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# Impact of Covid-19 on the UK workplace

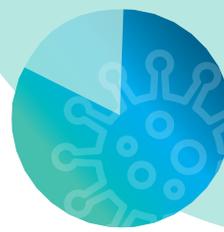
REPORT AUGUST 2020



# Impact of Covid-19 on the UK workplace

To assess the impact of Covid-19 on the UK workplace, GoodCorporation commissioned Opinium to survey 2000 working adults designed to be representative of the UK working population. The survey examined how organisations have responded to the pandemic and in particular how well employees and other stakeholders have been treated during the Covid-19 crisis. It also looks at what support employees have said their organisation will provide coming out of the Coronavirus crisis. 





**83%**   
of UK employees report that they have been **treated well by their employer** during the crisis

# Key findings

<b>Fair Treatment during Covid Crisis</b>	<b>83%</b> Employees treated well	<b>82%</b> Customers, clients service users treated well	<b>74%</b> Suppliers and contractors treated well
<b>Problems with UK furlough scheme</b>	<b>26%</b> Of furloughed employees asked to work	<b>28%</b> Of public sector workers asked to work while furloughed	<b>34%</b> Of workers in 18-24 age group asked to work while furloughed
<b>Excessive working hours during the last 4 months</b>	<b>30%</b> Of employees have been asked to work excessive hours	<b>48%</b> Of UK working males asked to work excessive hours	<b>63%</b> Of London-based workers asked to do excessive hours
<b>Adequate sick pay coming out of the crisis</b>	<b>27%</b> Think their employer will provide adequate sick pay	<b>15%</b> Of manual workers think their employer will provide adequate sick pay	<b>24%</b> Of women think their employer will provide adequate sick pay
<b>Adequate mental health support coming out of the crisis</b>	<b>36%</b> Think their employer will provide adequate mental health support	<b>29%</b> Of private sector employees think they will receive adequate mental health support	<b>16%</b> Of manual workers think their employer will provide adequate mental health support
<b>Safe working environment coming out of the crisis</b>	<b>64%</b> Think their employer will provide a safe working environment	<b>50%</b> Of employees in small organisations think their employer will provide a safe place to work	<b>46%</b> Of unskilled manual workers think their employer will provide a safe place to work
<b>Flexibility around caring and/or home-schooling responsibilities coming out of the crisis</b>	<b>39%</b> Think their employer will provide flexibility around caring and/or home-schooling responsibilities	<b>27%</b> Of small company employees (<50) think their employer will provide flexibility around caring and/or home-schooling responsibilities	<b>13%</b> Of manual workers think their employer will provide flexibility around caring and/or home-schooling responsibilities

Overall the response was positive, **83%<sup>1</sup> of UK employees report that they have been treated well by their employer during the crisis**, with a similar figure (82%) believing that customers, clients and service users have also been treated fairly. The treatment of suppliers and contractors was slightly less positive, with 74% concluding their organisation had treated these stakeholders fairly.

About **12% of the workforce feel that their employer has not handled the crisis well**, rising to 17% for furloughed workers. Similarly 17% of employees in the North East/Yorkshire and Humberside do not think their employer has handled the crisis well. Blue-collar workers are also more negative with 19% feeling that their employer has not done well.

<sup>1</sup> Research conducted for GoodCorporation by Opinium Research from 10-20th July 2020 of 2001 working adults in the UK. Sample designed to be representative of the UK working population. Research conducted by email survey using Opinium's omnibus panel. Population for this research is the UK working population estimated by the UK government to be circa 28,000,000 in employment - the overall analysis has 95% confidence level and +/-2% confidence interval some of the sub-data has a wider confidence interval and this is noted in footnotes where applicable.

# Problems with UK furlough scheme

A total of 21%<sup>2</sup> of respondents had been furloughed and **26%<sup>3</sup> of those furloughed reported that they had been asked to work during the furlough period**, even though this is illegal.

More worrying still is the fact that that a similar level of **public sector workers (28%) were asked to work when furloughed** as those in the private sector (27%).

## Asked to work when furloughed

**?** Question: *Has your organisation asked you to work while furloughed over the last four months?*

	ORGANISATION SECTOR				RESPONDENT AGE		
	TOTAL	Public	Private	Not for profit	18-34	35-54	55+
 <b>Yes</b>	26% 109	28% 31	27% 74	15% 4	34% 48	27% 50	12% 11
 <b>No</b>	70% 290	70% 78	69% 189	80% 20	61% 86	68% 124	87% 80
N/A	4% 17	2% 3	5% 13	5% 1	6% 8	5% 8	1% 1
Base: <i>all those furloughed</i>	<b>415</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>91</b>

“  
Young people aged 18-24 are more likely (34%) to have been asked to work when furloughed... 🌀”

Any fraudulent use of the furlough scheme is an abuse of public funds and these responses suggest an issue to be investigated. That some of these abuses may have been committed by public sector employers is of real concern, particularly given the Government guidance on the scheme. This stated<sup>4</sup> that where employers receive public funding for staff costs and that funding is continuing, they would expect employers to use that money and not apply for the scheme. Furthermore, employers in the public sector, whose staff

were not able to carry out their usual work, were specifically asked to make every effort to redeploy staff to assist with the Government's response to the pandemic. It may also reflect employees providing public services who are working for outsourced providers. Given the significant cost to the country of the Coronavirus response, this possible abuse of the Government's own scheme should be investigated thoroughly. Failure to do so will damage public trust.

2 415 of 2001 employees in the UK report that they are furloughed at the time of the survey (21%) .

3 Of those furloughed 26% (109/415) report that they have been asked to work - 95% confidence level and +/- 4% confidence interval.

4 LGA workforce: coronavirus job retention scheme.

The sector breakdown shows that the abuse of the furlough scheme is seen in most sectors of the economy. Abuse of the scheme also varied by age and seniority. Young people aged 18-24 are more likely (34%) to have been asked to work when furloughed compared to older workers aged 55 or over (12%)<sup>5</sup>. 44% of respondents in middle management or above had been asked to work while furloughed, compared to just 20% of junior managers, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

Indeed blue-collar workers are less likely to have been asked to work while furloughed (18%<sup>6</sup> reported working when furloughed) compared to white-collar workers (31% asked to work when furloughed).

“ Given the significant cost to the country of the Coronavirus response, this possible abuse of the Government’s own scheme by public sector employers should be investigated thoroughly. Failure to do so will damage public trust. ”

## Small organisations vs large

While smaller companies are more likely to have asked furloughed employees to work, even in the UK’s largest employers (with more than 5,000 employees) 11%<sup>7</sup> of such employees reported

that they had been asked to work when furloughed. This suggests that there is widespread fraud and misuse of the furlough scheme, even amongst large organisations with access to

human resources specialists and legal teams who could provide guidance on the correct implementation of the worker retention scheme.

**?** Question: Has your organisation asked you to work while furloughed over the last four months?

		BUSINESS SIZE						
		TOTAL	1-9 employees	10 & 49 employees	50 & 249 employees	250 & 1,000 employees	1,000 & 4,999 employees	5,000 employees or more
	<b>Yes</b>	26% 109	23% 10	23% 21	31% 31	36% 22	35% 16	11% 6
	<b>No</b>	70% 290	74% 33	73% 67	66% 66	60% 37	61% 28	85% 42
	<b>N/A</b>	4% 17	4% 2	3% 3	3% 3	5% 3	4% 2	3% 2
Base: all those furloughed		<b>415</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>49</b>

<sup>5</sup> A total of 48/131 (34%) aged 18-34 compared to a total of 11/91 (12%) aged 55+. 95% confidence level and +/- 8% confidence interval.

<sup>6</sup> This is taken from a small sample of 24/135 (18%) blue-collar employees, compared to 85/274 (31%) white-collar workers. Estimated 95% confidence level and confidence interval of +/-6%.

<sup>7</sup> This is taken from a small sample of 6/49 (11%) employees working in companies with more than 5,000 employees, compared to 69/207 (33%) employees working in companies with 50-5,000 employees. 95% confidence level and estimated +/-9% confidence interval.

## Excessive working hours

The survey also found that **30% of employees have been asked to work excessive hours during the last four months**. A total of 38% of UK working males were asked to work excessive hours,

compared to 22% of women. Nearly half of young people aged 18-24 were asked to work excessive hours (48%) compared to 22% of 35-54 and just 11% of those aged 55 or over. A total

of 63% in the London region reported that they had been asked to work excessive hours. A total of 39%<sup>8</sup> of employees from BAME backgrounds reported working excessive hours.

**?** **Question:** *Has your organisation asked you to work excessive hours over the last four months?*

	TOTAL	GENDER		RESPONDENT AGE		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
 <b>Yes</b>	30% 610	38% 406	22% 204	48% 378	22% 193	11% 39
 <b>No</b>	65% 1294	57% 607	73% 688	48% 376	73% 630	81% 289
N/A	5% 97	4% 47	5% 50	3% 27	5% 44	8% 27
Base: all respondents	<b>2001</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>355</b>

## Managing employees well

Overall 15% of the workforce think that their employer has not managed employees well during the last four months. This rises to 18% for 35-54 year olds and to 18% for the North East/North West, Yorkshire and Humberside (the 'north') combined and perhaps not surprisingly to 23% for furloughed workers.

Over the last four months 13% of UK employees felt that their employers have not prioritised health and safety and this rises to 16% in the 'north'.



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# Managing communications

Communication with employees during the crisis has been challenging, with **19% of**

**employees saying that their employer has not managed communications well during**

**the crisis.** This rises to 20% for women, compared to 17% for men and 26% for blue-collar workers.

**?** **Question:** *Has your organisation communicated well with you and your colleagues about the Coronavirus situation and any changes going on in the organisation?*

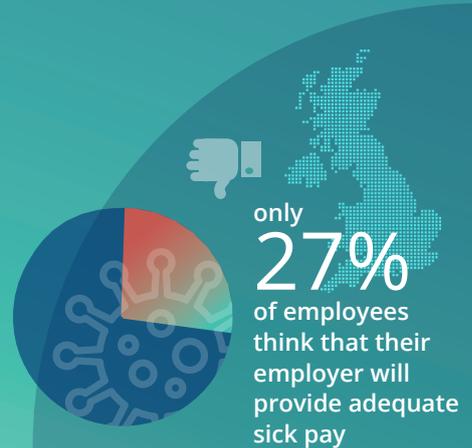
	TOTAL	GENDER		RESPONDENT AGE		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+
 <b>Yes</b>	75% 1503	77% 813	73% 690	75% 586	74% 641	78% 276
 <b>No</b>	19% 370	17% 180	20% 191	18% 139	20% 174	16% 58
N/A	6% 128	6% 67	6% 60	7% 56	6% 52	6% 20
Base: all respondents	<b>2001</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>355</b>

# Moving forwards

Many employers have responded well to the crisis and provided additional support to their employees. Nearly two-thirds (64%) report that their employer will provide a safe working environment as the company comes out of the crisis. However **only 27% of employees think that their employer will provide adequate sick pay.** Ensuring that all workers can afford to isolate if required to do so by

the track and trace scheme is essential to its success. Inadequate sick pay could well deter individuals from complying with the scheme and so contribute to the ongoing spread of the virus. Government and employers need to work together to ensure that individuals do not suffer financially as a result of following Government measures to limit virus transmission.

The survey also highlighted concerns around mental health support and flexibility around caring and home-schooling responsibilities. Just over a third of **employees (36%) believe that their employer will provide adequate mental health support** as we continue to adapt to working through the crisis.



When it comes to flexibility around non-work responsibilities such as caring and home-schooling, only **39% of employees felt they would receive**

**the necessary flexibility** from their employer to accommodate these obligations.

**?** **Question:** Which of the following, if any, has your employer said they will provide coming out of the Coronavirus crisis?

	WORKING STATUS		
	TOTAL	Full time	Part time
A safe working environment	64% 1271	64% 1050	60% 220
Flexibility around my caring and/or homeschooling responsibilities	39% 773	41% 672	28% 101
Adequate mental health support	36% 771	38% 624	24% 87
Adequate sick pay	27% 540	29% 467	20% 74
Other	1% 19	1% 16	1% 3
None of the above	18% 353	16% 260	25% 93
Base: all respondents	2001	1634	367

	ORGNISATION SECTOR			
	TOTAL	Public	Private	Not for profit
A safe working environment	64% 1271	65% 503	62% 687	71% 72
Flexibility around my caring and/or homeschooling responsibilities	39% 773	38% 291	38% 424	53% 53
Adequate mental health support	36% 771	45% 346	29% 322	38% 38
Adequate sick pay	27% 540	28% 217	27% 296	24% 24
Other	1% 19	1% 4	1% 12	2% 2
None of the above	18% 353	15% 114	19% 213	15% 15
Base: all respondents	2001	775	1104	100

Responses of employees are similar across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, except in the area of mental health support. Here the difference between private and public sector workers is striking.

**Far fewer employees in the private sector (29%) believe that their employers are likely to provide adequate support for any mental health needs, than those in the public sector (45%).**

The other key distinction is between blue-collar and white-collar workers as shown in the table below. While 66% of white-collar workers believe their employers will provide a safe working environment as we come out of the crisis, this is true for only 54% of blue-collar workers. Only 14% of blue-collar workers believe that their employers will provide flexibility around caring and home-schooling responsibilities, compared to 45% of white-collar workers.

“ Only 14% of blue-collar workers believe that their employers will provide flexibility around caring and home-schooling responsibilities, compared to 45% of white-collar workers. Similarly, blue-collar workers are less likely to receive adequate mental health support (17% compared to 40%) and less likely to receive adequate sick pay (18% compared to 30%) ”

Similarly, blue-collar workers are less likely to have confidence that they will receive adequate mental health support (17% compared to 40%) or sick pay (18% compared to 30%) than their white-collar counterparts.

Finally, it is of concern that nearly one in five employees believe that their employer would provide none of the measures outlined in the table below, rising to one in three for blue-collar workers.

**?** **Question:** Which of the following, if any, has your employer said they will provide coming out of the Coronavirus crisis?

	WORK CATEGORY		
	TOTAL	White-collar	Blue-collar
A safe working environment	64% 1271	66% 1023	54% 216
Flexibility around my caring and/or homeschooling responsibilities	39% 773	45% 704	14% 55
Adequate mental health support	36% 771	40% 629	17% 69
Adequate sick pay	27% 540	30% 459	18% 72
Other	1% 19	1% 13	1% 3
None of the above	18% 353	14% 211	33% 131
Base: all respondents	2001	1554	397

# Conclusion

Clearly the Covid-19 crisis is unprecedented in its impact on employment in the UK. There is also a need to stop and reflect on the impact it is having on 'ethics' in the workplace and fairness towards all stakeholders. GoodCorporation has argued throughout the crisis that companies should think carefully about the impact of their response on all stakeholders, making concerted efforts to ensure that those least able to shoulder any burden are protected as far as possible. This will be important as we move forwards, so the finding that only 27 per cent of employees think that sick pay will be adequate is of considerable concern. If workers feel they cannot afford to abide by the requirements of either quarantine or the track and trace scheme, the current increase in daily cases is likely to continue.

The issue of fraud of the government furlough scheme will undoubtedly rise up the agenda in the coming months. The sense of unfairness for employers and employees who have acted honestly needs to be addressed. The government must show that the schemes taxpayers have funded are robust and not open to wanton abuse,

least of all by entities working in the public sector. The fact that so many employees have worked when furloughed must be taken seriously by HMRC and investigated properly.

One of the hidden costs of the crisis is likely to be its impact on mental health. With many people still working from home, the

prospect of local lockdowns and a second wave looming, it is vital that employers put this on their radar. In particular, it is important that the private sector catches up and does what it can to support the mental health and wellbeing of its employees and considers this in relation to blue-collar as well as white-collar workers.



*The fact that so many employees have worked when furloughed must be taken seriously by HMRC and investigated properly. 🙌*



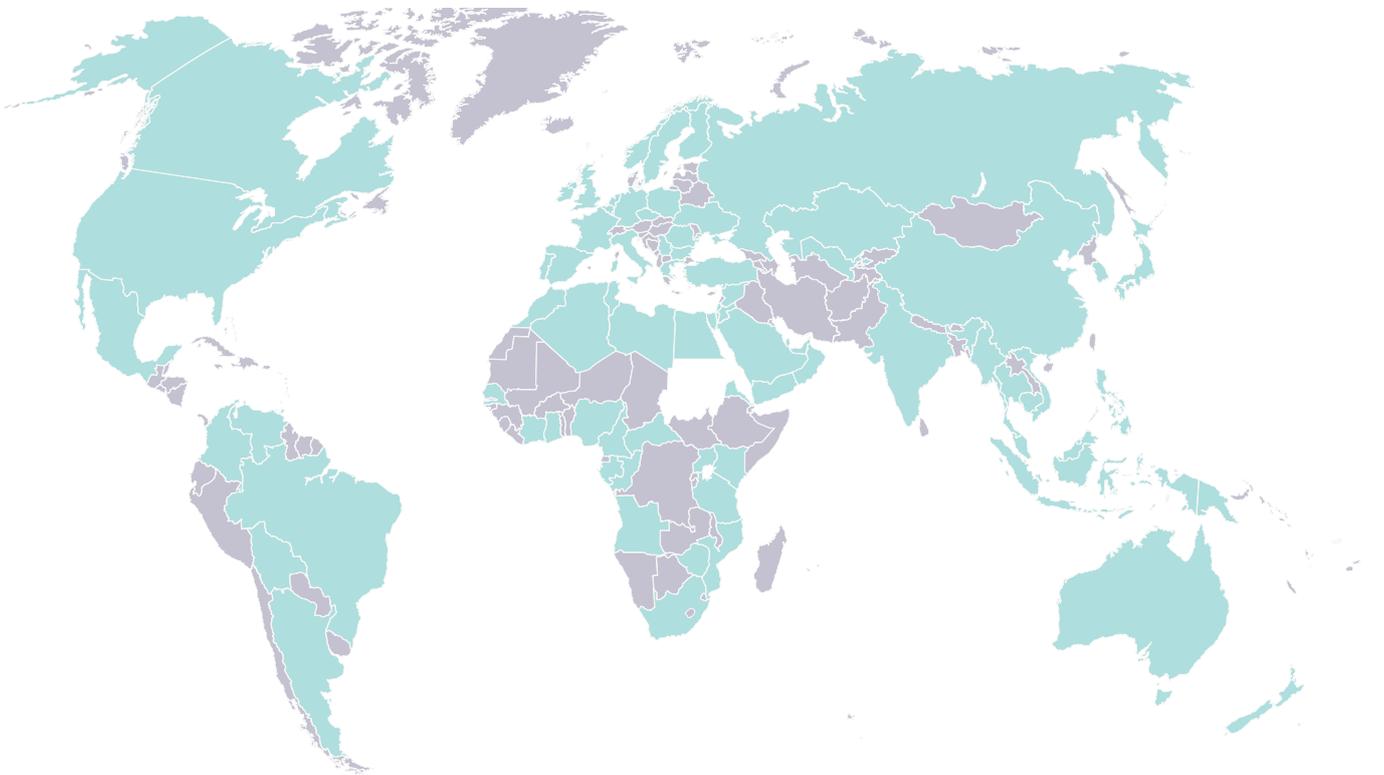
# About GoodCorporation

Recognised in the field of corporate responsibility and business ethics, GoodCorporation has almost 20 years' experience of checking and measuring corporate behaviour. We have conducted over 600 projects in over 80 countries for a range of clients including FTSE 100 and CAC 40 companies.

We offer a range of business ethics consultancy services to help our clients assess, design, build and embed effective ethics and compliance programmes. We ensure that the correct policies, procedures and systems are in place, tailored to the needs of each organisation.

We also provide opportunities to share best practice and thought leadership through our Business Ethics Debate Series at the House of Lords.

## Where we have worked



- |                      |                |            |                  |                     |            |
|----------------------|----------------|------------|------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Algeria              | Colombia       | India      | Mozambique       | Saudi Arabia        | Turkey     |
| Angola               | Congo          | Indonesia  | Myanmar          | Senegal             | UAE        |
| Argentina            | Côte d'Ivoire  | Ireland    | Netherlands      | Serbia              | Uganda     |
| Australia            | Czech Republic | Israel     | New Zealand      | Singapore           | UK         |
| Belgium              | Egypt          | Italy      | Nigeria          | South Africa        | Ukraine    |
| Bolivia              | Eritrea        | Japan      | Norway           | South Korea         | USA        |
| Brazil               | Ethiopia       | Jordan     | Oman             | Spain               | Uzbekistan |
| Brunei               | France         | Kazakhstan | Papua New Guinea | Sweden              | Venezuela  |
| Bulgaria             | Finland        | Kenya      | Philippines      | Switzerland         | Vietnam    |
| Cambodia             | Gabon          | Libya      | Poland           | Syria               | Yemen      |
| Cameroon             | Germany        | Malaysia   | Portugal         | Tanzania            | Zambia     |
| Canada               | Gibraltar      | Mexico     | Qatar            | Thailand            | Zimbabwe   |
| Central African Rep. | Greece         | Montenegro | Romania          | Trinidad and Tobago |            |
| China                | Ghana          | Morocco    | Russia           | Tunisia             |            |

*Impact of Covid-19 on the UK workplace* has been compiled by GoodCorporation, one of the leading practitioners in assessing and measuring responsible management practices. The paper analyses the findings from our survey of UK employees to assess perceptions of how well organisations have treated stakeholders during the Coronavirus outbreak.



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