The Impact of Remote Working Practice on Organisational Performance in a Further Education Setting

by

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Abstract

This study provides a unique insight into the impact of remote working practice on organisational performance within a Further Education (FE) college setting. Although there were instances of remote working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not until lockdown restrictions were introduced in 2020 that that the potential of remote working in the longer-term were appreciated. Post COVID-19, it is important to understand the remote working practices that are effective in promoting employee productivity and well-being so that they can be retained and promoted. However, it is equally important to identify and understand any remote working practices that negatively impact on performance so that they may be discontinued or revised.

This research adopted a qualitative approach to explore the remote working experiences of employees from an FE college and to understand their views regarding the impact of their colleagues working remotely on performance. Semi-structured interviews were held to enable conversations to develop inductively to create a deeper understanding. Fifteen participants were purposively sampled to ensure representation from across the college. Thematic analysis was used to identify six key themes that formed the basis of the investigation into remote working. The themes included: *is anyone actually working?*, *conflicting priorities – families in the workplace*, *communication*, *work completion, achieving a greater focus and support for students on site*.

The findings from this study are illustrated in a conceptual framework that identifies the opportunities and challenges that working remotely presents for both the individual employee and the organisation as a whole. The key findings are that remote working promotes employee productivity and well-being due to increased flexibility, autonomy and concentration. However, this needs to be managed (according to role) to ensure that a presence on site is maintained to provide support to students. The promotion of employee productivity leads to organisational productivity.

Recommendations for future remote working practice are made and areas for future research are presented for consideration. This research makes a contribution to knowledge as the findings may be used to positively influence the productivity and performance of employees in the FE sector and they are potentially transferrable to other educational institutions or organisations outside the education sector. The practical implications are that employee preference influences the optimum work location for each employee and should be considered when job crafting, hybrid working provides a balance between employee and organisational needs, which is influences by the academic calendar in FE. The performance management practices need to be revised to acknowledge the flexibilities required to maximise the benefits of remote working or hybrid, so need to focus on work completion rather than Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AOC	Association of Colleges
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
FE	Further Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GFE	General Further Education
GPS	Global Positioning System
HE	Higher Education
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
ITP	Independent Training Provider
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
ONS	Office for National Statistics
UCLan	University of Central Lancashire

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I must also thank the participants in this research, giving up their time to attend the interviews and for being so open in sharing their personal perspectives. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

This research seeks to investigate the impact of remote working practice on the performance of employees working within the Further Education (FE) sector. By generating an understanding of this, leaders within the sector will be able to encourage remote working practices that impact positively on performance and disregard those that do not; thus, promoting organisational productivity. There has been a significant change to working practice in the education sector in recent years, most notably since the COVID-19 pandemic (Derrick et al., 2022; Horton and Jacobs, 2022; Nicklin et al., 2022; Ansoms et al., 2024) when all activities had to be carried out remotely to comply with legislation. However, it is unclear how remote working practice beyond COVID-19 impacts on employee performance.

Remote working (previously described as teleworking) has been recognised as a viable alternative to working in the traditional workplace since the early 1970's, when this method of working was introduced in response to the oil crisis to reduce both fuel consumption and congestion (Hambly and Lee 2019; Hopkins and McKay, 2019; Ismail et al., 2018). Although remote working did gradually increase over the years that followed, alongside technological and digital advancements, it was not until the COVID-19 pandemic caused lockdowns on a global scale that there was a significant shift and broad acceptance of remote working (Wang et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2022). Indeed, it is widely recognised that COVID-19 was the catalyst for many organisations accepting remote working as a recognised alternative to attending the workplace and for many employees it was the first time that they were able to experience this working practice.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was an opportunity for both employers and their employees to experience remote working; and due to the extended nature of the crisis there was also the need for adaptations to working methods to be implemented as it soon became clear that

this was not a short, temporary situation (Jackson, 2022; Papp and Cottrell, 2022). Alternative working methods, alongside new management practices, were introduced that recognised the new ways of working. This was enabled by advancing technology and digital capability improvements. However, it is acknowledged that working remotely during COVID-19 lockdowns was not 'normal' as there were other pressures such as home schooling or caring responsibilities that may have been an influence on both practice and performance (Yoshiro, 2021; del Boca et al., 2022; Pabilonia and Vernon, 2023).

As COVID-19 restrictions were gradually removed the need to work remotely reduced from a social distancing perspective. However, there were examples of employers from all employment sectors who recognised the ongoing benefits of having their employees working remotely as this was positive for some in terms of productivity (Tobia et al., 2024) and the overheads associated with accommodating their workforce (Marzban et al., 2023). Yet, there were also examples of employers who wanted / needed their employees back on site; working face to face to deliver a service or collaborate (Taaffe-Maguire, 2024; Vass, 2024), the education sector being a prime example of this. Alongside this, there were differing perspectives of employees to consider. Some struggled with the isolation of working remotely as they recognised the benefits of socialising in the workplace (Butler and Yeh, 2022); yet others preferred the flexibilities and accessibility that remote working offers (Lake and Maidment, 2023).

1.1.1 Further Education

The Further Education (FE) sector employs a workforce in a variety of roles. Some are positions that are only found within education, such as lecturers or academic support staff, but there are also employees to carry out roles that are transferrable to other sectors, such as those working within the finance or Human Resources (HR) teams. Figure 1.1 – The Further Education Workforce in England 2023/24 illustrates the range of roles and volume of employees in the FE sector. The

challenge is that although those employed in education-specific roles are broadly accepting of the need to support some face-to-face activities when working with young people, there are other roles where the reality is that their entire role can be carried out remotely. However, this raises the question of fairness amongst employees as there are potentially misunderstandings between teams where there are differing perceptions regarding remote working and the acceptance of this as a fair alternative to working on site.

Role	**Number of Employees**	**Percentage of Employees**
Teaching	80,500	40%
Support	51,700	25%
Administration	44,400	22%
Management	19,500	10%
Leadership	6,800	3%
TOTAL	**202,900**	

Figure 1.1 – The Further Education Workforce in England 2023/24

(Source: Department for Education, May 2025)

The FE sector comprises of five different types of colleges, as detailed with Figure 1.2 – Colleges in England 2025. This study into remote working practice was conducted at a land-based college. As a land-based college delivers a broad range of education, including academic, technical, vocational and programmes for learners with learning needs, the opportunity for transferability is enhanced.

College Type	Number of Colleges	Brief Description
General Further Education (GFE)	156	Academic, technical and vocational training for post 16 students.
Sixth Form	36	Academic and technical education, predominantly for students aged 16 – 18 years.
Land-based	9	Focus on the skills needed to support the rural economy, specialising in agriculture, land and animal sciences.
Art, Design and Performing Arts	2	Focus on art, design and performance skills.
Specialist Designated College / Institute of Adult Learning	10	Focus on specific areas, such as supporting students with learning difficulties or adult education for those with limited or no prior qualifications.
TOTAL	**213**	

Figure 1.2 – Colleges in England 2025.

Source: Association of Colleges (AOC), September 2025.

1.2 The Research Problem

As employers and their employees started to look forward and plan for the 'new normal' (Corpuz, 2021; Memon et al., 2022; Xiang, 2022; Katsabian, 2023) there were opportunities for research into what this would look like. Some employers took advantage of remote working and removed on-site working as an option, others insisted on a return to the workplace and there was an increasing number of organisations who introduced hybrid working as a way of maximising the benefits of both working styles. However, there has now been time to experience the newly introduced ways of working and some workplaces are already changing in terms of their expectations regarding employee presence.

The Office for National Statistics (2025) report that the number of Great Britain employees (all sectors) hybrid working has increased since 2022, when the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions ended. From 2023, as the 'new normal' started to become established, there has been a steady

increase in the number of employees hybrid working but the number of employees either fully working from home or on site is largely consistent. Figure 1.3 – Work Locations of UK Employees 2022 – 2025 illustrates the change in work location since the COVID-19 pandemic ended.

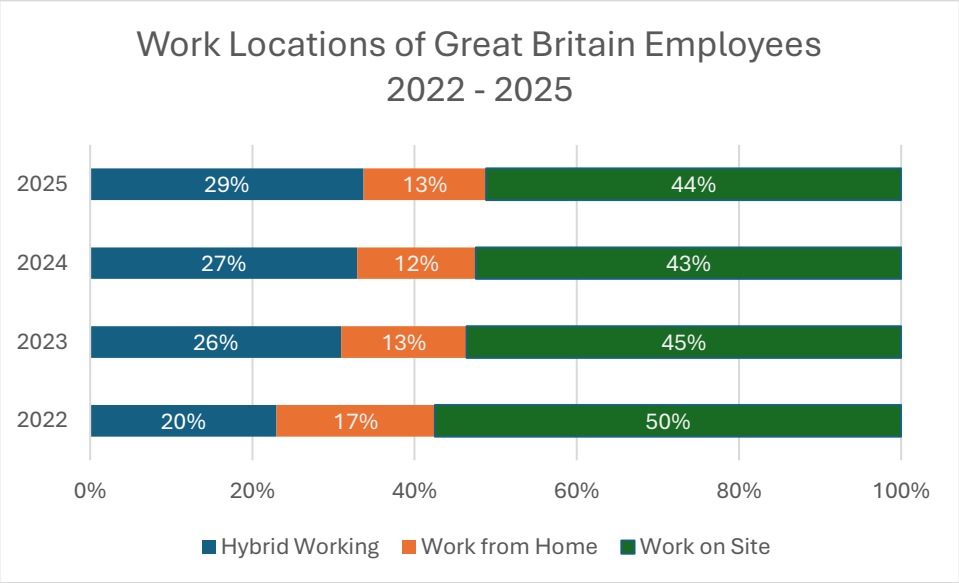

Figure 1.3 – Work Locations of Great Britain Employees 2022 – 2025

Source: Office for National Statistics (2025)

This research seeks to understand best practice in terms of remote working as an ongoing situation to enable managers to make informed decisions to support productivity alongside employee well-being. This provides the opportunity to suggest the retention of the more positive aspects of remote working but the removal of the less successful practices. By engaging with managers and employees this research includes multiple perspectives to allow a range of views to be considered.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic some FE Colleges have encountered a recruitment challenge, particularly for those employed in roles that are transferrable to other sectors (O'Neill, 2021; Association of Colleges, 2022; Smith and Husband, 2024). Figure 1.1 – The Further Education Workforce in England 2023/24 illustrates the breakdown of roles within colleges, with only 40% of

employees in colleges fulfilling teaching roles. This highlights the scale of the problem where a high proportion of FE college staff will have the skills to successfully gain employment outside the FE sector. Unless flexibilities regarding working practice can be offered it is suggested that this recruitment crisis will continue as the pool of potential candidates reduces to the geographic restrictions that are introduced if there is an expectation for onsite / hybrid working. This research focusses on the FE sector and shares expectations from an informed perspective to make recommendations for the sector moving forwards.

1.3 Aim, Objectives and Questions

This research aims to assess the impact of remote working practice on organisational performance in a Further Education (FE) college. The research objectives listed below define the focus of this study and by answering the research questions identified recommendations are made.

Objective 1: To identify models of remote working practice in an FE college

Objective 2: To critically analyse the concept of remote working in an FE college.

Objective 3: To interrogate the performance of employees who are working remotely, on site or hybrid in an FE college.

Objective 4: To examine any differences in performance between those working remotely, those working on campus and those who are hybrid working.

Objective 5: To propose recommendations regarding working practice.

Question 1: What are the models of remote working practice used within an FE college?

Question 2: How are FE college employees who are working remotely, on site or hybrid performing against the objectives that are relevant to their specific role?

Question 3: Are there any differences in performance between those working remotely, those working on campus and those who are hybrid working?

Question 4: Are there any working practices that are identified as having an impact on employee performance (positively or negatively) and therefore organisational performance?

1.3 Rationale for the Study and Contribution to Knowledge

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity to implement remote working practices on a global scale (Ozimek, 2021; Yang, 2023). For many organisations this was the catalyst for change in how the business operated on a daily basis (Boland et al., 2020; Sull et al., 2020). Now that the COVID-19 restrictions have been removed there is the opportunity to ensure that positive remote working practices are retained, but there is also the ability to remove or reduce any practices that have a less positive impact on the workplace and / or employees.

Although the pandemic served as an opportunity to pilot remote working this was not carried out during normal circumstances where employer or employee choice was a factor (Gifford, 2022; Pass and Ridgway, 2022; Adisa et al., 2023). The problem is that the engagement of employees in remote working practice is presently potentially related to individual employee choice or convenience rather than to drive forward performance (Vij et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2024).

The introduction of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 (UK Government, 2023) became law in 2024 and includes remote or hybrid working as flexible working examples that

can be requested by employees. The act requires employers to consider all requests in a '*reasonable manner*'. The findings of this research will support FE colleges in justifying the reasons why or why not an employee should be permitted to work flexibly as the impact of remote working on organisational performance is analysed in an FE college setting.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) inform that in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, around 12% of working adults in the UK reported spending part of their working time working from home. During lockdown (2020) this rose to 49% and more recently from 2nd – 27th April 2025, it is reported that 41% of UK adults worked either wholly or partially from home (ONS, 2025). When considering those employed specifically within the education sector the ONS (2021) identify that in 2020 only 5.45% of employees worked mainly from home (compared to 2.65% of all occupations in the same time period) and 56.95% of employees in education never worked from home. In 2022 37.1% of respondents from the education sector stated that they will be working permanently from home with only those employed in Information and Communication or Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities exceeding this statistic (ONS, 2022). However, by 2023 when considering actual remote working data rather than predicted, in December 2023 in the education sector 36.5% of employees reported that they used a hybrid model of working and 10.7% reported that they were working exclusively from home (ONS, 2024). This demonstrates the significant increase in remote working practice in education for which Covid-19 can be explained as the catalyst. Both data sets (all occupations and those working in the education sector) are indicative of the generic changes in working practice and there is now the opportunity to retain the new practices that are beneficial in terms of performance and remove those that are less successful. The accurate identification of practices to be continued or removed is essential if performance is to be maximised by those working within the education sector. Data regarding the scale of remote working in the FE sector specifically is unavailable. However, within this study only one of the fifteen participants engaged in remote working prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (7%), yet in this study there were eleven participants (73%) who were engaged in remote working (mainly hybrid).

The scale of the FE sector is significant. Although there are 260 colleges in the UK in total, 217 are in England (AOC, 2025). It is estimated that almost two million students attend a college in the UK each year, including 1.6 million in England (Higginbotham, 2025). The income of FE colleges in England is significant, £6.9 Billion was generated in the 2022/23 academic year (Moura and Tahir, 2024). Although the total investment in the FE sector from the UK Government is unclear due to the complex range of funding methodologies, as a guide funding for students aged 16 – 18 years is estimated as being £7,350 per student for the 2024/25 academic year (Drayton et al., 2025). There is a positive return on investment as student skills are improved and this leads to higher earnings and improved job prospects (Social Mobility Commission, 2023). Therefore, the productivity and performance of the FE sector is of significant importance and the impact of remote working on this is of considerable value.

As the FE sector is people-orientated there is the need to balance organisational efficiency alongside the requirement to maintain a vibrant, people-focused community (Bullock and Henry, 2021) that is welcoming to vocational students attending daily. The core business of an FE College is the delivery of courses to young people aged 16 – 18, which includes the development of vocational skills through social participation (Dennis et al., 2020; Buchanan, 2020) that can only be delivered face to face. There is also the requirement of 'eyes on the child' for vulnerable learners so regular attendance is essential (Holmes, 2022; Kearney et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2024). Although the student-facing element of roles such as teachers or learning support is clear, it is unclear whether performance is impacted if the remainder of the working week is conducted remotely as although performance can be monitored via existing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) the potential of remote working impacting on performance has not been analysed.

Consideration of non-student facing roles is also an important factor, such as within the administration or data teams. There is the argument that remote working should be available to those in these roles if this maximises individual performance, yet there could be the risk that this

could cause antagonism between those who need to attend work and those who do not (Kong et al., 2022; Vyas, 2022; Vij et al., 2023). It could be argued that as a people-facing business all employees should work on campus, but the organisation may be at risk of not attracting or retaining the best talent if this is expected as those with the skills to work outside FE may choose to leave the sector if greater flexibilities are available elsewhere. This study is inclusive of all roles within an FE college and as such has representation from a broad range of participants, compromising of those from both academic (curriculum) and support (business enabling) roles.

Communication between individual employees and teams is imperative in any organisation (Dai et al., 2022; Vrucan, 2022; Willett et al., 2023) and there are differences in opinion on how remote communication methods can restrict or enhance performance (Shockley et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Maurer et al., 2022). Although it can be argued that remote communication is available regardless of location (on or off campus) there may be a positive or negative impact on performance as the balance of constant availability against the need to focus on the task in hand is a consideration (ter Hoeven and van Zoonen, 2020; Wang, 2022) as well as the loss of informal 'corridor conversations' when teams are working remotely. However, the value of remote communication when working at a multi-campus College cannot be ignored.

The findings from the research will be shared with Senior Managers from the college where the research took place to recommend the working practices to be deployed across the organisation. It is anticipated that these recommendations may be transferable to similar organisations such as other Further Education Colleges, Independent Training Providers and Universities.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 examines and evaluates the literature that is available on the subject of remote working. There is extensive literature available regarding the experiences of businesses and their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, however post-pandemic literature is not as widely available. Literature relating specifically to education and the wider subject of remote working (outside the education sector) has been considered to ensure that the learning from other sectors, where appropriate, is considered within this research.

The research methods used to investigate and analyse remote working practices are described within **Chapter 3.** This qualitative research has been carried out within the interpretative paradigm and focuses on the response provided by the employees at the college, the researcher's own employer. The opinions of the participants were collected via semi-structured interviews, providing a framework of questions whilst providing the flexibility to investigate and probe further where appropriate or introduce further questions to support understanding. The subjective nature of this research was a key consideration within the research design, with reliability and validity being of paramount importance. Reflexivity is an important factor and researcher bias has been mitigated as much as possible, however the researcher remained mindful of this throughout the study to ensure that this is consciously avoided.

The results from the research are provided in **Chapter 4,** based on the opinions gathered from the participants and collected within the semi-structured interviews in order to answer the research questions. The extended discussions between the researcher and the participants provided detailed information that is summarised within the chapter. The research results are collated according to themes to provide structure, focus and clarity.

Chapter 5 discusses and analyses the results collected and reported in Chapter 4, comparing the findings to the literature available to explore and answer the research question. Recommendations are made with regard to the continuation of remote working practices in an FE

College. Recommendations for further research are made based on further questions that have emerged as a result of this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In reviewing the literature associated with remote working practice the information is initially grouped into three time periods, before the COVID-19 pandemic (pre-March 2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020 – February 2022) and post COVID-19 pandemic (March 2022 to present). This enables comparisons to be made between the different time periods and illustrates how remote working has evolved with COVID-19 as the catalyst. Secondly the chapter considers remote working specifically in relation to the FE sector; taking into account productivity, online teaching and learning, and support for students. The chapter then explores the practice of remote working, reviewing the impact on employee wellbeing before considering the impact of remote working on employee recruitment, retention and inclusivity. Finally, this chapter focuses on employee performance and organisational efficiencies as a result of the enhanced digitalisation and technological advancement that is associated with remote working.

2.2 Remote Working in Relation to the COVID-19 Pandemic

2.2.1 Before the COVID-19 Pandemic (Pre-March 2020)

Although developments in information technology made remote working possible since the 1980's, the gradual advancement of digital technology and infrastructure limited its implementation in most sectors (Kahkonen, 2023; Leonardi et al., 2024; Temel and Yildiz, 2024). At this time remote working was considered to be a solution to traffic congestion and associated pollution (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Agba et al., 2022; Almeida et al., 2024) as well as being a positive response to the oil crisis that began in the 1970's (Walentek, 2020; Garro-Arbarca et al., 2021; Macias et al., 2022); factors that are still relevant today. Due to the general assumption that there was an expectation to

carry out work in the workplace and the availability of resources on site, such as higher quality internet access or the presence of technological devices to work on, the use of the newly developed resources that would facilitate remote working were commonly only accessed in the workplace itself (Dittes et. al., 2019; Craft, 2020; Marsh et al., 2022). This allowed for the continued development of resources that would ultimately facilitate remote working, however the benefits of this were not fully realised until the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Figure 2.1 illustrates employee engagement with home working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic across all sectors. The data illustrates that there has been a gradual increase in homeworking from 2015-2019. However, the percentage of employees working from home remains low with only 5.1% of employees working from home by 2019.

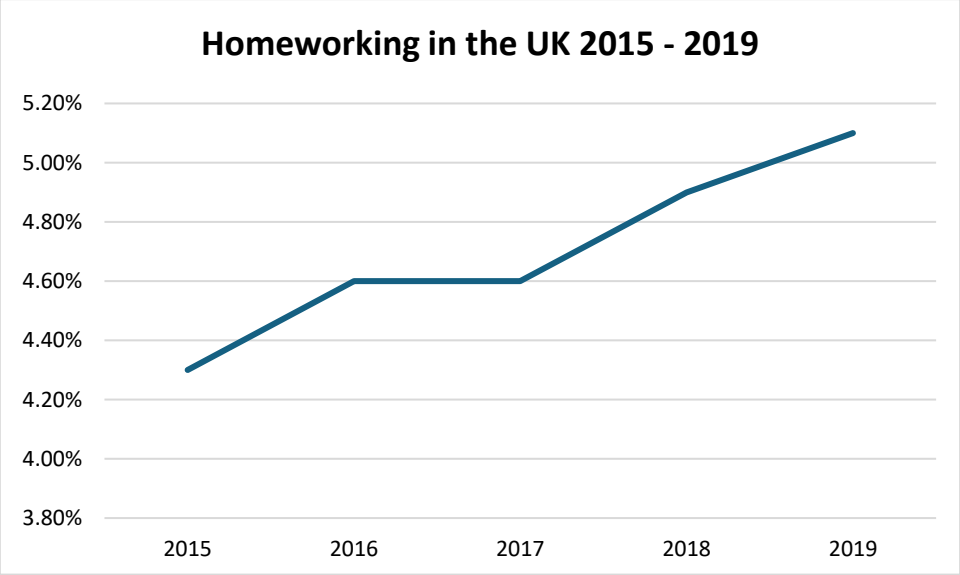

Figure 2.1 – Homeworking in the UK 2015 – 2019

(Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021)

Homberg et al. (2023) recognise that remote working was initially promoted for executive employees and managers needing to complete complex tasks from the early 1990s. This concurs with the reports that there are less interruptions and distractions when working remotely as opposed to being in the office (Ani, 2021; Kowalski and Slebarska, 2022). The combination of enhanced

concentration due to the reduction of interruptions and the increased autonomy associated with remote working leads to increased employee well-being (Charalampous et al., 2019; Uwannah et al., 2022; Huang, 2024; Praditina et al., 2024). In contrast, Greer and Payne (2014) testify that the ability of employees working remotely to respond immediately to queries was used as a measure by supervisors to determine whether an employee is currently working, which compromises the employee's ability to concentrate as they become distracted by work-related communication that must be responded to in a timely fashion. However, by communicating regularly with employees and setting clear expectations regarding response times and communication, performance can be enhanced (Allen et al., 2021). being able to separate home life from working life can be a challenge when working remotely, resulting in a negative experience for employees (Song and Gao, 2020; Borghouts et al., 2022). Interestingly, the practice of working remotely was still described as 'marginal' as recently as 2014 (Hynes, 2014).

Those working in academia within the Higher Education (HE) sector were early adopters of remote working. Indeed, Young (2002) predicted that up to 90% of HE courses would eventually become blended (combining face-to-face and technology driven teaching) and by 2004 46% of US undergraduate institutions offered blended programmes (Allen et al., 2007). However, despite this early adoption of remote working and learning, the COVID-19 pandemic is still recognised as the catalyst for a shift to remote working in the HE sector (Okeke-Uzodike and Ngo Henha, 2025).

The advent of cloud computing, removing the need for servers located at office premises, introduced flexibility and accessibility for users, whilst reducing costs and space requirements for organisations (Prince, 2011; Kaur et al., 2017; Sanchez, 2017). This facilitated the identification and recognition of the need to create shared resources that could be edited in real-time across colleagues, organisations and sites which enabled shared working that was both time efficient and avoided the confusion of multiple versions of the same document was starting to be accepted as a working practice pre-pandemic (Craft, 2019; Agba et al., 2020). Although the custom of people

working independently yet contributing to the same work was starting to become common place, it had yet to become broadly accepted as a way of working when employees were completely remote from each other. This new and agile way of working was revolutionary and significantly improved remote working practice further as community cloud computing became common in the workplace, where real-time collaboration between colleagues became possible and universally accepted (Khan et al., 2022; Castranova et al., 2023; Al-Dujalii et al., 2024). Organisations working across large geographic areas, including international and global businesses, realised the benefits of virtual teams pre-pandemic (Castellano et al., 2016; Chong et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2018), which became a vital method of communication and effective teamworking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic (April 2020 – February 2022)

The demand to implement remote working during the lockdown period due to the restrictions introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19 presented an unforeseen opportunity to initiate remote working on a mass scale, with whole organisations moving away from centralised locations (Agba, 2020; Badura et al., 2023; Banerjee and Gupta, 2024). Although during the pandemic there was a significant impact on global mobility as travel was severely restricted (Dickmann and Bader, 2020; Tufnell, 2021; Jooss et al., 2022) the consequence was that the need for global travel was also reduced as organisations utilised the benefits of remote communication and new ways of working (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Limburg and Daverat, 2021, Selmer et al., 2022). To realise the opportunity to work remotely there was a requirement to upskill employee's digital skills with no notice to enable them to continue working effectively and thus avoid a decline in productivity (Barabaschi et al., 2022; De Vincenzi, et al., 2022; Benligiral et al., 2024). However, for those who lacked the necessary digital skills and / or equipment to work remotely, this was a particularly stressful time, particularly as this also impacted negatively on their ability to access training which was typically only available online (Singh et al., 2022; Demerouti, 2023; O'Hare et al.,

2024). By providing access to IT support employers were able to mitigate some of the anxieties experienced by employees (Chong et al., 2020; Pfaffinger et al. 2022; Meyer and Tisch, 2024) and minimise or avoid technostress.

Older workers were more likely to be asked to work remotely due to the nature of their role during the pandemic, yet the same group of workers were commonly found to lack the digital skills required to work from home effectively (Raymundo and da Silva Santana, 2019; Tams, 2022; Settels, 2023) and were therefore more likely to find the transition from working in the workplace to home working more of a challenge (Awada et al., 2021; Coco, 2022; Okubo, 2022). The opportunity to access digital support via younger members of the workforce, commonly described as 'reverse mentoring', that many older employees are reliant on (Gadomska-Lila, 2020; Garg et al., 2021; Kortmann et al., 2023) is lost when working remotely which presents a further challenge. It is of interest that Barbour et al. (2021) identify that older workers were less likely to work from home for the first time during the pandemic, suggesting that they had previously engaged in remote working pre-pandemic. As more mature employees are more likely to have a more settled home and work life, in addition to being less likely to having to provide childcare (Groarke et al., 2020), this suggests that older workers may be better placed to adapt to a remote working model. During the COVID-19 pandemic older workers who had previously had childcare commitments, particularly looking after grandchildren, were unable to continue with this responsibility due to lock-down restrictions meaning that they had a greater availability for work (Blum and Dobrotic, 2021; Bobeck et al., 2023). Indeed, it is acknowledged that older workers were more skilled in setting boundaries between home life and work life during the pandemic, leading to greater productivity (Scheibe et al., 2022; Scheibe et al., 2024).

It is of interest that employee resilience has a positive impact on remote working productivity (Bakker and van Wingerden, 2021; Blaique et al., 2023; Karaca et al., 2023), suggesting that without resilience, a digitally skilled employee will struggle to maintain their performance when

working remotely yet if an employee is resilient then necessary digital skills can be learned to enable them to function away from the office as their resilience leads to adaptability (Malik and Garg, 2020; Sharma and Tiwari, 2023; Ma et al., 2024). It is recognised that employee resilience can be promoted by providing organisational support (Makiniemi et al., 2021; Zhai et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2023) and individual resilience can be enhanced via team resilience (Hartmann et al., 2020; Stoverink et al., 2020; Ambrose et al., 2024). Employees who demonstrated satisfaction, engagement and commitment pre-pandemic had higher levels of performance during the pandemic (Yuan et al., 2021; Sham and Tang, 2023; Dong and Wilson, 2024).

The advantages attributed to the sudden move to remote working cannot be ignored, with employers reporting an increase in employee retention and a reduction in burnout amongst teams (Kakar et al., 2023; Ki and Lee, 2024; Kranke et al., 2024). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were incidences of employee burnout due to remote working (Bakarich et al., 2022; Costin et al., 2023; Urrejola-Contreras, 2023; Kranke et al.,2024) that resulted in inconsistencies of service and the challenge of balancing home life and work life all under one roof that resulted in reduced job satisfaction, leading to employees intending to resign from their role (Vaziri et al., 2020; Allen, 2021; Nemteanu and Dan-Cristian, 2023). It was discovered that exhaustion and burnout could be reduced by introducing a support network for employees (Shockley et al., 2021; Vu, et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Ortiz-Bonnin et al., 2023), which ultimately avoids costly recruitment processes and a loss of talent from the organisation (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2020; Khun and Yu, 2021; Kumar, 2022).

The change to remote working during the pandemic was carried out under difficult circumstances whereby many individuals were experiencing feelings of social isolation and uncertainty that were not necessarily related solely to the new remote working practice but to global circumstance (Adisa et al., 2021; Brown and Leite, 2022; Shal, 2024). Therefore, acceptance or non-acceptance of remote working could be related to the exceptional circumstances that individuals found themselves in, and further research post-pandemic as a comparator was recommended (Ipsen

et al., 2021; Jacks, 2021; Ng at al., 2022). Razmerita et al. (2021) report that research conducted during the pandemic was influenced by the unexpected introduction of the enforced situation.

The swift, unexpected move to remote working at the outbreak of the pandemic resulted in employers being unprepared in terms of resources available to their employees (Kohont and Ignjatovic, 2022; Yogapriya and Dash, 2023; Jayarao et al., 2024). This resulted in some employees experiencing a lack of equipment to effectively continue their role, such as laptops or access to suitable office furniture in the home that resulted in employees experiencing musculoskeletal symptoms (Dockrell and Culleton-Quinn, 2023; Wells, 2023). Duque et al. (2020) identify that work engagement increases as employees working remotely have greater physical comfort. Also, employees with a dedicated office space at home were more likely to separate home and work life, leading to greater job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2021; Awada et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2021)

It has been acknowledged that during the pandemic female workers were at a disadvantage to their male colleagues as they were more likely to be responsible for caring for their families whilst remote working (Nash and Churchill, 2020; Power, 2020; Newsome et al., 2022; Mascarenhas et al., 2024). Indeed, female employees were more likely to experience furlough or job loss than their male colleagues (Petts et al., 2020; Blazquez et al., 2023; Liu and Gan, 2024). Female employees with caring responsibilities were more concerned about their career trajectory than those who did not have these additional responsibilities when working remotely (Sevilla and Smith, 2020; King et al., 2022; Byrne et al., 2023); so it is important that employers are mindful of this concern and actively reassure employees as appropriate. During the pandemic some parents, particularly fathers, described being able to spend more time with their children than they would under normal circumstances (Craig and Churchill, 2020; Lagomarsino et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2023). Indeed, fathers took on more childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their increased presence in the home and/or lack of access to external childcare support (Petts et al., 2020; Chung et.al, 2021; Hipp and Bunning, 2021; Garcia, 2022). Although not impacted by conflicting

responsibilities in the home, support was also needed by those living alone to help them deal with loneliness and social isolation (Carnevale and Hatack, 2020; Wels et al., 2023; Quy and Zhu, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on employees working from home. Figure 2.2 – Percentage of the Employed UK Population Homeworking 2011 - 2020 illustrates that although there has been a steady increase in the percentage of those who are working from home this increased significantly in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 the percentages of those who never or occasionally worked from home decreased, with almost 20% of employees recognising themselves as recently working from home. The percentage of employees mainly working from home doubled in comparison to the previous year.

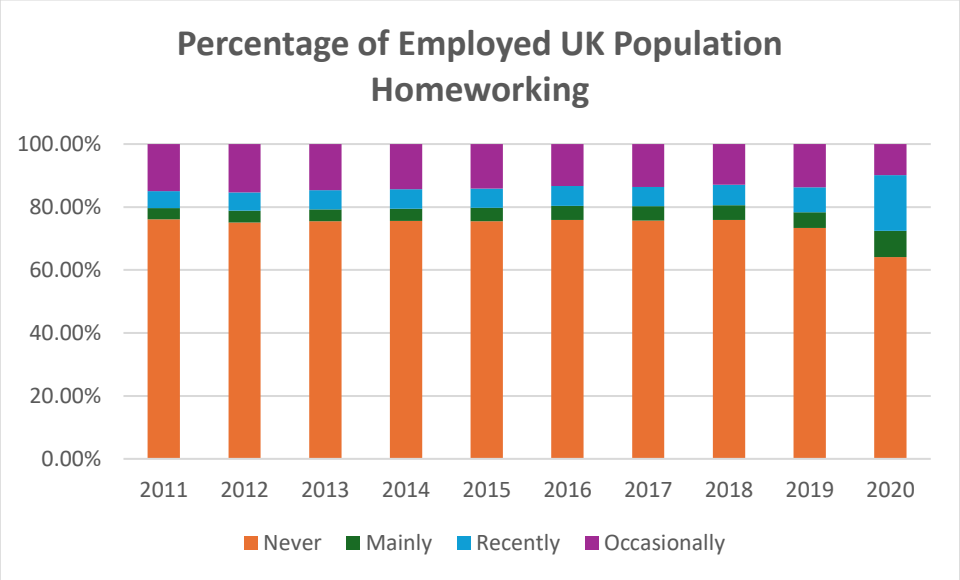

Figure 2.2 – Percentage of the Employed UK Population Homeworking 2011 – 2020

(Source – Office for National Statistics, 2021a).

During the pandemic there was considerable employee uncertainty that had the potential to cause disruption to the workforce and impact negatively on productivity. However, by providing regular supervisory or managerial support and being attentive toward employees this could be minimised or avoided (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020; Sanders et al., 2020; Mihalache and Mihalache,

2022). The behaviour of managers in responding to the pandemic impacted positively or negatively on employee behaviour, leading to feelings of either gratitude or resentment (Campo et al., 2021; Slaughter et al., 2021; McPhail et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Post COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2022 to Present)

As COVID-19 restrictions formally ended in the UK in February 2022 (UK Government, 2022) there have been over three years for organisations to adapt to post-pandemic practice. However, the working practices commonly seen are evolved practices that are based on personal or team preferences rather than research–informed business need (Abesiri and Rupasingha, 2022; Billsberry et al., 2023; Smite et al., 2023). Although some limited research has been carried out to investigate the continuation of working from home in education post-pandemic (Papp and Cottrell, 2022; Smith et al., 2023; Tobia et al., 2024), there has not necessarily been enough time since the end of the pandemic to fully appreciate the longer-term impact of remote working practice. Literature is starting to emerge post-pandemic, but earlier post-pandemic literature is limited as it was unknown at the time whether the pandemic was actually over, or if a new wave or variance of the virus was going to appear. After operating in a post-pandemic environment there is the opportunity to reflect, evaluate, and explore working practices that need to be stopped, continued, or developed (McKenzie et al., 2022; Gerhardt, 2023; Schulte-Romer and Gesing, 2023; Cay and Gurbuz, 2025).

Organisations have been balancing the advantages and disadvantages of remote, hybrid and on-site working to create the optimum equilibrium since COVID-19 restrictions ended. The increased flexibilities and associated cost savings due to factors such as reduced office space and travel need to be considered alongside the missed opportunity for collaborative working in the same physical work environment; all of which need to be contemplated according to individual needs and the demands of specific roles (Delany, 2022; Howington, 2022; Lake and Maidment, 2023; Fan and Moen, 2023). The productivity of employees working remotely versus onsite is also an important consideration as

employers balance the needs of the business alongside employee well-being (Kazekami, 2020; George et al., 2022; Saridakis et al., 2023; Jibunoh et al., 2025). The adoption and continued development of online collaboration technology and video conferencing during the pandemic has led to changes in the workplace post pandemic that facilitates remote working whilst generating efficiencies (Rujira et al., 2020; Trees, 2021; Ozimek, 2022; Kokshagina and Schneider, 2023). Meresca (2024) recounts that the cost to the organisation of providing remote working equipment to employees is offset by the efficiency savings generated through working away from the workplace. Indeed, Stamos and Kotsopoulos (2024) estimate that the cost of providing remote working equipment is recovered within the first year of working remotely due to other efficiencies generated.

Hybrid working, where employees spend part of the week working remotely and the remainder in the workplace is being seen as a compromise, where both employers and employees have the advantage of using both models (McPhail et al., 2023; Potter and Ross, 2023; Jindain and Gilitwala, 2024). Consideration needs to be given to the new digital skills of employees, and associated technology-enabled equipment (Antonopoulou et al., 2021; Carlisle et al., 2021; Huu, 2023), that will be advantageous for their home or social life as well as to fulfil work requirements (Hecker et al., 2021; Konig and Seifert, 2022). There has been a cultural change to engage in more online activities outside work that has the added benefit for employers in ensuring that digital skills and interests are maintained (Wijesooriya et al., 2020; Mouratidis and Papagiannakis, 2021; Mouratidis et al., 2022).

Many employees express a preference for continuing to work online, recognising that the flexibilities offered, including increased autonomy, working hours and lack of commuting is beneficial to their personal circumstances and contribute to an improved work / life balance (Heiden et al., 2023; Elsamani and Kajikawa, 2024; Kodama, 2024). It is acknowledged that working remotely post-pandemic enables employees to integrate their family commitments alongside their professional role (Hipp and Krzywdzinski, 2023; Lass and Wooden, 2023; Prati, 2024), recognising the positive impact

that the reopening of childcare provision and schools has made a towards achieving a balanced family life when working from home. McCain (2023) notes that when choosing a new employer 59% of employees are more likely to want to work for an organisation that offers the opportunity to work remotely, with 55% of employees expressing a preference to work from home at least three days per week. The benefits of online working concerning inclusivity in the workplace cannot be ignored as employers seek to achieve equality, diversity, and inclusion within their organisation (McNamara and Stanch, 2021; Dowling et al., 2022; Kalmanovich-Cohen and Stanton, 2023; Hsu and Tambe, 2025).

The environmental benefits of remote working are an important consideration as it can significantly reduce carbon emissions due to the removal of the need to commute (Li et al., 2023; Tato et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2024). The mobility of the workforce has changed dramatically since the pandemic in that new options for travel are available and there is a new focus on sharing; in addition to traditional public transport there are now e-scooters or bicycles available for short-term hire in many cities or incentives are provided for car sharing (Lyons et al., 2018; Standing et al., 2018; Mouratidis et al., 2021). The consequences of this are positive environmentally, and there are also considerable cost savings for individual employees. If there is not the requirement for the employee to physically attend the workplace every day a less frequent, longer commute may be feasible (Rappaport, 2022; Speroni and Taylor, 2023; Bloom et al., 2024). Much of the new 'shared transport' ethos is made possible by using technology (via apps) where information regarding bookings, payments and availability are easily available (Batty, 2020; Jamal and Habib, 2020; Mouratidis et al., 2021; Sengupta and Tripathi, 2025). There has also been an increase in the number of employees choosing to commute actively, using transport methods such as walking or cycling as they may not be attending the office every day, resulting in less traffic congestion, less pollution and safer roads (Islam et al., 2023; Ashour et al., 2024; Barbour et al., 2024).

Working remotely during the pandemic gave some employees the opportunity to re-locate to a greater distance away from the workplace in order to achieve a better work / life balance but

this now presents a challenge to employers, and their employees, who may now want to re-introduce on- site working (Dean and Hoff, 2021; Hsu, 2021; Thompson, 2021). This raises the question of whether to enforce an onsite presence and potentially risk losing experienced members of the team who would now struggle to commute due to distance or to allow employees to choose how and/or where they wish to work. There have been recent examples (in 2025) of organisations significantly reducing the amount of time that employees can work remotely. For example, Amazon insisted that all their staff returned to working in the office permanently (Wieczorek, 2024) and the University of Liverpool introduced the expectation that all employees must attend the workplace for a minimum of 60% of their working time which resulted in disruptive strike action (BBC, 2025). As employees viewed these developments negatively, it is proposed that employers need to be proactive in meeting employee need if they wish to retain their current workforce (Hirsch; 2021, Sheather and Slattery, 2021; Escobedo and Garza, 2023).

Figure 2.3 – Homeworking Comparisons 2022 and 2025 shows the changes in work location from immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic to three years after the pandemic ended. The percentage of the workforce continuing to work exclusively from home has remained consistent. However, as the number of employees travelling into the workplace has declined as those who are hybrid working has increased.

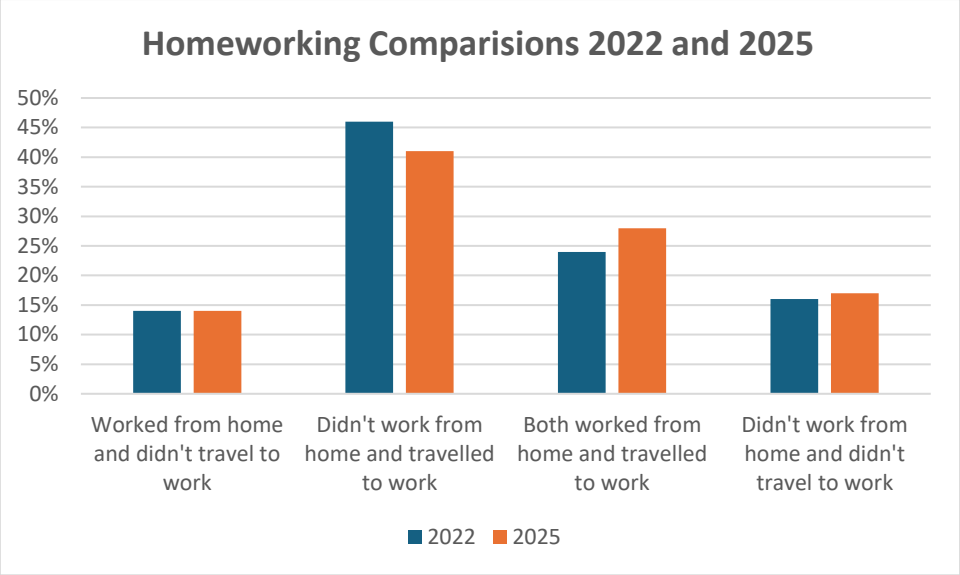

Figure 2.3 – Homeworking Comparisons 2022 and 2025

Source: Office for National Statistics (2022a) and Office for National Statistics (2025a)

It was identified during the pandemic that remote working resulted in employees suffering from feelings of isolation, stress, or physical difficulties such as musculoskeletal problems. However, much of this was considered to be impacted by the pandemic itself (Ameen et al., 2023; Wels et al., 2023; Figueiredo et al., 2024). It is important for employers to recognise that these challenges must be mitigated if there is to be a permanent change to remote working within the organisation as this may not necessarily be restricted only to the enforced lockdown. Although the need for two-way communication within any organisation is important, the need for regular and ongoing communication with employees working remotely is critical to the success of the organisation (Nyberg et al., 2021; de Sousa Figueira et al., 2023; Lee, 2023). Where information can be disseminated informally between employees working on the same site, this may not be possible as employees work remotely and may have no relationship with their colleagues.

2.3 Remote Working within Education

2.3.1 Work Location – Further and Higher Education

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) are responsible for providing digital infrastructure and support to UK colleges and universities. As digital leaders in the sector, their interest and research include the requirements of and practices within the sector. JISC conducted digital experience insights surveys between October 2024 and June 2025, targeting employees working in FE and HE. As the survey questions were identical the reports produced allow for direct comparisons to be made.

Employees in the FE and HE Sectors revealed their current (2024/25) work location, as illustrated in Figure 2.5 – FE and HE Work Location 2024/25 (JISC, 2025). There were differences in location reported between FE and HE, where FE employees informed of a greater presence on campus (68%) than HE employees (27%). A very low proportion (1%) of FE employees work mainly online, those who do carry out online work do so as hybrid workers (30%). However, in HE the majority of employees work hybrid (60%) with a greater percentage working mainly online (13%) than in FE. This data supports the findings of Batchelor, 2020; Benavides et al., 2020; Bullock and Henry, 2021 who report that a vibrant, people-focused campus must be maintained in FE (see 2.3.1 – Further Education).

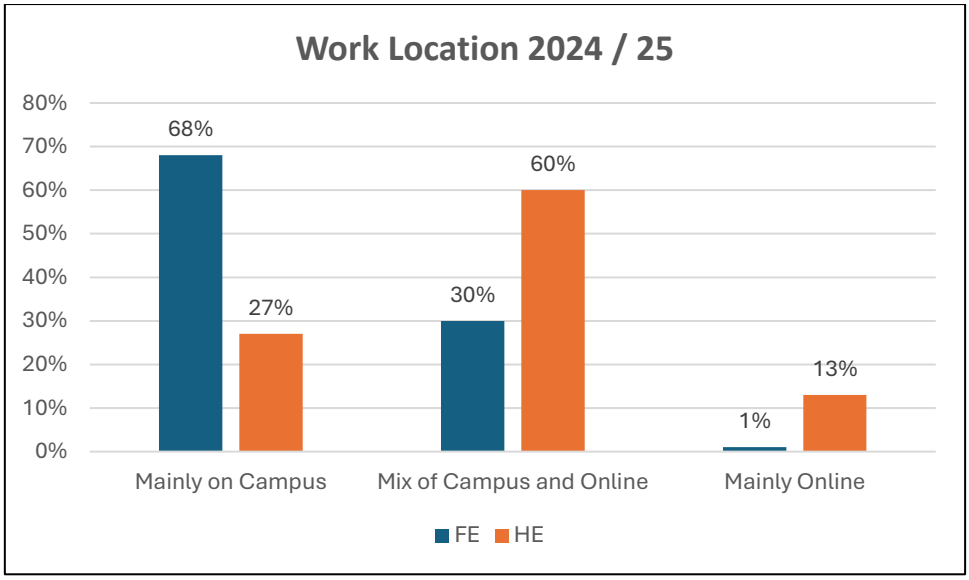

Figure 2.4 – FE and HE Work Location 2024/25

Source: JISC FE (2025) and JISC HE (2025).

JISC (2025) reveals that employee preference for working remotely is greater than the actual (see Figure 2.6 FE and HE Preferred Work Location 2024/2025). In FE a further 20% of employees would prefer to work hybrid (total 50%), yet in HE only a further 1% would prefer to work hybrid (total 61%) but with an additional 8% preferring to work mainly online. The greater number of FE employees expressing a preference to hybrid work may be attributed to a lower percentage currently working in this way in comparison to HE. The feedback clearly indicates that employees in both FE and HE have a preference to hybrid work.

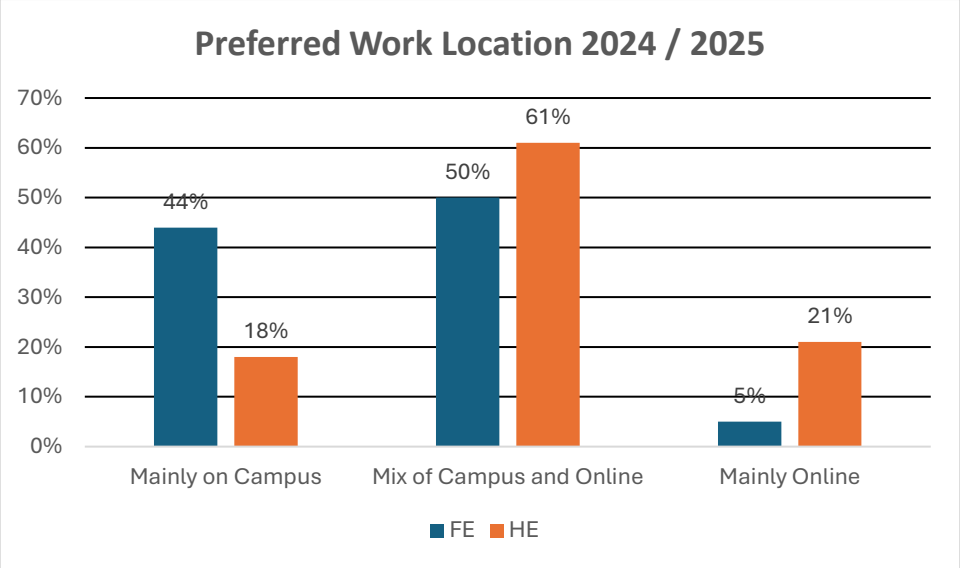

Figure 2.5 – FE and HE Preferred Work Location 2024/25.

Source: JISC FE (2025) and JISC HE (2025).

The preference to carry out work online (hybrid or wholly online) may be attributed to the high satisfaction with the digital work environment. In FE 80% of staff rated their satisfaction with this as above average, yet in HE this was slightly lower at 76% (JISC, 2025). This is of interest given the higher proportion of employees in HE working online compared to FE; respondents stated that their greatest challenge was with connectivity which may correlate with the greater proportion of employees working online and being reliant on home internet connections rather than on-campus networks.

2.3.2 Remote Working in Further Education

The Further Education (FE) sector experiences specific challenges when compared to other sectoral partners, such as schools and Higher Education (HE) institutions. Indeed, FE has been described as a '*poor relation*' (Spours et al., 2022) due to the poor level of funding and subsequent low investment in resources (Department for Education, 2020; Orr, 2020; Association of Directors of

Children's Services, 2023; Senior and Barnes, 2023). Therefore, the need to maximise performance alongside efficiencies is of paramount importance to the sector, and research to support this through an investigation into remote working practice represents an opportunity to achieve this. Employee performance is typically measured objectively via the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the sector to promote accountability (Virca and Rusu, 2020; Chang, 2021; Medne et al., 2022) so there is an opportunity to compare and contrast employee performance using established metrics in many cases pre and post working remotely.

As the FE sector is people-orientated there is a need to balance organisational efficiency and digitalisation alongside the requirement to maintain a vibrant, people-focused community (Batchelor, 2020; Benavides et al., 2020; Bullock and Henry, 2021) that is welcoming to vocational students attending daily. Spivey (2024) reports that the ability to retain a community on campus is the greatest concern for leaders in education. The increased uptake of hybrid or remote working for employees in the sector has the potential to impact negatively on the campus community. Figure 2.4 – Challenges to Moving to Remote Work (2021 vs 2023) illustrates this. Figure 2.4 ranks concerns by priority.

2021	2023
1. Preserving campus community	1. Preserving campus community
2. Fair and equitable policy	2. Maintaining service levels
3. Preparing managers to manage remote employees	3. Preparing managers to manage remote employees
4. Collaboration between employees	4. Collaboration between employees
5. Maintaining service levels	5. Fair and equitable policy
6. Monitoring and evaluation of remote staff	6. Monitoring and evaluation of remote staff
7. Legal and tax compliance concerns	7. Legal and tax compliance concerns
8. Access to necessary technology	8. Access to necessary technology

Figure 2.6 – Challenges to Moving to Remote Work (2021 vs 2023)

Source: Spivey (2024)

The core business of an FE college is the delivery of courses to young people aged 16 – 18 years, which includes the development of both social and vocational skills through social participation (Buchanan, 2020; Dennis et al., 2020; Warner, 2020). This can only be delivered face to face as it is difficult to replicate this when working online. Although the requirement for an on-site presence for those employees in student-facing roles, such as teachers or inclusive learning support, is clear during timetabled sessions; it is unclear whether performance is impacted if the remainder of their working week is conducted remotely as although performance can be monitored via existing KPIs the potential of remote working impacting on overall performance has not been analysed. However, Spivey (2024) reports that concern for maintaining service levels when employees are working remotely has increased from 2021 to 2023, indicating that concern regarding this is increasing.

Consideration of non-student facing roles is also an important factor, such as within the administration or data teams. Spivey (2024) reports that 47% of non-academic staff were hybrid

working in 2023, an increase of 15% from 2021. There is the argument that remote working should be available to those in these roles if this maximises individual performance, yet there could be the risk that this could cause antagonism between those who need to attend work and those who do not (Kong et al., 2022; Vyas, 2022; Vij et al., 2023). A dichotomy between the educational and commercial needs of FE colleges has already been identified (Locke and Maton, 2019; Dennis et al., 2020; McCarroll and Lambert, 2024) and presents a further challenge when recruiting business support staff due to a potential requirement to be on-site may serve to increase the disparity.

The nature of work that is completed remotely differs, depending on the role of the employee and the tasks that require completion. Remote working is described as being the completion of work away from the workplace (Leonardi et al., 2023; Cabinet Office, 2024), which in education may include Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) (DfE, 2024) or assessing the performance of employed students in their own workplace (National Skills Agency, 2023). Online working (or working from anywhere) is defined as working via an internet connection that may be in the workplace, home office or any other venue with an internet connection (Tran et al., 2022; Fauziyah et al., 2024).

Communication between individual employees and teams is imperative in any organisation (Dai et al., 2022; Vrucan, 2022; Willett et al., 2023) and there are differences in opinion on how remote communication methods can restrict or enhance performance (Shockley et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Maurer et al., 2022). JISC (2025) report that 74% of employees in the FE sector agree that they are provided with applications to support collaboration, which is lower than in the HE sector where 84% of employees agree. The difference may be attributed to a greater number of employees in the HE working remotely than in the FE sector. Although it can be argued that remote communication is available regardless of location (on or off campus) there may be a positive or negative impact on performance as the balance of constant availability against the need to focus on the task in hand is an important consideration (Wang, 2022; Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen, 2023; Rick et al., 2024) as well as the loss of informal ‘corridor conversations’ when teams are working remotely. However, the value of remote communication when working at a multi-campus college cannot be ignored.

The importance of the role of FE colleges in preparing young adults for employment is critical and there is an appreciation that there is a need for institutions to model the business world that students will be entering on completion of their studies. The expectation is that new entrants to employment on leaving education should be up to date with the emerging technologies that are relevant to the occupational sector that they will be joining (Dabbous and Emms, 2020; Sinclair et al., 2021; Allison, 2022); some of which is likely to include an element of online working. This therefore supports the integration of online learning into courses, whether it be as part of their studies or as employees (particularly teachers) model digital working good practice (Garlinska et al., 2023).

2.4 Productivity in Relation to Remote Working in Education

It is important for managers in the education sector to consider the impact of digitalisation on the productivity of the workforce when considering remote working practice as this is a critical factor. Although digital solutions are commonly seen as a way of reducing workloads, there is the risk that teachers who are not digital specialists may be exposed to 'technostress' that inhibits both their well-being and performance (Li and Wang, 2020; Nang et al., 2022; Awofala and Oladipo, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). However, it is recognised that managers in the education sector embrace technology as a workplace tool as this provides them with ready access to information and facilitates timely communication (Dormann et al., 2019; Owan and Agunwa, 2019; Dandalt, 2021) thus supporting productivity.

Student engagement in online activities has a direct impact on the productivity of education employees (Waheed et al., 2020; Lacka et al., 2021; Al-Dmour et al., 2023); and the ability to individualise learning via digital learning programmes can support both student engagement and productivity (Eslamian et al., 2019; Hattingh and Northcote, 2023; Bjerknes et al., 2024). Furthermore, the establishment of an appropriate working environment in the home for both

students and tutors supports productivity (Zengin and Yurtsever, 2023; Doi, 2024; Purnomo et al., 2024). It is recognised that this can be a greater challenge for female students and tutors as they are more likely to have caring responsibilities in the home and are potentially less engaged with technology than their male counterparts (Chandler, 2022; Aruleba et al., 2023). However, Aljaraideh and Balaineh (2019) observe that female students are more committed to their studies than their male counterparts so are more likely to actively participate in online learning.

Though recognising the opportunities for efficiency presented due to digital working, the need to have an on-site presence in colleges cannot be ignored (Bickerstaff et al., 2021). Ultimately, colleges are people-focused organisations where there needs to be a level of supervision and personal contact for young people; where a culture of support and inclusion can be promoted whilst supporting socialisation (Fletcher et al., 2023; Pluviose and Elfman, 2023; Vilez, 2023). Indeed, there is a positive correlation between staff presence and student retention, reflecting that the positive relationships developed between staff and students are effective in promoting engagement (Snijders et al., 2022; Srairi, 2022; Cribb, 2023). If there are high volumes of staff working remotely the number of staff onsite could be limited, meaning that there may be a perceived safety risk (Andersen et al., 2021) and the staff capacity to effectively respond in the case of an emergency cannot be achieved (Beaujolais et al., 2020). A further important consideration is that there is a relationship between student safety and academic achievement, the safer the campus the greater the level of academic performance (Maier and DePrince, 2020; Santos and Farey, 2020; Shalka and Leal, 2022).

Access to specialist employee training to enable them to provide further support to students, such as to develop their skills when dealing with student mental health challenges, is more readily available online as training sessions with specialists can be facilitated more easily than fitting in face-to-face sessions (Walker and Baird, 2019; Gaffney and Baginsky, 2021; Binmohsen and Abrahams, 2022). Furthermore, it is recognised that students who are embarrassed or ashamed of their circumstances may be more likely to engage online with specialist practitioners as there is a feeling of

anonymity (Carson et al., 2019; Paterson et al., 2019; Moylan et al., 2022). By students receiving support to meet their individual needs they are more likely to perform well in their learning (Conesa et al., 2022; Collins-Warfield et al., 2023), thus impacting positively on organisational and / or tutor productivity. However, access to online technology is a potential barrier for students needing to engage remotely that needs to be mitigated or resolved (Kyriakidis et al., 2024; Salman et al., 2024; Shomurodov, 2025).

The planning and delivery of teaching and learning involves a high amount of tutor time. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an interesting new development that may increase tutor productivity by providing support in the development of high-quality learning materials that are actually more accurate than tutor-generated materials, whilst also providing support in giving feedback to students (Kim, 2024; Jia et al., 2024; Branscum, 2024). AI can provide valuable support to students to facilitate peer learning and enable them with access to support outside the classroom (Kim et al., 2022; Afzaal et al., 2024; Lan and Chen, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024), thus potentially reducing the amount of face-to-face teaching in the classroom. The availability of the data generated by online learning is enhancing the pool of data that is available for generative AI, using the online materials as a source of information (Diwan et al., 2023; Ivanovic, 2023). Indeed, there is has been a 15% increase in employees using AI systems, such as chatbots or virtual assistants, from 2024 to 2025 in the FE sector (JISC FE, 2025).

Barrero et al. (2021) identifies that only 20% of the benefits gained by remote working can be measured using conventional productivity metrics, for example, the time saved by not commuting is not included. However, it is recognised that there is a strong, positive correlation between remote working and productivity (Flores, 2019; Iwaniuk et al., 2021; Martinolli et al., 2023). The avoidance of on-site interruptions when working remotely can also play an important part in promoting employee well-being as interruptions in the workplace that are recognised as causing employee stress and

emotional exhaustion as they struggle to focus on the task in hand can be controlled and / or avoided (Keller et al., 2019; Stocker et al., 2019; Fritz et al., 2020).

2.5 Online Teaching and Learning

Interaction between tutors and students can be challenging when working online, with the greatest barrier being identified as a lack of active involvement in classes by students (Gunasekara et al., 2022; Yamoah and Haque, 2022; Ivino, 2023). Indeed, it is a concern that when teaching online tutors may not be able to tell whether students are paying attention to the session, particularly when there is no requirement for interaction between the student and the tutor within the lesson (Ping et al., 2020; Roque-Hernandez et al., 2023). It is therefore recommended that an element of collaborative learning is incorporated into online sessions to promote engagement and develop the online collaborative skills of students (Radkoitsch et al., 2020; Strauss and Rummel, 2020; Xu et al., 2020). Kalluri et al., (2025) recognise that by including Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) within online learning resources the learning materials can be enhanced as learners become more connected with the subject.

Online learning impacts on relationships between the students themselves, though if friendship groups and opportunities for collaboration online are encouraged by tutors this enhances the effectiveness of teaching (Pulgar et al., 2022; Rosen and Kelly, 2022; Satratzemi et al., 2022; Chen and DeMara, 2024). The facilitation of online collaboration by both students and tutors has been successful and is recommended for continuation post-pandemic (Nungu et al., 2023; Thurson et al., 2023; Sharif-Nia et al., 2024), though tutors need to take responsibility for ensuring that students are able to maximise the benefits of the opportunities that online collaboration presents (Rueter et al., 2019; Dilling et al., 2020; Gutierrez et al., 2022). It is acknowledged that online learning can make engagement, communication and relationships challenging for students (Ferri et al., 2020;

Nsengimana et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Online classroom management and adaptations by tutors can overcome these difficulties by planning lectures specifically for online delivery and setting engagement expectations with students (Romaniuk and Lukasiewicz-Wielba, 2020; Recke and Perna, 2021; Marzano and Zajac, 2022). Hung et al. (2024) identify that there is a correlation between online learning and the cognitive load (working memory) of students when studying remotely; this further supports the need for tutors to plan specifically for online learning.

The importance of training teachers to use online teaching resources cannot be ignored (de la Rama et al., 2020; Moorhouse, 2020; Fuchs and Phillips, 2022; Hasper and Barkhuizen, 2023) and both initial teacher education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers must be constantly developed and updated to ensure that the online teaching skills of tutors are addressed (Cronin, 2022; Suksawas and Yiemkuntitavorn, 2022; Jarvie-Eggart et al., 2023). Digital learning methods can enhance the teaching and learning experience (Baker and Driscoll, 2022; Zung et al., 2022; Mbanga and Mtembu, 2023) and do not need to be limited to off-site engagement. Considerable research has been carried out to investigate the opportunities and challenges presented by online learning, resulting in colleges and other educational establishments becoming aware of the recommended actions required to enhance the learning experience for both students and tutors, meaning that the benefits of working online can be maximised (Gani and Van Den Berg, 2024; Sola et al., 2024). Although there is an increasing trend in employee satisfaction with the level of organisational IT support provided within the education sector (77% satisfaction in FE and 69% in HE) there is still room for improvement (JISC, 2025).

The prevalence of online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in students becoming ‘technostressed’, negatively affecting both student achievement and satisfaction (Kader et al., 2022; Rafsanjani et al., 2023; Sharma and Gupta, 2023). However, it is reported that regular communication between students and tutors enables tutors to understand the learning requirements of an individual student and thus facilitates differentiation of learning and targeted student support

(Konig et al., 2020; Taley, 2022; Ayaya, 2023). Student engagement in online learning is identified as good preparation for employment as many roles now include online working as normal working practice (Terkowsky et al., 2019; Bowen, 2020; An et al., 2023) so the importance of online teaching cannot be ignored. The greatest challenge for educators is that technology is evolving and advancing so quickly that it is difficult, and arguably impossible, for educational institutions to keep up with the pace of change in the modern workplace (Yazdanian et al., 2020; Yazdanian et al., 2022; McDiarmid and Zhao, 2023); a case can be made that the role of colleges is to prepare students to become adaptable when faced with change (Hult and Bystrom, 2021; Kamsker and Slepcevic-Zach, 2021; Hora, 2023).

2.5.1 Organisational Support for Students Working Remotely

Assistance and professional independent advice for students beyond the curriculum support that is provided by tutors is essential if students are to be successful (Price et al., 2019; White et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2021); and it is therefore important for staff from across the organisation to continue to provide appropriate guidance to students even if they are working remotely. This includes representatives from a broad range of departments (Aad et al., 2024); such as finance, admissions, Information Technology (IT), careers or the library. As an example of where broader support may be required, students in FE are often living independently or semi-independently for the first time, yet their understanding of personal finance may be lacking and the consequences of poor money management may extend beyond their studies (Long, 2019; Liaqat et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2021). Therefore, ready access to good advice whilst in education is essential. Quyoum et al. (2021) recognise that the advice should be personalised in order for it to be meaningful, suggesting that it is important that the person providing the advice knows the student. However, establishing a relationship may be difficult if working online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when all activities were carried out remotely, students reported that one of the greatest challenges was building up

trust and / or a connection with those in a supportive role within the organisation (Jones et al., 2022; Scriver, 2022; Aad et al., 2024) and there is the risk that the continuation of remote support could extend these feelings unnecessarily. This concurs with the findings of Ng et al. (2020) who identify that there may be a challenge whereby some students may be unwilling to seek advice, support and information online.

2.6 Employee Remote Working

Remote working is when an employee engages in work away from a centralised location, this may include completing tasks online (Dzandu et al, 2023, Kumar et al., 2024; Singh and Das, 2024). Although it may possible to work from anywhere with an internet connection (if working online) it is more likely that an employee works from home in a quiet, confidential space (Kalmanovich-Cohen and Stanton, 2024) and via a private and secure internet connection to avoid security threats (Algarni and Jan, 2024). JISC (2025) report that although the majority of employees work from home when working off campus, there are those who work in public spaces such as cafes. Indeed, 15% of FE employees carry out work in public spaces (JISC FE, 2025), which is lower than in the HE sector where 23% of employees report that they do the same (JISC HE, 2025). When working remotely online the employee continues to complete work tasks using digital tools, such as via cloud-based resources. It is also possible to engage in other work activities remotely, such as visiting and working with an apprentice in their own workplace. The suitability of remote working is dependent on a range of factors, such as employee role, their personal preference, employer preference and the availability of resources to support remote activities (Han et al., 2024; Leonardi et al., 2024; Tarnowska et al., 2024).

Although remote working was available prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it was not normal practice in many organisations (Ellder, 2020; Phadnis et al., 2021; Labrecque et al., 2023), including

FE colleges and educational establishments. The exception to this is Higher Education (HE) institutions, such as universities, who engaged successfully with remote working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since this there has been a wider acceptance of remote working (Ameen et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023; Wohner, 2023), whether on a full-time basis or for a proportion of the working week ('*hybrid*') (Jasgur, 2022; Petersen, 2023; Lamovsek et al., 2025).

In the US Higher Education sector there are a greater number of non-academic employees working hybrid than within the private sector (Spivey, 2024). Figure 2.7 – Employee Work Arrangements 2023 exemplifies this. However, the key difference identified between the education and private sectors is that there is greater employee choice in the private sector, with the education sector mandating work location. The percentage of employees working fully remote in both sectors is identical (7%).

Work Location	**HE (Non-academic) Employees**	**Private Sector Employees**
Fully on Campus / On Site	46%	38%
Structured Hybrid	47%	29%
Employee Choice	N/A	26%
Fully Remote	7%	7%

Figure 2.7 – Employee Work Arrangements 2023

Source: Spivey (2024)

The option for employees to work remotely is attributed to a number of factors, such as the availability and development of technology to support working from home (Pennington and Miller, 2020; Morgan, 2021; Satpathy et al., 2021), the removal of and / or the replacement of processes and practices within organisations that would otherwise have limited the possibility (Maiqs and

Fraser, 2021; Raghavan et al., 2021; Pink-Harpuer and Rauhaus, 2022) for remote working and a change in mindset within the population as a whole (Schur et al., 2020; Walentec, 2020; Gifford, 2022), that includes both employers and employees.

The acceptance of digital working methods by employees may be linked to a preference to working away from the office; as those who are digitally confident are less likely to become stressed by digital engagement (Schmitt et al., 2021; Makowska-Tlomak et al., 2023; Marsh et al., 2024). However, this can be mitigated by training to digitally upskill staff (Edelsbrunner et al., 2022; Micic and Mastilo, 2022; Weritz, 2022) and it is recognised that the digital technologies themselves can support informal learning (Karhapaa et al., 2023) via 'help' functions embedded within systems. Innstrand et al. (2022) share that there is a correlation between those who choose to work remotely and positive engagement in digital working methods. JISC (2025) state that the most preferred source of digital training and support in the FE and HE sectors is via online training or webinars. Regardless of the digital resources supplied by the employer there is still a reliance that the employee's digital connection is suitable and has the ability to meet work expectations thus maintaining productivity (Finnegan, 2020; Santhanam and Balaji, 2023).

2.7 Employee Wellbeing in Relation to Remote Working

Employee wellbeing is described by Cambra-Fierro et al. (2025) as feeling positive and satisfied; avoiding feelings of stress and anxiety. This is of significant importance in education as there is a direct corelation between teacher wellbeing and effective teaching and learning (Abdulaziz Alfayez et al., 2024; Karakus et al., 2024; Nwoko et al., 2024). The positive wellbeing of the teacher encourages their students to experience higher levels of wellbeing (Harrison et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024), thus having a positive impact on their education experience.

Educational leader wellbeing is impactful as it is recognised as having a '*ripple effect'* throughout the organisation (Doyle Fosco et al., 2023; Floman et al., 2024); so maintaining their positive state is advantageous. The supportive environment that a leader in education can create leads to improved teacher well-being (Bellibas et al., 2023; Langford and Crawford, 2022). Marchant et al. (2024) identify that leaders in education report experiencing higher work-related stress than those in other professions and the general population, so a pro-active approach is required to reduce their stress levels and promote their wellbeing.

There is a risk that employee stress can cause burnout and is attributed to having a poor work / life balance caused by a heavy workload and a lack of resources (Dlamini and Dlamini, 2024, Rahman et al., 2024, Douglas et al., 2025). Work related stress is identified as being one of the primary reasons for teachers leaving the profession, so action to reduce this will improve retention (Doan et al, 2024; Li et al., 2024). However, work-related stress impacts negatively on employee retention regardless of role (McMahon et al., 2024; Unguren et al, 2024; Farhana et al., 2025) and therefore should be considered for the entire college workforce.

2.7.1 Promotion of Employee Wellbeing

Remote working may offer the opportunity to work more flexible hours that work around family commitments and responsibilities (Hocking and Wilding, 2004; Jagganath and Singh, 2022; Charalampous et al., 2023; Lu and Zhuang, 2023) and it is recognised that the increased autonomy that remote working offers promotes employee wellbeing (Chuang et al., 2024; Figueiredo et al., 2024; Mofakhami et al., 2024). Indeed, employee attendance at work is greater when working remotely; suggesting that employees either are more willing to work in the comfort of their own homes when they are feeling unwell, and where they are unable to pass on their symptoms to their colleagues or their perception of illness changes (Steidelmuller et al., 2020; Gerich, 2022; Fiorini,

2024). An alternative argument is that employees working remotely are healthier due to their improved wellbeing so are less likely to be absent from work.

There is a positive correlation between employee engagement and well-being when working remotely, therefore by proactively supporting employee engagement their well-being is promoted (Oksa et al., 2021; Syrek et al., 2021; Makikangas et al., 2022). Actions to promote engagement may include job crafting, allocation of appropriate resources and supervisor support. The benefit of saving time due to the removal of a daily commute (Cerqueira et al., 2020; Stiles and Smart, 2021; George et al.,2022) is also a consideration and employees also recognise the cost-savings associated with working from home as the need to travel is removed (Adisa et al., 2021; Bielinska-Dusza et al., 2023; Taksi-Deveciyan and Alay, 2023).

The advantages of pet ownership or pet presence in the workplace and its positive impact on the mental health of employees are widely recognised (Earwaker, 2019; Keleman et al., 2020; Junca-Silva, 2022). In some circumstances, assistance or support dogs are trained to offer specific support to their owners (Callahan, 2019; Jammaers, 2020; Sykora and Dinour, 2022) and they therefore become an integral part of the workforce. Indeed, there is a positive correlation between pet presence and self-described employee performance (Hall and Mills, 2019; Wagner and Pina e Cunha, 2021; Junca-Silva et al., 2022). However, not all employees value having an animal present in the workplace (Driscoll, 2023). Therefore, working from home is an ideal solution to enabling employees to work alongside their pet without their pet's presence having a potentially negative impact on their colleagues. This avoids the disruptive aspects, such as allergic reactions or phobias that may be a cause for concern amongst the workforce (Hunter et al., 2019). However, employers must also be mindful of a potentially negative impact if employees are instructed to re-locate back to the workplace without their animal (Schiavo, 2021; Kogan et al., 2022; Singh, 2022).

It is recognised that working from home has a positive impact on sleep, which is due to factors such as not needing to be awake as early in the morning as there is no need to commute or

exposure to different light exposure when comparing workplace lighting to home lighting (Halman et al., 2021; Salfi et al., 2021; Aries et al., 2022). It is widely acknowledged that there is a direct, positive relationship between improved sleep and improved wellbeing (Konjarski et al., 2018; Chow, 2020; Okuyan and Begen, 2021).

2.7.2 Challenges to Employee Wellbeing

When considering remote working, it is important to ensure that the disruption of time boundaries that were experienced particularly during the pandemic is not continued as regular working practice and that managers recognise those employees who are more likely to struggle with the potential lack of structure (Rodriguez-Modrono and Lopez-Igual, 2021; Gillett et al., 2022; Kegerreis, 2022). Delineation and the appropriateness of work and non-work spaces is a further consideration that may impact negatively on employee well-being if not managed effectively (De Gieter et al., 2022; De Albuquerque and Fabio, 2023; Michaelides et al., 2024). There may be further negative implications when working remotely whereby employees may lose the benefit of overtime payments and meal payments alongside the need to self-finance digital connections and utilities (Battisti et al., 2022; Gannon, 2023).

Ergonomics are an important matter for employers (Larraea-Araujo et al., 2021; Fontaneda et al., 2023; Kanamori et al., 2024) as the use of inappropriate furniture can have negative health implications for employees who are sedentary whilst working from home. Wodajeneh et al. (2023) identify that ‘awkward posture’ has the greatest negative impact on employee well-being when working remotely, so investment in appropriate office furniture for the home office is highly likely to support employee wellbeing. Other environmental considerations are important, such as the lighting in the home office or the brightness of the computer screen (Galindo et al., 2021; Gerding et al., 2021; Cruz-Ausejo et al., 2023). The completion of a working from home ergonomic risk assessment will encourage employees in identifying potential problems that the employer can then assist the

employee in resolving the issue (Guimaraes et al., 2022; Raval et al., 2022; Wodajeneh et al., 2023). This promotes employee wellbeing whilst supporting the employer in fulfilling their health and safety responsibilities towards their workforce.

The social connectedness of working together physically as a team is likely to be lost when all or some of the team members are working remotely; thus, potentially removing the feelings of belonging that commonly impact positively on employee wellbeing (Prasad and Satyaprasad, 2023; Vine, 2023; Watermeyer et al., 2023). Indeed, Horton and Jacobs (2022) report that teachers working remotely experienced higher levels of stress compared to those working onsite or hybrid; recognising the influence of social connections. The consideration of an employee's circumstances outside work is an important factor when working remotely, those living alone may be more likely to experience loneliness (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020; Gao and Sai, 2020; Law et al., 2023) as they are reliant on their social connections in the workplace.

It is a concern that employees working remotely are less likely to engage in physical activity (Arhus and Paasuke, 2021; Wildar et al., 2021; Webber et al., 2023). There are a range of factors that contribute towards this including the removal of the commute that could include walking or cycling, general loss of movement when moving around an office / workplace or due to the loss of a regular routine. To address the lack of physical activity amongst those working remotely some organisations are being proactive by introducing prompts to employees to leave their workstation periodically or by providing active workstations (Crane et al., 2022; Buffey et al., 2023). Alongside this, the removal of the daily commute is not necessarily welcomed by all employees as some describe their commute as a buffer between the workplace and home or state that they value aspects of their commute such as some time alone, walking or cycling home (Bird, 2019; Rubin et al., 2020; Kroesen, 2022).

It is also identified that working from home can have a negative impact on sleep patterns, potentially due to the extended hours that some employees feel compelled to work (Afonso et al.,

2022; Lim et al., 2023; Banerjee and Gupta, 2024). Consideration should be given to the timing of the research as there is a potential that anxiety regarding COVID-19 may have impacted findings.

2.8 Managerial Implications of Employees Working Remotely

Managers must be mindful that there are different approaches to managing teams who are working in various ways: onsite, hybrid or remote. This must be achieved whilst ensuring fairness, inclusivity and openness (Antonacopoulou and Georgiadou, 2020; Fenwick at al., 2021; Verma et al., 2023). However, regardless of whether an employee is working onsite, hybrid or remotely it is still crucial for managers to communicate effectively with individual employees to develop and maintain a positive relationship (Stoker, 2019; Guzzo et al., 2021; La Noire, 2022). When employees are working remotely there is a requirement for managers to review and adapt managerial control practices that are in place as there is a vast difference between managing employees on-site and off-site; not doing so can result in conflict and insecurities amongst employees (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2021; Figueira et al., 2023). However, it is recognised that the new ways of working may require employees to work with greater flexibility and be creative in their approach. Therefore, managers need to respond to this by enabling them to do so by providing a framework for them to work within and not exerting excessive control over tasks. This allows employees to positively influence individual and / or team performance as employees are then able to utilise their close understanding of processes to make improvements (Anser et al., 2021; Waheed et al., 2021; Charoensukmongkol and Pandey, 2023).

The style of manager messages, including emails, is of importance when seeking to communicate with teams; if the style is appropriate managers can motivate teams to work effectively, even when working remotely (Dirani et al., 2020; Kirchner et al., 2020; Molek-Kozakowska and Molek-Winiarska, 2022). Within organisations that have some employees on-site and some working remotely it is important to ensure that there is equity in terms of managerial support and

appreciation alongside professional growth (White, 2021; Figueira et al., 2023). Indeed, managers must be mindful that employees may interpret the dissemination of information via digital methods as cyberbullying (Ikeda et al., 2022) as the detail can be misinterpreted by the receiver when the 'human' element is lost.

Consideration should also be given to managers as employees and as such their needs should be considered when they are working remotely. Indeed, managers may need additional skills so that they are able to provide the support and leadership that is unique to remote working (Boccoli et al., 2024; Leonardi et al., 2024). When the employees for whom the manager is responsible for are working remotely, they gain autonomy that in turn changes the role of the manager (Gutierrez-Crocco et al., 2023; Cimini et al., 2024; Fatima et al., 2024) and this must be acknowledged and the relevant support provided.

Collaborative working may include the facilitation of online meetings, such as via Teams or Zoom. Indeed, Teams is recognised as the most commonly used tool or app in the FE and HE secotrs (JISC, 2025). Other collaborative tools may take many forms, such as shared access to data dashboards, virtual reality or real-time document sharing via Microsoft Sharepoint or Google Drive. Online collaboration may take place locally or globally, facilitating communication between dispersed teams (Darics and Gatti, 2019; Burova et al., 2022; Johnson-Peretz et al., 2024). The greatest positive impact of remote working is reported by managers as being the facilitation of responsive and collaborative online meetings, where this would potentially have previously been a challenge to assemble all those required to meet in a central location (Mohamedbhai et al., 2021; Kowalski and Slebarska, 2022; Mitchell, 2023). However, managers need to ensure that teams are able to use the collaborative tools to the best effect to ensure that they are maximising their benefits (Simons and Mayer, 2022; Cherbonnier et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2024). It is recognised that although remote working can enhance and encourage collaboration with external professionals within the sector, it

may hinder relationship-building with colleagues due to the lack of face-to-face interactions and loss of '*dynamic interactions*' (Davis et al., 2020; Derrick et al., 2022; Smith, 2023).

It is generally accepted that remote working can facilitate a work environment with less interruptions that leads to improved employee concentration (Chow et al., 2022; Raneses et al., 2022; Demirhan and Bulgur, 2023); the benefits of this should be maximised by employers to improve productivity. Although teams need to collaborate in order to develop new initiatives and share ideas, there are also times when individuals need to be given space to concentrate on the task at hand (North et al., 2020). It is of interest that those who are fully working from home are more likely to be highly educated than those who do not or are hybrid workers (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022; Araki, 2023; Pedreira and Pitombo, 2024). Indeed, Dey et al. (2020) testify that the lower the educational attainment of the employee, the lower the likelihood of them being in a role that can be carried out remotely.

The need to maintain online security when colleagues are working remotely is a constant threat and has serious managerial implications, so the need to mitigate the risk is essential (Borkovich and Skovira, 2020; Pranggono and Arabo, 2020; Algarni and Jan, 2024). As such, security must be managed effectively by introducing robust packages to support this (Ziomek, 2023). Training all staff in online security is a priority as awareness needs to be raised regarding everybody's responsibilities; such as recognising and not opening suspicious phishing emails or scams (Sebastian, 2021; Hijji and Alam, 2022; Angafor et al., 2024). Consideration must be given to the broad skills that are required by an employee who is working remotely, such as time management, communication, cybersecurity and problem solving (Benligiray et al., 2024) and should be factored into organisational staff training plans.

2.9 Employee Recruitment and Retention

There are significant staff recruitment challenges in FE, in both teaching and non-teaching roles (Association of Colleges (AOC), 2022; FE Week, 2023). Although the AOC (2022) state that colleges have shared that the primary reasons for lack of recruitment are due to lack of skills and low pay they also note that one College has stated that '*candidates want greater flexibility / home working*' as a barrier to recruitment. Following the COVID-19 pandemic organisations, including FE colleges, experienced an increased proportion of their workforce resigning from their posts as they re-evaluated their careers and life priorities, leading to an unexpected loss of talent that presents challenges when seeking to fill staff vacancies (Fuller and Kerr, 2022; Newman et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2023; Serenko, 2023). This is exacerbated by a number of organisations seeking to recruit employees at the same time.

The ability to work from home provides potential employment opportunities for those living a distance away from the workplace, where it may not practical to commute on a daily basis (de Vos et al., 2019). This potentially reducing staff recruitment challenges (Ilag, 2021; Strickland et al., 2024) as access to talented future employees from a wider pool is facilitated (Turnea et al., 2022; Ardi et al., 2024; Matei, 2024). Indeed, Kley and Reimer (2023) identify a strong correlation between the likelihood of remote working and the distance of the employee's home away from employer premises. For those employees working further away from the workplace and traveling periodically, for example when hybrid working, they are better able to multi-task when traveling when using public transport as technological advances now mean that Wi-Fi is easily accessible and therefore online working options are available (Nathan et al., 2019; Molin et al., 2020; Pawlack, 2020). Although this technology is available for those employees with shorter commuting times it is more advantageous for those with longer commutes as the time saving is greater.

Employees who are working remotely are identified as having greater engagement and autonomy, which as a consequence promotes loyalty and therefore retention (Kortsch et al., 2022;

Singh and Sant, 2023; Elsamani and Kajikwa, 2024). Indeed, it is recognised by Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2019) that autonomy and flexible working can facilitate a positive work-life balance that can support the retention of talent amongst younger employees. Increased retention is cost-effective for employers, reducing or avoiding recruitment costs and the associated time; especially as competition for future employees has increased as organisations are able to recruit from a wider geographical pool due to remote working (Jones, 2021). Therefore, employee retention is a critical factor whereby employers are under greater pressure to retain staff and reduce attrition (Friedman, 2022; Gelencser et al., 2023; Krishna and Borah, 2023). The result of this is that employers are being forced to be proactive with regard to retention which may mean offering the opportunity to work remotely or hybrid if this is expressed by the employee as an essential criterion for them to accept the role offered (Mehdi and Morissette, 2021; Jones et al., 2023). Indeed, Bichsel and Schneider (2025) state that of the Higher Education support staff seeking alternative employment, over a third cite the desire for remote and more flexible work arrangements as the reason for them wishing to leave their current employer.

Although some employees report a preference for working from home (Cockayne and Treleaven, 2023; Hampel and Hampel, 2023; Yang et al., 2023), the autonomy and flexibilities facilitated through hybrid working may be preferable to others (Chafi et al., 2022; Ainurrofiq and Amir, 2023; Aprilina and Martdianty, 2023; Zomerdijk et al., 2023). Consideration should also be given to those who prefer to routinely work on-site (Alfaleh et al., 2021; Hampel and Hampel, 2023; Potter and Ross, 2023). However, it is important to appreciate that a poor experience of remote working during the pandemic (self or others) could negatively influence employee perceptions towards remote working on a permanent basis (Wontorczyk and Roznowski, 2022; Chudzicka-Czupala et al., 2023). Therefore, it is appreciated that not all employees prefer to work remotely so offering onsite or hybrid working alongside remote work could increase employee satisfaction and therefore retention (Summerfield, 2022; Selvi and Madhavkumar, 2023; Bloom et al., 2024).

2.10 Inclusivity in the Workplace Facilitated by Remote Working

It is reported by Dhanani et al. (2024) that feelings of workplace inclusivity are promoted by being present in the workplace but that those with a minoritised social identity (based on sexual orientation, race, religion or disability) are likely to disagree with this. This may be attributed to the ability of an minoritised employee to craft their own workplace and introduce mechanisms to support their performance (Janin, 2022; Back and Back, 2024) when working remotely.

It is recognised that the technology that is an integral part of remote working can either introduce a barrier or promote inclusion in the workplace (Georgiadou et al., 2024) and it is important that employers recognise this and involve employees in discussions regarding remote working so that they are able to influence decisions or working practice expectations where appropriate (Beijer et al., 2024; Ressi et al., 2024; Topic, 2025). Indeed, Lacerenza et al. (2024) recognise that customised resources by be suitable for some individual employees working remotely to promote inclusivity and engagement. By offering a hybrid working environment the inclusivity needs of all employees can be promoted based on their preference.

2.10.1 Inclusivity of Employees with a Disability

There is an ongoing challenge whereby people with a disability are far more likely to encounter unemployment in comparison to those without a disability (Beatty et al., 2019; Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019; Bonaccio et al., 2020). By promoting the inclusive aspects of a role to potential employees with a disability provides employers with access to a greater pool of prospective employees (Fryer, 2019; Lightfoot, 2021, Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2021). As the World Health Organization (2024) states approximately 16% of the global population experience a disability which may present a considerable opportunity for recruitment by employers proactively promoting the inclusive nature of the roles available to attract a broad spectrum of applicants. Remote working

has supported the inclusion of employees with physical disabilities as it removes potential barriers to working that are presented when attending the workplace by reducing and / or removing the need for adaptations and the need to commute (Schur et al., 2020; Bozena, 2024; Smith, 2024). JISC (2025) testify that digital tools are used by 10% of employees to promote accessibility in the FE and HE sectors. The increased autonomy experienced when working from home provides the opportunity for employees who require different working patterns, such as taking regular breaks due to their health, to manage their work patterns discreetly to facilitate this (Holland, 2021; Taylor et al., 2022; Yamashita et al., 2022). However, there may be unintended negative consequences when an employee with a disability is working from home, such as the loss of help from colleagues that is facilitated by on-site working (Tomczak et al., 2022; Badura et al., 2023) or the loss of face-to-face social interactions that are experienced in the workplace (Hoque and Bacon, 2021). For employees who are neurodiverse, their environment within their virtual workspace can be tailored to meet their specific, individual needs whilst avoiding the potentially overwhelming characteristics of the traditional workplace (Das, et al., 2021; Szulc et al., 2023; Branicki et al., 2024). Working remotely offers the opportunity for employees who may be excluded from or discriminated within the workplace because of their differences in appearance, including ethnicity or age, to work without being seen (Patrickson, 2002), thus providing them with the confidence to fulfil their role. However, if there is an expectation for employees with hidden disabilities, such as autism or poor hearing, to join an open office or hot-desking, that is often the workplace solution for hybrid workers, which can result in their individual needs not being met (Martin, 2020; Capuano, 2022; Curnow et al., 2024).

2.10.2 Gender Inclusivity

Female employment, productivity, and job satisfaction were impacted negatively during the pandemic which has been attributed to female employees being more likely to have more caring responsibilities than their male colleagues (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo, 2020;

Sevilla and Smith, 2020). The need to monitor this post-pandemic is recommended as the re-opening of schools and daycare facilities may reduce the burden of female employees, thus removing the factors causing the employee performance gender gap that was seen during the pandemic (Feng and Savani, 2020; Couch et al., 2021; Johnston et al., 2023). Concern has been raised that the advances seen over recent decades towards gender equality in the workplace will be undone following the COVID-19 pandemic as a reliance on mothers providing the greatest proportion of childcare has the potential to continue (Blum and Dobrotic, 2021; Chung et al., 2021; Daly, 2021). However, it cannot be ignored that remote working can also impact positively on female employees in the workplace as working from home can also support the balancing of commitments in the home and family life alongside workplace responsibilities (Connley, 2020; Minkus et al., 2022; Pabilonia and Vernon, 2022). Nevertheless, the new ways of working have the potential to introduce discrimination and exclusion into the workplace as employees fail to meet the expectations of the new, remote working models (Cooke et al., 2020; Nath and Lockwood, 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2022).

2.10.3 Inclusivity of Older Workers

The engagement of older workers in remote working practice and a requirement or expectation to be digitally literate is an important consideration for employers due to the increasing age demographic in the workplace (Ann and Blum, 2019; Seberini et al., 2022; Takeuhi and Katagiri, 2024) as retirement is delayed for some mature employees (Li et al., 2021; Veira-Ramos and Schmelzer, 2021; Yuan, 2023). Indeed, there is concern that ageism in the workplace has increased following the outbreak of COVID-19 (Coibion et al., 2020; Monohan et al., 2020; Schnell et al., 2021). However, it is also recognised that older workers may be more successful than younger workers in creating boundaries between their work and home commitments when working remotely (Klaiber et al., 2021; Scheibe et al., 2022; Scheibe et al., 2024), which may be attributed to not having a younger family in the home.

2.10.4 Pay and Progression

Access to digital resources (digital inequality) or holding the digital skills required by employees who are working remotely may enhance or reduce their productivity and performance, which may in turn impact negatively on equal access to pay and / or promotion (Robinson and Reisdorf, 2024; Zahoor et al., 2024). This is an important factor when considering employee fairness, which is recognised as essential when promoting employee motivation (Hasyim and Bakri, 2024; Petriashvili, 2024).

2.11 Performance Implications of Remote Working Practices

2.11.1 Remote Working Productivity

Working remotely is widely credited as having a positive impact on job performance, leading to increased productivity (Raneses et al., 2022; Elbaz et al., 2023; Adawiyah et al., 2024). Indeed, the ability to work from anywhere where there is an appropriate environment also extends the opportunity to work away from home and / or the usual workplace, leading to even greater flexibility that can enhance productivity further (Levie, 2020; Choudhury et al., 2021; Bolisetty et al., 2023). This practice can enable employees to live further than a commutable distance away from the workplace, which may be considered by some employees to be a workplace incentive and thus lead to increased motivation and performance (Kryscynski et al., 2020; Lerman and Dwoskin, 2021; Weinrich, 2022). As overall organisational performance is reliant on individual employee performance the importance of actions to promote this is significant.

Employees working from anywhere can access employment that may not ordinarily be available locally, live closer to family, or benefit from a lower cost of living. However, employers must be mindful that remote working performance can be limited if employees are not provided with the correct equipment or support by their manager (Voytsekhivska and Voysekhivskyy, 2021; Al-Dmour

et al., 2023; Deepa and Dharshini, 2024), so it is essential that this is managed effectively. Also, the desire of employees to work remotely does not necessarily correlate with increased productivity (Smite et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2022; Richards et al., 2024), therefore employers need to manage expectations carefully.

2.11.2 Leveraging Digital Work Practices to Improve Performance

The digitalisation of workplace policy and practice since the pandemic has enabled employee performance to be tracked and monitored digitally, leading to greater efficiency (Ravid et al., 2019; He et al., 2021; Al-Alawi et al., 2023). Artificial Intelligence (AI) performance monitoring has enhanced the possibilities for digital monitoring of employees, but ethical considerations are of importance (Lockwood and Nath, 2021; Scassa, 2021; McPhail et al., 2023). AI makes it possible to monitor employees in great detail, such as keystroke monitoring, Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking, facial recognition tracking and access to behavioral analytics.

There are also advantages in digital working for employees whilst on site in the workplace. The opportunity to engage with a colleague in a different office, geographic location or time zone are presented; or large meetings with multiple attendees that would be challenging to get together in a single room can be facilitated easily online (Ball et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2022; Watson and Ireland, 2023). The use of collaborative tools to facilitate team working has enhanced the experience of many regardless of whether they are working in the office or remotely (Turhan et al., 2022; Knoblauch, 2023; Schoch et al., 2023).

2.11.3 Adaptation of Performance Management Theory

As working practices have evolved to facilitate and include remote working there is also the need for performance management theory to develop to ensure that performance metrics and

methods remain relevant (Nikiforova et al., 2023; Mabaso and Manuel, 2024; Novita and Edriani, 2024). It is recognised that performance management practices that exist for onsite working may need to be revised to accommodate remote or hybrid working as managers are required to manage outputs rather than overseeing work as it is completed (Göndöcs and Dörfler, 2021; Williamson et al., 2024; Junaidi, 2025).

The need for managers to continuously feedback to employees who are working remotely is of paramount importance (Mambaso and Manuel, 2024; Jansson and Kangas, 2025; Junaidi, 2025). This is significant as without this the employee may be unclear as to how they are performing as opportunities for informal and spontaneous feedback that possible within physical workplace are lost. Unlike traditional performance management approaches, where performance management is rigid and commonly discussed at an annual performance review, there is now a requirement for performance management to be agile to meet the demand of the more flexible, remote workplace (Alamri et al., 2024; Maley et al., 2024; Warin and Darmawan, 2024). It is likely that goals require more frequent adaptation in response to the performance of empowered employees who are reacting to ongoing feedback. Indeed, continuous feedback enables organisations to base decisions on '*real-time insights'* rather than the information being outdated when it is collected / analysed (Carreno, 2024; Celestin and Sujatha, 2024; Omachi and Ajewumi, 2025).

The impact of technology on performance management is relevant to those who are working remotely. The use of innovative technology to both monitor and predict performance enables managers to gain information relating to performance efficiently resulting in personalised performance insights and accurate information being gathered to inform decision making (Okon et al, 2024; Tasleem, 2025). Indeed, the personalised insights generated digitally enables managers to identify when additional support is required to avoid negative consequences such as burnout and can promote employee advocacy (Elufioye et al., 2024; Mohan et al., 2024). However, technology must be used sensitively and appropriately to avoid the perception of '*surveillance*' that could have a

negative impact on employee morale, well-being and performance (Mettler, 2024; Sethi, 2025). The monitoring of employee performance based on the work produced, rather than on presenteeism, is significant in promoting autonomy (Abgeller et al., 2024).

2.11.4 Employee Autonomy when Working Remotely

As an employee working remotely has greater control over their working environment, they benefit from increased autonomy and associated flexibilities, thus promoting their work / life balance (Ahmadi et al., 2024; Mustajab, 2024). Autonomy is recognised as leading to increased productivity (Hocker et al., 2024; Sulistamtama et al., 2024; Donati et al., 2025), but this is further enhanced as employees working remotely also benefit from work flexibilities that likewise enhance productivity (Holovchenko, 2024; Vaidya and Bedi, 2024; Yang, 2024). When employees are working remotely there is less attention paid to employee presence but a greater focus on engagement and outputs (Bilderback and Kilpatrick, 2024); resulting in employees focusing on generating solutions to promote productivity, challenging traditional practices (Orlandi et al., 2024), which is only possible due to their increased autonomy.

It is recognised that autonomy enables employees to tolerate higher levels of stress as they are empowered to manage a situation (Han et al., 2025; Lamovsek et al., 2024; Zaidi and Qasim, 2024). However, high levels of autonomy without managerial support may lead to ambiguity which has a negative impact on the ability to tolerate stress (Maharjan, 2024; Trimming et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to achieve a balance whereby the employee has the autonomy to work effectively, but the support from managers when required (Trifunovic, 2024).

2.11.5 Technostress

Technostress is recognised as a negative consequence of remote working due to the continuous use and exposure to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Dutta and Mishra, 2024; Khedhaouria et al., 2024; Nayak et al., 2024). It is important for managers to support their team by providing digital leadership support (Al Issa and Omar, 2024; Ertio et al., 2024; Farmanesh et al., 2024). Organisational support may include clarity in terms of employee expectation, such as guidance relating to employee wellness programmes to promote resilience (Acedera and Etado, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2025; Uslu, 2025), which is supported by proactive mechanisms, such as access to digital literacy support and healthy technology habit promotions (Ballangan et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025).

Clarity regarding work expectations is significant, where performance is related to outputs rather than presence, is supportive in the avoidance of technostress (Choi et al., 2024; Coban and Uslu, 2025). This provides reassurance to employees that they are not expected to be constantly contactable and that they must manage their time so that they are away from technology for periods of time. Positive action can be taken to avoid or address technostress, such as digital detox (Joseph, 2025; Malik et al., 2025) or mindfulness activities (Ioannou et al., 2024; Rushalini and Weerawardane, 2024; Lubis et al., 2025).

It is important to recognise that remote working is not the preference of every employee, particularly if they are more susceptible to technostress. It may be that the remote working situation becomes untenable, leading to burnout and a decline in productivity (Ali et a., 2024; Nowrouzu et al., 2024; Presbitero and Aruta, 2024).

2.12 Organisational Efficiencies due to Remote Working

Organisational efficiencies are generated as a consequence of remote working, when overheads such as utilities, rent and maintenance costs are reduced and / or removed (Ferrara et al., 2022; Orzel and Wozniak, 2022; Maritan et al., 2024). Also, the shift to online meetings from off-site locations can reduce travel and accommodation costs for organisations (Faulconbridge et al., 2020; Raisiene et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2022) alongside the time efficiencies generated. The requirement to have fewer employees on site also means that on-site resources that were previously at a premium, such as office or parking spaces, experience less demand (Vyas and Butakhieo, 2020; Rutherford and Henderson, 2023). Further efficiencies are also generated as there are potentially less distractions than in the traditional workplace for employees resulting in a more time-efficient working model (Nikiforova et al., 2022; Pokojski et al., 2022; Nikiforova et al., 2023). However, the negative impact on the revenue generated externally within local businesses or internally within support areas, such as catering services, due to the reduced on-site presence as employees work remotely results in a loss of turnover is a factor for organisations to consider (Bloom, 2020; Schmidt and Schmidt, 2022).

Although there may be initial costs in establishing remote workstations for employees, ensuring that they have access to the correct IT equipment and that cyber security measures are in place (Hayes, 2020; Budacia et al., 2021; Faruque et al., 2024), the cost savings are greater in the longer term. The majority of employees in the FE and HE sectors are provided with devices from their institution (81% of FE employees and 92% of HE employees), the difference correlating with the greater number of employees working remotely in HE (JISC, 2025). A consequence of not investing in the correct equipment will have a negative impact on performance, therefore reducing efficiency (Guimaraes et al., 2022; Gerich, 2023; Maresca, 2024). From a personal perspective, employees report that they are able to benefit from the efficiencies of not needing to commute to the workplace on a daily basis (Nguyen, 2021; Williams, 2021; Battisti et al., 2022) but this must be

considered against the additional household costs, such as increased utility bills, incurred due to working from home (Cicala, 2020; Meinrenken et al., 2020; Chinthavali et al., 2022).

2.12.1 Innovation to Support Digital Working

The education sector continues to be challenged by a lack of funds, as is typical within the public sector, so the need for employees (including lecturers) to maximise their individual performance is imperative (Sutoro, 2021; Huang et al., 2022). New innovations in teaching includes digital solutions that can enhance the effectiveness of lecturers (Abdul-Rahman Al-Malah et al., 2020; Strelan et al., 2020; Fahmi et al., 2022) and therefore their performance. Indeed, Rahardja et al. (2020) identify that there is a correlation between the quality of technology available, such as the equipment used, and lecturer performance. It is therefore essential that college managers support employees by providing appropriate resources within the virtual estate and are proactive in ensuring that training is provided to enable teachers to use the equipment effectively (Tolwinska, 2021; Xu and Zhu, 2023; Chen et al., 2024).

2.13 Conclusion

On reviewing existing literature within this chapter relating to remote working practice there are distinct areas of focus, dependent on when the research took place. Early literature focuses on the introduction and opportunities presented by remote working, coinciding with advancements in technology (Chiru, 2017; Athanasiadou and Theriou, 2021; Waters, 2022). In 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to Governments introducing legislation to control infection, resulting in organisations shifting to working remotely wherever possible to continue working. This proved to be the catalyst to many organisations accepting remote working as a common form of working practice and has been the subject of widespread research (Jacks, 2021; Ho et al., 2024). However, as this

research was carried out during uncertain times the issue is that it is unclear whether the new ways of working are effective within a 'normal' working situation.

Post-COVID-19, further research investigated how organisations and their employees adapted to balance traditional working methods in the workplace alongside the remote working that in many cases was successful during the pandemic. Immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic research focused on understanding common working practices and making recommendations for future remote working (Capone et al., 2024; Khorakian et al., 2024). However, the issue is that much of this research took place before remote or hybrid working practices were fully understood and embedded. Since then, there have been changes where organisations and employees have had the opportunity to routinely work remotely or hybrid as an alternative to face to face and there is a gap in the literature whereby the impact on employee performance in various roles across an organisation is unknown.

The timing of this research is an important consideration as enough time has lapsed since the COVID-19 pandemic for different working practices to become embedded into routine practice. It is no longer within a period of extreme uncertainty due to the pandemic itself, nor is it during the time of establishment of the 'new normal'. The key issue is that it is important to identify and understand both successful and unsuccessful remote working practice and it is only by recognising this that successful practice can be continued and unsuccessful practice discontinued. This information can be used to inform future recommendations for remote working.

This study will gather qualitative, primary data from fifteen participants via semi structured interviews who all work in the FE sector (see Figure 2.8 – Research Primary Data and Purpose. The data will be used to inform of both current and preferred working practice in relation to remote working. The following primary data will be collected.

Primary Data	Purpose
Working models (Face to face, remote or hybrid)	To understand current practice
Preferred working models (Face to face, remote or hybrid)	To appreciate employee preference
Employee performance	To recognise how current / potential working models impact on performance.

Figure 2.8 – Research Primary Data and Purpose.

This research seeks to examine the employee perspective on how remote working practice impacts on performance and the implications for individual, team and organisational performance will be considered. Chapter 4 presents the research approach used within this study.

3. Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research approach used to investigate the impact of remote working practice on the performance of employees working within the Further Education (FE) sector. In addition to identifying the research approach, an explanation and justification for the approach chosen is provided. The research aims and objectives are repeated as a reminder of the purpose of the research.

The analytic process used to interpret the data collected is described, offering clarity regarding how the data has been used to provide a valuable insight into the subject. The transferability of the findings of the research is explained, recognising the value of the findings to and beyond the post 16 education sector. The actions taken to ensure that ethical standards are maintained are clarified.

3.1 Research Philosophy

This research qualitatively explored the impact of remote working practice on employees working at an FE college. Conducted within the interpretative paradigm, this research sought to explore and interpret the data collected from the participants in relation to remote working and the impact on their performance. It was only by collecting the views of those who were working within the sector, routinely experiencing the effect of remote working practice, described by Megheirkouni and Moir (2023) as '*lived experience*', that the researcher was able to achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

In interpretivism, reality is subjective and it was the role of the researcher to identify meaning from the data received (Cuthbertson et al., 2020; Dewi, 2021; Mahadevan, 2023). The process involved understanding the perspectives of others through their lived experiences and bringing their perspectives together to identify commonalities to suggest the truth, though

considering a broad range of perspectives may have resulted in more than one truth being discovered (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020; Junjie and Yingxin, 2022). Interpretivism relies on questioning to gain an insight and generate rich data for analysis whilst appreciating the importance of context. The ability to be inductive and interpretive was facilitated via the qualitative method (Corley et al., 2020; Lanka et al., 2021; Vears and Gillam, 2022).

The interpretivist method was necessary in this research in order to consider the subjective views shared by the participant's verbal explanations of their experience within the context of an FE college (Grosskopf and Barmeyer, 2021; Ugwu et al., 2021; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022; Weinrib, 2024). This was more appropriate than adopting a positivist paradigm that would have only considered objective facts and therefore may have missed the socially constructed reality that exists in the workplace (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020; Turyahikayo, 2021; Junjie and Yingxin, 2022), whether it be in person or remote. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher became involved in the research via the data from the participants rather than taking a detached view that would have been the case if the research had been carried out with a positivist approach (Bonache and Festing, 2020; Mahadevan, 2023).

Although the research design included questions to be discussed with the participants, the nature of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C – Semi Structured Interview Questions) allowed for further discussion to enable understanding and thus accommodating an inductive approach. The inductive approach was in keeping with qualitative research and with the interpretivist paradigm as it was flexible, open and conducive to capturing multiple and subjective realities (Pathak and Thapaliya, 2022; Hamid et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2024). The questions provided direction to ensure that specific topics were considered, yet enabled the participants to share their own opinions, values and thoughts in relation to remote working practice in its broadest sense. The interpretivist method enabled the researcher to seek opinions, feelings and experiences; not just facts from the participants (Nyein et al., 2020; Kumatongo and Muzata, 2021). This was of importance in this

research as how someone feels and operates could have impacted on their performance and potentially the performance of others.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was taken as the researcher was seeking to gain a valuable insight into the phenomenon of remote working practice in the FE sector. Although it can be argued that remote working is not a new concept, the widespread adoption of this practice has increased significantly beyond the forced working from home directives experienced during the COVID-19 lockdown periods (Gunsan and Yergin, 2024; Kantyka and Macaig, 2024). It was therefore important to have the flexibility within this interpretivist research to ask the questions that sought to explore the subjective experiences of the participants (Toyin et al., 2023) and describe how current remote working impacted on those involved, rather than simply measuring the impact quantitatively (Lanka et al., 2021), to achieve holistic understanding (Lake and Maidment, 2023).

Where previously remote working was commonly either not an option or for a specific purpose it has now increased significantly. As a result, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of this (Al-Dmour et al., 2023; Belingiray et al., 2024) on FE employees from their own personal perspective. Researching qualitatively has enabled the researcher to discover what the participants thought about remote working rather than measuring what their performance was because of remote working (Bosshardt et al., 2024). The adaptive and flexible approach that was available within this qualitative research paradigm enabled the researcher to be responsive to the findings presented, thus ensuring that all factors were considered including those that were unexpected.

This research sought to gain a deep understanding of the impact of remote working post pandemic; acknowledging that although there had been considerable research carried out during the COVID-19 lockdowns this was not during a ‘normal’ and extended period (Adikaram and Naotunna,

2023). Although the previous findings were insightful, there was no choice regarding workplace location at the time and employees were also facing unusual challenges caused by the pandemic which may have also impacted their performance or attitude (Vine, 2023). By working with the participants to understand their own current experiences and opinions regarding remote work as an on-going practice, the researcher was able to observe patterns within the responses received that provided the opportunity to uncover factors that would otherwise have remained undetected (Busetto et al., 2020; Lim, 2024). By categorising the participants by job role, it was possible to understand through quantitative methods if there were any commonalities or differences between the opinions of the different groups (Allen et al., 2024) in relation to remote working.

Unlike quantitative research that relies on numerical data and statistics to consider only known or suspected factors, qualitative research is more exploratory in its approach and uses investigative questioning to gain a deep understanding of the topic. Non-quantifiable experiences were considered, ensuring that potentially relevant information was not excluded due to the narrow and possibly restrictive design of the quantitative study. Although it can be argued that qualitative research is subjective, and indeed nebulous, these are the characteristics that allowed the researcher to remain open-minded and without expectation; meaning that they were open to new learning through discovery (Stahl and King, 2020; Bhangu et al., 2023; Pyo et al., 2023). This was in keeping with the inductive approach to data collection.

Researching qualitatively enabled the researcher to seek understanding by exploring the opinions and feelings of the participants (Nassaji, 2020; Akyidiz and Ahmed, 2021; Ezer and Aksut, 2021; Kawar et al., 2024), generating an insight into how remote working affects employees within the organisation. Also, the qualitative nature of the research enabled the researcher to discover relevant factors that may potentially have been discounted due to prescriptive questioning had the research been quantitative (Busetto et al., 2020).

3.3 Research Method

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of collecting data. As a broad framework, open questions and discussion topics were prepared in advance; this provided structure whilst supporting the generation of data that was comparable between participants. The conversational nature of the interviews allowed for the expansion of responses where appropriate, facilitating deeper discussions and improvisation that was based on the responses received (Adeoyo-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021; Naz et al., 2022; Ruslin et al., 2022). The development of further questions depending on participant responses was possible due to this inductive approach and the researcher was able to maximise the opportunity to gather new or unexpected information from the participants. The discussions enabled new learning to be explored and considered (Ares et al., 2022; Elliott, 2022; De Jesus-Espinosa et al., 2024).

Had unstructured interviews been used as a data collection method this potentially would have introduced a challenge whereby comparisons between participant responses may have been more difficult to identify. Also, if closed questions had been used, whether within an interview or via a questionnaire, then the dynamic discussions and associated new learning generated from the open questions would potentially have remained undetected. Focus groups were not chosen as a method of data collection as the confidentiality of each participant would have been compromised. Also, the variety of participants invited to participate resulted in a multitude of perspectives and the researcher concluded that by maintaining the confidentiality of the responses provided by each participant the potential influence of the opinions of others on each participant was avoided.

An individual face to face appointment was agreed with each participant for their interview; they were planned to take place at a time and at a location that was both private and appropriate for them. Face to face interviews were chosen to provide consistency, acknowledging that not all participants may be confident in using digital technology. The face to face nature of the interviews also enabled the researcher to put the participants at ease and pick up on social cues that may have

been missed if meeting remotely. The interviews took place in a range of locations and campuses to meet the needs of each participant and lasted approximately one hour. Prior to and during each interview the researcher worked to ensure that the participant was comfortable and put at ease. The atmosphere created was both informal and welcoming which was conducive to building trust and a rapport with the participant that encouraged them to share their thoughts and opinions more openly (Goyes and Sandberg, 2024), thus leading to insightful information disclosure. Learning from the discussions within the initial interviews, the researcher ensured that it was clear to the participants that the research was focused on current working practice and not the experience of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a risk that had this not been clarified that the incorrect information could have been collected.

At the beginning of each interview the researcher discussed the purpose of the research and explained the role of the participant (see Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet). The opportunity was taken to reassure each participant that the process was confidential and that they would be unidentifiable. It was clarified that if the participant changed their mind at any time prior to the thesis being submitted they were able to withdraw their consent to take part without any challenge or consequence. Once the participant was fully aware of their role in the research and confirmed verbally that they were willing to take part they were asked to sign a Participant Consent Sheet (see Appendix B – Participant Consent Form).

All interviews were held face to face and recorded using the transcribe feature within Microsoft Word (see Appendix D – Example of a Transcript). In addition to supporting transcription, this recording method also promoted the security of the information collected as all information was immediately stored digitally in a secure, cloud-based location. The recording of the interviews supported the researcher as they were able to focus fully on the interview as the need to take notes was avoided. This unobtrusive recording method supported the participants in feeling relaxed as it contributed to a more informal setting.

3.3.1 Interview Guide

The planned interview questions and discussion topics included those listed below. Responding to each question was entirely voluntary for each participant. Indeed, everyone interviewed was reminded that they did not need to feel obliged to answer every question if they felt unable to unwilling to do so.

1. Proportion of time spent working on site / remotely?

   Own choice or employer choice to work this way?

   Preferred working method? (On site / off site / hybrid?)

2. Online collaboration methods used routinely in the workplace.
3. How does working remotely impact on performance? (Any differences from when working on site?)

   How does it impact on performance when others are working remotely?

4. How do you feel about you / others working remotely?

   Discuss and explore satisfaction with working remotely.

5. How does remote working (you or other colleagues) impact on team performance (in your opinion)?
6. Does remote working (you or other colleagues) impact on team morale / atmosphere in the workplace (in your opinion)?
7. Do you benefit from any remote working practices when working on site? *(EG supporting cross centre working?)*
8. Is there anything that would support you in working on site / remotely? *(EG Training, equipment etc).*

The semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to expand on the questions listed above, exploring topics further where appropriate and using the learning from previous interviews to enhance and evolve the questions asked. This resulted in some differences between the interviews whereby each interview was unique and adapted according to the individual situation. This was achieved due to the flexibility of the approach and resulted in inductive questioning and associated discussions.

3.4 Sampling

Fifteen participants, who were all employees working in the same FE college, were selected randomly according to their job role to participate in the research. A single college was selected for the research due to the diversity and breadth of the organisation selected. Participants were selected by role and from across the organisation and included those in managerial, operational and academic roles. This ensured that there were no employees excluded from the selection pool and that there was representation from across of the whole organisation. Figure 3.1 – Organisational Structure (Executive Leadership Team) illustrates the college structure and clarifies how all roles fall into the categories of either curriculum or business enabling (support).

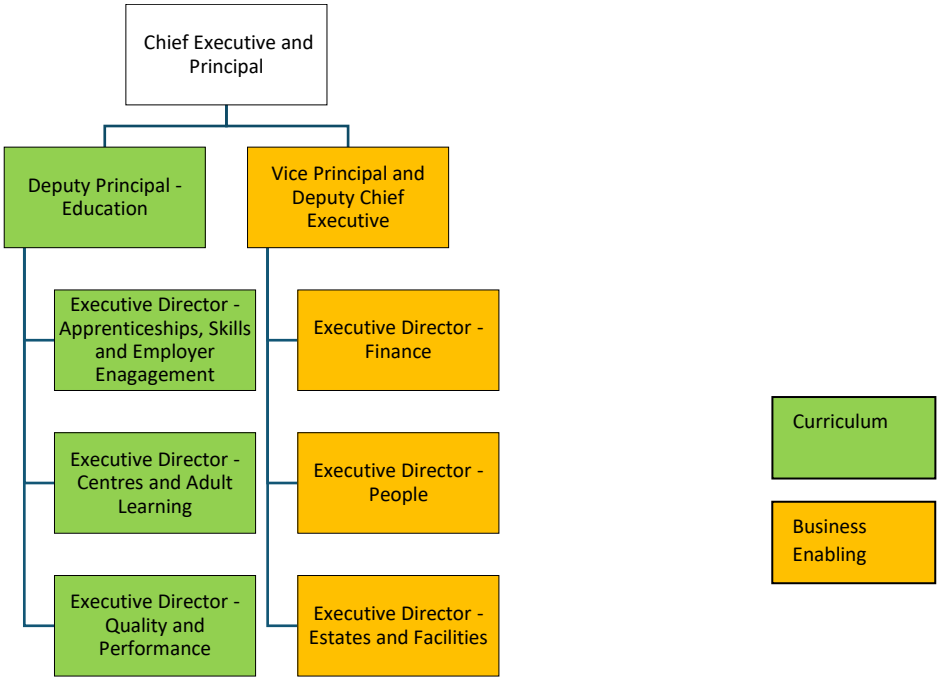

Figure 3.1 – Organisational Structure (Executive Leadership Team)

In order to achieve as diverse a sample as possible participants were recruited to include representatives from different campuses and those who work face to face, remotely or hybrid. Although it could be argued that an employee working face to face should not be included in the pool as they do not engage in remote working it was considered to be important to consider the impact of others working remotely on their performance. Once selected, the checks ensured that there was representation from a broad range of employees with consideration given to gender and age. Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure that there were no posts excluded from the pool of potential participants to exploit the diversity of the sample (Ramos-Morcillo et al., 2020).

The identification of participants from across the organisation enabled the researcher to gather a wide range of rich data as the diversity of the sample provided differing opinions and perspectives for exploration (Conlon et al., 2020). The fifteen participants provided data saturation as it was felt to be unlikely that the recruitment of further participants would result in any changes to

the analysis (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022; Mthuli et al., 2022). It was acknowledged that the determination of the sample size could be considered to be subjective, but the application of purposive sampling focused on the quality of the data provided by the participants rather than quantity (Subedi, 2021; Janusheva et al., 2022; Tutar et al., 2024) promoted validity. The responses received from the participants reassured the researcher that data saturation had been achieved as the same information was relayed by multiple participants. The data received included a variety of perspectives according to the role of the participant that promoted a deeper understanding.

A member of the College's Human Resources (HR) team supported the researcher by including all employees from the college in a pool and grouping them according to their role. This method of purposeful sampling was used to ensure that a diverse sample of roles were represented within the research to increase the depth of understanding whilst using the interview time efficiently (Campbell et al., 2020; Thomas, 2022). The roles were grouped according to the headings listed below to ensure that all areas of the organisation were represented in the research. Figure 3.2 – Overview of the Participants identifies the nature of each participant's role, whether curriculum or business enabling (support). There was almost equal representation from curriculum and business enabling colleagues, the difference being attributed to recruiting an odd number of participants.

- Executive Leadership Team
- Curriculum Managers from Land-based Directorate
- Curriculum Managers from Sports and Engineering Directorate
- Curriculum Managers with responsibility for Apprenticeships
- FE Lecturers
- HE Lecturers
- Apprenticeship Tutors

- Inclusive Learning Managers
- Inclusive Learning Team Members
- Business Support Managers
- Business Support Team Members
- Student Services Managers
- Student Services Team Members
- Estates / Facility Managers
- Technicians

The HR Advisor used a digital programme to randomly select one representative from each group and shared their details with the researcher so that they were able to approach each potential participant to explain about the research and invite them to participate. This was done initially via email; a brief explanation of the research was provided and it was explained that their participation was entirely voluntary. As each group included several employees there was the capacity to select an alternative participant if the first person (or multiple people) selected in the group did not wish to participate. Also, the large number of potential participants in each group allowed for further participants to be selected if there had been a concern following the fifteen interviews that data saturation had not been achieved. The researcher had no control regarding the selection of participants.

Each potential participant responding positively to the initial invitation was contacted by the researcher and further information regarding the research was shared, including the sharing of a Participant Information Sheet. There were three instances where potential participants chose not to be part of the study, this was accepted immediately, and alternative participants were invited from

the same group to ensure the planned representation from across the college was achieved. Figure 3.2 – Overview of the Participants provides further detail regarding participants who engaged in this research. The ages of the participants have been banded to protect their anonymity.

Name (Pseudonym)	**Role**	**Curriculum or Business Enabling Role**	**Gender**	**Age**
Ash	Curriculum Manager from the Sports and Engineering Directorate	Curriculum	Male	50 - 54 yrs
Cherry	FE Lecturer	Curriculum	Male	55 – 59 yrs
Daisy	Inclusive Learning Manager	Curriculum	Female	45 – 49 yrs
Fern	Curriculum Manager with responsibility for Apprenticeships	Curriculum	Female	35 – 39 yrs
Hazel	Inclusive Learning Team Member	Curriculum	Male	50 – 54 yrs
Heather	Student Services Team Member	Business Enabling	Female	45 – 49 yrs
Holly	Executive Leadership Team Member	Business Enabling	Female	50 – 54 yrs
Iris	Business Support Manager	Business Enabling	Female	40 – 44 yrs
Ivy	Business Support Team Member	Business Enabling	Female	45 – 49 yrs
Jasmine	HE Lecturer	Curriculum	Female	35 – 39 yrs
Linden	Estates / Facility Manager	Business Enabling	Male	55 – 59 yrs
Poppy	Curriculum Manager from the Land-based Directorate	Curriculum	Female	45 – 49 yrs
Rose	Technician	Business Enabling	Female	25 – 29 yrs
Rowan	Student Services Manager	Business Enabling	Male	40 – 44 yrs
Willow	Apprenticeship Tutor	Curriculum	Male	35 – 39 yrs

Figure 3.2 – Overview of the Participants

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the interview data, using the guidance offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis firstly involved the researcher becoming familiar with the data before generating a series of codes. Then patterns and common 'themes' are found within the data collected. Whilst identifying themes, the researcher was starting to interpret the data collected as they matched the emerging themes to the codes that emerged from the initial analysis. Re-reading and identifying further themes supported the researcher in refining the codes, thus extracting further detail and information from the data. Kiger and Varpio (2020) describe thematic analysis as 'recursive', where the researcher back-tracks with their analysis as new themes are identified that require further exploration. Thematic analysis enabled a systematic approach to be applied to the qualitative data collected (Xu and Zammit, 2020; Squires, 2023); enabling a considerable volume of data to be analysed successfully.

3.5.1 Data Familiarisation

The transcripts from the interviews were generated using the transcribe facility within Microsoft Word. Although this generated the initial transcripts, significant editing was required to transform the documents from a series of words into coherent sentences and paragraphs. Once all the interview transcripts (see Appendix D – Example of a Transcript) had been checked for accuracy they were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with the data.

3.5.2 Coding

A number of broad topics of interest were identified and were labelled (coded) by highlighting the relevant text within the transcripts to support identification. It is important to note that the codes were identified according to relevance rather than the number of times that they

were found within the transcripts. An inductive approach was employed whereby the codes 'emerged' from the transcripts rather than being pre-determined (Dawadi, 2020) and were reflective of the entire data set. The initial coding activity provided the researcher with the information required to develop a coding framework, which evolved as further codes were identified. The codes identified are listed below:

- Wholly / mostly (+60%) onsite working
- Wholly / mostly (+60%) remote working
- Hybrid
- Own choice
- Employer choice
- Location dependent on time of year / if students are present
- Peace and quiet to be able to focus on a job
- Accessible whether at home or at work
- Working from home improves my performance
- Working on site improves my performance
- Working on site / remotely doesn't affect my performance
- Others working remotely negatively affects my / others performance
- Others working remotely positively affects my / others performance
- Others working remotely doesn't affect my / others performance
- I feel that I need to be onsite to do my job
- Others working remotely affects morale negatively
- Sustainability is positively affected
- Sustainability is negatively affected

3.5.3 Themes

The coding activity enabled the identification of patterns that then supported the identification of themes (Finlay, 2021; Braun and Clarke, 2022; Thompson, 2022). At this initial stage all themes were assumed to be relevant as significance was determined as part of the final analysis and disregarding any themes would have been premature. As this analysis is potentially subjective, the importance of regular reflection to consciously avoid researcher bias was significant.

By reviewing the themes many times, the researcher was able to check that each theme included both adequate commonality and fit. This resulted in some themes being re-named, combined, added or removed to ensure that duplication and overlap was avoided whilst making certain that nothing was missed. Once the themes had been confirmed they were each defined and their relevance to answering the research question considered. Each theme was analysed independently whereby all data relating to the theme was extracted, analysed, discussed and compared to existing literature as appropriate. At the end of the thematic analysis all work was checked to confirm that the duplication of information had been avoided. From the eighteen codes initially generated, these were grouped into categories which evolved into the six themes. Figure 3.3 – Development of Themes illustrates the process of how the codes influenced and contributed towards the generation of the themes.

Figure 3.3 – Development of Themes

3.6 Validity

Validity is achieved when the research reflects the values and truth of the researched subject, thus ensuring credibility (Rose and Johnson, 2020; Coleman, 2021; Sabnis and Wolgemuth, 2024). Validity is a common discussion topic in relation to qualitative research, as there is a greater risk that subjectivity and interpretation may affect analysis than in quantitative research. The qualitative researcher must be clear regarding how rigour is upheld as although flexibility needs to be maintained, so must rigour and trustworthiness.

In interpretivist, qualitative research it is the responsibility of the researcher to both discover the truth and then further develop an understanding of the problem (Cian, 2021; Ronkainen and Wiltshire, 2021). However, in developing understanding there is the risk that unless the analysis is thorough the research may achieve an inaccurate result, so the researcher must be proactive in ensuring that this risk is mitigated. In this research this was achieved by continuously validating the themes identified by referring back to the initial data to check the accuracy and authenticity, thus ensuring that all findings were substantiated. Thematic analysis is unlike the scientific research methods that can be applied to quantitative research where the answer can be scientifically calculated and proven.

In this research thematic analysis was chosen as the analysis method to promote validity through repeatedly re-reading and checking the data and continuously extracting the emerging information. Ozuem et al. (2022) recognise the importance of the researcher checking that there is supporting evidence in place to validate any interpretation of the data.

3.6.1 Transferability

Although the research has been carried out at one organisation, the findings will be transferrable to other specialist land-based colleges, General Further Education (GFE) colleges,

Independent Training Providers (ITPs) and Universities. As the college within this study delivers such a broad range of provision, including FE Study Programmes delivered to learners aged 16-18 years, apprenticeships, HE degree programmes and commercial training programmes using a range of methods (face to face, online, blended or onsite in the work place or community centre) the findings relating to specific elements of the research are appropriate for organisations delivering to any of these provision types or using the delivery methods identified. The college where the research took place is a large organisation that operates from six campuses across the Northwest of England, in addition to delivering Apprenticeships Nationally via peripatetic tutors. This introduced a dynamic to the research whereby staff who are working from different geographical locations already had experience of engagement in remote working practice who were able to introduce opinion based on lived experience over a longer time period. The college selected also has significant commercial operations, including a farm and international equine arena. The breadth of provision and associated operations provided confidence regarding transferability and enabled the research to be focused on a single organisation as it was likely that this generated the same results that would have been gathered in alternative multiple organisations.

Although not the intention of the research, there is also transferability to organisations outside the education and skills sectors as the college employs a staff in roles that are relevant to other sectors. These include Human Resources (HR), finance, Information Technology (IT) and administration the findings may be applicable to other organisations. However, context is an important consideration if applying the findings to any organisation outside the education and skills sector.

3.6.2 Reflexivity

Subjectivity is an important part of qualitative research, and this can be applied to both the participants and the researcher themselves. Although subjectivity from the participants is necessary

when asking them to share their personal perspectives, the subjectivity of the researcher needs to be managed to ensure that validity is not compromised. Reflexivity is a method of managing researcher subjectivity, seeking to offset any negative impact or bias (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023) by the researcher becoming self-aware and reflecting on their own pre-conceptions or assumptions (Ide and Beddoe, 2023). I was mindful that prior to this research although colleagues appreciated the value of remote working, those who worked in student facing roles understood the need for a staff presence on-campus to create a vibrant environment for students. However, it was unclear if the same perspective was true for those employed in non-student facing roles.

When deciding on remote working as a research topic my personal view was that as people-focused organisations, colleges should prioritise on-site working. I believed that by creating an expectation to work on site as much as possible that the campus would be enriched through the presence of people. I assumed that although the working practices required to enable remote working are being used to enhance productivity, much of this work would remain on site. During the research process my opinion has changed, although this can be attributed partially to engagement in this research, the evolution and general acceptance of remote working may have also influenced my views.

Maintaining impartiality through continual reflexivity created the opportunity to challenge my own personal assumptions and biases, thus enhancing and enriching the research experience. The extent to which colleagues engage in remote working was a surprise as I had previously assumed that this was the exception rather than the norm for most. However, it became apparent that remote working was beneficial in terms of productivity on both an organisational and personal level in many and varied situations. Through personal reflection I was able to consider this new knowledge in relation to different circumstances across the college to enable informed recommendations to be made, thus enriching the research outcomes.

Within this research it was important to engage with each participant with an open mind, whilst consciously and deliberately avoiding biases and there was an awareness that any pre-conceptions may not be true. It was essential to be mindful that as the research was being conducted by a manager from the college it was possible that the participants may have felt obliged to say what they considered to be the right thing say rather than to share their own views and opinions on the subject. When introducing the research to each participant it was explained that this was not the case, and their own personal views and opinions were essential to the process. Due to the risk that the participants would not be as open when sharing their views and that the analysis of the information provided would not be impartial, reflexivity was of significant importance. However, the content provided within the interviews provided reassurance that the participants were not holding back data as there was information shared that would not ordinarily be shared with a college manager. Besides reflexivity, throughout the process triangulation and sense-checking were carried out to provide reassurance and avoid bias. As I was mindful throughout the research that my status as a college manager had the potential to introduce bias. An awareness of this being a potential problem led to this being questioned and challenged throughout the process. I deliberately challenged myself to avoid prejudice and ensure that the integrity of the research was not compromised.

A prior understanding of the organisation by the researcher enabled an informed interpretation of the responses received throughout the process. An existing understanding of the college structure and roles within the organisation also avoided interruptions to the flow of the interviews. Without this prior knowledge the participants would have been required to explain organisation in detail for their opinions to be understood. The same was also true in relation to the use of acronyms that are commonly used within both the college and the wider educational sector whereby explanations could be avoided.

Reflexivity enhanced this study as the researcher critically analysed their own perspectives and experiences from working within the FE sector. This enriched their interpretation of the information shared by the participants and extended their understanding. The prior knowledge and understanding of the researcher became an integral part of the research process through continuous self-reflection. It is important to recognise the positive contribution that the process has presented. Reflexivity prompted the exploration of the findings presented to a greater depth to ensure complete understanding thus leading to greater insight and knowledge. Assumptions were challenged and ethical standards upheld throughout the research.

3.6.3 Authenticity

The recruitment of a broad range of participants was an important factor in promoting authenticity within this research. As the selection of participants was diverse, the researcher was confident that participants who were able to share different perspectives and values had been recruited. Although all participants worked for the same college, the participant selection criteria by role promoted the inclusion of a variety of different perspectives. The semi-structured interviews provided a forum for the researcher and the participants to discuss and explore the information shared to promote authenticity, facilitating the checking of researcher understanding of the participant's view.

3.6.4 Member Checking

The transcribed notes were shared with the participants to promote validity as they were able to provide further comment or explain the responses that they had provided previously. In addition to providing the opportunity to check the information already provided. This encouraged participants to comment further served as an opportunity to gather further details (Amin et al.,

2020). For example, one participant was able to explain that when they had described finding a quiet area in the 'house' they were describing an area in the workplace rather than in their family home; changing the interpretation of the information provided completely. However, the researcher was mindful that member checking formed only part of the validity process as it was acknowledged that there is the risk that participants may not engage fully with the request to provide further information when reviewing their transcript (McKim, 2023; de Loyola Gonzalez-Salgado et al., 2024). Sharing the completed research with the participants will also enable the researcher to check that their interpretation of the response that they provided was accurate (Motulsky, 2021).

3.6.5 Audit Trail

This research has been designed to provide transparency, enabling the reader to understand the steps that the researcher has taken to draw their conclusions. By understanding how the information has been interpreted the reader is able to make judgements regarding its credibility (Carcary, 2021). Transparency is important as it ensured that it is clear that conclusions are drawn from participant responses and not researcher bias.

3.7 Ethics

Ethical consideration must be applied to any research to ensure that the participants are protected, and any researcher must act with integrity to maintain credibility (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020; Zhaksylyk et al., 2023). Prior to the commencement of this research ethical approval was sought and granted from the UCLan Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit. This Department within the University is responsible for ensuring that ethical standards are maintained by all UCLan researchers. Ethical approval involved answering a series of questions and providing supporting documentation to demonstrate how ethical standards would be achieved in this research. The key factors are described below.

The confidentiality of the participants was essential, whereby there was a need to ensure that participants remained anonymous and that they would not be recognisable in the final report (Dougherty, 2021; Kang and Hwang, 2023). Confidentiality was promoted by not sharing the details of the participants and anonymising their data as quickly as possible. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. In keeping with the land-based nature of the college, all pseudonyms used were plant based; tree names were allocated to male participants, and flower or shrub names were allocated to female participants.

Data protection was an important element of this research as the need to protect participant information was understood (Pascale et al., 2022). All records were stored electronically via the Microsoft Office 365 One Drive system, enabling documents to be stored securely as all information was stored in the cloud and could only be accessed by the researcher using both password protection and two-factor authentication. This data storage method was fully compliant with UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law.

The participants received clear information (see Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet) to enable them to make an informed choice as to whether they were willing to participate in the research or not. All prospective participants received a Participant Information Sheet that provided them with information relating to the research and they were able to contact both the researcher and / or a named member of the Human Resources (HR) team if they required further information. Throughout both the recruitment of participants and the research itself participants were reminded that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could remove their permission to participate at any time without challenge.

At the beginning of each interview the purpose of the research was discussed. This provided the opportunity for further explanation and to answer any questions. Once the researcher was assured that the participant was willing to proceed with the interview, they were asked to sign a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix B – Participant Consent Form). Participants were assured

that if they felt uncomfortable answering any of the questions they could choose not to and reminded that if they wished to withdraw from the research at any time this would be accepted without question.

The researcher was confident that all participants, as college employees, had capacity to understand both the reason for the research and their role in providing information via a semi-structured interview. A named representative within the HR team was provided to all participants so that they were able to ask questions regarding the research anonymously to the researcher and to ensure that they had access to impartial support throughout the process. Details of the independent counselling service that is accessible to college employees were also shared with participants.

Beneficence has been an important consideration throughout the research process. The well-being and anonymity of the participants has been upheld whilst enabling rich and honest data from a range of perspectives to be gathered for analysis. Each participant understood their role in supporting the understanding of the impact of remote working practice within the college to ultimately influence the organisation's Remote Working Policy. It is intended that the outcome of this research will be that there is a greater understanding of remote working across the college so that access to remote working opportunities can be applied fairly with individual and organisational benefits realised, whilst reducing or avoiding feelings of injustice and frustration.

3.8 Limitations

Although interviewing fifteen participants could be a limitation, the researcher was satisfied that data saturation was achieved. The sampling strategy was successful in recruiting participants from across the college. Participants from a range of roles were represented and individual characteristics were balanced in terms of gender and age (see Figure 3.1 – Overview of the

Participants). The reliance on a data set from a single organisation could also be deemed to be a limitation, where the involvement of other educational institutions could enrich the findings. However, transferability has been considered and is applicable to this study.

Within the interviews there were several references to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic by the participants. Although the intention throughout the research was to gain an insight into current remote working practice, the experiences described during the pandemic have influenced the views of the participants and are therefore relevant. It is therefore acknowledged that all individual experiences of remote practice contribute to the findings of this research to truly represent the views of the participants.

A refusal to participate in this research may have influenced the findings, indeed five potential participants either refused or ignored invitations to take part. Although information regarding the research was circulated when potential participants were invited to engage, this does not mean that the information was necessarily read or understood. The views of those not working remotely are of equal importance to the views of those who are working remotely within this research, but there was a risk that by not appreciating this could lead to potential participants choosing not to engage. However, any attempts to personally explain this to the participants could have been interpreted as coercive so was therefore avoided.

3.9 Conclusion

The research into the impact of remote working practice on the performance of employees in the FE sector was a qualitative study that was conducted within the interpretative paradigm. The research design focused on recruiting a random sample of fifteen employees from a range of different roles at an FE college to seek their perspective on remote working practice. Each participant

was invited to attend a semi-structured interview to share their opinion. All participants were asked the same core questions to ensure that the data generated was comparable, but the semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated further inductive questioning and discussion.

All data was recorded and transcribed electronically. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data by coding the information and developing a coding framework. This supported the establishment of key themes to ultimately provide answers to the research questions. Regular validity checks were made by the researcher to ensure that standards were upheld, and that the information was not compromised. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research, using the methods approved by the UCLan Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit. The confidentiality and well-being of the participants was maintained throughout the research. All participants were able to make an informed choice regarding their involvement in the research and were reassured by the information shared.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis described within this chapter and discusses the findings in relation to the research aims and objectives.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results and discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews, exploring the views of the fifteen participants who engaged in interviews as part of this research to understand remote working practice in an FE college. The broad spectrum of roles that the participants are engaged in presented a variety of perspectives which were broken down into themes and analysed systematically. The research themes were established inductively. Each theme represents either commonalities between the responses received or aspects of the topic that the researcher felt to be of significance based on the interview data. The themes identified are as follows:

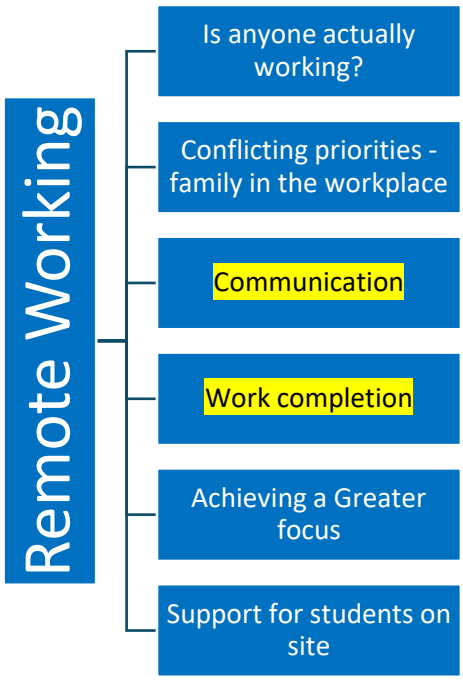

Figure 4.1 – Thematic Diagram

4.1 Working Patterns

In each of the fifteen interviews the participants were asked about their working methods, whether they work remotely, on site or hybrid (see Appendix C – Semi Structured Interview Questions). Only one of the participants, a Work Based Tutor within the Apprenticeships and Skills team, works wholly remotely. This is a peripatetic role, visiting apprentices at employer premises and completing administrative tasks at home. Participants worked wholly on site; one in an Estates and Maintenance role, one who works as an Animal Technician and two who work term time only in student-facing support (non-teaching) roles. Ten participants work both on site and from home (hybrid). There were considerable differences in the working patterns among the participants, with some only working from home on an ad-hoc basis when they needed to focus on a specific task, others who routinely worked from home at specific times during the week, and those who only work from home out of term time when there is less demand to be present in college.

4.2 Is Anyone Actually Working?

This study reveals variance in the responses received from the participants where a range of opinions were shared about work completion. When speaking about their own, personal experiences, a recurring comment amongst those interviewed was that working remotely enabled them to focus on their work as they were undisturbed and therefore became more productive. Holly, who fulfils a management role, commented: *'I think you can just get your head down and box a lot of things off, where in the office someone is always coming in'*. However, when the participants were describing others working remotely there was a suspicion as to whether they were really working and as focused as they would be expected to be in the workplace. Indeed, Spivey (2024) acknowledges that the monitoring and evaluation of employees who are working remotely is ranked as sixth in the list of challenges when moving to remote work in education (see Figure 2.4 - Challenges to Moving to

Remote Work (2021 vs 2023). Analysis revealed that some participants proactively managed their workload based on where they would be working.

The sentiment amongst those who carried out any type of remote working, whether on a regular or ad-hoc basis, was that they were able to work without interruptions and focus on their work, meaning that they could complete their work quickly. For some it was a reason for working remotely most of the time, but for others it was more about choosing to work remotely when a specific task needed to get done. Iris revealed: '*I just get chance to focus when I'm when I'm working remotely but I don't do it very often. It's just when I really need to concentrate'*. This corroborates the findings of HR Drive (2024) and PR Newswire (2024) who recognise that working remotely enables employees to concentrate more deeply due to the lack of interruptions.

The terms '*trust*', '*flexibility*' and '*transparency*' were frequently used when referring to working remotely, where although specific tasks needed to be completed there was no expectation from managers that this needed to be completed at a specific location or at a certain time of day, as long as the work was completed before the deadline. Curriculum managers shared their views, with Ash remarking: '*In reality nobody knows where I am. ...It's all about trust, isn't it? …I appreciate the flexibility,*' and Fern commenting: '*as long as I've done those hours across the week then line management is fine with that*'. Participants revealed that they considered that this made them more efficient as they could work in the way that suited them best as this was a mutually beneficial arrangement for both the employee and the employer; the job could be completed to a high standard and without wasting time. Indeed, this corresponds with the findings of Sinda et al. (2021) and Human Resource Management International Digest (2022) who recognised that the trust and leadership style of managers impacts positively on virtual team efficiency.

Tasks, such as marking, administration or data inputting, were commonly associated with remote working. Jasmine commented: '*I've got access to everything I need'*, meaning that working remotely did not hinder the tasks she was completing. Participants reported benefitting from not

having to travel into the office and instead working in the comfort of their own home and away from distractions. Poppy stated: '*I've never not been able to complete something from home'*. This provides confidence that tasks that can be completed remotely and that colleagues can demonstrate that they are working as they should be. Some participants were concerned that colleagues (including managers) would be unable to tell that they were working hard when working from home, yet the participants in a management role were clear that they know how productive those within their teams are when working remotely. Poppy observed: 'i*t's very transparent* [and] *it would be very difficult to hide if people were working from home continuously and not actually achieving anything*' Meanwhile Holly revealed: '*we've not had any concerns that the work isn't being done*'.

There were some surprises for the researcher as to which roles were being completed remotely, for example, a member of the reception team always works from home on a rota basis so that they are able to prioritise answering telephone calls rather than the '*more demanding'* and '*time-consuming'* face to face enquiries. The reception work that is seen on site (delivered face to face) includes a combination of call handling, welcoming visitors and responding to enquiries. Indeed, Hudson (2025) describes her interest in the '*hustle and bustle*' of the physical reception desk as the reason for wanting to be employed in a receptionist's role. As the researcher assumed that this was the only way that the reception team operated it was a surprise that some activities were taking place remotely and that this was enhancing productivity. However, on reflection it is clear from the response shared by the participants that remote working enables essential reception tasks to be completed whilst benefitting from the positive impact on productivity associated with working from home, as identified by George et al. (2022).

There was a great sense of positivity among participants who were routinely working from home; they described how they felt trusted and valued by their managers. Rowan imparted: '*It's really refreshing to know that we are trusted….* [This has a] *positive impact on the team, we're solutions focused to make sure it works'*. Others stated that they believed that they worked better

when they have the 'freedom' to work remotely. This concurs with the findings of Cho et al. (2021) who recognise that job autonomy leads to employees feeling more trusted. Jasmine raised the question within her interview: '*Why would you waste time? ....You know what you need to do and you just need to get through it – nobody wants to do a bad job*'.

The removal of travel time into work was seen as positive. Some participants reported that they tend to use the time when they would otherwise be spending on their commute to complete work. Poppy commented: *'I use the time when I would have otherwise been travelling to work when I'm working from home. Some days this can give me an extra 3 hours per day'.* This is therefore beneficial for the employer as additional time working promotes productivity. Indeed, Barrero et al. (2021) and Ford et al. (2021) argue that productivity increases due to the removal of commuting time as employees work from home.

Within the Apprenticeships and Skills Team remote working is accepted as the norm, having been the expectation for many years. This is different from any other team in the college as the nature of apprenticeship delivery is that training predominantly takes place in the apprentice's own workplace (rather than on college premises). Peripatetic tutors complete training and assessment activities with the apprentice, which is supported by online learning activities. Home working is performed around the visits to the apprentices in the workplace, which was described as an efficient use of time as participants avoid busy travel periods and only attend the college site infrequently. Having the flexibility to plan their own diary was received positively as it emphasised the feeling of trust and promoted efficiencies as appointments were arranged based on geographic location and proximity to other apprentices rather than fitting in a certain number of visits per day. Willow remarked: '*I like not having to be tied down to being at college for this amount of time just to tick a box'*. This infers that he feels that coming into college would serve no purpose when he could complete the work required from home.

The question of fairness provoked some interesting discussions. It was observed that some roles were suitable for remote working and some, particularly when employed in student-facing roles, were not. Some participants revealed that they planned their remote working time alongside the demands of any on-site work tasks. There are some tasks that due to their nature can only be completed in the workplace, such as mail distribution or on-site student supervision. Therefore, as Ivy remarked, it is important that there is a regular on-site presence to ensure that the completion of such tasks is not compromised. Concerns regarding the unfair allocation of work were illustrated by Cherry who revealed that he is off timetable for one day per week. Although he acknowledged that he would rather complete his administrative tasks on site at college, he opted to work from home on this day as he is then never asked to provide teaching cover for a colleague with a poor attendance record due to sickness. As he regularly works remotely on this day the consequence was that it normally fell to other colleagues working on site to provide the teaching cover, resulting in an unfair allocation of work. Conversely, because of this, participants were distrustful of colleagues choosing to work from home as they speculated that they may become distracted and stop working. This concurs with the findings of de Souza Santos and Ralph (2022) who posit that working from home can create distrust between colleagues. This has the potential to reenforce feelings of resentment amongst those working on site as the distribution of work amongst colleagues in the team is unequal. For example, Jasmine disclosed that: '*it causes a little bit of annoyance when you know other people have got more freedom than you when you are doing the same job*'. This supports the findings of Lane and Aplin-Holt (2023) who state that remote working can impact negatively on employee perceptions of fairness.

There was recognition that there may be differences in the way that tasks are completed when working remotely, but that does not necessarily mean that the output is being compromised and indeed may improve performance. Ivy observed: '*it's a different product that you produce'* when referring to the completion of tasks when working remotely. Analysis illustrates that it is important to consider if something needs to be done differently in order to achieve the same (or improved) result

when working remotely. It is an opportunity to review how specific tasks should be completed as just because they have been completed a certain way previously (particularly paper-based tasks) does not mean this is the best or only way of getting the job done. Clear communication regarding new ways of working is important as this may challenge the perception that colleagues are not working when they are not on site; potentially they are instead working differently. Indeed, Dulce Martins et al. (2023) recognise that the promotion of fairness is highlighted as an important activity for managers to ensure that the positive impact of working from home on performance is not lost as others who remain in the workplace are at risk of becoming less productive if they feel that colleagues working remotely are not actually working. This observation is corroborated by this research where a lot of suspicion was revealed towards those working from home.

Many of the tasks being completed remotely are online and if the systems fail, it prevents colleagues from being able to complete their work. This re-enforces the belief that those working remotely are not really working as although this issue may impact those working on site, there is for them a greater opportunity to complete alternative tasks that are not reliant on the network. Participants shared their concern that the technology that remote workers are reliant on can compromise performance, commenting: '*devices don't always work'* (Ivy) and: '*sometimes the system speed is slower when you're working remotely so it slows you down*' (Jasmine). However, JISC (2025) states that in employees in the FE sector report greater challenges with connectivity on campus than off campus and that access to systems is almost equal (within 1%) whether working on or off campus. Working from home was perceived to be used as an excuse for not completing all elements of a role and Ivy challenged: '*if this is the case should this person be working remotely*?'.

Some of the negativity associated with remote working related to the participants looking at the work being completed by colleagues. However, it is important to recognise that they may not know or understand the tasks that others are completing, and their opinion could be based on incorrect assumptions. Linden, a manager at the college, commented: *'People will always look at*

what others are doing and if they feel that others are doing less or being less productive then they will be too, if the perception is that those who are working remotely aren't really working then it will impact on productivity'. This illustrates that employee effectiveness may become compromised if they feel that work is not being allocated or completed fairly, regardless of whether it is actually true.

The comments from the participants suggest that there is a need for honesty when planning to work from home as for some the practice of working remotely may negatively impact on their performance. For example, Linden admitted that he becomes distracted if he is working remotely so chooses not to, sharing: '*it was too tempting to play with a dog or going to watch telly'*. Ivy also revealed that one of her colleagues also chooses not to work from home, revealing: '*she only worked half a day* [per week remotely] *but she doesn't like working from home, she likes to be in and have people to help her get through the day'*. This raised a question in the researcher as to whether this inability to work from home effectively is always communicated? Although there were examples of participants who chose not to work from home as they were concerned about their own performance there may be others who feel the same but do not share it, resulting in them working from home and being less productive due to distractedness. It is recognised that in order to work from home effectively the employee needs to be self-disciplined, and motivation can be difficult (Borghouts et al., 2022). Analysis revealed that the temptation to work from home was too great for some even though they may recognise that they are easily diverted. For example, Cherry stated that he should avoid working from home as he knows that he becomes too distracted at home, yet he revealed that he still works from home one day per week.

The issue of trust was highlighted by one manager (Iris) who commented that she could trust some members of her team to work from home, but others she could not. She recognised that this presented a challenge as the perception amongst the team is that this approach is unfair if only some members of the team are allowed to work from home. Iris justified this as she needs to ensure that members of her team are working in the environment that is best for them. This emphasised that

fairness does not necessarily infer equality. Another manager, Poppy, commented on productivity when working from home: '*I can see exactly what they're doing or what they've got planned to do that day and that's how we work it. …it's that transparency*'. This illustrates that managers monitor the productivity of those working remotely, thus allowing action to be taken if necessary.

The inconsistent approach to working remotely was considered by one of the curriculum managers, Fern, who revealed: '*one member of* [full time teaching] *staff asked to work from home… but then the work was never done. I couldn't see him online so I had to ask him to come back on site. They've performed since they've come back on site, that was a timely decision. I do think that it's a completely different situation in apprenticeships - they know that they are remote, working from home. They're setup* [for this]*'.* Rowan was apprehensive that if concerns were raised about the productivity of colleagues working from home the option of working remotely could be removed for everyone. This emphasises the need to fully consider the implications of remote working according to role to promote both fairness and productivity.

4.3 Conflicting Priorities – Family in the Workplace

This research reveals that remote working has introduced a new dynamic whereby employees working from home need to consider the impact of their presence during the working day on others within their household. During the Covid-19 pandemic there was extensive research carried out as families had no choice other than to stay at home during lockdowns, coping with the conflicts between working, schooling and family life (Coban, 2020; Andrade and Petiz, 2021; Carvalho and Matias, 2024). However, as workplaces, schools and childcare facilities have now re-opened it would be easy to assume that this is the end of the problem. However, this research revealed that the impact that other family members have on the remote working situation continues, both positively and negatively.

There was recognition that remote working offers a positive solution to childcare. Fern described how the flexibilities afforded to her through remote working supports her in caring for her young family: *'I tend to have Mondays and Fridays as definite working from home days to allow me to do school drop off and pick up. ….I stop* [working] *to do the school pick up and then work in the evening, usually picking back up at half seven. ….It works for me'.* Fern was clear that working this way does not impact on other members of the team, so there is no detriment in her opinion. She works within the Apprenticeship and Skills team who have existing flexible working patterns; in a team with a more traditional approach to the working day, such as an expectation to work 9am – 5pm, this might be more challenging. Fern was very positive about this arrangement as she is still able to work uninterrupted in the evening after her child's bedtime. This supports the findings of Ray and Pana-Cryan (2021) who acknowledge that the flexibilities and job control that can be more easily accommodated via remote working can ease the pressure on commitments outside the workplace, such as family responsibilities, leading to a more productive workforce. An extended debate is presented by James (2024) who introduces the theory that the ability for working mothers to be retained in roles that suit their skills due to remote working can prevent them needing to move to more unskilled roles in order to achieve the flexibilities required for family life. This potentially removes the issue identified by Martucci (2021) that a woman's career is more likely to suffer when becoming a parent.

Comments from other participants reveal that the opportunity to work flexibly is not the only childcare solution when working remotely. Poppy also has childcare responsibilities but has a different approach when remote working, stating: '*if I work from home I drop the kids off, the kids go to preschool and after school club regardless, so I drop them off for half seven. ….I'm back working and on the laptop before the time I would normally arrive at work'*. This arrangement means that she can work whilst the children are not at home, so there is no interruption to the standard working day. Poppy was positive about this arrangement as she is able to do the school drop-off and pick up but still complete a full working day.

The data suggests that the greatest challenge when working from home is posed by childcare arrangements not being in place to ensure that children are looked after while their parent works. Fan and Moen (2025) also describe the presence of children creating difficulties when parents are working from home due to the number of interruptions they make. Ivy described struggling to contact colleagues working from home as they do not tend to answer calls if they are looking after children when they should be working: '*I put a call through to someone once* [from reception] *and then that person rang back and said a child had just picked up the phone. ….If you're working from home and you have a child, that child should be with someone else or at nursery or you can't have it with you. …childcare's not a reason for working from home'.* Cherry acknowledged having similar frustrations with a colleague who works remotely on specific days during the week. He described childcare as being the only reason his colleague works from home: '*there have been times where* [because] *one member of staff* [is] *staying away there's only two* [staff within the team] *at the moment who can cover'.* He expressed his irritation that this practice is allowed and his dissatisfaction that his colleague is never asked to cover classes or complete practical tasks as they would if they were working on site. This illustrates the necessity for working from home policies that are managed effectively to ensure fairness.

Participants divulged examples of how the presence of children within their own homes was effectively planned and managed. Ash commented that he is in a good position when working from home as his partner can look after their children whilst he physically removes himself from his family during working hours, sharing: '*I am in a quite good position because my partner can look after the children so I can just lock myself upstairs'*. Similarly, Hazel described removing himself from his family while he is working to avoid distractions: '*I just find a room in the house, somewhere you can just crack on with work'*. Their frustration with colleagues who do not have childcare provision in place was evident as they felt that one cannot concentrate on work when they are looking after children at the same time. There was also a feeling of unfairness when they had made arrangements to ensure their children were being looked after whilst others were considered to be 'getting away with it'.

Romens et al. (2024) observe that childcare policies need to be explicit, that parents should have suitable childcare arrangements in place when working remotely, thus avoiding any potential unfairness.

The impact of family in the workplace is not only restricted to children; there are also challenges when other adults are present in the home. Shirmohammadi et al. (2023) identify the need for clear boundaries in households, particularly where there is more than one family member working from home. Both Poppy and Iris have experience of their partners also working from home (for different organisations). Poppy admitted that when both she and her husband are working from home on the same day it can cause problems, revealing: '*Occasionally my husband works from home in the next the room so it's really handy for me to just go to in* [to college]'. The challenge in this example is spatial, which is a common problem when there are multiple people in the same household working remotely at the same time (Kent and Delbosc, 2024).

It was revealed that the negative impact of other family members working remotely within the same household is not restricted to them causing a physical distraction. Iris disclosed that she worries about her partner working from home as he has become very isolated: *'My husband doesn't work for the college but he works from home permanently. It's really affected his mental health where he's not particularly sociable person anyway but he's literally not seeing people…. I just think that's really, really important when people are thinking about working from home. It isn't good for some people. I get that some people want to, but it does really worry me that there's some people hidden that aren't in a good place when they're at home on their own'.* Iris recognised that the worry about her husband's challenges with mental health has affected her own performance at work as she has become distracted and has difficulty concentrating. Due to these concerns she tends to work from home more than she would otherwise, despite her preference for being in the workplace, so that she can be present to support her husband during the day. This highlights the notion that

remote working does not suit everyone. Krishnan et al. (2023) identify that working remotely can result in a decline in mental health; therefore, it is important to consider personal preferences.

A further distraction and consideration when remote working is the presence of pets in the home. It can be argued that the companionship they provide is supportive of remote working, impacting positively on owner wellbeing, as identified by Junça Silva (2024). Yet the presence of pets can also serve as a distraction, as Cherry remarks: '*I worked from home with the dogs around and trying to get anything done with them is hard*'. However, there is a balance to be found; Victor and Mayer (2023) appreciate that the presence of pets when working from home can provide companionship. It is therefore important for owners to manage their pet's behaviour effectively when working remotely to avoid animals causing a negative distraction (Hoffman, 2021).

4.4 Communication

Communication between colleagues in the workplace is important (Dai et al., 2022; Lazauskaite-Zabelielske et al., 2024), whether teams are working alongside each other on site or remotely. This research exposed differences of opinion between participants when asked about the impact of remote working on workplace communication. Although there were some very positive comments, there was also some negativity. Participants positively acknowledged the value of digital communication methods; the negativity derived from colleagues not answering calls or responding to requests for collaboration suggesting that technology was not the issue. Spivey (2024) reports that collaboration between employees is ranked as fourth in the top challenges when moving to remote work in education (see Figure 2.4 – Challenges to Moving to Remote Work (2021 vs 2023).

It was widely recognised that digital communication methods can support collaboration and team working between those working onsite and those working remotely, concurring with the findings of Singh (2023). Regardless of whether colleagues were working remotely or not, the value

of digital communication methods was clear, for example, within a multi-site organisation digital communication has been strengthened as Ash described: '*it supports cross-centre working. That has been made a lot easier'*. This corresponds with the findings of Giusino et al. (2023) and Lane et al. (2024) who draw attention to the evolution of digital communication amongst team members and the positive impact on geographic flexibility. Although Rose works exclusively on site due to the practical nature of her role, she accepted the value of digital communication methods, declaring: *'we can walk around trying to find each other but it can be beneficial contacting someone remotely'*. This points to the value of digital communication between colleagues working on the same site.

When asked about contacting colleagues, when either they or their colleagues are working remotely, Poppy stated: '*I've never had a problem getting hold of someone* [working remotely]'. Iris reinforced this, stating: *'it's easier to get hold of people*' as colleagues who are working remotely can easily join Teams conversations as they are already at their computer and in a private space. This was Fern's opinion, who revealed: '*everyone is so easily accessible on Teams'*. Cherry commented that a colleague in another department was highly responsive, appreciatively commenting: '*three rings and he's answered*'. Although colleagues pointed to success in contacting others, Gillet et al. (2024) warn that the strain of being immediately contactable can have a negative effect on the well-being of employees as they feel that they must always be accessible. It is therefore important to ensure that communication expectations are agreed and communicated in advance to remove unnecessary pressure. Indeed, Jasmine revealed: '*I think because people like it* [working remotely] *then they're more likely to answer you if they're not on site because they've not got everything going on and because they want to keep working from home. I think everyone is quite keen to make sure there's no complaints about it'.* This is concerning as it suggests that the desire to continue working remotely potentially supersedes the decision to remain contactable despite the possible negative impact on individual well-being, which Stempel et al. (2022) caution will ultimately result in decreased performance.

The increased use of digital communication methods such as Teams, for which remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic was the catalyst (Hartig-Merkel, 2022; Musleh Alsartawi et al., 2022; Knuepling et al., 2025), has enabled communication groups to become established. This is an effective and efficient way of communicating with multiple colleagues concurrently and Ash appreciated the value of being able to '*tap into those groups'* to benefit from the consistency of message. Within the Apprenticeship and Skills team, communication across the team was enhanced as everyone is allocated administration time on the same day every week resulting in synchronised availability. Fern revealed: '*it does actually make it easier to communicate with the remote team because of Teams and because they have allocated time'*.

One manager, Ash recognised the value of unplanned 'corridor conversations' when working on site, imparting that he considered himself to be: '*more accessible when working on site*'. He acknowledged the importance of being seen on site to ensure that colleagues felt comfortable approaching him for advice. This concurs with the findings of Lal et al. (2023) who identify that the loss of impromptu conversations in the physical workplace due to remote working can negatively impact team coherence as communication tends to be planned and a more formal approach is adopted as colleagues are focused on specific work-related matters. Indeed, Spivey (2024) recognised that the preservation of a community on campus is identified as the top challenge when moving to remote work in education (See figure 2.4 - Challenges to Moving to Remote Work (2021 vs 2023). Heather appreciated the value of face-to-face conversations and expressed her frustration: *'because they're at home you can't go and track them down easily to get in touch with them'*. This was corroborated by one of the managers, Daisy, where she conceded that: '[in specific circumstances] *you need to speak to somebody face to face, but most of the time you can contact them on Teams or email as well'*. Battiston et al. (2021) identify that although face to face communication positively impacts the person receiving the information there is an investment of time by the person providing it. It is therefore important to consider communication methods where although communication face-to-face may be preferable, and potentially more effective, this can

present challenges for those working remotely. It is also important to consider whether the communication challenge can be balanced against the other benefits realised when someone works remotely.

The frustrations experienced by some were evident as they disclosed that some colleagues kept their cameras off when they were on Teams calls. The visibility of those engaged in an online call is highly beneficial in enabling participants to benefit from non-verbal cues (Castelli and Sarvary, 2021; McArthur, 2021) and this opportunity is lost if cameras are not turned on. The lack of camera use also raised suspicion as to where colleagues were; whether in a suitable work location at home or in a more social environment. There were further annoyances reported as participants described colleagues avoiding answering the telephone. Ivy observed that not being able to communicate via telephone with those working remotely resulted in the reception team sending out more emails to ask for colleagues to call back enquirers. She stated: '*if they're working from home they might not pick up the phone, which does happen quite a lot even though it says they're available*'. In addition, where colleagues previously worked in communal offices they would answer calls intended for others within their team but this is no longer happening as administrative tasks are often being completed in isolation off site, further exacerbating the communication challenge as colleagues are unable to pick up messages or answer queries on behalf of others.

The lack of availability of colleagues in other departments, such as support services, was perceived as having a negative impact on the performance of those working elsewhere within the college. Although location and working patterns were routinely communicated and shared within a team, there was a view that this information was not distributed more widely to other teams. This resulted in frustration if the support required from someone in another team was lacking. Ash disclosed: '*when we're trying to get hold of a lot of people who would be integral to our success, whether that's support staff, admin staff, HR etc* [because they were] *working from home it became really difficult* [for me and my team]'. This corresponds with the findings of Yang et al. (2022) who

report that the asynchronous communication that results from remote working has a negative impact when sharing information. However, Jasmine noted that contacting support teams was inconsistent whether they were working remotely or not, acknowledging that it makes no difference as: '*some teams are faster at responding than others'*.

There was a recurrent concern regarding the use of the telephone system '3CX' as a communication tool. 3CX is a system whereby calls to a telephone extension number can be answered via an app on a variety of devices, such as on a mobile phone, tablet, laptop of traditional handset. The user decides how they wish to answer their calls based on personal preference. The issue does not appear to be systems-related but instead due to it not being accepted as a preferred option for conversing. Heather commented: *'when I need to talk to colleagues sometimes they will show as available on the phone but when I phoned them they don't pick up, so Teams is better'*. Rowan affirmed '*a lot of people still aren't registered on 3CX so we still have Teams*', suggesting that Teams is the preferred method for internal communication. However, external calls coming into the college are answered via the 3CX system so the reception team relies on colleagues using this to respond to the calls that they need to transfer. Iris conceded: '*a lot of people aren't registered with 3CX so it can be quite hard getting hold of people that way'*. Only Poppy acknowledged that she had difficulties using 3CX: '*I struggle sometimes to get 3CX to work on the phone from home, I can get it to work occasionally… it's sometimes a bit of a hinderance*'. This raises concerns that others could be facing the same challenges but not reporting them; resulting in the problem remaining unresolved. This may be symptomatic of the concern reported by Jasmine previously, that those colleagues who prefer to work from home avoid sharing any concerns in case this is seen as an opportunity to remove the option of working remotely.

4.5 Work Completion

This research illustrates that people have different preferred work locations, whether it be at home or in the workplace, agreeing with the findings of Kim et al. (2023). Some participants report that they are more productive when working remotely, as recognised by Choudhury et al. (2021) and Hayes (2022), whereas others prefer to be present in the workplace, as illustrated by PR Newswire (2024). This raises the question as to whether it matters where someone works, so long as they get the job done. However, there is a concern that the absence of those working remotely may impact on the performance of those working on site, so consideration must be given to how remote working influences the performance of all team members and not just those who are working remotely. This is particularly important as Spivey (2024) acknowledges that maintaining the level of service is the second highest challenge when considering moving to remote work in education (see Figure 2.4 - Challenges to Moving to Remote Work (2021 vs 2023)). As Vyas (2022) identifies, there is not a '*one size fits all'* solution to this dilemma.

Participants communicated their positive experiences of working remotely, recognising the benefits of working from home. Willow commented: '*… and when you're marking work it's done at home. I could come to college and do that but I think you get more done without any distractions at home'*. This is supported by Rowan who revealed: '*In terms of the actual work getting done, I think that it's improved and I think it's also improved like the intensity because it is a very intense job at certain times of the year.'* The advantages of working remotely were recognised by others: *'I absolutely get more done at home'* (Poppy) *and 'it's just easier at home. It's quieter and I feel you can just get into that kind of space and then there's less distractions'* (Jasmine). Fern described the time she spends working remotely as: '*protected time'*, meaning that she is able to work more efficiently and without the interruptions that she encounters when she is present on site. Working from home is thus seen as a welcome opportunity to complete tasks efficiently.

Conversely, Hazel described finding an alternative venue on site if he needed to work without any distractions: '*you could just find a room upstairs in the hall somewhere to do it* [in an area that is not] *in a student accessible place'.* This illustrates that working remotely is not the only solution when needing to focus on specific tasks and there may be some opportunities for compromise. This concurs with the findings of Sokolic (2022) who observes that employees may need to adapt their working methods to meet the demands of their role and other alternatives, such as hybrid working, in some instances may be preferable to working exclusively on-site or remotely.

Consideration should also be given to how work is organised and the relevance of remote working to the specific situation. Willow, a member of the Apprenticeship and Skills team, works almost entirely remotely, only coming into college approximately twelve days per year. He described how his work has been developed to suit those working remotely as the network of peripatetic work-based tutors is a national model and it is coincidental that he lives close to the college. He described how he considers that it would be a waste of his time to come into college, stating '*I tend not to come back to College regularly because you get more done because it's quiet at home*'. His focus is aligned to working efficiently rather than coming into the workplace for what he considers to be no specific purpose.

Jasmine reflected on who should benefit from efficient working, sharing: *'It comes down to if you've got X, Y & Z to do today, I need to mark these 50 scripts or whatever. Do that efficiently and it takes you less than seven hours you're winning. You've done the job so everyone's happy, or should it be well I've marked them in five hours I've still got two and a half hours left to go, should you be penalised for that?*' In this example it is the employee who benefits from the efficiencies rather than the employer but the positive impact on staff morale may have wider benefits for the employer. The improvement in staff morale that is generated by supporting a better work / life balance may encourage positive outcomes such as organisational commitment and reduced turnover (Hainey, 2021; Gajendram et al., 2023; Petersen et al., 2024). However, the employer may consider the

increased productivity made possible by working remotely to become the norm and raise their expectations for work completion.

Nevertheless, there was recognition that working remotely is only possible if remote networks and Wi-Fi are functioning correctly. Willow commented: '*As long as your computer's working and your iPad's working then you're fine'*. However, it could be argued that this is also the case for those working on site.

Just as some participants judged that they are able to complete more work when working remotely, the opposite is true for others. Ivy revealed: '*I can do more work here* [in the workplace] *than I can at home. There are more things that you can do, like the parcels or the stationary orders'*. This demonstrates that an identical working model does not suit the variety of roles that are found in a large organisation, such as an FE college. Consideration must also be given to the fact some employees cannot fulfil their role if they are not present on site. Rose imparted: '*it makes no sense for me to do remote working because as an animal technician my job is to be with the animals. I look after the animals, you can't really do that remotely*'. This is an extreme example of why a decision to arbitrarily move to remote working for all employees would be inappropriate; exemplifying that fairness does not mean everyone works in the same way but instead implies a range of suitable expectations. This concurs with the findings of Orr and Savage (2021) who advise that although the work locations of employees may differ there are other work-related instances where fairness can be demonstrated to avoid a feeling of injustice.

Linden explained why he feels that it is important for him to work on site in his management role: '*There's a lot of reactive stuff and I need to be here in support of my team'*. However, it could be argued that with improved planning the volume of reactive work could be reduced, enabling him to focus on his role rather than dedicating time to operational matters. Gomaa (2024) identifies the benefits and efficiencies generated through proactive maintenance rather than the reactive approach mentioned above.

There was recognition that some colleagues need closer supervision than others to ensure that they are fulfilling their role. Ivy commented: '*If people are working remotely I do have some issues. Some staff do need to be micromanaged and that can only be done if they're in college and their colleagues are with them…. I think if you work from home you need to be self-motivated and self-disciplined; and if you're not you need to come in* [to the workplace]*'*. This illustrates the need for the effective management of employees regardless of where they are working to ensure fairness and consistency, supporting the findings of Lane and Aplin-Houtz (2023) who considered the negative impact of 'organisational justice'.

When asked about the working location of others Willow commented: '*It doesn't make a blind bit of difference to me as to where they are'*; illustrating that he considers the location of others to have no impact on his own performance. However, Ash, who fulfils a management role, considered the complications associated with the fair application and acceptance of remote working, sharing: '*This is never going to be a hard and fast rule, I think it's understanding the impact that your team working remotely has on the team working on site. Whether it's a perceived injustice or whether, you know, it's an absolute nightmare'*. However, there may be some positive consequences of others working remotely as by reducing the volume of employees working on site the amount of work required from the Estates and Maintenance team could be reduced. Linden disclosed: '*Well, they say it's positive in that it lessens the maintenance burden. You know if there are fewer people here there will be fewer reports of issues with maintenance'*.

When considering whether it would be better working remotely Heather acknowledged: '*It wouldn't work for me at home, I'd probably make work for my colleagues*'. This highlights the need to consider remote working for each role and colleague independently to maximise the benefits. As Fern commented: '*I suppose it kind of highlights the fact that remote working doesn't work for everybody*'. Indeed, Cherry expressed concern that the negativity of colleagues about working

remotely could impact on his own performance, sharing: '*The fact that they're having a bit of a moan, yes it does it affect their performance*'.

When asked about the potentially negative impact of those working remotely, Rowan revealed: '*I think if it's working then embrace it, don't hinder it by trying to say "right, well, it's not fair on these people", so you've got to make something slightly less efficient just to appease this other group of people. I think that mentality doesn't work now*'. This supports the argument that if employees can work effectively remotely then there should not be the expectation to attend the workplace.

The need for input from colleagues working remotely led to some negative comments from participants who are working on site, particularly those who are employed in a student-facing role. Ivy described her frustration: '*Sometimes you need that person when things happen within college and it's quite an important role, but they're not here'*. Heather also provided an example of finding it challenging when others are working remotely: '*…If I do get in touch with them they'll say "can you screenshot and send me this", and then my screenshot thing won't work, so it's like I'm trying to describe things; whereas if they were in they could just come and have a look at the screen and that would be easier'*. This quotation illustrates that managers need to consider the impact of working remotely on both an individual employee and their colleagues.

The potentially negative impact of managers working remotely from their teams was illustrated by Linden who revealed: *'… you also work as your team needs you to work sometimes. And actually, you need to be seen and need to prove that you know what talking about, seemingly getting involved and actually the value of that is immeasurable'*. This is echoed by Ash who commented: '*I don't feel like I'm doing my job properly, as in I feel like I should be here. For example, I need to be seen to be available. I prefer to be here and that feels like how it should be*'. This illustrates that the positive impact of managers leading by example (Eldor, 2021) is applicable across all work locations.

Participants carrying out a range of roles described how they have the autonomy to manage their own diary, enabling efficiencies to be generated as travel times are consolidated or negated. Poppy revealed that: '*Monday is one of the days where generally I do work from home because I don't have any other senior leadership meetings or anything like that…. Other than the Monday morning meeting, any other meetings that we have are generally face to face*'. The flexibility afforded to those working remotely to work outside traditional office hours (9am – 5pm) was appreciated. Willow described how starting his working day early in the morning is beneficial for the apprentices he visits in the workplace, sharing: '*the nature of going out to see greenkeepers is* [that it is] *a very early starting job anyway so you're always going to have to get there no later than say 10:00 am because a lot of greenkeepers are finishing work for the day at 1:00pm or 2:00pm. It's no use in turning up at 1:00 in the afternoon and saying I'll see you from 1:00 to 5:00 because they're finishing work at between 2:00pm and 3:00pm. Especially in the summer, a lot of them that would be starting there at five in the morning so they'll be finished by 1:30 in the afternoon'.* He described how the early morning starts are mutually beneficial in that this supports his own well-being as he is able to finish work earlier in the afternoon. When asked whether this level of flexibility is common amongst colleagues within the Apprenticeship and Skills team and whether he considers the model to improve performance Willow commented: '*I think it suits them to be able to have that sort of mixture of starting early, finishing early or starting and having a few hours off in the afternoon and catching up on some work in the evening. I think it works for everybody. I've never heard anyone saying that they I want to work nine to five'*. This flexibility was similarly appreciated by Fern, who also works within the Apprenticeship and Skills team but as a manager. Although another manager, Ash, works within a different team, he recognised the benefits of providing flexibility to colleagues, sharing: '*I think giving them* [team members] *that little bit leeway does then improve morale a little bit and probably would improve productivity'*.

It is acknowledged that employees do not need to routinely work remotely to benefit from working from home. Jasmine revealed that although she works remotely on occasion, there is no

fixed routine: *'It's really sporadic so totally depends on like the time of year or on my timetable*'. Also, where it is advantageous to work remotely this can be requested as Poppy described: '*The academics will occasionally say to me 'I've got this lesson to prep and I've got this to do, do you mind if I work from home?' I don't generally have an issue'*. By managers agreeing to individual requests from those wanting to work from home, task completion is supported. Holly, a manager herself, also described how working remotely or on site is managed to meet the needs of the organisation: '*different teams have sort of different priorities. For example, the Sales Ledger team said at the start of the term they had to be in dealing with students and were really busy with that. It was important that they all knew what each other were doing so we did have a little bit of working on site all the time*'. This illustrates that the principle of flexible working works both ways; just as those who ordinarily work on site may prefer to work remotely to complete a specific task, the opposite is also true whereby those who routinely work remotely may decide to work on site to promote effective work completion.

4.6 Achieving a Greater Focus

There was a recurring refrain throughout this research that participants were able to concentrate more when working away from the office. One manager, Holly revealed: '*if I worked at home… I'd get so much more done',* a sentiment that was repeated by other participants. Indeed, remote working is cited as the reason behind increases in productivity within organisations (Leonhardt, 2023; Elmurodov, 2024; Salehi et al., 2024) as employee focus is enhanced. However, Emanuel and Harrington (2024) state that those who choose to work exclusively from home are more likely to be less productive in an onsite role. Therefore, the productivity of individuals should be considered in context.

This study revealed that some participants used the opportunity to work from home regularly to catch up on work, sometimes reserving more complicated tasks for when they were due to work away from the office. Others were routinely present in the workplace but chose to work

from home if they had a specific task to complete that required higher levels of concentration and focus. Indeed, Rowan revealed: '*It changed my life because I can actually focus on a specific thing and say "right, I'm going to do this from working from home".*'

Fern routinely spends approximately 60% of her time working remotely. She reflected on the interruptions that she experiences when she is present in the workplace: '*When you are onsite people just turn up at your door; so you could have like a block of time working on a piece of work in your diary but then people will appear at the door and then that work stops. Whereas if you were at home, you protect that time, and you've not got those people knocking at your door and seeing you there. When I've got something like that on I tend to use the days when I'm working from home so I can just hide away*'. The findings of JISC (2025), who report that 27% of FE employees working on campus are unable to access a private area to work, are relevant when considering the need to concentrate. By anticipating interruptions on site one manager, Fern, is able to effectively plan her working week, allocating time at home to when she needs to be able to concentrate. This provides balance to the disturbances that Fern experiences, where although interruptions may enhance the employee's sense of belonging (Ma and Zhang, 2025) there is still time during the working week where she can avoid all disruption and concentrate by working remotely. Poppy experiences similar challenges with interruptions when she is in the office but expressed concerns that these result in her needing to complete unplanned work to address the challenges that have been brought to her, adding: '*My list is twice as long and I've done nothing that was that was on it that was supposed to do*'.

Rowan routinely works from home; indeed this has been a longer-term arrangement as he was working one day per week from home pre-COVID. He disclosed: '*I think if I wasn't able to work remotely now I'd struggle*'. Working remotely has become a habit and he has become used to having the flexibility to manage his workload, he stated: '*It has a big positive impact and to be able to just work*'. This supports the findings of McPhail et al. (2023) who recognise that employees and their

managers have become more effective in working remotely as their experience in working this way increases over time.

When considering her own performance, Holly imparted: '*it improves when I'm working at home, for sure. You're focused and you haven't got those distractions. You know you can just get your head down and crack on'*. This is supported by Ash, who welcomed: '*the opportunity for a bit more quiet time* [when working from home]*'*. This corresponds with the findings of Andjarwati (2023) who observes that improvements in performance can be achieved through employees working from home whilst efficiencies are promoted.

Iris recognised that although she routinely works on-site due to the nature of her student-facing role she will occasionally choose to work from home where necessary, commenting: '*if I need to focus on something and get something done I'll go home to do it so that I can concentrate and get it done. A job that maybe takes me two or three days because I'm getting disrupted and interrupted in college if I'm working remotely I might be able to get it done in an afternoon'*. Iris's comment illustrates how a task can be completed much more efficiently when working remotely due to not being disturbed. However, as Iris works from home to avoid interruptions there are unintended consequences as the questions that colleagues would have asked her in the workplace still require a response. Iris commented: '*what I do find is that the people who want to ask me something who would have interrupted me while at work tend to e-mail me more if I'm not there'*. From a negative perspective, this can result in colleagues not having the answers to their questions immediately and in Iris receiving a greater volume of emails to respond to. However, she is able to manage her own time and respond when it is convenient for her, thereby still being able to work without interruption. Behrens et al. (2024) recognise the importance of achieving an '*equilibrium*' in relation to hybrid working to maximise performance whilst balancing all associated factors.

Holly revealed: '*I think sometimes they ask* [me questions as their manager] *just because some people need to show that they're working as well*'. This implies that that not all interruptions

are necessary, and the manager feels that some of the questions that are being asked by the team are designed to show that they are in the office and busy. Therefore, if the manager works from home this would avoid seemingly unnecessary questions, allowing both the manager and individuals within the team to focus on their work. One manager, Poppy, revealed her frustration with being regularly interrupted whilst working on site: '*If I am in the office I can get disturbed 3-4 times in an hour easily, with just people knocking on just to catch up or walking past the office and then engaging in conversation or coming in to ask me something. The majority of the time I feel that if I hadn't have been there they would figure it out themselves*'. Poppy concludes that the disturbances on site are the primary reason why she is able to work more productively from home. The examples provided by Iris, Holly and Poppy are supported by the findings of Allen et al. (2024) who recognise the value of hybrid working, enabling employees to effectively manage their time by balancing the need to be accessible to colleagues alongside the need for quiet time away from interruptions and distractions.

Hazel disclosed that although he is routinely present in the workplace, if he had a specific administrative task to complete he would welcome the opportunity to work from home for a limited time, noting: '*I suppose if there was a particular job you have to do (an admin task) it may be an idea to sort of go and work from home and not have the disruptions which we tend to see quite often'*. Daisy also acknowledges: '*in light of what I could work on at home would it be easier* [to work remotely]… *I think there's always going to be a feeling that if somebody is at home a lot people think "why can't they come into the office sometimes and be more present for their colleagues"?*'. This implies that Daisy's performance is compromised as she is routinely present on site even though she feels that she would be more productive working from home and she is concerned that people may question why she is not present in the workplace more often. Although Ivy stated that she prefers to work on-site she accepts that she can 'tolerate' working one day per week from home and plans her work accordingly, sharing '*I don't mind because it's just one day and I can get all the things done, like my rotas, without being disturbed*'. These examples suggest that the participants do not have the

autonomy to decide where they are working (on site / remotely), although it should be acknowledged that these participants all are in student-facing roles which implies a need to be present on site. The need for an on-site presence should be balanced alongside the benefits of work location autonomy, according to Boyraz and Gilbert (2024) and Hocker et al. (2024).

Members of the teaching team commonly cited marking as an activity that they prefer to complete from home as they are able to focus on student work without distractions. Cherry responded: '*marking from home, definitely. If it meant coming in here* [college]*… when the students aren't in and I've got a lot of marking to do. I would sooner do that at home because I'm not sidetracked*' when asked about any tasks that he would choose to complete remotely. Ash, who is in a curriculum management role, explained that he regularly receives and accepts requests from members of the teaching team to carry out marking from home, sharing: '*When someone says "look I've got a load of marking today, students aren't in. Am I alright to just crack on and get all this done at home because by the time I've driven in that's extra time out and I'll get distracted in the office?" so I don't mind that*'. Another curriculum manager, Poppy, revealed that she also receives requests from teachers within her team to work from home when they are preparing for lessons. The supportive comments from curriculum managers suggest that although teaching positions are seen as on-site roles there is still the opportunity to work from home when requested. Although Willow routinely works remotely as he works with apprentices he recognised the need to set aside time at home for marking, commenting: '*if you've got a Level 3 assignment or to mark you need to dedicate proper time to focus on it and be in the right mind space for it. You can't just flick through it in 10 minutes so I think that's when the benefit of doing it on the Friday comes in. The day's clear so you think well but nothing else today except for marking these pieces of work and replying to emails'*. This illustrates that although working from home supports marking activities there is still the need to plan working time effectively.

This study shows that consideration should also be given to the time that employees spend working either at home or in the workplace. Fern imparted: '*if you work from home regularly you're set up for it and you've got your routine. Whereas if it's someone that bobs in and out it's a bit like hot desk in your own house'*. This situation could differ according to where the person routinely works and it may be necessary to have the same office environment both at home and in the workplace to avoid the 'hot desk' scenario and to provide consistency.

4.7 Support for Students on Site

This study exposed differences in working practice between those who were engaged in a student-facing role and those who were not. The former were expected to be on site during term time to provide support, but the same was not expected of the latter. This led to some animosity among student-facing colleagues as they highlighted differences and noted that everyone in the college has a responsibility to support students. Indeed, Ash commented: '*If all the support staff who could potentially work from home* [did so] t*hat's less staff who would be walking into the canteen and just inadvertently asking students if they could put on their lanyard. I think we saw a turn in poor behaviour* [after COVID-19], *probably because of the lack of staff around*'. There was an acceptance that support for students from a teaching and learning perspective was delivered face to face by teaching staff, but the unplanned generic support that is required by students was harder to quantify and often required support from non-curriculum staff who were more likely to work remotely as they are not deemed to be ordinarily student- facing. Bouchey et al. (2021) argue that the support offered to students should be in a format (online or face to face) that is preferable to them.

The academic calendar influences when some participants need to be present on site at college. Although they are able to work remotely outside term time, they are expected to be on-site during term time in order to fulfil their role if they are student-facing. Holly acknowledged: '*It's not the same throughout the year. It changes over summer*'. Jasmine agreed and rationalised the need to

be present at college during term time: '*Obviously, you're here when the students need you because that's the actual job'*. Indeed, Iris recognised: '*because I'm student facing I've got to be here all the time I've got to be available'*. Hazel, who works term time only, reasoned; *'I always work on site at the college… At the end of the day we're in people facing roles so is kind of top priority*'. Heather provides pastoral support for students, and revealed: '*I'm there just as a port of call people come to me if they've forgotten their lanyards or they're collecting their bus passes or if they've generally got a question about college life... the experience that I've had so far with the students is that lots of them are far more comfortable somebody face to face. A lot of them don't even like to use the phone so definitely face to face*'. This underlines the need to be present on site to provide support to students.

Curriculum Managers, although not strictly student-facing in their roles, understood and accepted their on-site commitments. Ash stated: '*I believe my role is on site'*, adding '*at dinner time I also like to I go and walk around all the classrooms and just put my head in and chat to students so they get used to me going in and that's common place now…, which obviously I wouldn't if I was at home'*. This view was reiterated by Poppy, who is also a curriculum manager: '*I'm here during the week just to be there in case there's any queries or questions or concerns or any issues with students or anything like that*'. This exemplifies the role of the Curriculum Managers as middle managers within the college which requires them to be on-site as mediators given that they balance their operational and strategic responsibilities (Gahagan, 2023).

Providing cover for members of the teaching team off sick was a concern: if non-timetabled staff were unable to provide cover due to them working remotely, this impacted negatively on the student experience. Cherry disclosed: '*when they're working from home they can't cover so one of the one's who are in has to take that group. If there were lots of staff it probably wouldn't matter too much, but we haven't got bank staff. I can see that being an issue if somebody does get poorly*'. There is already a concern that teachers providing teaching cover do so out of the time that should be

reserved for lesson planning and course administration (Klein, 2022), but if this requirement frequently falls to the same members of the team who are on site or cover cannot be provided at all for them, the support available to students on-site will fall below expectations.

Heather raised concerns about support staff not being available for students on site when they needed their help. She divulged that when colleagues from the finance team are not on site students come to see her instead, revealing: '*sometimes the student's upset, they feel that by seeing somebody face to face they'll have more of an understanding about why they're upset rather than just being a voice on the end of the phone just getting frustrated. I suppose if they were comfortable emailing somebody they would have already done it by the time they get to me... Finance questions create a genuine fear, you definitely need to be able to trust a person and it needs to be face to face rather than anonymously*'. Ivy agreed with this, stating: '*For bursaries, we've had it before when neither of the team from bursaries are around and someone* [needs help]*'*. Ash also disclosed: '*If someone is really struggling, the customer experience isn't about saying they should call someone.* [Sometimes] *speaking to someone is important face to face*'. Daisy concurred with this, stating: '*sometimes you need to speak to someone face to face… We are a people business*'. Conversely, Holly who works within the finance team, revealed: '*We've done quite a bit with students. If you can do an interview with a student or help them with a bursary application online I think it's probably helped because students quite often don't want that face to face contact*'. Her comments suggest a student preference for anonymity that is possible when working remotely. These two contrasting perspectives illustrate that there are distinct differences in student communication preferences that exemplify the need to offer students different options. Bass (2023) acknowledges the need for colleges to be student focused, developing support around student preference rather than organisational structure.

Poppy revealed the concerns raised by members of the team that she manages, caused by differences in work location between the academic and placement teams. She disclosed: '*the*

academics [commented that] *when the students are in, if they've got questions about placements there's never anybody in office for us to talk to… So I spoke to both of them and …. we've now put a rota in place so that every day of the week at least one person from that team is in the office, so the office is manned and it's fair… Since then, it's been it's been much better between the academics and the placement officers*'. This illustrates that managers are able to navigate solutions to problems in order to meet the needs of students. Spivey (2024) discovered that concerns regarding establishing equity and fairness regarding to access to remote working arrangements reduced between 2021 and 2023, suggesting that employees were becoming more understanding of the differences in expectation to work on campus as remote working becomes accepted as normal practice.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides a clear overview of the participants' perspectives on remote working practice within their organisation. Each participant was open in sharing their views and they were able to articulate their personal experience of their own remote working or the impact of their colleagues working remotely. There were clear differences in the views of participants who were student-facing and those who were not, where there was a greater expectation of student-facing colleagues to be present on-site during term time but there was a more flexible approach to those who were not.

All participants were able to share both positive and negative aspects of working remotely. Working from home was commonly identified as an opportunity to focus on a specific task as participants reflected that there were fewer interruptions or distractions than when they are physically present in the workplace. However, there were more positive comments about working remotely when considering their own performance and some suspicion attributed to the performance and commitment of others when working from home. Chapter 5 concludes the research and offers recommendations for practice and future research.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

The aim of this research was to assess the impact of remote working practice on performance in an FE college. The selection of and engagement with participants from across a broad spectrum of roles within an FE college provided a valuable insight. The impact that remote working has on the participant's own performance, the performance of their colleagues and on the student experience was considered. Participants worked using a variety of methods, including remote working, hybrid, on site or working remotely very occasionally; these are described by Lamovsek et al. (2025) as '*work arrangements'*. Differences in performance were explored as participants shared insights into their own performance and commented on the impact that others working remotely had on their work.

There was extensive research carried out into remote working both during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, but these studies were carried out in uncertain times and under extraordinary circumstances. This study was carried out when there were no Government directives to stay at home, when childcare facilities and schools were fully open and when post pandemic work routines had become established. Therefore, this study is reflective of routine remote working in a FE college and the findings are significant in informing ongoing working practice. Figure 5.1 - A Conceptual Framework of the Impact of Remote Working in a Further Education College - illustrates the key findings from the research from both an organisational and individual perspective.

Although other studies have considered the impact of remote working within the education sector, there is limited research relating specifically to FE and the majority of the research has focused on the HE sector. Where other educational research has considered remote working practice in relation to online teaching and learning, this study has considered remote working in relation to operations across the whole College, so the findings will also relate to studies within the wider business sectors.

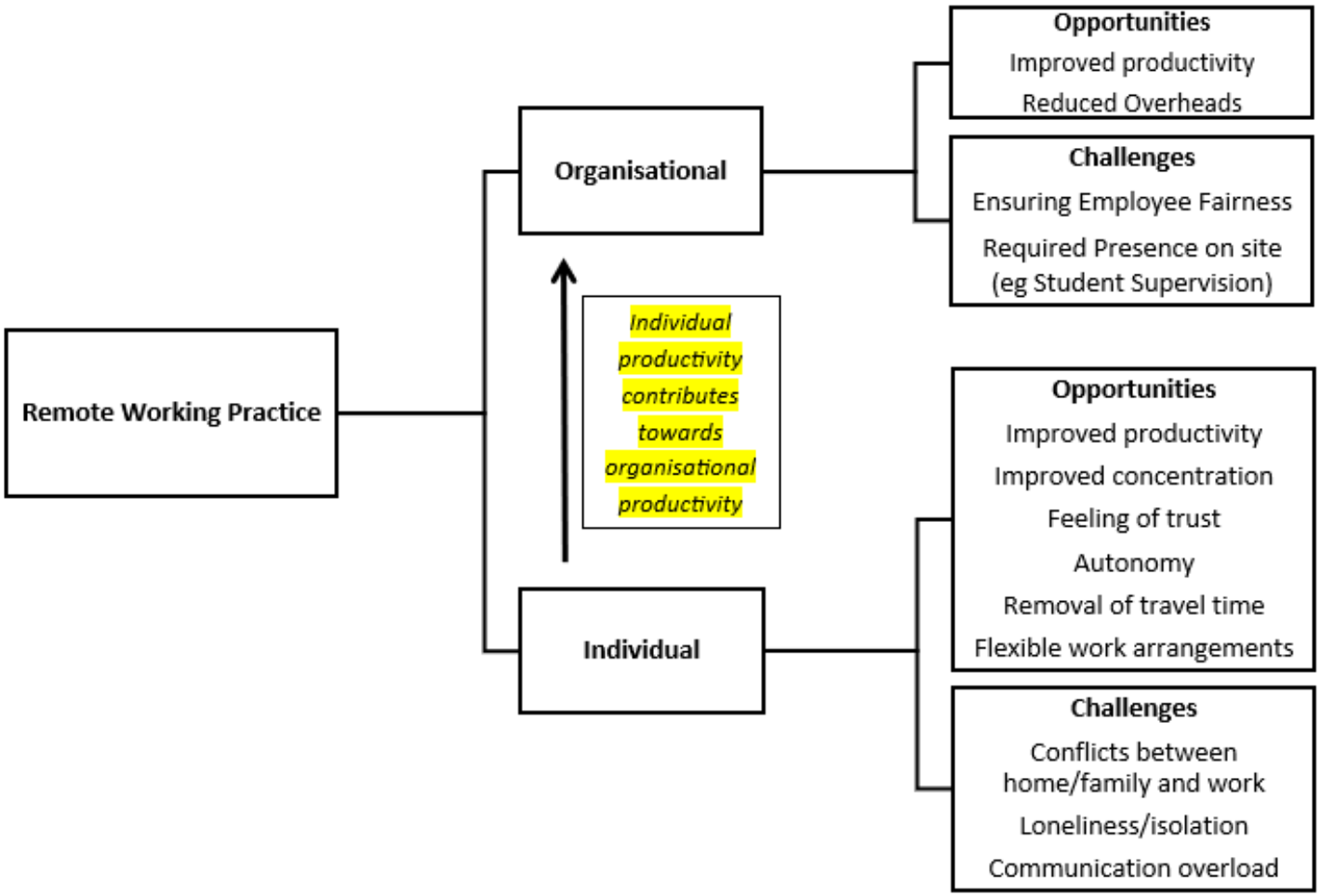

Figure 5.1 – A Conceptual Framework of the Impact of Remote Working in a Further Education College

Analysis led to the creation of six themes as listed below:

- Is Anyone Actually Working?
- Conflicting Priorities – Families in the Workplace.
- Communication.
- Work completion.
- Achieving a Greater Focus.
- Support for Students on Site.

The first theme posed the question: ***Is anyone actually working?*** This study found that there was commonality between the participants, where working remotely provided the opportunity to focus on specific tasks without interruption leading to increased productivity. However, those working on site reported suspicion as to whether those working from home were proactively engaged in work activities which led to feelings of unfairness. This study illustrates a clash in perceptions, with suspicion of remote workers contrasting with a perceived positive impact on the performance of those working at home. Although those working on site were able to describe examples of when they found that colleagues working remotely were away from home and not engaged in work-related tasks there was evidence to suggest that this may be explained by those working remotely using the opportunity to work flexibly. This study established that managers were able to monitor team productivity when working remotely and corroborated the reasoning that colleagues were engaging in flexible working rather than avoiding work.

Participants appreciated the flexibility and trust that they experienced when working remotely, which is acknowledged by Reshma et al. (2025) as integral in enabling effective remote working. Indeed, this study found that working remotely resulted in employees being granted the autonomy to manage their workload, leading to increased flexibility and the realisation of time efficiencies. There were instances of participants completing their working hours at different times

during the day, for example starting work earlier to accommodate workplace need or working different hours to support personal circumstances, such as to accommodate the school run. The removal of commuting time was received positively by remote workers, providing participants with 'additional' time at the beginning and end of what would have been their ordinary working day had they been based on site, therefore effectively increasing the amount of time that was available to them to work.

This study found that remote working does not suit every employee; consideration must be given to job role (where there is a need to be on site), personal preference or an employer decision based on concerns regarding the individual's ability to complete work and maintain concentration when working remotely. This illustrates the need for managers to understand the work location preferences of individual employees within their team and to balance this alongside organisational requirements and work completion. There was evidence within this study to suggest that the changes to working patterns in an FE college throughout the academic year were associated with hybrid working. For example, a member of the teaching team may need to be on-site during term time to deliver face-to-face lectures, but they benefit from remote working when marking or preparing lessons, particularly out of term time.

The second theme, ***Conflicting Priorities – Families in the Workplace,*** considered the impact that other family members had on work completion. This study revealed that the presence of other family members in the home when employees are remote working presents a challenge. Indeed Smite et al. (2023) identify that the interruptions caused by the presence of other family members negatively impact efficiency as college employees struggle to concentrate. However, this study adds nuance by illustrating that it is possible to mitigate the risk of interruptions by having a dedicated workspace in the home away from other family members or scheduling their own working hours to avoid times when they are likely to become distracted by others.

There is evidence within this study that remote working is not a childcare solution and that those with children in the same household should make arrangements to ensure that there is appropriate provision in place. Examples were shared by participants of how they managed childcare, including after school clubs or by working flexible hours. However, the frustrations of colleagues were also apparent post-COVID-19 when a lack of childcare was cited as the reason for working from home.

This research found that the poor mental health of other family members working remotely impacts negatively on college employees within same the household. There was concern that this was detrimental to their concentration and well-being; leading to an increased need to work from home in order to monitor those who were struggling. It is therefore important that employers proactively support the health and well-being of employees working from home (Chaudhuri et al., 2022; Somasundram et al., 2022; Chang, 2024) and this study demonstrates that employee preference should influence their workplace location where appropriate.

The third theme ***Communication*** considered the impact of remote working on the ability to contact colleagues. This study provides evidence to suggest that digital communication is effective regardless of the location of the employee. Indeed, it is proposed that remote working can improve communication between colleagues as those working from home are already working at an electronic device and located within a private space. This study echoed the findings of Sulistiani (2025), who also found that the collaborative capability of digital communication is recognised as enhancing interactions between both individuals and teams. However, this study revealed that the accessibility of those working remotely can also be a challenge whereby the expectation to be contactable may introduce additional pressure, thus supporting the findings of Foley et al. (2024). It was evident that that those working remotely were more likely to respond to a call to ensure that there were no complaints about them working from home, in order to continue working remotely.

This underlines the findings of Booker et al. (2025) who recognise the expectation for remote workers to '*show presence*'.

This study revealed that where there was a history of remote working within a team, work practice had evolved to overcome communication barriers. For example, within the Apprenticeship and Skills team every team member completed administrative tasks and attended online meetings each Friday to ensure the full availability of team members on that day, leaving the remainder of the week to focus on completing routine work tasks. By synchronising diaries to facilitate communication interactions between colleagues were supported.

The negative impact on communication caused by working remotely was also revealed within this study. There was evidence that due to colleagues working remotely the opportunity for informal or spontaneous conversations in the workplace was missed. There was a challenge identified whereby those working on site felt resentment towards those working remotely as they believed that the work to support students was not being allocated fairly. This led to tensions between colleagues and raised suspicion as to whether work was being allocated or completed fairly. This was further exacerbated when calls to those working remotely were sometimes left unanswered or they were answered from a location that was inappropriate as a work environment due to factors such as the level of background noise.

The fourth theme ***Work Completion*** contemplated whether work location (remote or on site) should be dictated by the employer so long as the work was completed to the required standard. This study revealed that organisational requirements alongside employee preference influence where work activity should be completed. This study showed that although some roles can only be completed on site, there may be occasions when remote working is appropriate, such as when a report needed to be completed or marking needed to be done. Where roles could be completed partially remotely (hybrid) participants were able to structure their working week to accommodate this. This is identified by Abu Orabi et al. (2023) as a way of promoting employee work / life balance,

well-being and productivity. This study found that there were differences in work locations during and out of term time. There was evidence to suggest that providing the flexibility to enable employees to choose their most appropriate work location resulted in improved *job satisfaction*. It was revealed that the availability of workplace flexibilities led to the enhancement of productivity.

This study acknowledges that there is the opportunity to reduce maintenance overheads on-site if colleagues are working remotely. However, it is apparent that this arrangement needs to be managed if the savings are to be fully realised. This study showed that the benefits of reduced on-site occupation were not being fully appreciated as there were examples of multiple offices being partially occupied rather than maximising occupation in fewer offices to reduce costs. Previous studies recognised reduced organisational overheads from a utilities, rent and consumables perspective (Licite-Kurbe and Leonovica, 2021) but this study extends this by considering maintenance savings.

Achieving a Greater Focus was identified as the fifth theme as this was a recurring observation by those who worked from home. It was clear that those working remotely (including hybrid) were able to concentrate and apply greater focus to their work, leading to increased productivity. This concurs with the findings of Kumari et al. (2025) and Williams and Shaw (2025). This study found that participants were reserving work that required a greater focus for when they planned to work at home so that they could use the quiet environment without interruption to full advantage. There was evidence to imply that although an employee may ordinarily be expected to be present on-site there may be instances when they requested to work remotely so that they were able to focus on a specific task.

This study revealed that by working remotely interruptions can be effectively managed. Although the need to direct questions towards colleagues to support understanding and work completion remains when working remotely, the spontaneity of this can be controlled. For example, non-urgent questions can be asked by messaging the person so that they are able to respond in their

own time and at their convenience rather than causing an interruption. Indeed, the lack of an immediate answer sometimes prompted the employee asking the question to work out a solution independently, thus supporting efficiencies and professional development.

A key priority of an FE college is to ensure that students are supported in person, prompting the sixth theme ***Support for Students on Site***. This study revealed that although roles or specific tasks could be completed from home there was a requirement to have a staff presence on site during term time to ensure that students were supported and the need for the on-site presence of some roles led to some animosity between colleagues as they observed differences in expectation of presence on site. This study highlighted the need to ensure that staff presence on site was dictated by student need rather than employee preference, for example during term time to support the creation of a vibrant college environment for students.

This study recognised that differences in job roles led to the unequal ability to work remotely during term time. However, the unequal opportunity to work remotely does not mean that the opportunity to work remotely is unfair. Consideration should be given to different roles, balancing the need to be on site alongside the advantages of remote working. Within this study it was revealed that a range of roles can be completed, and indeed enhanced, by working remotely and that clarity regarding what can or cannot be completed remotely will support perceptions of fairness. It was observed within this research that transparency regarding the on-site availability of colleagues will enhance communication for both colleagues and students who are present on site, thus removing some barriers to effective working and / or support.

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes an important contribution to knowledge by highlighting the opportunities and challenges inherent in remote working on both an organisation and individual level, with a

particular focus on the FE sector where there is a gap in knowledge. It was apparent that the optimum work location differs in relation to both individual predilection and task, so equal consideration should influence work location. Indeed, Ferrar et al. (2022) report that the disposition of the individual employee influences their engagement with remote working. The benefits of remote working and the input of employees when job crafting in relation to work location is valuable, which supports efficiencies whilst promoting employee satisfaction as their opinion is appreciated, concurring with the findings of Zapata et al. (2024). Hybrid working, where the proportion of time spent working remotely varies according to role, specific circumstances (work or personal) and the academic calendar provides the greatest flexibilities.

This research makes an empirical contribution by understanding that the difference between remote and on-site working needs to be recognised and supported. For those who are working on-site it is important to understand the nuances of remote working to avoid feelings of injustice and unfairness in terms of workload. This is consistent with the findings of Wontorczyk and Roznowski (2022), where employees working on site had a negative perception of the performance of those working remotely due to a lack of understanding. It is important for employers to communicate the contribution and expectations of those working remotely across the organisation to ensure a wider understanding and appreciation of the tasks being completed away from the workplace. Additionally, for those working remotely it is important to promote employer acceptance of the flexibilities afforded to them, such as that there may be no requirement to work between specific hours in the day (such as 9am – 5pm) so long as the expected working hours are completed without a negative impact on others. This will promote well-being and productivity for those working remotely, whilst if the flexibilities are understood by those working on-site then potential suspicion that remote colleagues are not working can be avoided.

By examining the differences in the experience of participants working in different teams across the college it was possible to identify models of good practice that can be applied in a wider

context across FE colleges and other organisations, thus making a contribution to knowledge. The Apprenticeship and Skills team were very experienced in remote working practice, having used this working model for a number of years and the response obtained from participants from within this team is of significant importance when considering transferability. For example, the promotion of flexible working patterns, the provision of online and accessible resources and the remotely focused communication structure are all transferable to other teams.

In the field of performance management, existing theory is overwhelmingly focused towards traditional, on-site working. This study adds to theory by introducing a new direction for those working either entirely remotely or hybrid, which is a contribution to knowledge beyond the FE sector. This research illustrates that by applying performance management approaches that are only appropriate for on-site working that this can be restrictive for those working remotely. Instead, it is important to introduce specific remote working performance management expectations. For example, recognition that the monitoring of work completion rather than progress is likely to be a more appropriate performance management metric, agreeing with the findings of Adascalitei and Riso (2024).

This research presents the contribution in relation to remote working that by providing autonomy to employees to effectively manage their own time and prioritise tasks that work is completed whilst promoting employee satisfaction. In many cases the employee is experienced in understanding the best way for them to complete a specific task and if allowed to do so can work more efficiently and effectively. Opportunities for sharing good practice will support dissemination amongst colleagues. In the existing field of performance management there is a focus on ensuring that targets are achieved to ensure that all employees attain a minimum expectation. However, this study recognises the importance of encouraging employees to exceed expectations by promoting trust and autonomy by the provision of flexibilities. Those employees who may be underperforming

remain recognisable as tasks are not completed so that this can be addressed separately to encouraging the high levels of performance demonstrated by others.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practice are divided into employee productivity and organisational productivity. However, the impact that employee productivity has on overall organisational productivity must be considered, whether positive or negative.

5.3.1 Employee Productivity

Remote working supports employee performance and productivity, providing a work environment where there is the opportunity to concentrate and focus on task completion. In this study the majority of those working remotely did so as part of a hybrid working arrangement and this is recommended as it provides balance between working alone at home and working on-site as part of a team in the workplace, satisfying the need to work in a private environment when working at home at times alongside face-to-face collaborative working when in the workplace. This recommendation can be applied not only to the Further Education sector but also to a wide range of other sectors. However, when applying this recommendation to an education setting consideration must be given to the academic calendar, ensuring that there is an appropriate number of employees working on site to provide supervision to students.

This study revealed that flexible working models support employee productivity, satisfaction and well-being. Remote working is effective in supporting flexible working where employees have autonomy when planning work completion.

Employees have the greatest insight into their role and this research exposed examples of how individuals were managing their work to enhance productivity by understanding when they

needed to be alone to concentrate (achieved by working remotely) and when they needed to physically attend the workplace. This promotes satisfaction and well-being as employees are able to work efficiently, consequently reducing anxiety and burn-out. The recommendation that employee autonomy should be promoted in relation to remote working opportunities is applicable to the both the Further Education and wider education sectors; indeed, it likely to be applicable to other sectors beyond education.

5.3.2 Organisational Productivity

Organisations from all sectors should consider employee choice when proposing remote working. The availability of organisational support is an important factor for those choosing to work remotely as this promotes employee engagement and well-being (Deepa and Dharshini, 2024; Pham et al., 2024). This study illustrated that not all employees choose to work remotely, and doing so would not support their productivity or well-being if expected to do so for extended periods. Ferrar et al. (2022) recognise that the disposition of the individual employee influences their engagement with remote working. Although hybrid working may be an appropriate compromise, unless the workplace is closed at specific times, if employees prefer to work on site this should be facilitated. It is advised that any request to work remotely should be considered alongside employer requirements to ensure that any requirements for an on-site presence are balanced.

Employee communication in all sectors regarding remote working is recommended. This study revealed that those working on site were suspicious of those working remotely, believing that colleagues were not fulfilling their working hours or completing the work that they were expected to finish. This is consistent with the findings of Wontorczyk and Roznowski (2022), where employees working on site had a negative perception of the performance of those working remotely. By raising awareness of the tasks that were being completed remotely and reassurance that work targets were

being completed this may lead to employee acceptance and a recognition of fairness, thus promoting organisational performance.

In the education sector it is important that a vibrant campus is maintained (Lopez, 2024; Patil et al., 2024; Potter et al., 2025). However, this requirement is only applicable during term time and on other key dates, for example to support specific events such as during student enrolment and induction periods, when exam results are published or graduation events. Therefore, as illustrated within this study, there is the opportunity to engage in remote working out of term time even if somebody is employed in a student-facing role. By providing the opportunity to work remotely when there is no requirement from a business need perspective to remain on site promotes employee satisfaction and therefore promotes productivity.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study revealed that there is an aspiration from employees to engage in remote working as they recognise the benefits associated with this practice for both themselves and their employer. However, this presents a gap in knowledge as it is unclear whether the availability / unavailability of remote working impacts on employee recruitment and retention. Researching this both specifically within the FE sector and more widely across all education sectors would support future planning and potentially improve employee recruitment and / or retention.

The interviews with participants employed within the sector were valuable to this study of remote working but this study did not provide an insight into the views of any stakeholders. It is suggested that the views of students, external employers (such as the employers of apprentices or work experience providers) and partner organisations should be explored as the presence of college employees on site or their availability online could impact on the experience of stakeholders

engaging with the college. Understanding this could influence the planned work locations of college employees.

The awareness and acceptance by the participants of others working remotely was more negative than anticipated in this study. It was clear that there was suspicion of those working remotely that they may not be actively working, yet most participants were able to articulate how working remotely positively impacts on their own performance. It is suggested that it would be helpful to further explore this with a greater employee sample to discover whether this perspective is common across the organisation as understanding this may influence future communication and awareness raising activities.

5.5 Reflections on the Research Process

Throughout the research process I became more and more interested in the subject of remote working and the focus of my interest changed. My choice of research was initially based on my observation following the re-opening of college campuses after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted that although there was a need to welcome students back onto site there was a reluctance from some colleagues to return to college, despite the need for student supervision. As I work with some very socially vulnerable students I could see that for many there was a real need to re-engage back on site and in reality, the safest place for some students was not remaining at home but being back in college.

The subject of remote working post-pandemic was less about trying to make established on-site work processes ‘fit’ online, which was seen during the pandemic, and more about systems and processes evolving to embrace the ‘work from anywhere’ ethos. My interest became about retaining the aspects of remote working that are effective and removing the areas that are ineffective. There

are some opportunities to embrace remote working to support productivity and well-being, so it is important that this is understood, and the benefits maximised.

My skills as a researcher developed significantly, and I have been provided with incredible support by my supervisors throughout the process. My academic writing has improved, and I have experimented with new technology to record the interviews with participants. The use of AI, though very tempting, has been something that I have actively avoided throughout my studies to ensure that my work is not compromised. In both my personal and professional life, I have noticed that I now question everything, not accepting anything at face value. As a result of this my personal confidence has increased as I challenge the opinions of others or reflect on established processes to find answers, expand my knowledge and propose alternatives.

On reflection, my experience of the research process is directly related to Kolb's Learning Cycle as illustrated in Figure 5.2 (Kolb, 1984). The cyclical nature of the learning cycle exemplifies the stages of the research process and although this study is now complete, my engagement in the learning process will continue as I develop further as a researcher.

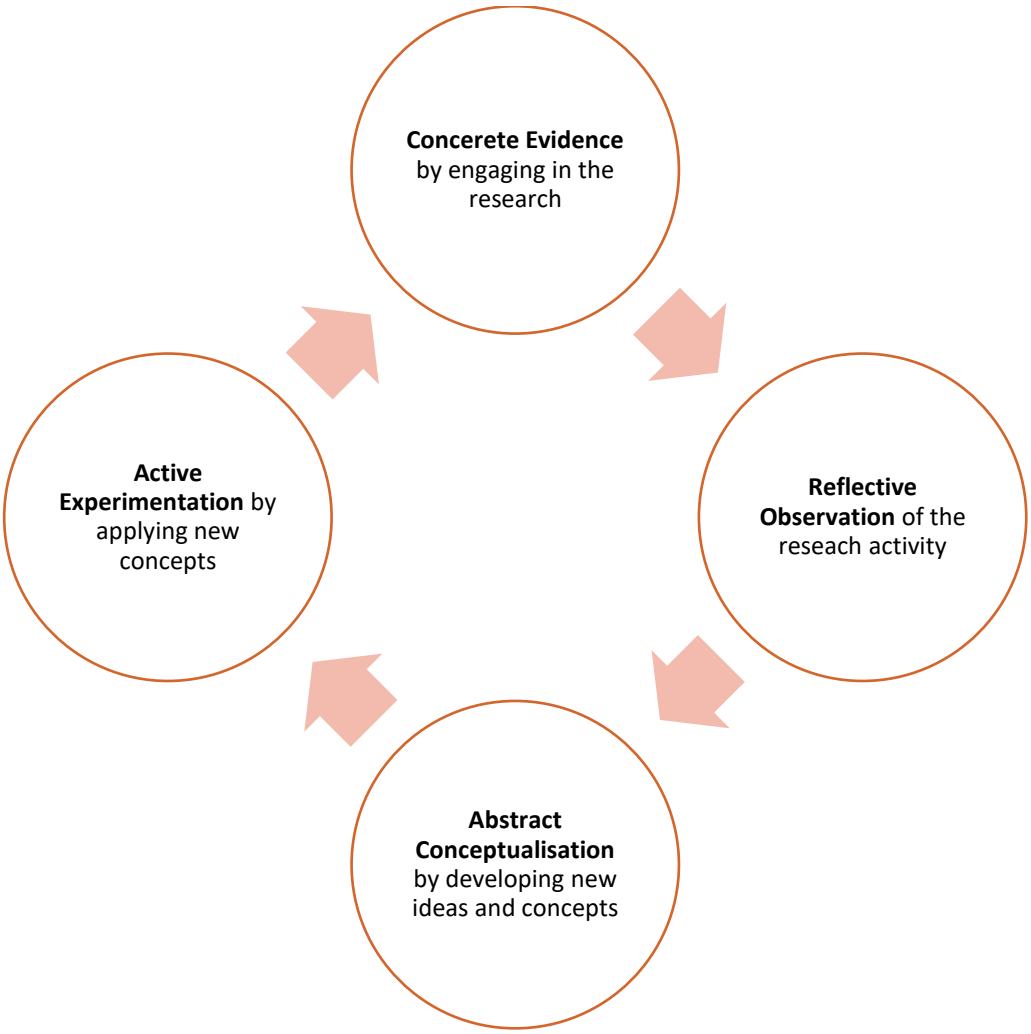

Figure 5.2 – The Application of Kolb's Learning Cycle to the Research Process

As a result of my studies I now have a greater understanding of the remote work that takes place routinely across the college. It has been interesting to take the time to explore normal working practice and the opinions of colleagues from across the organisation. I was pleased to be consulted regarding the college's Remote Working Policy and the initial findings from this research have influenced the procedures and expectations within the document. As part of my role in college I work with Higher Education lecturers and researchers. I am now confident in working with them and having an understanding of their work and the challenges that they face is very helpful.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

1. **Research Question**
   The impact of remote working practices on performance in a Further Education (FE) College setting.

2. **Version**
   Version 3, September 2024.

3. **Ethics Approval**
   This research has obtained ethical approval from The University of Central Lancashire's Business, Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (BAHSS) Ethical Review Panel, Ref: BAHSS2 01233.

4. **Invitation to participate in a research study**
   As an employee at the college you are invited to participate in this research study. It is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve before you decide whether to participate. This Participant Information Sheet includes information regarding the research, but if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly using the details provided. If you feel more comfortable asking questions anonymously, please contact [NAMED PERSON] within the HR Team who is able to answer questions on your behalf. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and there is no expectation that you must accept this invitation. You can withdraw from the research up to 4 weeks after the interview taking place. After this time your data will be anonymised and as such unidentifiable.

5. What is the purpose of the study?

This research seeks to investigate how remote working practices impact on employee performance within an FE College.

The objectives of the study are:

Objective 1:	To identify models of remote working practice in an FE College.
Objective 2:	To evaluate the performance of employees who are working remotely, on site or hybrid in an FE College
Objective 3:	To explore any differences in performance between those working remotely, those working on campus and those who are hybrid working.
Objective 4:	To propose recommendations regarding remote working practice.

The findings of the research may be used to inform the college's Flexible Working Policy.

6. Why have I been chosen to take part?

As a college employee you have been invited to take part. A selection of 15 employees in different roles across the College have been randomly selected to take part.

7. Do I have to take part?

No. The decision is yours as participation is voluntary and you can decide not to take part. You can withdraw from the research up to 4 weeks after the interview taking place, without giving any reason. After this time your data will be anonymised and as such unidentifiable. During the interview, you can choose not to answer all the interview questions or stop the interview at any point without giving an explanation. There will be no consequence to you if you decide not to take part.

8. What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in the research you are asked to attend an interview with the researcher. You will be asked a series of questions about how remote working practices impact you in your role and your opinions about it. The interviews, with your permission, will be recorded and subsequently transcribed and anonymised.

The information provided will be collated and analysed by the researcher to find out whether the new working practices may have influenced your own and members of your team's performance at work. All your personal information will be removed to ensure that you cannot be identified as your participation in this research is confidential.

9. How will my data be used?

Further information on how your data will be used can be seen in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	Interviews will be audio recorded and the transcripts stored via Microsoft Office 365.
How will my data be stored?	Research information will be stored on Microsoft Office 365. No paper-based records will be stored.
How long will my data be stored for?	All data will be anonymised and any original recordings destroyed. Anonymised data will be retained for 7 years.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	All data and information will be stored on Microsoft Office 365, which is password protected and further secured via Two Factor Authentication (TFA).
Will my data be anonymised?	Yes – data will be anonymised as labelled only as Participant A, Participant B etc.
How will my data be used?	It will be analysed for the purposes of a Doctoral thesis and to inform the college Remote Working Policy.
Who will have access to my data?	Student Researcher and Supervisor / DoS.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No.
How will my data be destroyed?	Electronic files will be deleted and any paper documents will be shredded.
Privacy Notice	https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

10. Expenses and / or payments

There will be no payments for taking part in the study as no expenses will be incurred.

11. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no anticipated risks from taking part in this research. If you require any confidential support at any time during the research, please contact a member of the College Counselling team. If you experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of this research, please let the researcher know immediately.

12. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The opportunity to influence future working practice at the College.

13. What will happen as a result of the research?

The findings from this research will be used by the student researcher as part of a Doctoral thesis. A copy of the findings will be shared but you will not be identifiable from the results. The results of the research will be shared with the Executive Leadership Team at the college where the research is being completed to support them in adopting specific working practices across the organisation.

14. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If change your mind and want to stop taking part you simply need to let the researcher know. It is not necessary to provide a reason. As your feedback will be anonymised and therefore unidentifiable you need to let the researcher know if you wish to withdraw within 4 weeks of the interview taking place (prior to anonymisation).

15. What if I am unhappy or there is a problem?

Please contact the Director of Studies. Dr Deborah Slater at Daslater1@uclan.ac.uk in the first instance. If your issue is not resolved, you should contact the UCLan's Officer for Ethics and Integrity at officerforethics@uclan.ac.uk. You will need to provide details of the study, the researcher involved and the details of your complaint when contacting the Officer for Research Ethics and Integrity.

UCLan has high standards in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns regarding the way that your personal data is handled you are able to refer a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (0303 123 1113).

16. Who should I contact if I have further questions?

You should contact the Director of Studies for the research. Dr Deborah Slater at Daslater1@uclan.ac.uk

The student researcher is Helen Eaton who can be contacted at heeaton2@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Title of the research: The impact of remote working practices on performance in a Further Education (FE) College setting.

Name of researcher: Helen Eaton

Please initial

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated September 2024 for the above research, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves being interviewed by the researcher, who is UCLan research student Helen Eaton. I may be asked open questions about my views regarding the impact of remote working practices on both my own performance at work and that of my colleagues. I understand that the interviews will be recorded.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the research up to 4 weeks after the interview taking place; without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. After this time my data will be anonymised and as such unidentifiable. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.
4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information that I provide and I can request the destruction of that information up to 4 weeks after the interview taking place.
5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at UCLan until it is fully anonymised and stored within the University's Microsoft 365 Account. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the dissertation that result from the research.
6. I understand that signed consent forms will be stored electronically within the University's Microsoft 365 Account. Original audio recordings will be also stored until they have been transcribed and anonymised within the University's Microsoft 365 Account. Once transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed. The University's Microsoft 365 Account is password protected and further secured via Two Factor Authentication (TFA) and is accessible only by the student researcher and the Director of Studies until the completion of the student's study period at UCLan.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Participant name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Student Researcher
Helen Eaton
UCLan
heeaton2@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix C – Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. Proportion of time spent working on site / remotely?

   Own choice or employer choice to work this way?

   Preferred working method? (On site / off site / hybrid?)

2. Online collaboration methods used routinely in the workplace.

3. How does working remotely impact on your performance? (Any differences from when working on site?)

   How does it impact on your performance when others are working remotely?

4. How do you feel about you / others working remotely?

   Discuss and explore satisfaction with working remotely.

5. How does remote working (you or other colleagues) impact on your team's performance (in your opinion)?

6. Does remote working (you or other colleagues) impact on team morale / atmosphere in the workplace (in your opinion)?

7. Do you benefit from any remote working practices when working on site? *(EG supporting cross centre working?)*

8. Is there anything that would support you in working on site / remotely? *(EG Training, equipment etc).*

Appendix D – Example of a Transcript

OK so then in your role as XXX what proportion of the time we spent working remotely or on sites?

Well, it's because I'm student facing I've got to be here all the time I've got to be available. It's just part and parcel of the role. Sometimes, very occasionally, if I need to focus on something and get something done I'll go home to do it so that I can concentrate and get it done. A job that maybe takes me two or three days because I'm getting disrupted and interrupted in college if I'm working remotely I might be able to get it done in an afternoon.

Is it your own choice or employer choice to work in this way?

Well, I suppose I've got the flexibility of working at home if I want to but really my role is student facing; so I suppose is my employer's choice. That's the role and I'd rather be face to face anyway.

Since COVID we've used a lot of online collaboration methods and things like teams and SharePoint. Do you use any other methods to communicate with people whether you're on site or working remotely?

Teams and SharePoint gets used all the time. To be honest because we have colleagues that work different shifts and it's really good for sharing information and everyone's working on the same documents. We also use 3CX but a lot of people aren't registered with 3CX so that can be quite hard getting hold of people that way. I sometimes talk to parents on teams as well, that seems to be an easy way of getting hold of people. I also use the messenger bit of and teams because you can message a teacher while they're in class so the message is there ready for when the when they've stopped teaching. They can't answer call when they're teaching anyway. Moving forwards we're getting Prosol installed and that will save an awful lot of hassle in terms of being able to collaborate, to be able to have student records all in one place. It will mean that we won't be using SharePoint quite as much but it will be a much better source and the place where we can share information.

So how does working remotely impact on your performance? Are there any differences to when you're working on site?

I say I just get chance to focus when I'm when I'm working remotely but I don't do it very often. It's just when I really need to concentrate but what I do find is that the people who want to ask me something who would have interrupted me while at work tend to e-mail me more if I'm not there. So I end up with a lot more emails to come back to. I suppose it means that I can respond to them in my time rather than being interrupted like a would be if I was in the office.

In terms of impacting on your performance when others are working remotely does it make any difference at all?

I can't really say, sometimes it's easy to get hold of people because of them being at a computer I can get hold of them more easily on teams. Sometimes it can be a problem getting hold of colleagues working in finance because sometimes if a student struggling with something they just want to talk to somebody and they want to talk somebody there and then. It's not always possible if someone is working remotely.

So how do you feel about you or others working remotely where you can choose as and when you want to work remotely?

I don't think there's any animosity between teams and people who are or aren't working remotely. In my job with it being so student focused and my team are as well it's not really something that gets discussed. You know if someone feels left out if they can. Sorry they can't do it so no, no not feeling either way really.

So, what about remote working of you or your colleagues impacting on your teams performance?

I know I can focus more on my work when I'm at home so therefore I can crack on and get my job done. I can really focus on a report or a document that I need to work on but I suppose it could affect my colleagues because they can't get an answer to a question immediately like if I was if I was in the

office. So I suppose it does affect the performance of others but then it improves my performance so I suppose on balance team performance is probably all affected, that's what I think anyway.

So remote working by you or your colleagues – does it impact on team morale or atmosphere in the workplace at all?

I'd say not because we're all in together and that morale / atmosphere is still there. There might be odd grumbles about people in other teams, you know where they say 'they're never in' but nobody really knows enough about what other people are doing to be able to comment. It's nothing nasty or really negative, not that I've seen anyway.

Do you benefit from any remote working practices when you're working on site such as supporting cross centre working?

I don't really work across centres because they don't have residency [on other sites] and we only have residency at Preston. Like I said before, I find it really easy to get hold of people on teams and messaging teachers when the teaching means that there's a quick message there ready for when they stop teaching. It's less formal and quicker than sending an e-mail a lot of the time.

Is there anything that will support you in working on site or remotely, such as training or equipment or anything?

No, not really I've got my laptop, it's not the best laptop in the world but it's OK for what I do. What I have done is I've got an extra screen now from work for when I'm working at home because that's how I'm used to working when I'm working in the office. I did need that extra screen and it's a bit little bit bigger than my laptop. Training-wise we've all been going through training on pro solution ready for when that comes in so we're all looking forward to that.

Any other comments at all about working remotely? Is there anything that we've not discussed that you want to bring up?

Well, I suppose I'd just like to share my concerns about remote working because my husband doesn't work for the college but he works from home permanently. It's really affected his mental health where he's not particularly sociable person anyway but he's literally not seeing people. They've gone on to hot desking for when he goes into the office and he has to book a desk when he goes in. That means that he has to plan in advance when he's got to be in and if there's a big meeting going on and there's lots of people called in to the office sometimes you'll go you'll try and book a desk but there's none available. That makes him feel really bad. He’s had some time off on the sick with it because he was struggling that much but when he's off sick but he's still at home so it's not actually beneficial. It’s not changing his environment so I just think that's really, really important when people are thinking about working from home. It isn't good for some people. I get that some people want to but it does really worry me that there's some people hidden that aren't in a good place when they're at home on their own.