

HOWARD KENNEDY



## Lockdown lessons: work and relationships

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## Executive summary

### Work and personal relationships since Covid-19

In September 2020, Howard Kennedy commissioned YouGov to undertake a nationwide survey investigating how lockdown has affected work and relationships. It follows research we did in 2019 on how relationship breakdown affects higher performing individuals at work.

We received 2,092 responses. The survey results identify some useful themes:

- Lockdown has had a positive impact on committed romantic relationships and work-life balance
- Many people are optimistic about the future of their relationships post-lockdown
- Workload itself hasn't materially changed on the whole
- The impact on how we work is pretty wide-reaching and there are points for employers to consider long-term on agility at work

In our previous research communication, quality time, work-life balance and prioritising the relationship were the most cited as the steps people are taking to stop relationship difficulties happening in the future. We wanted to see therefore if quality time and work-life balance had improved now that spending time away from home was less of an issue, and what this might mean for employers.

We hope you find this report insightful. Please let us know if you have any questions.



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I believe that a strong work-life balance is the responsibility of the employer as well as the employee, and should be given more weight as part of employment packages.

SURVEY RESPONDENT 2019



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## Statistics at a glance



2,092 respondents: 46% male, 54% female

- **66%** of those in committed relationships have been positive about their relationship since the Coronavirus pandemic
- **66%** said they have felt positive about the future of their relationship since the start of the pandemic
- **33%** of those in committed relationships stated that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a positive impact on their work-life balance
- **47%** of our respondents in committed relationships thought the pandemic has had positively impacted them having more quality time with their partner



## Our findings

### Lockdown and work-life balance

Overall 40% of those in work say that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a positive effect on their work-life balance. This makes sense, with less travel and more time at home, there's more time to participate in life outside work.

As a law firm that advises private individuals and their employers on employment and family law, we were especially interested in the responses of parents and those in committed relationships. Of our respondents 33% of those in committed relationships stated that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a positive impact on their work-life balance. This included parents with 37% saying that their work-life balance was positively impacted by lockdown as opposed to 26% without children.



Greater proximity and time together has accelerated relationship progression. The family team has been as busy supporting new expressions of commitment and parenthood as it has been advising on breakdown, separation and divorce. The stages are the same but people are reaching them sooner.

**LOIS LANGTON, HEAD OF FAMILY LAW**

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## Our findings

### Good news for relationships and quality time

For many people in Great Britain lockdown has meant more time together at home, something that wasn't always possible before.

66% of those in committed relationships have been positive about their relationship since the Coronavirus pandemic and the same percentage said they have felt positive about the future of their relationship since the pandemic began. This is in contrast to 9% who thought it had had a negative impact and 21% saying it made no different. 47% of our respondents in committed relationships thought the pandemic has positively impacted them having more quality time with their partner.

### Mixed results for parenthood and work-life balance

We would have expected parents to have struggled more with balancing work and home life. Having children at home we thought might make things challenging, especially school age children. The YouGov survey results provided contradictory results. The question we asked was whether the pandemic has had a generally positive or negative impact on:

- Having more quality time with your partner
- Being able to put in place childcare arrangements
- Your general work-life balance
- Being able to manage your workload

### Quality time and parenthood

The national average for quality time was 29% positive to 9% negative, for parents/guardians of children (of any age) they had a slightly higher response at 33% positive and the same negative. There were differences depending on the age of the children with children 4 years and under (44% positive/18% negative) and 5 to 11 years (42% positive/16% negative), and as a whole people with children under 18 had marginally higher positive scores for quality time than the net (39% positive/14% negative).



## Our findings

### Being able to put in place childcare arrangements

We had thought to find more interesting results from this question and although there was evidence that parents would appreciate support from employers with childcare arrangements, in terms of how positively or negatively lockdown had impacted childcare the results were low 5% positive, 6% negative and 80% don't know/not applicable. There were slightly more interesting results for children 4 years and under and 5 to 11 where 35% of parents/guardians stating that lockdown had had a negative impact, and 28% for the 5 to 11 year age group. However, children below secondary school age require more supervision and support so those results are unsurprising.

### General work-life balance for parents and guardians

There were variations on responses that surprised us based on the age of the children. Parents with children between 4 and 16 years ranged between 37% and 39% positive and between 22% and 25% negative, with the national average was 29% positive.

Parents with children over the age of 18 are the least likely to say the pandemic has had a positive impact on their work-life balance (20%). Although our research didn't explore responses further, we wondered whether this might be the return of adult children to their parental homes and the disruption that might have caused. And there was certainly anecdotal evidence amongst our own team that supported that observation.

20% of respondents stated that their general work-life balance was negatively impacted by lockdown and parents/guardians broadly mirrored this with results averaging 19%.

### Being able to manage your workload

There was so much press coverage about the challenges placed upon employees by lockdown that we were interested in seeing whether there was an impact on the ability to manage workloads. 28% of the overall respondents said it had neither a positive or negative effect. This figure was higher for parents/guardians of secondary school age children where the results ranged from 33% to 37%. However, we did notice that while the average for all respondents was 24% positive to 15% negative, parents of adult children had lower scores for positive 17% and negative 10%, (this may also be due to their age which would include those in part-time employment or retired). Our conclusion from these results is that while the pandemic has had an enormous impact universally, in terms of workload itself, the effect was less wide reaching than on work-life balance, childcare and personal relationships.



of parents with children 5-11 want flexible working patterns

## What can employers expect?

We asked respondents which steps they think employers should be taking to help employees with working life once lockdown eases completely. We wanted to know what might change permanently now so many of us have experienced such long periods working from home, or so differently from before.



We provided prompts covering providing employees with:

- more fixed working from home days (i.e. specific days in a week where they would work from home)
- flexible working patterns (e.g. allowing early/ late starts, extended break periods etc.)
- the option to work from home full-time
- more childcare options (e.g. providing/subsidising childcare close to work)
- a financial contribution to help set up a home office



We also gave respondents the option to state if there were any particular steps they thought employers should be taking to help employees.

### Employer flexibility on where and when we work

Moving away from our research last year and its focus on higher earners we asked respondents about the changes they thought all employers might seek to make. A conclusive 67% of respondents said they thought employers should provide more flexible working patterns and more than half thought fixed working from home days (55%) and the option to work from home full-time (52%). This can't be unexpected and may be welcome news, however, what may be less welcome is that 38% thought employers ought to contribute financially to support those working from home and 35% thought employers could help with childcare post-lockdown.



Employers have had to demonstrate incredible empathy, agility and resilience this year. Our clients are now looking to the future and we are working with them to ensure they have the policies, decision making tools and frameworks in place to adapt and enhance their ability to attract and retain staff as the 'new normal' becomes business as usual.

**JANE AMPHLETT, HEAD OF EMPLOYMENT**

## What can employers expect?

### What employees may seek to change

We wanted to know whether people would be seeking to make any changes to the way they work when restrictions ease completely. The results were balanced – 24% (500) people said yes, and 28% (590) said no. However, when we explored and looked further into what this group thought employers should be doing for employees post-lockdown. 82% of those who said they would be seeking to make a change also thought that employers should provide more flexible working patterns, 71% thought employers should consider allowing employees to work from home full-time and 70% thought employees should be provided with more fixed working from home days.

### Londoners may seek more flexibility

We also looked at regional difference and adults based in London were among the highest (73%) employees suggesting employers should seek to provide flexible working patterns e.g. allowing early/late starts, extended break periods etc. as a result of Coronavirus pandemic. Interestingly 73% of parents of children aged 5 to 11 years said the same.

### Younger employees might prefer fixed days at home

In terms of the age of respondents 65% of the younger generation (aged 18-24) are keen for their employers to provide them with more fixed working from home days i.e. specific days in a week where they would work from home. In comparison the 55+ generation who are fairly evenly split (50%) although it's worth noting that this age group will include retired former workers.





## Observations and conclusions

The Coronavirus pandemic has had an irreversible impact on life at home, bringing with it terrible personal tragedy, public expense and commercial pressure. It has to be hoped that some lasting positive change will come from it.

Whether our research demonstrates that we can't know but there are some interesting observations to draw and points for further discussion that we would like to debate:



- We were pleased to see that overall the future for relationships looks positive and that work-life balance and quality time have both improved.
- Just as the lines between work and home have become more blurred, we are also keen to see what steps employers will be seeking to make to retain and attract employees once lockdown eases.
- Productivity is resilient with people across Great Britain able to adapt successfully to manage their workloads in the face of huge changes in the way they work.
- Expectations on employers, their role and obligations may never be the same and where there is competition for talent; employers should expect benefits and working patterns to change.





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## About the research

### What we wanted to learn

We were interested in seeing whether lockdown had had a positive impact on work-life balance, and what this might mean for employers.

### Why we moved away from relationship breakdown to focus on employers

We were interested in seeing whether lockdown had had a positive impact on work-life balance, and what this might mean for employers.

There has already been a great deal written and published during the Covid-19 crisis on the impact of the virus on home lives, including research identifying risk for vulnerable individuals in abusive relationships, as well as research illustrating a diminishing of relationship breakdown due to increased quality time as well as lack of opportunity for infidelity.



### The research methodology

A nationwide YouGov survey was commissioned by Howard Kennedy. This document provides the analysis and interpretation of the research along with observations and further questions for consideration. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. This research comprises a total sample size of 2,092 adults across Great Britain. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st and 22nd September 2020 within the YouGov daily GB Omnibus survey. The results have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

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## The team behind the research

This research was sponsored by the Family and Employment teams of Howard Kennedy.

Howard Kennedy is a London based, full-service law firm, specialising in providing straightforward advice to entrepreneurial businesses and individuals on domestic and international matters. Our Family and Relationships team comprises experts in every aspect of family matters from matrimonial issues, cohabitation, separation and pre-nuptial agreements to arrangements for children. Our Employment team advise business owners, Boards, HR professionals and senior individuals on all aspects of employment, discrimination and global mobility.

For the 2019 research we worked alongside Marriage Foundation, the leading think tank on research into marriage and family stability; Soulmates Academy, specialists in proactively equipping people and organisations with strong relationship competence; and The Relationships Foundation, the think tank for a better-connected society.

For more information on the research or to explore the issues raised in it please contact the relevant team behind the study or visit: [www.howardkennedy.com](http://www.howardkennedy.com).

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