

# What five years of evidence on hybrid working tells us about the future of employment

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## Executive Summary

This article addresses the evolving evidence base on hybrid and remote working in the UK, drawing primarily on the findings of a House of Lords special inquiry titled 'Is Working from Home Working?' published after a ten-month investigation. The author, an academic seconded to parliament as thematic research lead, argues that five years of post-pandemic evidence now provides sufficient grounding for organisations to make informed hybrid working decisions. Key findings presented include: hybrid working's productivity impact is context-dependent and best assessed case-by-case; hybrid arrangements could yield a 1–2% labour supply gain; retention and recruitment savings may reach £7–10 billion annually for UK employers; return-to-office mandates create employee relations tensions without resolving underlying preference gaps; and technology for collaboration remains underutilised. The article concludes that well-managed hybrid working, including coordinated in-person 'anchor days' and redesigned office environments, offers a 'best of both worlds' outcome. Implications point toward the need for nuanced, industry-specific hybrid policies rather than blanket mandates, with appraisal systems potentially recognising collaborative contributions.

## Key Insights

1. Hybrid working's impact on productivity is not uniform and is best evaluated on a case-by-case basis across industries, roles, and individual circumstances.
2. Return-to-office mandates represent an employer trade-off between perceived collaborative benefits and staff satisfaction, and blanket mandates risk worsening employment relations by failing to address the gap between employer and employee preferences.
3. Hybrid working demonstrates measurable inclusion benefits, particularly for disabled people and parents of young children, with an estimated 1–2% potential labour supply gain relevant to UK economic inactivity policy.

## Practical Takeaways

- Organisations reviewing hybrid policy may find value in coordinating structured 'anchor days' for in-person team interaction, rather than relying on ad hoc office attendance or blanket mandates.
- Performance appraisal processes could be examined for their capacity to capture collaborative contributions — such as mentoring — that are frequently unrecognised in hybrid environments.

## Critical Analysis

**Strengths:** The article is grounded in a formal parliamentary inquiry process with a broad evidence base, and the author discloses their direct involvement in the inquiry, providing transparency about their position. The synthesis covers multiple stakeholder perspectives including employers, employees, disabled workers, and policymakers. **Limitations:** Key statistics — notably the £7–10 billion retention savings figure and the 1–2% labour supply gain — are attributed to unnamed experts giving evidence, with no methodological sourcing provided, limiting verifiability. The article conflates the inquiry's findings with the author's own research conclusions without always distinguishing between the two. The tone shifts from neutral synthesis toward advocacy for hybrid working, particularly in the concluding sections. The article does not engage with evidence critical of hybrid working beyond acknowledging collaboration concerns. The UK-centric focus limits generalisability. As an opinion piece by an author embedded in the inquiry process, the potential for confirmation bias toward pro-hybrid conclusions warrants acknowledgement.

## Organizational Practice

The article describes organisations implementing hybrid working arrangements with varying degrees of formality, including the use of seat-booking systems, 'anchor days' for structured in-person team attendance, and return-to-office mandates specifying minimum office days. Some organisations are reported to have rethought physical office space post-COVID, resulting in insufficient capacity for genuine collaboration. Appraisal processes are noted as a potential mechanism for recognising collaborative behaviours in hybrid environments. Acas-funded research examined post-pandemic working practices across multiple UK industries.

## Strategic Implications

The evidence presented suggests a divergence between employer concerns about collaboration and employee preferences for flexibility, with mandated return-to-office policies potentially creating measurable employment relations risks. The estimated scale of retention and recruitment savings attributed to hybrid working indicates that workforce strategy decisions around location flexibility carry material financial implications. The identified underutilisation of digital collaboration technology points to a gap between current hybrid infrastructure investment and its potential performance support capacity. The inclusion dimension of hybrid working — particularly its association with higher employment rates among disabled people and caregivers — intersects with broader labour supply and economic inactivity policy agendas in the UK context.

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