REMOTE WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RESULTS OF THE BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART B: QUALITATIVE DATA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report details the content analysis of staff responses to the open-ended questions within University of Aberdeen survey about remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this summary is to provide a very brief overview of the key points from each section of the analysis.

Section 1: Positive actions taken by the University during the Covid-19 crisis

- **Communication:** A large number of staff felt that communication during the crisis was timely, empathetic, and informative. The frequency of communication from senior management was praised, particularly the honesty and clarity provided.
- **Taking action:** Many staff commented on the University's quick response to the pandemic, moving teaching online and staff off campus swiftly and effectively.
- **Support:** Some staff felt the support provided at a University level was multifaceted (including several strands such as mental health and practical measures including blended learning support) and prioritised staff and student wellbeing.
- **Remote work:** Numerous staff reported that the University had taken steps to provide IT support and facilitate remote working following lockdown.

Section 2: General issues and concerns raised by working arrangements

- **Issues relevant to communication**
  - **Excessive:** The primary issue, raised by a proportion of staff, was an excessive number of online meetings (usually using Teams). Staff felt this led to work progress being halted and a feeling of 'living online'.
  - **Ineffective:** A small proportion of staff indicated that some aspects of communication during the pandemic could be made more effective via streamlining and further management oversight.
  - **Management:** Issues raised around communication management included the timing of emails, a need for increased flexibility and aspects such as recording meetings / taking minutes.
  - **Acknowledgement:** Some staff raised the issue that their managers were not always compassionate or empathetic to individual circumstances. A proportion of staff also indicated that it was difficult to know how to give feedback or raise concerns.
- **Lack of progression and security**
  - **Career progression:** A proportion of staff raised the issue of career progression within the pandemic. This had two main aspects: concerns around the promotions exercise being halted / cancelled, and issues accessing training (request for increased online training sessions).

- o **Financial and job security:** A high proportion of staff raised concerns about long-term job security – in some cases this was linked to being furloughed. There were also several concerns about conducting research and securing grants during the pandemic, and the impact this might have in terms of both security and progression.

Section 3: Work-life balance

- **Workload and mental health:**
  - o **Workload:** A proportion of staff reported that they were experiencing increased workload, often related to the online pivot (teaching). Staff also expressed feelings of unfairness in relation to workload allocation.
  - o **Well-being:** A large number of staff raised the issue of excessive workloads impacting mental health and well-being. This was worsened by feelings of social isolation and linked to increased stress and anxiety.
- **Caring responsibilities**
  - o **Work-care impact:** Several staff indicated that their workload and caring responsibilities were difficult to balance. They emphasised that recognition of increased care pressures, alongside an adjusted workload for those with caring responsibilities, would be appreciated.
  - o **Meetings-care impact:** The main issue reported here was the lack of flexibility associated with meeting attendance – which infringed on caring responsibilities.

Section 4: Suggestions for improvements

- **Improvements to workload, task management and training:**
  - o **Work pressures:** The key issues were a need for generally reduced workloads, a reduction in the number of meetings, alongside consideration of flexible deadlines.
  - o **Teaching changes:** It was suggested that teaching staff should have more input into the approach to blended learning, including the development of guidelines for staff implementing teaching changes.
  - o **Decision-making:** Some staff suggested the need for a more inclusive decision-making process, with further staff consultations.
  - o **Productivity and promotion:** Staff highlighted that any reductions in productivity caused through the pandemic and additional caring responsibilities should be considered in future promotions exercises.
- **Additional support:**
  - o **Carer support:** Staff with caring responsibilities felt that additional practical support would be helpful, including adjusted workloads. A survey devoted to staff with caring responsibilities to delve into the issue further was suggested.

- o **Mental health support:** Staff acknowledged that current activities to support mental health (such as mindfulness exercises) were appreciated, and suggested that the range of activities could be extended further, including provision of staff counselling services.
- o **PhD support:** Concerns about the impact of the pandemic on the progression of PhD students was raised, with the suggestion that funded extensions and additional support would be helpful.

Section 5: Practical actions to enhance working conditions and safety

- **Actions to improve current working conditions:**
  - o **Equipment / IT:** Staff highlighted the need for further IT support and equipment provision to avoid the use of personal laptops and subsequent reductions in productivity.
  - o **Access:** Linked to the point above was the expressed need to access offices and labs to collect important equipment.
  - o **Remote working guidelines:** Some staff felt that a roadmap for the future of remote working, and the return to campus, is needed.
  - o **Support:** A number of staff highlighted the need for more inclusive support, including support for members of staff currently on campus, in addition to those remote working.
- **Actions to enhance safety:** Issues around safety primarily involved the return to campus, with the need for PPE, cleaning materials and appropriate health and safety precautions highlighted.

Section 6: Changes that should be adopted moving forward

- **Remote working:** A high proportion of staff indicated that working from home had proved productive, and that retaining the ability to work from home, ideally with some regularity (such as 2 days per week) would be appreciated. Many people referred to the enhanced flexibility working from home provides, particularly when balancing caring responsibilities.
- **Greener University:** Numerous staff highlighted that several of the measures introduced during the pandemic, including working from home, online meetings and paperless admin, could all benefit the environment (e.g. lower carbon footprint).
- **Staff socialisation and wellbeing:** Several staff indicated that the social activities promoted during the pandemic – such as online quizzes, mindfulness sessions, and group activities, had helped to promote a greater sense of community. They felt it was important to carry on these actions in the future, both for building community and to enhance wellbeing.

- **Online teaching:** Some aspects of online teaching were highlighted as being very effective, particularly online assessments. Staff suggested that these aspects could remain online permanently, beyond the pandemic.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Human Resources and the Applied Psychology & Human Factors Lab collaborated to design and analyse the current project: assessing University of Aberdeen's response to Covid-19 to improve staff well-being in the future. In February 2020, the University of Aberdeen began regular communications with staff and students regarding Covid-19; in mid-March 2020, face-to-face teaching was suspended, and campus went into lockdown.

The literature on remote work presents a number of positive and negative factors to working from home, ranging from flexible work hours and increased life and job satisfaction to lacking communication and feeling isolated from colleagues and institution (Eddleston, & Mulki, 2017; Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013; Staples, 2001; Wheatley, 2017). However, the pandemic prompted an unprecedented situation where the working population transitioned to working from home out of necessity rather than convenience and the transition contained stressors including family responsibilities, health concerns, and general safety uncertainty.

Preliminary studies on remote work during Covid-19 emphasize the importance of employers addressing employee well-being (Prasad, Rao, Vaidya, & Muralidhar, 2020), keeping open communication (Prasad & Vaidya, 2020), combating isolation (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), and providing technical support (Costa & Tumagole, 2020). Feelings of isolation and work/family conflicts are common with remote work but amplified during the pandemic as isolation is not limited to workhours and general stressors exacerbate conflicts (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Prasad & Vaidya, 2020). Protective factors mitigating employee stress and lack of well-being include: regular, managerial communication (Costa & Tumagole, 2020); positive organizational climate and policy (Prasad et al., 2020; Prasad, Vaidya, & Mangipudi, 2020); and organizational support with regards to training opportunities and carer-support to facilitate the adjustment period to working from home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The current project implemented a mixed-methods survey to assess the effectiveness of Covid-19 procedures put in place by the University of Aberdeen and identify specific strong and weak points in the University's response.

METHOD

Participants

Staff and PGR students from the University of Aberdeen were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey. Survey invitations were distributed via email by the University of Aberdeen Human Resources department. A total of 1445 responses were received. To view a break-down of the sample demographics and employment information please refer to the first, quantitative, report.

Survey

The survey was developed by the University Human Resources department, in consultation with both campus trade unions and staff forums. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions (see quantitative report for analysis of quantitative questions). A total of five open-ended qualitative questions were included in the survey:

1. Is there anything you think the University has done particularly well during the Covid-19 crisis?
2. Is there anything you think the University could have done, or could do better during the Covid-19 crisis?
3. Is there anything that the University could have done or could do better to support you in providing you with flexibility in your work activities to enable you to accommodate caring responsibilities during the Covid-19 crisis? (Caring responsibilities differ from person to person, please feel free to share your own challenges and what support/assistance would help with these).
4. What concerns you the most as a result of the Covid-19 crisis regarding your work? (e.g. a lack of appropriate equipment / work-space to work effectively, childcare commitments, other caring commitments, workload, mental health, other?).
5. From your recent experience of working during the Covid-19 crisis, are there any changes you would like to see the University adopt on an ongoing basis?

Data analysis

The data derived from responses to the qualitative questions were analysed using directed qualitative content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) on a question by question basis – with one report author allocated to each question.

- The first stage of coding was inductive and manifest, with initial codes developed based on the semantic information provided by respondents. This was done to ensure the codes remained close to the information provided.

- Second, all initial codes were then considered and refined or edited to ensure codes were representative of the data, made sense, and did not overlap.
- Third, after the initial coding stage was completed the report authors paired up and each coded 100 responses from another question (different to the question each author had initially coded). A test of inter-rater reliability was then conducted to ensure coding reliability for each question.
- The fourth stage of the analysis process involved the generation of categories wherein each author analysed their codebook to determine patterns within the data relevant to the questions posed.
- Finally, each category was labelled and defined, with the clustered codes checked and confirmed by the lead author.

At the final stage it became apparent that categories were repeated, or overlapped, across questions. As a result, the analysis is organised according to type of category, as opposed to question, to avoid unnecessary repetition of information across results sections.

Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability analysis was conducted using Cohen's Kappa to determine consistency in coding across raters for the five questions. In each case raters cross coded the first 100 responses for each question. The results indicated a very good level of agreement for each question (a k of 0.7 or above is generally considered to indicate a good level of agreement between raters): Q1 ($k = .98$), Q2 ($k = .98$), Q3 ($k = .90$), Q4 ($k = .94$), Q5 ($k = .95$)

RESULTS

Section 1: Positive actions taken by the University during the Covid-19 crisis

Analysis for this section was based on responses to the first qualitative question within the survey: 'Is there anything you think the University has done particularly well during the Covid 19 crisis?' Staff primarily identified actions taken by the University before and during lockdown, which they felt improved their experience.

1.1 Positive practices improved staff experience

The qualitative analysis identified four key categories - one category included two subcategories - within the data: communication, taking action, support, and remote work (table 1.1).

Table 1.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding actions taken by the University that improved staff experience during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Communication: *Staff felt communication throughout the pandemic was timely, transparent and kept staff informed without striking panic.*	Good communication	352
	Kept informed/updated	226
	Initial response/communication	226
	Email communication	132
	Senior Management communication	122
	Supportive/reassuring tone	117
	Transparent and direct communication	117
	Opportunity to ask questions	21
	Timely communication	19
	Regular team meetings	17
	Honesty is imperative	14
	Friday newsletters	6
Taking Action: *Staff felt the University responded promptly, kept staff financially secure and implemented online learning quickly.*	Quick response to pandemic	120
	Closed campus	43
	Preventative preparation	32
	Action Pre-UK lockdown	32
	Better response than other institutions	32
	Job security	31
	Allowed remote work	25
	SMT salary cut	15
	Taking responsibility	13
	Financial security	12
	Quick transition to online teaching	11

	Suspend face-to-face meetings	10
	Financial transparency	10
	Furlough scheme	9
	Re-establish trust in administration	9
	No detriment policy	4
	Returning to campus safely	4
	Cancel L1/L2 assessments	2
Support: *Staff felt the university provided technical and emotional support from various levels of management, protected physical and mental health, and provided resources.*	*Technical/Practical:*	
	Top-down support	57
	Line management	49
	Practical support	27
	Multifaceted support	21
	Leadership	21
	Student support	13
	Head of School	10
	Research Finance support	7
	Blended Learning support/CAD	7
	Library resources	5
	Covid-19 admin team	5
	Encouraged seeking manager support	3
	Emotional/Wellbeing	
	Respite Days	113
	Prioritize Staff/Student health and well-being	65
	Mental health and well-being	53
	Wellbeing online support opportunities	41
	Supportive Environment	40
	Feeling Community, though? apart	30
	Compassion and understanding	30
	Staff feeling cared for	29
	Facilitate colleague interaction	16
	Mindfulness	16
	Regular Check-In's with staff	15
	Social Media Use	14
	Boosting Morale	12
	Increased productivity from Support	5
	Pastoral Support	4
Remote work: *Staff identified factors that made the transition to remote work easier: the university provided resources, understood staff concerns, and implemented IT changes quickly.*	IT support	148
	Providing IT and miscellaneous resources	87
	Delivering (IT) resources for remote work	76
	Appreciating individual challenges/feelings	72
	Smooth transition to remote work	59
	'Teams'	54
	Understanding Struggling with workload	51
	Online training and courses	49
	Flexibility	47
	Responsive to work/carer balance	45
	Adaptive IT staff	33
	IT issues handled swiftly	22
	Allowed pick-up of resources	8
	Access to online teaching resources	6
	Allow resources home prevented issues Help	6
	with remote work set-up	5
	Employment start remotely	4
	Policy learning from WFH	2

1.1.1 Communication

The largest theme within the data related to communication: staff ($n = 352$) appreciated the frequent communication from senior management, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic. Communication was frequently identified across genders and departments.

'The initial communication from the Senior Management Team was excellent and very consistent'. Participant (P)905

A high proportion of participants ($n = 226$) reported that updates made them feel informed and aware of how and why actions were taken.

'[E]very step of the way I have felt informed about what was happening, what steps were being taken and why'. P169

Several participants identified communication tone as a source of reassurance. Senior management taking a compassionate stance with staff encouraged a positive line of communication. Descriptively, women ($n = 67$) identified tone more often than men ($n = 36$).

'Good tone of comms to staff, focus on support, understanding of difficult situations'. P303

Transparency was particularly important to staff, with clear and honest communication imperative for building trust. Staff indicated that by acknowledging uncertainties, the University kept communications open and honest rather than offering false guarantees.

'The University is very good at keeping staff up to date with the situation and is honest about the next steps that it is taking. These are not easy times and it is certain the pandemic will have a devastating effect on our lives in the future, and the University is honest about their decisions and their knowledge on the matter - even if it is informing staff that there are uncertainties. It is more appreciated than giving false hope'. P395

Several participants ($n = 17$) mentioned regular, virtual team-meetings to have aided communication within departments both professionally and personally:

'Encouraged regular virtual team meetings'. P302

1.1.2 Taking Action

A high proportion of staff (n = 120) praised the University's quick response to the pandemic: moving teaching online and staff off campus before the official UK lockdown with evident preparation from the University's side to facilitate the move:

'(…) appreciated the quick response to move to working from home while giving sufficient time to shut down labs in an orderly manner'. P265

Multiple participants (n = 31) identified the University's stance on keeping jobs and offering financial security for furloughed staff as a commendable action. Job security and financial security was identified equally by male and female staff and was represented by all job roles:

'The message that all is being done to avoid or reduce the number of redundancies in the short-term was a bold message and helped greatly with morale'. P354

Further, participants reported pay cuts taken by Senior Management in solidarity with other members of staff as sympathetic and an appreciated sacrifice:

'I was impressed by the voluntary pay cuts the SMT took and am grateful for that sacrifice'. P527

Staff (n = 32) believed the University had handled the pandemic better than most institutions; showing greater leadership and more care for staff. Staff felt explicit actions taken by Senior Management revealed genuine care for the institution and staff.

'It is very difficult to overstate how much this (support) - and a willingness by the senior management team to embrace inclusiveness - has mitigated certain issues and inevitable frustrations. I am privy to the antics of those who purport to manage another Uni and who have taken exactly the opposite approach and by so doing have maxed out the stress levels for those unfortunate enough to work there'. P1077

1.1.3 Support: Technical/Practical & Emotional/Wellbeing

Multifaceted support targeting both practical and personal aspects of the pandemic made staff feel well taken care of. Various levels of management: Senior Management, Head of Schools and Line Managers was identified as effective. Line manager support was identified by members of staff from all departments except Law and Research and Innovation. Respite days

and prioritizing staff and student health and well-being improved morale and aided the transition period at the beginning of lockdown.

'At the early stage of lock-down the University provided staff with two ex-gratia days (Fridays) to allow staff to get used to WAH, which was greatly appreciated. Instructed staff to take regular breaks and keep themselves well. Informed staff to contact supervisors/line managers if any problems arose from WAH'. P224

Staff identified excellent mental health and wellbeing support with initiatives to facilitate colleague communication and community, mindfulness sessions, and general compassion, which made staff feel cared for. Both male ($n = 9$) and female ($n = 16$) members of staff reported feeling cared for by the University. Online support specific to well-being negated feelings of isolation and provided opportunities for members of staff to maintain contact despite the distance. Mental health support also helped members of staff who were particularly affected by the pandemic by offering counselling and pastoral services. Daily mindfulness sessions were identified as helpful by members of staff:

'The University has kept us very well informed throughout the crisis and has endeavoured to provide us with as many support opportunities as possible. Between the PG forum, initiatives such as Pawsitivity or other occasions to meet and talk with people, it was great to feel a sense of community, compassion and solidarity within the University networks'. P90

1.1.4 Remote Work

Staff identified provision of equipment and online courses to facilitate the transition to working from home as especially important and well done by the University:

'Making good practical efforts, within constraints, to ensure we are as well-equipped as possible to work at home (e.g. IT services arranged for me to have a docking station and monitor so I am not bent over a laptop screen). Provision of courses and support for transitioning teaching to online (and blended going forward)'. P261

IT support was identified as the most important factor to facilitate effective home-working and the IT department was praised for their rapid, adaptive response to working online and for addressing issues swiftly:

'Support from IT service desk has been amazing. Queries were addressed very quickly even in the early days of the lockdown'. P337

Teams was identified as an important contributor to effective remote work by all departments:

'Access to Teams and other support software has been vital to keeping me and others working'. P52

Respondents highlighted responsiveness to work/carer balance from senior management, head of schools, line managers and colleagues. Descriptively, women ($n = 24$) identified tone more compared with men ($n = 14$):

'There has been a huge amount of support as a working parent and I think the University has really gone over and above to allow people to manage their caring roles and their work life'.

P497

Section 2: General issues and concerns raised by working arrangements

This section discusses the analysis of responses relevant to worries, concerns and issues directly related to the working environment, including aspects such as communication, a lack of security and the upcoming requirement for blended teaching delivery.

2.1 Issues relevant to communication

Table 2.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to communication during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Acknowledgement from senior staff: *A need for greater empathy and acknowledgment of struggles from managerial staff was highlighted. This included consideration of personal circumstances and better communication on an individual and group level.*	Management unsupportive/uncompassionate	13
	Uni communication/actions incongruous	9
	Work efforts unacknowledged	6
	Completely unsupported by Uni	3
	Communications/policies late	3
	Feedback/views unwelcomed	2
	Reporting struggles difficult	2
	Senior staff unresponsive	2
	Threatening communication	2
Communication problems: *Excessive MS Teams meetings are slowing progress, with some days consisting of back-to-back meetings. Staff also indicated a discrepancy between on-line and offline communication, often addressing the lack of informal, spontaneous interactions with colleagues. The top-down flow of information was also a concern, with communications from upper management being regarded as ambiguous.*	*Excessive*	
	Excessive Teams meetings	51
	Communication issues	31
	"Living" online	4
	Excessive out-of-hours communication	3
	No email etiquette	2
	Information overload	2
	Ineffective	
	No informal / spontaneous communication	23
	Online teamwork ineffective	6
	Need to streamline communication/restrict meetings	3
	Online discussion ambiguity	2
	Poor top-down communication	2
Level of information: *Staff would have preferred clearer and more consistent information, in relation to: teaching/assessments, working expectations and procedures the university were implementing as a result of COVID-19. Staff would also prefer to be consulted on decisions made by the University prior to students being informed*	Clear/concise communication	55
	Inclusive communication	17
	Inform staff prior to students	16
	PhD communication	12
	More updates	6
	Improved FAQs	6
	Consistent communication/information	6
	Organised communication	4
	Maintain levels of communication	4
	Encourage communication	4
	Diverse communication style	4
	Place-holder communication	5
	Fewer communication channels	3
Communication management: *Staff highlighted the high volume of emails/meetings*	Fewer/concise meetings	24
	Timing of emails	13

and noted communications could be more efficient. Furthermore, early communication was preferred alongside greater flexibility in terms of taking meetings/recording meetings.	Fewer emails	13
	Relevant emails	11
	Timing of meetings	5
	Efficient emails	4
	Record/take minutes	3
	Alternative meeting platforms	3
	Inclusive meetings	2
	Prior meeting slides	1
	Smaller meetings	1

Section 2.1.1: Acknowledgement

Some staff ($n = 19$) felt there was a lack of compassion and support from management with regards to acknowledging caring responsibilities and workload difficulties. Particularly where unadjusted workloads and caring duties were causing stress:

'I am a single parent (…) with home-schooling and general care needs. This has been extremely difficult, and I feel there are some departments who don't seem to understand this. I am also currently doing 2 full-time jobs (…). Management do not seem to care about this, and I am overwhelmed and very stressed'. P228

Several participants ($n = 9$) expressed that, although the University has communicated an understanding of the difficulties staff are facing, line managers have not taken action to support these communications:

'The uni has said they are supportive and understand the challenges, but nothing really concrete has been said or done. We still have the same workload, no one has asked how much we can work realistically. So, we have to manage all of this. And it is hard'. P992

Further to this, a small number of staff ($n = 3$) emphasized that they felt the University had offered no support in response to their individual circumstances, even when these circumstances were raised as being difficult / stressful:

'2 weeks ago (…) happened. Despite being aware of this, no support whatsoever has been offered, on the contrary I have been asked to carry out additional tasks (marking)'. P1244

Two staff members reported that they had found it difficult to communicate personal struggles to management. Participants identified a need for management to be proactive in identifying any potential issues which staff may be having, in terms of coping with workload or caring responsibilities, and to offer support to mitigate these:

'It is not fair to expect staff to have these awkward conversations with line managers. Line managers should recognise the needs of their staff (e.g. speak to them about caring responsibilities and proactively troubleshoot and communicate university policy on flexible

working and reduced hours - these conversations are being left by staff who are struggling to have, or not because they are not comfortable)'. P528

Participants mentioned that feedback requested by management was thereafter received as unwelcome.

'The communication at the school level has been rather poor and while we are asked for feedback, honest views are discouraged as "negative"'. P489

Section 2.1.2: Communication problems

Excessive communication

Staff raised concerns regarding excessive communication, particularly in the form of Teams meetings ($n = 51$), which significantly impacted (in some cases even bringing to a halt) their work productivity. It was stated that some working days consisted exclusively of back-to-back meetings, with very little break time in-between:

'(…) no true end to working day anymore, also the number of online meetings is rising sharply, with some staff in meetings from morning until late afternoon'. P15

This recurrent participation in online meetings, in addition to social interaction occurring online during the pandemic, lead to a feeling of "living" on-line. Staff ($n = 4$) reported that this had a negative impact on both their mental and physical health:

'Online environment and screen time for work would be manageable but also living your life online with family and friends adds to fatigue'. P1195

Additionally, and as a result of being constantly "connected" with unrealistic expectations of perpetual availability, a proportion of staff highlighted an increase in out-of-hours communication, particularly in the form of multiple, excessive, emails ($n = 3$). Concerns regarding poor email etiquette were also voiced:

'(…) a blurring of the boundaries of work and home. (…) Stricter rules on timing of emails going out, etc would be helpful e.g. if an email is sent after 17:30 then it is held back until 08:30 the next day'. P263

Ineffective communication

Some staff members also raised concerns regarding effectiveness. In general, on-line communication was regarded as being of poorer quality compared to in-person. The absence of non-verbal cues such as body language, network connectivity issues, and sound issues were frequently mentioned as contributing to a reduced flow of information between individuals, as well as a source of frustration:

'Communicating with other team members has been more difficult over MS Teams than in person. We can't read body language and sometimes the videos freeze or there is lag or blurriness, or the sound is not clear'. (P193)

Another concern raised by some members of staff ($n = 23$) focused on the lack of informal forms of communication that naturally occur during workplace conversations. The semi-formal character of meetings, alongside the issues associated with online communication, were described as leaving little room for more informal interactions between staff members. A twofold disadvantage was highlighted: first, the lack of informal communication was perceived as further contributing to feelings of isolation, as well as causing additional fatigue due to the rigid nature of online meetings; second, staff members described that it significantly inhibited productivity, as ideas or information that could normally be communicated with ease through casual conversations at work are now switched to the more time-consuming on-line alternative of emailing.

> *'Feelings of tasks taking longer or awaiting on responses from colleagues due to most communication being via email, rather than a quick phone call or face-to-face within building'. P774*

Staff ($n = 6$) also considered that online communication negatively impacted the quality of teamwork. These concerns regarded an increased degree of ambiguity in interactions which was described as causing unnecessary confusion in matters that would otherwise be straightforward, thus potentially putting a strain on amicable work relationships and resulting in less cohesive teams:

> *'Discussions which would be far easier face to face but now taking place online/virtually leaves room for ambiguity and tone being picked up wrongly, etc'. P552*

Section 2.1.3: Level of information

A proportion of staff ($n = 55$) reported a desire for clearer and more concise communication of information. Staff also reported that information, specifically related to changes to teaching, was not always efficiently shared with all members of staff, leading to an information lag and the perception of changeable decisions:

> *'Clarity in communication; on certain aspects there has a difference in what was being communicated at the top level and what has been communicated at a school level. For example it was initially communicated that pure on-line was to be the focus and then there*

was a shift to blended learning. From the top level things are being presented as up for discussion, but at school level they are being presented as decided'. P371

Staff expressed the need for the development of a more inclusive communication style. Specifically, it was reported that several staff felt excluded or over-looked when information is shared, and as a result do not feel part of the university community:

'[…] I do also think that some teams (especially support/technical staff in --) are not kept in the loop as much as others and feel less part of the university community'.

P553

Some staff (*n* = 16) also highlighted that students were sometimes given important information prior to staff. As a result, staff felt they appeared unprofessional, and that their ability to uphold their responsibilities and support students was compromised as a result:

'At the start there seemed to be communications that went out to students before staff knew anything about them. I know it was chaotic at the time, but even an hour or so notice would have been appreciated - we looked very unprofessional at times because the students knew more than we did'. P610

Section 2.1.4: Communication management

A proportion of respondents (*n* = 24) reported that there was an unnecessary level of meetings, which in some cases had the capacity to became overwhelming. Therefore, the desire for fewer/concise meetings was highlighted as this would prove to be far more effective at communicating relevant and important information:

'Communication is overwhelming and not at all effective. Initially there was an overload with online meetings, now it has shifted to very lengthy and very many emails'. P710

In addition, staff (*n* = 13) raised the issue with the timing of emails being sent out. Many staff reported emails relating to the closure of campus and changes to teaching were sent out after 5pm. This proved problematic as staff with issues or concerns regarding the information could not then contact office staff until the following day/week. This only heightened the confusion felt by many staff and students:

'Stop sending emails after 5pm. The ones sent on the 13th and 16th announcing the online teaching and building close down caused so much added chaos and confusion among staff and students that could have been handled much better before 5 when there are more people in the offices'. P919

Staff also conveyed the need for fewer emails in general:

'Too many communication emails (most have no message and are meaningless, or repeat messages and take lot of time)'. P222

Section 2.2: Lack of career progression and security

Table 2.2: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to career progression and security during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Lack of career progression: *The need for staff to continue to progress, both during the current pandemic and beyond. This included consideration of options for promotion alongside training opportunities.*	No career development	15
	More online training opportunities	10
	Delayed / unfair promotion	8
	Reinstate 2020 promotion round	5
	Provide management training	5
	Additional support for grant / contact issues	4
	Provide CPD to early career researchers	2
	Review of those currently on probationary periods	2
Economic implications: C*oncerns regarding the security of employment, as well as long-term economic implications of the pandemic on the university as a whole. A halt in research output represented a cause for concern for many, as it was considered that the pandemic has prevented grant allocations and opportunities for career development.*	Employment security	103
	Inability to do research	100
	Loss of project funding/research grants	33
	University-level economic implications	32
	Being furloughed	14
	Increased living costs	10
	Excessive unpaid overtime	7
	Diminished research output	7
	Student recruitment	6
	Employee protection	6
	Staff shortages	5
	No research visa support	4
	Inflexible financial decisions from the university	3
	Part-time working more than full-time	3
	Salary reductions	2
	Increased inequalities	2
	Pay freeze	2
	Budget cuts = services suffer	2
	Disproportionate impact on women	2
	Lack of research funding support	2

Section 2.2.1: Career progression

The key concern reported by a proportion of staff (*n* = 25) was a lack of career development and training opportunities. This encompassed both direct upskilling to learn new skills in response to Covid-19, and general encouragement for the continued provision of online training:

'Ensure staff are upskilled to use technologies, roles are adapted to accommodate this, expectations that office working as we knew it is changing and staff have to be supported and trained to change'. P1168

'Provision of online training for PhD students and others - I have heard from several of my students that this has been quite welcomed, and works better with timetables for those students who are part-time, working remotely, etc.'. P590

There were also calls for the reinstatement of the 2020 promotion round from some staff (*n* = 5). It was highlighted that the promotion process indicates the extent to which staff are valued by the University:

'Don't just tell them, the university should SHOW staff that they are valued. The university should reinstate the 2020 promotion round so that (a) staff who meet the required criteria are successful and appropriately rewarded; and (b) those who do not meet the required criteria have the appropriate opportunity to prepare for a future application'. P200

Several staff followed this with the suggestion that promotions could be awarded without any pay increase (until the current financial situation has improved), or alternatively, that staff could be given feedback on their applications along with an indication on whether the application is likely to progress when the promotions exercise is reinstated.

Section 2.2.2: Economic implications

Employment security was the largest theme within the data in this category. Staff members (*n* = 103) were predominantly concerned regarding the ways in which their jobs would be affected by the pandemic and its impact on the University's economic resources. Job loss was mentioned most frequently, followed by concerns regarding the extension of contracts, particularly those of staff members on part-time or short-term arrangements.

'Losing my job'. P41

'The thing that concerns me the most is the extension of my contract. There seems to be so much uncertainty regarding extending or not short-term contracts'. P92

'The potential for staff reductions due to balance of economic viability and requirement'. P174

The second largest theme within the data involves concerns regarding an inability to conduct research. As a result of losing laboratory access following the onset of the pandemic, many staff members (*n* = 100) have found themselves unable to run experiments, which has a twofold impact on both their individual careers, as well as the University's overall research output:

'The main problem was the fact that all the lab activities have stopped and having a number of projects that are the end stage this is frustrating and, I am afraid, will have a big impact on the final deliverable of these projects'. P84

As a direct consequence of the inability to conduct research, there were concerns surrounding the fact that a loss of research compromises subsequent grant allocations. Thus, a diminished research output could drastically impact the amount of funding allocated to the University in the future, raising additional financial concerns and compromising researchers' careers.

'Loss of research work. The loss of wet lab time has meant I cannot apply for funding and fellowships therefore my contract will end before I can get the next batch of funding'. P35

'Concern of research student progress and project delivery due to laboratory access. With current workload I am worried about both publication and grant output'. P363

Staff members have also expressed concerns about being furloughed and the uncertainty it brings. It was indicated that being furloughed adds additional pressure as workload piles up, as well as contributing to feelings of anxiety and worrying about the future.

'Having been advised out of the blue about being furloughed it brings uncertainty for the future'. P534

Several members of staff ($n = 10$) also voiced concerns regarding the increased living costs associated with remote work, questioning the long-term sustainability of the measures. It has been indicated that working from home results in additional costs to the employee such as increased electricity or phone bills, increased heating and lighting costs (especially if remote work will continue into winter). In some cases, employees have had to make modifications or buy additional equipment out of their own money to adjust to working remotely, with no appropriate compensation.

'Expense - I had to get internet installed to be able to work from home. It's fine but my bills have gone up a lot as a result'. P734

Section 3: Work-life balance

This section contains the content analysis of participant responses focused on issues around work-life balance, including juggling multiple tasks, caring responsibilities and mental health.

Section 3.1: Workload and mental health

Table 3.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to workload and mental health during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Individual workload: *Increased workload and pressures relating to marking deadlines and teaching changes were highlighted. Staff raised concerns that overworking was impacting their home life. It was felt that salaries should match the increased work efforts.*	Working longer/antisocial hours Timetable deadlines short/unrealistic Autumn term prep considerable Admin/teaching expectations increased Spontaneous teams calls/meetings Salaries don't reflect workload Student extensions impact workload No time to utilize 'help groups' No time for annual leave	45 6 6 5 4 2 1 1 1
Team workload: *Concerns regarding team workload imbalance were raised. Non-caring staff felt their workload increased due to adopting work from caring staff. Some staff were reluctant to share the heavy workload as this would burden colleagues*	Noncarer workload increase Taking on others' workload Can't share workload Taking on subordinate workload Understaffed department Team workload imbalance	4 2 2 1 1 1
Mental health & wellbeing: *Feelings of social isolation, increased stress and anxiety levels were often reported, with excessive workloads and pressure cited as contributing factors. Similarly, physical health concerns such as back pain or eye strain caused by improper home office setups, long working hours and excessive screen time were highlighted. Staff members also indicated a need for additional mental health support services.*	Excessive workload Caring responsibilities Mental health concerns Inadequate workspace/ work environment No work/life balance Isolation/No social contact Physical health concerns Long working hours Concerns for others Increased stress/frustration Home working = decreased productivity Confusion/uncertainty High fatigue/burnout Excessive demands/pressure No break time/leave opportunities Increased anxiety Personal worries about the future Inability/no time to exercise Living alone Feelings of guilt Difficulty concentrating Lack of motivation Coping well	332 309 284 242 99 79 76 58 54 47 46 40 38 35 32 29 24 12 16 15 13 13 12

	Excessive screen time	11
	Underlying health conditions/vulnerable group	11
	Sleeping issues	8
	Feeling forgotten/uncared for/excluded	8
	Difficulty stopping work for the day/ "switching off"	7
	Fear of not contributing sufficiently	4
	Improved mental health	3
	Disability	2
	Reduced stress	2
	Improved physical health	2

Section 3.1.1: Workload

Multiple staff ($n = 45$) reported working longer hours, often at antisocial times, to keep up with increased workload and to meet tight deadlines. This was found to have a negative impact on home life and quality of care given to children:

'My children have been neglected at times as there has been expectation for marking to have been completed by fixed dates. This has meant weekend, evening, night-time working, which has impacted significantly on home life'. P539

Additionally, overworking to meet heightened workload demands was highlighted as having a negative influence on both the mental health of staff and the quality of work which was produced:

'To manage workload I often have to work late at nights and start early in the morning. This definitely has an impact on my quality of work and my mental health'. P782

Participants ($n = 11$) reported that preparations for the new semester (including the online pivot) were contributing to their increased workloads, with some deadlines proving to be unrealistic or given at very short notice:

'Tasks should not be shovelled onto staff at short notice with sometimes less than 12 hour deadlines - such as the exercise of mounting the teaching timetable for next year'. P682

Concerns were also expressed with regard to workload imbalance at the team level. It was identified that a perceived imbalance of workload could create a sense of inequality and produce negative feeling toward team members:

'A lot of the workload of people who have caring responsibilities are being lumped on us. We want to help, but we also have limits. We seem to be carrying more than we should now because we are seen as people who don't have any issues just now, just because we are not carers'. P110

Section 3.1.2: Mental health and well-being

The largest theme within the data encompasses concerns related to staff members' mental health. Due to both the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic and the ever-increasing

pressure of simultaneously balancing excessive workloads and ($n = 332$) additional responsibilities (e.g. caring commitments, $n = 309$), many participants have reported experiencing mental health difficulties as a result of transitioning to remote work:

'The lack of separation between work and home blurs the lines between working and non-working hours. Lockdown means that any holidays also take place in the same location. This is all detrimental to mental health'. P45

Isolation was among the most prevalent concerns in this category. Staff members ($n = 79$), especially those living alone, have reported feeling increasingly isolated as a result of being deprived of social contact outside the online work medium:

'Mental Health - I live by myself and it has been very isolating'. P135

'Lack of social interaction with colleagues has had insidious effect on mental health overall'. P329

Alongside feelings of social isolation, the pressures associated with the pandemic have also led to staff members raising concerns regarding increased stress levels. The stress was predominantly related to balancing excessive workloads and caring commitments, as well as increased pressures and unrealistic expectations from the University, with reports that there had been few adjustments made to account for the drastic changes in how work is being conducted.

'Pre-existing pressures of work now worse. (…) No support in terms of well-being. It has been said expectation of through-put is lower but no adjustment has been made to workload, reallocation of resources, extending deadlines or delaying work'.P131

Staff also reported increased feelings of anxiety ($n = 29$) surrounding the pandemic. The pressures of work, the uncertainty and long-term characteristic of the situation as a whole, along with personal worries regarding the future, have been named as factors contributing to developing and perpetuating increasingly anxious mental states:

'Pressure and uncertainty has led to increased feeling of anxiety for myself'. P146

'I am anxious about the long term nature of this crisis'. P314

Section 3.2: Issues balancing workload and care responsibilities

Table 3.2: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to workload and care responsibilities during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (n)
Work-care impact: *Staff with caring responsibilities felt that high workloads impacted the quality of care they could give. In turn, care responsibilities were impacting time to address these workloads, causing reduced productivity or overworking. Staff highlighted that recognition of increased care pressures (particularly for women) and an adjusted workload for those with caring responsibilities would be appreciated.*	Work/care imbalance	57
	Heavy/unadjusted workload	54
	Lacking time for work/research	26
	Care responsibilities impact productivity/performance	18
	Caring impacts flexibility/availability	11
	Needs flexible workhours	11
	Feeling exhausted/tired	10
	Carer/noncarer workload inequity	9
	School children – blended schooling challenges	9
	Mental energy impacted by caring responsibilities	8
	Tasks taking longer to complete	7
	Care difficulties unacknowledged	7
	Lack of breaks/downtime	5
	Guilt when prioritising care	2
	Lab/shift work impractical with care responsibilities	1
Meetings-care impact: *It was highlighted that the number and length of Teams meetings had an impact on the flexibility of caring staff. This impacted their flexibility to home-school children effectively. Staff felt that greater flexibility to attend meetings and the ability to catch up on missed meetings would be appreciated.*	Too many meetings/emails	13
	Meetings too long	13
	Meetings limit personal flexibility	4
	Meeting times inflexible	2
	Meetings impact care quality	2
	Can't access missed meetings	1

Section 3.2.1: Work-care impact

Staff with caring responsibilities felt that unadjusted workloads ($n = 54$) were impacting the quality of care they could give. Equally, it was indicated that caring responsibilities were infringing on the time available to manage normal workloads. Staff expressed that this imbalance caused feelings of stress due to reduced levels of productivity:

'Having a 1 year old and both parents trying to work is extremely difficult. Only one of us is getting to work at a time and the other is having to look after our daughter. Doing bit part working / parenting feels like you actually accomplish nothing apart from stressing that you aren't managing to do anything'. P1219

Several participants also expressed the increased pressures felt by female members of staff in particular, as a result of often being the primary care giver along with keeping up with full time workloads:

'I am now with the University of Aberdeen in a full-time role and I also have a 2.5 year old at home and it is difficult to work when you are also having to attend to the every need of a

toddler. Even with my husband at home, the childcare duties seem to land much more on your shoulders if you are a woman'. P1433

Staff identified that their workloads had increased over lockdown. However, managing heavy workloads was proving difficult, as a result of heightened care pressures:

'The reality is my workload has increased but my time available to address it has drastically decreased as a result of my caring responsibilities'. P982

Participants (*n* = 18) indicated that care responsibilities were having an impact on the mental energy available to complete work-related tasks. Staff expressed that it was difficult to carry out work to the same standard as they felt that their 'head space' was occupied with care-related duties:

'A major challenge is head space. Home-schooling and caring for children and working online are doable, but it is very difficult to then find time to think about curriculum, developments, and research in the same way'. P28

Section 3.2.2: Meetings-care impact

Several staff (*n* = 13) felt that Microsoft Teams meetings were too long. These long meetings were impractical for staff with caring and home-schooling responsibilities, due to repeated interruptions from children:

'I have young children who need to have someone sitting with them at all times to manage their schoolwork and there is multiple work meetings that can last 2 hours +. It is impossible to concentrate in these long meetings without distractions'. P1287

Some participants (*n* = 4) indicated that meetings limited their personal flexibility. Meetings during core hours of the day impacted carers' availability to assist children with home schooling when help was required:

'There are lots of meetings on now, all during core hours when school is on, which means that some days, I cannot provide any help to my children with their school assignments when they are struggling. They feel they cannot ask me as I'm always on Teams'. P1259

Staff (*n* = 2) highlighted that meeting times were often inflexible and were scheduled for specific times. This created extra pressures and difficulties for caring staff, as they felt obligated to prioritise meetings alongside managing demanding caring responsibilities.

'I have three children age 4 and under, which is exceptionally demanding when you add work into the mix. I have sometimes found that meetings have been scheduled with little room for manoeuvre, and as my husband is also working, it has sometimes led to very difficult juggling of responsibilities'. P848

Section 4: Suggestions for improvements

This section focuses on staff suggestions to improve the ongoing response, and actions, taken by the University in response to Covid-19. Staff reported several potential improvements which spanned multiple areas including training, mental health support, managing workload and supporting career progression.

Section 4.1: Improvements to workload, task management and training

Table 4.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to workload, task management and training during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Meetings: *Staff suggested that, going forward, less or shorter meetings would be more effective. Alternating meeting days and checking staff availability would help increase attendance for staff with caring responsibilities. It was also highlighted that scheduling specific "offline" periods, where no meetings occur would be helpful.*	Consider less meetings/calls	12
	Consider "offline" periods	10
	Consider scheduled meeting periods	6
	Consider recording meetings/provide minutes	3
	Non-compulsory meeting attendance	2
	Consider shorter meetings	1
	Check staff availability for meetings	1
	Alternate meeting days	1
	Consider breaks between meetings	1
	Consider meeting agenda preview	1
Work pressures: *Easing of work pressures such as: reduced or dispersed workload. Easing of certain deadlines and policies was also suggested, along with funding for staff assistance or cover.*	Consider workload reduction	36
	Consider extended/flexible deadlines	9
	Consider dispersed workload	8
	Consider fewer/shorter workdays	5
	Funding for staff assistance/cover	2
	Consider easing certain policies	1
	Understand workload stress impact	1
Teaching changes: *Staff expressed the need for personal input in terms of blended teaching structure and for the University to acknowledge this advice. Staff also highlighted the need for specific guidelines and resources to be provided to aid blended teaching.*	Improve communication – teaching changes	6
	Allow staff input – blended teaching structure	4
	Acknowledge staff advice/feedback	3
	Provide online/blended teaching guidance	3
	Efficient decisions needed – teaching changes	2
	Provide blended teaching materials	1
	Adjust expectations – distance teaching	1
Decision making: *Staff reported they would prefer a more inclusive decision making process whereby their input be taken into consideration. They further called for more decisive decisions to be made that are consistent and clear.*	Decisive decisions	14
	Consult staff	13
	Inclusive decision making	9
	Clear decision making	7
	Centralised decision making	5
	Transparency	5
	Concise/consistent decisions	4
	Address issues/inequalities	3
	Clear graduation plans	2
	Faster decision making	2
	Thought-out decisions	2
	Left to staff	1

Productivity and promotion: *Staff highlighted it would be important that any reduction in productivity due to the pandemic and/or caring pressures should be considered in terms of impact on promotion and progression opportunities.*	Don't penalise productivity decrease	8
	Ensure career stability	3
	Empathy regarding productivity decrease	2
	Contract extensions for carers	1
	Acknowledge care impact – probation	1
	Commit to fair promotions	1
	Don't freeze promotions	1

Section 4.1.1: Reduce work pressures

Staff (*n* = 36) indicated that, in response to an increase in pressures due to the pandemic, a reduction in workload would be beneficial. This included the potential option to be furloughed or the opportunity to disperse one's workload to others:

> *'I have an ongoing issue, but it has been exacerbated by this, so very difficult to control. Some workload relief, or possibly furlough and replacement person for some of it?' P348*

Further to a reduced workload, some participants (*n* = 9) expressed that having the ability to complete tasks at a later date, in response to increased home pressures, would be appreciated. This would help to ensure staff burnout is avoided:

> *'I end up getting up very early to complete some work before starting to help the children. It makes for a very long day. Reduced workload would help and the real power to say, "I just can't complete that today"'. P830*

A proportion of staff (*n* = 12) suggested that a reduction in the number of Microsoft Teams meetings would allow for better management of care responsibilities. It was felt that adopting asynchronous ways of working might be more effective and help to alleviate the feeling of having to be constantly available:

> *'Have less MS Team meetings. The synchronous nature of this way of working is difficult to manage alongside caring responsibilities. Trying to think of ways of working that enable more asynchronous activity would be helpful'. P242*

Implementing "offline" periods, where no Microsoft Teams meetings or instant messaging occurs was suggested. This would allow for staff to have a guaranteed period of downtime and should help to reduce stress:

> *'Small changes such as not scheduling meetings between say 12.30pm and 1pm to enable a proper lunch break or having breaks from the instant messaging of Teams during these periods would make it easier to switch off for at least a short period'. P1214*

Staff reported that the option to extend certain deadlines and soften response pressures would help to ensure a better work-life balance. A need for acknowledgement, in terms of workload demands caused by the pandemic, was also expressed:

'The main thing is an awareness that we are having to juggle work and life much more than usual. So, we need longer deadlines for things like marking and it is unreasonable to expect instant responses'. P127

Section 4.1.2: Teaching changes

A proportion of staff (*n* = 6) indicated the need for better communication from senior management with regard to teaching changes and preparations for the Autumn term. Some staff expressed feelings of frustration as result of experiencing what they considered to be ineffective instruction from leadership:

'Senior members of staff have requested timetables to be completed within 2 weeks (an exercise that can take up to 2 months sometimes) and it has been done in the wrong order. We should have understood how we want to deliver the teaching and assess it and then do the timetable', P535

Further, several participants suggested that it would be helpful if communications about teaching were written with greater clarity and sent out to staff in good time:

'There's been little transparency and a delay in sending out important communication regarding changes to teaching delivery'. P489

Some staff (*n* = 4) also reported that they would appreciate greater input in terms of the blended teaching structure for the coming term and for the University to acknowledge this advice:

'Listen to the experts who have been teaching for years or decades, and allow us to make appropriate judgements e.g. on how and what to teach next term. We want the best for the students too. In the long-run they will not be happy if we over-promise and under-deliver'. P451

Section 4.1.3: Decision-making

A proportion of respondents (*n* = 14) expressed the notion that the University was, on occasion, indecisive. This primarily related to teaching format; staff reported their need for a decision to be made, ideally a commitment to online teaching for the first semester. This would enable both staff and students to make necessary arrangements and have clear expectations:

'Make a committed decision to online teaching in HS1 2020/2021. There seems to be a desire to offer the best of both worlds (online and offline) despite recognizing that a majority of on campus teaching won't be able to function as normal. Committing to online would give a clear instruction to staff and prospective students about what could be expected and allow individuals to plan in an informed way. […]'. P753

A proportion of staff (*n* = 13) also indicated the desire to be more involved during decision making processes. This was linked to the development of a safe working environment:

'It would have been better to be more involved from the initial stages making the workplace safer - periodically sanitizing door handles, setting up sanitation stations around the campus; offering free face masks to client-facing staff. Surely our academic staff could have been consulted and fed these ideas on what can be done besides putting posters around campus telling people to wash their hands'. P266

Although several staff indicated they would like to be more involved in decision-making, not all staff were clear on how they might do this (e.g. not clear how to join Covid-19 response groups):

'I know there are several working groups coordinating School responses to COVID. However, I don't understand which Teams working groups I can or should join to contribute to that response. I feel I've lost that message somewhere and I think we can do a better job of communicating how we're organising to respond and expecting staff to contribute. I'm not necessarily worried about the response plan, I'm worried about how I can contribute to that plan'. P810

Section 4.1.4: Productivity and promotion

Staff (*n* = 8) indicated the importance of noting any reduction in productivity, due to the pandemic and/or caring responsibilities, within promotion and progression opportunities. It was felt that women in particular were facing challenges in terms of maintaining productivity and that this should be acknowledged:

'Recognise that women face a greater challenge during this time, not only due to caring responsibilities but also due to the much greater toll on research productivity. Several publishers are tracking gender-based disparity in research productivity and submissions to journals during this COVID -19 period and the results are unambiguous. The university could reduce the burden on its female workers by (1) recognizing this disparity; (2) confirming women workers will not be penalised for managing the crisis in less than optimal ways'. P468

This was linked to the need for the University to ensure career stability, particularly for women and those with caring responsibilities. Measures to ensure equity between caring and non-caring staff were suggested, such as allowing contract extensions for caring staff:

'What formal measures will the university institute to help the careers of those carrying these double burdens? In the short term will carers be given automatic extensions of their contracts? In the long term will carers be given access to ring-fenced funding to help them catch up with peers who don't have the double burdens? Will they be given preference in

prestige committees or promotions? Without substantial efforts towards equity these people (vastly disproportionately women) will be disadvantaged for the rest of their careers'. P829

Section 4.2: Additional support required

Table 4.2: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding issues relevant to additional support requirements during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Carer Support: *Staff with caring responsibilities felt that it would be helpful if the University offered practical support to address caring responsibility pressures e.g.: a survey of caring responsibilities and a policy issued specifically for caring staff. Adjusted workloads and expectations for carers were also suggested. A need for better understanding of individual caring pressures and the impact of these on work performance was also expressed.*	Calculate workload to consider care responsibilities Consider female care responsibilities Adjust expectations – caring staff Acknowledge caring challenges Acknowledge care impact – availability Provide policy for care providers Recognise different caring responsibilities Promote self-care Consider caring responsibility survey Address carer workload inequity Understand new pressures/priorities	17 7 5 5 4 3 3 3 2 2 2
Mental health support: D*espite mental health resources being available, staff often found themselves not having the time to access them due to excessive workload, indicating that a reduction in the amount of work could allow them to better take advantage of said services. Staff would also benefit from being provided with counselling services.*	Virtual coffee mornings = beneficial for mental health Mindfulness resources = helpful for mental health Lack of mental health support No recognition of workload impact on mental health Necessity for counselling groups No time to access mental health resources	4 3 2 2 1 1
PhD Support: N*umerous concerns have been raised regarding the pandemic's impact on the career prospects of PhD students. Difficulties included a lack of access to resources for thesis writing, exceeding funding deadlines and the impact on career development.*	Limited PhD support PhD funding concerns Early career concerns PhD thesis writing difficulties	32 17 12 5

Section 4.2.1: Carer support

Several staff (*n* = 17) expressed that it would be helpful to calculate workloads to consider care responsibilities. Staff with caring responsibilities would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with senior management:

'I have two children, one of whom has additional support needs - I would appreciate clear conversations early on within disciplines regarding possible adaptation to workload models for staff in this situation'. P823

Further, it was recommended that workloads for caring staff should have adjusted timescales to accommodate for the reduction of worktime available for those with caring responsibilities.

'Recognition for work done and acceptance that priorities of workload need to be applied. I think tasks coming from management should have a set time scale applied that takes into consideration those with caring responsibilities'. P1394

Participants highlighted that women should be particularly considered when assessing workloads based on caring responsibilities:

'I would like workloads for next session to take into consideration the caring responsibilities of individuals, particularly women, during this time'. P46

It was reported that an adjustment of 'minimum expectations' should be made for staff with caring responsibilities. Staff felt that their care responsibilities should be a main focus of consideration when developing blended learning plans for the new semester.

'I would hope that the university (at all levels of management) keeps the varying constraints of staff with caring responsibilities more fully in view when drafting future guidelines of "minimum expectations" or coming up with plans for blended learning'. P1390

The importance of receiving acknowledgement and understanding of personal care responsibilities from management was highlighted by a number of staff ($n = 9$). It was indicated that all staff members with caring roles should be recognised as having the potential to experience difficulties when managing care duties alongside work. Participants also suggested that women may be less likely to seek help when experiencing work-care pressures:

'My main concern is that understanding is shown to all staff with demanding caring roles - not just those who talk openly about it (I know that's difficult to ensure from a managerial point of view). A related point, again difficult to manage, is that (some) men have tended to be the ones who draw attention to the challenges of their own childcare - women are more likely to just get on with things as best they can. I'm really saying that we should be aware that the people who shout the loudest are not always those with the biggest challenges'. P567

Section 4.2.2: Mental health support

Several staff members ($n = 4$) expressed their appreciation for the virtual coffee mornings during the lockdown period. It was stated that while these could not fully replace face-to-face interactions, they were successful in alleviating feelings of loneliness or isolation.

'What has helped are the efforts put in place by the academic department where i am physically based which has virtual coffee meets'. P403

Similar feelings were also expressed with regards to the mental health resources provided by the University, such as mindfulness techniques:

'(...) mental health - although the uni mindfulness has helped with this'. P613

Several participants, however, have voiced some concerns related to the overall mental health support from the University. For example, it was stated that while resources were provided, little to no recognition of the workload's impact on mental health was shown ($n = 2$). In practical terms, it has been suggested that the University could contribute more to raising awareness of mental health, as well as provide staff with more widespread training on both self-help techniques, as well as ways to help support their colleagues:

'Mental health of colleagues and the frustration that there is little I can personally do. University could provide more mental health awareness and training as courses that have been held have filled up very quickly'. P94

Furthermore, one participant also suggested that, upon return to work, the University could provide counselling groups for members of staff that have been particularly affected by the pandemic and are struggling to cope:

'Whether returning to campus or continuing to work from home, I believe we will all need a more compassionate employer than ever. Although difficult to implement, it would be a massively worthwhile venture if the University could offer counselling groups to those who are particularly suffering'. P1397

Lastly, the increase in workload has made some participants feel unable to access help resources, despite these being provided. It has been indicated that a reduction in workload would allow those struggling with their mental health to better access sources of support:

'Workload has gone through the roof, and while I see mindfulness courses and other resources being promoted to help mental health, I don't feel like I have time to undertake them'. P396

Section 4.2.3: PhD support

A proportion of participants ($n = 32$) expressed concerns regarding a lack of PhD student support from the University. Both PhD students, as well as supervisors, expressed worries regarding the pandemic's impact on early-career researchers and its long-term implications:

'Concern about PhD students' welfare in general as this is a group that can be very significantly affected (lab based) and the support that we can provide is limited'. P444

Potential funding losses as a result of delays, laboratory restrictions, and an overall inability to do research or get adequate extensions to compensate for this setback represented another significant concern for PhD students:

'Enormous set back from inability to perform laboratory research at a crucial time. PhD students' careers jeopardised by this and some may not recover'. P354

Similarly, early-career researchers voiced their concerns regarding the lack of support received during the pandemic. Several respondents felt that the University failed to provide them with adequate training and communication, thus leading to feelings of being left out and increased anxiety. Furthermore, it has been suggested that allowing some time for early-career researchers to focus on their skills might prove beneficial in helping them feel more secure in their role:

'I feel as though I am not making the progress I should be making. I was supposed to be attending training courses and since nothing has been put in place and my job is busier than ever I feel anxiety all the time that I am not good enough. I do appreciate that I learn on the job but this is much easier in the office as other members of staff are always available for questions. Please please consider allowing even just a day a fortnight for early career researchers to work on their skills in the absence of training courses and support from colleagues'. P199

Lastly, several participants ($n = 5$) indicated that a lack of access to laboratories and library resources caused difficulties in writing their PhD thesis, thus further delaying their progress:

'I'm in final year of my PhD writing thesis. Due to lockdown I'm writing from home. Due to limited access to journal, software licensing and also lack of writing space at home it has made my writing very difficult'. P763

Section 5: Practical actions to enhance working conditions and safety

Staff used the survey to make practical suggestions designed to improve situations or circumstances where work was more difficult than it needed to be, and to enhance safety, particularly in the context of returning to campus.

Section 5.1: Actions to improve current working conditions

Table 5.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding suggested actions to improve working conditions during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Equipment/IT: *Lack of working/IT equipment provided to staff. Many staff were reliant on personal laptops and had issues finding a suitable working environment. This had implications on productivity levels and created unnecessary stress, it was proposed a more efficient equipment extraction plan was deployed or access to offices to collect belongings.*	Provide IT/work equipment Using personal equipment IT support Improved material extraction Teaching material access Remote access issues Personal site access Software investments Deliverable printed documents Increase library content	97 26 26 23 17 7 5 2 1 1
Access: *Staff highlighted the need to access buildings/offices in order to collect essential teaching materials/documents to efficiently do their job. More information regarding this was requested*	Office / building access Access to information	28 2
Remote working guidelines: *Staff highlighted the need for more clear and responsive guidelines/roadmap to remote working – which would have been greatly beneficial in adapting. The guide should include working expectations, deadlines and teaching/returning to campus.*	Remote working support/guidelines Prior remote-working roadmap Remote working preparation	7 4 1
Support: S*upport for staff currently working on campus is immediately required. It was reported that toilet and break areas had not been cleaned for months and little procedures put in place to ensure the safety of staff. Additionally, more down days were requested. This was reported to aid in levels of stress and workload.*	Staff support-inclusive of all staff Understanding individual situations Support from managers Improved COVID-19 support/guidance Student support One-to-one sessions Staff difficulties/offer support Concern for staff Sincere tone Safe working conditions Support one another HR support An earlier survey COVID-19 victim support International student/staff support	48 17 16 14 11 8 6 5 5 5 4 4 3 2 2

	Less involvement in PGR	2
	Support available from student residence assistants	1
	Increased visibility of Principal	1
	NHS support	1

Section 5.1.1: Equipment / IT

Multiple staff ($n = 97$) expressed their desire for the provision of additional, or improved, IT/working equipment. It was felt that many staff were unable to effectively carry out their tasks with the limited amount of equipment they had available. This impacted all staff in various job roles, with the largest proportion reporting an adverse impact being those in the professional services ($n = 32$):

'Provided better access to IT facilities such as shared drives to access materials that were saved online; improved working conditions, such as desk space set up, e.g. office chairs; screens that are adjustable height wise rather than working from a laptop'. P722

Many staff ($n = 26$) raised the issue of using personal equipment due to a lack of IT/working equipment made available by the University. This proved problematic as staff reported they had experienced physical health problems as a direct result of not having appropriate work stations at home. As a preventative measure, it was suggested that permission could be given for staff to take office chairs home:

'Access to some office equipment at an early stage would have been good. Office chairs in particular have been a problem with staff having issues with their backs in particular due to poor seating and when requested to be able to get an office chair this went nowhere. For some staff it was so bad they had to go and buy a chair online'. P730

It was further noted that IT support needs to be more responsive in aiding those with IT/computer issues. The length of time waiting was seen to have a negative impact on some staff, with reports of delayed work while waiting for advice:

'I've had IT issues with my set up and university laptop. Sometimes it takes several days before anyone gets back to you from the ServiceDesk. Very challenging working from home especially if you are waiting around for advice when things aren't working with your IT'.

P1060

Section 5.1.2: Access

Several respondents ($n = 28$) described the need to gain access to buildings/offices. It was noted that staff appreciated the help from fellow colleagues in the delivering of certain items although not all items could be explained and obtained. It was highlighted that access is highly important to collect essential working/teaching equipment:

'At this point of slowly lifting lockdown restrictions, it is frustrating that we cannot return to our offices. In many cases it is not understandable why. For academic staff (….) our offices are our 'laboratory' and essential for undertaking our work. Even with the kind offer of colleagues collecting stuff from our offices and delivering this at home, it is impossible to describe every item you need (e.g. books, arch files, folders')'. P661

Section 5.1.3: Remote working guidelines

A proportion of staff ($n = 7$) indicated the need for clear support/guidelines on working remotely, ideally in the form of a roadmap. Specifically, some staff were unsure of working expectations and whether they were required to work their normal hours whilst caring for others:

'It would have been beneficial to have some more explicit guidelines on homeworking. eg. 'You are not required to work your normal hours but these should still be completed in the course of a week' or 'it is ok for staff to not fulfill their usual working hours due to accessibility/caring responsibilities'. P116

Section 5.1.4: Support

A proportion of staff ($n = 48$) described feelings of an uneven distribution of support amongst different departments/contract types. Many felt overlooked and under-appreciated with no/little support. It was felt that focus was given to home workers and not critical workers who remained on campus:

'Feel very let down by the University - I have been continually working on site during the lock down period the majority of the support has been mostly aimed at the home workers but a lack of support for the critical workers'. P1282

It was further felt by some staff that there had been a lack of support for those on fixed term contracts. Specifically, staff with contracts due to end during the pandemic need additional financial support and aid in seeking new employment:

'I've heard that some people on fixed term contracts that ended during this period, left with limited support in place. Support should have been offered to those individuals from a employability and financial perspective, particularly if they had no other job to go to'.

P426

A number of responses ($n = 16$) highlighted the need for more support from management in relation to mental health and working expectations/workload. It was stated that management ought to be more understanding of staffs' abilities in producing such a high quality of work and the potential impact of such demands on worker health:

'I think there need to be more honest, open discussions between line managers and staff (at all levels of the organisation) about workload, mental health/mood, energy levels, and how much we will all really be able to deliver between now and September. Some people in management seem to think that we can deliver a rolls royce blended/online experience, when the reality is that even trying to deliver that might cause real harm to staff'. P248

Importantly a number of staff noted a lack of support for those still working on campus. The impression was that there were few guidelines or procedures put in place to protect the welfare and health of these essential staff. Several staff requested improved COVID-19 protection plans and a higher level of cleanliness on campus:

'More could have been done to ensure the welfare of staff still having to work on site. Our toilet and welfare facilities were not being cleaned during the first two months of lockdown, and also safe working risk assessments should have been carried out and necessary procedures put in place'. P278

Section 5.2: Actions to improve safety

Table 5.2: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding actions to improve safety during Covid-19.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Safety considerations: *Staff raised concerns about the imminent return to work, highlighting the need for guarding the safety of staff and students. A need for appropriate health and safety precautions to reduce the risk of infection was highlighted, as well as the necessary provision of personal protective equipment and imposing of social distancing measures. It was further indicated that staff would appreciate being given the option to work from home.*	Return to work/campus	98
	Loss of campus/lab access	49
	Risk of illness	47
	Social distancing	44
	Access to office/lab equipment	37
	Teaching delivery	36
	Teaching preparations	35
	Workplace health and safety measures necessary	27
	Provide safe working environment	24
	Commuting	10
	Wish to continue remote work	7
	Make cleaning products available in offices	7
	Provide PPE and shielding	7
	Lack of PPE	6
	People not following government guidance	4
	Overly prescriptive regulations	4
	Prefer working on-campus	3
	Re-opening buildings	3
	Presenteeism = risk	3
	University life disruptions	3
	Participant recruitment/Human subject studies	3
	Feeling "coerced" into remote work	3
	Accommodation guidelines for students and staff needed Public events	3
		2
	Face-to-face teaching and research continuity	2
	No government updates	2

Section 5.2.1: Safety considerations

The largest theme within the data encompassed concerns regarding staff and students' return to campus and the potential safety risks this may entail ($n = 98$). Given the high numbers of people usually present on campus and individual circumstances that make some more vulnerable to virus transmission than others, many participants across departments have voiced concerns related to both their own and others' safety upon return. Some respondents also expressed their wish to be given the option to continue remote work once the semester starts:

'My concern is like I said above is the idea of returning to campus as I do not believe this to be safe and would prefer to work from home as long as I can'. P423

'I am concerned about the return to the University. There should be permanent changes to reduce risks of infection'. P655

The risk of virus transmission upon return also represented one of the central concerns highlighted by staff ($n = 47$). Members belonging to vulnerable groups or with caring responsibilities for individuals required to shield were particularly worried about the possibility of virus transmission in their work environment upon return. Additionally, the increased risk of infection associated with face-to-face teaching delivery for prolonged periods of time (in some cases >2 hours) represented a prevalent cause for concern, being perceived as a source of unnecessary pressure. Alongside the additional workload associated with developing online modules for blended learning and the lack of access to office/lab resources due to restrictions during the summer, an increased risk of virus exposure led to face-to-face teaching delivery being perceived as both unsafe and unnecessary.

'As someone who provides care for someone in another household who is shielding it is a concern about a potential return to work and the increased risk of infection that may arise, particularly given that I share an office corridor with lab researchers and active NHS consultants'. P151

'I am also worried about pressure to be in class with students. We know that young adults are a key group for asymptomatic spread of Covid and that they are the group least likely to conform to social distancing rules - please don't force us to be in a room with them when we don't have to be. Small group teaching is likely to be a higher risk than lecture halls'. P190

Participants have similarly indicated that the provision of adequate health and safety precautions upon return to campus represented a cause for concern. A need for appropriate social distancing guidelines to lower the risk of disease transmission was highlighted, as well as a necessity on part of the University to provide adequate personal protection equipment to staff members.

'Preparations for people to return are exceptionally slow - most office workspaces in Aberdeen have Perspex installed, corridors marked up, etc and it does not appear the University are pushing this forward at speed working to dates at end September when teaching is ongoing and people need back to office spaces and working routine'. P160

'I work in a shared office with another 9 colleagues and we have a shared printer with another office of 14/15 colleagues. There are some areas of the office where social distancing is not possible and if these are to remain in place I would worry and possibly become stressed if this was ignored within the office'. P998

Section 6: Changes that should be adopted moving forward

Responses to the final open-ended question in the survey identified practices and activities staff felt should be taken on permanently (predominantly the ability to engage in flexible and home working) and was also used as an opportunity to highlight concerns and issues that had been emphasised by the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.1 Changes that are working

The qualitative analysis identified four key categories within the data: working remotely, creating a greener University, staff socialisation and wellbeing, and online teaching (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: *Inductive content analysis of question responses regarding proposed changes that should be taken forward into the future by the University.*

Category	Codes	Frequency (*n*)
Working remotely: *Staff felt that home working was productive, enhanced flexibility and should be normalised as a working pattern, with associated guidelines.*	Ability to work from home	522
	Flexible working	272
	Retain capacity for online meetings	140
	Regular home working	138
	Home working productive	124
	Normalise home working	33
	Clearer support / clarification home working	19
	Remote workers in varied locations	10
Create a greener University: *Staff highlighted that actions taken during Covid-19, including working from home, could have a positive impact on the environment and should be encouraged moving forward.*	Home working = reduced travel	57
	Home working = reduced carbon footprint	40
	Online meetings = reduced travel	34
	Paperless working and business practices	10
	Encourage less travelling	9
	More publicity and facilities for cycle to work	2
Staff socialisation and wellbeing: *The sense of community and focus on staff wellbeing was appreciated by staff. Further engagement and support in this area was recommended.*	Engagement / focus on staff wellbeing	41
	Continue with open communication	30
	Regular social meetings / chats	11
	Sense of community	11
Online teaching: *Several aspects of teaching online were reported as good practice that should continue beyond the pandemic. However, clearer guidance regarding the online pivot is needed in the immediate future.*	Increase online teaching	35
	Provide more support for online teaching delivery	17
	Online conferences	15
	Retain changes to teaching patterns	14
	More investment in online facilities	14
	Online exams and assignment submissions	12
	Recognition that not all courses can go online	3
	Clearer pathway for online teaching	2

6.1.1 Working remotely

The largest theme within the data related to remote and flexible working, with a high proportion of staff ($n = 522$) indicating that they would appreciate retaining the option of being able to work from home after the Covid-19 crisis has passed, including the option for online meetings and conferences:

'Encourage and allow much greater flexibility for homeworking on an ongoing basis'. P40

When discussing working from home staff stated that they felt they were equally, or more productive in comparison to office working. The enhanced flexibility was mentioned frequently with reference to caring responsibilities:

'For staff with caring responsibilities, the ability to work at home on either a part- or whole-time basis could be completely life changing'. P47

The issue of trust was discussed by a proportion of respondents, with several stating they felt the recent crisis had illustrated how committed and productive staff can be when working away from the office. Staff indicated that supportive guidelines should be put into place to normalise home and remote working, often in the context of staff regularly working a set number of days from home (where home working was the preference):

'Further normalising working from home as an option, providing this as an option for those who may want to work from home say 1-2 days a week rather than be in the office each week'. P312

Several participants ($n = 10$) reported that building enhanced home and remote working policies might support recruitment of staff with specific skill sets through removing the need to move to Aberdeen:

'Attracting staff to Aberdeen can be difficult because of geography; COVID-19 is showing that in my field (..) staff can work effectively from anywhere in the world, they don't need to be in Aberdeen'. P17

6.1.2 Create a greener University

Working from home was linked to reduced travel with several potential benefits ranging from reduced travel costs to a reduction in carbon footprint ($n = 40$):

'We've used 90% less fuel across 3 months which has had a great impact on our pocket that we can notice and I'm sure it'll be a big help for the environment'. P377

Staff ($n = 10$) also felt that working online, with materials produced electronically, had worked well. Maintaining a paperless approach for business and administrative materials, where possible, was recommended for environmental reasons:

'We now know for certain that the paper system is unnecessary and that the job can be easily done remotely and completely online. Hopefully, once back in the office, the majority of the system will be changed to more environmentally friendly and flexible in case more lockdowns are to come'. P395

Linked to taking a 'green' approach was the suggestion that cycling and walking to work should be further encouraged, with appropriate facilities provided:

'An increase in secure storage facilities for bikes in order to encourage people to cycle to campus. A place to change if you have cycled/run to campus'. P886

6.1.3 Staff socialisation and wellbeing

Activities to encourage and support staff socialisation during the Covid-19 pandemic were viewed positively by staff (*n* = 41), with several recommending that these types of activities be continued beyond the pandemic:

'The moves to provide social 'events' such as online coffee breaks, quizzes etc, has been excellent and I would like to see this continue where possible'. P1051

Staff felt that these activities contributed to the sense of community within the University and the feeling that staff were important and valued. This community feeling was highlighted as an important aspect to take beyond the pandemic, with potential positive effects for staff wellbeing and motivation:

'The feeling that everyone mattered and the feeling that everyone was working together for a common aim'. P1213

However, in addition to generalised community building, staff also felt that there should be an increased focus on individual wellbeing and support, particularly from line managers and often with a focus on staff who are currently furloughed:

'I feel that good line managers should have some responsibility in checking on their staff mental health, especially those on furlough who may not be "seen" in meetings as frequently'. P660

On a more general, University-wide level, the open, inclusive, communication practised by senior management was praised, with staff (*n* = 30) expressing the hope that this type of communication will continue:

'I think one of the best things about the crisis is the way that university management have communicated with staff and pulled everyone together'. P181

6.1.4 Online teaching

Staff reported a positive experience with elements of online teaching that were implemented prior to, and then during, the lockdown. The provision of online exams and assignments was viewed favourably, with some staff ($n = 12$) highlighting the advantage of typed rather than handwritten submissions, and others reporting the reduction in workload associated with conducting exams online, rather than in-person:

'Exams have worked really well online and I feel it's something we need to look at for the long term. We usually have a lot of extra work to deal with students with special provisions and having exams online has eased that dramatically'. P402

Some staff ($n = 35$) suggested that elements of teaching, with an emphasis on lectures, could move permanently online. Reasons for this recommendation included improved inclusivity, increased effectiveness and a greater emphasis on interactive teaching:

'Potentially delivery of (some) lectures/courses online should become a more permanent feature. Material will have been prepared for effective online teaching and we should use that in the future to make the f-2-f time with students more efficient; discussing and working on practical problems'. P655

Respondents also suggested that some supervision, committee meetings and training could continue to occur via Teams or via collaborative software beyond the pandemic. However, while teaching online appeared to be viewed positively, staff also highlighted the need for additional support and investment to ensure that moving online was accomplished effectively and successfully, minimising the additional work burden where possible:

'Better support for going blended for the autumn which is focused on getting the job done'.
P808

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