

The impact of COVID-19 on the Good Work Agenda and flexible working

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"At a time when organisations are faced with an opportunity to change the way in which they work, this is a perfect opportunity to link into and develop the Good Work agenda."

Introduction

It is now evident that COVID-19 restrictions have increased the prevalence of homeworking and a more flexible way of working in terms of hours and locations, even as work-from-home mandates have ended in recent months.

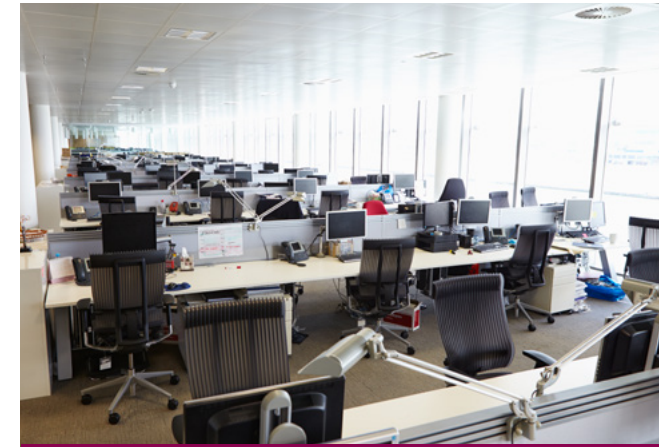
This has led to numerous publications and predictions claiming that there may be significant changes to the way we work in the future. Firstly, in significant global academic papers that consider the impacts of the pandemic on differing industries, workers and employers (for e.g., Forbes et.al, 2020; Chung et. al., 2021; Putra et.al 2020; Taylor et al., 2021; Wang et al 2020).

Post-pandemic economy predictions - specifically for business that have estimated cost savings due to increased flexibility and homeworking - also envisage a much greater reliance on remote working, claiming that 'working from home will likely continue at significantly higher rates than before COVID-19'. (Ellingrud, 2021; Lund et.al, 2021). More recently, there have been calls from the UK Government to make flexible working 'normalised' (Truss, 2021) and as organisations are experiencing the end of government's guidance on working from home, reviews have been conducted on large organisations' decisions on their plans for the future of work in their own workplaces (see for e.g., Partridge and Makortoff 2021).

These messages indicate that the world of work will change – although the short and potentially long-term changes are not yet fully clear. Many of the themes addressed in those predictions and advice resonate with findings in this report and will help inform organisations planning for future ways of working.

Whilst those studies mentioned earlier help us to understand what is happening more broadly, this project looks specifically at organisations in the North East of England. Working in collaboration with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), we wanted to understand North East organisations' experiences of working through the pandemic and their predictions for future ways of working.

Understanding organisations' visions around the Good Work Agenda in the North East was also important. Good Work, which includes truly flexible work and working conditions that meet the requirements of the whole work force, is a priority identified in the North East Strategic Economic Plan - the region's plan to deliver 100,000 more and better jobs between 2014 and 2024.



What is the Good Work agenda?

'Good Work' needs to be able to take a holistic and reciprocal approach to the employment relationship and this has been recognised by the UK Government in reforms to employment policy since 2017. This is mirrored in international initiatives such as the International Labour Organisation, across varying UK home nations and more recently, in regional and localised Good Work pledges, charters, and other collective efforts that aim to provide better quality and more meaningful work. This is inclusive of those in the North East - The Good Work Plan (2018), Good Work Pledge (2020) and the Great Jobs Agenda (TUC, 2017), all of which focus on the vision for the future of the UK and regional labour market and the maintenance of fair and decent work - as well as providing realistic opportunities for employees to develop and progress in their work. Clearly, with the prospect and predictions of changes in the way we work in the future, this is a very timely opportunity for organisations and people professionals to proactively shape the future of work (see also CIPD 2020) as well as progress Good Work initiatives. Of course, good, fair or decent work needs to be defined as more than simply a 'good job'. Participants of this study described good work in a range of positive ways such as justice; fairness; transparency; opportunity; balance; enjoyment; and support.

These issues are significant for they resonate with earlier findings from a larger in-depth research project by two of the authors (McBride and Smith 2018). Amongst other findings their study highlighted that flexible working

needed to be more meticulously addressed within the agenda for 'good work'. Such issues were also similarly reflected in the North East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan. Therefore, as a follow up, this project focuses more specifically on flexibility and ethical HR practices within the pursuit for good work here in the North East.

Furthermore, as the UK was hit by the global pandemic in 2020, the project also aimed to explore the ways that organisations and HR practices mobilised to support their workers and adopt flexibility in varying ways during these challenging times. Framing the project this way also provided the opportunity to look to the future and consider how the world of work could potentially change from experiences and lessons gathered during the pandemic.

Our Approach

In collaboration with the North East LEP, and with help from the Northern Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Regional Confederation of British Industry (CBI), we called for organisations in the North East to take part in interviews based on the impact of COVID-19, flexible working, and the effects on their organisation – as well as their thoughts and preparations on the future of work in their own workplaces. We spoke to 20 organisations across the North East (all listed in the Appendix) of varying sizes and across different sectors, conducting interviews either with members of the HR team or in some cases with company owners and partners.

We need to make clear that no employees were interviewed during the project, so the findings presented here are based on the perspective of owners, employers and senior management only. All organisations were asked the same set of questions and we discovered that many similar issues and experiences were being drawn out of the interviews as key impacts of COVID-19 on their workplaces. Therefore, we felt it more useful to draw out these key themes for this report, rather than present individual case studies. This may also prove useful to other organisations who may be experiencing the same issues and can compare their experiences and intentions for future work.

The following three key headings illustrate the major themes drawn out of the interviews: the impact of C19 on the workplace; flexibility and work-life balance; and the future of work. Elements of 'Good work' are weaved in the text throughout each theme.

1. The impact of COVID-19 to the workplace and how we work

The organisations that took part in this study span across various sectors and sizes, with a variety of office and site-based workers, facing different challenges as they have moved in and out of lockdowns and implemented social distancing guidelines. The impact and the changes they had to introduce were all dependent on their unique workforces and challenges.

“The biggest challenge has definitely been the people. People are your biggest asset and actually looking after them - as well as us going through this at the same time - is a real challenge. We have done an extraordinary amount to try and help people come to terms with that and deal with it as best as they can, whatever situation they find themselves in.” (Groundwork)



Adapting to enforced remote working

As we are now all familiar, the pandemic has elevated the importance of the physical dimension of work and accelerated trends in remote working. In March 2020, almost all business offices were suddenly instructed to move to remote operations where possible, prioritising safety for those who could not work remotely. Impressively, some of our participant organisations had already prepared and/or practiced for a lockdown situation.

ENGIE developed a 'Disaster Recovery Mode' three weeks before lockdown and staff were already working from home prior to government announcements. This approach was proactive and supportive, ensuring that all staff had the IT equipment they needed, furniture, chairs, screens, and anything else that was required to work remotely. Communication with employees was continuous and they ensured that all IT services were working efficiently so that the transition was as smooth as possible.

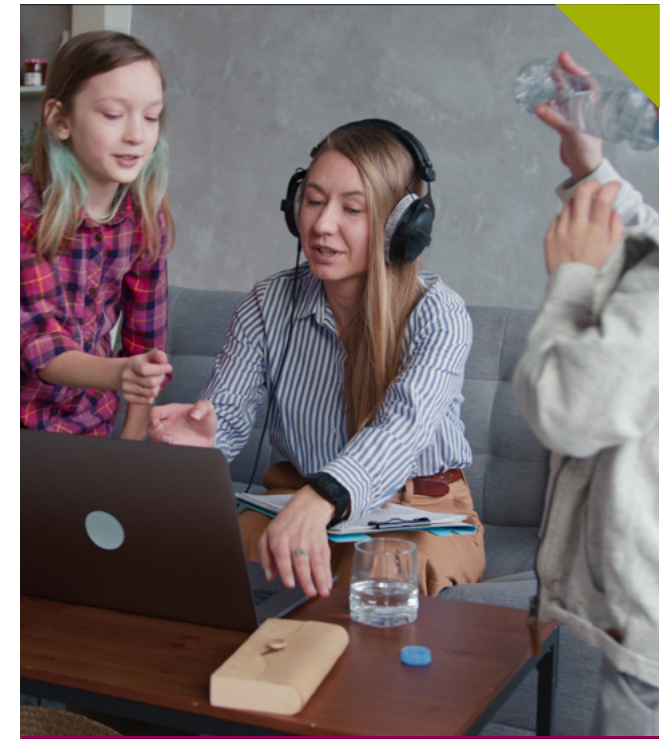
Others, such as Harlands, had practised flexible home working for many years prior to the pandemic with employees choosing to work one or two days at home if they needed to. However, overall, most organisations needed to confront the challenges and quickly adopt new initiatives to ensure employee safety whilst maintaining productivity during this unprecedented period of business uncertainty.

Many also had to adopt new technologies, with others investing heavily in IT ergonomics, to ensure not only that all functionality was maintained, but also so that employees could work comfortably and safely. Amongst others, Harlands, Leica and Akzo were proactive in assessing staff needs and purchasing equipment to be quickly delivered to employees at home. For those with a more limited budget in the Third Sector, both Groundwork and Newcastle Carers allowed their employees to take furniture from their offices that they needed to work remotely. The majority of organisations also facilitated home display screen equipment assessments, as never before had they needed to enquire about their employees' personal home IT possessions such as what type of PC they owned, desks, equipment, IT security applications. Some were surprised when they discovered how their employees worked from home during the early stages of the first lockdown.

“One of my colleagues worked for the first few weeks, or even months, from an ironing board! We had to put some guidance out to say - look, here is how you do a DSE assessment and how your set up should be. Obviously, we didn't know who had a set up at home or not. So, it was a case of how do we adapt and react to these issues that people are having” (Akzo)

Sensitive to changing needs for everyone, organisations we interviewed had to continually assess these situations through, for example, conducting regular surveys with their employees to assess their needs to working from home. Following such a survey, **Irwin Mitchell** found that they needed to double the amount of funding available to employees for what they referred to as a 'home kit fund', whilst CPI also provided a similar 'hybrid working allowance' to support their employees including the costs of home WIFI amongst other expenses. Others also provided upgrades to WIFI connections, extra online IT support and training, chairs, desks, laptops, mobile phones and developed online meeting platforms.

The sudden and rapid move to home operations also persuaded many of our participating organisations to consider the varying impact and challenges faced by their employees when working away from the traditional office environment. Some of the responses in employee surveys highlighted how it was not as straightforward as replicating interactions and issues arose concerning collaboration in the virtual space. For example, **Irwin Mitchell** explained how some of their employees lived in shared accommodation or cramped accommodation with no proper desk or space to work comfortably (see also Taylor et al., 2021). In such circumstances, there had to be flexibility to accommodate these employees' availability for client-facing meetings. Many organisations responded by managing employees' concerns of job insecurity and anxiety as a result of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. The example below shows how some managed these issues with transparency and supportive communications.



“[we] got a flurry of nervous emoji faces in the staff survey, and this was mainly around issues of furlough, job retention schemes – people were worried about job security. The CEO held an all company call and said ‘For the next [X amount of] years, here is the trajectory so you know you do not need to worry about your job’. That was great because we nipped that in the bud.” (CPI)

Managing the onsite/offsite spatial dynamic

Amongst the diverse organisations that took part in the project, not all were able to simply move all of their operations to remote working. Depending on the sector and whether the employees had key worker status, organisations had to consider the implications of workers who needed to continue working either onsite or face-to-face.

For manufacturing companies such as **Akzo**, **Leica** and **CPI**, as well as the **Fire Service**, remote working was not an option for all employees. Physical implications had to therefore be prioritised, inclusive of safety, occupational exposure to the virus, and managing the risks of workplace outbreaks. As a social housing provider, **Bernicia** also had to manage the different roles for staff. For example, all trades people who were in and out of tenants' houses needed to be able to access PPE for all external jobs at any time. **Leica** also adopted an immediate response to ensure that staff onsite were able to socially distance.



“In production and distribution, we reduced the hours and introduced two shifts so that workers were able to socially distance from one another...it meant reducing their hours (but not their pay). It gave us the time to enable that everyone would be safe in our workplace and were spread out when they were in work.” (Leica)

Leica and **CPI** also both operated a two week rota to ensure that those on site worked alternate weeks in order to minimise the transmission of infection for the safety of everyone.

Leica split shifts for those on site, creating a third team to provide cover if one team needed to isolate. All teams need to know what the other does for cover if isolation does need to take place, so they created a matrix around team one and two with those who knew how to do the job and now have a team three who needed to be trained up on how to do those skills, therefore upskilling the workforce.

In managing the dynamic and the perceptions of safety between those onsite and those in the office, **Akzo** faced the challenge that some employees on site claimed they felt that only part of the workforce was being protected. **Akzo** actioned this by managing everyone on a case-by-case basis, aware that with such a varied workforce each had their different needs, preferences, and vulnerabilities.

Replicating the social

One of the main challenges mentioned by almost all our participants' experience from their employees' comments was the loss of social interaction through work, particularly when it became apparent that working from home was going to extend significantly beyond the originally anticipated 12 weeks. This was complexly interwoven with matters of mental health, wellbeing, and isolation which will be covered in more detail later in this report. The organisations implemented innovative ways to replicate the absence of the social side of work and maintain socially connected workforces.

Activities included **Newcastle Carers'** 'elevenses', **whyaye!**'s 'water cooler moments', optional virtual brekkies (where they don't talk about work), Friday's business update followed by a Teams quiz; **Harlands'** 'late afternoon gin tasting sessions', and **Womble Bond Dickinson's** 'Friday get-togethers'. Although all were virtual, it was stressed that they were initiatives designed to get staff talking about anything but work. Others, as well as socialising for fun or for 'the craic', emphasised more social initiatives to encourage support within a team. **Harlands** established 'children's conference calls' for parents and carers so that when the parents/carers had online meetings, there was another set up for their children so that they could chat with one another online whilst their parents were having a work meeting. This was to try to alleviate the demands of parents who were working and home schooling.

Robson Laidler also used virtual socialising and well-being initiatives to support their staff.

"We are continuing excellence partners in the NHS and Northern TUC Better Health at Work award. During Covid the mental health initiatives have been popular with working at home. We disseminated information and links to websites on health and wellbeing, and had interactive sessions and online quizzes. We did mindfulness workshops with staff and actually opened these up to clients as well. We also did a sleep awareness workshop. We joined forces with the Newcastle United Foundation and their health and wellbeing coordinator too."
(Robson Laidler)

As the lockdowns and working from home prolonged, we were then alerted to the new challenge of employees feeling *zoomed out*, and with IT fatigue. Many therefore had to move towards a balance of achieving a social offering that remained appealing but also in adequate amounts that didn't put pressure on staff to have to get involved. **whyaye!**, **Muckle**, and **Womble Bond Dickinson** all found themselves 'scaling down' the social events, striving for a sustainable balance that would be feasible both in and out of lockdowns.

"Our meetings started off with quizzes, but we got tired of quizzes and ended up deciding that actually it was just nice to catch up with each other, so we do a bit of that and so that's quite nice... [...] ...We are trying to think about new ideas, and I guess it is just about keeping the team feeling like they are a team."
(Womble Bond Dickinson)

Other organisations, during times when lockdown restrictions were lifted, allowed some of their staff to work from the office to alleviate the issues from prolonged working from home.

"Homeworking was quite exciting at first, last March it was a novelty, we didn't know how long it was going to last for – but it has not been without its shortcomings, challenges and issues. So we've opened up the offices to let people choose to come into work but have ensured that we have it Covid secured and socially distanced." (CAB)

CAB also talked about the image of the workforce changing from 'professionally separated people to being a human being'.

"The pandemic has given people permission to make those changes. It's opened people's eyes and I think those changes are going to be really long ranging. You're not sitting in the same building at a desk doing the same work – the homeworking - we see dogs bounding into rooms, deliveries knocking during meetings, it has been different and in a sense, it has in some ways humanised the workforce."
(CAB)

Some organisations found themselves breaking down previously rigid lines of hierarchy/authority claiming they had bonded over the changes and challenges that teams had experienced and improved their employment relationships. This was demonstrated in some of the more social initiatives that were introduced throughout the pandemic as highlighted from the following short case studies.

"We have a weekly online update. Now we have reps giving their story of how they are coping in lockdown with the kid crying and cat sitting on their knee – and we are trying to break down the isolation with humanity. We are encouraging our line managers to have one-to-ones with individuals to make sure they are ok – even just a morning cup of tea. We try to make it flexible." (Leica)

Team Fostering offered guidance against working longer hours, ensuring staff take rest breaks and have arranged 'walking days', along with a bake-off challenge. (Our participant told us that when lockdown is lifted she will meet up with her friend for a coffee and cake by the seaside.)

Newcastle Carers also 'got on the quiz bandwagon' and put on remote challenges, for example with Active Newcastle who support the Better Health at Work initiative. Staff are encouraged but not pressured to get involved. All the social initiatives are arranged within work time and advertised as something to do as part of the working day.

Harlands have a young team and birthdays used to be a real social event for them: "... so when it has been someone's birthday, I've sent them a cake via Just Eat, it's trying to keep some kind of social, human interactions. We've sent pamper packages with face masks, tubs of Haribo sweets etc. All the managers have sent thank you cards to everyone – just little initiatives like that. We did a team step challenge one week and gave our money to a specific charity. We usually have a monthly night out and I booked a magician and a comedian to lift everybody's spirits...We've just done everything we can to support everyone." (Harlands)



2. Flexibility and work-life balance

The term work-life balance refers to the ability of workers to accommodate employment with their family or household, domestic and caring responsibilities (Galea et al., 2014). However, the daily realities and practicalities of juggling employment with family or caring duties are complex and contested (Crompton, 2006; Smith and McBride, 2021). Some of the organisations in this study already had long-established and extensive flexible working policies and practices. However, all organisations had to rapidly adapt to working from home and newfound flexibilities of work. The pandemic pushed a reflection, re-assessment and rapid extension of flexible working, particularly for those organisations who had previously asserted that such flexibilities would not have been either practicable or possible. For many this contributed to a re-evaluation of how flexibility would be viewed when looking to the future of their respective organisations and staff.



A new way of managing and accommodating flexibility: working from home or sleeping at work?

As mentioned, some of the organisations that took part in the research were already adopting flexible ways of working, including **Team Fostering**, **Groundwork**, **Harlands** and **Akzo**. Some organisations already had practices in place to make the transition to remote and more flexible working much smoother. For others such as **Bernicia** and **Newcastle & Gateshead CCG**, the pandemic moved them towards more unfamiliar challenges.

Many of the employers we spoke to were compelled to move to a more flexible working day in terms of when and where people worked. This was to benefit those facing various challenges such as childcare or eldercare and for others where flexibility was necessary for more personal challenges such as isolation, mental wellbeing and developing a psychologically safe workplace.

For organisations such as **whyaye!**, **Newcastle & Gateshead CCG**, and **Team Fostering** employees were entrusted to complete their hours on a schedule that suited them (often within the set core hours of flexitime arrangements), in order to accommodate any other responsibilities or commitments that they had. Other examples showed how some organisations also accommodated schedules other than a traditional 9am-5pm working day such as **Harlands** and **CAB**, to fit working hours with individual employee needs. In client facing roles, at both **Muckle** and **Irwin Mitchell**, staff were given the trust and autonomy to manage their own flexibility and working hours around their clients' needs.

"It is just about being even more Flexible. We still have the four hours a day minimum in place, but that everyone needs to bear in mind their health and wellbeing and take care" (Harlands)

"Although we were quite flexible before COVID-19, we have been really flexible during it, and I think it will be about maintaining that and looking at different ways to support people within the various things that they go through in life" (Irwin Mitchell)

Many of the organisations that took part in the research were small and medium sized employers and did not have dedicated HR departments. As a consequence, many of the work-life balance and flexible working practices were not formalised and were developed throughout the pandemic. Therefore, we recognise that there may need to be care taken with any potential issues over management discretion, consistency and transparency regarding future work-life balance policies and practices. There is best practice guidance provided by ACAS on flexible working [here](#) and from the TUC [here](#).

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Amongst the organisations where workers had remained onsite, management were aware that the same levels of flexibility could not always be extended to different teams, for example those in manual manufacturing. **Akzo** admitted that as an organisation they were still looking to different ways of supporting flexibility amongst the more manual trades, however in the meantime they did what they could to be flexible, for example in easing the rearrangement of shifts.

Flexibility was also practiced in terms of workload and responsibilities. **Engie, Bernicia, and Newcastle Carers** all discussed the way that they had remained flexible in terms of workload in order to support their staff, considering the changing influx of work, and demands in and out of work during the pandemic. **Newcastle Carers** found that although they were not necessarily receiving more referrals from clients, those that they did receive were more critical, therefore they recognised that the evaluation of staff workload was vital, especially in such an emotionally sensitive sector.

Some HR managers we interviewed were aware of the complexities of 'balancing' workplace pressures and home schooling, together with flexible working and associated extended working days.

"One of the reasons I changed where I was working before is because my previous job didn't have that flexibility and support, especially for all of my sons' appointments. I needed somewhere with flexibility. Our CEO has said 'If we can't provide a flexible place for a carer to work, who is going to?'. So it has been an extension of that attitude that was already there" (Newcastle Carers)

Supporting a diverse workforce

Work-life balance policies and practices had to extend across the different groups to be aware of all workers and their different challenges.

Parents and workers with young children found their schedules disrupted by school closures and the additional challenges of home-schooling. The organisations discussed the ways that flexible working practices alleviated pressure for them. Organisations such as **Muckle, Irwin Mitchell, and CAB** encouraged parents to make the most out of more lenient working hours as well as other working practices to help to allow for home-schooling or childcare into their schedules.

Although not COVID specific, **Newcastle and Gateshead CCG** have an 'Other Leave' policy which they use to give the right to leave, for example for domestic issues, foster care, and volunteering. Law firm **Muckle** also spoke of how they tried to encourage men to make the most of flexibility, for example periods of paternity. These initiatives were to promote inclusion across all their different members of staff. However, some of the HR staff that took part in the research were aware that certain managers only

"...when these issues started to come to light, we introduced other ways of working. If staff were part-time and wanted to change days around, or if they were home-schooling and their children did work between 10 and 2, they could get online at 9 to get set up and just start working when they could. So, if people couldn't take phone calls due to having children in the background, we introduced Webchat so it pushed the boundaries on flexible working" (CAB)

perceived work-life balance to be typically for young women with young children. Many organisations had plans to promote the awareness of work-life balance policies and practices, and to monitor the uptake.

The organisations taking part in the project also stressed the importance of using flexible working practices not just for responsibilities but also for hobbies and interests. Both **CPI** and **Akzo** emphasised that flexibility at work should be for the benefit of anyone, for example those who wanted to change their hours to accommodate their own interests or personal motivations. Again, this promoted inclusion and wellbeing.

Indeed, some organisations, such as, **Team Fostering** and the **Fire Service**, conducted staff surveys and consistently found that flexibility and a degree of employee autonomy over working hours was very popular with staff.

"Obviously when you introduce a policy like flexible working, people immediately think it is just for mothers who have children, to allow them to do drop offs. We very much promoted it in that it is not. If you have got a hobby on a Friday afternoon that you want to go and do, we want to encourage you to go and do it. And that is how it was promoted. We collected people's feedback after the policy had been implemented for six months, and we got a huge range of different people. One guy loved going surfing at South Shields so he compressed his week!" (Akzo)

Encouraging a healthy work-life balance

As with flexibility, many organisations were already developing practices encouraging work-life balance. However, as the pandemic hit, these practices had to be adapted and accelerated to extend to the large number of staff who were working from home. There were new challenges due to the rapid development of working remotely, encompassing loneliness, isolation and anxiety. Many workers also faced the additional pressure of responsibilities, such as intensified household management and home-schooling.

The dynamic of being able to promote and maintain a healthy and appropriate work-life balance when working from home was a key hurdle that many of the organisations faced. During the interviews, **Robson Laidler, Akzo, and Muckle** spoke of the issues that they faced around employees not being able to switch off amongst newly blurred boundaries between work and home life. **Muckle** described their approach to confronting this as a type of 'etiquette' in that they introduced guidelines and advice to encourage employees to switch off successfully. **CAB** referred to the impact of not always being able to do this and the burden of feeling it was necessary to be constantly available being a 'professional guilt'.

"A few months in we did a big thing on etiquette... about putting meetings in at night – or in fact not to do that unless it was really essential. We didn't put rules in, but just told people to think about other colleagues. Do they really need to be there at 7 in this meeting? What is driving that meeting – is it just because you want to get it done? There was such a blurring of work and home. A lot of people were struggling with that. A lot of people felt like they couldn't leave their laptop. They didn't feel like they could do that at home in case people thought that they weren't working." (Muckle)

Although clearly a challenge, some organisations showed awareness of the complexities of work-life balance, home working and working hours. In a similar vein, the topic of surveillance came up but not necessarily in the way that one might have imagined. To take a few examples, **CAB, Team Fostering, whyaye!** and **Groundwork** adopted ways to monitor the working hours to ensure that staff were not over-working. This included informal support and monitoring to avoid excessive working.

"Everybody is personally responsible for their own work-life balance, but I definitely call it out when I see it – that is if they are working too much. I am confident that even without policies in place, we identify it as quickly as possible and we pounce on it." (whyaye!)

Managers and supervisors who became aware of overworking as a problem took a more vigilant approach to discouraging staff from doing so and looked to either issue guidance or to support them with their workload where necessary. **Bernicia** also took a similar approach to staff taking time off and leave.

"We insist that people take their holidays and don't allow them to carry over. I know that some people have seen that as harsh, but we see that as good. It is about work-life balance and being a good employer. We still expect people to clock in and clock out too so we can see they are not working excessive hours even from home." (Bernicia)

The pandemic raised mental health and wellbeing matters to the surface for many workplaces and homes alike. For the organisations we spoke to, both flexibility and work-life balance played a key role in ensuring that the physical and mental wellbeing of all staff were considered and acknowledged in practice. The wellbeing initiatives we learnt about were varied, and some were also part of the social element of remote working which has been mentioned earlier.

To take some examples, **Coote O'Grady** actively welcomed staff to take walks and get fresh air, whilst **Newcastle Carers** provided exercise classes as well as **Quorum** who provided classes such as yoga and meditation. Many of the organisations spoke of encouraging conversations about wellbeing and work-life balance and accommodating a culture that supported these conversations as well as the initiatives themselves.

“Work-life balance is something we are pushing as line managers for their own wellbeing – that is the biggest thing. We also talk about it in meetings as well, so all of our meetings have a team wellbeing conversation...so at the very beginning we will all check in on how the team is feeling...and how they are feeling as a team not necessarily as individuals.”
(Engie)



3. The future of work/business as usual?

As lockdowns and regulations began to ease during the mid-waves of the pandemic, the organisations in our study began to consider what a return to the workplace might look like in both the short and long term. This included not only how to organise this with all employees front of mind and assessing the economic impacts, but also how they envisaged the return might differ to the way they had worked pre-pandemic.



Returning to the workplace and designing a future way of working

Speaking to the organisations in early 2021, many were already preparing for the implications of returning to the physical workspace, whether this be the office or other sites. Conversations were based around both the practical side of business continuation and productivity, but also to potential employee preferences as well as their safety. Many believed that the workplace would never return to pre-pandemic 'business as usual' and most accepted that adapting to new ways of working was essential for business continuity.

Based on employee surveys and staff online meetings, there was no uniform opinion on how employees of the organisations felt about returning to work, and opinion was often divided. The **Fire Service** found that there was a split between the office staff between those who wanted to return to the office and those who did not. Similarly, **Newcastle Carers** found that younger members of staff were more enthusiastic to return to the workplace, whereas older staff and carers appeared more anxious and hesitant.

"Even if the government say that everything can happen again as normal, we are going to have staff who are not ready to do that for lots of reasons. Physically, mentally...it is easy to forget things. It is not just like turning the tap back on and everybody floods back through the factory gates ready to do what they did before. There needs to be a warming up back to where we want to get to...and until we do that, I am not sure how many people will be ready."
(Groundwork)

Many organisations accepted that the return to in-person working would require an evidence-based approach, actively assessing needs and circumstances of employees to understand their expectations and concerns, reflecting on lessons they learnt through the previous lockdowns and being able to adapt flexibly. As also highlighted by an earlier CIPD survey (Gifford and Green 2020), our organisations realised that how they chose to respond and adapt in the short and long term will undoubtedly have major implications for the future of work.

Working models in the future: hybrid working

After positive experiences with remote working during the pandemic, many organisations were already planning a more blended approach to working in the future. The interview participants used varying terms for this - hybrid, agile, or flexible working - although all meaning the idea of a balance between remote and office working. Some organisations were already planning to shift to flexible workspaces, a move that would reduce the overall space they need and bring fewer workers into offices each day.

The organisations discussed being able to get the best out of this balance and how it would be achieved in practice. For **Womble Bond Dickinson**, there were some early ideas that they knew could be developed using contributions from workers' feedback.

"We see the offices as being a hub, and a really collaborative space for meetings, for project work, and all that kind of stuff. What we are looking to do is to get more regular feedback from people. We would like to ask people questions about how they are feeling on things and then we will be able to assess the employer/employee relationship more effectively." (Womble Bond Dickinson)

Engie, Bernicia, and Harlands proposed that whilst the office space was still necessary, it would be used differently to pre COVID-19 and other functions could be carried out remotely. This move would reduce the overall space needed and bring fewer workers into offices each day. One proposal was a differentiation between transactional and transformative work and having a shared space, for example offices, to remain as a collaborative and creative space for team working.

"We have had a couple of conversations and when we had some of the team back into the office, it was interesting to see who wanted to come in and who they wanted to be working with, and it hasn't been with their mates, but someone they are working with and need to collaborate with, so that was interesting. We are tight for space in the office anyway, so we're talking about getting new desks and not expecting everyone to be in 9-5, and not have all bums on seats every day! We want it to be more collaborative but haven't really thought about it in terms of finalising, only thoughts and plans at the moment" (Harlands)

Other organisations spoke of the more practical and logistical side of agile working, for example the benefits of hot desking and reduced need for office space at the **Fire Service**. **Bernicia** also spoke of the challenges in doing this, for example having to train more staff to be fire monitors to ensure that there was always somebody suitably trained at any one time. **Hadaway & Hadaway** and **Team Fostering** also commented that the move to remote working had driven them to consider a 'paper-lite' office and that they were eager to continue the positive changes made around this moving forwards.

"The best thing to do is to burn your bridges so that you can't go back to working the way you did before - because that is what you do isn't it - you get back and you'll just fall back into the same routine." (Hadaway & Hadaway)

Other organisations looked at the different benefits to be gained from an agile or hybrid approach to working, for example making the most out of increased creativity which can be achieved through online collaboration. **Coote O'Grady** spoke of the positive possibilities of a more diverse workforce when considering recruitment through the elimination of more geographical constraints.

One of the organisations in our study, **CPI**, had already embarked upon using hybrid working at their workplace.

We embarked on a project called FLEX to make hybrid working an employee choice. We had lots of communication and workshops with employees involved. The project team was ran by the Employee Base with me (HR manager) a sponsor. Just before Christmas (2020) we basically took the plunge to to say, right, we went through the process with everyone who was eligible to work from home and asked about all the tools and everything we needed to provide. Then we said, "You are now a hybrid worker", so we now have a fifth of our workforce, who are permanently a hybrid work workforce which basically means your predominant base is at home. (CPI)

It should be noted that this was an evidence-based decision and agreed with those employees who wanted to engage in hybrid working, they were not coerced or forced to do so. This is important to raise here, for new evidence in other external research as discussed later in this report, pointed to such practices (employee involvement in decision making on hybrid working) as being essential. We believe that **CPI** were very much 'ahead of the game' in this case and asked them to explain their approach and how they communicated with their employees.

Of our employee base 150 of them are now hybrid workers, so we can clear space in the office, we can do all of that sort of stuff so that's been a big win for us. And the employees themselves are over the moon that we've been able to do that all for them because now they can plan ahead, they now know that "okay I'm going to be at home, so I can reduce my child care costs, I don't need to renew my travel season ticket" - all of that sort of stuff which is great.

We formally do a 'net promoter' score every year with our employees and did one in January this year with different questions. It was quite a detailed survey that gave us loads of data, loads of insight, which has enabled us to change, not only a flexible working policy, if you like, but also a number of other things that we do as an organisation and how we connect with each other. There were a few open questions, so people could put their own words to it, which again gave us loads of insight around things we had to do differently and things we were doing well, and when we decided to take the plunge to making hybrid working an option - an employment option - we held lots of workshops across the organisation. One with the employee forum, one with a selection of line managers. One group that are like early adopters to technology, so we asked them. And we've got loads of really good feedback. It was worth it. (CPI)



The individual impact for workers and what it means for the future

The organisations knew that the events of the pandemic and the resulting changes that were made would have a long-term impact on the way they would operate in the future on a more personal level.

As discussed, all the organisations mentioned that staff missed human interactions, and that the pandemic, and an enforced move to remote working, had pushed them to consider both the intrinsic value of work and working relationships - but also the value that physical presence had for them both professionally and personally. Although many of the organisations made huge efforts to maintain a social aspect of work and continue the culture they had once shared in the workplace, many also emphasised that it just 'wasn't the same'.

"I think from an HR perspective the organisation misses the opportunity to be able to change, direct and influence where we want our culture to go, because people aren't here to see it and feel it. You become detached, but that move from having the human interaction and seeing people in 3D to an interface on your PC will have a massive impact on mental health and connectivity with the organisation."(Fire Service)

The organisations therefore acknowledged that future working models and contexts would need to be sensitive to the challenges that many had faced during the pandemic. They also needed to try to reinstate and provide staff with the aspects that they had genuinely missed, for example their colleagues and teams. Although hybrid and agile models appeared to be of much value, there was no tangible evidence of the full demise of the office just yet. Furthermore, still confronted with managing the more individual challenges and individualities of staff, the organisations suggested that the relationships had become closer and on a deeper and more personal level, in particular amongst the team at **whyaye!, Akzo, and CAB.**



"The pandemic has created an opportunity to see into people's lives, into their homes, with their families, which hopefully will have made people a lot more considerate of others as individuals as opposed to a thing that works for a company that is delivering a thing." (whyaye!)

"We will come out of this as a stronger team. We have really pulled together." (CAB)

"People connecting with each other is a big change - we have had to become... even though we are all working from home, so we are separate...it feels like we have had to become closer! When there are no technical issues, you could be having this conversation face to face, so why would I travel to go and meet someone? I do think it takes away the personal element but it proves that we can do it. I have got to know the team better and work closer with the team, and so I have got to know people better and learn from them, and people who I wouldn't normally have had the chance to. Everything feels closer." (Akzo)

Conclusions, key messages and recommendations

Conclusions, key messages and recommendations

Throughout the UK, various cities and regions have been developing their own charters and pledges to develop better working practices (see the Appendix for links to these charters and pledges). This includes the North East of England where we have introduced a Good Work Plan (2018), Good Work Pledge (2020) and the Great Jobs Agenda (TUC, 2017), all of which focus on the vision for the future of the UK and regional labour markets and the promotion of fair and decent work.

These initiatives also provide realistic opportunities for employees to develop and progress in their working lives. All of these Charters were developed and initiated prior to the pandemic, therefore are not specific to the unique challenges and changes that COVID-19 has brought about. However, the experiences of working through the pandemic, and what is presented in our case studies, strongly demonstrates that there has never been a more critical time for organisations and employers to consider how they can implement good work into their policies and practices in the same ways that the pledges and charters encourage. Our study concludes that many organisations developed initiatives during the pandemic out of necessity. Whilst not all of the organisations are accredited or signed up to Good Work pledges, many have developed policies and practices that are reflected in the principles, values and motivations found in the Good Work Agenda more generally.

Key messages and recommendations

Overall, the key message drawn out from this study is the need for employers and managers to *value your workforce*. What could be viewed as a positive effect of COVID-19 on work and employment is how many organisations have realised the value of their employees, such as in their commitment, loyalty, engagement, sacrifice and the ability to quickly adapt to flexible working initiatives. This can be evidenced in varying forms, but what follows are the key areas of value we recommend from this report.

Job quality

This term can have varying definitions, and is often used as an umbrella term to include job satisfaction and fair pay. These are important, but for the purpose of this report, we focus on the job quality also being secure and stable work with guaranteed working hours.

All of our case study companies offered secure work. Only one used some form of Zero Hour Contracts and this was with highly paid, highly skilled professionals, usually retired experts in their field or doctoral students. The government published a [Good Work Plan](#) in 2018, including a pledge to introduce legislation “to give all workers the right to request a more stable contract”. However, the right to request does not necessarily mean that a positive decision will be given.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we need to ensure that good work and good jobs with employment security and stability, along with guaranteed working hours where workers also have some influence over working hour/shift patterns, are prioritised.

Fair pay/decent wage

Good work and good jobs should have a decent rate of pay.

We recommend, that for lower paid employees (who were more likely to be key/critical/essential workers during the height of the pandemic) are paid at least the Real (Foundation) Living Wage (RLW). As of 15th November, this has been increased to £9.90 in the UK and £11.05 in London.

Employers who do pay the RLW may experience benefits, such as: increased employee commitment and motivation, and a reduction in staff stress and anxiety due to financial concerns. Using a more expansive grading scale for lower paid staff can encourage confidence in development, progression, increased worker motivation and job satisfaction.

For further advice on the Foundation Living Wage see - <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

Flexible working practices

We recommend that here we need to focus on secure but also flexible work.

Since the first lockdown, the organisations who contributed to this report, and their employees, have exhibited remarkable flexibility and adaptability in their clear ability to respond swiftly to the pandemic with purpose and innovation. This included sensitivities and leniency in response to the challenges faced by their employees, ranging from employers developing practices to help staff to balance work with familial and home-schooling duties, as well as those needing allowances for other personal reasons including flexibility in schedules for those wanting to engage in hobbies or other wellbeing initiatives. Many organisations are moving towards developing a hybrid workforce in discussion with their employees and some also with their trade unions. This all exhibits a genuine valuing of the workforce as well as an understanding of the importance of work-life balance.

Regarding flexibility and organisational work-life balance policies and practices, this report emphasises that flexible working will be a key feature of the future world of work.

Our **recommendations** are:

Flexible working has proven to be popular with many employees, however, what is also important is the **responsible autonomy of employees having some degree of control over their working hours, schedules and shift patterns.**

We recommend all organisations develop formal work-life balance policies and practices to support all of their employees. However, we recognise that there needs to be care taken with issues over management discretion, consistency and transparency regarding future policies.

Work-life balance policies and practices and the management of those practices. ACAS provide best practice guidance on flexible working which is very useful to both employers and employees. The following weblink also provides guidance for those organisations who do not yet have formal work-life balance policies.

<https://www.acas.org.uk/responding-to-a-flexible-working-request/consider-the-flexible-working-request>

Organisations also need to monitor the take up of work-life balance policies and practices, **to move away from 'traditional' and 'gendered' notions of flexible working** (i.e., in assuming that work-life balance policies and practices relate only to young mothers with young children).

Furthermore, employees need to be fully aware of such organisational work-life balance policies and practices and **they need to be actively promoted, communicated and accessible to all staff.** This should include not only full-time 'core' employees, but all employees including those on other forms of employment contract, particularly more insecure contracts. For further information and help on this, The Living Hours campaign produced a document pre-Covid that will be helpful

[\(https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/](https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/)

[Living%20Hours%20Final%20Report%20110619_1.pdf](#))

Similarly, there is some useful guidance provided by the Trades Union Congress - <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-guidance/pay-holiday-and-working-hours/flexible-working>

When making any changes to working practices we recommend that any decision making is done through active consultation and discussions with employees and, where recognised, trade unions. This is vital in understanding employees' expectations, concerns, needs and wants of any future workplace changes.

Engagement and employee voice – effective communications and representation

Many of our participant organisations have already been intensively engaged in consultations and discussions with their employees and trade unions, and most have reflected and acted upon the changes and experiences acquired and learned through the pandemic and its impact on work.

Promoting health and wellbeing

Many organisations in our study had signed up to other more health focused accreditations such as the TUC Better Health at Work campaign. This provided stronger foundations for workplace cultures that considered both the physical and mental health of all employees. Examples included providing activities, communities, and support for anybody who needed it. Within this, almost

all the organisations in our study developed new ways of keeping in touch with their employees, especially those working remotely.

Some may find the following useful:

<https://www.betterhealthatworkaward.org.uk/>

The effects of the pandemic on employees will be wide and varied and for many, there will not be a simple 'return to normal'. Therefore, a strong focus on health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace and a re-evaluation of existing related policies is recommended.

Developing a balanced workforce

We would recommend a focus on employment policies and practices to ensure these are equitable and fair across an entire organisation.

For example, organisations will need to take into account the effectiveness of their **equality and diversity policies**, ensuring these are available and accessible to all employees. What is also important to note is the importance of the **development of employability skills** – these are essential to developing the workforce, as well as, avoiding underemployment. Good work initiatives typically emphasise the importance of job design, training and skills development, and career progression opportunities and these should be available to all staff to enhance employee recruitment and retention.

This is now more important than ever, as organisations

across the country begin to plan what work will look like in their workplaces in the future. The organisations we spoke to were already having important conversations with their workforces about how to develop a workplace and working arrangements that are safe, secure and appropriate for everyone.

We conclude by arguing that it is imperative that organisations continue to develop progressive policies and practices to enhance flexible working, work/life balance, employee voice, job satisfaction and job security, as we found in our study. Indeed, The Good Work Charters and TUC's Great Jobs Agenda provide a good pathway to the development of meaningful and decent future work and employment.

Recommendations and concerns for the introduction of hybrid working

The rapid move to remote working has demonstrated how it can be carried out at a greater scale and may help to dispel any misgivings, or previous attitudes of hesitancy from some managers regarding the allowance of flexible working policies and practices to employees.

Many studies are publishing results and predictions and, for the most part, claiming that most employers expect 'hybrid' working to become commonplace post-pandemic. The most likely longer-term changes are expected to be a mix of working from home some days and working in the office, for a significant proportion of the UK workforce. However, from reading this literature, it seems that it will not be as straightforward as simply picking up what worked for organisations during the pandemic and continuing with that strategy.

There are many concerns and recommendations raised in other studies with reference to the move to Hybrid Working that we felt would be useful to add to the end of our report and these are as follows:

1. **It is now acknowledged that not all employees who can work from home** will necessarily want to work from home for varying reasons (this was also found in our study):
 - Not everyone will have the same capacity or ability to work from home. For example, this may be constrained due to shared or cramped accommodation with no suitable space to work from home or a lack of IT equipment (see also Taylor et al., 2021).
 - The social interactions that many people have missed due to working from home. Due to the loss of workplace interactions and communities, some employees have suffered with mental health conditions due to being socially isolated. They may want to work in an office and socialise with colleagues.
2. Research has demonstrated how **many employees are, in some cases, overworking themselves and feeling pressured to work endless hours** for reasons such as:
 - Job insecurities, isolation and not being able to access support, fearing company 'spot checks' (such as monitoring how much work they are doing at home). An article by Trenaman in People Management (2021) demonstrates that, while productivity may have improved among those working remotely, this also has a negative effect on employees, many of whom have been working three hours longer on average per week – this is leading to concerns of 'burnout' (see Taylor et al., 2021).

Funded by:

- The inability to escape the workplace. It is suggested that people are working longer hours as they do not have the clear boundary between work and home. Also described as “boundary-blurring,” whereby employees work longer hours when they do not have the ability to leave a physical ‘office’ as they would when having a clear spatial separation of a place of ‘work’ and ‘home’.
 - Research has demonstrated how women have predominantly taken on the caring roles and home-schooling duties at home during the lockdowns. This means that many women have been left to ‘work when they can’, thereby extending their working day and becoming exhausted. Hardy (2021) cautioned how some sectors have reported that “... high-earning women with caring roles who have sought to maintain their careers during the pandemic feel that they are falling even further behind their male counterparts.”
 - There are also issues of working extended and excessive working hours, as employees try to ‘balance’ work with home schooling and caring duties. Some of the organisations in our study tried to mitigate this and warn against a long hours culture.
3. From a survey of 5,000 working adults in the UK during January and February 2021, it was cautioned that **organisations need to also be aware that they might lose excellent members of staff** as “Workers will use the pandemic as an opportunity to consider what their job actually means” (Trenaman 2021) and employees will be able to more easily ‘move through employment contracts when working online’. Therefore, to retain good staff, an organisation must ensure they have a

good flexible working policy that values all staff. If not, the study suggests that **a third of workers could leave their job if employers do not continue to provide for flexible working beyond the pandemic.**

4. When designing a flexible/remote working hybrid system it is warned **that true flexible working won't be achieved if employees are forced to work in a remote location** (HR magazine 2020). If a company is “just going to try and half [their] property bill and haul people in on Monday, Wednesday and Friday,” this isn't moving to a true remote working model.
5. The CIPD (2020) have cautioned that **a rise in working from home might lead to a change to employment contracts**. For example, they note how some HR professionals are raising questions about “...changing pay structures on the grounds that employees do not have to pay for their commute.” They point to the counter argument that “...longer-term, organisations may see savings in office space costs, which are built into human resource costs.” We concur with the CIPD that “renegotiating pay or contracts risks trashing the psychological contract if not breaching legal contracts”, and that protecting good work should be paramount.
6. It has also been noted that **some employers may see a rise in homeworking as an opportunity to employ more ‘gig work’, in effect a ‘digital piecework’** that leads to more precarious forms of work (Gifford and Green 2020). This will be unsustainable for some and does not protect or promote good work. In fact, the changes made now may provide some good in eradicating precarious forms of work and insecure

work contracts. In earlier research (McBride and Smith 2018), we discovered serious issues to peoples' lives when working in precarious work contracts.

The pandemic has brought to light the jobs that are valued by society, with some workers hailed as heroes through the pandemic. Indeed, many of these jobs classed as Key work or Essential work were conducted by those on lower paid contracts. Indeed, many of these ‘key/essential’ jobs, as we discovered in our earlier research pre-Covid, (McBride and Smith 2018) were also mostly precarious, insecure contracts with limited working hours. Yet many of these workers have been given a rise in social status during the pandemic and the value of this work still needs to be taken into account in any decisions for the future of work (see McBride and Smith, 2020).

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/from-forgotten-to-key-workers-protecting-the-precariously-employed/>

7. This leads us to our final point, most media reports focus on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on changes in work arrangements for workers in a regular, standard employment contract. However, we would argue that **when an organisation conducts a granular analysis of their workforce to develop a remote/flexible way of working, they need to take into account the entire workforce** (see also Spurk and Straub, 2020) including all of those people on existing forms of flexible contracts who face insecurity and underemployment at work, yet are now classed as key/essential workers.

Stakeholder consultations

Stakeholder consultations

AkzoNobel (abb. Akzo)

AkzoNobel are a global paint manufacturing company, including household name brands such as Dulux. Within the UK the organisation has around 3,500 employees spread across various sites and stores. In the North East, Akzo have manufacturing sites in Felling, Gateshead and Ashington, as well as offices in Gateshead.

Bernicia Homes (abb. Bernicia)

Bernicia Homes are a social housing provider in the North East, managing around 14,000 properties and 30,000 tenants. Bernicia has around 550 employees operating from four primary offices in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Ashington, Durham and Newcastle. Although Bernicia's core business is social housing, they also have a commercial arm to property owners in leasehold block environments, of which all profits go back into the social purposes of the organisation, for example employability schemes and supporting the Bernicia Foundation.

Centre for Process Innovation (abb. CPI)

CPI is an independent technology innovation centre in the UK operating across diverse markets including healthcare, food and agriculture, FMCG, electronics, energy, transportation and construction. CPI has around 450 employees and operates from various sites across the North East including Wilton, Darlington and Sedgfield with some office space also in Durham.

Citizen's Advice Bureau (abb. CAB)

CAB is a community-based charity in County Durham providing independent, impartial advice to all for no charge as well as campaigning for change. CAB help their clients with anything from money issues to problems at work, housing, to consumer rights. The CAB based in Durham covers all across County Durham including Barnard Castle, Seaham, and Consett. CAB has 124 paid staff, and although they did have a significant volunteer workforce of around 250 volunteers, this experienced changes due to the pandemic.

Coote O'Grady

Coote O'Grady provide legal spend management and operational services for global organisations across various sectors. They have 11 employees, all of whom work on a flexible basis and have done since before C19. They believe that employees should not be wasting ten hours each week travelling from one place to another to deliver their job when the technology exists to support a modern, flexible workforce. Nor should they have to quit the working world altogether just to ensure their children get to and from school. They are based in East Boldon.

County Durham and Darlington Fire Service (abb. Fire Service)

County Durham and Darlington Fire Service is a public sector organisation with 550 staff, covering both the County Durham and Darlington regions. They have 15 fire stations and 245 fire engines. The service's key mission is to respond to emergency situations, namely fires, rescues, and traffic accidents. Due to the nature of their work their operations are on-hand 24/7.

ENGIE

ENGIE is an international energy efficiency and facilities management regeneration company. ENGIE has around 17,000 employees in the UK and approximately 170,000 across the globe. Newcastle city centre is home to the shared services centre which supports the UK business unit and holds around 210 employees.

Groundwork

Groundwork is one of a federation of charitable organisations, established in the wake of the mining crisis, set up to support disadvantaged communities to empower them to help themselves. Groundwork North East has around 55 employees who conduct their work at various sites across the North East including Jarrow Hall, Marsden Health and Wellbeing Centre, West Boldon Education Centre, and they also have a Groundwork shop selling second-hand furniture.

Hadaway & Hadaway Solicitors LLP (abb. Hadaway & Hadaway)

Hadaway & Hadaway is a solicitors practice based in North Shields, dealing with an equal split of both legal aid and private client work. Hadaway & Hadaway work from one office, but the office has expanded noticeably over the years. There are around 40 members of staff within the firm, inclusive of the 4 partners.

Harlands Accountants (abb. Harlands)

Harlands is a business accountancy service, primarily for manufacturing and engineering, professional services, science and technology and food and drink manufacturing. Harlands have 23 members of staff including 3 partners. Harlands main office is based in Stanley in County Durham.

Irwin Mitchell LLP (abb. Irwin Mitchell)

Irwin Mitchell is a multidisciplinary law firm, covering various legal services for both personal and business clients. Irwin Mitchell has roughly 3,000 employees in the UK nationwide and offices across the country, including in Newcastle. Irwin Mitchell also has finance-related subsidiaries within the group, as well as call centres and a whole range of group services around sales, marketing, and IT.

Leica Biosystems (abb. Leica)

Leica is a medical devices company that develops and supplies clinical diagnostics to the pathology market with operations all over the world. Specifically, they manufacture products that advance cancer diagnosis and enable clinicians to efficiently provide patients a highly confident diagnosis within 24 hours of biopsy. Leica has operations in the North East with 250 employees based at Newcastle. This consists of both production and distribution employees (classed as essential workers) and office-based staff.

Muckle LLP (abb. Muckle)

Muckle is a law firm based in Newcastle, covering all areas of commercial law. The team comprises of around 150 members of staff, however they are going through a period of growth. Although Muckle does have an office in the centre of Newcastle, they have been on an agile working journey for close to three years.

Newcastle Carers

Newcastle Carers is a small charity supporting unpaid carers who care for someone living in the Newcastle area. With around 27,000 carers in Newcastle, the charity ensures that they know their rights and provide support, advice, and information. Newcastle Carers also raises awareness of carer issues and have contracts with Newcastle City Council and the NHS to provide support to carers. The charity is grant funded. There are 23 members of staff and the office is located in Byker. Newcastle Carers also offer a satellite service where workers would normally travel to community venues and offer drop-in services.

Newcastle & Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (abb. Newcastle & Gateshead CCG)

Newcastle & Gateshead CCG is a commissioning organisation which commissions the health and care for the population of Newcastle and Gateshead. They work to improve health inequalities for Newcastle and Gateshead, and have around 120 employees who occupy various roles, for example general practitioners, administrative staff, board members and directors. They also commission hospitals in the area, and the office is based in Newburn in Newcastle.

Quorum Business Park (abb. Quorum)

Quorum Park is a business park in Newcastle with around 30 tenants located at the site including up to around 7,000 members of staff. During the pandemic this reduced to around only 1,000 members of staff a day working on site. Quorum provides events such as business, food and learning events and manages a system of communication for all the tenants to keep informed. The 'hub' that manages the site is a team of 6 people.

Robson Laidler Accountancy Services (abb. Robson Laidler)

Robson Laidler provide accountancy services, business advice and wealth management. They recently celebrated their 100th year anniversary. They are currently based in Jesmond in Newcastle, and previously had an office in Chester-le-Street. Robson Laidler have 97 members of staff. The organisation experienced fundamental changes around six years ago.

Team Fostering

Established some 20 years ago, Team Fostering is an independent third sector/non-profit organisation. It is based in the North East of England, in North Shields but covers the North East, Yorkshire and East Midlands. Team Fostering is a private fostering agency. The organisation is funded by local authorities and is an ethical organisation. It has 65 staff and a small central services team, social workers, and an education team.

whyaye!

whyaye! was founded in 2019, is based in Newcastle, and since its inception has shown quick growth. whyaye! is a financial services organisation, providing specialism in technological change, people change, and operational resilience. The team has around 30 members of staff and pride themselves on their lack of organisational hierarchy. whyaye!'s working structure has always been predominantly remote, other than client visits, even before any changes due to the pandemic occurred.

Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP (abb. Womble Bond Dickinson)

Womble Bond Dickinson is a legal firm with traditions based in the North East since the 1700s. It is now a transatlantic law firm serving corporate, individual and non-profit clients across every business sector. With various offices in the UK, specifically in the North East, Womble Bond Dickinson have an office in Newcastle located on the Quayside.

Pledges and charters

Pledges and Charters

Birmingham Business Charter for Social Responsibility (Birmingham City Council). See https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50209/birmingham_business_charter_for_social_responsibility/1828/the_charter_and_policies

C-19 Business Pledge (Nationwide).
See <https://www.c19businesspledge.org>

Good Employment Charter Croydon (Borough of Croydon).
See <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/business-licences-and-tenders/running-business/croydon-good-employer-charter>

Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter (Greater Manchester Combined Authority).
See <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk>

Humber Skills Pledge (Humber Region).
See <https://www.humberlep.org/skills-pledge/>

Lancashire Skills Pledge (Lancashire). See <https://www.lancashireskillshub.co.uk/lancashire-skills-pledge/>

Liverpool Fair Employment Charter (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority). See https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/FEC_2019.pdf

The Mayor's Good Work Standard (London). See <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/supporting-business/good-work-standard-gws-0>

North of Tyne Good Work Pledge (North of Tyne Combined Authority). See <https://www.northoftyne-ca.gov.uk/good-work-pledge>

Nottingham Jobs Pledge (Nottingham City Council).
See <https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/jobspledge>

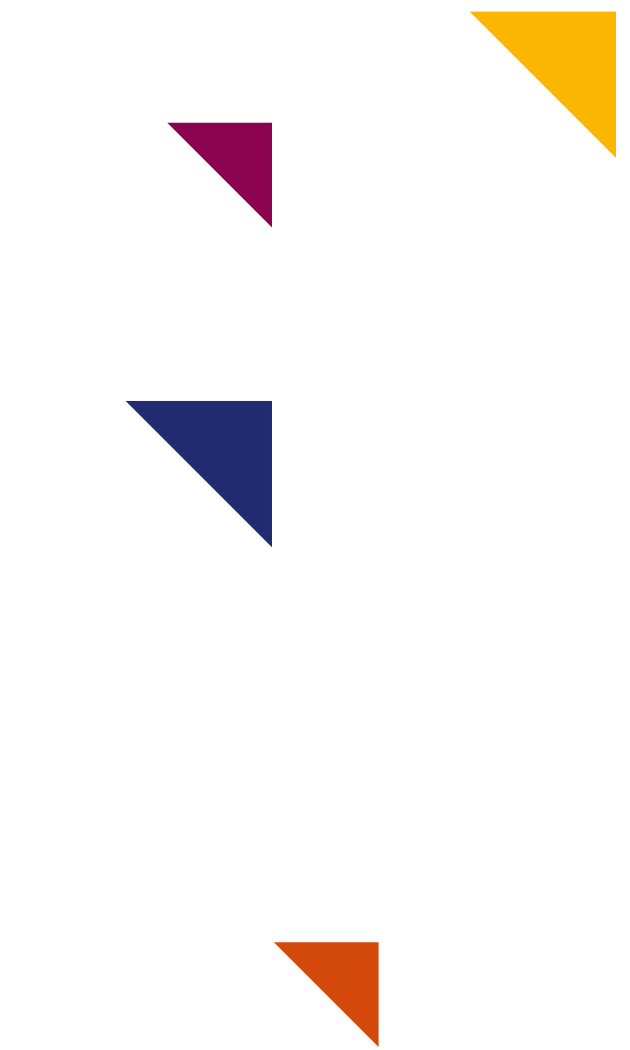
Oldham's Fair Employment Charter (Borough of Oldham).
See https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200146/strategies_plans_and_policies/1303/oldham_s_fair_employment_charter

Preston's Fairness Charter (Preston City Council). See <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/1397/Preston-s-Fairness-charter>

Salford City Council Employment Standards Charter (Salford City Council). See <https://www.salford.gov.uk/your-council/city-mayor/city-mayor-s-employment-standards-charter/the-employment-standards-charter-categories-and-pledges/>

Scottish Business Pledge (Scotland - Nationwide).
See <https://scottishbusinesspledge.scot/about/>

Worcestershire Charter for Inclusive Growth (Worcestershire Council). See <https://www.fusionworcs.co.uk/projects/wcig/>



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