

# Where will people work as we exit Lockdown?

As we make slow progress out of lockdown there will be more discussion amongst businesses, Trade Unions and employees over where and when office work will take place. Many people will still have little choice. If you are a shop worker or factory staff you need to be there in person when the facility is open when it is your shift. Many others now see opening up the vista of keeping on with some homeworking after a year of working mainly or wholly from their living room. Many companies have found they can continue to meet their customer needs and fulfil their work requirements on line with many working from remote locations.

For the employee there is the advantage of not having to get up early and rely on trains or buses to reach the office, nor having to sit in the traffic jam if you go by car. You save plenty of money on the season ticket or the fuel bill. Although there is more heating and wear and tear at home, there is a substantial time and cost saving by cutting out commuting. For all those employees who have to juggle minding and maintaining a home, and looking after children or elderly relatives with paid work, the conflicts are reduced and multi tasking just got easier.

For others often living on their own life became a lot lonelier with home working. Seeing work colleagues on a zoom meeting call is not the same as having lunch or after work drinks with them and being able to swap stories and arrange social events over the coffee maker. Those who live in smaller properties, or have well occupied homes with others needing the broadband capacity and some quiet space to make calls returning to the office gives them a better environment for what they need to do.

Employers seem divided or unsure about what they want. Some do think they need people back in the office to provide discipline and framework to people's working hours. They value the advantages of in person collaboration, informal meetings and idea generation. Others think they can exert discipline through the well monitored systems of computers logged into the company network and can ensure the outputs flow from the home location. Maybe the individual is also less fussy about the time of some requirements because they are at home and can break off for domestic needs during what turns out to be a longer working day. Maybe the bosses often with larger houses like homeworking themselves and see the need to allow some of the same for others. There is little study yet of what has happened to productivity or how the wins and losses net out. Clearly many business meetings requiring travel and stays away were expensive and time consuming. It may be as good as well as much cheaper to do those on line.

Many say they want a hybrid week. That probably means Mondays and Fridays at home . Is that a good compromise for employers? Would that maximise output as well as employee satisfaction? What would it do to our city office centres who have travel and hospitality capacity for millions five days a week?

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## Condolences to the royal family

Many will have personal memories of the Duke of Edinburgh from meeting him or from his presence in our living rooms on tv or in the newspapers. The Queen has launched an electronic book of remembrance on [www.royal.uk](http://www.royal.uk). I recommend this for all wishing to send condolences and to record their impressions of him and his service to the Queen and nation. The royal website also has more information about the Duke and his work.

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## The death of the Duke of Edinburgh

Our thoughts today are with the Queen and members of the royal family on the sad news of the death of her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. He dedicated his life to serving the public and supporting the Queen as she carried out her duties. I send my condolences from the Wokingham constituency as the nation mourns his loss.

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## PCR Tests

Product type: Nucleic acid testing (NAT) technologies that use polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for detection of SARS-CoV-2

Date: 13 January 2021

WHO-identifier: 2020/5, version 2

Target audience: laboratory professionals and users of IVDs.

Purpose of this notice: clarify information previously provided by WHO. This notice supersedes WHO Information Notice for In Vitro Diagnostic Medical Device (IVD) Users 2020/05 version 1, issued 14 December 2020.

Description of the problem: WHO requests users to follow the instructions for use (IFU) when interpreting results for specimens tested using PCR methodology.

Users of IVDs must read and follow the IFU carefully to determine if manual adjustment of the PCR positivity threshold is recommended by the

manufacturer.

WHO guidance Diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2 states that careful interpretation of weak positive results is needed (1). The cycle threshold (Ct) needed to detect virus is inversely proportional to the patient's viral load. Where test results do not correspond with the clinical presentation, a new specimen should be taken and retested using the same or different NAT technology.

WHO reminds IVD users that disease prevalence alters the predictive value of test results; as disease prevalence decreases, the risk of false positive increases (2). This means that the probability that a person who has a positive result (SARS-CoV-2 detected) is truly infected with SARS-CoV-2 decreases as prevalence decreases, irrespective of the claimed specificity.

Most PCR assays are indicated as an aid for diagnosis, therefore, health care providers must consider any result in combination with timing of sampling, specimen type, assay specifics, clinical observations, patient history, confirmed status of any contacts, and epidemiological information.

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## The international order

The UK decided to restore democratic powers by leaving the EU. We can now improve, amend or remove laws and spending programmes as we see fit. The government proposes, Parliament responds and public opinion is brought to bear on the process. If a government makes a mess of using its powers it will be replaced at the next election so the voters are in ultimate control.

Various contributors here believe that green policies and covid policies are somehow the work of hidden powerful advisers and forces. They are, on the contrary very public, and have been through substantial governmental processes. Whilst we have removed the overarching powers conferred by the EU Treaties and enforced by an active and powerful court, our country is still under a number of other important Treaties which governments of most political persuasions will observe and enforce. Anti pandemic policy has been heavily influenced by our membership of the World Health Organisation. The UK's green enthusiasm has been locked in by the Climate Change Act enacted by the Labour government and accepted by the incoming Conservative one, and by UK agreement to the Paris and other international conference commitments made globally. I was one of just a handful of MPs who did not support the legislation.

The structure and culture of UK government is to abide by international rules and Agreements. There is no need to look for hidden influences urging these policies when they have been signed up to in a public way so the whole might of the UK official machine is bent on enforcing and complying with them. It is true the CV 19 policies are advisory. It is true the green policies

require our consent and there is no strong enforcement mechanism like the European Court to make us do them, but government wishes to apply them anyway.

This means if UK citizens do wish to change these policies it is a bit more difficult. There could be arguments about "breaking international law". When the UK ventured a different view of the Northern Ireland protocol as it needed to do some asserted this was breaking a Treaty and not allowed. I think they were wrong as a good argument can be made from the terms of the Protocol and Treaty themselves that there needs to be change to secure one of its prime objectives, the freedom of the UK single market.

In practice countries do renounce or amend Treaties by agreement, or sometimes reinterpret them . What matters is popular will and national law. Some say of course all Treaties must be obeyed, citing the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht which stated Gibraltar is a UK Crown dependency. I of course favour respecting that Treaty. The truth however is the status of Gibraltar rests with the will and views of the people who live there. It is because 99% voted to stay British that they will stay British and observe the Treaty. If they voted 99% to be Spanish of course there would be change whatever the Treaty says.

So my advice to those of you who disagree with the health or green policy, understand you need to change the policy of the government which in turn will need to amend its promises and proposals to the international community if you succeed.