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# COVID-19 Insights

## Impact on workforce skills

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## Introduction

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The impact of COVID-19 on employers and their workforce, has been far-reaching and will continue to exert a considerable influence on service delivery for some time to come.

The last few months have proved to be a watershed in terms of working practices, with staff across all industries impacted to greater and less degrees. This ranges from whole sectors almost grinding to a halt, with staff furloughed or facing redundancy, to others stretched beyond capacity in their efforts to deliver services, such as the health sector.

Health and social care employers and employees have had to confront new ways of working. Both the organisational and personal capacity to carry out what previously have been everyday tasks, has been tested to the limit in terms of IT, home-working and functional practices.

In addition, the impact on the physical and mental health of workers has been brought to the fore, with individuals having to cope with new and incredibly difficult challenges.

The findings from our research, in which we surveyed nearly 3000 respondents, shed light on some of these critical issues and begin to uncover a picture of a workforce and its employers, tackling unprecedented and uncharted waters.

It is the first step in our efforts to provide intelligence and support which will help guide a path to recovery in terms of service delivery, and most importantly, ensure that employee well-being is at the forefront of future ways of working.



**Jon Parry**  
Head of Research & Evaluation  
Skills for Health

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## Skills Loss

### Nearly a quarter say skills will be lost due to COVID-19

With **22.7%** of respondents reporting skill losses as a result of COVID-19 in their organisations, it is clear that the pandemic has had wider than expected consequences (*Figure 1.1*). There are a multitude of reasons for these skill losses; one of which is **staff leaving** due to increased pressure that the pandemic has brought on. A number of respondents report staff, especially in nursing professions, choosing to take **early retirement**. This has resulted in a loss of the in-depth experience and skills these members of staff possess.

*Staff have brought forward retirement, losing valuable knowledge and skills.*

As healthcare staff encounter cases of COVID-19 more regularly than any other sector, many employees have caught the virus. This has resulted in **ill health**, long-term sick leave and, in some cases, death. Some staff have also had to self-isolate or stay at home to **care for family members** suffering from COVID-19. This has meant that valuable skills have been altogether lost or taken out of service for an extended period.

*We have lost an experienced consultant to COVID-19 and we have some staff who now have long-term health issues after recovering.*



## Training Needs

Many respondents report on skills loss in their respective organisations as **training has been put on hold** due to pressures related to the pandemic.

Despite many workplaces not being able to offer training to staff, **72.2%** of respondents state that **training needs have increased** due to the pandemic (*Figure 1.2*). Many of these training needs are a direct effect of working during the pandemic and relate to PPE usage, infection control, new ways of working (including clinical management of patients) as well as digital skills relating to remote working such as operating Zoom, Skype or MS Teams.

There have also been suggestions of **additional training needs** relating to soft skills such as managing uncertainty and empowering staff.

In many areas of the healthcare sector, **staff have been redeployed** or new staff have been employed which has also led to training needs increasing.

*Due to the loss of staff from COVID-19, we've had to employ unskilled people who are furloughed from other industries. They need to be trained as many had no experience at all. Our own staff have had to do more clinical duties than normal.*

**70% say training needs have increased due to the pandemic**



## Recruitment

Apart from healthcare assistants, it is suggested that **roles needing to be filled** relate to GPs, nurses, facilities staff, phlebotomists, respiratory wards and dispensary staff. New roles relate to trace and protect as well as COVID-19 and anti-body testing.

*There will be an increase in recruitment to cover those who have retired. Specifically in employing nurses and midwives for our "bank". There is also a need to increase a new "bank" for hotel services staff because we have opened additional wards to cope with the pandemic.*

### Nearly half of organisations will increase recruitment over the next 6 months

**46.5%** of respondents state that their respective organisations are **planning to increase recruitment** over the next 6 months. **Only 14.2%** report that recruitment activities will be frozen (*Figure 1.3*).

This planned increase in recruitment is in part due to the effects of the pandemic with many **staff having left or become ill**, as well as the **additional pressure** COVID-19 has placed on the healthcare sector. It is also anticipated that many healthcare assistants who have joined from other sectors might return to their own industries, thus resulting in many unfilled positions.

*Support workers who have joined us may go back to work in their own industries. We will need to replace them.*



## Key Skills

### A clear mandate for new key skills with over 90% consistent response

An effect of the pandemic has been the need for workforces to **acquire new key skills** or further develop existing ones to better cope with related pressures and enhance sustainability.

**Nearly 100%** of respondents state that **infection prevention and control**, as well as **conveying information effectively**, will be a key future skill. **Over 95%** thought that dealing with **out-of-the-ordinary situations** and the appropriate **use of equipment**, facilities, and materials would be crucial for staff going forward (*Figure 2.2*).

**COVID-19 awareness**, knowledge of social distancing, **decision making** skills as well as knowledge surrounding Health & Safety **legislation** were also deemed to be important.

Key skills relating to **resilience and cultural change** centred on awareness of changing clients/service users' needs (**96.7%**), active listening (**96.5%**) and awareness and understanding of others' reactions (**96.4%**) (*Figure 2.3*).

Staff are keen to have knowledge that empowers them, helps them manage anxiety and makes them feel competent with so much uncertainty.



## Changing Practices

The pandemic has inevitably brought along changing work practices, especially so in the healthcare sector with the increased use of PPE, home working and the clinical management of patients with COVID-19 infection.

However not all employers felt prepared for these new ways of working. **40.6%** of respondents state that their **organisation was not adequately prepared** for this sudden shift in working methods. Many respondents report on **issues obtaining PPE** as well as **inadequate IT systems** and digital skills to facilitate remote working (*Figure 1.9*).

*Policies not in place, not enough equipment, PPE or laptops.*

*Shortage of appropriately trained staff.  
Disastrously short of basic PPE!*

Many organisations have however put a number of measures in place as a response to the pandemic. **71.2%** of respondents report that their **organisations have enabled remote working**, **57.1%** have **redeployed staff** to other parts of the organisation and **40.2%** have **increased staff training** (*Figure 1.7*).

Barriers in implementing effective response measures had to do with increased patient flow, postponement of vital services, poor IT infrastructure, lack of, and cost of PPE as well as staff and skills shortages.

## 71.2% of respondents report that their organisations have enabled remote working



## New Ways of Working

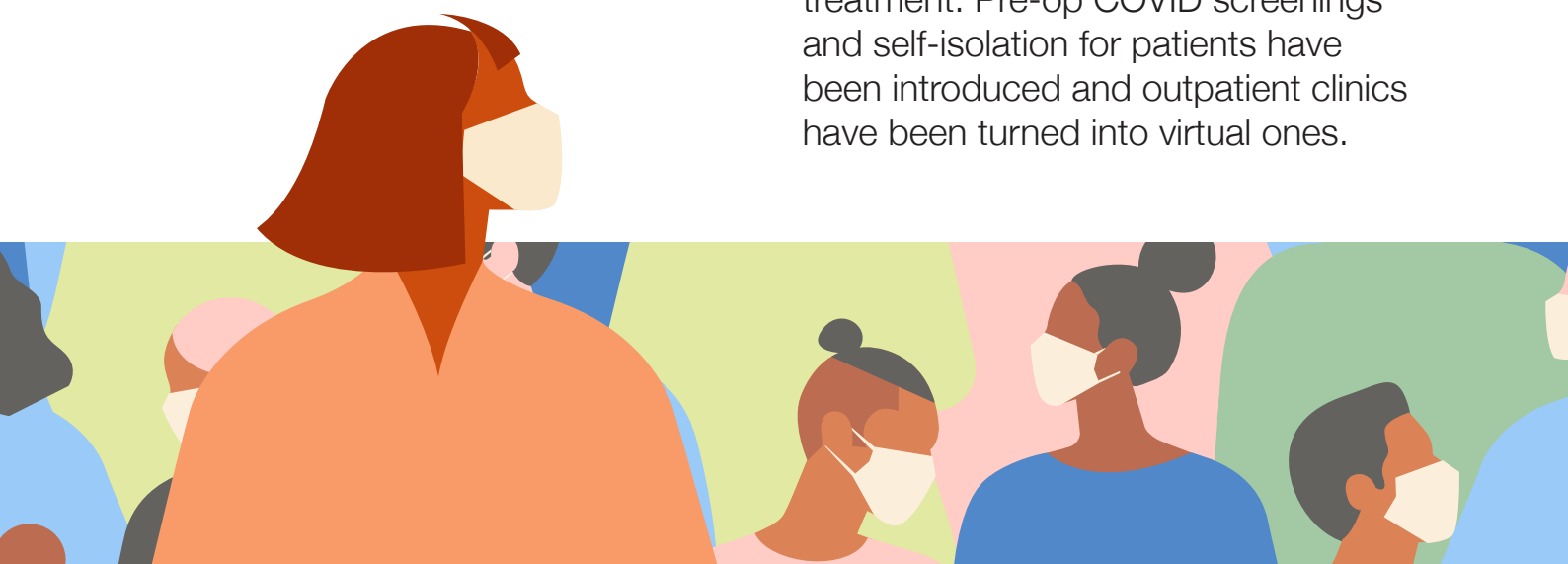
### Nearly all respondents report on home working having been rolled out.

**96%** of respondents report that their respective organisation has had to implement new ways of working due to COVID-19. These new ways of working for the healthcare sector mainly relate to changes within the physical environment, the workforce, and the clinical management of patients (*Figure 1.8*).

**Physical environment:** Respondents report on areas between staff and patients having been cordoned off and posters and markings being put in place to inform staff, patients and visitors of **social distancing** measures and **hygiene control**. Hand sanitisers have been made available and units/wards have been split into COVID and non-COVID zones. In addition, some **theatres have been transformed** into ICU/HDU areas.

**Workforce measures:** Nearly all respondents report on **home working** having been rolled out. Some organisations have introduced longer working hours, more shifts and removed Bank Holidays. Daily **COVID related communications** have been provided and use of **eLearning has increased**. **Mental Health support** has been offered to staff and one organisation has set up a temporary staff bank to cover COVID related absences. **Paid placements** for student nurses have been introduced and **workforce planning** is taking place on a regular basis.

**Clinical management of patients:** Many organisations have **suspended elective surgery**, and some have made use of private hospitals for cancer treatment. Pre-op COVID screenings and self-isolation for patients have been introduced and outpatient clinics have been turned into virtual ones.





## Organisational Support

As a result of the pandemic, **44.3%** of employers report that their **organisational structure will look different**. This includes accommodating **remote working** to a larger extent, making efficiencies, introducing telephone triage and increased reliance on **contingency planning** as well as on **infection control** (Figure 1.4).

*A review of corporate and administrative areas with more remote working. Potential reduction in WTE as there will be greater efficiencies with remote working. Roles will change as services will change as more services will be delivered virtually.*

**As a result of the pandemic, 44.3% of employers report that their organisational structure will look different**

To aid revised organisational structures and potential new ways of working, employers state that they would like immediate support with staff well-being processes (**60.9%**), employee engagement (**47.9%**) and workforce planning (**37.9%**).

In the longer term, organisations require support with leadership training and development (**52.65**), organisational development (**52%**) and Learning Management Solutions (**49.1%**). To further aid with recovery, employers would also like help with **creating a shared vision of sector requirements for recovery** after COVID-19 as well as guidance on **sector specific infection control** requirements (Figure 1.5).



## Summary



The pressure of working in the healthcare sector during the pandemic has led to many staff retiring or resigning. Several professionals have become ill themselves which has resulted in long-term sick leave and in some cases death. This has meant that roles have become vacant and skills gaps have occurred.

As a result, nearly half of the respondents report that their organisation is planning on increasing recruitment over the next 6 months. However, several organisations have frozen training activities which has led to skills gaps.

The pandemic has brought along new ways of working which has meant that COVID-19 awareness and knowledge relating to social distancing as well as infection prevention and control have become crucial for healthcare staff.

Other key skills relate to dealing with out-of-the-ordinary situations, appropriate use of equipment and awareness of the changing needs of service users.

For the healthcare sector the pandemic has led to a change in working practices or an introduction of new ones. The sector has seen a change in the clinical management of patients with COVID-19 infection as well as an increase in home working and the use of PPE.

However, 40.6% of respondents state that their organisation was not adequately prepared for this sudden shift in working methods. Many respondents report on issues obtaining PPE as well as inadequate IT systems and digital skills to facilitate remote working.

Nearly all the respondents state that their organisation has had to introduce new ways of working due to COVID-19. These new ways of working for the healthcare sector mainly relate to changes within the physical environment, the workforce, and the clinical management of patients.

As a result of the pandemic, 44.3% of employers report that their organisational structure will look different. To aid revised organisational structures and potential new ways of working, employers state that they would like immediate support with staff well-being processes, employee engagement and workforce planning.

The COVID-19 Workforce research was carried about by the Research division at Skills for Health, led by Senior Researcher Sabina Enback, whereby we conducted a national survey of 2950 respondents in June 2020.

## About Us



We are the UK's leading not-for-profit workforce experts, committed to the development of an improved and sustainable healthcare workforce.

Established in 2002 as the UK's Sector Skills Council for Health, we help to inform policy and standards focused on training, skills and education. We are your trusted provider of workforce and organisational development, designed to increase quality of healthcare, patient safety and productivity.

Our solutions are based on one core mission, to develop a more skilled, productive and flexible workforce for the future. We do this by championing better jobs, careers and sustainable employment, developing employer-led competencies and raising standards in training to maximise quality and improve patient outcomes.

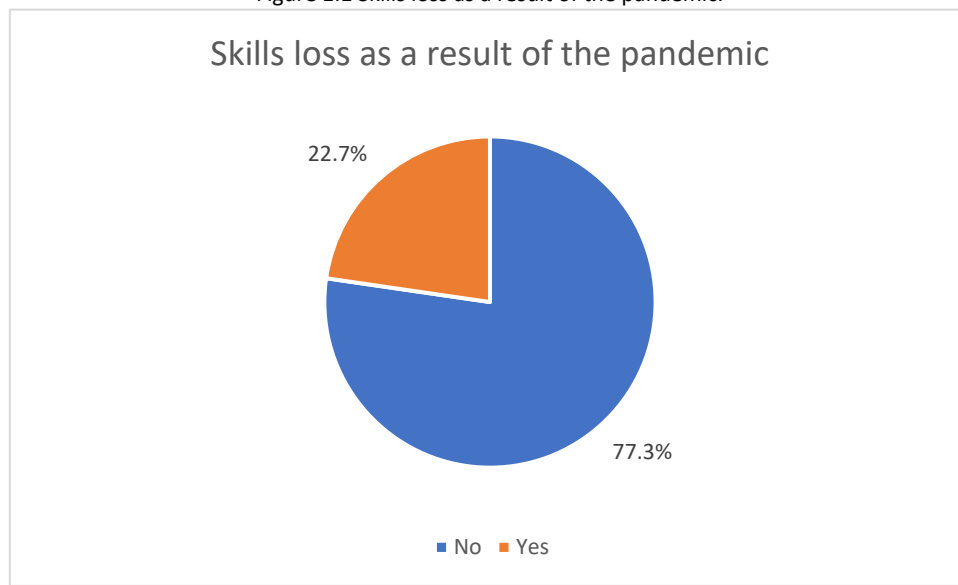


# Appendix

COVID-19 Insights  
Impact on workforce skills

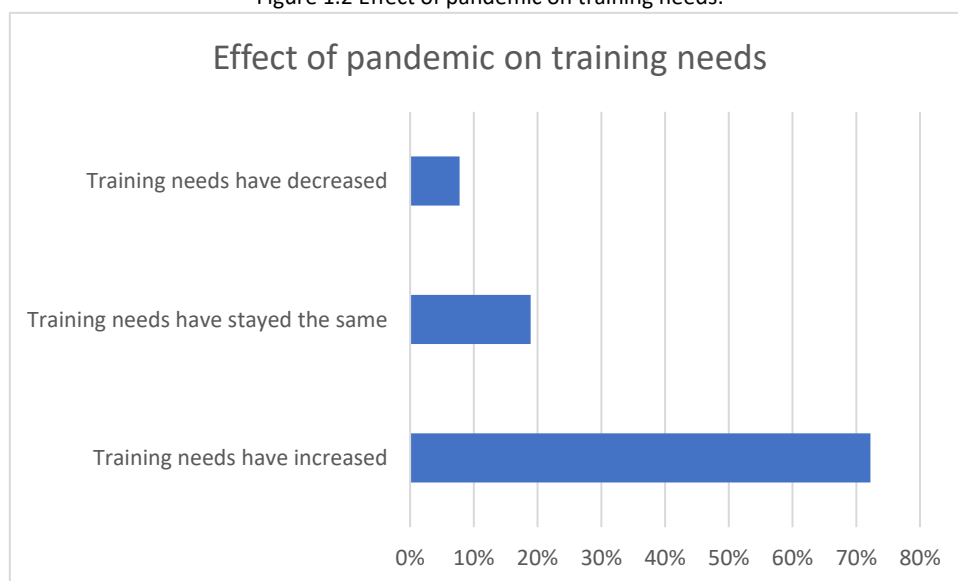
- 2,363 individuals across the Healthcare sector took part in the survey.
- 22.7% of respondents' organisations had experienced skills loss as a result of the pandemic.

Figure 1.1 Skills loss as a result of the pandemic.



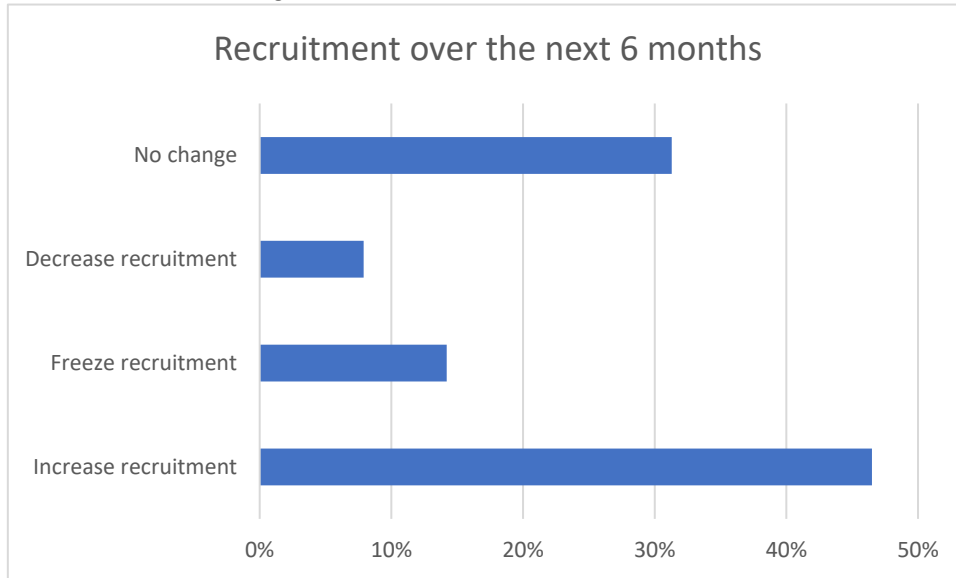
- 72.2% of respondents reported that training needs have increased as a result of the pandemic.

Figure 1.2 Effect of pandemic on training needs.



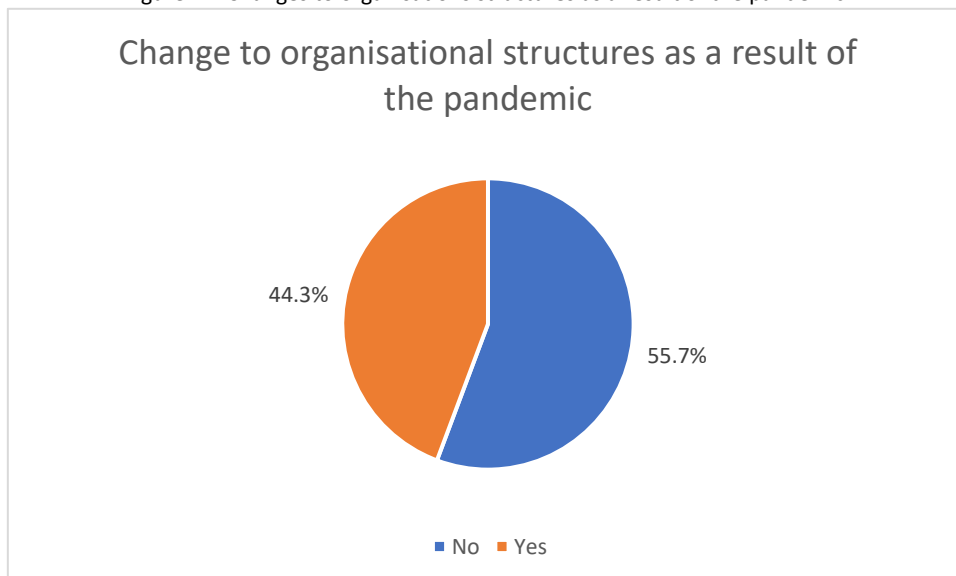
- 46.5% reported that recruitment will be increased in their organisation over the next 6 months.

Figure 1.3 Recruitment over the next 6 months.



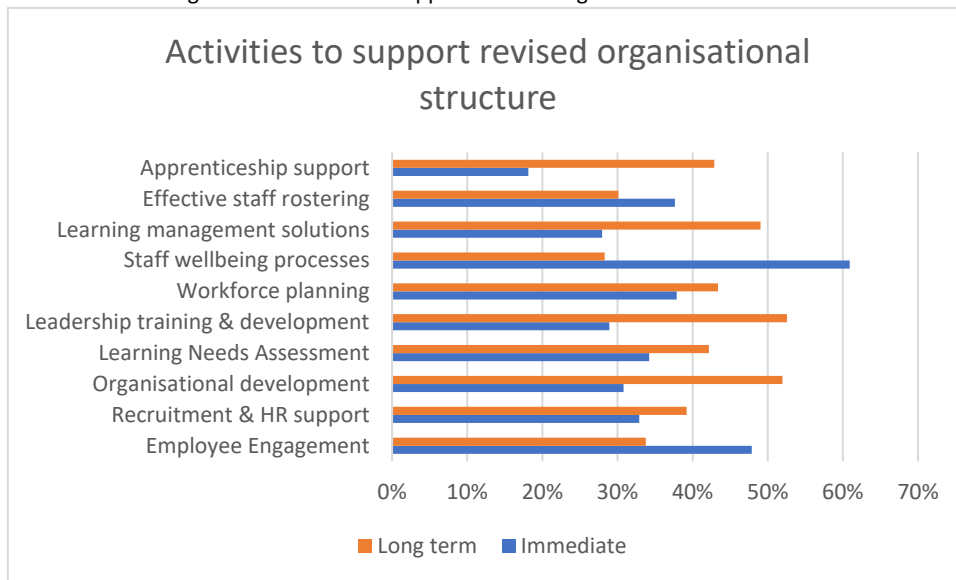
- 44.3% stated that their organisation would make changes to organisational structures as a result of the pandemic.

Figure 1.4 Changes to organisations structures as a result of the pandemic.



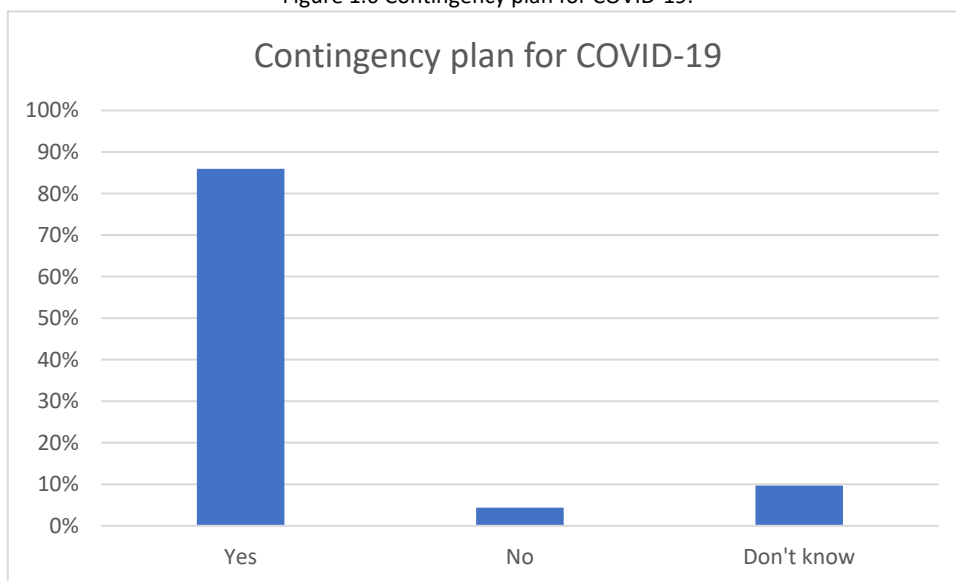
- To aid revised organisational structures, employers stated that they would like immediate support with staff wellbeing processes (60.9%), employee engagement (47.9%) and workforce planning (37.9%). Employers requested support in the long-term with leadership training & development (52.6%) Organisational Development (52%) and Learning Management Solutions (49.1%).

Figure 1.5 Activities to support reviews organisational structures.



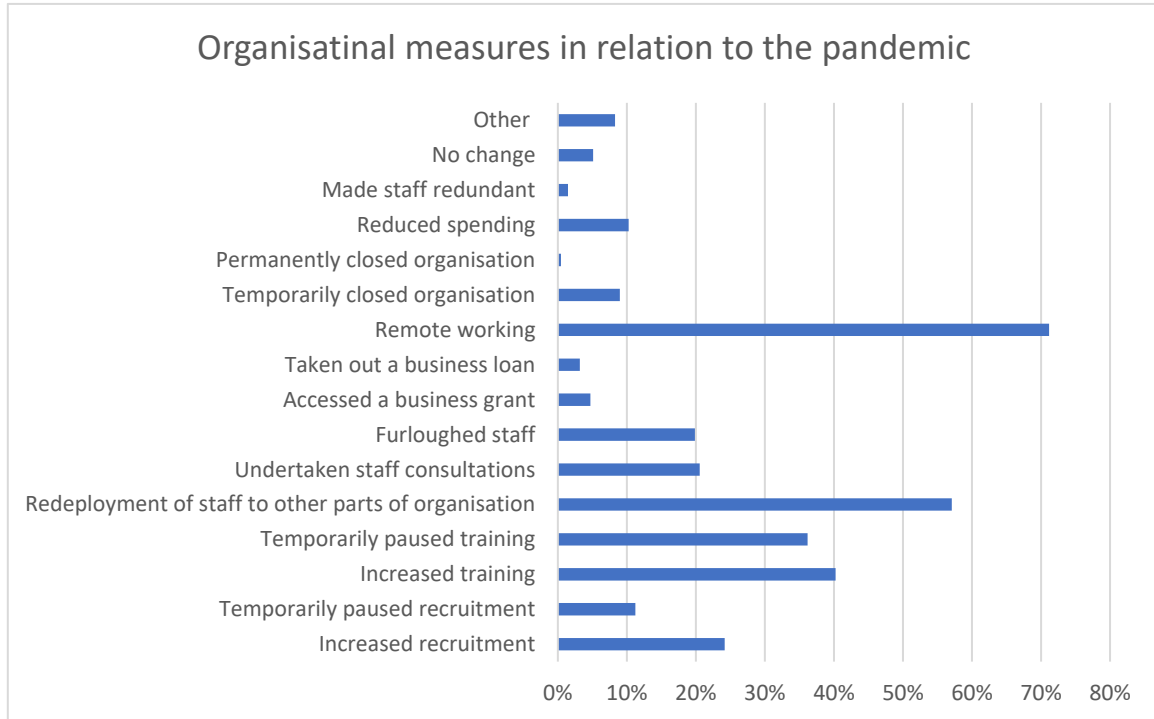
- 86% is currently using a contingency plan in dealing with the pandemic.

Figure 1.6 Contingency plan for COVID-19.



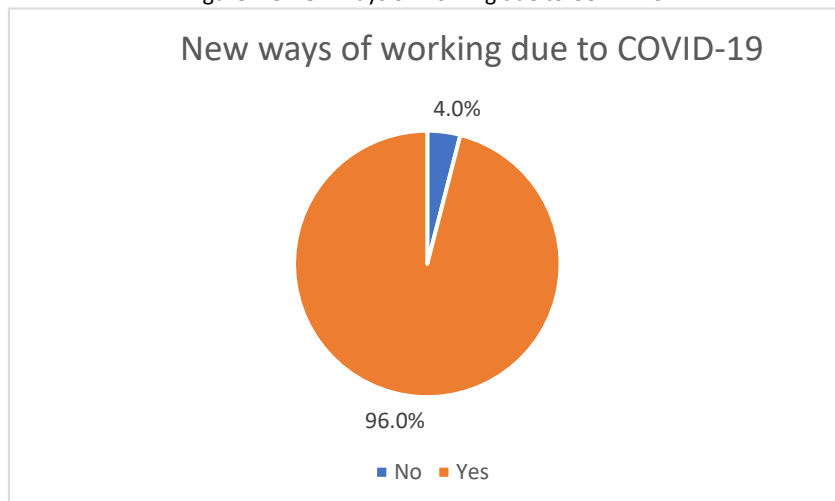
- 71.2% of respondents reported that their organisations have enabled remote working, 57.1% have redeployed staff to other parts of the organisation and 40.2% have increased staff training as a response to the pandemic.

Figure 1.7 Organisational measures in relation to the pandemic.



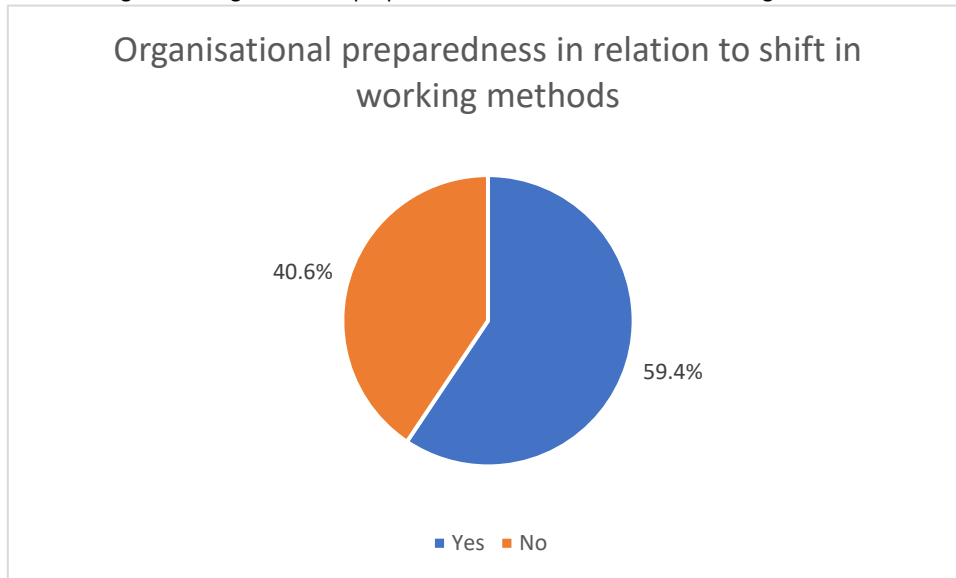
- 96% of respondent have implemented new ways of working in their organisations.

Figure 1.8 New ways of working due to COVID-19.



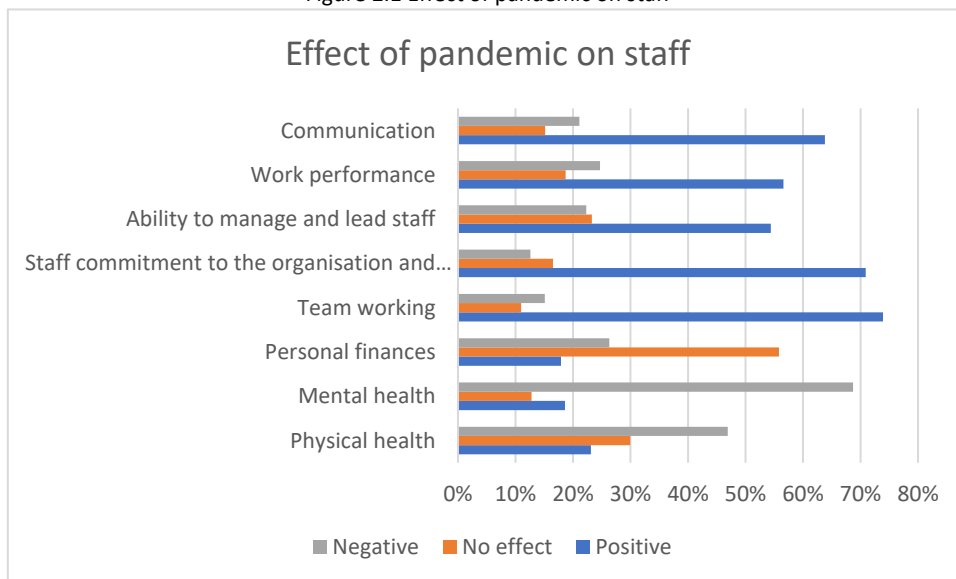
- 40.6% did not feel that their organisation was adequately prepared for a shift in working methods.

Figure 1.9 Organisational preparedness in relation to shift in working methods.



- 68.7% of respondents stated the pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health of employees with 46.9% reporting a negative impact on the physical health of staff. The pandemic has also had a positive impact on staff for a number of measures such as team working (73.9%), staff commitment to the organisation and its goals (70.9%), communication (63.8%), work performance (56.6%) and the ability to lead and manage staff (54.4%).

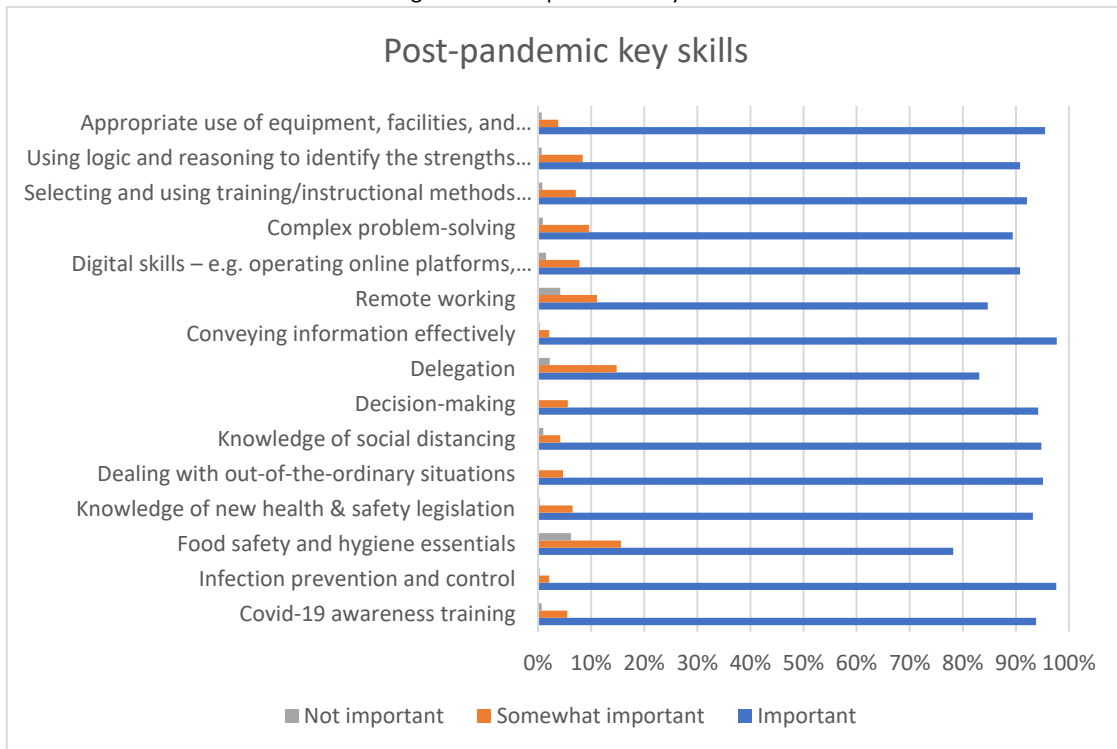
Figure 2.1 Effect of pandemic on staff





- The vast majority of respondent's state that infection prevention and control (97.6%) and conveying information effectively 97.7% will be a key future skill. 95.1% thought that dealing with out of the ordinary situations would be crucial for staff going forward.

Figure 2.2 Post-pandemic key skills.



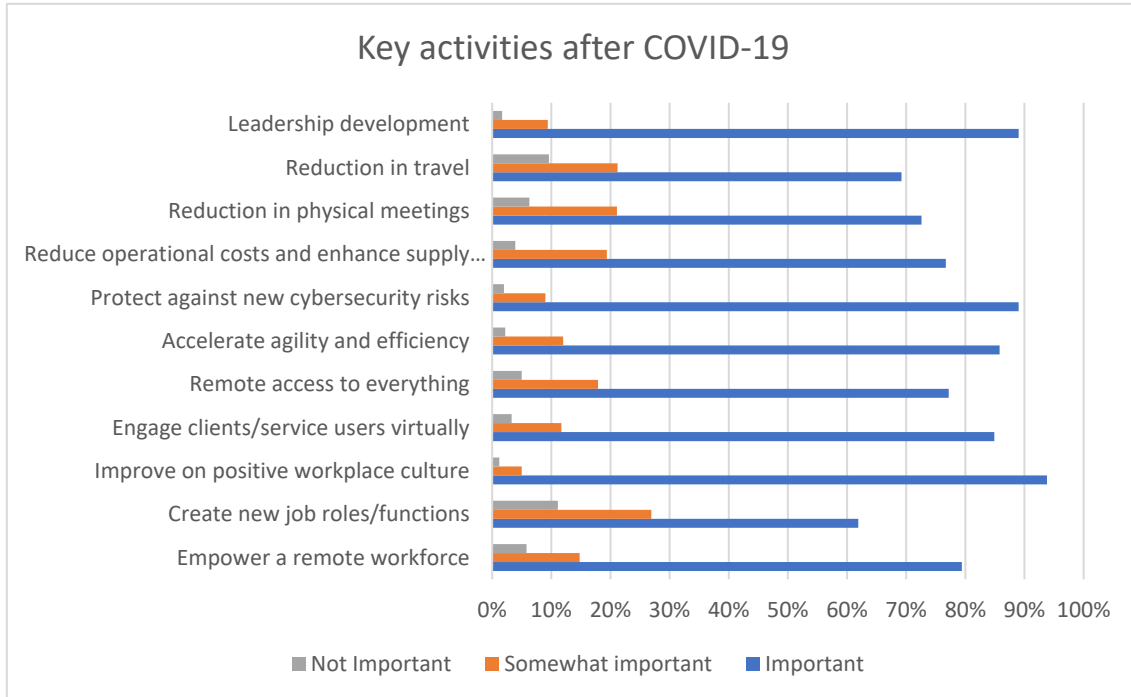
- Key skills relating to resilience and cultural change centred on awareness of changing clients/service user's needs (96.7%), active listening (96.5%) and awareness and understanding of others' reactions (96.4%).

Figure 2.3 Skills related to resilience and cultural change.



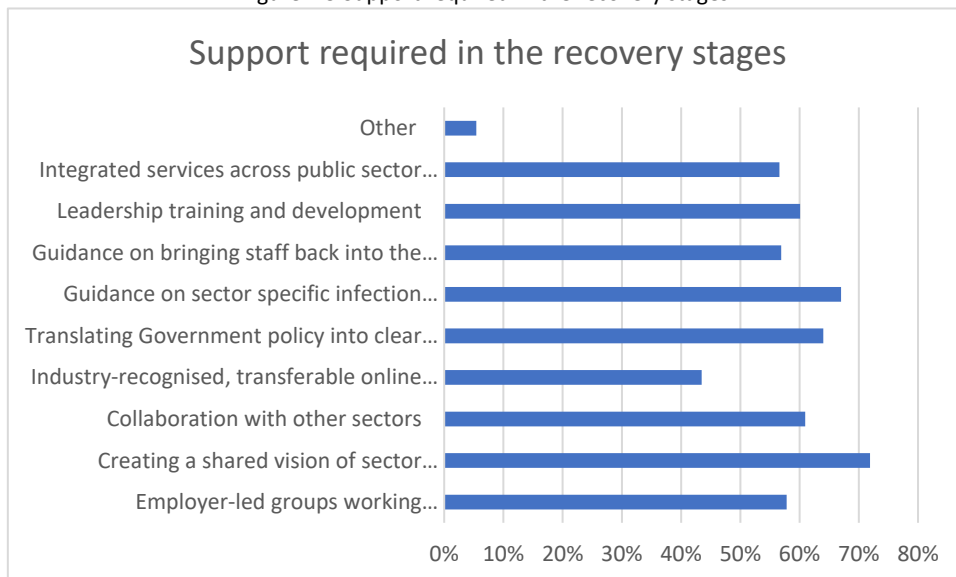
- After the pandemic, organisations key activities for respondents will be to improve on positive workplace culture (93.8%), protect against new cybersecurity risks (89%) and leadership development (89%).

Figure 2.4 key activities after COVID-19.



- To aid with recovery from the pandemic, employers would also like help with creating a shared vision of sector requirements for recovery after COVID-19 (71.9%) as well as guidance on sector specific infection control requirements (67%).

Figure 2.5 Support required in the recovery stages.



## Skills for Health

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