



in-person office days

A call for a comprehensive **HYBRIDWORKING STRATEGY**

SUPPORTING YOUNG GRADUATES
AND THEIR EMPLOYERS

KEY FINDINGS

01

Successful hybrid working entails specific hybrid working skills and practices.

02

There is a strong need to adjust workplace practices, policies and environment to the dynamics of hybrid working.

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When successfully managed, hybrid working can boost motivation, retention and productivity.

04

Young hybrid workers require tailored support and flexible, needs-based arrangements.

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Benefits of hybrid working for employees are significant but not universal.

06

Hybrid working can foster social mobility, but it can also disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups.

Executive summary

Hybrid working plays a crucial role in job motivation and employee wellbeing. It is by far the most preferred mode of working among young graduates, offering not only flexibility but also a great potential for increased workplace inclusion and social mobility. However, it also poses considerable challenges, in particular for young employees entering the workplace. If the potential of hybrid working for driving productivity, employee well-being and workplace inclusion is to be realised, a multi-pronged strategic approach, rather than an isolated policy, is required to prepare and support young graduates, and their employers, to successfully navigate hybrid working.

Our research demonstrates that hybrid working is a very distinct work environment - one that demands specific skills, practices and robust support mechanisms. For hybrid working to act as a driver for growth, we recommend the development of a comprehensive Hybrid Working Strategy. This holistic approach can help to strategically plan for, accommodate and accelerate successful hybrid working among different parts of the workforce. This Strategy should be embedded within the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and inform the Employment Rights Bill.

This policy brief focuses on the unique needs of young hybrid working graduates and outlines actionable policy implications to ensure they can thrive in the modern workplace.

Introduction

To date, research has struggled to keep pace with the rapid and uneven adoption of various types of hybrid working arrangements across sectors and workforce demographics. Despite its popularity among employees, and many employers, there is limited empirical evidence on what successfully navigating hybrid working entails. This gap in understanding limits our ability to effectively plan, support and accelerate its potential to boost sustainable economic growth.

Current debates usefully highlight macroeconomic trends and the broad implications of hybrid working. These debates, however, inadvertently present a more homogenised picture of the experiences of hybrid working. In order to tap into the potential of hybrid working as a lever for productivity, employee well-being and workplace inclusion, a more detailed understanding of hybrid working is needed. In our report we focus on a key segment of the workforce, namely recent graduate employees.

Young graduates, commonly referred to as part of Gen Z, are a crucial socioeconomic cohort. Forecasts indicate that the UK will require 11 million new graduates by 2035 to meet its economic growth ambitions, particularly in the high-skills sectors prioritised by the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy. This is the first generation to enter the labour market at scale under hybrid conditions. Yet, the existing legislative, educational and organisational support frameworks are only beginning to recognise the profound implications of this shift.

New graduate employees require targeted and responsive support mechanisms, as their needs are markedly more complex than those of established professionals. The transition from student to employee is inherently challenging but, in a hybrid context, it becomes even more demanding, compounded by uncertainty around working and housing arrangements, and boundary and relationship management. Our study reveals that workplace integration and job performance of young hybrid workers depend on three critical factors: their readiness for hybrid work, the development of effective hybrid working skills and practices and the robustness of organisational support mechanisms.

To fully realise the potential of hybrid working as a driver for productivity, well-being and workplace inclusion, we call for a three-pronged strategic approach for developing hybrid ready graduates and employing organisations. There is a strong need to plan for the development of hybrid skills and practices among new and prospective graduates and their employing organisations. Secondly, comprehensive support mechanisms for young hybrid workers need to be put in place, and regularly monitored at a national level, particularly for those in disadvantaged groups. Thirdly, concerted efforts should be directed toward the development of strategic pathways to mitigate the challenges of hybrid working and to accelerate its opportunities as a lever for productivity, employee well-being and inclusion.

This strategic approach is not merely a workplace adjustment. A comprehensive Hybrid Working Strategy should be recognised as a core pillar of the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and be further codified in the Employment Rights Bill.

Research approach

To address the urgent need for more evidence-based policy and industry recommendations, we have conducted an in-depth qualitative study to explore the experiences and needs of young graduates navigating hybrid work. Our multi-method approach combined approximately 80 hours of in-depth interviews with 40 recent graduates - both UK and international employees - alongside a detailed analysis of corresponding experiential maps depicting their hybrid working practices and organisational support available to them.

Our sampling strategy focused on capturing diverse multi-sector voices. Participants were drawn from a wide range of sectors and employing organisations, including start-ups, charities, multinational corporations, and public sector organisations, ensuring a rich cross-section of employment contexts. Approximately half of our sample comprises UK nationals, the remainder consists of international graduates employed in the UK, originating from a variety of European, African and Asian countries.

The graduates taking part in our study hold degrees from modern as well as Russell Group universities and international higher education institutions. They include both bachelor's and master's degree holders across a broad spectrum of disciplines, spanning the social sciences and STEM fields, such as business and management, HRM, international relations, psychology, journalism, creative writing, architecture and engineering. Our sample includes participants from different ethnic and religious minority groups.

Research results

Our findings showcase that hybrid working is not a singular model but a highly varied set of practices and work arrangements with profound implications for workplace dynamics, employee experiences and outcomes. Effective hybrid working requires specific hybrid working skills and practices that need to be developed and cultivated among new entrants, line managers and their teams and supported by organisational processes and routines. Hybrid working constitutes an attractive proposition for young graduates that tends to boost their motivation and their self-reported productivity despite its many challenges.

We noted a clear preference among young graduates for flexible, needs-based hybrid working arrangements that are adjusted to specific needs. The needs of hybrid working graduates vary greatly depending on their characteristics, such as their socio-economic and ethnic background, as well as their working environment, and are thus highly context-dependent. The effectiveness, well-being and workplace integration of young hybrid workers depend to a large extent on the development and provision of hybrid-working friendly workplace practices, policies and environment that cater to the specific dynamics and requirements of hybrid working, such as the need to plan for relationship-fostering opportunities throughout the employee lifecycle.

When designing and implementing hybrid working arrangements and practices, it is crucial to remember that their benefits and challenges are not universal and static. Workplace accommodation practices can mitigate many of the challenges and enable a wider population of new graduate talent to benefit from hybrid working, thus boosting inclusivity and further diversifying the workforce.

01 Successful hybrid working entails specific hybrid working skills and practices

While all graduates must develop a wide range of skills and role-specific competencies, hybrid working poses additional demands that extend well beyond technical proficiency. Success in hybrid working often entails adaptability, effective boundary-management and the development of healthy hybrid working and sustainable self-care routines. Young graduates need to manage the heightened risks of digital presenteeism in hybrid working while effectively navigating multi-channel communication for professional development and relationship building.

These demands should not be viewed as challenges of individuals. Instead, they signal a systemic shift in the nature of work that carries significant implications for national skills development policy, as well as for further and higher education institutions, professional bodies, and employers.

The management and support of hybrid workers also involve distinct skills and practices. Our findings point to a crucial role played by line managers, teams, peers, mentors, buddies and organisational processes to create a conducive hybrid working environment for new hybrid workers.

02 There is a strong need to adjust workplace practices, policies and environment to the dynamics of hybrid working

Hybrid working affects multiple spheres of workplace dynamics, such as culture, teamwork, trust and relationship building, leadership, learning, organisational socialisation and inclusion. Organisational practices, policies and, more broadly, the workplace environment, need to be considered in light of these unique dynamics. Our findings point to a range of positive employee and organisational outcomes when core organisational processes, such as recruitment, new employee induction and onboarding, performance management and professional development are adjusted to the unique dynamics of hybrid working.

03 When successfully managed, hybrid working can boost motivation, retention and productivity

Despite its often reported challenges, hybrid working remains the preferred mode of work for the majority of young graduates. Our study demonstrates that once hybrid working skills and practices are more fully developed, young graduates largely benefit from the flexibility offered by hybrid working. Flexibility is not merely logistical; it is often deployed to practise self-care and to implement more effective working and boundary management routines.

Our study points to a tendency among young graduate employees to view hybrid arrangements as a perk and a valuable sign of trust on the part of the employer. This perception, in turn, positively affects their workplace motivation and productivity boosting efforts. In our sample, the value placed on hybrid flexibility often surpasses organisational loyalty. The threat of an imposition of more

traditional office-based working is associated with an intention to seek alternative employment opportunities.

04 Young hybrid workers require tailored support and flexible, needs-based arrangements

Our study highlights a significant variation in the needs and support requirements of young hybrid workers. These differences are shaped by individual circumstances of young hybrid workers, the nature of their roles and the organisational setting they are entering. While general accommodation practices for hybrid working are important, they are rarely sufficient on their own. The most effective solutions are based on flexible needs-based approaches.

Such approaches are best dynamic and co-developed with young employees as they gain experience and clarity about their working preferences and professional goals. This requires employers to move beyond one-size-fits-all models and embrace collaborative, needs-based support frameworks that evolve alongside their employees.

05 The benefits of hybrid working for employees are significant but not universal; its challenges can be mitigated

Our research reveals that the opportunities and challenges of hybrid working are not experienced uniformly. From the employee perspective, outcomes vary significantly depending on intersecting personal and structural characteristics, including financial status, living arrangements, health conditions, cultural and religious identity, accented speech, perceived foreignness, age, social class, and visa status.

Critically, the impact of these characteristics means that those from already disadvantaged groups are less likely to experience the full benefits of hybrid working without targeted support and accommodation. For example, those in precarious housing situations might benefit from access to coworking spaces, whereas others might primarily require support with homeworking equipment. Therefore, to boost productivity, employee well-being and workplace inclusion, it is important for policymakers and organisations to develop solutions that account for different intersecting characteristics of hybrid workers.

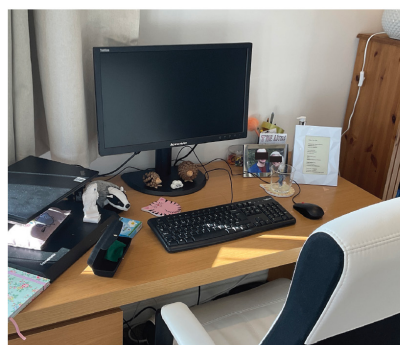
06 Hybrid working can foster social mobility but it can also disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups

Hybrid working presents significant opportunities for both young employees and their employing organisations. In our study, hybrid working arrangements were particularly important for new graduates with health issues or protected characteristics, enabling them to tailor working patterns suitable for their personal circumstances. For these individuals, hybrid working is not simply a preference, it is often a critical enabler of quality employment.

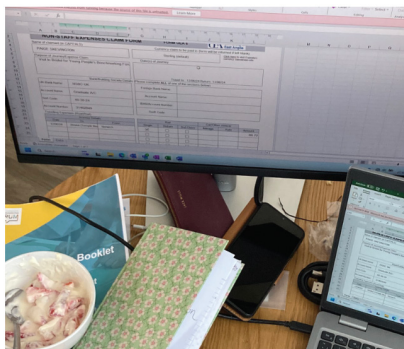
The employment opportunities hybrid working offers for disadvantaged group members have clear implications for diversifying the UK workforce. For hybrid working to foster social mobility, however, it needs to be designed and managed with inclusivity at its core so that those from disadvantaged groups can maximise the benefits of hybrid working and mitigate their personal workplace challenges.



its all about balance



a productive work session



challenging home setup!



a slower day...

Recommendations

Building on the insights from our study, we recommend the development of a comprehensive Hybrid Working Strategy - a coordinated national framework focused on planning, supporting and accelerating successful hybrid working as a driver for growth, workplace well-being and inclusion.

This comprehensive Hybrid Working Strategy should inform the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and the Employment Rights Bill.

PLAN policy responses to boost hybrid working skills

Curricula in FE and HE institutions, as well as professional bodies and graduate trainee programmes in employing organisations, should be systematically revised to consider how best to support prospective and new graduates to effectively navigate hybrid working.

There should be clear training and guidance for line managers who are managing hybrid workers so that a conducive organisational environment is created for hybrid working. This will need to include the whole employee lifecycle - e.g. induction, probation, training and development opportunities.

SUPPORT hybrid workers through further revisions to employment rights

As part of a strategy for growth, a revised Code of Practice should be developed to support existing legislation regarding flexible and hybrid working. It should include guidelines for implementation of hybrid working arrangements that ensure employer responses are both inclusive and evidence-based.

The effectiveness of support provided for new graduate hybrid workers should be monitored at a national or sectoral level. This might be captured in productivity, employee

retention and turnover as well as motivation and wellbeing measures by mode of work in key organisational sectors.

These changes could be included in future revisions of the Employment Rights Act.

ACCELERATE diversifying the workforce through hybrid working

Hybrid working should be considered not only as a flexible employment model but as a strategic lever for workforce diversification. Its potential to broaden access to employment, particularly for individuals facing structural barriers, makes it a powerful tool in advancing equality and inclusion across sectors.

National or sectoral equality action plans should incorporate mechanisms to monitor the differential outcomes of hybrid working across diverse employee groups to avoid systemic disadvantage. This includes examining access to training and development opportunities, promotions and performance management policies.

Firmly linking hybrid working with equality frameworks will allow policymakers and employers to identify and address systemic disadvantage, ensuring that hybrid arrangements contribute meaningfully to the creation of more inclusive workspaces.



mastering hybrid work



trying different approaches

Policy implications

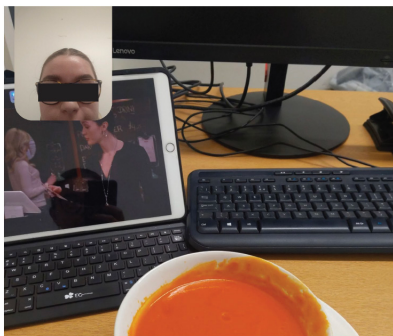
The UK Government's commitment to driving economic growth and strengthening employee rights through the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill presents a timely opportunity to address the opportunities and challenges associated with hybrid working. The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy identifies a number of interventions around skills development to support the growth of core sectors in the UK in the face of skills shortages identified through the Invest 2035 consultation. Hybrid working skills and practices are, however, currently missing from the planned bill.

If the potential of hybrid working as a lever for growth is to be realised, hybrid working skills and practices should be formally recognised and embedded in the Employment Rights Bill. As technology continues to reshape entry-level roles, particularly through the integration of AI, hybrid working skills and practices will require ongoing review in collaboration with core sectoral stakeholders.

Policies that consider the specific needs of hybrid workers, including new graduates, are essential to ensure that organisations develop the skills required to recruit and retain a hybrid workforce that can contribute to the growth of the UK economy.

Hybrid working should be recognised as a strategic lever in the diversification of the future UK workforce, with the potential to reshape the UK's talent pipeline and advance the 'Get Britain Working' agenda. By broadening access to employment for underrepresented groups, hybrid arrangements can play a pivotal role in promoting social mobility and workplace inclusion.

Hybrid working should be considered fundamental to sustainable growth plans as it can support productivity, employee wellbeing and workplace inclusion. To fully realise this potential, there is a strong need for a comprehensive Hybrid Working Strategy to inform the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and the Employment Rights Bill.



feeling lonely



working at the cafe



Social Thursdays

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