

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how we work and manage caring responsibilities

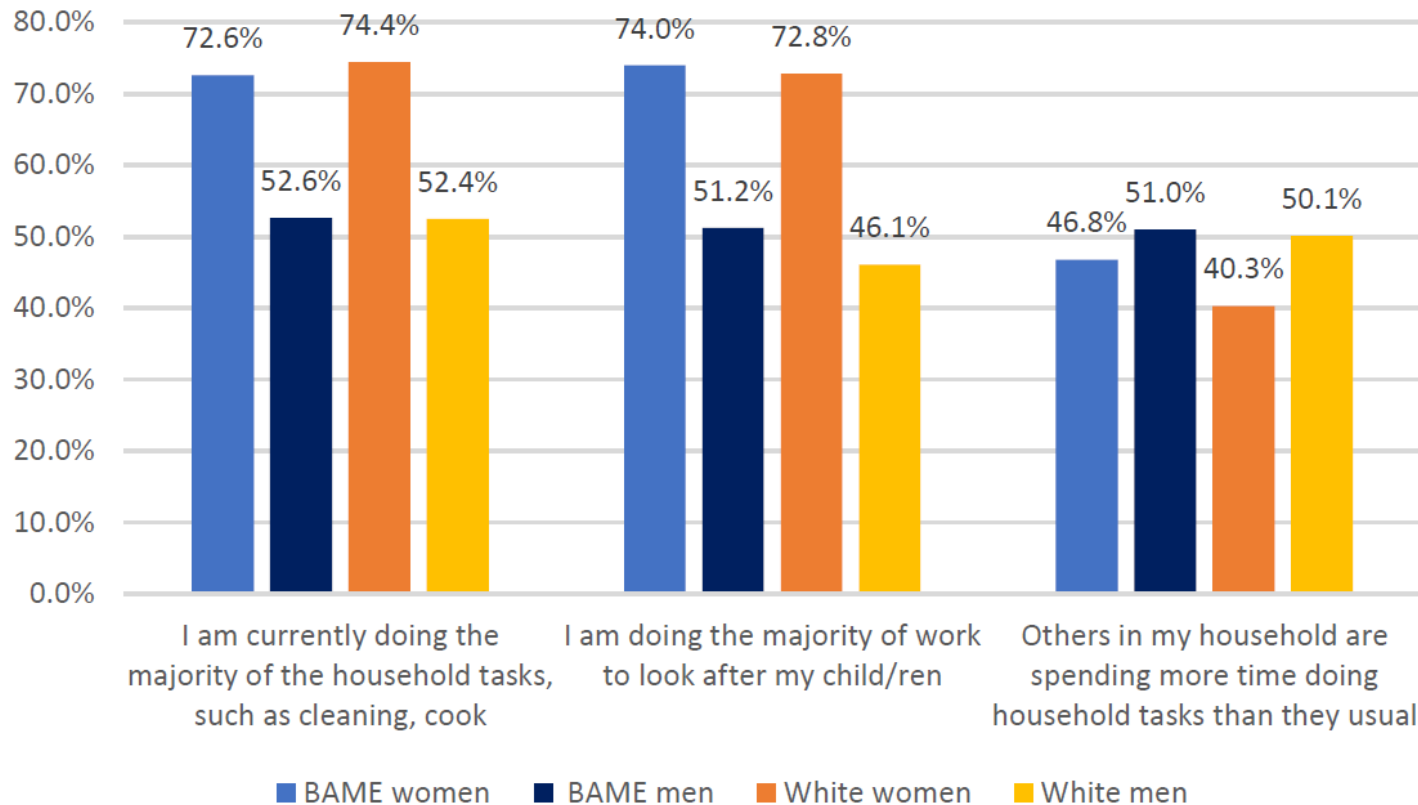
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Context

- Length of pandemic has impacted on how we live and work
- Commitment to campuses reopening in September 2021
- ‘The pandemic is far from over and the global response is at a critical phase’ (World Health Organisation 2021)
- ‘There is a significant risk thatwomen’s... inequality will be further reinforced’ Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, Council of Europe (June 2020).

Equality issues in the 'new' working environment

Who has been doing the majority of caring and domestic work?



Source: BAME women and Covid-19 – Research evidence
www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=cae4917f-1df3-4ab8-94e7-550c23bdc9cf

N=3,253; 1,627; 2,639

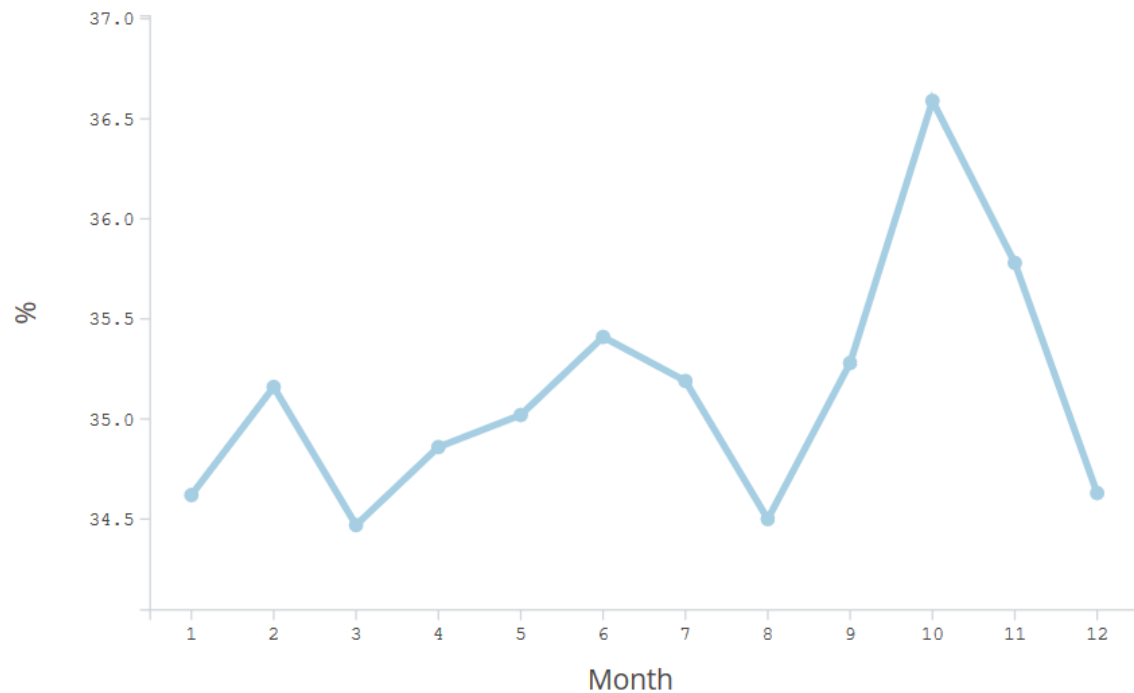
Research conducted within the HE sector to date has found that:

Women report less time to spend on research due to caring responsibilities. Men researchers have reported this to be the case too, 41% in comparison to 42% women (Vitae, 2020).

However evidence shows women have been 'struggling' the most (Smith & Watchorn 2020), and women's publication rates were significantly impacted (Thackery, 2020) (THES, 2021).

Proportion of research papers accepted where the first author is female, by month of submission

2020



Source: Digital Science/Dimensions

HE specific research continued

- Women in professional and services occupations have borne the brunt of caring responsibilities and domestic tasks in comparison to men (WHEN, 2021).
- Women more concerned than men about contract renewal or cessation. (Vitae, 2020).

Other factors to consider

- Women in business had more early starts, late finishes and sought more time off to look after children and elderly family members (IBEC, 2021).
- Many women working from home, may not have access to adequate workspace. Any existing home office space 'defaults to the man' (Patton, 2020).
- Research by YouGov has found that women are worried about burn out with 41% citing it as a professional concern over the next 1 to 3 years.

Word cloud 1

What have been the key equality issues for your HEI during the Covid-19 pandemic to date?

Work cloud 2

What initiatives have been introduced in response to the equality issues?

Considerations in supporting staff with caring responsibilities going forward

Domestic abuse

- Reported incidents increased 15% during 2020 in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland at least 2018 women and 550 children received support each month from September to December.
- Go Purple for Domestic Violence Day launched in Republic of Ireland in 2021
- Domestic Abuse and Civil proceedings Act 2021 (NI) extends protection



Like COVID-19, you can't always see the signs of domestic abuse.
If you hear violence next door, get help. [#listeningfromhome](#)



CIPD & EHRC (Sept. 2020) guidance on managing and supporting employees experiencing abuse

www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse-guide_tcm18-84538.pdf

Reflecting on remote working

Shift to homeworking and new digital infrastructures present opportunities for wider social change (Oertelt-Prigione, 2020)

Respondents (n=1270) to Advance HE's research into remote working said that it had helped them engage in:

- + Departmental meetings (64.3% men and 64.8% women)
- + Their administrative work (61% men and 60.5% women)
- + Internal and external committees (51.7% men and 49.7% women)
- + Career development activities (31.2% men and 46.8% women)
- + Conferences (36.1% men and 41.3% women)

www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/gender-differences-uk-he-staff-experiences-remote-working

Productivity and remote working

39.3% of respondents said that they were more productive now than compared with before the shift to remote working (i.e. March 2020).

What was more likely to predict how respondents' rated their own productivity was:

1. Access to adequate workspace;
2. having an institution that provided information on opportunities and processes; and
3. having an institution that made arrangements to support remote working and keeping in touch with colleagues.

Hybrid working

Tips from Timewise

- **Fairness:** Will everyone be able to access hybrid working?
- **Inclusivity:** What steps will be taken to ensure an office based 'in-crowd' and more remote workers does not develop? Are disabled people and those with caring responsibilities more likely to opt for homeworking?
- **Collaboration and innovation:** how will formal and informal collaboration be facilitated when people aren't in the office together?
- **Inequality:** How will you support staff if you expect them to be homebased for part of the week on an ongoing basis?

Word cloud 3

How is your institution preparing for hybrid working?

Culture surrounding hours of work

Consider:

- Providing guidance on meetings e.g. length and built in breaks
- Straplines on expectations of response to emails
- Briefing managers on expected amount of personal contact with employees and what to do if concerned regarding well being
- If previous mechanisms for identifying staff working excessive hours are appropriate
- Implications of the new 'right to disconnect'

www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/codes_practice/code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf

The University College London 'hour' runs from 5 minutes past the hour to five minutes to the hour. This gives staff 10 minutes between meetings and is likely to benefit staff with caring responsibilities who need to check on older children and relatives.

Core hours

- Initially designed to enable working parents to more easily manage childcare before and after school.
- Nursery and school closures plus uncertainty over wrap around care has meant children are at home more. If still applied in the pandemic, is the core hours policy still fit for purpose?
- Are there any trends that can be identified in the hours that staff with caring responsibilities are working? Are these trends concerning?

What do we count as work?

‘The time invested in care and schooling work must be recognised as working time in order to prevent excessive workloads and the health consequences thereof (such as e.g. burnout). In the medium and long term it will be important, that time invested in additional care and schooling work will not be regarded as active research time when applying for promotion or professorships.’
Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, Council of Europe (June 2020).

https://genderaction.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SWGGRI_Position-paper-on-COVID-19.pdf?mc_cid=20fb2eec9f&mc_eid=8449fa2042

Supporting men carers following the return to campus

We have an opportunity to reset norm of domestic work being conducted by women (Chauhan, 2020).

Studies in the US, Canada, Germany, Turkey and the Netherlands find men are doing more domestic work and childcare than before the pandemic (Aschaiek, 2021, CCF 2020, Schulte & Swenson, 2020)

Funders of research are	Institutions can
Extending funding deadlines and research programmes	Ensure staff with caring responsibilities are aware and support staff in applying for extensions.
Recognising the need to consider impact of Covid-19 during promotions, recruitment and funding allocation processes	Review recruitment and promotions processes to ensure staff with caring responsibilities during the pandemic are not at a disadvantage during the recruitment and promotions process.
Developing new principles in recognition of the impact of the pandemic on staff with caring responsibilities	Ensure policies, practices and procedures to support staff with caring responsibilities are appropriate in the context of the pandemic
Monitoring impact of higher education institutions responses on gender equality	Ensure continued resource for gender equality work including work to support staff with caring responsibilities
Conducting research to enable policy development appropriate to our new context	Share information on these opportunities with all staff and encourage consideration of gendered impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in research design

Higher Education Authority

HEA National Committee for Gender Equality statement on the COVID-19 pandemic and gender equality in Irish Higher Education includes a list of policies and practices which the committee recommends are implemented, some of which are already in place.

<https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/07/Statement-on-the-COVID-19-pandemic-and-gender-equality-in-Irish-higher-education-1.pdf>

Examples of initiatives and reflective thinking

Insights from Athena Swan



- Too early to tell impact of the pandemic on gender equality work undertaken in relation to Athena Swan.
- Was drop in submissions in 2020 primarily due to extensions offered because of the pandemic.
- Will continue to monitor and support the sector e.g. events to support and inform practice and good practice database <https://bit.ly/3dBNm7J>

What initiatives were introduced to support staff?

- www.advance-he.ac.uk/advance-he-scotland-good-practice-sector-response-covid-19
- Additional days off/complete institutional closure not uncommon. Universities of Strathclyde and Newcastle 4 day week during lockdown.
- QUB has surveyed staff to understand the impact of lockdowns, potential solutions and positive learnings. Has specific FAQs for staff with dependents, supports staff in changing their working pattern and has extended Dependant Leave to a maximum of ten working days on full pay only where staff are unable work. The Queen's gender initiative and QUB childcare developed childcare resources to support staff with caring responsibilities.

- Focus on information, advice and guidance e.g. provision of **clear overview of support available to staff with caring responsibilities** e.g. Imperial support website for staff <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/covid-19/staff/>
- Wellcome Sanger Institute introduced fixed pay rises and took a lighter touch approach to appraisal. Disaggregating data from staff surveys by caring responsibilities (children, older and disabled people) as well as equality characteristics. Carer's grant extended to cover childcare and other costs due to Covid-19 to be covered. Parents and carers network very active during the first lockdown and published advice and resources on the staff intranet.

UCL Covid-19 Career Support Scheme:

Commits £500,000 of funds or support to staff whose career has been most affected by the pandemic:

1. Giving back time – a payment of up to £500 to alleviate personal pressures e.g. to pay for additional child care.
2. Equity Bridging Fund – provides grants of up to £10,000 to support work e.g. by meeting salary costs of extending contracts or increasing hours of part time staff.
3. Supporting Teaching, Technical, Research, Academic and Professional Services – provides funds to pay for 20 – 40 hours of temping support.

www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/covid-19-career-support-scheme

Putting staff at ease: University of Edinburgh

- If your **role** can be done remotely, **we do understand** that you may be trying to do so **while simultaneously caring for very young or disabled children**, or supervising the **home-schooling of older children**. You may be doing this **on your own** and may also have other **vulnerable or elderly dependants to care for**. If it is impossible for you to work from home due to your caring responsibilities, you should discuss this with your manager as you may be eligible for furlough, i.e. placed on temporary paid leave. More information on 'furlough' can be found above.
- **We know that what works for one member of staff working at home will not work for another. What worked in week one of the national lockdown may not work several weeks later, and we know that the needs of your household and dependants will change along the way, including as you perhaps move from home-schooling to what would have been school holidays.**
- **So there are no rules** – it will be what works for you and **we trust you** to work that out and do what you can, when you can. We'll operate in the spirit of 'best endeavours'. If you can work from home at some point in the day, we ask that you do so and that you do what you can to ensure your manager, your team and other key colleagues know when you are likely to be available. We understand that, with other members of the family at home, it may be difficult to predict when you will be available and that your availability to work may change at short notice.

Reflective thinking

- Where will we be in 6 months time and in 2 years?
- Should we be taking a business as usual approach to gender equality or changing our approach?
- How can the HEA support gender equality based on what we know about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic?



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