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**COVID-19 and disabled workers:**

**Time for a homeworking revolution?**

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**June 2020**

**Chairs’ introduction**

For years disabled workers have been saying that they could often do their job better and with less pain if they could work from home. In fact, for years disabled workers have apparently had the right to work from home as a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010.

But the reality has been entirely different. Time and again we have been told home working is “not our policy” or just wouldn’t be possible.

But then Covid-19 came along. And all of a sudden millions of people were told to work from home.

Our survey found that half of disabled workers worked from home every day during the pandemic. Giving the lie to employers who claimed it just wasn’t possible. And almost three quarters of these workers said they were more productive or just as productive.

So Covid-19 has proved that working from home is possible and can have a positive impact on both workers and on business.

Of course, not everyone wants to work from home. And personally, we are both looking forward to getting back to work when it’s safe. We don’t want a “one size fits all” approach. But disabled workers who want to work from home should have the right to do so.

This virus has had a devastating effect on disabled people. Simply put, we’re twice as likely to die compared to non-disabled people. But let’s try and take something positive out of this horrific experience for disabled people. Let’s have a revolution in homeworking for those who want it.

**Graeme Ellis and Tansaim Hussain-Gul**

**Co-chairs, UNISON National Disabled Members Committee**

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
2. UNISON undertook a survey of disabled workers’ experience at work in June 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was at a time when the ‘lockdown’ had been partially eased but most of the UK were still being advised to work from home and over 2 million people were “shielding”.
3. Key findings from the survey were as follows:

* 50% of disabled workers worked from home all of the time during the Covid-19 pandemic
* 73% of disabled workers were more or as productive working from home
* Reasons for increased productivity included reduced impact on pain and fatigue due to less commuting and ability to work more flexibly with additional breaks or later start times
* A number of disabled workers reported taking less sickness absence as they were able to manage their condition better when working from home.
* For those who were less productive, reasons included lack of reasonable adjustments, IT equipment and the mental health impact of homeworking
* 53% had not been given any reasonable adjustments to support them to work from home
* Only 5% had help from Access to Work, the government’s flagship agency that funds adjustments for disabled workers
* 41% did not know about Access to Work and 23% did not think Access to Work could help with working from home
* 54% felt that they would benefit from working from home in the future
* However, 37% believe their employer is unlikely to allow them to work from home in the future

1. UNISON’s conclusions are:

* A significant proportion of disabled workers would benefit from working from home
* Home working would also be a benefit for the employer in terms of increased productivity and reduced sickness absence for these workers
* However too few disabled workers are being allowed the option of home working as a reasonable adjustment
* Access to Work has not been able to support disabled workers to work from home during Covid-19 as much as it should have, mainly due to lack of awareness, investment and capacity and an emphasis on paper processes
* Nonetheless, there remain many disabled workers who do not want to work from home and are more productive in the workplace. They should be supported to remain in the workplace, increasing the visibility of disabled people and exercising their right to reasonable adjustments.

1. Recommendations include:

* A new enforceable right to home working for disabled workers who want it, with clear deadlines for response from employers and for implementation
* A new government fund for IT and other equipment to encourage a radical shift in the workforce towards homeworking for those who want it
* Significant investment in Access to Work to kick start radical change in disabled people’s working lives and so that capacity is not an issue in future emergencies
* A step change in the profile of Access to Work so that all disabled workers (and employers) are made aware of it
* Increased efficiency of Access to Work, including a default acceptance of electronic claims.
* Increased enforcement of the right to reasonable adjustment so that those who do not want to work from home (or cannot do so) can exercise their right to reasonable adjustments to continue to go to work, and there is no “one size fits all” approach.

1. **ABOUT UNISON**
2. UNISON is the UK’s largest trade union with 1.4 million members. Our members are people working in the public services and for private contractors providing public services, including in the essential utilities. They include frontline staff and managers working full or part time in local authorities, the NHS, the police service, colleges and schools, the electricity, gas and water industries, transport, non-departmental public bodies and the voluntary sector.
3. Based on government data, we estimate that we have between 160,000 and 200,000 members who are disabled.
4. UNISON is committed to self organisation and has a strong self organised disabled members group which operates on a branch, regional and national level. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all workers but disabled workers are more likely to be impacted by the virus.
5. **METHODOLOGY**
6. The online Workplace Disability and Health survey was distributed via a targeted email to UNISON members who identify as disabled in June 2020. It was also publicised using UNISON social media channels so that non-members could participate. Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their experience of homeworking during the Covid-19 pandemic.
7. Where a respondent said they did not have a mental or physical impairment likely to last 12 months or more, they were disqualified from completing the survey.
8. **RESPONDENTS**
9. There were 4,455 complete responses to the survey but up to 4,788 people answered some of the questions.
10. Reflecting the primary communication channels used to publicise the survey, 99.3% of respondents said they were UNISON members.
11. EXPERIENCE BEFORE COVID-19

Prior to Covid-19, less than 5% of disabled workers worked from home every day or most days. In contrast 77% never or very rarely worked from home. Just 9% occasionally worked from home, for example one or twice a month.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, which of the following best described your job?

The Covid-19 pandemic and the government advice to work from home if at all possible saw a huge change in disabled members experience of work. Almost overnight many had to move to working from home every day.

50% worked from home every day during the pandemic. A further 15% worked from home some of the time.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic started in March, have you been able to work from home some or all of the time?

However, it is important to remember that a significant 35% continued to go to their usual workplace and were not part of the ‘working from home revolution’.

In contrast to this huge increase in home working, prior to Covid-19 40% of disabled workers did not feel they could ask to work from home or had previously requested home working and been turned down by their employer.

Thinking back to before coronavirus, have you ever previously been turned down for home working in your current job?

1. **EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME**

We asked those who worked from home some or all of the time whether they found they were more or less productive than usual. Overall, 73% of disabled workers were more or as productive working from home. Almost 40% said they were more productive.

Nonetheless, a significant 27% felt they were less productive when working from home.

Do you think you are more or less productive while working from home?

**6.1 Workers who were less productive**

The reasons why people felt less productive working from home included issues that would have affected all workers such as:

* Childcare and caring responsibilities (usual options unavailable due to Covid-19 restrictions)
* Other distractions including partner also home working and noisy neighbours
* IT issues, broadband access and lack of equipment such as laptops
* Nature of the job made home working difficult
* Lack of suitable work space
* Lack of interaction with colleagues

However, there were a number of issues causing lack of productivity that are specific to disabled workers. The key issues included:

* Lack of reasonable adjustments
* Distractions that impact on disability
* Impact of IT and work station issues on disability
* Impact on mental health and increased isolation and loneliness

**Lack of reasonable adjustments**

A common reason for reduced productivity was a lack of reasonable adjustments. This included adjustments already in place in the workplace but not transferred to home and new adjustments required to work from home.

***“I was not provided with adequate equipment to help with my disabilities. I was later sent***

***a suitable chair but was told that a second larger screen to help with my cognitive issues***

***would not be provided. I have finally had to buy one for myself.”***

***“I have specialist equipment set up at office. However at home I do not have specialist***

***back chair with increased support and height adjustable table. Due to not having***

***comfortable equipment I am needing to get up and walk round more.”***

***“I have a specialist chair in the office due to a back injury. At home I don't have a chair that***

***I can sit on for any length of time hence I am experiencing more pain and discomfort and***

***I am not sleeping properly due to the pain.”***

***“Unsuitable*** ***equipment has increased pain.”***

***“At work I have my desk set up to meet my needs having had a work station assessment carried out by OH which unfortunately I can't replicate at home.”***

***“I have not been able to have my equipment whilst working from home. I isolated at end***

***March and have not had my Dragon software installed on the lap top I am using. I have***

***not been able to use my specialist keyboard and my specialist chair is at work. I also do***

***not have an office area at home (desk etc) so my posture is affected. This also makes my fatigue bad, my body and hands painful and my cognition slower. Not having the right***

***equipment is having a bad effect on me.”***

***“I need to use the phone a lot for my job, however the mobile supplied is an old style***

***cheap Nokia, the sound quality is awful. I'm hearing impaired.”***

***“My environment is not set up for working from home. I have a visual impairment and can***

***not use the equipment set up to support my vision.”***

***“Pain levels increased, I wasn’t allowed to take adaptive equipment at the start of the pandemic or any screens etc, increase my pain.”***

***“Unsuitable working environment, I have a specialist chair and such as work to help me***

***stay comfortable. Sitting in a bad chair at home has given me back issues.”***

***“I don't have my custom chair or my desk that raises so need more breaks.”***

Some disabled workers felt the need to buy their own equipment as they could not access reasonable adjustments.

***“I do not have all the accessible IT equipment I need. I have raised this but don't want to make a fuss as I fear consequences from a new boss, to overcome this I have purchased at my own cost a new iPad, so I can dictate and then email content to my desktop. It is very labourious and I get no thanks.”***

Deaf workers were often particularly excluded from work colleagues due to a lack of reasonable adjustments. This led to a sense of isolation amongst some.

***“Unable to call or take part in group calls. My department doesn't use any form of video conferencing that would allow a sign language interpreter to be included.”***

**Distractions**

Although many people reported common distractions applicable to all workers, some neurodivergent respondents said that they needed clear boundaries between work and home. They found it difficult to work from home without clear structures.

***“I have ADHD and an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Aspergers Syndrome). I do not like to***

***work from home because the opportunities for distraction and avoidance are greater than in the office and there are not the structures, constraints and disciplines of office life***

***and public transport time tables to help/constrain me to start, focus, finish each day. My***

***waking and sleeping hours are completely out of kilter, I am frequently too exhausted to***

***get up when the alarm goes off, the remains of the morning disappears in distraction,***

***anxiety and avoidance and the last couple of weeks this cycle has progressed to the***

***level of anxiety leading to panic attacks in the afternoon so that I do not get any work***

***done of substance each day.”***

**Impact of IT and work station issues**

Although many non-disabled home workers will have experienced issues with getting the right IT equipment and having a suitable place to work, for disabled workers this often had an particular impact on their impairments.

***“Due to not having a proper workstation and having to work on my bed exacerbating health issues.”***

***“Not a great desk set up which has led to increased pain in joints.”***

***“I do not have the correct set up or all of my equipment, so I have to move around more***

***to make sure my joint pain doesn't worsen.”***

**Mental health impact**

Those who reported increased mental health impact included a significant number who were affected by fear of getting Covid-19 and concern about the global situation. This was particularly the case for respondents who were shielding. Some respondents who had PTSD reported that being at home during the pandemic triggered this and impacted their ability to work.

***“My mental health has suffered partly due to my reasonable adjustments not being met.***

***Worried it is going to be the new norm.”***

***“Because I can't hold myself accountable for working on my own. In the end I had to stay***

***up until 3:30 am the night before my work was due, doing it all in one evening because I***

***can't focus without it being urgent in an unstructured environment. This has a very***

***negative impact on my mental health as for weeks I was anxious about the work I had to***

***do and yet unable to start working and unable to focus on the few occasions I could. This***

***led to a severe breakdown in my mental health.”***

**6.2 Workers who were more productive**

39% of respondents said they were more productive while working from home, while 34% said their productivity was about the same at home.

***“There are less distractions for me at home. I feel safe and able to take breaks when I***

***need to. My environment is calm and I can play music or go for a walk outside if I get***

***stressed. My mood has been a lot more stable at home, I have less panic attacks and so***

***I'm able to work for longer periods. If I do have a bout of depression, or crying episode, I***

***can do this privately and take a short break to calm myself. Then return to working when***

***I'm ready. My sadness episodes don't last as long and I don't feel the need to take sick***

***leave whilst working at home. This has helped me feel productive and less of a burden***

***to work by not having to take sick leave.”***

The main reasons were as follows:

* Less distractions
* No commuting
* Less sensory issues that impact on impairments, such as lighting and background noise
* Able to structure day to adjust to impairments – eg longer day with more breaks, later start, etc
* Impact of travel on pain levels and fatigue significantly reduced
* Greater ability to manage mental health at home
* Greater ability to manage pain at home and to access bathroom facilities
* Less time off sick

Although it is arguable that lack of distractions and reduction in commuting impacted non-disabled workers too, the issues for disabled workers were very specific.

**Less “distractions”**

For many disabled workers the distractions they refer to were not simply colleagues asking questions but included the distractions of noise and lighting in busy open plan offices that do not make adjustments for disabled workers. Neurodivergent workers and those with hearing impairments or mental health problems particularly reported that home working had allowed them to address these issues.

***“I am hard of hearing and struggle a great deal in my working environment in an open***

***planned office. Although my employers have been promising for over 18months or so***

***to provide me with equipment to help and aid me in work this has yet to be done. The***

***quietness of my home allows me to work with less stress or pressure.”***

***“I can hear better I have hearing loss in both ears. The quiet of the home enables me to***

***hear and think clearer.”***

***“I do not have to deal with the social anxiety I have whilst in the workplace with other***

***colleagues.”***

***“I live with bipolar. Working from home gives me a controlled quiet space with no***

***distractions. When needed, I am able to interact with colleagues via email or phone.”***

In particular, many neurodivergent workers found the sensory overload of the workplace could be reduced at home. (Although it’s important to recall that a significant number of other neurodivergent workers found the lack of structure at home was a bigger issue.)

***“As an Aspergers sufferer I am hypersensitive to light and sound, unlike at the office I can***

***control the se environmental factors at home.”***

***“I'm autistic and the office is a relentless sensory assault. So much of my energy goes on***

***trying to function while blocking out the sound, light and feel of an open plan office.***

***Almost every day after I got home from work I had to lie down on the sofa for half an***

***hour with my eyes close because they ached. I couldn't take proper breaks unless I went***

***and sat in the toilets. At home I can take regular breaks [...]. I can work in a room that is***

***totally quiet with the light adjusted exactly as I like it, with my headphones in all the time.”***

Pain is another frequent “distraction” for disabled workers. Many respondents reported that they had been better able to manage their pain when working from home.

**No Commuting**

Similarly, disabled workers didn’t simply welcome the additional time which not commuting allowed them, but the impact not having to travel had on their pain and fatigue. Many reported the daily battle to get to work and the huge impact this had on their ability to work once there. Home working had completely removed this barrier for many.

“***I'm putting less pressure on myself to make a lengthy commute into work on days where my pain is worse. For example, two weeks ago, I was up at 4am in agony and finally fell asleep at 7am for just over an hour. If I was required to go into work, then I would have had to call in sick, but as I was working from home, I was able to do a full day's work, and take a proper rest on my lunch.”***

***“I am in pain daily and have to get up over two hours early in order for my medication can start working so I can walk to the bus stop, I am no longer able to drive.”***

***“I have inflammatory arthritis that affects both my ankles and is very unpredictable as to***

***when I get flares. Mornings are worst for me and travel on top often means I’m very***

***tired when I arrive. Though I have had flares, being able to get up and already be where***

***I'm working has been great.”***

***“I don't need to start my day at 5am just to make sure I have all morning treatment and***

***medication in order to be able drive to work. Getting up at 7 am makes massive***

***difference. Less travel/ driving time means less impact on my disability.”***

**Flexible working day**

The ability to work more flexibly was also welcomed. From later start and finish times to the ability to timetable in more breaks, workers found that they could better manage their impairments without the rigidity of the work environment.

***“Able to work around my pain levels. On good days can do longer and can take regular breaks when I need to.”***

***“Able to structure my day around my own rhythms and productivity needs.”***

***“I do not have to deal with the anxiety in the office all the time, I can work far more***

***flexibly, my brain works better at different times, so working from home let me work***

***when my brain does.”***

***“I frequently have days where I am fatigued and don't feel 100% due to long term illness.***

***I find that the flexibility to continue working a bit later if I have taken some breaks throughout the day to combat this really helps my productivity. I also like working from home because it allows for more rest time in the morning when I should need it.”***

**Access to bathroom**

Some worker said that their homes were better set up to manage their impairments, including in terms of access to toilet facilities.

***“I suffer from a condition which affect stomach emptying, I have found I am able to relax***

***more if working from home. I can concentrate on working rather than the pain and if I***

***need a toilet [there] is one near or available. I am also able to use my own chair which adjusted***

***for me and I have a height adjustable desk so able to adjust this depending on the***

***position I have to sit or stand in.”***

***“Able to [...] fit work around life easier with no worries on how often I go to loo [due to Crohns disease].”***

***“My home is adapted to my needs where work place is not disabled friendly meaning increase of pain, exhaustion.”***

**Impact on sickness absence**

A number of members reported that working from home had allowed them to manage their impairment better whereas of they had been in work they would have needed to take time off sick over this period.

***“I can gently move to prevent muscle spasms all over my body, spine, both legs. I would not have been able to travel to work the last 4-5 weeks. I would have been off sick my condition is very severe.***

***“I have managed to stay well at home and have not gone off work sick at all this year. If I***

***were in an open plan office at work as I usually would, by now I would have picked up a***

***cold or cough and as I have lung problems, it would affect me more than most.”***

***“It has reduced my sickness absence as I am better able to manage my health condition at home.”***

***“There have been days when I would have definitely had to call in sick be cause of being unable to make the commute due to my illness, but I have been able to continue working due to working from home, so I have missed fewer days of work due to disability.”***

It is notable that significant numbers of both those who reported feeling more productive and those who reported being less productive reported distractions – more distractions or less distractions – as a reason for this. This underlines the different experiences of disabled people working from home and the need for a flexible response based on individual circumstances and choice.

1. **NON-HOMEWORKERS**

35% of respondents said they could not work from home at all during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The most significant reasons why people could not work from home were as follows:

* Job frontline, such as school support, clinical, libraries
* Lack of IT, including laptops and access to business systems
* Employer refused to consider it

Significantly, 69% of employers gave the unsuitability of the job as a reason to turn down home working.

What reason did your employer give for not allowing you to work from home?

However, 20% of these workers felt they had been treated unfairly by not being able to work from home during the pandemic.

Do you think you were treated unfairly by not being able to work from home?

In many cases the employer simply refused to consider homeworking.

*“I feel I could do my job at home both in normal times and Covid but was not offered to me at all. This has put me in financial difficulties.”*

***“My job can be done from home. My manager just didn’t want it to happen.”***

*“Although I work in frontline NHS, my role is completely admin and I could have worked from home for the majority of the time. Working from home was considered and put in place for doctors and nurses but not even considered for admin staff.”*

*“I was told that the [police] force does not feel it's getting 'bang for its buck' ”*

A number of people who were shielding reported that they had been willing to work from home rather than go on special paid leave, sick leave, furlough or unpaid leave but were not allowed.

***“I’m being paid on special leave for doing nothing. Bit embarrassing, as I was willing to work from home, help out if needed.”***

***“I have been at home since March on full pay so far; however, I did request to work from home on several occasions as I am bored and I don't think this is good for my mental health. I was not given a reason why I am not working from home unlike my peers.”***

It was particularly concerning where these workers had been forced to take unpaid leave or statutory sick pay.

***“The options we were given from our management was either attend work and be subjected to multiple people or go on sick leave - company sick pay was withdrawn and [we were] told all on offer was SSP.”***

***“I not only was not able to work from home, no support was given to those who should be shielded or vulnerable. We were told you wouldn’t be paid if you didn’t work. SSP only if ill.”***

***“I'm in the shielding group. They have said I have to take unpaid leave.”***

Others reported differential access to IT equipment and that some people were allowed work from home while others weren’t, with no clear criteria.

***“I could easily work from home but have not been given the logins and equipment necessary to do so. In fact, I have barely been contacted by managers and have had almost no information on what's happening in my service/workplace.”***

***“I had to isolate due to being asthmatic and pregnant. I offered to work from home as I had a work laptop. I was refused as it was apparently impossible even though there are some things I could have done. It came to my attention another member of staff who had to self isolate was allowed to work from home.”***

1. **REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR HOMEWORKERS**

Of those who worked from home during the pandemic, 53% said that their employer had made no adjustments to support them.

Has your employer provided any reasonable adjustments to help you to work from home?

The most common adjustments made were adjustable chairs, desks, keyboard and mouse, which were provided to over half of those who were supported with adjustments. 33% of employers made changes to their workers’ duties to allow them to work from home. 16% provided assistive technology such as Dragon software.

What adjustments did your employer provide?

27% of respondents said there were still adjustments that would help them to work from home that they had not been provided with. A high number, 23%, weren’t sure which may suggest they are unaware of what the options for support might be.

Are there any adjustments you think you need to help you work from home that you've not been provided with?

The most common adjustments identified as needed but not provided were adjustable equipment (chairs, keyboard, etc) while changes to duties was also significant.

Please tell us what adjustments you think you need to help you work from home

1. **ACCESS TO WORK**

Access to Work is a government scheme which funds adjustments for disabled workers. The service is open to people who work from home. However just 5% of disabled workers had approached Access to Work for help.

Did you ask for help from Access to Work to allow you to work from home?

When asked why they didn’t apply to Access to Work for support, 41% (almost two thousand respondents) said they did not know about Access to Work. A further 26% did not think that Access to Work could help with working from home.

**Is there any reason why you didn’t apply to Access to Work?**

A number of respondents who did apply to Access to Work reported delays, attributable to the pandemic.

*“Still waiting to hear from them. There are delays apparently.”*

*“I have had no reply.”*

*“It took 10 weeks for them to get back to me.”*

*“Still in the process of A2W....they stopped, never got back to me from the start of the pandemic.”*

*“I contacted them in middle of March 2020. I gave them the information I required but I have not heard from them.”*

***“Access to work never got back to me even though they said it would be a 3 week wait.”***

Some respondents stated that they were told that, during the pandemic, Access to Work was for key workers only. The Access to Work website says that “priority” will be given to key workers.

***“I applied to Access to Work and they said their resources are directed to key workers so have not heard anything back from my application.”***

***“Access to work are prioritising key workers so said they couldn't help me yet.”***

***“They are too busy with key worker applications and the rest of us need to wait!”***

The above issues highlight a significant lack of capacity in the service which was unable to respond to the increase in demand from disabled workers forced to work from home without adjustments.

Another issue highlighted by some respondents was that Access to Work expects employers to provide and pay for “reasonable” adjustments which includes IT access in the home.

“***Access to work will not help with equipment at home if you work for a big organisation. I was told that your work should do like for like. However, the work place states that working from home is not compulsory.”***

Other disabled workers reported difficulty in getting Access to Work to accept electronic paperwork during the crisis. Although the Access to Work website states that electronic paperwork may be acceptable and applicants are asked to phone to arrange, in practice some disabled workers found that they had to fight to be allowed to submit electronic claims.

1. **AFTER COVID-19**

54% of respondents said they felt they would benefit from being able to work from home after the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

***“Before Covid 19 I asked if I could work from home for a minimum of 1 day a week and was refused. I was advised that Customer Liaison Officers were not allowed to work from home. Now I have worked from home for 9 weeks due to Covid, so I am hoping this will continue with my health issues and not be refused again, as I have proved, I am more than capable of working from home and carrying out my duties to the full.”***

***“I'm actually enjoying my job again and I feel more efficient but I don't see where this will be acknowledged or if it will be taken into account in the future. I have a life long mental health condition and whilst I understand the university is risk averse it seems the rest of the world plans to encourage more home working in the future but not this university?”***

**Do you think you would benefit from being able to work from home more often in the future?**

The biggest obstacles to working from home in the future were the nature of the job and resistance from employers, both at almost 37%. 20% said there was nothing that would stop them from working from home in the future. A significant 19% said that issues around isolation and mental health would impact on their ability to work from home in the future.

Is there anything that would stop you from working from home in the future?

1. **CONCLUSIONS**

Disabled workers have had different experiences of homeworking during Covid-19. Broadly speaking, some have found working from home has been of great benefit to them, helping to manage their condition and reducing pain and fatigue. However, for others homeworking has been a huge struggle and they are keen to return to the workplace once it is safe. It is important that both of these perspectives are taken into account in any policy recommendations.

The UK has a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the working lives of many disabled people who would benefit from working from home. This would also be a benefit to employers and to the economy, in terms of increased productivity and decreased sickness levels. It is likely to increase the proportion of economically active disabled people.

However, we need to ensure home working does not lead to employers reneging on their duty to provide reasonable adjustments in the workplace or a reduction in the visibility of disabled people at work. In addition, mental health, isolation and loneliness are issues for homeworkers and additional investment would need to go into ensuring home workers were supported.

Access to Work continues to be the government’s “best kept secret” in that only a very small proportion of disabled people are aware of it. Covid-19 revealed a lack of investment and capacity which saw it having to turn down many disabled workers for immediate support. It was also not clear that homeworking support was available. Additionally, Access to Work is continuing to operate and system which is paper based by default and is not suitable for the 21st century.

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Disabled workers should be given a new right to work from home if they want to, including robust enforcement and a timetable for responses to requests, and for implementation. This should be an option, with those who want to remain in the workplace continuing to have the right to reasonable adjustments to make their workplace accessible.

There should be stronger enforcement in law of the right to reasonable adjustments, both for homeworkers and for those who want to remain in the workplace.

Government should create a new special fund for equipment to enable a radical roll-out of homeworking which could pay for items such as computer equipment, desks, chairs, etc.

Government should invest in Access to Work so that it can better support home working as an option to those disabled workers that could benefit from it.

Government should find ways of informing disabled workers about Access to Work, for example by including information in annual HMRC communications.

Access to Work should accept electronic claims by default and should offer applicants a range of accessible ways of getting support from the system, in addition to paper based options.