomes for service delivery the leadership and the HR team will be working closely with managers to oversee the approach providing support, guidance and intervention as may be necessary. Consideration is also being given to appropriate learning interventions to support colleagues with developing understanding and skills related to working with and managing hybrid teams.

## **2. RISKS**

The risks associated with agile working are varied ranging from the effects of potential loss of connection between managers and colleagues, the impact on information governance and data protection approaches and the overall responsibility for health and safety of colleagues. Generally speaking, the type of risks which need to be considered are broadly the same as working in employer provided accommodation and relevant types of risk are considered as part of the application process for any agile working arrangement.

### **3. CONSULTATION**

There is no proposal to consult on the current approach to the return to the workplace as there is no significant change required to the existing policies and procedures which the council has in place. The proposed policies for the new Cumbria authorities will be consulted upon in line with any agreed consultation protocol for those authorities.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

The Panel are asked to consider the findings of the staff survey and the information provided on the approaches developed to agile working following the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **7. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES**

Agile working policy and guidance exist to provide managers and employees with a clear framework in which to approach agile working in a fair and consistent way taking account of the needs of service delivery. Effective policies and procedures instil confidence in the public on the process for managing high expectations and performance expected of Council employees.

**Contact Officer: Darren Crossley**

**Ext: 7004**

**Appendices attached to report:**

**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:**

- None

#### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:**

**LEGAL** – Any application for agile working should be considered in line with current legislation and the council's policies and procedures.

**FINANCE** – Any application for agile working should be considered in line with the council's policies and procedures which include budget considerations. Any financial implications arising from changes in working approach should be met from existing budgets.

**EQUALITY** – Any application for agile working should be considered in line with the council's policies and procedures. The Council's current associated policies and

procedures takes appropriate account of the protections provided under the Equality Act 2010.

**INFORMATION GOVERNANCE** – a breach occurs if personal data (any data relating to an identified or identifiable natural person) is destroyed, lost, altered or if there is unauthorised disclosure of (or access to) personal data as a result of a breach of security. The UK GDPR and DPA 2018 set a maximum fine of £17.5 million or 4% of annual global turnover, whichever is greater, for infringements. The Council has controls in place and any application for agile working should be considered in line with the council's policies and procedures which seek to mitigate associated risks.

## **Introduction**

The 2021 Staff Survey – Flexible Working Arrangements is a new survey, which was live between the 27<sup>th</sup> April and the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021. 223 staff responded and a summary of the responses is below. Out of these 223 staff, only 216 of these were eligible to WFH, based on their response to Question 4: 'Are you usually office-based?'. Based on the survey's response rate we calculated an overall confidence interval (CI), at a 95% confidence level, of +/- 3.28. This is calculated by using our sample of 223 staff, and our population of 297 staff who are eligible to WFH.<sup>1</sup> However, we were not able to apply this CI to individual questions as we split the survey between part-time and full-time staff, and we don't have accurate headcounts for part/full-time staff who are eligible to WFH.

---

<sup>1</sup> Figure from HR.

**Summary of results****Q1: Which of these statements best describes your job role in the Council?**

Manager	Colleague
56	167

**Q2: Which directorate are you in?**

Directorate	Response Rate
Community Services	49 (22%)
Economic Development	26 (12%)
Governance and Regulatory Services	74 (33%)
Corporate Support	27 (12%)
Finance and Resources	47 (21%)

**Q3: What is your place of work / normal site you report to?**

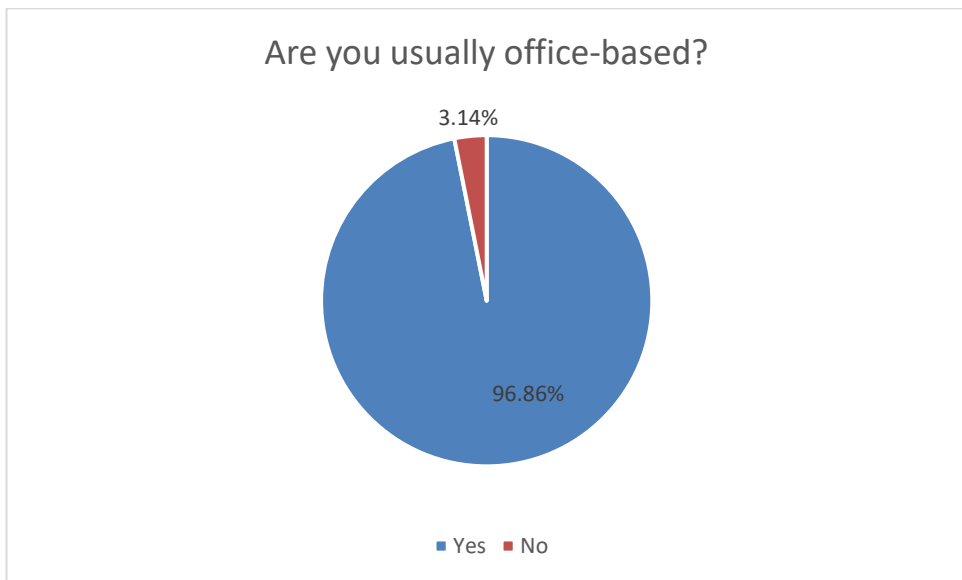
Answer Choices	Responses
Civic Centre	213
Bousteads Grassing	1
Hostels	3
Cemetery / Crematorium	1
Talkin Tarn	0
Old Town Hall	1
Other (please specify)	4

Other:

- Civic Centre and sites
- Mixed home/office (3 days home, 2 days office)
- Work from home
- Various



**Q4: Are you usually office-based?**



Yes: 216. No: 7.

**Q5: The Council is currently reviewing its agile working policies and exploring future options for flexible working. Are you?**

Full Time	Part Time
144	73

*The following questions are only answered by part-time staff:*

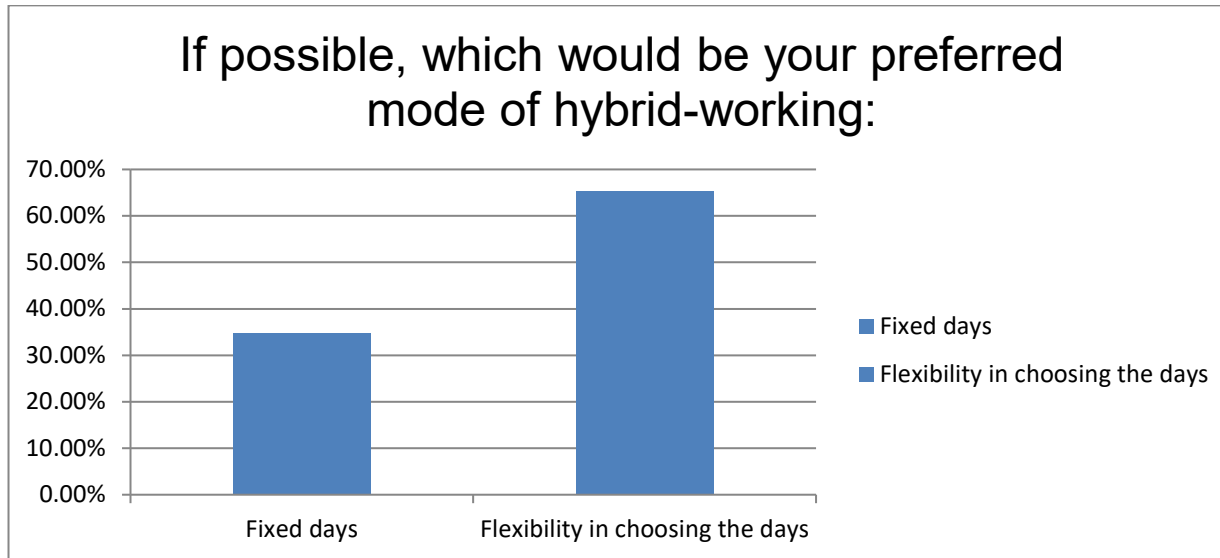
**Q6 (Part-time staff): How many hours a week do you work?**

Average	Mode	Min	Max
23.14	22	8	31

**Q7 (Part-time staff): How many days a week do you work?**

Average	Mode	Min	Max
3.65	3	1	5

**Q8 (Part-time staff): If possible, which would be your preferred mode of hybrid-working:**



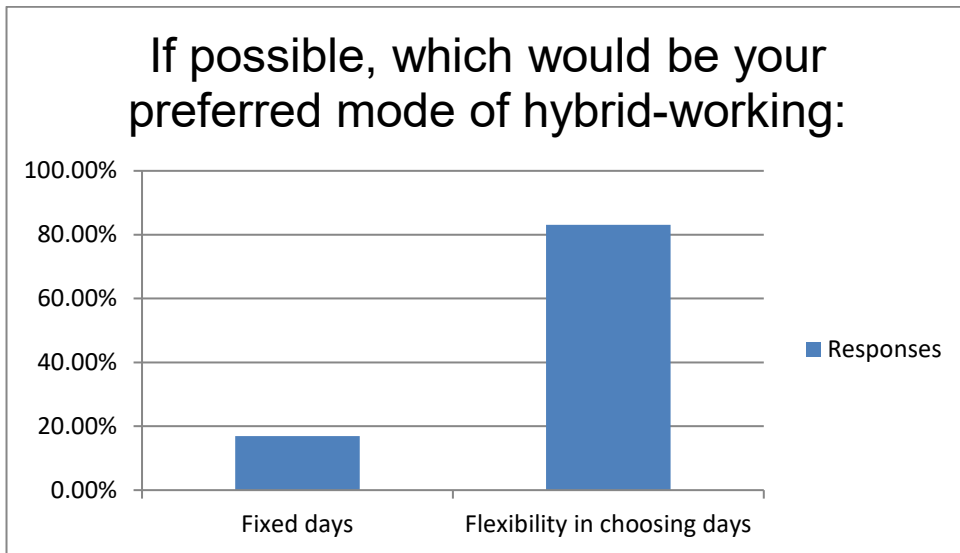
Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Fixed days	34.7%	25
Flexibility in choosing the days	65.3%	47

**Q9 (Part-time staff): If you could, what proportion of your week would you want to work from home?**

Average	Mode	Full WFH	No WFH
56	60	8	6

*The following questions are only answered by full-time staff.*

**Q10: If possible, which would be your preferred mode of hybrid-working:**



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Fixed days	16.9%	24
Flexibility in choosing days	83.1%	118

**Q11: If you could, what proportion of your week would you want to work from home?**

Average	Mode	Full WFH	No WFH
60	60	13	3

*The following questions are answered by part-time and full-time staff.*

**Q12: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

Statement	Overall		Part-time		Full-time	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Working from home will improve my connection with colleagues in my team.	47%	53%	39%	61%	51%	49%
WFH will improve my ability to collaborate with other teams.	61%	39%	49%	51%	67%	33%
WFH will improve the Council's focus on employee wellbeing.	80%	20%	76%	24%	81%	19%
WFH will improve the flexibility around completing my day-to-day tasks.	91%	9%	85%	15%	94%	6%
WFH will improve my work-life balance.	91%	9%	89%	11%	93%	7%
WFH has allowed me to spend my commuting time better.	92%	8%	89%	11%	94%	6%
WFH will improve my mental wellbeing.	77%	23%	70%	30%	81%	19%
WFH will improve my physical wellbeing.	75%	25%	68%	32%	79%	21%

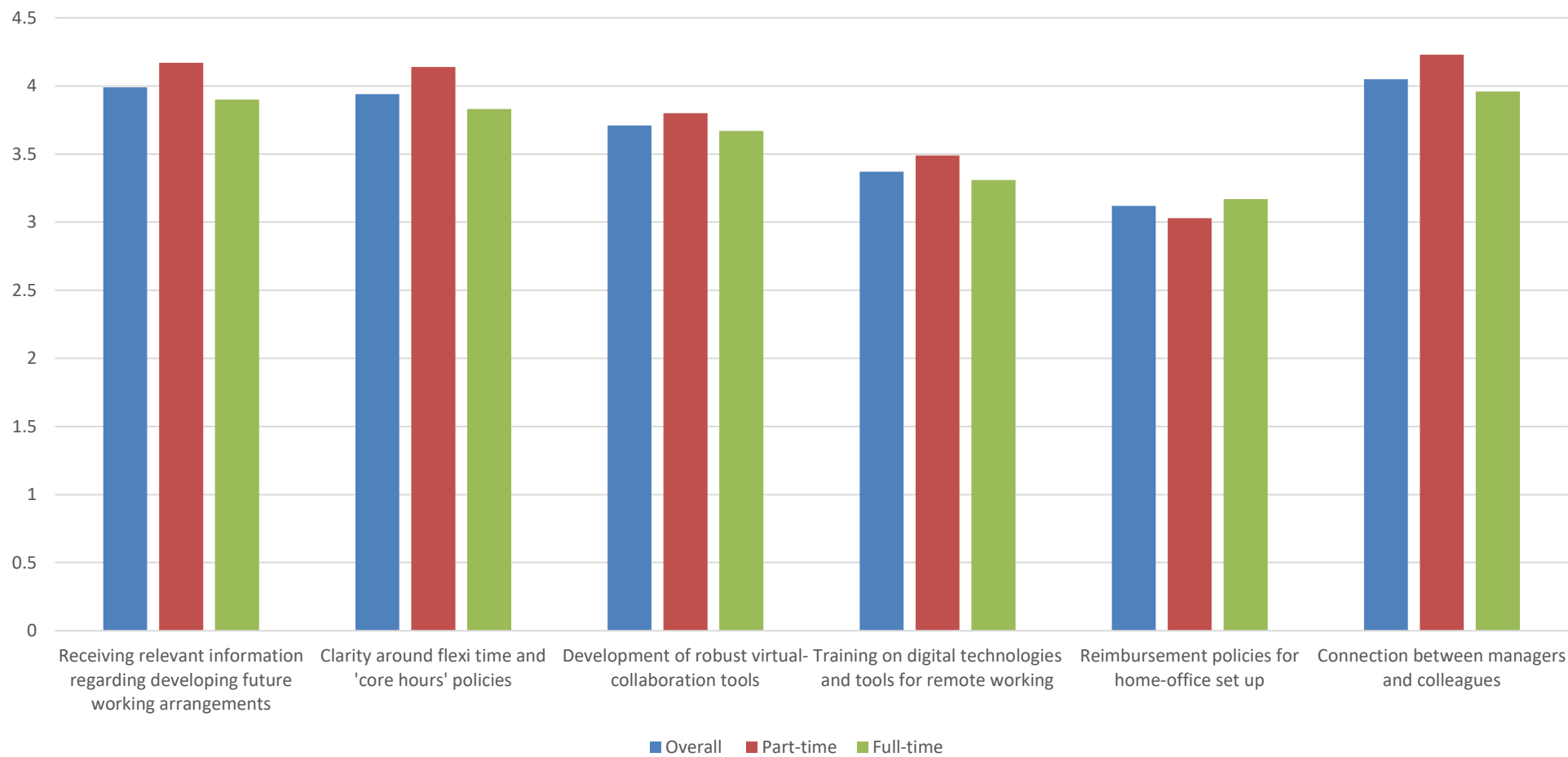
**Q13: In moving towards more flexible working arrangements which of the following are the most important to you? (1, least important, 5, most important).**

Statement	Overall	Part-time	Full-time
Receiving relevant information regarding developing future working arrangements	4	4.2	3.9
Clarity around flexi time and 'core hours' policies	3.9	4.4	3.8
Development of robust virtual-collaboration tools	3.7	3.8	3.7
Training on digital technologies and tools for remote working	3.4	3.5	3.3
Reimbursement policies for home-office set up	3.1	3	3.2
Connection between managers and colleagues	4.1	4.2	4

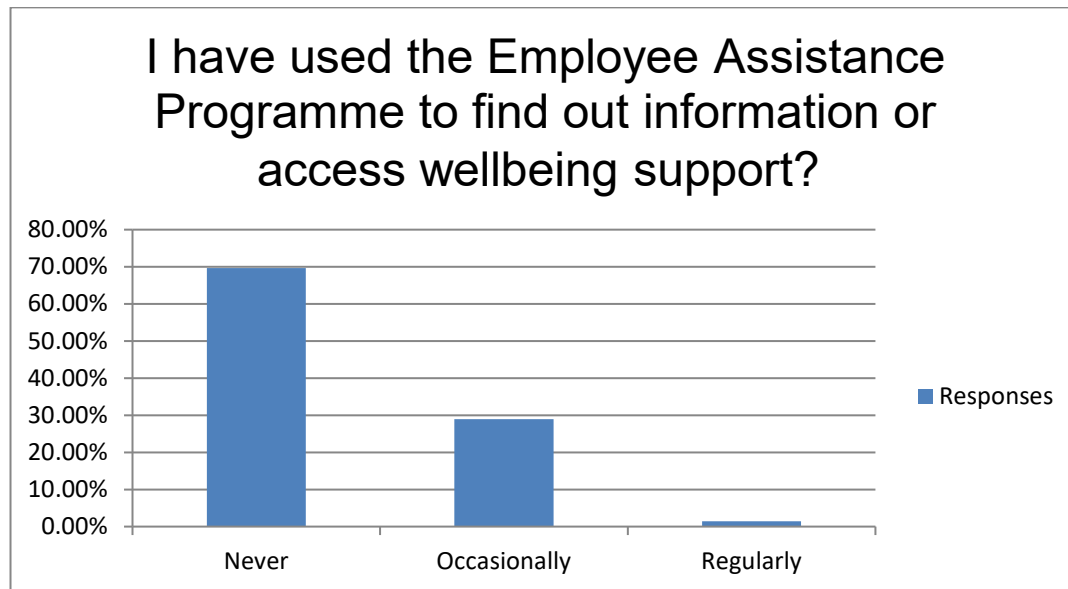
Table 2: Statements and weighted averages<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Full results are in appendix A.

Q13: In moving towards more flexible working arrangements which of the following considerations are most important to you?



**Q14: I have used the Employee Assistance Programme to find out information or access wellbeing support?**



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Never	70%	149
Occasionally	29%	62
Regularly	1%	3

**Q15: Finally, please use the box below for anything else that you would like to share with us:**

97 comments (43% of respondents commented) – see Appendix B for full comments.



**Appendix A: Q13, full results.****Overall:**

	1		2		3		4		5		Total	Weighted Average
Receiving relevant information regarding developing future working arrangements	5.7%	12	4.3%	9	18.6%	39	28.1%	59	43.3%	91	210	4
Clarity around flexi time and 'core hours' policies	6.7%	14	7.1%	15	15.2%	32	27.6%	58	43.3%	91	210	3.9
Development of robust virtual-collaboration tools	4.3%	9	11.4%	24	23.8%	50	29.5%	62	30%	65	210	3.7
Training on digital technologies and tools for remote working	8.1%	17	17.1%	36	24.8%	52	29.5%	62	20.5%	43	210	3.4
Reimbursement policies for home-office set up	14.3%	30	21.9%	46	21.9%	46	21.4%	45	20.5%	43	210	3.1
Connection between managers and colleagues	7.1%	15	2.9%	6	15.2%	32	27.1%	57	47.6%	100	210	4.1

**Part-time:**

	1		2		3		4		5		Total	Weighted Average
Receiving relevant information regarding developing future working arrangements	4.2%	3	1.4%	1	16.9%	12	28.2%	20	49.3%	35	71	4.2
Clarity around flexi time and 'core hours' policies	2.8%	2	5.6%	4	12.%	9	32.4%	23	46.5%	33	71	4.1
Development of robust virtual-collaboration tools	4.2%	3	8.5%	6	22.5%	16	32.4%	23	32.4%	23	71	3.8
Training on digital technologies and tools for remote working	4.2%	3	14.1%	10	29.6%	21	32.4%	23	19.7%	14	71	3.5
Reimbursement policies for home-office set up	15.5%	11	23.9%	17	22.5%	16	18.1%	13	19.7%	14	71	3
Connection between managers and colleagues	4.2%	3	2.8%	2	11.3%	8	29.6%	21	52.1%	37	71	4.2

**Full-time:**

	1		2		3		4		5		Total	Weighted Average
Receiving relevant information regarding developing future working arrangements	6.5%	9	5.8%	8	19.4%	27	28.1%	39	40.3%	56	139	<b>3.9</b>
Clarity around flexi time and 'core hours' policies	8.6%	12	7.9%	11	16.6%	23	25.2%	35	41.7%	58	139	<b>3.8</b>
Development of robust virtual-collaboration tools	4.3%	6	13%	18	24.5%	34	28.1%	39	30.2%	42	139	<b>3.7</b>
Training on digital technologies and tools for remote working	10.1%	14	18.7%	26	22.3%	31	28.1%	39	20.9%	29	139	<b>3.3</b>
Reimbursement policies for home-office set up	13.7%	19	20.9%	29	21.6%	30	23%	32	20.9%	29	139	<b>3.2</b>
Connection between managers and colleagues	8.6%	12	2.9%	4	17.3%	24	25.9%	36	45.3%	63	139	<b>4</b>