




**HYBRID  
WORKING**

**in the**

**ADVERTISING  
INDUSTRY**



## About Credos

This report is brought to you by Credos, the UK advertising industry's think tank. We produce research and insights about advertising's impact on society, culture and the economy.

We are grateful to the members of the Advertising Association and the Front Foot network who help to fund the work that Credos undertakes.

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# All In: The Roadmap to Change

**KATHRYN JACOB**

All In Steering Group Chair

**ALL IN**



The All In initiative is now a powerful force for good in the advertising and marketing industry, providing a roadmap to real, tangible change. The way the industry has come together at scale to share their varied backgrounds and experiences is the first step in building the inclusive workplaces we want to see, where all feel welcome. In 2023, almost 19,000 people completed the All In Census, making it the largest survey of its kind in the UK – a huge achievement and testament to the engagement of our industry. We thank all those who took part and enabled their workforces to do so.

“

As an industry, we have traditionally thrived on spending time together, working creatively and collaboratively and making fast-paced decisions.

Questions added in 2023 on hybrid working arrangements have given us a remarkable dataset from which to evaluate the way the industry has been working, and the way we would like to work. As an industry, we have traditionally thrived on spending time together, working creatively and collaboratively and making fast-paced decisions. But we rose to the challenge of remote working driven by pandemic, and produced some amazing work, including pivotal public health campaigns. This report helps us understand the impacts of hybrid work on our employees, with particular focus on different groups and characteristics who may require different levels of flexibility.

One thing is clear: we need to move away from a limited view of flexibility which focuses purely on where we work. Instead, we should be looking to incorporate other elements of flexibility that encourage people back into the office whilst supporting a work-life balance that enables each of us to thrive.

In recent conversations I've had, senior leaders have rolled their eyes when hybrid working comes up. To many, hybrid working feels like a topic that has been figured out and settled already. But the shift towards remote and hybrid work is still only a couple of years old, and there can be no doubt it is here to stay. We are still in the early stages of truly understanding the impacts of remote work on employee satisfaction, productivity, and career development. How we respond as an industry is critical. I'm not sure we've quite got it right yet, but our ability to attract and retain the very best talent dictates that we must.

”

# 10 Key Findings

1

No single solution works for every situation and some level of compromise is almost always required by both employer and employee. Recognising the need for balance and compromise should be the basis of hybrid working decisions.

3

82% of those working fully remotely reported sufficient flexibility to meet their family/personal needs compared to 70% of those working four or five days per week in the office.

5

Lack of work-life balance is even more of an issue for disabled employees, with 34% of disabled leavers saying they were planning to do so due to a lack of work-life balance, compared to 24% of non-disabled leavers.

2

For some employees, a more holistic approach to flexible working, such as altering start and finish times or compressed hours, will be of more value than hybrid working on its own.

4

Of people planning to leave their company, those who were working in the office for two days or fewer were less likely to put a lack of work-life balance as their reason (23%) than those working in-office for four or five days (33%).

7

56% of employees working fully remotely felt supported professionally, compared to 66% of those working in the office five days per week.

9

40% of ethnic minority employees would like to spend a maximum of one day per week in the office compared to 31% of White employees.

6

Those spending five days per week in the office are significantly more likely to feel that they belong in their company (80%) than those working fully remotely (64%).

8

Junior employees are most likely to feel supported when working in the office three days per week – levels of support decrease at four and five days in the office. However, high levels of remote work are particularly unsuitable for those at the start of their careers, with support at less than two days dropping significantly.

10

59% of Black employees feel they belong at their company compared to 73% of their White colleagues, with feelings of belonging peaking for Black employees at three days per week (69%).

# Introduction

**The average person will spend 90,000 hours, or 10.2 years, of their life working<sup>1</sup>. In 2019, just 5% of workers spent most of that time at home. By April 2020, due to covid-19 restrictions, that figure had skyrocketed to 43%<sup>2</sup>.**

Today, working patterns are no longer enforced by covid-19 safety measures. Instead, an elevated level of remote working persists due to its benefits for employees. For many, hybrid working is

now considered a standard work benefit, comparable to holiday allowance, flexi-time or healthcare, allowing companies to attract prospective employees.

The covid-enforced shift towards hybrid working also ushered in a wider conversation about general working flexibility. While hybrid working relates to “staff spending some of their working week at home and some in the workplace”, flexible working is defined



as “an amended working pattern that an employee has requested”, including “compressed hours, part-time work, or working from home”<sup>3</sup>.

Hybrid working is therefore just one of many tools available to employers to improve the work-life balance of their workforce. Focusing entirely on the office vs home-working debate risks overlooking other important aspects of flexibility. That being said, hybrid working is a significant piece of the flexible working picture and has brought about fundamental change to working patterns in a very short space of time.

Despite limited existing research supporting the benefits of mass returns to the office, companies across the business world are re-evaluating policies; 64% of CEOs believe that there will be a full return to the office in three years’ time<sup>4</sup>. Whilst this may reflect the CEO view, our data suggests few in the industry would welcome such a move. However, an employer vs employee paradigm is far too reductive. Many employees enjoy a traditional workplace dynamic, with staff spending their days together. Equally, there are countless companies and leaders who remain steadfast in their support of hybrid working. Clearly, striking the right balance between flexibility and a positive workplace culture is a real challenge for today’s business leaders.

The findings in this report are based on the responses of 19,000 advertising and marketing professionals, collected in March 2023 as part of the All In Census. Led by the Advertising Association in partnership with the IPA and ISBA, the All In Census recorded the largest response ever for our industry, and is the largest survey of its kind completed by any industry in the UK. Though now one year old, its data provide an unparalleled view of the role hybrid working plays in improving diversity and inclusion in the industry. As highlighted in this report, remote working policies affect different groups and demographics in vastly different ways. To make the office experience one that works for all, achieving the right balance between flexibility and in-person interaction is paramount. We hope that this report will bring some much-needed insight and nuance to a difficult-to-navigate topic.

The advertising industry’s approach to where and when people work will be critical to creating a happy, productive, and successful workplace that works for all. This report is a call for research-backed action that is logical, understanding and nuanced. If we can achieve that as an industry, we can ensure that advertising remains a desirable and inclusive industry in which to work.

1. Naber, A. (2021). *One third of your life is spent at work*. [online] Gettysburg College

2. Felstead, A. and Reuschke, D. (2020). *Homeworking in the UK: Before and During the 2020 Lockdown* [online]

3. Davis, C. (2022). *The difference between hybrid and flexible working*. [online] Citation.

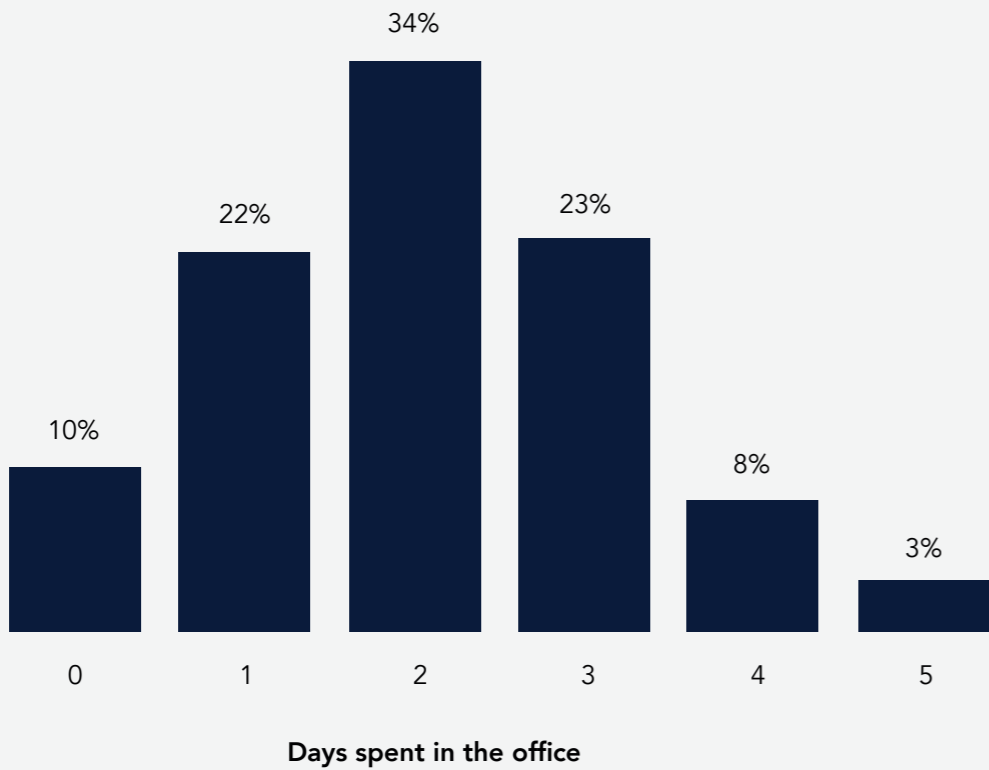
4. KPMG. (2023). *KPMG 2023 CEO Outlook* - KPMG Global. [online]

# Preferred number of days spent in the office

All In respondents were asked where they would most like to work in a standard working week. Overall, employees mostly enjoy the flexibility on offer and, on average, prefer to spend most of their working week at home.

The most common preference for working splits is two days per week in the office. As shown in **Figure 1**, 66% of respondents would choose to spend the majority of their week working from home, with a significant number (10%) opting for fully remote work as their preference.

**Figure 1:** Preferred number of days spent in the office



Source: All In Census 2023

## Improved work-life balance

Improved work-life balance is the overarching benefit of hybrid working, from which various other benefits arise. A reduction of the time required for commuting is a key one – the average London worker spends 1 hour 19 minutes commuting into and from work every day<sup>5</sup>. Working remotely and eliminating the commute therefore represents a significant time saving for many. A 2019 study, titled “How commuting affects subjective wellbeing” concluded that “longer commute times are associated with lower job and leisure time satisfaction, increased strain and poorer mental health”<sup>6</sup>. Another study found that adding 20 minutes to a daily commute per day “has the same negative effect on job satisfaction as receiving a 19% pay cut”<sup>7</sup>.

For many, hybrid working therefore means freeing up time to spend on responsibilities and interests outside of work that are crucial to their wellbeing. It could mean more time to care for family; it could mean more time to pursue hobbies outside of work; or it could just mean more time to unwind and relax after work. All are legitimate reasons for supporting hybrid working policies and will be a common reason for any employee reporting that they would prefer more days at home.

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For many, hybrid working therefore means freeing up time to spend on responsibilities and interests outside of work that are crucial to people’s wellbeing.

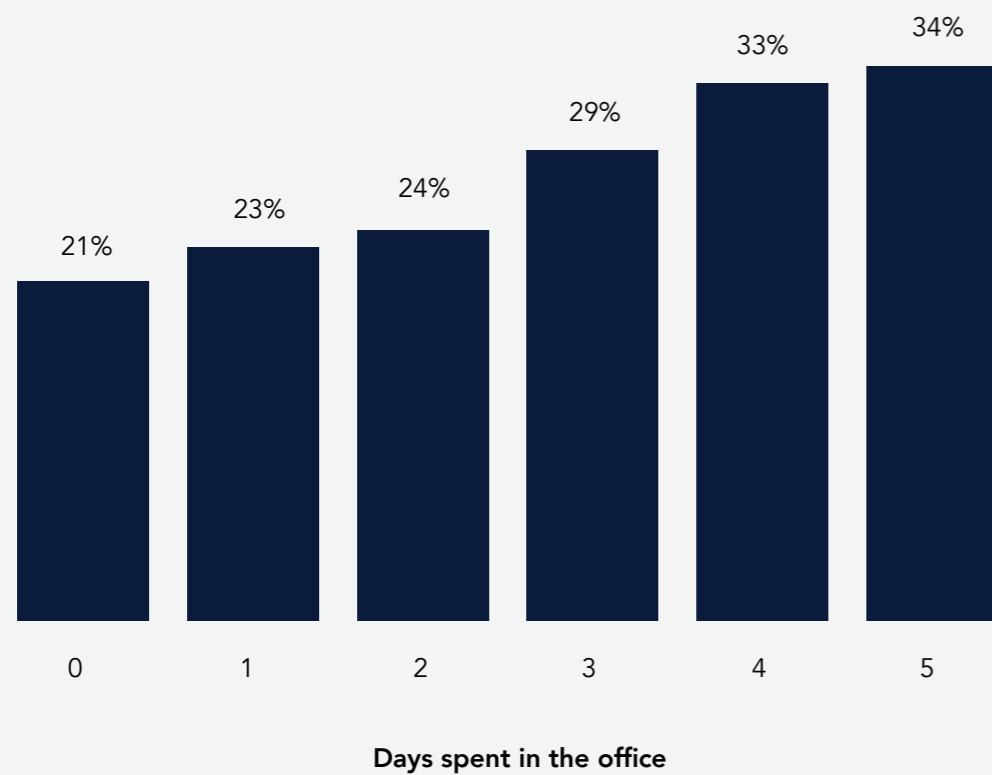
”

5. TUC (2019). *Annual commuting time is up 21 hours compared to a decade ago*. [online]  
 6. Clark, B., Chatterjee, K., Martin, A. and Davis, A. (2019). How commuting affects subjective wellbeing. *Transportation*, 47  
 7. Loudenback, T (2017). *Study: Adding 20 Minutes to Your Commute Makes You as Miserable as Getting a 19 Percent Pay Cut*. [online] Inc.com

The most telling indication of the value advertising employees place on work-life balance arises when looking at the reasons people give for wanting to leave the industry. The All In Census asked respondents whether they were likely to leave their current role within the next 12 months. Over a fifth (23%) of the 19,000 respondents said that they were. Only “better opportunity/salary elsewhere” was chosen more frequently as a reason to leave than lack of work-life balance.

Crucially, respondents were more likely to state “lack of work-life balance” as their reason for leaving when spending more days per week in the office. A third (33%) of potential leavers working in the office for four or five days stated lack of work-life balance as a reason compared to just 23% of those working two days or fewer. There is a particularly large jump in the proportion of likely leavers between two and three days, and three and four days.

**Figure 2:** % of respondents planning to leave their position in the next 12 months who cite work-life balance as the reason



Source: All In Census 2023

These findings suggest that mandating more days in the office creates more potential leavers. Companies should therefore be careful of radically changing hybrid working policies and risk employees leaving for companies and industries with more flexible working patterns. These findings are reflected in other industries; most notably in the civil service, which is now facing a backlash to the mandate that civil servants must spend at least 60% of their time in the office, with two-fifths of civil servants now thinking about quitting in response<sup>8</sup>.

Existing research suggests that the feelings of civil servants and advertising employees are more than just empty threats. Studies have shown that employees are increasingly leaving positions and companies in search of ones that offer better flexibility arrangements, including a global 2022 Microsoft survey which found that “21% of respondents who had quit their jobs in 2021 reported doing so because of lack of flexible working hours or location

(Microsoft WTI 2022)”<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, a CIPD survey conducted in 2023 found that 6% of employees had quit their job within the past year specifically due to a lack of flexible working options<sup>10</sup>.

This is not just an issue for individual companies, though – the same CIPD report found that 12% of people had at some point changed their career/profession due to there being insufficient flexibility within the sector. Ensuring that advertising as an industry offers sufficient flexibility for its employees is therefore important at both a company and industry level.

There is, however, more to consider when it comes to appropriate hybrid working policies. Everyone in the industry faces different working challenges, and to be as inclusive and supportive an industry as possible, it is important that we understand the ways that these challenges interact with hybrid working policies.

8. Civil Service World. (2023). *Two in five civil servants mull exit over 60% in-office mandate*. [online]  
 9. Microsoft (2022). *Microsoft New Future of Work Report 2022*. [online]  
 10. CIPD (2023). *Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023*. [online]

## The benefits of hybrid working for disabled employees

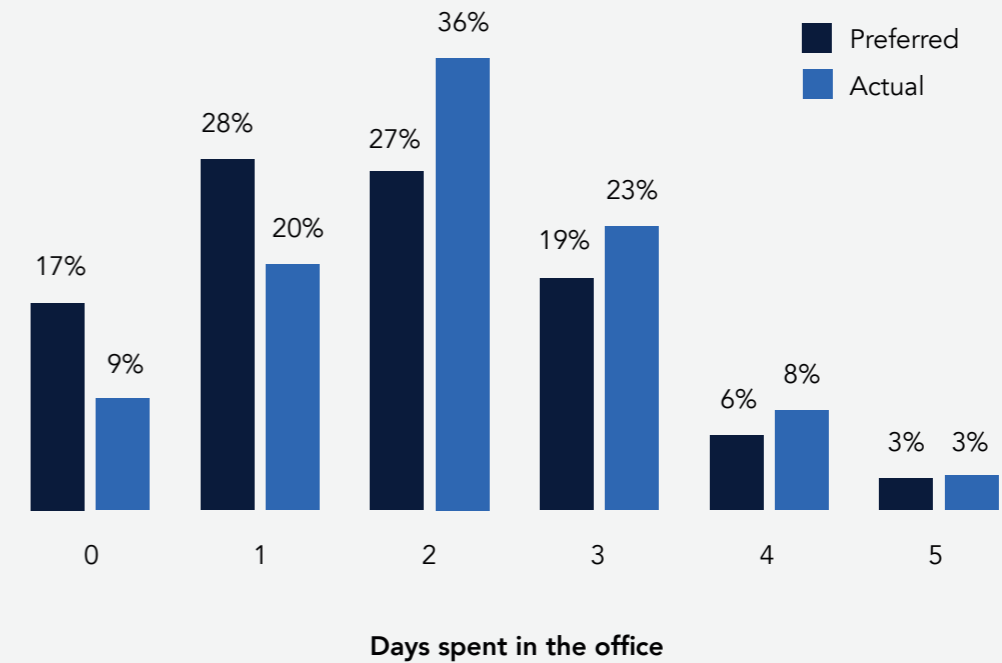
2023's All In Census found that one in ten employees in advertising are living with a disability as defined by the 2010 Equality Act<sup>11</sup>. Making advertising a place for people with disabilities to thrive is a key objective of the All In initiative, and there appear to have been some improvements: 76% of those with disabilities say they feel supported by their company, compared to 72% in 2021, and the percentage of those likely to leave due to discrimination has dropped from 22% to 16%.

Offering sufficient hybrid working options is one way that companies can ensure they continue to improve the working experience for disabled employees. Flexible working more generally – including allowing employees to set hours to meet their needs – may be particularly beneficial for some disabled employees.

In the CIPD survey referenced above, 21% of employees with a disability or long-term health problem said they had left a job in the last year because of a lack of flexible working options<sup>12</sup> – the figure was only 6% for the general employee population. The All In data reveals a similar pattern. Of disabled respondents who are looking to leave their company in the next 12 months, 34% said they were doing so due to a lack of work-life balance. This figure is just 24% for those without a disability.

**Figure 3** shows the actual number of days disabled respondents spent in the office compared to their preferred amount. The most noticeable difference between the preferred and actual working patterns is at one day and zero days suggesting that full flexibility is something that many disabled employees would benefit from but are not currently being offered. Understanding and catering to these working preferences will be important if the advertising industry is able to fully support, retain and grow its community of disabled employees.

**Figure 3:** Number of days spent in the office amongst disabled respondents: actual vs preferred



**Source:** All In Census 2023

Offering flexibility provides clear benefits for disabled employees, but high levels of remote working may not be optimal for everyone. Increasing access for disabled employees to work in the office where adjustments are required is extremely important for reducing the stigma surrounding disabled employees in work. Offering disabled employees individualised solutions to their own challenges is crucial, but so too is maintaining accessibility and involvement wherever possible.

It is therefore key that employers don't use hybrid working arrangements as an alternative to making the necessary adjustments to their office space and culture to sufficiently support their disabled colleagues. Failing to create disabled access but encouraging more remote work may have the reverse effect, resulting in some disabled employees feeling more isolated and less supported.

11. The 2010 Equality Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.  
 12. Mayne M (2023). *Lack of flexibility sees four million people change careers, CIPD study finds*. [online]

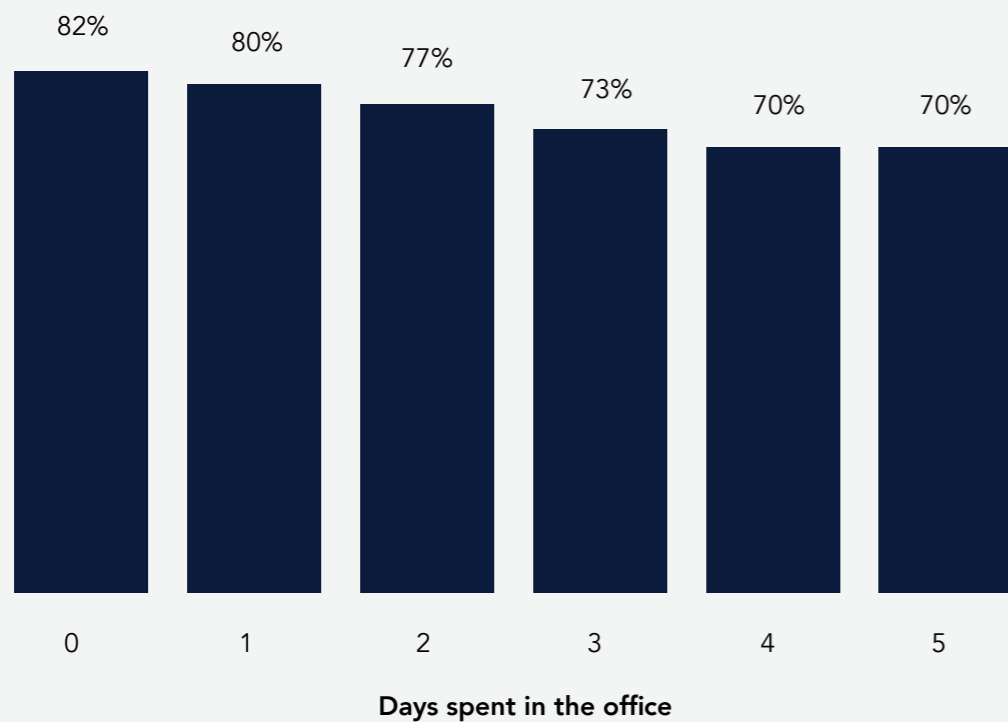
## The benefits of hybrid working for parents and carers

Employees that have caring responsibilities cite flexible working as a key benefit. For many parents and carers, it is true flexibility, rather than merely hybrid working policies, that are of most benefit. The ability to save commuting time and schedule working hours around caring responsibilities allows for the sharing of parental duties more evenly. Not only does it allow parents to collect children from school more often, but it also helps with managing after school

activities and reducing childminding costs. This is reflected in various studies, with CIPD reporting that 28% of people find flexible working important because it helps with childcare responsibilities<sup>13</sup>.

As shown in **Figure 4**, 82% of those working remotely full-time felt they had sufficient flexibility to meet their personal and family needs compared to 70% of those working four or five days.

**Figure 4:** % of respondents who feel they have sufficient flexibility to meet their personal/family needs



Source: All In Census 2023

However, the All In data does not wholly support the idea that parents and carers want more time at home. The actual and preferred working patterns of those who have children under sixteen are in fact very close to those without children. Given that many women retain primary childcare responsibilities you may expect these findings to divide along gender lines. Indeed, the data shows that women with children are significantly more likely than men with children to want to work two days or less in the office (72% vs 64% respectively). Interestingly, though, women without children are almost as likely to prefer to work two days or fewer in the office (69%) than those with children. This seems to suggest that women rather than parents are more inclined to work from home, and that it is more flexibility in a more general sense, rather than hybrid working, that is most beneficial to parents.

A classic hybrid working pattern will provide a good balance for a lot of parents, wherein more time is freed up to be spent with children, but work is not hampered by an excessive expectation of parental duties. The flexibility of working hours is particularly impactful for working parents and carers and should be considered by employees as well as their employers, in conjunction with hybrid working arrangements.

As with parents, there was similarity between the proportion of carers wanting to work two days or fewer in the office (70%) and non-carers (67%). In addition, carers were consistent in the belief that their company had been supportive of their caregiving status regardless of time spent in the office – 56% of carers spending two days or fewer in the office felt supported by their company compared to 58% of those working four or more days in the office.

These findings allude to an important point: carers may feel increasingly isolated and tied to their home lives with increased caring responsibilities. A Lancaster University study into hybrid working practices found that “workers with caring responsibilities were more likely to feel less connected to colleagues who are working remotely as they are less visible (63% compared with 55% of those without caring responsibilities).”<sup>14</sup> This is something that should be carefully managed between employer and employee.

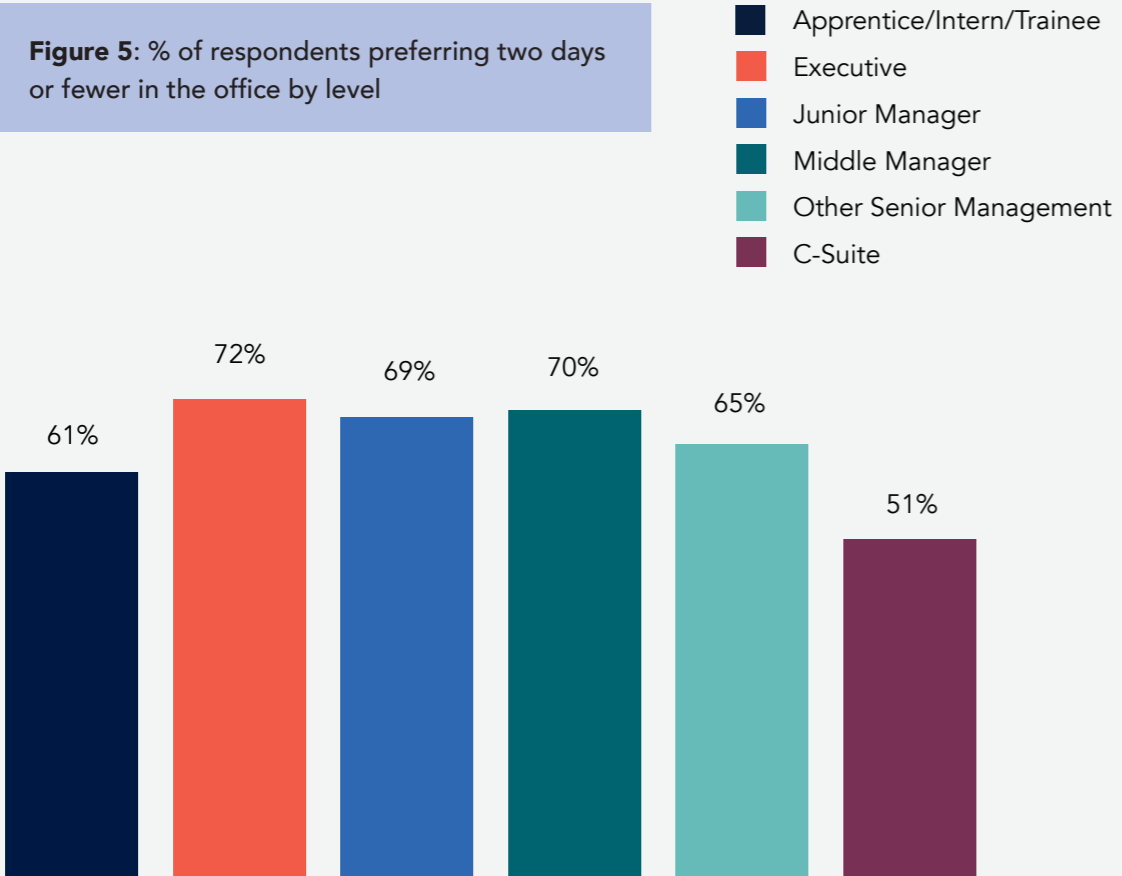
13. CIPD (2023). *Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023*. [online]

14. Taylor, H., Florisson, R. and Hooper, D. (2021). *Making Hybrid Inclusive – Key Priorities for Policymakers* [online]

## The seniority divide

The All In data revealed one clear outlier when it comes to preferred working patterns. The only demographic that were happy with their office/home split were those in C-suite positions, whose hybrid working patterns matched their preferences. This is unsurprising, seeing as it is usually those in C-suite positions who set company-wide

hybrid working policies. C-suite respondents were also the most polarised of advertising workers – the group have the highest percentage of people working fully remotely, as well as the highest percentage working five days in the office, suggesting that many C-suite workers set an example of attitudes towards work through their own working patterns.



Source: All In Census 2023

Contrastingly, executive and junior manager level workers were the furthest from their desired working patterns. **Figure 5** shows the percentage of respondents at different levels preferring a maximum of two days in the office.

Apprentices and trainees also desired more days at home than they experienced, though the gap was less pronounced than those with several years of experience. This reflects junior employees’ recognition of the benefits of time spent in the office for those at the start of their careers – something that will be explored more fully in the next section.

These distinctions by seniority are important for decision-makers to keep in mind as they assess their hybrid working policies. Having conversations with people from all levels of the company is crucial – C-suite discussions are unlikely to provide a fair reflection of sentiment throughout the company.

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# Understanding the drawbacks of hybrid working

As we have seen, generally the industry is supportive of hybrid working and many employees show a preference for more time at home. But not everyone feels the same way. Challenges exist at both an individual and collective level that must be carefully managed against the benefits of hybrid working. Understanding the trade-offs of hybrid working will enable companies to design an optimal solution that works best for their employees and their business.

## Work-life boundaries

One inadvertent effect of increased remote working since the covid-19 pandemic is a blurring of the boundary between work and recreation time. In the 1980s, only 1.5% of people spent most of their working life at home<sup>15</sup>; employees commuted into work, worked until their hours were finished or their work was done, and then clocked off for the day. Today, the separation between working and non-working hours is less clearly defined. For people working remotely work-life boundaries can begin to blur, resulting in feelings of increased pressure to be constantly available online<sup>16</sup>.

Some have even posited that children seeing their parents working longer hours online may have negative long-term effects for their development<sup>17</sup>. This is due to parents' attention being consistently diverted away from their children and towards their devices, causing the child to assume that they are less important than the parent's work/device.

15. Felstead, A. and Reuschke, D. (2020). *Homeworking in the UK: Before and During the 2020 Lockdown* [online]  
 16. UK Parliament (2022). *The impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations* [online]  
 17. Turits, M. (2022). *How remote working could be changing children's futures.* [online]

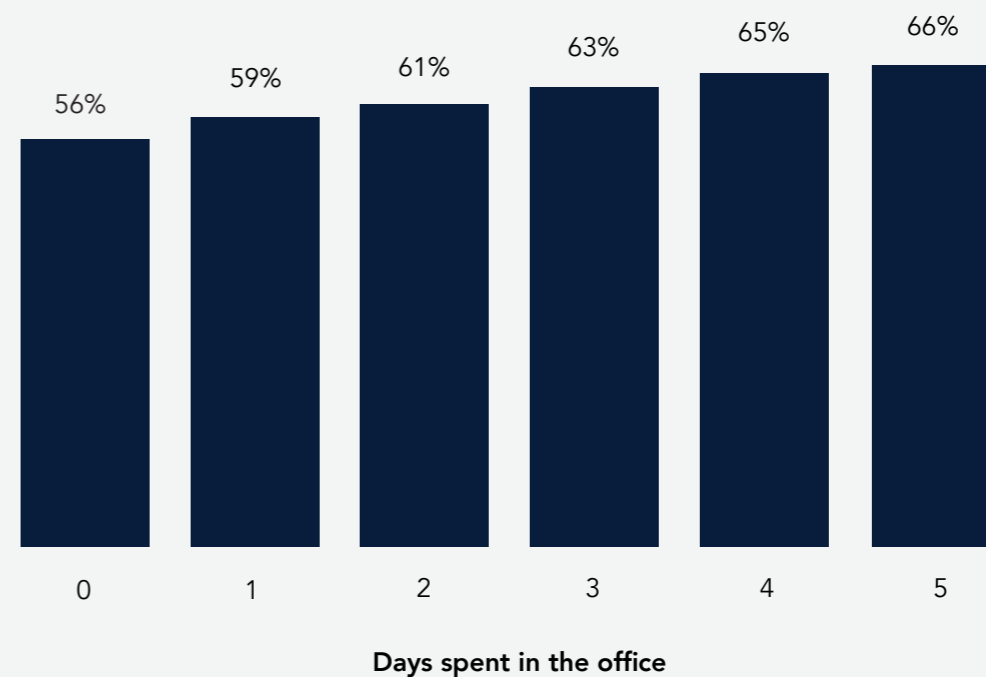
## Personal and professional development

One clear drawback of hybrid working that emerged from the All In dataset is its effect on progress and development. This is particularly acute for the most junior staff within the industry, as it is often more difficult to learn on the job when working from home. Serious planning and consideration must be applied to early-career development when large numbers of staff spend most of their time at home. Otherwise, junior staff may feel unable or embarrassed to reach out to managers to ask for guidance and advice when working remotely for much of the week.

As such, junior employees benefit more from in-person interaction and guidance during the early stage of their career.

All In respondents were asked whether they had been provided with sufficient support to develop their skills and progress their career in the last 12 months. As **Figure 6** shows, there is a positive correlation between days spent in the office and likelihood of being supported to develop your skills and career.

**Figure 6:** % of people who feel they are supported to develop their skills and progress their career

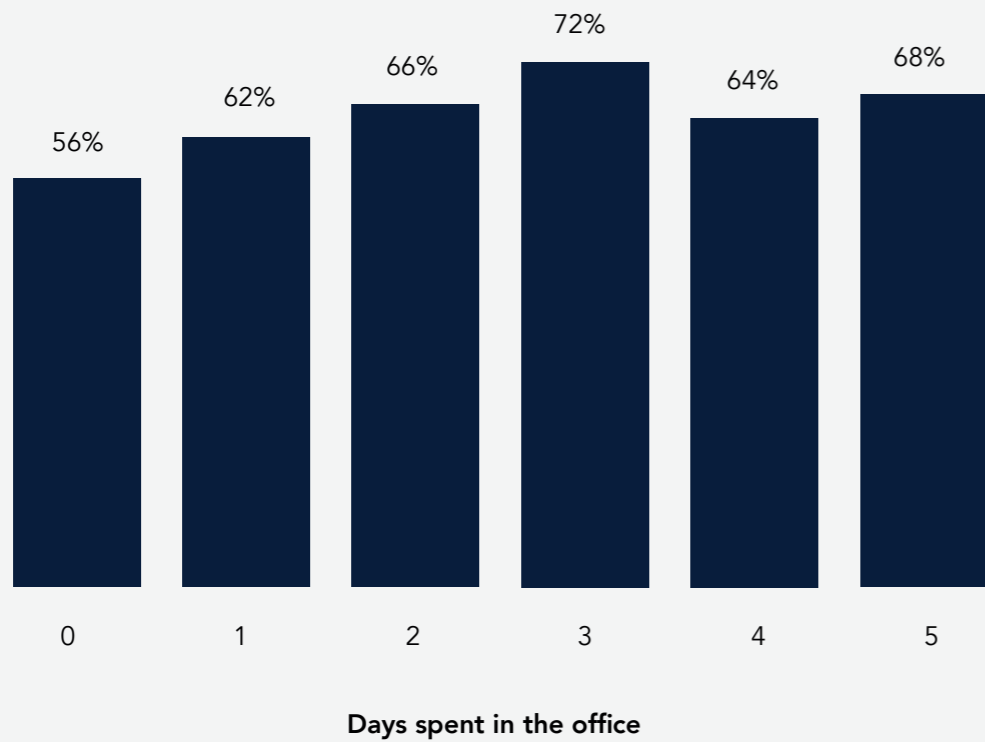


Source: All In Census 2023

According to this data, if all the employees working in the office for two days or fewer were to switch to four, it could result in up to 545 additional advertising employees from the All In sample feeling supported in their development. If this data from the All In sample were scaled up to represent the 350,000<sup>18</sup> people currently working in UK advertising and marketing, then an additional 10,000 employees could potentially benefit from feeling more supported to develop their skills and progress their careers.

Interestingly, the trend looks different when segmenting out employees in junior positions<sup>19</sup>, especially amongst executive level employees – it appears that junior employees feel most professionally supported when they spend three days per week in the office, as shown in **Figure 7**. The jump in feeling professionally supported between zero days and three days in the office, is significant with 72% of executive level employees working in the office three days per week feeling supported compared to just 56% of fully remote executives.

**Figure 7:** % of executive level employees who feel they are provided with sufficient support to develop their skills and progress their career



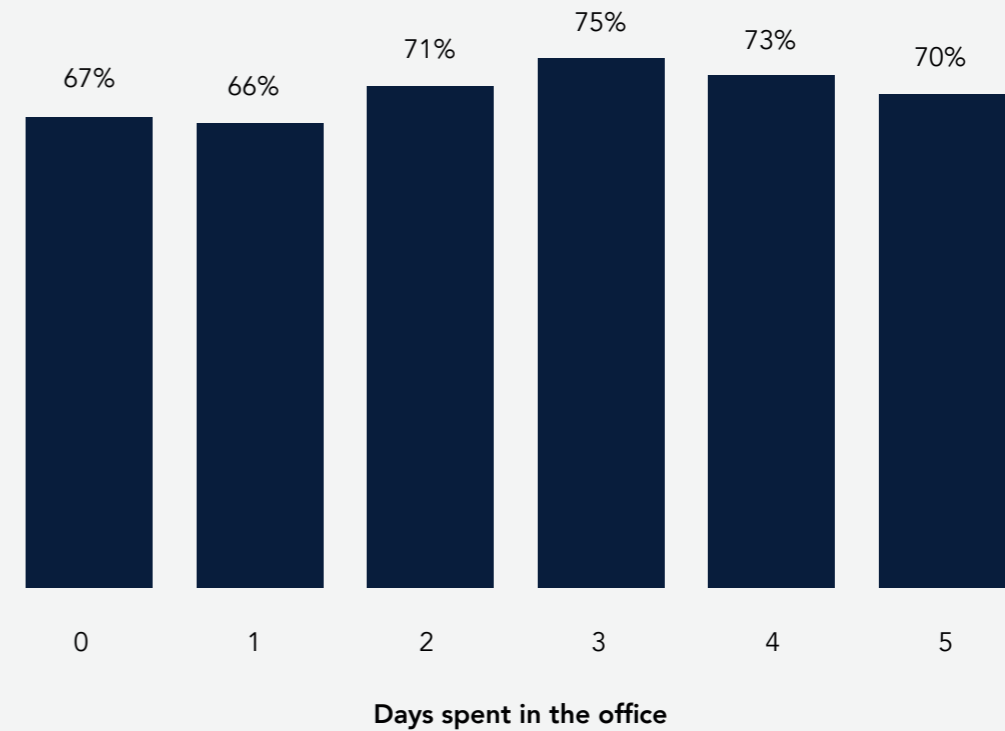
Source: All In Census 2023

18. Credos research, 2024

19. "Junior employees" as a category includes: apprentices, interns, trainees, junior executives and executives.

This peak at three days is also true of emotional and social support amongst junior employees, as shown in **Figure 8**.

**Figure 8:** % of junior respondents who feel emotionally and socially supported at work



Source: All In Census 2023

There is a clear relationship between working in the office and feeling supported both developmentally and socially. This should be considered carefully, especially by employees, when deciding how they would like to work. The general rule is that more days in the office will lead to a greater likelihood of feeling emotionally and socially, as well as professionally, supported, but some junior employees

– executive level employees in particular - may respond more positively to three days per week. Companies should pay particular attention to junior employees, and wherever possible avoid fully remote working policies due to the significant drop-off in professional support.

## Feelings of value and belonging

Perhaps paramount amongst employers' concerns regarding hybrid working practices is the impact on company culture and collaboration. One study, published in 2022, which analysed 360 billion emails across thousands of companies worldwide, concluded that hybrid working led to increased levels of siloed work, and that employees "broke off into subgroups that largely conversed among themselves from home"<sup>20</sup>.

This finding is reflected within the All In data, which shows that, of the respondents working remotely full-time, 79% feel they are a valued and essential part of their team,

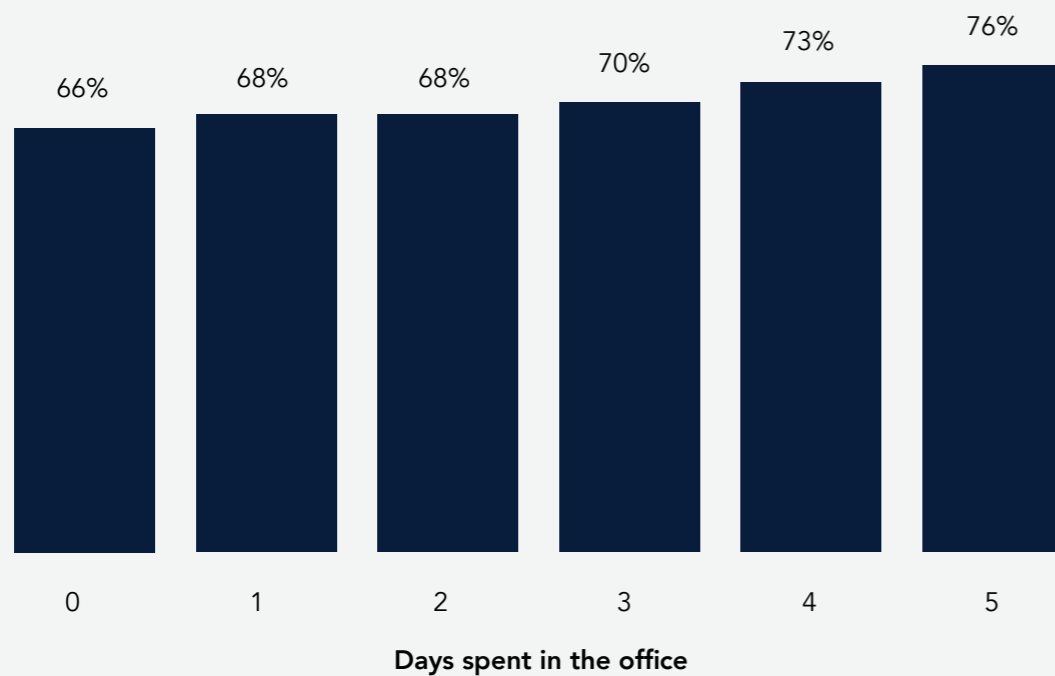
but only 66% said the same of their company as a whole. It may therefore be the case that hybrid working has a less negative effect on intra-team communication and morale than it does on inter-team work.

The All In data is also clear on the correlation between days in the office and employees feeling that they are valued within their company. **Figure 9** shows that the more days an employee spends in the office, the more likely they are to feel valued and essential to their company.

A recent study by KPMG revealed the very real benefits that more time spent in the office can bring. It found that 87% of CEOs were "likely to reward employees who make an effort to come into the office with favourable assignments, raises or promotions"<sup>21</sup>. Whilst this represents some of the presenteeism that we hope to move away from as an industry, it does reflect the reality for those working remotely more often than other colleagues. Ensuring balance and fairness in rewards should be a key priority for all companies. Whilst employers should aim to clearly communicate expectations around hybrid working, employees should ensure they understand these requirements to avoid missing out on career advancement opportunities.

Feeling valued within a company is primarily an indicator of an employee's perception that their contribution to work is recognised by their colleagues and their employer. A better indicator for what might be referred to more generally as 'company culture' is whether people feel they 'belong' in their company – this speaks more to how comfortable and understood a person is, often separate from work-related responsibilities.

**Figure 9:** % of respondents who feel they are valued and essential to their company



Source: All In Census 2023

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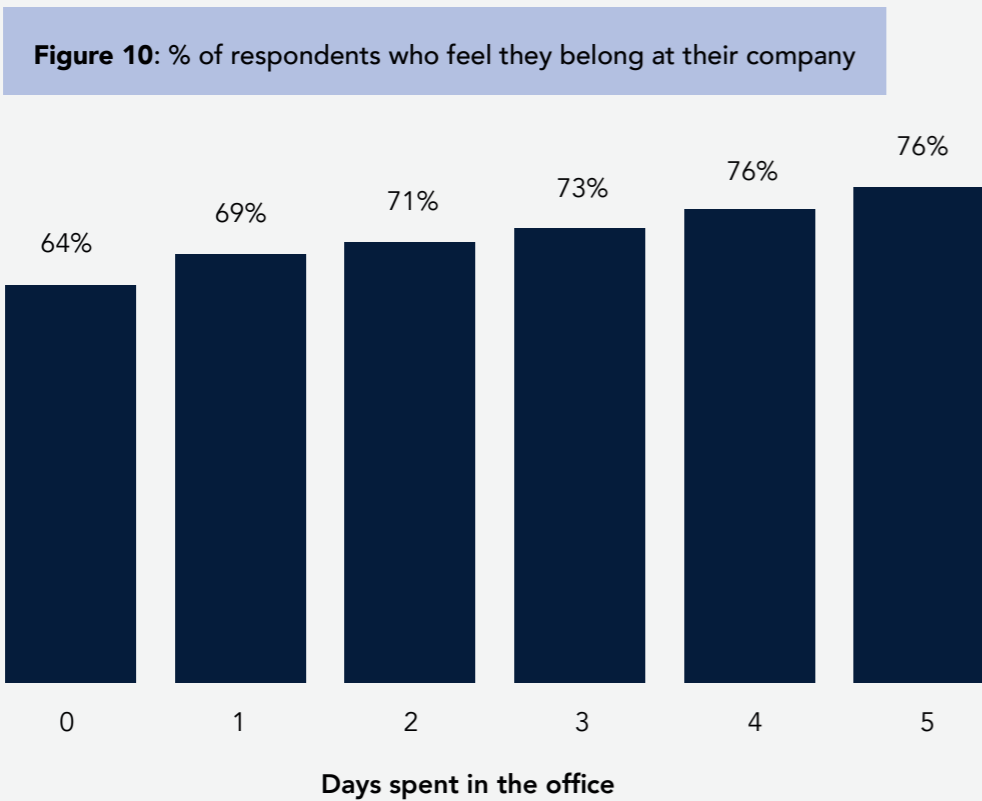
**Whilst employers should aim to clearly communicate expectations around hybrid working, employees should ensure they understand these requirements to avoid missing out on career advancement opportunities.**

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20. Zuzul, T et al. *Dynamic Silos: Increased Modularity in Intra-organizational Communication Networks during the Covid-19 Pandemic* [online]

21. KPMG. (2023). *KPMG 2023 CEO Outlook* - KPMG Global. [online]

The All In data again reveals a positive correlation between days spent in the office and the likelihood of feeling that we belong. **Figure 10** demonstrates this relationship. Those working remotely full time are significantly less likely to feel that they belong in their company (64%) than those working in the office five days per week (80%). What is striking is the large jump between zero days and one day in the office, suggesting again that even one day per week in the office can make a significant difference.



Source: All In Census 2023

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Without sufficient time and resources dedicated to developing a positive culture, the number of days spent in the office will likely have little impact.

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All In's findings are supported by Ipsos research<sup>22</sup> which found that 53% of 18–24-year-olds spending three or fewer days per week in the office frequently feel lonely, dropping to 42% for those who work in-office at least four days per week. Increased loneliness amongst employees working from home should be monitored very carefully.

For companies who have embraced high levels of remote work, mental health organisations like Mind recommend mitigating measures such as team days and regular check-ins<sup>23</sup> to maintain contact with colleagues

and offset the isolating effects of remote work. At the same time, employees feeling an increase in loneliness and isolation may consider increasing their days spent in the office to connect with colleagues on a regular basis.

Although more time in the office will likely improve culture and connection between colleagues, it will not drive feelings of belonging alone. Without sufficient time and resources dedicated to developing a positive culture, the number of days spent in the office will likely have little impact.

## Hybrid working may be a barrier to entry for some

For those of us who have the space and resources to comfortably work remotely, the choice can be liberating. However, employers should remain cognisant of the fact that not everyone in the industry is in the place to make such a decision. For those looking for companies and industries in which to build a career, remote working policies may be a barrier to entry if there is insufficient or unsuitable workspace and/or Wi-Fi connection at home. As such, remote working may be harming the industry's ability to recruit working class talent. Employers should remain aware of the barriers that their staff may face when implementing home working solutions and, wherever possible, facilitate any setup.

22. Ipsos Karian and Box (2023) *Making the case for the office*. [online]

23. Mind. *Creating a mentally healthy hybrid workplace*. [online]

# Creating a welcoming workplace for all

Preferences towards hybrid working identified by All In respondents are perhaps most clear when it comes to ethnic minorities. The difference between actual and desired working patterns is far larger than the general advertising workforce.

Generally, All In respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds were less happy with their hybrid working patterns than their White counterparts. Three quarters (75%) of respondents from an ethnic minority background would like to spend two days or fewer in the office. Moreover, 40% would like to spend at most one day per week in the office, while 25% were doing so. This is compared to 31% of White respondents preferring a maximum of one day in the office.

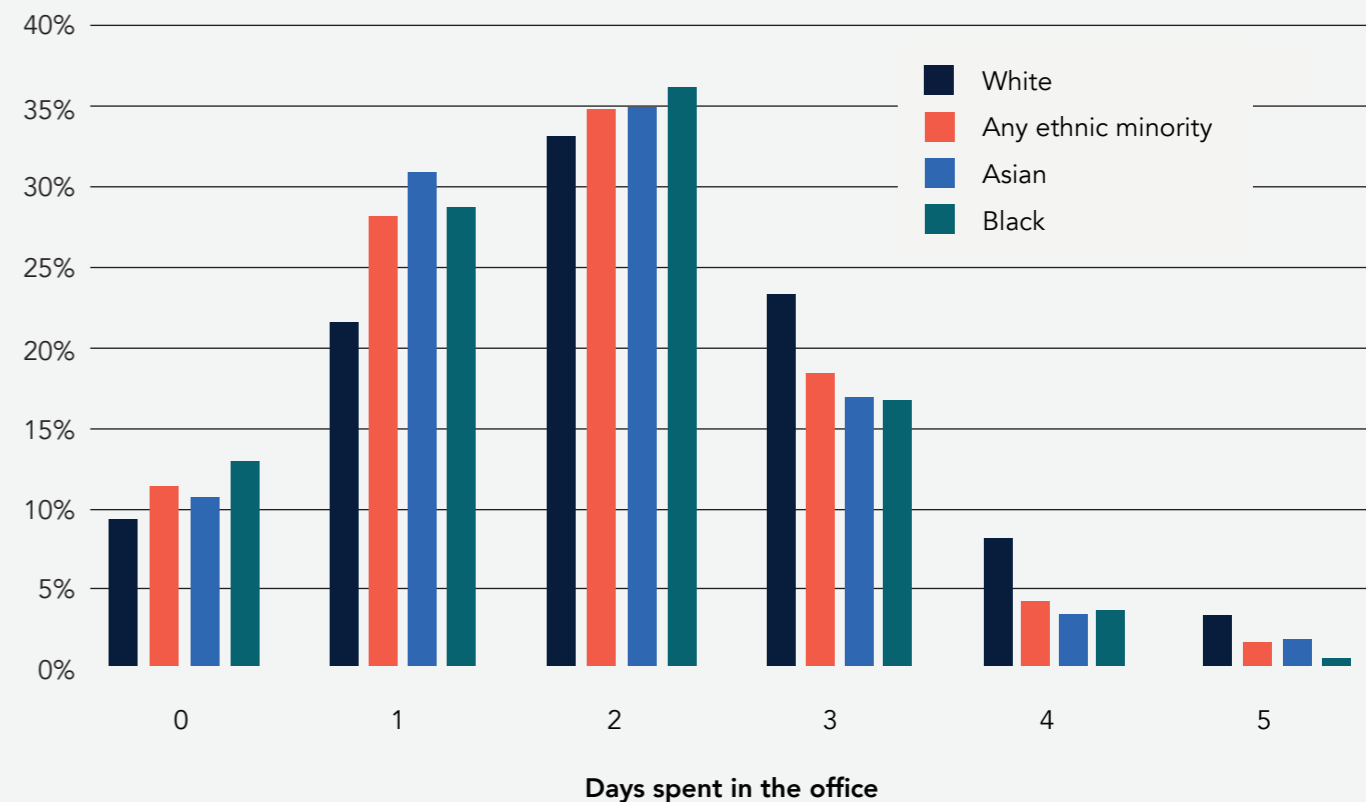
Simply put, ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to want to spend more time working from home than their White colleagues. It should be noted that this trend is consistent even when accounting for different role types (support services and client-facing roles) as well as when accounting for level of seniority. **Figure 11** represents this difference in preferred working patterns between White and ethnic minority respondents within the industry.

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**Figure 11:** preferred number of days spent in the office by ethnicity



Source: All In Census 2023

## The office experience for ethnic minorities

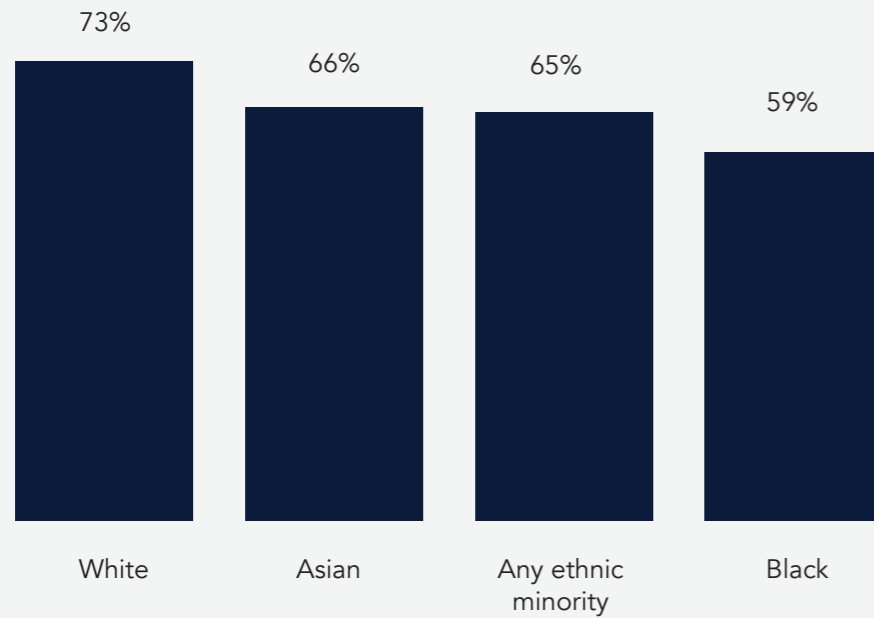
There are many possible explanations for the difference in desired working patterns between White and ethnic minority employees within the industry. However, the All In findings suggest the most likely explanation is that employees from an ethnic minority are more likely to encounter negative workplace experiences than

White employees and are therefore less likely to want to spend time in the office. For example, almost one in ten (9%) people from an ethnic minority had personally experienced racial discrimination at their current company, and 35% believed that their ethnicity was a hinderance to career progression.

## Belonging and value

Ethnic minority employees within the advertising industry report lower levels of belonging and lower levels of feeling valued within their companies. 72% of all respondents in the advertising industry agree with the statement, "I feel like I belong at my company" - this figure is 65% amongst all ethnic minorities and just 59% amongst Black employees, represented in **Figure 12**.

**Figure 12:** % of employees who feel they belong at their company



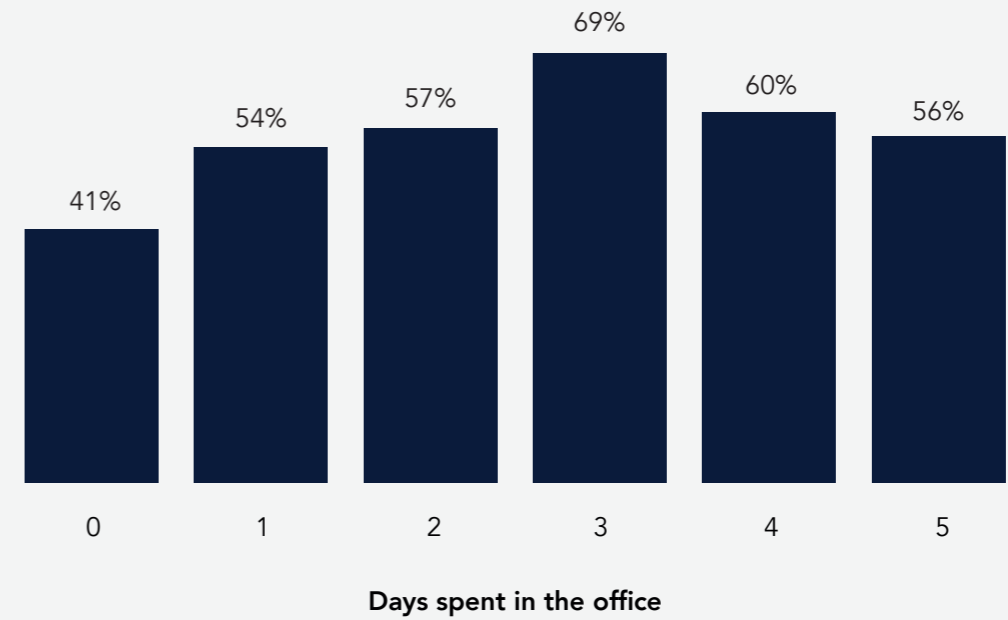
Source: All In Census 2023

Interestingly, feelings of belonging amongst Black employees increases significantly for those working in the office three days per week (69%), as represented in **Figure 13**.

All In data shows that there is a considerable increase in the likelihood of Black employees feeling that they belong when moving from zero days to one day per week in the office, with a clear peak at three days per week in the office.

However, as shown in **Figure 12**, fewer Black employees are spending three days per week in the office than their White or other ethnic minority colleagues. As such, it is important that employers continue to foster inclusive working practices to ensure those from ethnic minorities are not discouraged from spending time in the office.

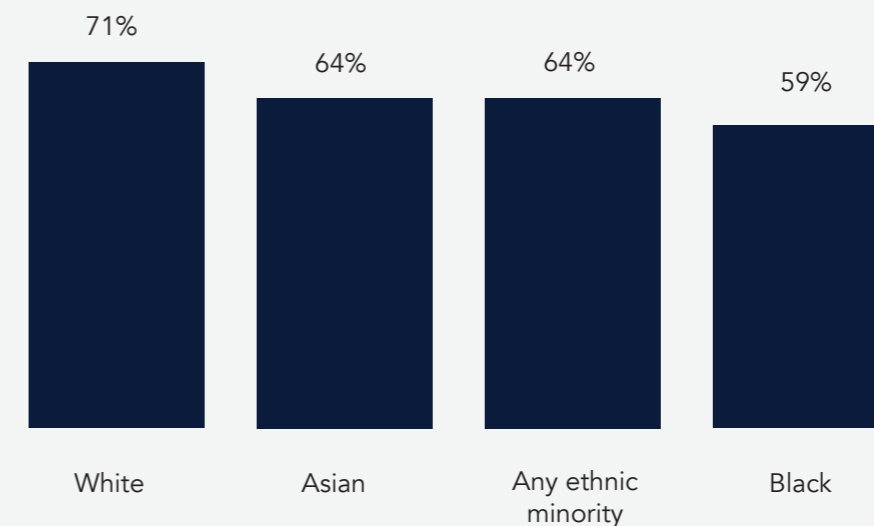
**Figure 13:** % of Black employees who feel they belong at their company by days spent in the office



Source: All In Census 2023

There is also a difference in ethnic minorities feeling valued at work. 64% of ethnic minority employees said they feel they are valued and essential to their company, compared to 71% of White employees. Again, Black employees were even less likely to feel valued or essential to their company, with only 59% agreeing with the statement.

**Figure 14:** % of employees who feel valued and essential parts of their company

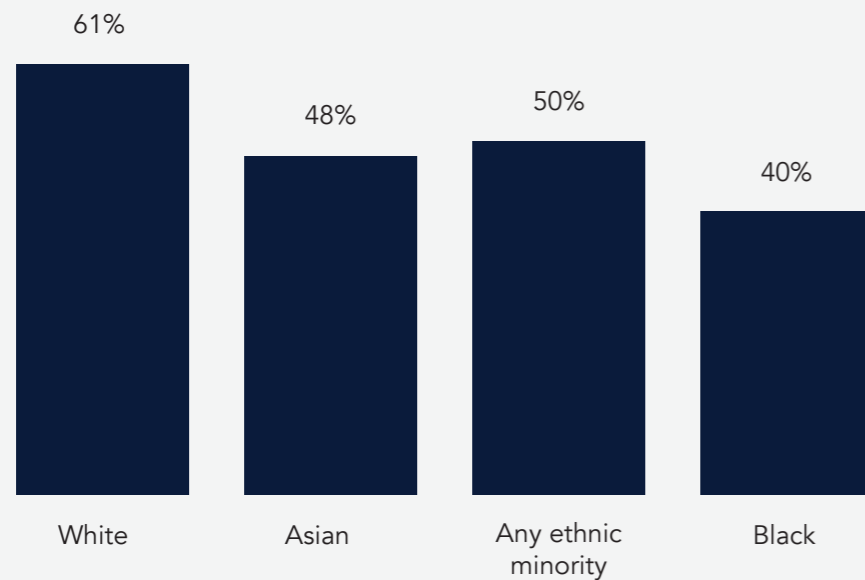


Source: All In Census 2023

## Fairness in hiring and promotion decisions

Perhaps most significantly, ethnic minority employees are far less likely than White employees to believe that “senior managers are fair when it comes to hiring or career advancements”. As **figure 15** shows, 61% of White employees agreed with the statement, compared to just 48% of ethnic minority employees and 40% of Black employees in the advertising industry.

**Figure 15:** % of respondents who feel that senior managers are fair when it comes to hiring or career advancements



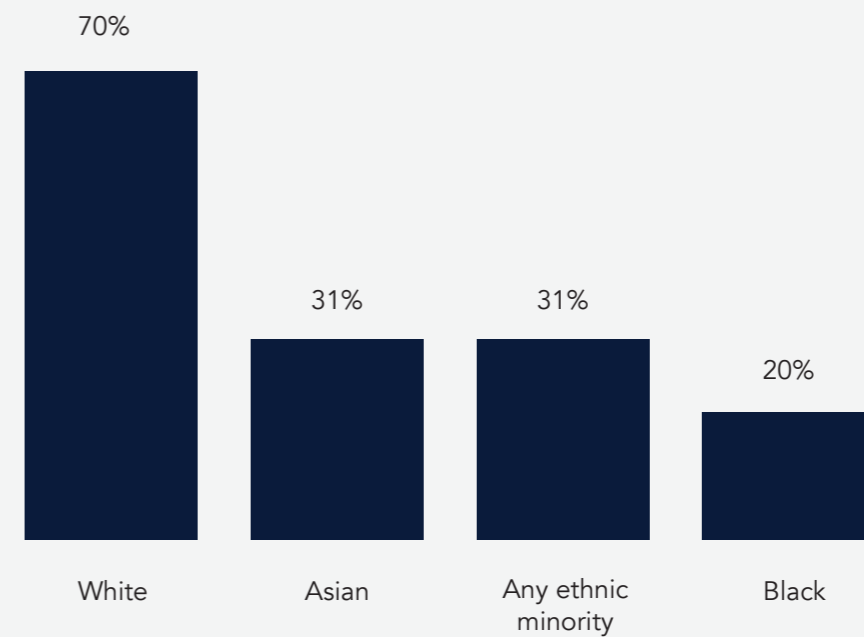
Source: All In Census 2023

It is possible that employees who feel that hiring and career advancement decisions are unfair are less likely to be incentivised to come into the office than those who believe that senior managers make fair decisions in the workplace. This may be a driving

factor of Black employees, and ethnic minorities more generally, being further from their desired working patterns than the overall workforce.

These perceptions of unfair or biased management decisions might be partially explained by ethnic minority employees not seeing themselves represented in senior management. This is reflected in the disparity in responses by White and ethnic minority employees to the statement, “I feel that there are people similar to me in leadership positions in my company”, presented in **Figure 16**.

**Figure 16:** % of employees who feel that there are people similar to them in leadership positions in their company



Source: All In Census 2023

## What can we do?

The All In findings highlight the differing office experiences of White and ethnic minority employees, and the impact that has on the amount of time people spend in the office. This relationship between lived experience and time in the office has perhaps gone unnoticed until now. It suggests that recent changes made to increase feelings of belonging and improve company culture through more time spent in the office, may have the opposite effect for those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The industry is already working hard to improve the experience of everyone working in UK advertising, but more can always be done. We urge all companies who have not yet done so to engage with the All In initiative and to implement the tangible actions it sets out to improve workplace experience and ensure that more time in the office is a prospect welcomed by all.

# What this means for employers

It is vital that employees understand the ramifications of hybrid work – both the positives and the negatives. But it is equally important for employers, as they look to set and amend guidelines going forwards. What are the key considerations?

## Hybrid working as a recruitment and retention tool

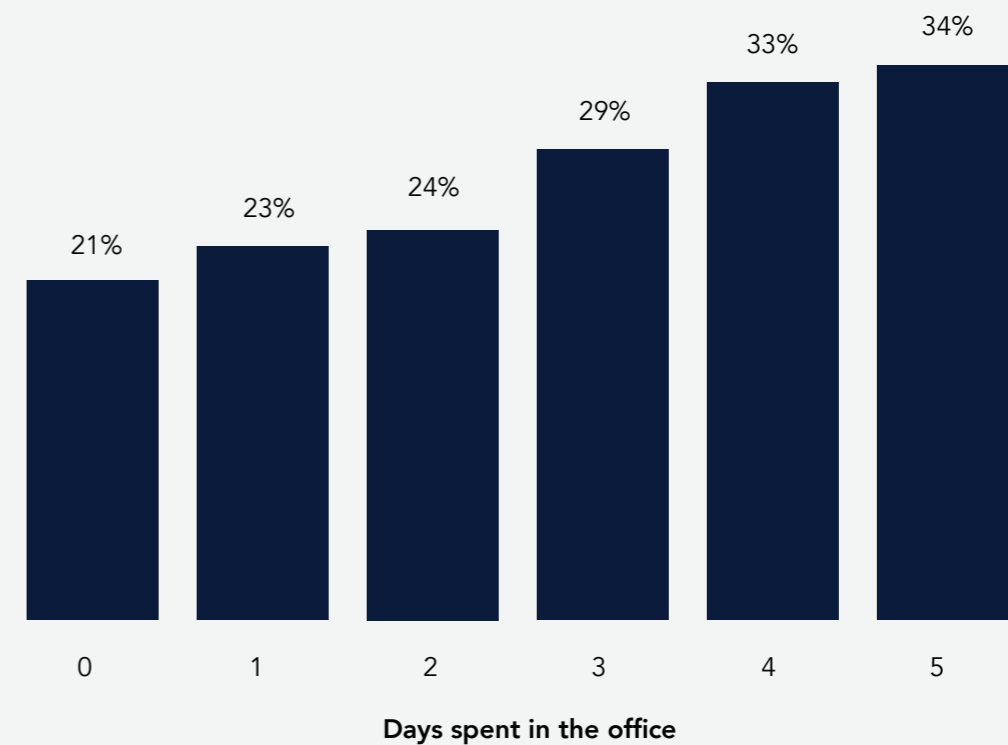
The overwhelming benefit of maintaining hybrid and flexible working options for companies is that it can help companies recruit and retain talent. As has been demonstrated throughout this report, advertising employees enjoy the flexibility of spending some of their week at home, and many will consider a company’s hybrid working policy when deciding whether to

join or stay in an organisation. The benefits of flexible working options for recruitment have been evident for some time, with government discussing the business case long before covid-19<sup>24</sup>. Today, offering hybrid work in an industry for which it is suitable is almost an imperative for a successful recruitment and retention plan<sup>25</sup>.

Of those planning to leave their current company in the next 12 months, over a quarter (26%) stated a lack of work-life balance as the reason. ‘Better opportunity/salary elsewhere’ was the only reason for leaving chosen more frequently. As shown in **Figure 17**, the likelihood of

an employee leaving for this reason is reduced with fewer days spent in the office; under a quarter (23%) of people working in the office for two days or fewer put this as their reason, compared to a third (33%) of people working in the office for four or five days.

**Figure 17:** % of respondents planning to leave their position in the next 12 months who cite work-life balance as the reason



Source: All In Census 2023

In addition to aiding employee recruitment and retention, businesses may find that they are able to operate more frugally by utilising the value that employees place on hybrid work. It has been estimated that staff value the ability to work from home for two or three days per week at roughly an 8% pay rise<sup>26</sup>. In a tight labour market and a cost-of-living crisis, using hybrid working as a tool to attract and retain talent is more useful than ever.

24. Willott, J (2014) *Business benefits of flexible working*. Speech to the Business Benefit of Flexible Working Conference.  
 25. The Alternative Board (2022). *The advantages and disadvantages of flexible working for employers*. [online]

26. Tangalakis-Lippert, K (2023). *The back-to-office backfire: Companies ending WFH perks lose out on top talent, who view flexible work as equivalent to an 8% raise*. [online] Business Insider.

## Understanding the challenges

Although many staff report higher levels of satisfaction and happiness due to hybrid working arrangements, the collective satisfaction of an organisation may be affected by having high numbers of staff working remotely.

Many employees still prefer to spend most of their time in the office, interacting with colleagues face-to-face; something that is difficult to do when offices are largely empty. Therefore, while offering full flexibility may seem to be the solution which suits all employees, it can act as a demotivator to those who enjoy office working.

The evidence also shows that employees' connectedness to their teams and companies reduces when they spend more time at home. This is demonstrated by reduced feelings of belonging, value and support amongst those with higher levels of remote work.

Many employers leading the shift back to more days in the office cite insufficient productivity as a key reason. This was a central driver of the civil service's recent U-turn and continues to play a key role in moves towards more traditional modes of work. Higher levels of remote work can put greater strain on management and leadership, especially in relation to the guidance of younger employees. In the words of Stanford Economics Professor Nick Bloom:

***Fully remote workers can struggle with mentoring, innovation, and culture building. However, it appears this can be reversed with good management. Running remote teams is hard but done well can deliver strong performance.***<sup>27</sup>

– Nick Bloom, Stanford Economics Professor

## Finding the balance

For most employers, the aim is to create a happy and effective workforce. Employees who enjoy their work and feel looked after are more likely to work effectively and stay in their positions. It is each employer's responsibility, then, to not just weigh these factors against one another, but to put in place mitigating measures. For those offering high levels of flexibility, how can you make sure your workforce feel adequately supported, foster greater belonging amongst employees and protect their mental health? For those asking staff to spend more time in the office, how do you ensure gains made in relation to work-life balance are not compromised? Is it possible to offer flexibility elsewhere?

The findings presented in this report are intended to generate further discussion about sensible and practical approaches to long-term hybrid working policies in the industry. Each company, depending on their function, goals and priorities will ultimately decide what is best for their business and the people they employ, but doing so with advertising-specific research in mind can only be a positive for the industry if we are to recruit, retain and develop the best talent while being mindful of the specific challenges that our employees face.

27. Bloom, N (2023). *Does working from home damage productivity? Just look at the data.* [online] The Hill.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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