

A guide for workplace representatives



Introduction

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the way we work. From shifting to remote working, to finding new ways to engage with teams and build relationships from behind a screen - be it Perspex or computer - what work looks like has never shifted so much, so quickly. At the FDA, we responded rapidly to keep members safe in the first instance, in courts, offices and workplaces across the country. We engaged with employers to enable public servants to adapt to circumstances beyond their control,

and we'll continue to prioritise your safety and wellbeing as long as the threat remains.

As part of our work considering what the future of work looks like, we took time to check in directly with members to find out what your experiences have been like to date, and what you'd like to happen next. We'll be looking in more detail at the results of our survey over the coming months, but some headlines include those illustrated below.

Your National Officer will have a breakdown of these survey results for your branch or section, and using this data can help you shape the conversation with your employer. We believe that this is a crucial opportunity to re-set and redefine the norm when it comes to how and where you do your jobs.

73% of members think working remotely has enabled them to strike a better work-life balance



66% of members said they'd turn down a promotion if the role didn't allow flexible/remote working



Most members (51%) want some flexibility to manage when they're in the office and when they're at home, rather than being asked to agree a set pattern of working mostly at home or in the office.



We want to ensure we are leading that conversation with employers and this guide provides you with the tools to shape the future workforce. We've identified five key themes that we'll be focusing on over the coming weeks and months:

Contractual changes
Places for Growth
Cultural shift
Career development
Equality impact



These five themes provide a breakdown of key bargaining areas and what some of our ambitions are, but this isn't prescriptive - we want to make sure that you have all the information you'll need to tailor your talks with your employer.

There are many questions that will need to be navigated locally, and as we emerge from the pandemic and our thinking develops, we'll update this guide. If you have good examples, or are facing challenges do get in touch with your National Officer - we can share your insight and seek answers collectively too.

A word on data

Using data in bargaining conversations is a great way to evidence your arguments. Your employer will have a variety of information that you can request. Here are a few examples of data requests you could make to help shape your thinking:

- Location data - proportion of staff working remotely, before and during the pandemic
- Desk usage - pre-pandemic and during
- Performance related bonuses - information on the distribution of bonuses could provide insight in to productivity trends and distribution bias
- Data on attendance management, disciplinarys and poor performance - has the use of these policies reduced during remote working?

- People survey data
- Results of local pulse surveys
- Training data - who is applying and who is being successful?

You can start the conversations with your employer by asking for this information, or they might be pro-actively sharing details with you. Using data to inform decision making is really valuable, but it shouldn't be prescriptive - we'll need to adapt going forward too.

The FDA also has data that you can consider, including our annual working hours survey and our survey looking at the future world of work. Both of these can be broken down by employer, so you can have a look at the trends across the FDA membership as well as more locally.

Don't forget you can also look more broadly at data trends - the Institute for Government is a great source of information and data, and you'll find research from private sector employers and organisations too. We'll be looking at broader societal trends as part of our ongoing research later this year, so do get in touch if you find anything useful.

Contractual changes

97% of FDA members told us they'd like to spend more time working remotely moving forward.



We've seen increases in productivity, a better work-life balance and a change in priorities for many over the last 18 months, and it's clear that members want to hold on to the benefits, where they've experienced them. In order to achieve this flexibility, we also need to consider the impact of the current contractual position of members. The majority of members in your branch or section might be covered by a clause that states that they're only entitled to a London Weighting Allowance, for example, if they attend an office in London for at least 3 days per week.

During the pandemic employers requisitioned our homes for free out of necessity and it worked for them. Moving forward, we need to be prepared to negotiate terms that work for members in the long term. This will be challenging, as in most cases we'll be seeking flexibility for individuals depending on their personal circumstances and preferences. This needn't just work for the employer as progress can be made to raise the standard and protect the position of members.

Your employer might use this opportunity to review the allowances, terms and conditions that are currently in place. Issues like travel and subsistence rates might come up and it's important that we consider how these were used pre-pandemic too, before planning how things will work in the hypothetical new world. It's important that we're not forced in to guessing what might be needed when a more iterative process may be more effective.

Health and safety is, and always will be, a trade union priority. We've worked really closely with employers to ensure that our members who had to attend a physical office or place of work were safe and we've been unafraid to use the legislation to ensure compliance. Our health and safety focus extends out to home working too. Having the right set up is crucial to prevent long-term health issues and we've been negotiating with individual employers throughout the pandemic to ensure that members have the right equipment and the right DSE (display screen equipment) set up. Talk to your local branch or health and safety representative to find out more about what health and safety work is being done locally.

Contractual changes

At the start of the pandemic our reps and officers adapted to supporting members with individual casework issues remotely, and as usual we relied on policies in place to navigate different scenarios.



Policies

Starting discussions on the new world of work provides the perfect opportunity to check in with your departmental policies and see if they're fit for purpose or whether they need refreshing to reflect new ways of working. One way of checking to see if there are any updates that might be needed, is to monitor the trends that come through in casework.

- Are you seeing a lot of contact from members on performance management? This could be because the processes that worked when members were in the office, simply don't translate to a remote environment - if hybrid working is going to continue going forward, how can we update the policy to make it work?
- Perhaps you're getting queries from members who are having their attendance monitored by managers checking when they are logged in to Teams or Skype. Attendance management policies might need to be redrafted to acknowledge the flexible way in which many people are working (and want to continue working) and you might also need to check in on your surveillance and monitoring or security policies.

- You might be seeing an upswing - or reduction - in grievances around bullying and harassment. Is the current policy up to date and does your departmental definition of bullying capture example of unacceptable 'virtual' behaviours too?

Negotiating changes to contractual rights is a significant task and your National Officer will be able to support with this work and take legal advice if necessary. Not all employers will look to engage in formal negotiations and make contractual changes, but it's important to identify if their proposal could constitute such a change, or if it's just a change to working practices. This can be a bit of a grey area, so it's worth speaking with your National Officer to ensure the proposals are in line with the employer's legal obligations.

Contractual changes

FDA members have demonstrated clearly that they are able to work effectively from home, and we've seen productivity increases linked to this new way of working.



Allowances

We're often asked by members what the impact of any allowances would be if they continue to work from home. The FDA is clear that where members can continue to commute to an office where they would be in receipt of allowances, this should continue to be paid. We're seeking flexibility for our members - you know when it's important for you to be at a meeting in person and when you can do a specific task or piece of work from home more effectively.

If you have members who are seeking to change their contract to become permanent home workers this will require full consultation as it's a contractual change. You might need to support members to draft applications or business cases for a shift to flexible working - our research on flexible working might provide you with some helpful background data and context.

Places for Growth

The Places for Growth agenda is focused on moving civil service jobs out of London and providing career development opportunities for civil servants across the country. Only around 20% of the UK's 456,000 civil servants are based in London, with those working in operational delivery typically working outside Whitehall. However, senior roles are disproportionately based in London and the South East with 71% of the SCS and 51% of grades 6/7. This is due to a range of factors, including ministerial proximity.

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We're involved with conversations with both the Cabinet Office and individual employers on what the Places for Growth agenda looks like for our members. There are a myriad of outstanding questions here:

- What locations are proposed for specific employers? Are they suitable and accessible? What are the timeframes?
- How do the locations contribute to regional economic growth and social mobility?
- Does a location ensure a diverse workforce with the right skills and talents from the local labour market?
- Are relocation packages adequate? What's on the table?
- What career development opportunities will be available? Are there set career pathways?
- Which other government departments are proposing to relocate to a location?
- Will I be penalised for not relocating? Will my career suffer?
- How does Places for Growth fit with an increase in remote working e.g. location neutral?
- How will estates be rationalised? Will I be able to get a desk or a meeting space if I need to?
- Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

Places for Growth

We know that employers are moving at different paces when it comes to Places for Growth - it's really important that you're having conversations early. As we mentioned above, the use of data here is crucial, as you'll be able to use information on attendance pre-pandemic to really focus on what the aspirations and ambition should be.

Speaking with senior leaders is also really helpful, as we know that SCS roles are being prioritised in some departments to move outside of London and the South East. It is important that "critical mass" structures are in place to allow for career development and progression.

Places for Growth is also an opportunity to link in with the wider issues around diversity within the civil service, and we know the government are particularly focused on the socio-economic opportunities of opening offices across the country. This is an ideal opportunity for you to join the conversation and shape a more diverse and inclusive civil service for the future.

As more thinking emerges and the practical implications of the Places for Growth programme become clearer, we'll update you, but a lot of this work will need to happen locally. Speak with your National Officer if you have questions or concerns.



Cultural Shift

Now we need to focus on the less tangible side of how work has changed for FDA members. For some, work has expanded in to our lives more than ever before and, for others, relationships have been redefined completely. Trust has shifted, with many line managers and employees showing that deliverables can still be achieved without the need for 'physical' presence. But we've also seen how difficult it can be to switch off - we're more available than ever before and there is a growing call for the right to "disconnect" to be recognised for all workers.

tokenistic, but the culture of an organisation can have a huge impact on how we perform, our career development and our broader wellbeing too. We think this is a great opportunity to recalibrate and make some headway towards creating organisational cultures that allow our members to thrive. Local pulse surveys and departmental data from the People Survey can be really insightful when it comes to talk about how members are feeling. You might also want to look again at the FDA's working hours or future world of work surveys - or even run a local survey to get answers to specific questions. Your National Officer can help with this.

Having conversations about culture with employers can be challenging or even feel a bit

Here are some ideas that you might want to think about with your branch, before starting the conversation with your employer about how the impact of the pandemic can change your workplace culture.



- Is there a two-tier workforce? Have some members been coming in to the workplace day-in-day-out during the pandemic, while others are at home? Is the focus too much on operational or non-operational roles? Are proposals fair, and will people be treated equally?
- What is the data telling you about stress and wellbeing? Can you ask members how they're feeling now?
- Switching off can be more challenging now - is the burden on members to find the balance, when workloads are increasing? What policies and practices are your employer looking at to make sure staff can turn off from work?
- How do these cultural shifts link in with our more regular negotiations like pay? Can you start a conversation about wellbeing, hours or use any increases in productivity as leverage?
- How does job design need to change? Do you need to be more explicit about when you'd need colleagues to be physically in the same workspace or behind a keyboard? Are there some tasks that can be done more effectively from home, and how do you ensure staff have autonomy to decide where fits them best?

Managing remotely

For our members, on both sides of the line-management table, we know that an increase in remote working and a greater awareness of personal circumstances has changed the dynamic for many when it comes to relationships with staff and managers. This provides a great opportunity to check in on policies and practices to check what is working. Does your employer have guidance on managing a remote team? Are there common practices or guidelines on how to create an inclusive workplace culture? Are there some principles about timing of meetings and prioritising collaboration remotely?

Learning

We'll be working with FDA Learn to deliver training for members that fits in to the themes of our work here, but you might want to approach your employer to see if you can partner on some training. Issues like managing remote teams, the diversity impact of Success Profiles, having difficult conversations or onboarding could be covered, and it's worth reviewing how any mandatory training fits in with our new working practices too. This might also link in to policy refreshes, for example, does your onboarding process factor in workers who might be fully remote?

Talking to new starters is a great way to pick up on what it feels like to start a new role or join a new team - it's also a good opportunity to remind them of the importance of being in a union!



Career progression

A lot of members have shifted jobs or taken a promotion over the past eighteen months. Joining a new team and starting fresh has been a unique experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, but what about how you secure that next step on the career ladder? How will a new way of working influence how we progress our careers?

Robust recruitment processes and access to data

Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that the recruitment and selection processes your employer is using are up to job. Are they:

- Blind sifting
- Avoiding EOIs
- Advertising opportunities openly
- Adapting competency behaviour questions for online interviews
- Providing training for interview panellists
- Giving good feedback
- Meeting the requirements around the guaranteed interview scheme

These are just some examples of actions your employer can take to create a level playing field when it comes to job opportunities. It's also really important to track what the data is telling us about access to opportunities too. Requesting demographic data - as well as details of grade and physical location - on who is being invited to interview, who is successful and who is accessing training opportunities can show trends and ultimately provide evidence to support your calls for action.

We need to ensure good practices are in place to head off the potential for presentee bias, where those in the office/workplace could be more successful at interview and selection because of their physical presence. As we move forward and workplaces adopt a mix of office, home and hybrid working it's really important that opportunities aren't only available for those who are seen to be in the office. Getting in to the habit of receiving and analysing data now will help us prepare for the future too.

It is also important that access to technology, or the ability to use different IT functions isn't a barrier to progress either. How robust is the training that has been provided? Are there pockets of staff who don't feel as confident in using certain team-working or collaborative applications? Ensuring new starters, and those who learn in different ways, have the right tools to participate fully is crucial to avoid digital disenfranchisement.

We're working with Civil Service HR on what's next since unconscious bias training was removed from the Civil Service Learning platform. If you think there's a gap in the training for those on interview panels, please do feed in through your HR colleagues - this will support our conversations at a national level.



Career progression

Leadership and digital visibility

The way we engage with senior leaders has also shifted, but we know that having access to decision makers can provide a really positive insight, that can help shape the next steps in your career. Are you as a leader as accessible as you were pre-pandemic? Is your manager? Is it easier to make connections now, or more challenging? If there's a disconnect in your workplace, it's worth feeding that in to conversations with HR. An increased investment in mentoring or shadowing can help to ensure career development opportunities aren't stalled, particularly as remote working continues.

Similarly, as a manager the way you engage with your team might have changed. The days of 'managing-by-wandering-about' have gone and you might have to invest more time in building connections and having informal one-to-ones in place of conversations in corridors or at the tea point. As a leader these interactions are really important and can really impact on the workplace culture - building in time and space for these personal connections should be prioritised by your employer.



Equality impact

34.4% of civil servants in London are from a minority ethnic group, compared with 8% in other parts of the UK (including overseas postings).



There are new challenges and opportunities in the equality and inclusion space. When we think about how we're working now, many members have been clear that remote working has levelled the playing field - particularly those who were working remotely previously and had felt overlooked or excluded when joining meetings on video link or over the phone. The foundations of effective meetings often rely on good chairing, but agreeing departmental or team protocols for how to manage hybrid meetings going forward can have a really positive long-term impact if you get it right. Will everyone remain on individual teams calls? Will you prioritise those on the phone/video link, or will they be an afterthought? If the tech doesn't work, will you commit to reschedule the meeting, rather than carrying on and looping someone in later? All these factors will have an impact on the culture of a workplace too.

We've become more aware of our colleagues' personal circumstances over the last year. When it comes to parenting commitments in particular, the elephant is no longer in another room, they have been right there on the Teams call, asking for a sandwich or a pencil. How can we acknowledge and embrace the insight we've had in to the balance of work and life? As a starter, it's worth refreshing your carers policy. The FDA has recently undertaken [some research on the working lives of carers](#) in the civil service and there are a number of recommendations you can look to adopt.

The pandemic has also been a good reminder about the need to schedule meetings at times that are workable for the attendees - clashing with the school run or running late in to the evening can become a real access issue. Agreeing those protocols, even if just within a specific team rather than across directorates, can really set the tone and ensure an inclusive approach.

Linking in with Places for Growth, we know that the government is focused on increasing diversity within the civil service, with a particular focus on socio-economic background. As a union, we're really keen to support measures that improve access to roles from a diverse range of individuals. This is a great opportunity to look at the accessibility of jobs and leadership opportunities over a variety of locations - but conversations need to start early. Building a pipeline of opportunities takes time and it's crucial that you're having conversations with employers early on.

34.4% of civil servants in London are from a minority ethnic group, compared with 8% in other parts of the UK (including overseas postings). The Places for Growth agenda therefore brings a series of further challenges to civil service employers and trade unions who are committed to increasing diversity and inclusion. We'll be monitoring the equality impact of proposals at both a departmental and central level.

Equality impact

The re-focus on smarter working offers us a chance to put together an attractive offer for members. Having the ability to access collaborative spaces and work from home will allow those with different needs to find a way to work that really works for them. Reasonable adjustments are one of the issues we support members with regularly - [you can make sure you're up to date with the latest guidance here.](#) ➔

Conversations on smarter working and Places for Growth are well underway in some areas, but for us, it's clear that the driver for any changes should be supporting members to be able to do their job effectively, not cost-saving. It might be that in your workplace an investment in office space is needed to ensure that proper collaboration and meeting spaces are available, and we need to be clear that safe, productive working spaces are our priority, be that at home or in the office.

It would be remiss of us to consider the equality impact of the pandemic without highlighting the impact on our mental health. Your members will have had different experiences and responses, but the actions your employer takes to protect and support people at work has never been more important.

Work can be a really great way of identifying or raising a concern about your own mental health or the wellbeing of a colleague - are your policies fit for purpose? Is training up to speed? And could more be done to reach those who are isolated?



Summary



Those are the five key areas that we think will shape the conversations you are having with employers. Each circumstance will be different, and you might have specific issues that you need to address. Working with your National Officer can help you to pick up on good practice from elsewhere too and we'll keep you updated with any developments and successes.

If you would like more information or have any questions on the issues covered in this guide, drop us a line at info@fda.org.uk

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