



Legal Sector in Wales Report:

# How are you really?

Research findings from our pandemic  
& remote working wellbeing survey 2021.

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& remote working wellbeing survey 2021.**

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Research supported by



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## Overview: Why did we launch this survey?

Cardiff and District Law Society and Legal News Wales invited lawyers in Wales to share their wellbeing and remote working experiences and desires for the future in a survey in April 2021.

**We collaborated to run a wellbeing survey for lawyers in Wales, to help understand how the Increased focus on wellbeing has shaped employees' aspirations for how they want to work, where and what kind of support they expect from their employers in the months and years ahead.**

The purpose of the temperature check is to hear from law firm employees – to obtain their views on returning to work, what a working week might look like, expectations for wellbeing support, remote and flexible working and more – to help law firms create attractive, healthy and aspirational places to work.

As law firms are planning to integrate remote working and possibly flexible working into their long-term operation, now is the time to see what employees want, and share that data with decision-makers.

The questions were largely split into two themes – peoples' experiences over the last 12 months, and what they want their future working environment to look like.

Over the next few pages, this report presents a summary of the findings, with accompanying appendices for both the full responses and junior lawyer only responses. A total of 106 responses were received in total.

Our many thanks to [legalnewswales.com](https://legalnewswales.com) for hosting and helping to market the survey to respondents – and to you for sharing your views.

**Clare Good, Wellbeing Officer, Cardiff & District Law Society**

*cardifflaw.org*

July 2021

## 1. Let's start with a review of the last 12 months:

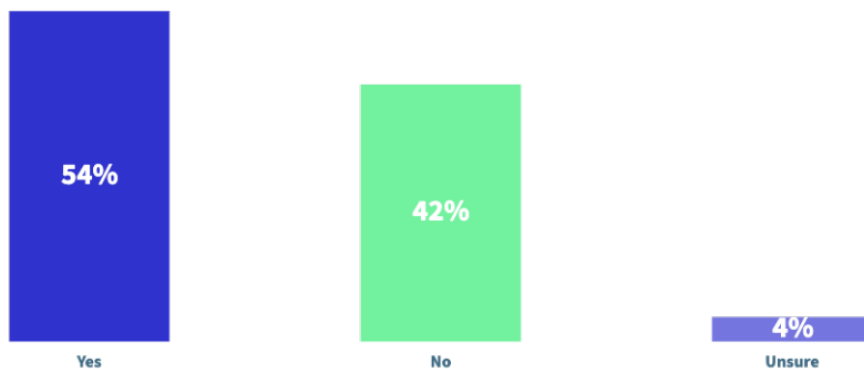
In the last year, 61% of the respondents had worked solely from home with the rest working a mixture of at home and in the office. This differs massively from how people worked pre-pandemic – with 51% of respondents never working from home previously and only 10% doing it once a week.

It is clear that this has been a big shift and learning exercise for most people – and one we did not get any time to prepare for! So, how have people found it?

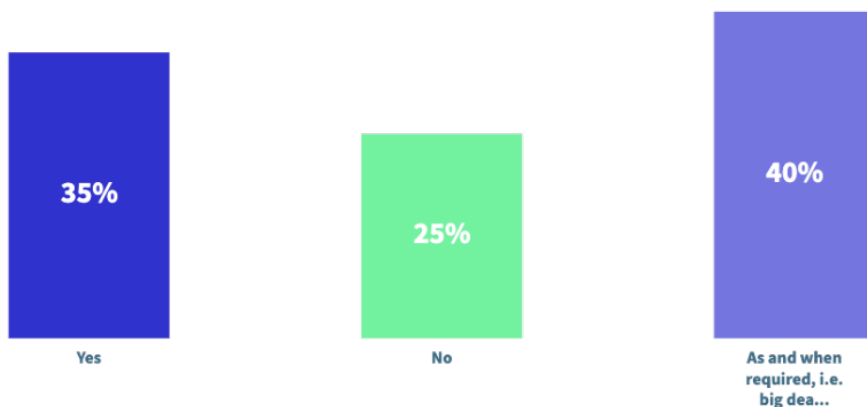
We asked people whether working from home had been a positive or negative experience – people could rate the experience from 0 (negative) to 100 (positive). The average score was 80% - so we can assume that, generally, it has been a positive experience for people.

We asked some more specific questions in relation to client and colleague relationships:

**In the last 12 months, have you found it harder to switch off from work when 'out of hours'?**



**Over the last 12 months have you felt the pressure to be available at all times by clients and your employer?**

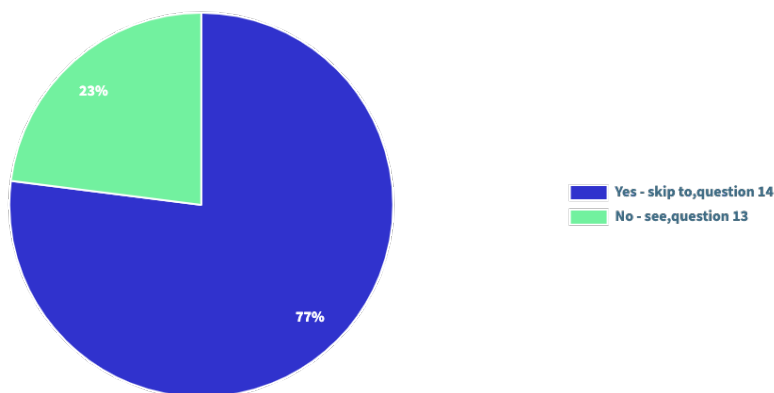


These responses are interesting – they show that even with an increase in issues that are associated with negativity in the workplace (i.e., less connection to colleagues, and a pressure to be available at all times) people still generally see working from home as a positive experience.

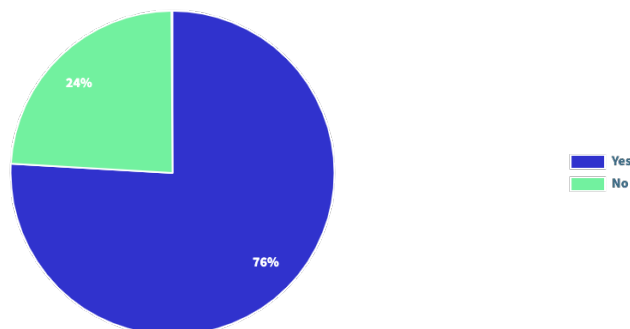
However, that does not mean that we should ignore these negatives, as they are likely to take a toll on wellbeing if they become the ‘new normal’.

We also wanted to delve into how employees felt their employers had responded to the pandemic:

**Over the last 12 months have you felt supported by your employer?**



**Over the last 12 months has your employer sought your views on changing the way you work when things go back to ‘normal’?**



These responses are incredibly encouraging – showing that the majority of firms have been open and supportive with employees.

## **2. Let's move on to what people want from the future.**

We appreciate that this is a bit of work in progress – who knows what next week, month or year will look like. However, now is the time to start planning and implementing the 'new normal' so we are prepared.

We asked people if they were anxious about returning to the office and 53% said they were. This was considerably higher with junior lawyers (75%). We asked people to provide text answers on how employers could reduce this anxiety. The full text responses are in the appendices and can be summarised with two key themes: on the one hand people want reassurance that it is safe to return (for example, clear COVID-protection methods in place), and on the other hand we have people who are concerned that they will be required to return to the office full time and will lose the flexibility and work/life balance they have gained over the last year. The desire to be consulted on any plans was also expressed by a number of respondents.

We asked people how they wanted to work going forward and only 3% said they wanted to be in the office every day. 73% want a mix, and 24% want to work from home every day. It is clear that there is still a desire to work from an office – just not every day.

We also wanted to know if people had considered moving away, now that they may not need to be tied to a physical office and location. 34% of people said they had, and this rises to 58% when filtered to just junior lawyers. This is something that employers will need to consider carefully – it may bring some challenges, but it could also open new opportunities, as the pool of potential recruitments could widen significantly if there was no longer a need to have employees physically present.

## **3. So where do we go from here?**

It is indisputable that the pandemic has brought significant challenges to the profession, but it has also brought many positives. We now have the chance to change how we work for the better. Many firms had been teetering on the edge of 'agile' working for many years, but there were too many unknowns. We have now been thrown into it and the result has been an even more productive (and profitable) workforce.

The challenge now is - how do combine the positives that both office and home working bring? How can we keep the flexibility of home working and increase in wellbeing that brings, whilst also maintaining the supervision, support and teamwork that the office environment bring? It is complex and many firms are still dipping their toes into how this hybrid model will look.

Our wellbeing officer, Clare Good, recently attended a LawCare roundtable event on returning to work and wanted to feed back some of the key suggestions we discussed:

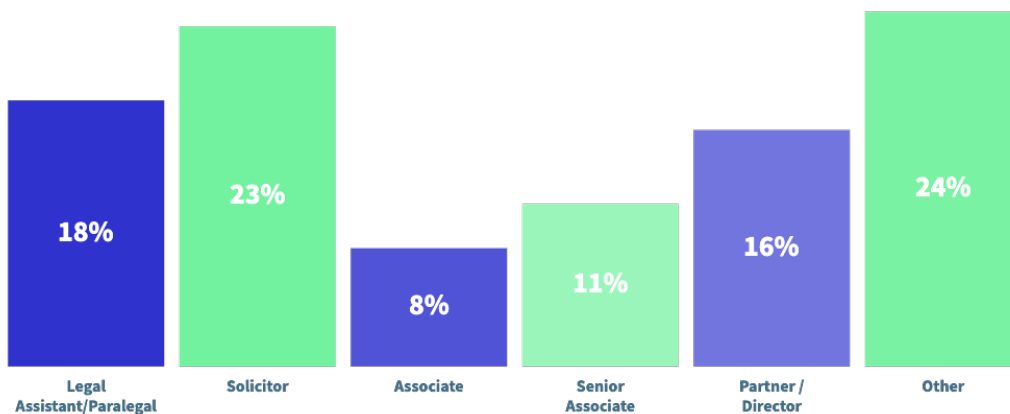
- Communication is KEY and this must be a two-way thing. Ask employees what they want and really listen to what they say.
- Be adaptable – it is unlikely that you will get it right first time. Keep listening and implement change where needed.

- Create a culture of openness. Our survey shows that a lot of people are feeling anxious about the return to the office. Encourage people to be open about their anxieties – from the top down - and this will help normalise those feelings.
- Reduce uncertainty by implementing clear COVID protection measures and letting people know what these are before they return.
- Don't forget the social activities! Many of us will not have seen our colleagues in over a year (or may even have some we have never met). Social events help people to blow off steam after a long week – and reintroducing these could help ease some people's anxiety about returning. Equally, be mindful that some people will not be ready to return to in person social activities.

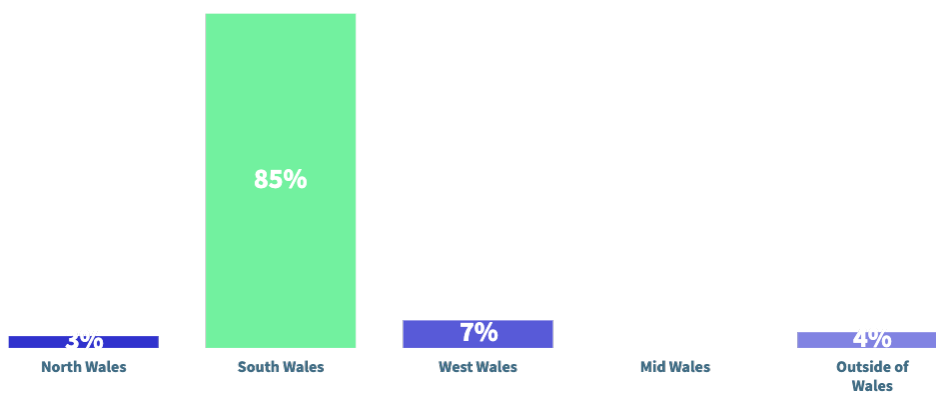
## Appendices

### Appendix a – General Responses

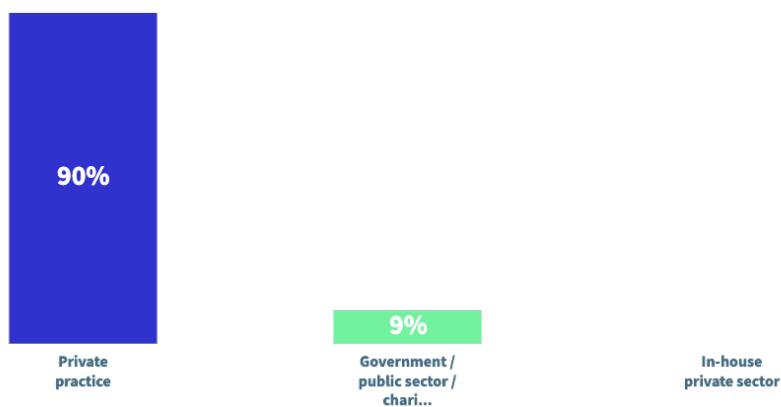
What is your current role?



Where are you based?

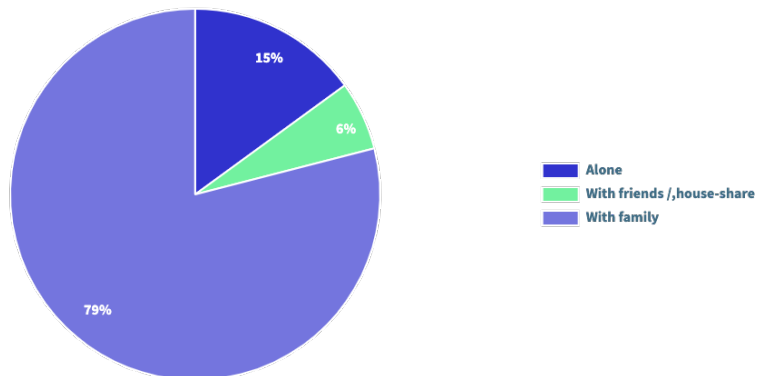


Do you work in...

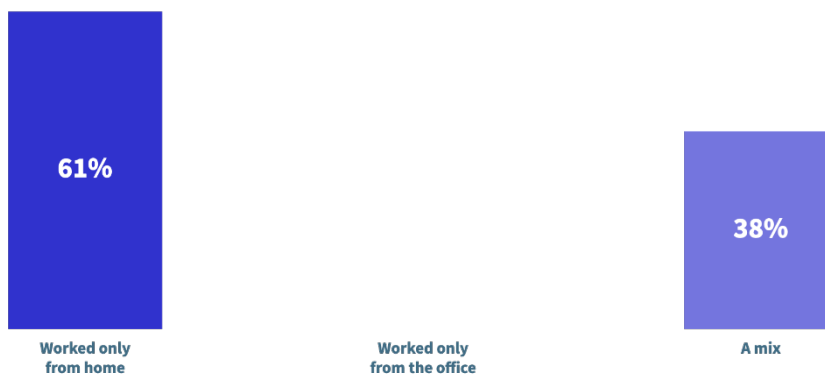




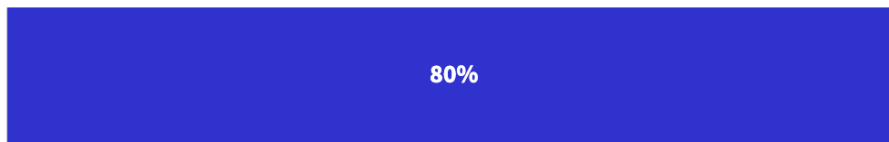
**Do you live...**



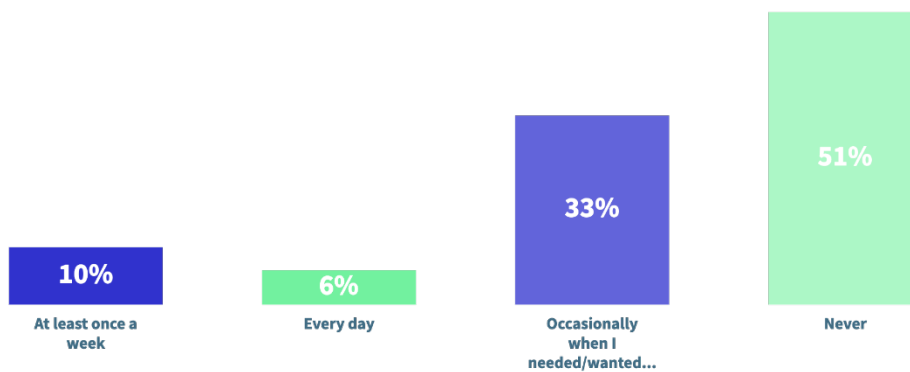
**In the last 12 months have you...**



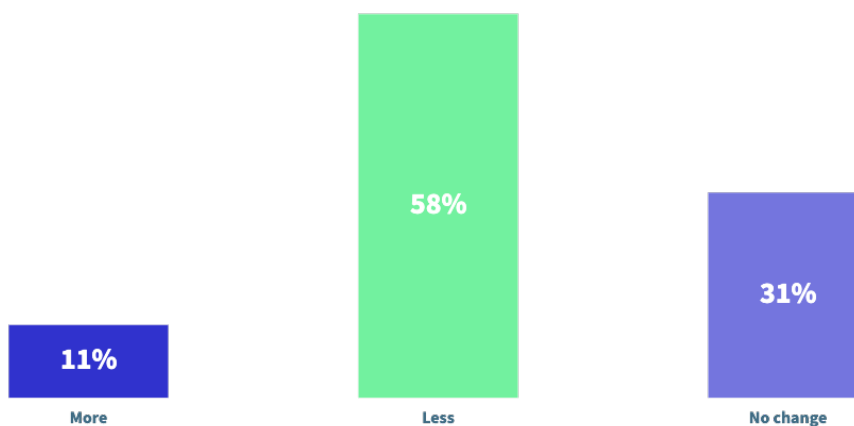
**Has working from home been a positive or negative experience for you?**



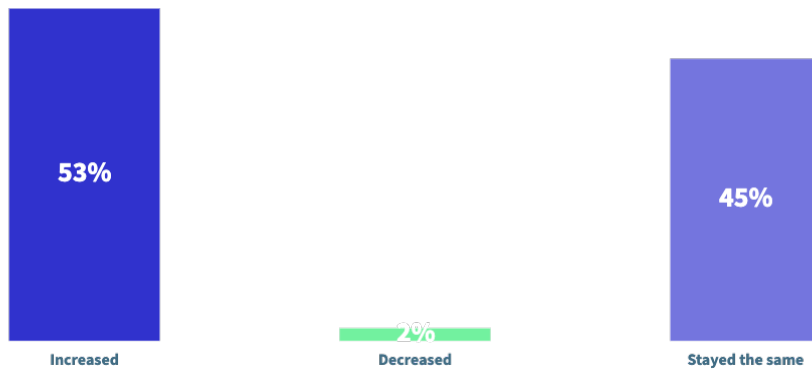
**Before the pandemic, how often did you work from home?**



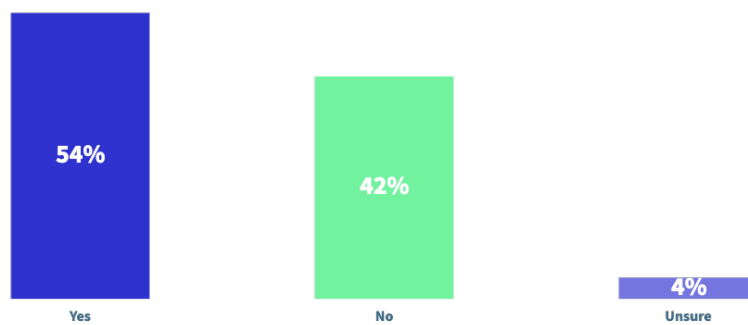
**Have you felt more or less connected to your colleagues in the last year?**



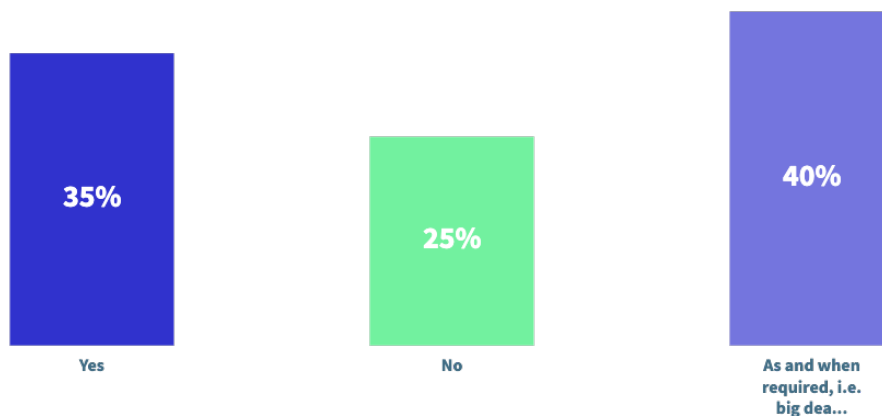
**Over the last 12 months have your working hours ...**



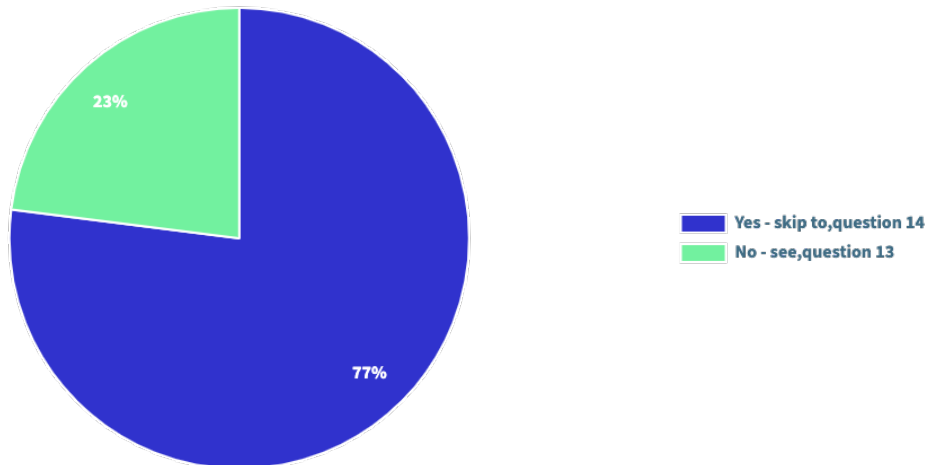
**In the last 12 months, have you found it harder to switch off from work when 'out of hours'?**



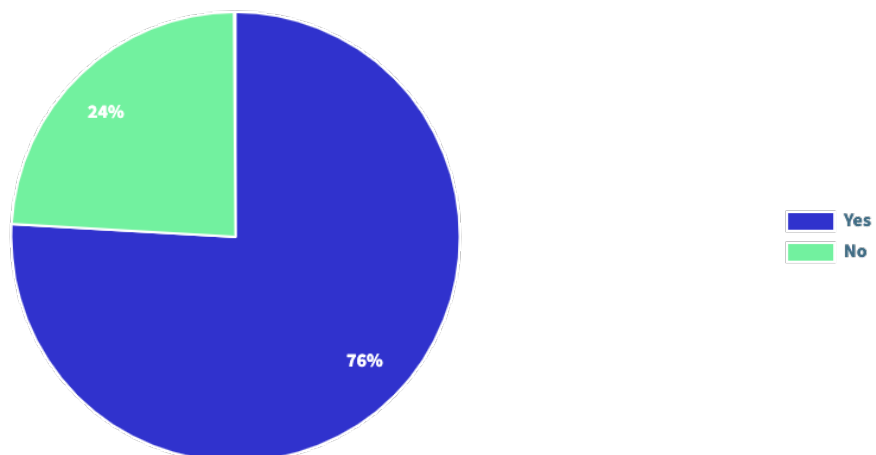
**Over the last 12 months have you felt the pressure to be available at all times by clients and your employer?**



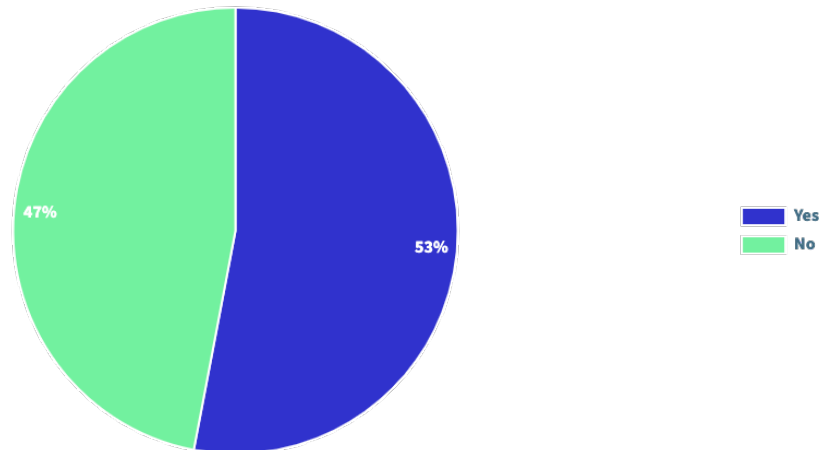
**Over the last 12 months have you felt supported by your employer?**



**Over the last 12 months has your employer sought your views on changing the way you work when things go back to 'normal'?**



**Are you anxious about having to return to working in the office?**

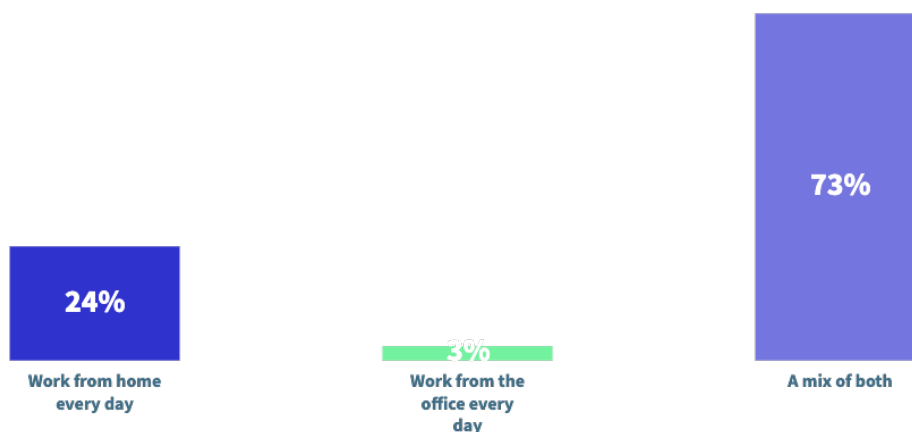


**Q16: OPEN TEXT REPLIES TO: How could an employer help reduce your / your colleagues' anxiety?**

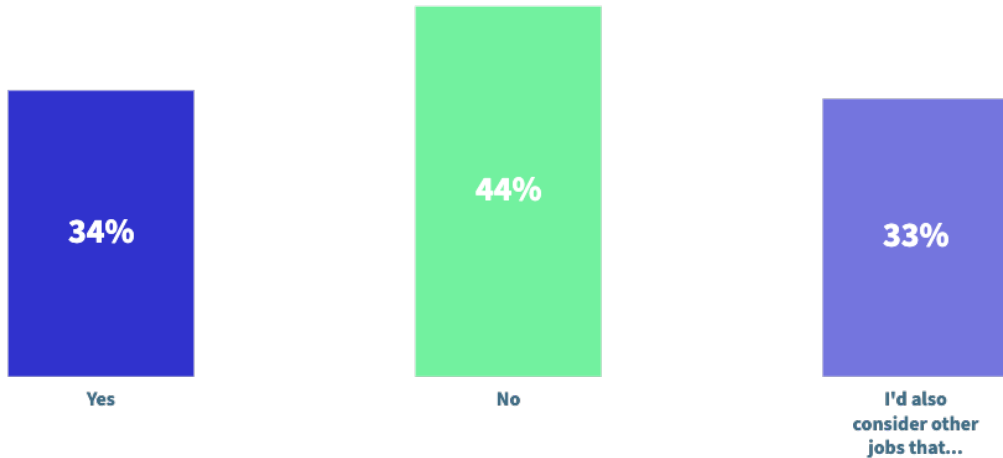
- Giving people enough notice about plans of a return and supporting people of those who do not wish to undertake public transport to get to the office.
- Consultation
- Not really, the anxiety comes from the commute as it can be frustrating and stressful on times
- Engage in a discussion about how employees want to return to the office.
- Allow total flexibility of workplace
- Allow flexibility
- I believe they are considering allowing staff to continue to work in whichever way suits us best, so that people who prefer to be in the office can do so, but those who prefer to work from home, can continue to do so if and when their workload and commitments allow.
- We are fortunate that our office environment has been re-fitted to ensure that social distancing and safety measures can be adhered to but we work from a mixed occupancy building and I have concerns about (i) entry/communal areas, (ii) using the lifts and (iii) air conditioning. I have referenced research on air conditioning during Covid-19 a number of times and have yet to receive reassurance that the requisite percentage of clean air is being fed into the system on a constant basis.
- Agree to work from home at all times, except when needed in the office
- Allow flexible working from home
- Be more flexible about working from home.
- Better positioning of my desk and better office space. More administrative support when I return. More effective communication from management.
- Improve systems implemented due to COVID that are not working.
- Reduce workload
- Employ further staff to support/reduce workload

- A mix of working from home and the office to limit exposure to so many people in a small office environment
- Consult with staff about proposals, rather than impose them.
- Manage clients expectations
- Allowing us to work from home for part of the week - say 3 days.
- Feedback from staff only requested very recently. Very late in day. Appears plans already in place and decision been made prior to consultation. Earlier consultation would have helped.
- There is the potential for working from home with minimal attendance at the office (proposed attendance is once a month)
- More certainty about what the split between wfh and office will be
- Balanced office/work from home policy
- I don't want to work from the office my productivity is awesome at home and if I was forced to return to the office 100% I would be looking for another opportunity
- Not having to use public transport ie by providing access to parking facilities and cycling
- allow the progress made in terms of flexible working to continue
- They can't unless they allow me to work from home with
- occasional visits to the office. I have to take public transport to and from work (a bus and a train).
- To wait to return until we have all been vaccinated.

#### What is your preferred way of working when we go back to 'normal'?



**Would you/ are you considering living further away from the office if remote / agile working provided that opportunity?**



## **Appendix B – Junior Lawyers responses:**

**Q2:** All the respondents were based in South Wales

**Q3:** 88 in private practice, 6% in-house & 6% in govt / public sector in-house roles

**Q4:** 81% live with family, 16 % alone and the rest in a house-share

**Q5: In last 12 months:**

73% worked from home

27% worked a mix of office and from home

**Q6: Before the pandemic:**

- 72% had never worked from home before
- 14% had worked from home everyday
- 7% worked from home at least once a week
- 7% worked from home on occasion

**Q7: Has working from home been a positive or negative experience for you?**

Respondents in this section ranged from 64%-100% on the slider. (100 being positive and 0 being negative). The average score was 94%.

**Q8: Have you felt more or less connected to your colleagues in the last year?**

46% said they felt no change here. 31% said they were less connected while 23% said they felt more connected.

**Q9: In the last 12 months, have you found it harder to switch off from work when 'out of hours'?**

77% said no, they did not

23% said yes, they did

**Q10: Over the last 12 months have your working hours ...**

69% said they stayed the same

31% said they had increased

**Q11: Over the last 12 months have you felt the pressure to be available at all times by clients and your employer?**

Half (50%) of respondents said 'as and when required, i.e. big deals or cases with tight deadlines'  
42% said 'no' and only 8% said 'yes' they felt the pressure to be available at all times.



**Q12: Over the last 12 months have you felt supported by your employer?**

92% said they felt supported while only 8% said they didn't feel supported.

**Q14: Over the last 12 months has your employer sought your views on changing the way you work when things go back to 'normal'?**

83% said 'yes' they had

17% said 'no' (at the time of responding)

**Q15: Are you anxious about having to return to working in the office?**

75% said yes

25% said no

**Q16: OPEN TEXT REPLIES TO: How could an employer help reduce your / your colleagues' anxiety?**

- They can't: my anxiety comes from the commute as it can be frustrating and stressful at times.
- Continue the progress made in terms of flexible working to continue
- Balance the office/work from home policy
- To wait to return until we have all been vaccinated.
- Make clear COVID-protection measures, and make clear their expectations over how much time we should or should not be in the office
- 

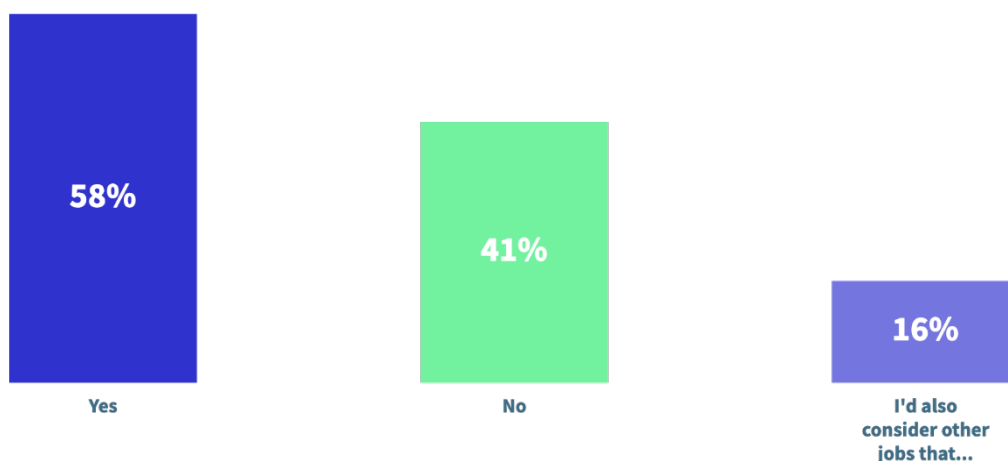
**Q17: What is your preferred way of working when we go back to 'normal'?**

58% said they'd prefer a mix of both home and office working

42% said they'd prefer to work from home every day

No-one in this group opted for 'work from the office every day

**Would you/ are you considering living further away from the office if remote / agile working provided that opportunity?**





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