Welsh Government Hybrid Working Staff Survey March 2024 Summary Findings

Contents

Background

A 12-month hybrid working pilot was introduced in April 2023 to explore what effective long-term hybrid working looks like for the Welsh Government.

The Corporate Research Team in KAS has provided support for the pilot by conducting two hybrid working staff surveys. The initial survey was undertaken in July 2023, with the follow-up conducted in March 2024.

The surveys aimed to provide insight on, and track any key changes to, staff hybrid working behaviours, practices, and experiences over the pilot period. The questionnaires were developed by the Corporate Research Team in consultation with the hybrid working co-ordination group and Trade Union Side.

The following report is the first output of the results from the March 2024 survey. Additional analysis is planned on, for example, survey results around travelling to work and office use. There is also an option to provide more detailed insight such as further exploration by demographic groups if required.

The report details the main findings from the most recent survey (March 2024), highlighting any key changes from the previous survey. It also draws on wider insight where relevant and useful, including:
- People Survey 2023.
- SCS Stakeholder Feedback Exercise.
- Hybrid Evidence Review.

A demographic analysis was undertaken on some of the results to explore any variations in behaviours, practices, and experiences between different groups of staff. The specific areas and demographic groups explored were thought to provide the most useful insight at this stage.

A short summary is provided at the start of each section of the report.

The survey was conducted between 26th February 2024 and 6th March 2024 and achieved a 55% response rate, which was in-line with the response rate for the previous survey. Whilst this provides a good indication of the views and working practices of staff, findings should be interpreted within this context.

Section 1. Hybrid Working Behaviours

Summary

More respondents reported working in a hybrid way compared to the previous survey and were most likely to 'spend more time working remotely with some time in the office'. These trends in hybrid working behaviours were reflected in the most recent People Survey. Around half of respondents were attending the office at least once a week, which was in line with the previous survey. Attending team or anchor days and connecting or socialising with colleagues were the main reasons given for going into the office. Cathays Park was the most frequently attended office over the previous 6 months.

Only a quarter of respondents were working remotely all the time, although around two-thirds of these said they would attend the office for certain activities and/or reasons and had attended a team or anchor day in person in the office. Only a very small proportion were remote workers who would not and had not attended the office over the previous 6 months.

Overall Hybrid Working Behaviours

Staff were asked how they were 'currently' working i.e. how much time they generally spend working in an office building compared to working remotely/at home.

*Figure 1. '**Thinking about how you are currently working, how much time do you generally spend working in an office building compared to working remotely?'**
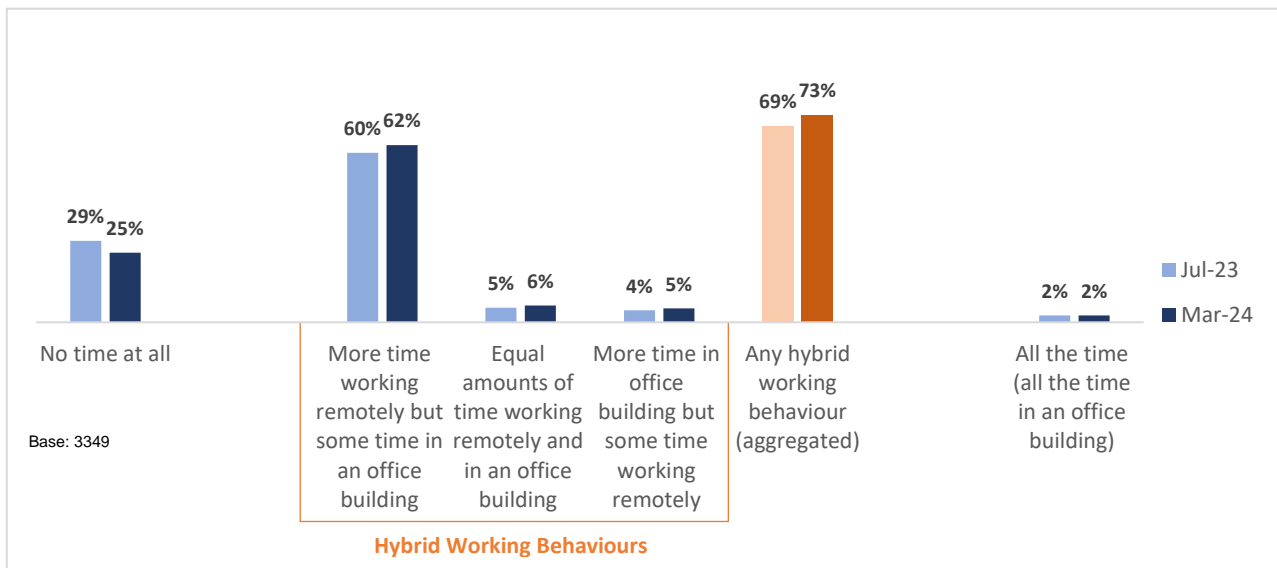
Around three-quarters of respondents were working in a hybrid way (73%), an increase of 4 percentage points from the previous survey. A higher proportion of respondents reported spending 'more time working remotely but some time in an office building' (62%), which saw a small increase from the previous survey (2pp increase).

A quarter of respondents (25%) said they spend no time working in the office, which was a lower proportion than reported in the previous survey (29%). It is important to note that the majority of respondents who said they were spending no time working in the office had attended a team or anchor day in person in the office over the previous 6 months. This will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

Over a third of respondents (35%) reported that the amount of time they spend in the office increased over the previous 6 months. Interestingly, in the previous survey, only 22% reported that they expect the amount of time they spend in the office to increase over the following 6 months.

Around a fifth (19%) expected the amount of time they spend in the office to increase over the next 6 months. The majority (78%) felt that it would stay about the same.

The most recent People Survey also saw a notable increase in hybrid working behaviours (i.e. staff working between home and office/workplace) from 77% in 2022 to 88% in 2023, with the majority of hybrid workers (76%) spending more time at home but sometime in an office/workplace, which also saw a notable increase from 68% to 76%.

Wider literature also suggests that many employers are offering a degree of flexibility in working and where hybrid working is available the most common pattern is to work more at home than in the office.

Who is working in a hybrid way?

Group and Directorate variation in hybrid working behaviours

The percentage of respondents working in a hybrid way ranged from between 70% and 81% for the Groups and between 52% and 97% for the Directorates.

Which groups of staff were less likely to be working in a hybrid way?

- Staff from the property profession (15pp below average), who were more likely to spend all their time in the office.
- Staff who had been in their job for at least 10 years but not more than 20 (8pp below average), who had more varied hybrid working behaviours but were less likely to be spending more of their time working remotely.
- Disabled staff (7pp below average), who were more likely to spend all their time working remotely.
- Older staff (60+; 7pp below average), who were more likely to spend all the time in the office.

Which groups of staff were more likely to be working in a hybrid way?

- Senior grades, particularly SCS and Grade 6 (20pp and 16pp above average), although specific hybrid working behaviours varied with G6 more likely to spend more time working remotely and SCS more likely to spend either equal amounts of time working remotely and in the office, or more time working from the office.
- Staff from certain professions including International Trade (22pp above average), Internal Audit (14pp above average), Security (11pp above average), Communications (11pp above average), HR (9pp above average) and Science & Engineering (7pp above average), with hybrid working behaviours varying across the different professions.
- Younger staff (16–24; 11pp above average), who were more likely to spend more time working from the office.
- Staff in OFM & PSO (8pp above average), who were more likely to spend more time working from the office.
- Staff who were new to their job or the WG i.e. no more than a year (11pp and 7pp above average), who were more likely to spend more time working remotely.

Wider literature has also suggested that younger people may be more likely to work from the office, as they could be more risk of loneliness or lower levels of wellbeing when working from home and are less likely to have a suitable work environment. In addition, younger colleagues who might be in more junior or trainee positions may also miss out on support and informal interaction with peers and learning opportunities from more experienced colleagues when working from home.

Staff who were attending the office

Those attending the office were asked for more information about how often, where, and why they attended the office.

Frequency of office attendance

Figure 2. 'Thinking about how you are currently working, how often do you attend the office?'

Base: 2527 (March 2024); 2401 (July 2023)
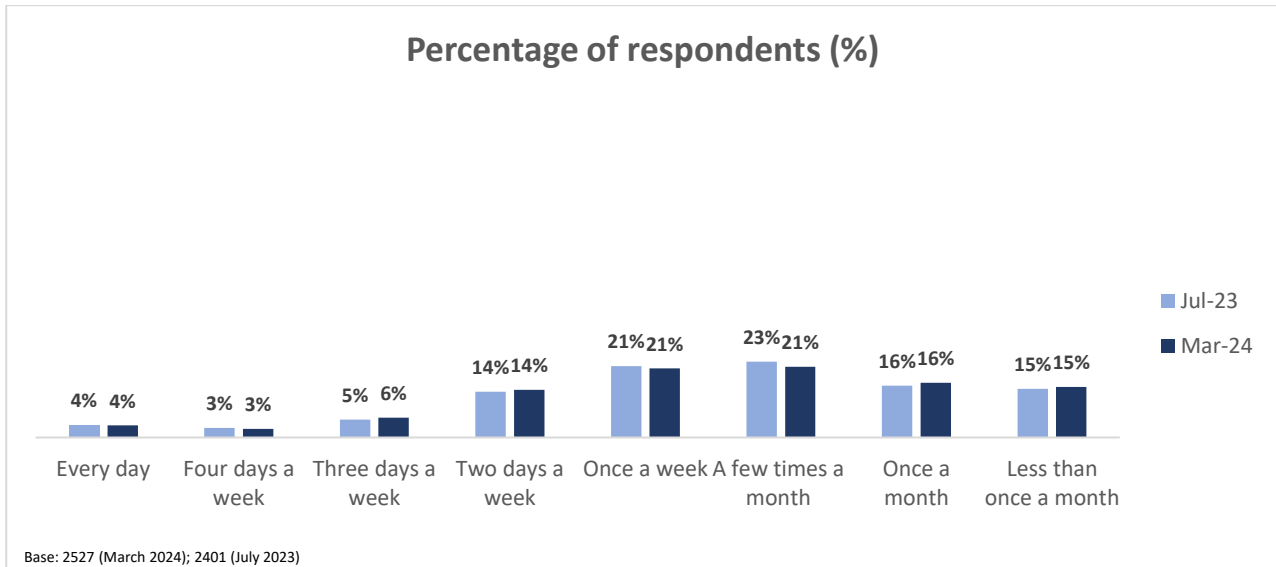
Around half of respondents (47%) attended the office at least once a week, with around a fifth attending the office either once a week (21%) or a few times a month (21%). Frequency of office attendance has remained largely similar between the two surveys.

> Wider literature suggests a similar pattern in the stabilisation of working from home since the pandemic, with a preference for hybrid working patterns rather than all at home or all in the office. Some evidence suggests average office attendance is around 2 to 3 days per week. This is more frequent than WG office attendance, but evidence includes organisations that are not fully flexible.

The offices staff were attending

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) reported that they had attended one Welsh Government office over the previous 6 months, with a further 28% reporting that they attended two offices and 10% attending three or more offices.

Cathays Park was the most frequently selected office for those attending either one or two Welsh Government offices (74% and 79% respectively). More detail on this will be provided in subsequent analysis.

Reasons for staff attending the office

Over a quarter of respondents (28%) said that their role required them to spend some of their time in the office, which increased from the previous survey (21%).

A very small proportion (1%) reported that their role required them to spend all their time in the office.

The most frequently reported reasons why respondents attended the office were:

Main reasons for attending the office	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey
Anchor/team collaboration days	61%	+10pp
Connecting or socialising with colleagues	59%	+1pp
In person or hybrid meetings	48%	-3pp
Health and wellbeing	37%	-2pp
Office admin/tasks (e.g. printing, shredding, clearing my locker)	31%	-7pp

Base: 2526

A full list of reasons can be found at Annex 1

Staff who <u>were not</u> attending the office (remote workers)

As noted above, 25% of respondents reported that they are spending no time in the office (i.e. were remote workers). Of these, two-thirds (67%) agreed that they would attend the office for certain activities and/or reasons. Only 16% said that they would not attend the office for certain activities and/or reasons and a further 17% were unsure.

The most frequent reasons why remote workers said that they would attend the office included for:

Main reasons remote workers would attend the office	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey
Anchor/team collaboration days	82%	+8pp
Induction or training	47%	+3pp
In person or hybrid meetings	39%	-17pp
Stakeholder/external engagement	37%	-1pp
Connecting or socialising with colleagues	33%	-14pp

Base: 685

A full list of reasons can be found at Annex 2

Overall, two-thirds of remote workers (66%) had attended at least one team or anchor day in person in the office and/or in another location over the previous 6 months. Of these, most had attended a team or anchor day in person in the office (89%) and over a third (37%) had attended a team or anchor day in person in another location (i.e. not a WG office).

Only a very small proportion of respondents overall (4%) were remote workers who also said they would not attend the office for certain activities/and or reasons (i.e. non-attenders), although some of these had actually attended a team or anchor day in person in the office over the previous 6 months. Only 2 percent of respondents overall were remote workers who said they would not attend the office and had not attended a team/anchor day over the previous 6 months.

Non-attenders were more likely to be [i.e. that they are over-represented in the non-attender group compared to their proportion of survey respondents overall]:

- Disabled staff (33% in the non-attender group compared to 20% of survey respondents overall)
- Those who are or suspect they might be Neurodivergent (31% in the non-attender group compared to 19% of survey respondents overall)
- Those in their role for at least 10 years but not more than 20 years (25% in the non-attender group compared to 12% of survey respondents overall)
- Those aged 60 or over (16% in the non-attender group compared to 9% of survey respondents overall)

The previous hybrid working survey (July 2023) provided additional insight on staff with a workplace adjustment, which may help to explain why some disabled staff are amongst the non-attender group. In the previous survey staff with a workplace adjustment were much more likely to report that they had access to the reasonable adjustments they needed whilst working remotely/at home than when in the office. They were also more likely to have access to the equipment they need to feel comfortable at home compared to the office.

Wider literature also suggests that working from home/hybrid working may be particularly preferred by disabled employees because, for example, video calling provides greater opportunities for networking than previously available to them.

Section 2: Effective Hybrid Working Practices

Summary

The majority of respondents had a Team Charter in place, although were less likely to report that they had an Individual Charter.

For the small proportion of respondents who reported that they had led the discussion on developing a Team Charter themselves, the majority did not appear to have experienced any difficulties in agreeing on the purposes for their team to come together in person. In fact, the majority of respondents reported that all or most of their team had come together in person and/or had attended a team or anchor day in person over the previous 6 months. However, some managers reported that they had experienced team members refusing or being reluctant to attend the office in person and felt that clearer guidance and positioning from the organisation around when staff should attend and what 'business need' entails would be helpful.

Overall, the majority of respondents felt able to connect, collaborate and concentrate regardless of where they were working, although views were generally more positive about doing so when working remotely. Out of a range of activities, initiating social interaction with colleagues was felt to be more difficult to do when working remotely. Respondents also reported higher levels of productivity and general engagement when working remotely. However, it is important to note that respondent's ability to connect, collaborate and concentrate, as well as their levels of productivity and engagement when in the office, saw notable improvements from the previous survey.

Most respondents reported having check-ins with their managers, which were more frequently conducted virtually. Overall, respondents were positive about the coverage and quality of these conversations. The majority also sought feedback from others to understand their performance, although to varying degrees.

Team & Individual Charters

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) reported that they had Team Charters, which was slightly lower than reported in the previous survey (77%). Over half (57%) reported that their line manager had led the discussion on developing their Team Charter. For around a fifth (18%) another member of the team had led the discussion and 4 percent said someone else had led the discussion. Less than 10 percent (8%) said that they didn't know who had led the discussion or they had not had one.

Fewer respondents (43%) reported having an individual charter, which again was slightly lower than reported in the previous survey (46%).

Leading Team Discussions

A small proportion of respondents (13%) reported that they had led a discussion on developing a Team Charter themselves.

Of these, most (95%) reported that they felt confident leading the discussion on developing a shared agreement on how the team would work. The majority (84%) reported that they had agreed on the purposes for which the team would come together in person and most (92%) had found it easy to do so.

Although respondents from across all Grades had been responsible for leading the discussion on developing a Team Charter, they were more commonly conducted by those at Grade 7 (43%).

Respondents who led the discussion on developing their team's charter were asked if they had experienced any challenges to developing a shared agreement on how the team will work.

A few respondents reported that coming to an agreement on how the team will work had not been particularly challenging, because team members were on the same page and open to attending anchor days or were flexible in their hybrid working routines.

For those whose experience had been more challenging, a key issue was the reluctance or unwillingness of individual team members to attend the office. Line managers often felt that they could not mandate office attendance and that attending the office for 'business need' was met with resistance from colleagues, who often used personal circumstances as a reason not to attend the office. Other challenges included:
- Where team members worked pan-Wales or different working patterns, which meant virtual meetings were seen as being more effective.
- Balancing the team's working practices and individual caring or personal responsibilities.

It was suggested that it would be helpful if the following was provided:
- Clearer guidance on how to encourage staff to come into the office.
- Additional support for line managers who are managing difficult situations with staff members.
- Greater clarity around what is classed as 'business need'. Managers felt that they were often 'caught in the middle' of staff and senior leaders, or 'left to be the bad guys when asking people to come in'.
- A mandate on staff attending the office for some of their time.

Coming Together In-Person as a Team

Around three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported that all or most of their team had come together in person over the previous 6 months, with a further fifth (19%) reporting that some of their team had come together in person. Only 5% reported that none of their team had come together in person over the previous 6 months.

The majority of respondents (88%) reported that they had attended a team or anchor day over the previous 6 months, whether in person, online or both.

Over three-quarters of respondents (79%) reported that they had attended at least one team or anchor day in person in the office and/or in another location, which saw an increase from 68% in the previous survey. Of these staff, most had attended a team or anchor day in the office (93%) and 36 percent in another location.

The majority (70%) reported that they had attended a team or anchor day online over the previous 6 months.

Staffs' Ability to Connect, Collaborate and Concentrate

Although the majority of respondents had come together in-person, they were generally more positive about their ability to connect, collaborate and concentrate when working remotely than when working in the office.

Respondents were more likely to agree that they felt connected to colleagues and the organisation when working remotely than when in the office:
- 76% said they felt connected to colleagues when in the office compared to 81% when working remotely, although both saw an increase in positive score from the previous survey (3pp and 2pp increase respectively).
- 59% said they felt connected to the Welsh Government compared to 71% when working remotely. Again, both saw an increase in positive score, but particularly feelings of connection when in the office (9pp and 2pp increase).

Respondents were more likely to agree that they are able to collaborate with the colleagues they need when working remotely than when in the office, but less likely to agree that are able to initiate social interaction with colleagues when working remotely:
- 78% agreed that they are able to collaborate with the colleagues they need when in the office compared to 93% when working remotely, but again there had been a notable increase in the proportion of respondents feeling able to collaborate with colleagues when in the office (13pp increase).
- 84% agreed that they are able to initiate social interaction when in the office, which saw an increase of 4 percentage points from the previous survey, compared to 73% when working remotely. Respondents feeling able to initiate social interaction when working remotely also saw a small decrease of 2 percentage points.

Respondents were much less likely to agree that they are able to concentrate on their work when in the office compared to when working remotely (94% compared to 67%). However, the proportion of respondents who were able to concentrate when in the office saw a notable increase of 12 percentage points from the previous survey.

Overall, more respondents felt able to work productively when working remotely than when in the office (93% and 71% respectively), although perceptions of productivity when in the office had improved from the previous survey (6pp increase).

General feelings of engagement amongst respondents also appeared to be higher when respondents were working remotely that when in the office:
- 74% felt that they made a valuable contribution to the organisation when in the office compared to 84% when working remotely.

- 78% felt motivated to do their job when in the office compared to 85% when working remotely.
- Respondents feeling that they make a valuable contribution and are motivated to do their job when in the office saw notable increases from the previous survey (both 9pp increases).

Managing Performance

Most respondents (93%) reported having check-ins with their line manager, with more reporting having check-ins virtually (99%) rather than in person (70%).

Check-ins conducted virtually occurred more frequently than when in person, with 67% reporting that they have weekly check-ins virtually compared to only 9% in person. A similar proportion reported having monthly check-ins with their manager virtually (25%) and/or in person (24%). Just under a third (30%) reported never having a check-in with their manager in person, with only 1% reported never having a virtual check in with their manager.

Respondents were asked about the coverage and quality of the check-ins they have with their manager and views about their check-ins were generally positive. The majority agreed that:
- They regularly talk about their wellbeing and any support they may need (86%).
- They receive the feedback they need to understand their performance (84%).
- Overall, they have good quality performance conversations with their managers (83%)

A slightly lower proportion, although still the majority, agreed that they receive the feedback they need to understand where they can develop (76%).

Staff were asked if they actively seek feedback from others to help them to understand their performance. Most (91%) said they did, with 17% saying they always did, but over half (52%) saying they sometimes did.

Section 3. Use of office spaces and technology

Summary

Overall respondents made greater use of desks and more 'social' spaces like kitchen and café areas, although frequency of use varied. SmartSpaces and Microsoft Teams rooms were used less, and less frequently, although usage had increased from the previous survey.

Respondents were generally positive about how easy it is to access the spaces they needed to do a range of tasks and activities, particularly meeting with colleagues formally and informally. Although the majority also reported that it was easy to access the space they needed to have sensitive conversations, this was a particular issue raised in a relation to the new Group neighbourhoods and co-location with external partners. Slightly fewer respondents agreed that it was easy to find the space to take calls or meetings away from their desks. Additional comments also highlighted the difficulties experienced in finding available meeting rooms and using the room booking system.

The majority of respondents were satisfied with the technology available in the office to work, connect and collaborate. There were reports of missing and broken kits on desks and some noted the need for more Microsoft Teams rooms and better equipped meeting rooms, as well as better Wi-Fi. It was also suggested that access to a wider range of software and platforms to support effective collaboration would be helpful. Some had noted however that working in the new Group neighbourhoods or being co-located with external partners had supported collaboration, networking and building connections.

Use of office spaces

In general, those attending the office were most likely to make use of desks (99%), kitchen areas (90%) and the canteen/café areas (89%). SmartSpaces and Microsoft Teams Rooms were less likely to be used (48% and 64% respectively), however usage of both these types of spaces had increased notably from the previous survey (18pp and 21pp increase respectively).

Additional comments provided by a small number of respondents indicated that they tend to use SmartSpaces when there are no meeting rooms available and/or because they are more comfortable spaces with fewer distractions, which may help to explain an increase in use.

The previous hybrid working survey (July 2023) reported that SmartSpaces were most frequently used for in-person meetings (53%), individuals joining in hybrid working (39%), hybrid meetings with others (38%) and individual-focused work (27%).

Use of office spaces were similar between disabled staff and those without a disability, although disabled staff were slightly more likely to use Microsoft Teams rooms (69%) compared to those without a disability (64%).

In terms of the frequency in which these office spaces were used, the majority of respondents (86%) used desk space every time they came into the office, which was an increase of 11% on the previous survey. Around half of respondents used kitchen areas and canteen/café areas every time they come into the office (56% and 51% respectively).

SmartSpaces and Microsoft Teams rooms were used less frequently, without around a third reporting that they use them sometimes (34% and 39% respectively).

A more detailed breakdown of the frequency in which the different offices spaces were used can be found at Annex 3.

Ease of accessing different spaces

Overall, respondents were positive about how easy it is to access the spaces they need to do a range of tasks and activities.

Most respondents agreed that it was easy to find the spaces they need to meet with WG colleagues (96%) and interact with colleagues informally (96%). Around three-quarters agreed it was easy to access the spaces they need to meet with external stakeholders (75%), have sensitive conversations (75%), access appropriate storage (75%) and concentrate on your work (74%). Slightly fewer respondents agreed that it was easy to find the space to take calls or meetings away from their desks (69%).

The majority of respondents also reported that they have been typically able to find a desk in the area that they normally work over the previous 6 months (84%), which was generally in line with the previous survey (83%).

A more detailed breakdown of the ease in which respondents are accessing the spaces they need to is provided at Annex 4.

A recent feedback exercise undertaken with the SCS on the impact of hybrid working on their engagement with stakeholders and interactions with Minister found that, although difficulties in engaging with stakeholders and Ministers whilst working in a hybrid way were not frequently reported, it was clear that there were certain tasks and activities that were felt to be more effective to do in person. These included activities and tasks that helped to build and maintain relationships such as networking and informal discussions, where sensitive or complex discussions were required, group activities or events where collaboration was necessary and more formal meetings and activities.

Availability of technology in the office

The majority of respondents (84%) reported that the full IT kit was always or often available on the desks they have used, which was in line with the previous survey (83%).

*Figure 3. **'Has the full IT KIT been available at the desks you have used?'***

Base: 2484 (2024); 2360 (2023)
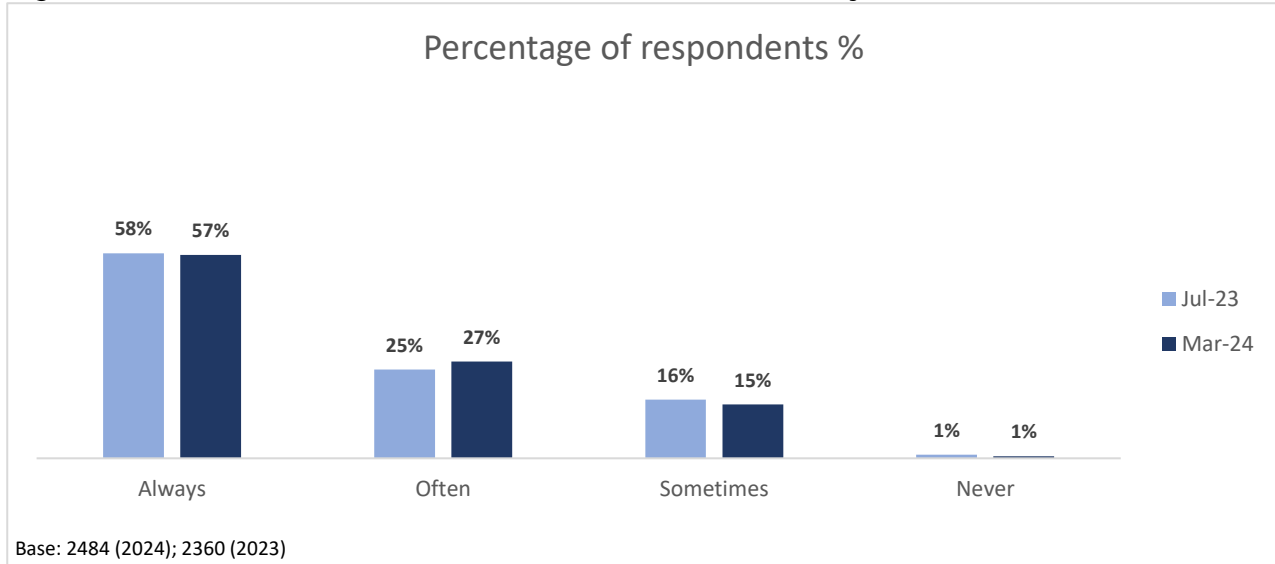
However, some respondents did report issues with the availability of equipment in the office, including missing leads, mice, and keyboards. In addition, it was reported that the technology available was not always functioning and it was felt that there should be regular checks on IT equipment. However, the majority knew how to report broken IT kit (81%), which was a higher proportion than reported in the previous survey (6pp higher).

Access to the technology to support staff to connect and collaborate

The majority of respondents agreed that they always or often have the technology to connect with the colleagues they work with (95%) and/or collaborate with colleagues within or external to the organisation (91%). Although views were slightly more positive for always having the technology to connect with the colleagues they work with (77%) than collaborate with colleagues within or external to the organisation (70%).

The most recent People Survey saw a small decline in satisfaction with the technology provided by the organisation that enables them to easily connect and collaborate with colleagues, from any location (3pp decrease; 88% positive score)

Respondents were asked what more the organisation, team and/or manager could do to support use of technology for connection and collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders, which received a high number of responses.

Some respondents were positive about the technology available and felt that it was sufficient and effective for connecting and collaborating with colleagues and stakeholders.

However, for others, the technology available posed some challenges including:

- The limited number of Microsoft Teams rooms available. It was suggested that more meeting rooms should have Teams equipment available, as well as be better equipped with technology more generally (e.g. second screens, laptop docking equipment and videoconferencing capabilities). In addition, some respondents noted that the booking system for meeting rooms was not very user-friendly because it does not show a preview of the room layout or available technology prior to booking. Respondents also experienced difficulties booking back-to-back meetings and block bookings.
- Slow and unreliable connectivity in the office. Areas including the middle part of CP2, Llandudno and Merthyr were specifically mentioned. It was also noted that some respondents struggled with the affordability and reliability of internet at home.
- Barriers to being able to access alternative platforms to effectively collaborate with external colleagues. Respondents commented on the lack of access to NHS Wales and Defra SharePoint platforms in particular, as well as Teams channels used by other UK Civil Service departments, South Wales Police and teachers.
- Limited availability of software that supports effective collaboration including Zoom and Skype, which were commonly used by external stakeholders, as well as Microsoft Copilot, Slack, Mural, and Miro. iShare and Global Protect was found to be slow and 'cumbersome' and not conducive to working with external partners as they did not have access to iShare.
- Outdated laptops and there not being computers available in the office if respondents did not want to commute with their laptop.

In the previous survey those staff with a workplace adjustment were asked what more the organisation could do to remove barriers to working. Suggestions mainly focused on workplace equipment and environment, particularly on the lack of permanent workstations and assigned desks, which resulted staff finding it difficult to access specialist equipment such as standing desks or required them to repeatedly set up a suitable desk area. Additionally, where specialist equipment was provided, such as supportive chairs, some respondents reported finding equipment moved or missing in the office.

Neighbourhoods

Less than half of respondents (41%) reported that they were based in a new Group neighbourhood, although 38% were unsure.

Those who were based in a new Group neighbourhood reported mixed experiences, with some unsure about the 'significance' or 'purpose' of the approach.

There were a number of positive comments about the neighbourhoods, which were felt to work well and provide opportunities for networking and collaborating with colleagues, making connections with new people, and creating a friendly atmosphere, which supported respondents' mental and social wellbeing. There were also a small number of positive comments specifically around the layout of their neighbourhoods, where there was felt to be plenty of space and flexible locker areas.

However, some challenges of working within neighbourhoods were raised including:

- That the layout of them is not always conducive to confidential work and sensitive discussions, particularly as some areas were accessible to external partners in the office building. It was felt that private spaces were not always easy to find.
- That some areas were dark, cold, and noisy, which made it difficult to work productively in the office. However, others noted that their neighbourhoods were often quiet with few colleagues attending the office, which could be isolating. This was more commonly reported to be the case in Merthyr and Aberystwyth offices.
- They did not always provide the space required to cater for anchor days in the office, with concerns over a lack of seating and desk space on these busier days.

Co-location

Less than half of respondents (45%) reported that they worked in an office where they are co-located with external partners.

Those who reported that they work in an office where they are co-located were asked for their feedback on the benefits and/or challenges of co-locating. The majority of comments provided were neutral, with many seeing no difference, or not being aware of any impact of co-locating with external partners. Many were not aware of the presence of external partners and did not feel there were any particular benefits or challenges. This was particularly prevalent for those who were in an office in which external partners were on a separate floor.

However, it was noted that more clarity could be provided around who staff were co-locating with.

The main benefits of co-locating reported by respondents were that:

- The working environment was 'fuller', 'busier' and 'more vibrant' or 'lively', which was viewed positively by those who commented.
- Co-location supported collaboration and networking with external partners. It was also felt that co-location provided opportunities to meet new colleagues and build stronger relationships through formal and informal, spontaneous meetings within the office space. Partnership working with NRW was particularly mentioned as benefitting from co-location.
- There were obvious financial benefits to co-locating which was seen to 'ease budget pressures'.
- Office facilities, notably the canteen and café, had improved and were able to stay open due to co-location.

Some challenges to co-locating were provided by respondents, which included:

- Concerns around having sensitive and confidential conversations, as there was a greater need to be mindful of being overheard by external partners, but it was often difficult to identify who was external. The lack of meeting rooms also made it more challenging to have these conversations away from their desks.

- The nature of open-plan areas meant that external partners could walk through, which was problematic for certain departments which dealt with sensitive material.
- There was now less parking availability and that space reservations for external partners was unfair. Lack of parking availability meant that some respondents felt less inclined or able to attend the office.

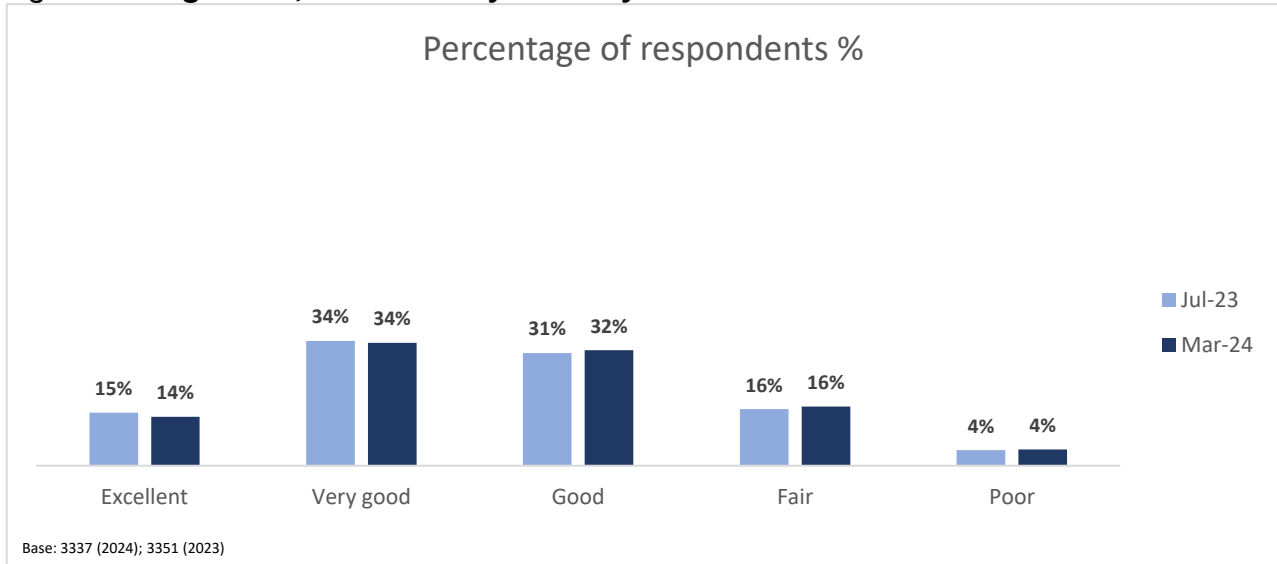## Section 4. Wellbeing, Work-Life Balance, and Working Culture

Generally, levels of wellbeing were similar to the previous survey, although this varied across different groups of staff. Overall, respondents were positive about their ability to maintain a work-life balance and disconnect from work. However, it appeared that some found it more challenging to maintain a good work-life balance, were more likely to work over their contracted hours and worry about work when not working. This was particularly the case for more senior grades.

Respondents' experiences of the 'always on' culture, which had become more prevalent with remote working, remained relatively unchanged from the previous survey. The majority felt that they needed to respond to Teams calls and messages immediately, although this appeared to be less of an issue for emails. A majority also felt the pressure for their Teams status to not show as 'away' for too long. For some, their working day was back-to-back Teams meetings and calls, although this had improved from the previous survey. The majority did report that they were able to take regular breaks from their laptops and lunchbreaks, although this appeared more common when working in remotely than when in the office.

Wellbeing

Overall, respondents were positive about their mental health, with 79% rating it good to excellent, which was generally in line with the previous survey (80%).

*Figure 4. '**In general, how would you rate your overall mental health now?**'*

Percentage of respondents %

|	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Jul-23	15%	34%	31%	16%	4%
Mar-24	14%	34%	32%	16%	4%

Base: 3337 (2024); 3351 (2023)

Overall, respondents were also positive about their physical health, with 77% rating it good to excellent, again generally in line with the previous survey (78%).

*Figure 5. '**In general, how would you rate your overall physical health now?'**

Percentage of respondents %

Base: 3328 (2024); 3341 (2023)
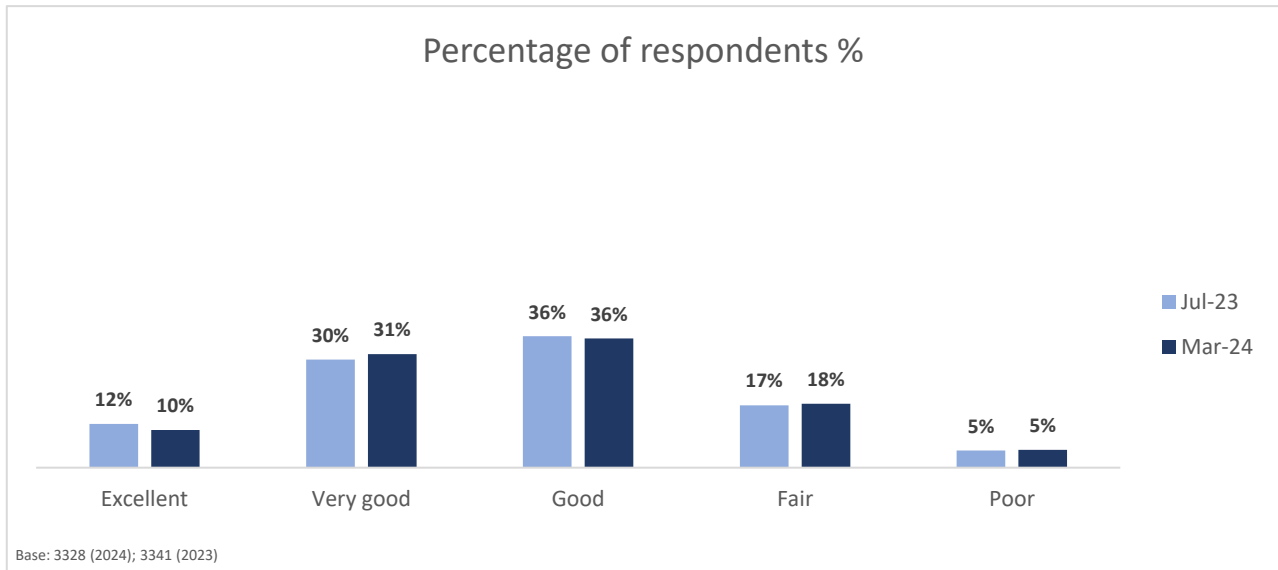
Related to physical health, slightly more respondents agreed that they have access to the equipment they needed to feel comfortable when working remotely (90%) than when in the office (86%). Although, there was a notable increase in the proportion of respondents having access to the equipment they need when in the office from the previous survey (8pp increase).

Levels of wellbeing varied for some groups of staff. Those who were less likely to report higher levels (good to excellent) of both <u>mental</u> and <u>physical</u> wellbeing compared to average included:
- – Disabled staff (15pp and 20pp below)
- – Staff in the property (14pp and 19pp below), Security (10pp and 8pp below) and Commercial (6pp and 10pp below) professions
- – Staff who are or think they might be neurodivergent (9pp and 8pp below)
- – Lone parents (8pp and 4pp below)
- – Carers (5pp and 6pp below)

It is important to note that there were also other groups of staff who were less likely to report either higher levels of mental or physical health than average.

Over half of respondents reported that they were 'hardly ever' or 'never' lonely (59%), which was generally in line in 2024 compared to 58% in 2023.

Figure 6. *'How often do you feel lonely?'*

Percentage of respondents %

Category	Jul-23	Mar-24
Often or always	4%	3%
Some of the time	14%	13%
Occasionally	24%	24%
Hardly ever	33%	33%
Never	24%	27%

Base: 3327 (2024); 3337 (2023)
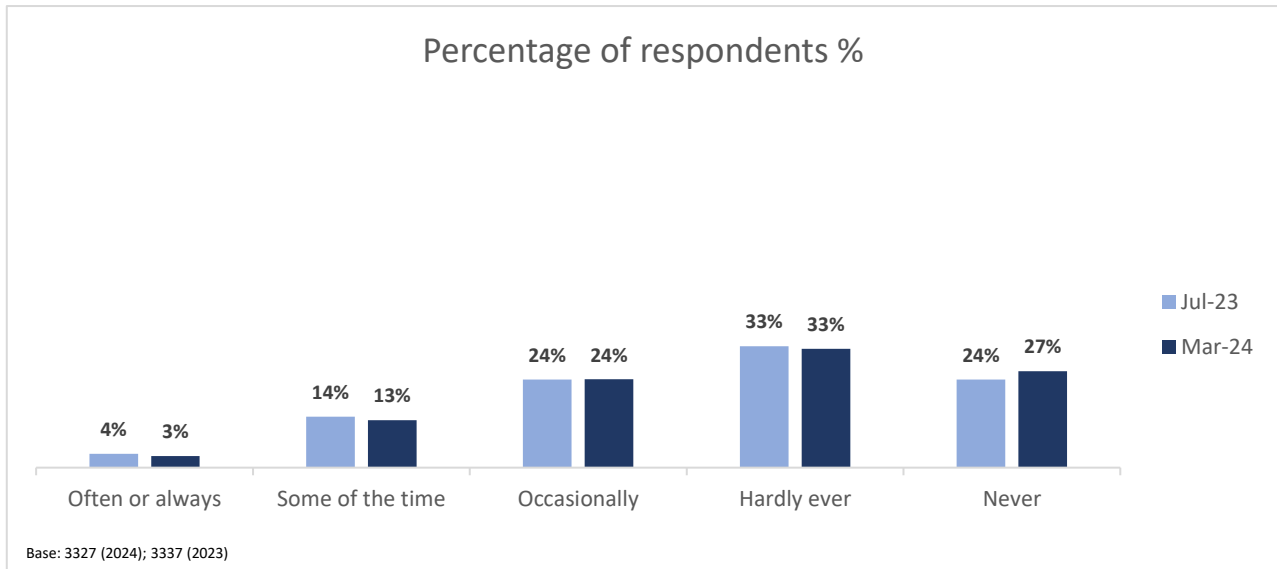
Work-Life Balance

Respondents were generally positive about their work-life balance, although for some this appeared to be more challenging to maintain.

The majority agreed that they are able to maintain a good work-life balance (86%) and that they are able to fully disconnect from work (72%), both of which saw an increase in positive score from the previous survey (3pp and 4pp increase respectively). Around 60% (61%) also reported that they regularly used their wellbeing hour, which also saw an increase from the previous survey (4pp increase).

However, 43% reported that they regularly work over their contracted hours[1]. A third of respondents (33%) worried about work when they are not working, in line with 2023 findings.

Although the ability to achieve a work–life balance varied across different groups of staff, it was a particular challenge for more senior grades (Grade 7 and above) whose experience was much less positive. For example, compared to average, the SCS were:
- Much less likely to report that they maintain a good work–life balance (28pp below), that they feel able to fully disconnect from work (32pp below) and use their wellbeing hour (49pp below)
- Much more likely to worry about work when they are not working (26pp above) and regularly work over their contracted hours (46pp above)

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[1] The question 'I regularly work over my contracted hours', was introduced in March 2024 therefore no time series is available.

Working culture

Respondent's experience of the 'always on' culture[2] that became more prevalent as the organisation moved to more remote working was mixed but was largely unchanged from the previous survey.

Over three-quarters of respondents (79%) felt that they had to respond immediately to Teams calls during working hours, two-thirds (68%) felt they had to respond immediately to Teams messages and half (50%) felt they had to respond immediately to emails, which saw minimal change from the previous survey (a decrease of 1pp, 2pp and 1pp respectively).

Although the need to respond to Teams calls, Teams messages and emails varied across different groups, greater variation was seen around responding to emails.

Compared to average, those staff more likely to feel that they should respond immediately to emails included:
- Staff in the International Trade (26pp), Intelligence Analysis (17pp) Internal Audit (14pp), Finance (8pp), HR (7pp), Communications (7pp) and Property (5pp) professions
- Lone parents (9pp above)
- More junior grades – Team Support and EOs (7pp and 6pp above)
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff (5pp above)
- Staff in OFM & PSG (5pp above)

More generally, senior grades and particularly SCS were much less likely to feel that they needed to respond immediately to this type of communication.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) agreed that during their working hours, they feel pressure for their Teams status not to show as 'away' for too long, which was in line with the previous survey.

Compared to average, those more likely to feel pressure for their Teams status to not show as 'away' for too long included:
- Staff in the Internal Audit, Communications and Analysis professions (24pp, 7pp and 6pp above)
- Younger staff (20pp above)
- Lone parents (9pp above)
- Female staff (6pp above)
- More junior grades e.g. EO's (6pp above)
- Disabled staff (5pp above)

Less than a third (29%) reported spending their working day in back-to-back Teams meetings and calls, which saw a decrease of 3 percentage points from the previous survey.

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[2] The 'always on' culture is characterised by excessive hours and a rapid and unrelenting delivery pace where staff perceived an expectation to always be available and found it difficult to disconnect.

Compared to average, senior staff and particularly the SCS were most likely to report spending their working day in back-to-back Teams meetings and calls (50pp above).

Those who were also more likely to report spending their days in back-to-back meetings and calls included:
- Staff in the Policy, Commercial Science and Engineering professions (all 11pp above), as well as HR (10pp above)
- Those aged 40-44 (8pp above)
- Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff (7pp above)
- Staff in PSWL (6pp above)
- Parents (5pp above)

Respondents were more likely to report being able to take regular breaks away from their laptops (72%) and take a lunch break (80%) when working remotely compared to in the office (67 percent and 76 percent respectively). However, the proportion of respondents taking regular breaks from the laptop and lunch breaks when in the office increased from the previous survey (5pp and 2pp increase respectively).

Annex 1

Table 1: Main reasons that office attenders attend the office

Reason	% of office attenders
Anchor/team collaboration days	61%
Connecting or socialising with colleagues	59%
In person or Hybrid meetings	48%
Networking with colleagues	45%
My health and wellbeing	37%
Office admin/tasks (e.g. printing, shredding, clearing locker)	31%
To carry out routine work activities I do on a day-to-day basis	22%
Stakeholder/external engagement	17%
More productive working environment	17%
To access IT services and support	10%
Induction or training	10%
My role requires me to	10%
Corporate/SCS events	9%
My manager(s) expects it of me	8%
Better broadband / Wi-Fi connection / IT equipment	8%
Other	7%
Financial reasons e.g. energy costs	5%
I have no other suitable place to work	2%
Base	**2526**

Annex 2

Table 1: Activities/reasons that remote workers (no time in the office) would attend the office

Reason	% of remote workers
Anchor/team collaboration days	82%
Induction or training	47%
In person or Hybrid meetings	39%
Stakeholder/external engagement	37%
Connecting or socialising with colleagues	33%
Networking with colleagues	27%
Office admin/tasks (e.g. printing, shredding, clearing locker)	27%
To access IT services and support	21%
Corporate/SCS events	21%
My health and wellbeing	9%
Other	6%
To carry out routine work activities I do on a day-to-day basis	3%
Better broadband / Wi-Fi connection / IT equipment	2%
More productive working environment	2%
Financial reasons e.g. energy costs	1%
I have no other suitable place to work	1%
Base	**685**

Annex 3

Table 1: Frequency of use of different office spaces, including a comparison to the previous survey

	Frequency of use									
	Every time I come to the office		Often		Sometimes		Never		N/A	
Types of office spaces	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey
SmartSpaces	5%	+4pp	8%	+2pp	34%	+11pp	47%	-14pp	5%	-4pp
Microsoft Teams Rooms	8%	+5pp	18%	+7pp	39%	+8pp	31%	-17pp	4%	-3pp
Standard meeting rooms	12%	+2pp	27%	0	50%	-2pp	11%	0	1%	-1pp
Desk space	86%	+11pp	7%	-9pp	6%	-1pp	1%	-1pp	0%	0
Informal meeting areas (pods/ breakout areas etc.)	13%	+4pp	22%	-1pp	44%	+1pp	19%	-3pp	2%	-1pp
Kitchen areas	56%	+13pp	16%	-5pp	19%	-6pp	9%	-1pp	1%	0pp
Canteen/café areas	51%	+14pp	18%	-5pp	20%	-4pp	5%	-2pp	6%	-3pp

Annex 4

Table 1: Ease of accessing different office spaces, including a comparison to the previous survey

Types of office spaces	Ease of accessing spaces							
	Very easy		Quite easy		Not very easy		Not at all easy	
	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey	% of respondents	Difference from previous survey
Meet with Welsh Government colleagues	60%	18%	35%	-13%	4%	-3%	1%	-1%
Meet with external stakeholders	29%	5%	46%	-4%	19%	-1%	6%	-0.3%
Have sensitive conversations	32%	6%	44%	-4%	18%	-1%	6%	-1%
Interact with colleagues informally	61%	16%	35%	-13%	3%	-2%	1%	-1%
Concentrate on your work	31%	9%	43%	-2%	17%	-4%	9%	-3%
Take calls or meetings at a space away from my desk	24%	-	45%	-	23%	-	8%	-
Access appropriate storage [e.g. day lockers or assigned lockers where necessary]	40%	-	34%	-	14%	-	11%	-

Please note: Those who responded N/A have been removed from the respondent base
The last two options were new for the March 2024 survey, so time series is not available