



One Year of Covid Survey Report

Introduction

This was a survey of all UNISON members working in Local Government in Scotland, that we have e-mail addresses for and permission to contact, conducted between the 26th March and 13th April 2021.

An initial e-mail was issued to all of these members with the survey link. Members were also encouraged to participate via UNISON Scotland Twitter and Local Government branch social media feeds and a reminder e-mail was sent to all members in the first week of April.

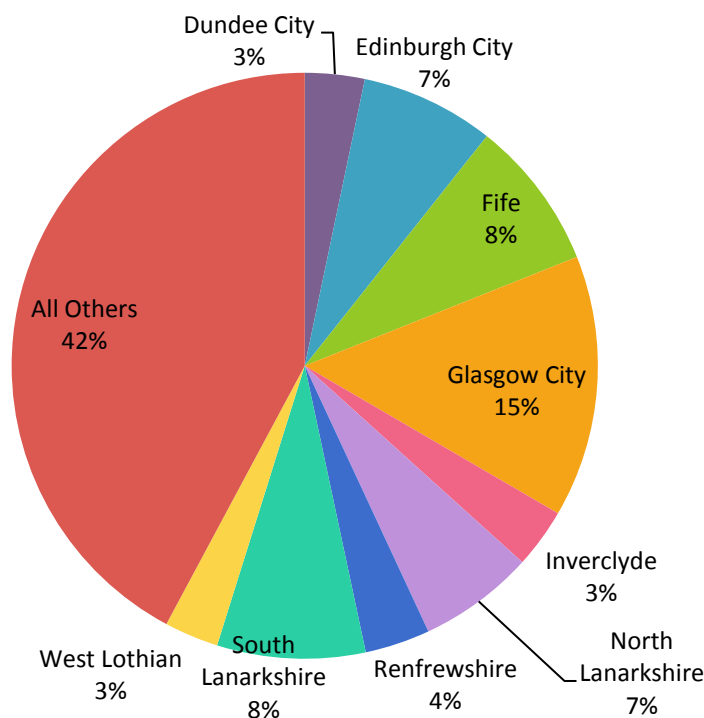
12,077 UNISON members participated in the survey, which 15% of UNISON's membership in Scottish Local Government.

Not all questions applied to all participants, e.g. only those who had been working from home would answer the home working question, however 9,467 members completed the survey in full and 2,610 answered only those questions that were applicable to them.

1. Participation across individual local authorities

We asked members which local authority they worked in. The largest number of respondents were from Glasgow City (15%), South Lanarkshire (8%), Fife (8%), North Lanarkshire (7%) and Edinburgh City (7%) though there were also a notable number of responses from Renfrewshire (4%), Inverclyde (3%), West Lothian (3%) and Dundee City (3%). The remaining 42% of respondents came from all other local authorities.

We believe this is a representative sample of members across the country.

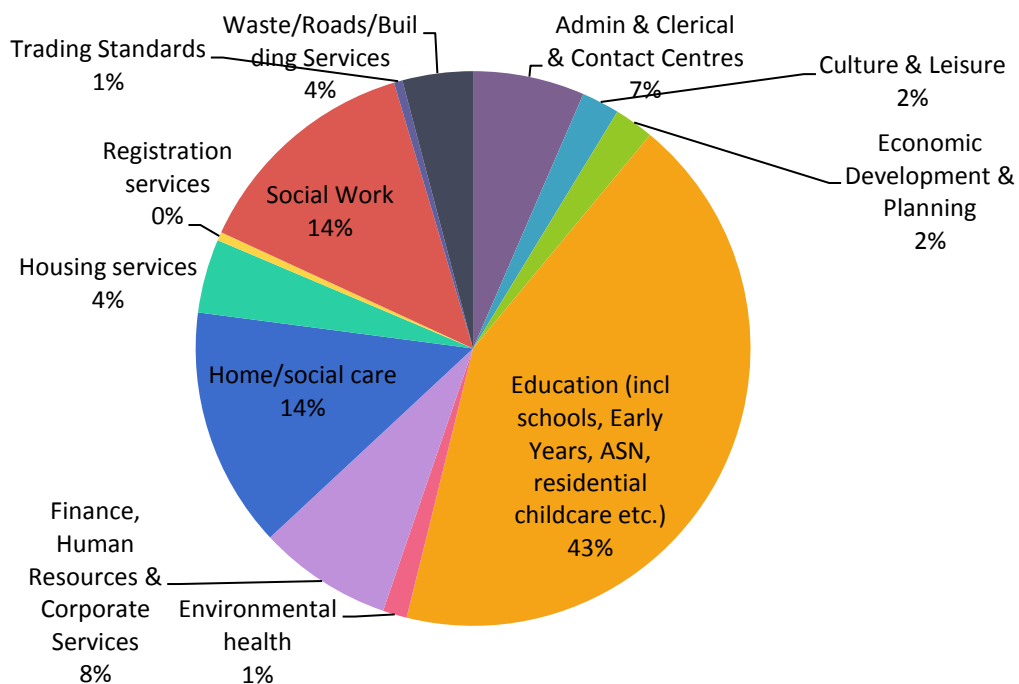


2. Participation across job roles

We asked what type of jobs respondents worked in. Noting that job titles can vary across different authorities we asked people to select the most appropriate overall heading for their job.

The largest response (43%) came from members who work in Education (including school settings, Early Years, ASN and residential childcare). The high level of response from this group is perhaps not a surprise given the number of issues they have faced recently and their high level of engagement with the union during the pandemic.

The second highest response came from members working in Home/Social Care (14%) and Social Work (14%) and then Finance, HR & Corporate Services (8%), Admin, Clerical and Contact Centres (7%), Waste/Roads/Building services (4%), Housing Services (4%), Economic, Development & Planning (2%), Culture and Leisure (2%), Environment Health (1.4%), Trading Standard (1%) and Registration Services (0.5%).

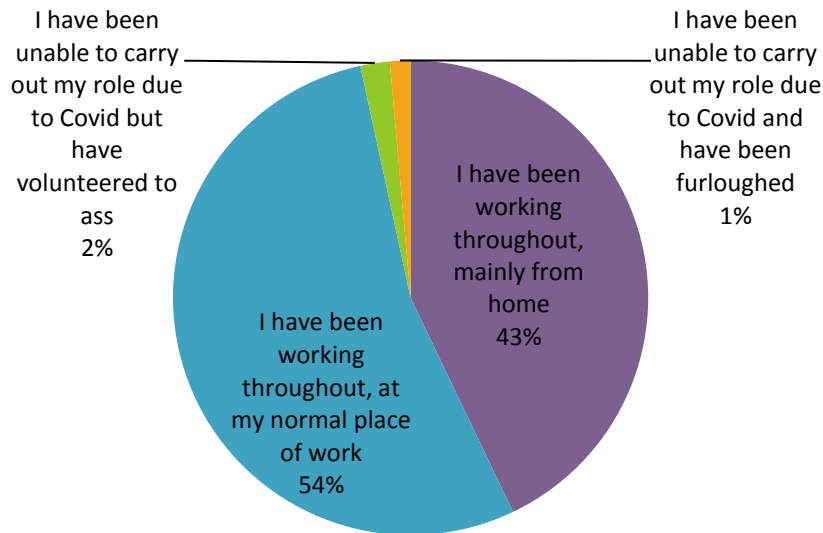


3. Impact of Covid on work

We wanted to get a sense of how members' roles have been impacted by the pandemic. The largest number of respondents stated that they had been working throughout the pandemic at their normal place of work (54%) but many (43%) stated that whilst they had been working throughout this had mainly been from home.

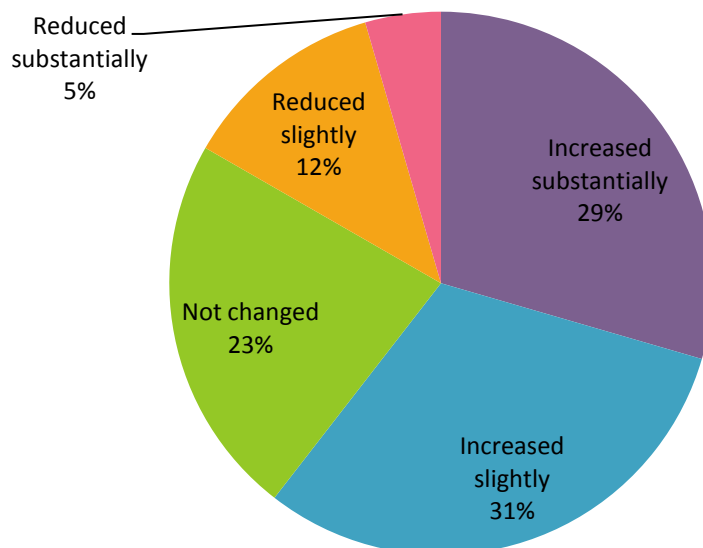
A smaller number said that they had been unable to carry out their role due to the Covid pandemic but had volunteered to assist the pandemic response in other roles (2%) or had been furloughed (1%).

This supports the feedback that we have been receiving throughout the last year - local government workers have not stopped during the period of the pandemic. Only a very small number were unable to carry out their own, or another, role within the local authority, during this time and a large number (45%) have adapted to changes to the role they carry out or where they carry it out.



4. Workload

Our concerns about increasing workloads of members has been borne out by results to this survey – 60% of respondents reported an increase in workload with 29% indicating that their workload had increased substantially. Far fewer stated that their workload had decreased slightly (12%) or substantially (5%).

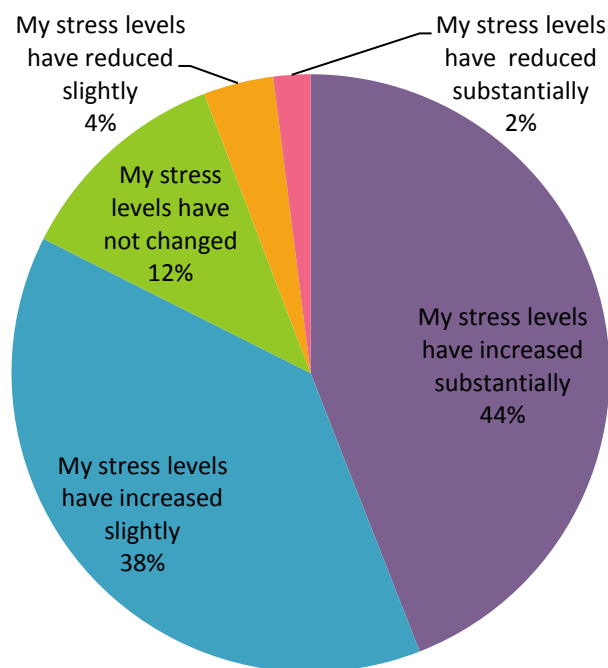


5. Stress

We know that the pandemic has been incredibly difficult for many and we wanted to evaluate how much stress our members had experienced over the past year compared to before the pandemic.

Whilst many will be unsurprised that people have found the last year stressful we are very concerned to see the extent of it - 82% of respondents reported an increase in stress, with 44% reporting that the increase in their stress was substantial.

Only 6% of respondents reported a decrease in stress.



6. Mental Health

We wanted to know if there had been a wider impact on members' mental health such that they have had to seek medical assistance for it.

27% of respondents stated that the past year had a wider negative impact on their mental health such that they have had to seek medical assistance for it.

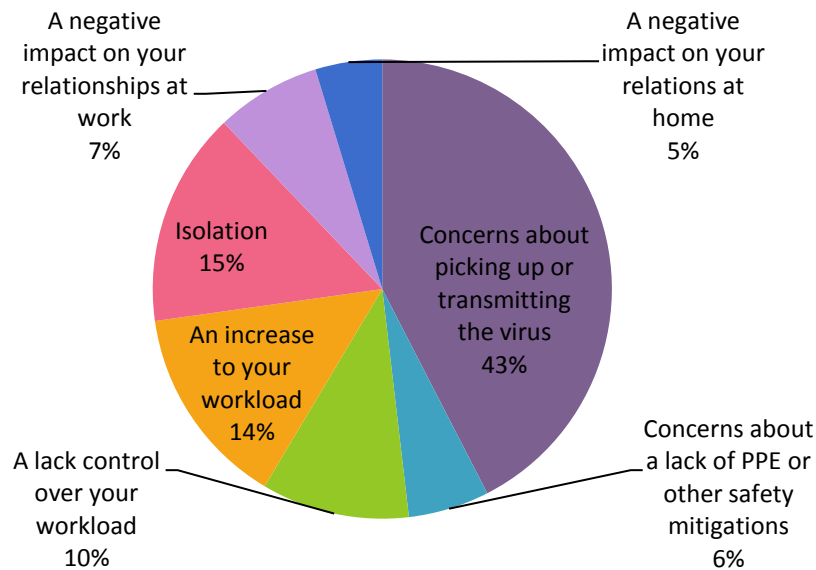
Local authority employers should be deeply concerned by this because it goes beyond people feeling 'a bit more pressure' and indicates a significant number of employees who are suffering from ill health.

This is a ticking time bomb which requires immediate action.

7. The cause of mental ill health

We asked those who indicated that they had experienced a negative impact on their mental health what they attributed that to.

The largest number indicated that this was caused by concerns about picking up or transmitting the virus (43%) but a large number also cited isolation (15%), an increase in workload (14%) and lack of control over their workload (10%).

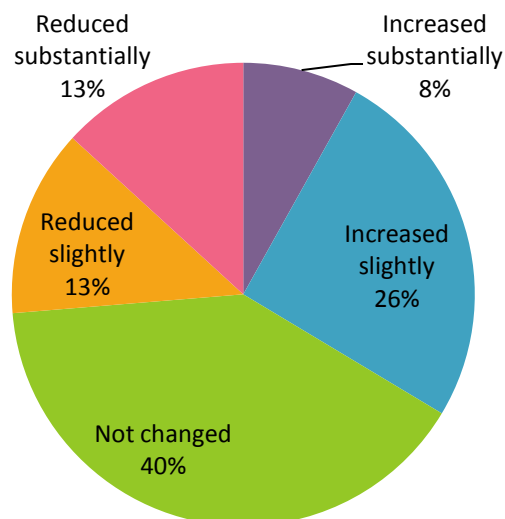


8. Support from the employer

We asked members to compare the level of support provided by your employer over the last year, compared to before the pandemic.

Surprisingly, given we have been operating in the middle of a global pandemic 40% of respondents reported no change in the support provided by their employer and 21% reported a reduction in the level of support provided by their employer.

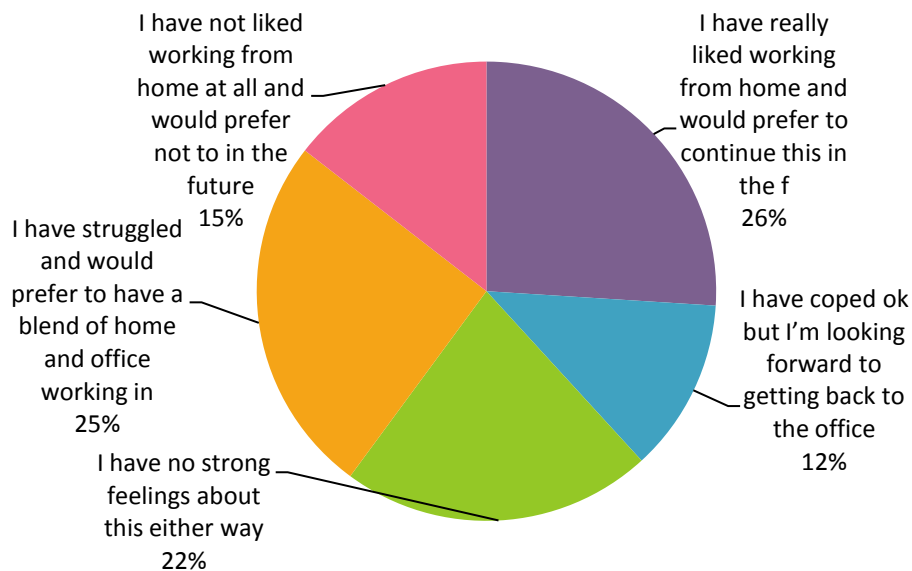
26% of respondents reported a slight increase in the level of support and 8% indicated a substantial increase in support.



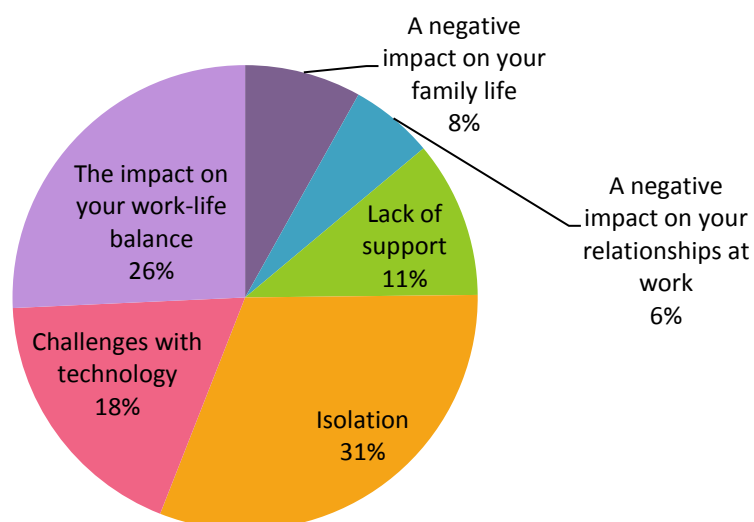
9. Home working

Given the number of members who have been working from home during the past year we wanted to understand how they felt about that experience and what their thoughts were about this continuing in the future.

Unsurprisingly views were mixed – 26% of respondents indicated they really liked working from home and would prefer to continue doing so in the future, 25% indicated they have struggled and would prefer a blend of home and office working going forward, 12% indicated they had coped ok but were looking forward to getting back to the office and 15% reported that they have not liked working from home at all and would prefer not to do so in the future.



We then asked those who indicated that they had not enjoyed working from home why that was. A third of respondents cited isolation (31%), a quarter (26%) cited the impact on their work-life balance, 18% cited challenges with technology and 11% indicated lack of support.

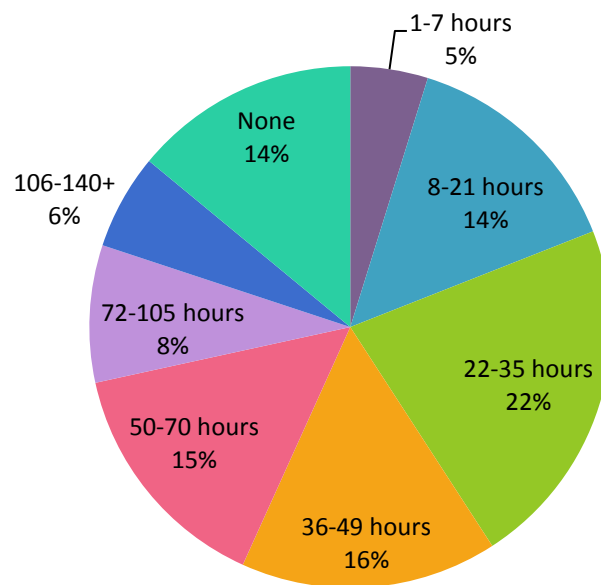


This underlines the importance of ensuring our members are properly consulted and engaged about future working arrangements post-Covid. We know that many local authorities are looking at reducing office space going forward but this clearly demonstrates that one size does not fit all - managers need to be flexible in their approach and cognisant of the need to ensure all employees are engaged and supported, particularly if they are managing remote teams in the future.

10 Annual Leave

We asked respondents to tell us if they had been unable to take all of their annual leave due to pressure of work caused by the pandemic. Perhaps unsurprising given the large number of responses from members working in Education (many of whom will be on term time contracts) 81% of respondents stated they had been able to take all of their leave within the leave year. 19% stated they had been unable to take all their leave due to pressure of work.

We asked those that had been unable to take all of their leave in the last leave year (19%) how many hours of untaken leave have they had been permitted to carry into the next leave year. 14% of respondents indicated they had not been able to carry any of their untaken leave into the next leave year.



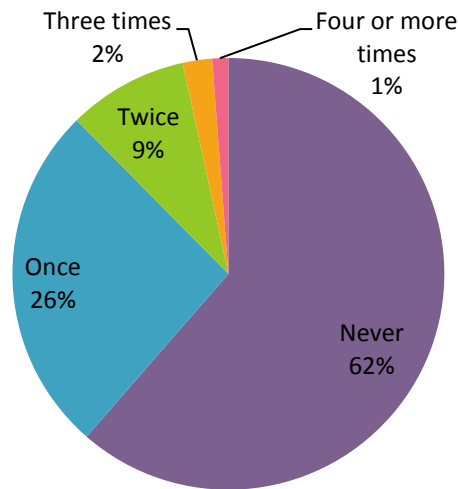
Untaken leave that respondents were permitted to carry forward

We then asked those that reported they had not been allowed to carry over all of their untaken leave into the next leave year, how many hours of untaken leave they had 'lost'. 34% of respondents indicated they had 'lost' leave, with 7% indicating they had lost more than 50 hours, as a result of not being able to take it due to pressure of work and not being allowed to carry their untaken leave forward into the next leave year.

11. Shielding/Self-Isolation

We wanted to know how often members had to shield or self-isolate because of Covid over the past year.

Thankfully 62% indicated that they had never had to do so. A quarter of members responding (26%) indicated that they had to shield or self-isolate on one occasion. 9% indicated they had to do so twice, 2% indicated that they had to do so three times and 1% indicated that they had to do so four or more times.

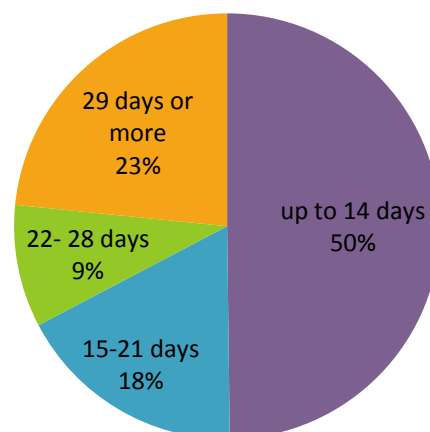


12. Personal experience of the virus

10% of respondents reported that they had contracted Covid and 22% of those indicated they had been diagnosed with 'Long Covid'.

We asked those who had contracted Covid how long their symptoms had lasted. 40% reported their symptoms had lasted 4 weeks or more, 24% reported they had lasted 2 weeks, 14% reported they had lasted 3 weeks and 16% reported they had lasted 1 week.

We then asked how much time those respondents had to take off work whilst unwell. Half said that they had to take up to 14 days off work whilst unwell, 23% indicated they had to take 29 days off work whilst unwell, 18% indicated they had to take 15-21 days off work whilst unwell and 9% indicated they had to take 22-28 days off work whilst unwell.



17% of members responding reported that they had experienced bereavement as a result of Covid. 81% of those who reported experiencing bereavement as a result of Covid did not take any time off work for that and 72% of them reported that they received no support from their employer in dealing with that.

13. Negotiating Priorities

We asked members, given the year they had been through, what they believed UNISON's negotiating priorities should be for the year ahead. Unsurprisingly, given 55% of local government workers earn below £25k per annum and most have received no reward or recognition for their incredible efforts over the past year, pay and reward was ranked as the top priority. Work-life balance was ranked second, mental health support third and flexibility over place and hours of work was ranked fourth.

If you have any questions about any issue covered by this report please do not hesitate in contact in us on j.baxter@unison.co.uk.

Johanna Baxter
Head of Local Government

16th April 2021