



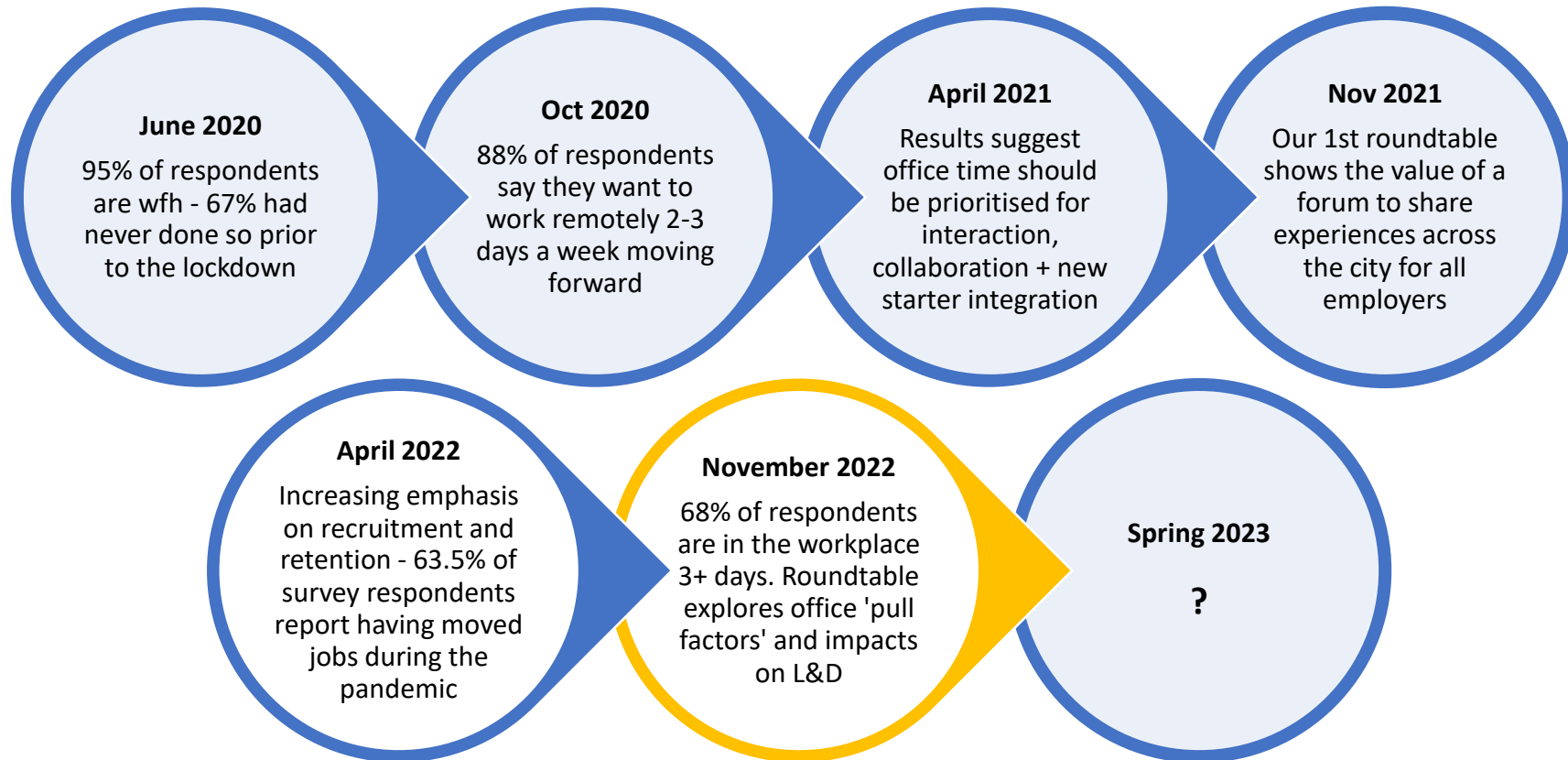
**CAMBRIDGE AHEAD YOUNG ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**January 2023 Future of Work Survey & Roundtable Report**

## Executive summary

The Cambridge Ahead Young Advisory Committee, a group of under-35s in CA Member organisations, conducts bi-annual surveys of how younger professionals are responding to the changing world of work. We then explore key themes in roundtable discussions with business leaders and experts. The results of these surveys and roundtables are shared with CA Members to provide a 'finger on the pulse' of the changing world of work, from the perspective of younger workers. Any Member that would like to engage further with the YAC on this workstream should contact Alex ([alex@cambridgeahead.co.uk](mailto:alex@cambridgeahead.co.uk)).

- **Under 35s seem to be going into their workplaces more regularly than before.** The percentage in their workplace for 3 or more days a week has increased from 29% to 68% in the most recent survey. However, roundtable attendees stressed that **the transformative benefits of hybrid working for some young workers should not be lost in an effort to entice them back to workspaces.** Current behaviours appear to be in line with younger workers' expectations: spending 2-3 days per week in their workplace has consistently been the most common request from under 35s across our surveys.
- Whilst our survey found that 'free food' would be the biggest enticement back to the workplace, it also matters to younger people who else is going to be there. We heard that **learning and development is a very different proposition remotely versus in person**, both in terms of formal and informal chances to develop skills and progress. There's a **growing concern among some younger people about the dangers of presenteeism** – a post-pandemic undercurrent to be wary of. As we begin to reach a point where working patterns appear to be settling down, and longer-term issues around progression and presenteeism are surfacing, how will employers respond?
- Many employers have responded to the rising cost of living. Almost half of respondents (44%) stated that their work had provided a salary increase or inflation bonus to help with increased bills. The **effect of rising costs on productivity and anxiety** levels were discussed at the roundtable. How might these concerns have developed over the winter period?
- Over half of under 35s surveyed are travelling more than 30 minutes to work and a similar proportion travel via private car. **Efforts to disincentivise use of the private car and invest in buses, micromobility and active travel in the region may affect this group more than most.**
- As many workplaces appear to be settling into a hybrid model, **what lessons are being learned from wider changes to working life** such as trials of the 4-day week? Will these reinforce or undermine the benefits of a more flexible working life?
- For future surveys, the subgroup will be considering how it might collaborate with researchers exploring future working at the Bennett Institute of Public Policy.

*YAC Future of Work: Programme Overview*





## Introduction

Jacqueline Platt, Deloitte

The Young Advisory Committee have completed their half yearly Future of Work Survey to capture the voice of the under 35 workforce in the Greater Cambridge Economy as represented by the Cambridge Ahead Members.

This survey was the fifth in this series that informs the ongoing work of assessing how the recent seismic events impact and shape the future of work.

We noted an increased number of respondents with a total of 247 of which 53.4% were female and an even spread across the age range of 21 to 35. These are strong indicators of a representative sample.

82% of the respondents indicated that they are able to do their job remotely and we have noted an increase in the population's "days in office" with 68% of respondents commuting to the workplace 3 or more days a week, previously this was only 29%.

These statistics raise very interesting questions around what the purpose of the workplace is and what draws employees to work at an office. In this survey, we explored this topic in more detail, gathering information around what rules are set by employers and also what employees' ideal or preference is. The results of these question indicated that 63% of respondents would ideally like to go into the workplace 3 or more days a week which corresponds with what is actually happening. Comparing this to rules set by employers we noted that only 14% of respondents indicated that there are no set rules by their employers and 13.5% indicated specific rules like a set number of days a month etc. A large proportion indicated that their employers set rules to be in the workplace 1 – 2 days per week (27%) and 3 – 4 days per week (30.7%).

With the main focus of questions and conversations being around the workplace we inquired of the population what the one thing their employer could do to make working from home better for them. The most common response was a desire by employees to have employers provide finance to cover the cost of energy bills.

## Travel to the workplace and employee retention

Henry Stark, Marshalls

### *U-35's travel to the workplace - now and in the future*

It has become well known that Cambridge is one of the least affordable cities in the UK and as a consequence could represent more of a challenge for employers looking to attract and retain a younger workforce in the future. Average house prices are around 12 times the average salary according to a recent survey and many young workers are opting to live outside of the city to commute into the workplace.

In this latest survey we were interested to understand more about under-35's current travel arrangements to the workplace and the options for more sustainable travel going forward.

Results show that 77% of the under-35s are travelling from anywhere between 21-60+ minutes to the Cambridge workplace at the moment and with this timeframe they are mostly travelling by private car. 52%, in fact, are currently travelling to work by car as the most convenient mode of transport. This of course has an impact on congestion in the city and is certainly not the most environmentally friendly option. The recent GCP City Access consultation will undoubtedly prompt a new way of thinking for this demographic and their future transportation plans to avoid the associated fees with the car.

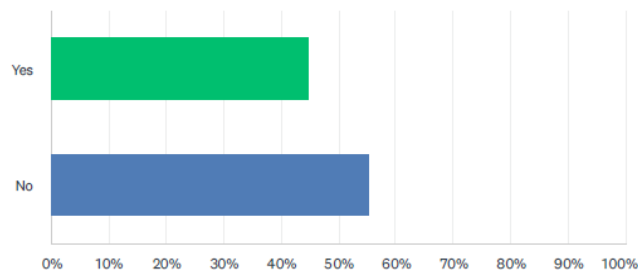
For the large majority who do travel by car, we asked what was stopping them from using public transport at this current time and the four overwhelming responses were 'time to destination' (80 votes), 'Frequency of transport' (66 votes), 'Accessibility of transport' (59 votes) and 'Cost' (47 votes). If coming to the place of work becomes inaccessible for the car, there is an undoubted need to address the sustainable travel options of the train, buses and cycle ways in order to actively encourage this demographic to use them. Without these alternatives in place, there is a significant risk of losing the future workforce to alternative employers that are more conveniently and sustainably accessible.

#### *Employee retention*

Attracting the under-35s to the workplace is key to supporting future growth for Cambridge employers. Transportation links aside, it is of course up to the employer to make the workplace an attractive environment to work in and to provide the opportunities needed to develop the workforce.

Interestingly, from this most recent survey we have seen a significant number of job changes from under-35s since the pandemic started with 45% of respondents having changed employer during this period as shown below.

Have you changed to a different employer since the pandemic started in 2020?



For the 45% who have changed employer, they were asked why they had changed. The largest majority was for the need of 'career development' which represented 66% of the votes. 'Better pay/benefits' and 'work/life balance' were the next highest scoring answers from this group. Retaining workers from this demographic will be imperative, so understanding how best to do this will undoubtedly be pivotal in continuing business growth for future generations.

In contrast, from the 55% who have stayed with the same employer since the pandemic of 2020, the majority stated that work/life balance and security were the main reasons for wanting to stay. In-house career opportunities also scored highly which is in contrast to those who changed employers in the section above.



From these results it is clear to see that the majority of employers have been very good at accommodating the needs of its employees in this under-35 demographic and have consequently retained their existing workforce or even made it more attractive to others to join their businesses.

To attract young talent, businesses will need to understand what matters to them. The pandemic has clearly taught us that flexibility at work is now an expectation, but value can be significantly added if companies can promote a [culture of continuous learning](#) and highlight the opportunities they'll provide for career growth. Whether this is facilitating mentorship opportunities or providing access to learning courses, all of these steps will go a long way to attracting and retaining those at the earliest stages of their careers.

## Enticing employees back to the workplace

Thomas Bewes, JLL

Only a quarter of respondents perceive that employees of all levels of seniority come into the workplace an equal amount, with half of the respondents stating that the most junior employees go to the office more than those from other seniority strata. Middle and senior management shared the remaining votes between them, with middle management c. 4% ahead of senior management for perceived workplace attendance.

When asked what factors might entice workers back into the office on a more regular basis, overwhelmingly the most popular response was free food. Needless to say, there is no such thing as a free lunch, but a day in the office would be a pretty negligible levy to pay for free sustenance. Respondents clearly agree, with over 52% noting this to be a key draw for them to be in the workplace. The other four factors which attracted at least 30% of respondents were being with other colleagues in the workplace, after work facilities (such as gyms and social space), team building events, and in person meetings. The latter two of these seem more obligatory than optional, and the second is more organic, so some real weight can be given to the office attendance advantages a firm can gain by offering food, gym facilities, and social spaces.

In terms of the issues respondents noted in the 'other' section, the prevalent factor pertained to transport costs, and either better public transport options, or contributions towards commuting costs from employers. Indeed, eight people noted this theme across 31 answers.

When working from the company workplace, the amenities most utilised locally are cafes (29% use daily) and shops (17% use daily), with galleries, pubs and bars all sitting at almost 0% daily use when working from the office.

When working from home, the gym sees an uptick of about 9 percentage points in terms of daily usage by respondents. This tallies with the aforementioned appetite from respondents for gym and exercise facilities as a draw to come into the workplace. There is a gap in expectation and reality here which could be catered to by employers seeking to attract people back to the workplace providing such facilities. Furthermore, when working from home, use of cafes reduces to 3%, and shops also sink to 6% daily usage across respondents.

Public services, such as dentists, doctors, and post offices, see a considerable (and understandable) increase in use by respondents when they work from home. Of course, people register with GPs and dentists local to their home as opposed to their work. If they have appointments in person, it



would be more pragmatic for them to work from home to save on commute times. But could there be something to be said for more employers offering health insurance packages which include online GP on-the-day appointments? Another facility which could be provided would be an in house postal service in the workplace, which some employers offer already, to save employees from having to stay at home to access postal services in working hours.

## How can Cambridge prevent the cost-of-living crisis from accelerating inequality?

Liam Ronan-Chlond, Socius

From public access to places of work, to increased energy costs and higher mortgage rates; there are multiple factors that impede Cambridge from tackling the scourge of inequality. Inequality plays out across intersections, from tangible concepts, such as incomings and outgoings, to more abstract notions of access to certain places and spaces.

For instance, in this survey, we asked people whether the tightened cost of living had meant our respondents might be more likely to head into the office, or work from home. At our last roundtable, which took place during historically high petrol prices, we had heard anecdotally that people who drove were more likely to stay working from home to save money on fuel. However, 51% reported no change in where they might work. While the squeezed cost of living has certainly added a new dynamic to hybrid working, it hasn't nudged people's working habits as much as we might have expected. The remainder were split, with just under a quarter saying they will head into the office more often and just over a quarter saying they'd prefer to work from home more.

Will this change after a harsh winter with increased energy costs? Furthermore, will fuel bills combine with rising mortgage rates to force people out of their existing homes?

The vast majority of our survey respondents don't seem to think so. Whilst most people don't seem overly inclined to change their working habits, the status quo remains for people's homes also. Rising energy bills and mortgage rates are only influencing 24% of people to move home. The remaining 76% are happy to stay put. Maybe this is also a reflection of the cost of moving home, which remains at an all-time high. This may also be because so many people moved during lockdown to find more appropriate accommodation.

In addition to asking people about their place of residence and place of work, we also wanted to ask those public spaces, in-between home and work. It's often noted amongst sociologists that progressive, more equal societies embrace public space. It might therefore not be surprising that Cambridge, as a city experiencing significant deprivation in some quarters and immense wealth in others, needs to work harder on sharing space. 72% of our respondents reported that their place of work contained no amenities that were accessible to the general public.

If Cambridge is serious about tackling inequality, then the city should be aiming for more shared publicly accessible space. Why is this important? Because Cambridge is a global knowledge capital, and to ensure everyone in the city can fully embrace this opportunity and reach their potential, its assets need to be more welcoming and accessible to local people. This is one of a number of issues that will be explored further, to open up opportunities in the city for all, as part of the Young Advisory Committee's 'City of Quarters' report, due to be launched in 2023.

Finally, it is worth noting that just under half of employees (44%) reported receiving a salary increase, or inflation bonus, in response to the recent rise on the cost of living. However, the



majority, at 56%, report their pay remaining frozen. With inflation reducing the value of this take-home pay, in real terms, it is maybe no coincidence that we are staring into a season of large-scale coordinated industrial action; to an extent not seen since the dark days of the winter of discontent in 1979.

To end on a more positive note, we were delighted that 68% respondents, that's 158 people, wanted to take part in our roundtable to discuss this survey further and lay the foundations for its next edition. This provides us with plenty of food for thought in terms of how we continue to engage with our survey respondents to maximise qualitative feedback.

## January 2023 Future of Work Roundtable

The latest in a series of roundtables was held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023 with a diverse group of local business leaders, researchers and employees with an interest in the Future of Work. Attendees explored a number of themes in further detail.

The survey gave an ambiguous impression of the impact of rising costs on younger workers and roundtable attendees offered different views on this. Some noted research with those in managerial roles which shows impacts on individuals' anxiety and productivity.<sup>1</sup> Others spoke anecdotally about seeing a higher proportion of people entering coworking spaces during colder spells, potentially due to higher heating costs. Ultimately, the latest survey (which was conducted in November 2022) is likely to not have captured the full picture of these impacts.

Roundtable attendees reflected on the 'pull factors' that might encourage younger people to be in their workplaces, but also stressed the transformative value of greater flexibility for some younger workers, especially those with young families. These benefits should not be disregarded in a drive to entice people back into workspaces. The importance of being physically present in your workspace in order to garner recognition from more senior staff and make social relationships was acknowledged. This may be a somewhat under-recognised dynamic of hybrid working which is worth discussing with newer staff, especially those who may feel undue pressure to be physically present.

Related to this, attendees also discussed the relationship between hybrid working and employee retention. Some suggested that employees who work entirely remotely appear to move on more quickly, possibly due to feeling less connected to their colleagues or to the work itself. Others noted that greater flexibility can be a huge draw and retainer of talent, pointing to significant interest in the 4-day week model for those seeking a new work-life balance.

Learning and development was raised regularly at the roundtable. Younger professionals expressed a concern that they have begun to take on some responsibilities of line managers who are not physically present e.g. onboarding new staff, without the same degree of training to do this effectively. Others reflected on new staff not receiving the same level of investment in their own development, which may weaken retention in the longer term. There was a strong interest from attendees in exploring learning and development within hybrid workspaces in more detail, either in a future survey or roundtable discussion.

An guest at the roundtable, Dr Nina Jörden of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, updated the group on research projects she is carrying out which may inform future surveys or roundtables within the YAC:

- [Mental Wellbeing, Productivity and Work](#): A 5-year project in collaboration with KPMG, focused on wellbeing in the workplace and its impact on productivity.
- An evaluation of the [4-day week trial](#) taking place at South Cambridgeshire District Council. Dr Jörden will be evaluating the impact of moving to a 4-day week – again focussed on wellbeing and productivity, but also to identify whether it provides a stronger recruitment argument for public sector employers.
- The experiences of younger professionals are a focus across these workstreams, with insights covering younger professionals' experiences of hybrid working and professional learning in hybrid environments. Research on these issues are covered the Bennett

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/article/the-forced-return-to-presenteeism/>





Institute's blog ['Why young knowledge-workers need special attention in the world of hybrid work'](#).

The YAC Future of Work subgroup will be considering how best to engage with these research projects, alongside suggestions for survey questions from the roundtable and the wider YAC meeting in late-January, as it prepares the next Future of Work survey for Spring 2023.