

# Hybrid working: wellbeing and inclusion



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## Introduction

In early 2020, the higher education (HE) sector had to react to unprecedented change and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The so-called 'pivot to online' (Salmon, 2020) forced emergency ways of working on university campus-based staff in an attempt to continue educating students while physical attendance at lectures, seminars, etc. were not permitted. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) took the opportunity to reflect on how these emergency practices and policies could or should evolve into a planned and proactive approach to working in a hybrid environment. This process of reflection included a greater focus on the wellbeing and inclusion of staff and students, which considered:

- the impact – positive and negative – of digital practices adopted as a result of forced home working
- employee expectations around office-based working
- assumptions about how university campus facilities and systems are managed and used.

Why is wellbeing and inclusion so important in a higher-education context? Barbara Bassa, a Programme Director at Advance HE, explains:

There is no argument about the fact that the quality of student experience at university starts with the quality of the services provided by the university staff: academics and professional support staff. In order for all staff to provide these quality experiences, they need to feel well and supported themselves. *You cannot pour from an empty cup.*

(Bassa, 2022)

This free course is part of the

[Supporting hybrid working and digital transformation collection](#). It was developed with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the public body operating between the Welsh Government and higher education providers. The course encourages you to consider your own development as an individual, and as a manager or leader, if that is part of your role.

While it focuses on the Welsh national context and higher education sector, the principles and considerations covered in this course can be applied to other nations and industries/organisations.

# 1 Three key contexts

This course is designed to give you the opportunity to consider key aspects of wellbeing and inclusion in the environment in which you, your colleagues and your organisation operate. The subject will be explored from a range of perspectives, with three particular contexts in mind:

- a national context
- a digital context
- your organisational context.

## 1.1 A national context

This course was developed with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the public body operating between the Welsh Government and higher education providers, so it's mainly the Welsh national context that will be referred to here. Your own nation may have different aspirations or targets for improving wellness and inclusion in the workplace.

In Wales, the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*:

requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022a)

The Act contains seven goals to improve the social economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales – but the areas they cover could apply equally to other nations. The goals are shown in Figure 1 and described in Table 1.



**Figure 1** Wellbeing goals.

**Table 1**

	<p><b>A Prosperous Wales</b></p> <p>An innovative, productive, and low carbon society that recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy that generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.</p>
	<p><b>A Resilient Wales</b></p> <p>A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.</p>
	<p><b>A More Equal Wales</b></p> <p>A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances).</p>



### **A Healthier Wales**

A society in which people's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.



### **A Wales of Cohesive Communities**

Attractive, safe, viable and well-connected.



### **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language**

A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage, and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.



### **A Globally Responsible Wales**

A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022a)

The two goals that most naturally relate to this course are 'A Healthier Wales' (for wellbeing) and 'A More Equal Wales' (for inclusion), and resources associated with these goals will be highlighted at appropriate points throughout the course, particularly what the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2022b) calls 'Simple Changes'. Look out for the boxes throughout the course containing links to these resources. The other goals won't be explicitly addressed, but as you work through the course, try to reflect on how the topics covered could link to them.

## **A healthier Wales**

The 'A Healthier Wales' goal is defined in Table 1. This goal will be explored from different perspectives in this course, with a particular focus on the impact of remote and hybrid working on mental and physical wellbeing.

## **A more equal Wales**

The 'A More Equal Wales' goal is also defined in Table 1. The *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* suggests that this goal could be realised by:

achieving more diversity in our decision-makers and our broader workforce, and ensuring that organisations in Wales are taking preventative, integrated approaches to end poverty and reduce inequalities.

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022d)

This course will explore how to improve workplace diversity, equality and equity, and identify some of the benefits such improvements could bring to your organisation.

## **1.2 A digital context**

As this course is part of a digital transformation collection, it will examine wellbeing and inclusion from a digital perspective. This will be informed by one element of Jisc's [individual digital capabilities framework](#) (Jisc, n.d.), namely 'Digital Identity and Wellbeing'. Jisc defined 'Digital Wellbeing' as the capacity to:



- look after personal health, safety, relationships and work–life balance in digital settings
- use digital tools in pursuit of personal goals (e.g. health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities
- act safely and responsibly in digital environments
- negotiate and resolve conflict
- manage digital workload, overload and distraction
- act with concern for the human and natural environment when using digital tools.

Many of these points will be explored throughout the course. It will also touch on some aspects of the 'Digital Identity' part of Jisc's framework, which relates to having an understanding of the reputational benefits and risks involved in digital participation.

The other elements in Jisc's individual digital capabilities framework are explored in the following courses from the [Hybrid working and digital transformation toolkit](#):

- [Hybrid working: skills for digital transformation](#)
- [Hybrid working: digital communication and collaboration](#)

## 1.3 Your organisational context

Your organisation may already have wellbeing and inclusion strategies in place, but are they just policy documents, or are they embodied by the behaviours and skills of staff at all levels and the values, culture and practices in your physical and digital workplaces? As its title suggests, this course will explore various aspects of wellbeing and inclusion, before considering how you can bring them together to build and maintain a supportive and inclusive hybrid workplace.

To learn about other aspects of organisational development in the hybrid workplace, you might like to study the [Hybrid working: organisational development](#) course included in this collection.

In the video below contributors share their insights and approaches for supporting wellbeing and creating a more inclusive organisation.

Video content is not available in this format.



Effective leadership recognises the need to embed wellbeing and inclusion throughout the different levels and roles within an organisation. For wellbeing, this could mean diversifying the one-size-fits-all support approach and ensuring that there is certified training available (e.g. Mental Health First Aider), or that chairs of staff support groups are facilitating safe-space discussion and reflection, instead of relying on a single, outsourced, employee support service.



## 2.1 Statistical measures of wellbeing

The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023) measures wellbeing at a national level using a series of indicators against which they ask people to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of their lives. The indicators include the following:

- **Personal wellbeing** – are they satisfied with their lives overall; how worthwhile do they think the things they do are; how would they rate their happiness yesterday; how would they rate their anxiety yesterday?
- **Relationships** – do they have people who would be there for them if they needed help; are they in unhappy relationships; how often do they feel lonely; do they trust other people?
- **Health** – do they have a reported disability; are they satisfied with their health; is there evidence indicating depression or anxiety; what might a healthy life expectancy be for them?
- **Occupation ('what we do')** – are they unemployed; are they satisfied with their amount of leisure time; have they volunteered more than once in the last 12 months; have they engaged with/participated in an arts or cultural activity at least three times in the last year?
- **Location ('where we live')** – have they been a victim of crime; have they felt safe walking alone after dark; have they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood; have they accessed the natural environment at least once a week in the last 12 months; are they satisfied with their accommodation?
- **Personal finance** – are they satisfied with their household income; have they found it difficult to get by financially?

These questions offer a wider view of wellbeing than you may originally have considered. Some of them will be revisited in Section 3. Next, however, you're going to look at a psychological perspective on wellbeing.

## 2.2 The PERMA model

Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy'. However, it is important to realise that wellbeing is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of purpose and how in control they feel.

A useful perspective on this comes from American psychologist, educator and author Martin Seligman. Seligman's research (2011) indicated that five core elements are needed for people to achieve a healthy sense of wellbeing, fulfilment and satisfaction in life. He called this the PERMA model:

- **Positive emotion**
- **Engagement**
- **Relationships**
- **Meaning**
- **Achievement.**

### Activity 2 Identify examples for the PERMA model

 Allow about 20 minutes

1. Spend a few minutes thinking of a workplace example for each of the elements of the PERMA model – e.g. what was the last positive emotion you felt at work, and why; what gives meaning to your work?
2. Now read this short article (700 words) on [Positive Psychology in the Workplace](#) (Finkbeiner, 2022) from workplace wellbeing provider Zevo.

Provide your answer...

How did the examples you thought of compare to the suggestions from Zevo? Note that the author of the article says 'Employers, managers, and leaders all have a role to play in workplace happiness'. Section 3 will pick up on this.

## 2.3 Different dimensions of wellbeing

Section 2.1 referred to the dimensions of wellbeing the UK ONS (Office for National Statistics) uses to measure young people's wellbeing, which were:

- personal
- relational
- health-based
- occupational
- environmental
- financial
- educational/skills-based.

If you research dimensions of wellbeing (often called 'wellness' in the USA) you will find other categorisations that range from five elements (typically aligned to the PERMA model described in the previous section) to eight elements. Eight seems to be the most common set, and comprises the types of wellbeing illustrated in Figure 3.





**Figure 3** Dimensions of wellbeing.

This course considers the post-COVID-19 digital landscape and the hybrid ways of working that have emerged in response to the pandemic, so much of it will be focused on factors relating to occupational (work-based) wellbeing. However, occupational wellbeing is hugely affected by your mental and physical health. Additionally, it's difficult to entirely separate what happens during working hours from every other aspect of your wellbeing, so the course will inevitably touch on several of the other dimensions listed above, to a greater or lesser degree.

## 2.4 Mental wellbeing or mental health: what's the difference?

Let's address a common question: what's the difference between mental wellbeing and mental health?

This course tends to refer to 'wellbeing' rather than 'health', and different interpretations of the meaning of 'wellbeing' (mental and physical) have already been presented. It's worth noting, however, that the terms 'mental wellbeing' and 'mental health' often get used interchangeably, and some of the resources included in this course will therefore refer to 'health' rather than 'wellbeing'. The UK Department of Health explains the relationship between mental wellbeing and mental health as follows:

Mental illness and wellbeing are independent dimensions; mental health is not simply the opposite of mental illness. It is possible for someone to have a mental disorder and high levels of wellbeing. It is also possible for someone to have low levels of wellbeing without having a mental disorder.

(Department of Health, 2014)

The terms 'mental illness' and 'mental disorder' are used to describe specific, diagnosable health conditions that involve emotional, thinking or behavioural changes – or a combination of these. They tend to have persistent behavioural signs and symptoms, just as health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease have measurable physical symptoms.

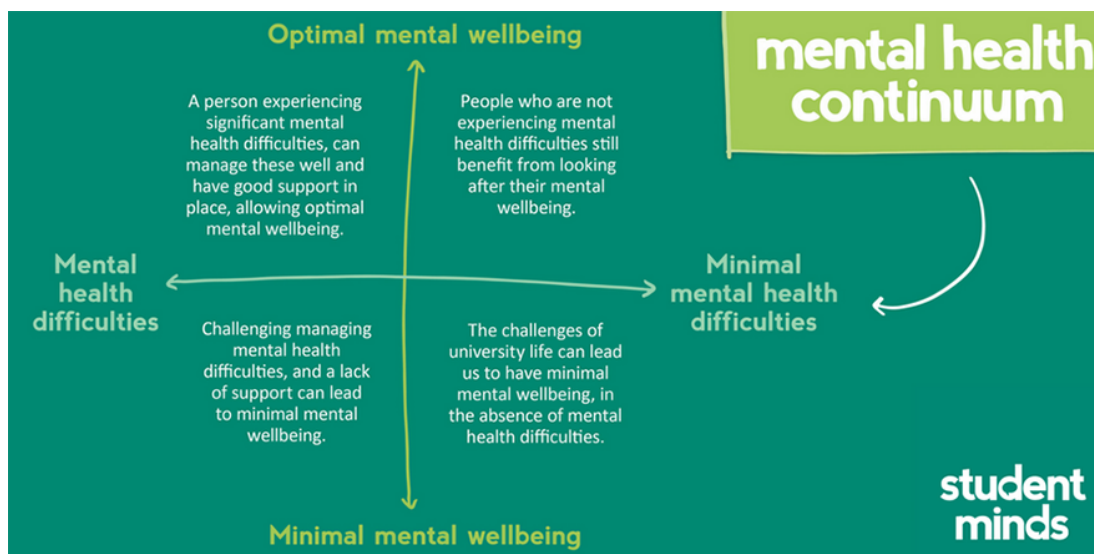
Slightly confusingly, the World Health Organization actually includes the word 'wellbeing' in its definition of mental health:

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders.

(World Health Organization, 2022)

Student Minds, the UK's student mental health charity, states that 'mental health is based on a continuum and can fluctuate at different times' (StudentMindsOrg, 2018). They have a useful graphic to illustrate this:



**Figure 4** Mental health as a continuum.

In summary, there's no straightforward distinction between the two terms, but there's no doubt that a person's mental wellbeing can have a considerable effect on their mental health. Looking after your mental wellbeing, and having resources and strategies in place to support you during challenging or stressful situations, can help you avoid developing more serious mental health problems. This course will introduce some of these resources and strategies, but it will not cover mental illness in detail. If you are interested in learning more about this subject, OpenLearn has numerous free courses, which you can find by visiting the [Free courses](#) page and typing 'mental health' in the search bar.

See also: [Wellbeing and mental health collection](#).

## 3 Whose responsibility is workplace wellbeing?

It was noted earlier that 'Employers, managers, and leaders all have a role to play in workplace happiness' (Finkbeiner, 2022).

However, when it comes to wellbeing, it is really important to be aware of your own status before you try to support others, and for you to feel able to seek support or take action to improve your own wellbeing if you need to. In safety briefings on aeroplanes, you are instructed to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others, and looking after your own wellbeing should be a similar priority in a work context, to equip you to be able to support colleagues at all levels.

In the video below, Sharon Mallon PhD, Senior Lecturer in Mental Health at The Open University, discusses how organisations and individuals can have greater awareness of monitoring wellbeing.

Video content is not available in this format.



### 3.1 Managing your own wellbeing

Section 2.1 introduced the indicators used by the ONS to measure the level of satisfaction young adults have with different aspects of their lives. The ONS also have a simplified set of four personal wellbeing questions that have been used in a range of surveys to measure national wellbeing since 2010 (ONS, 2018). Try answering these questions now in Activity 3.

#### Activity 3 Four measures of personal wellbeing

 Allow about 5 minutes

Table 2 contains four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions, note down an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'.

**Table 2**

Measure	Question
Life satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
Worthwhile	Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
Happiness	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
Anxiety	On a scale where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious', overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

(ONS, 2018)

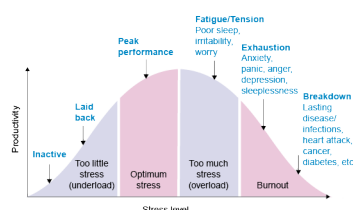
### Discussion

This is a really useful little tool to regularly check in and monitor your own emotional or mental wellbeing. If you answered at the lower end of the scale for one or more questions, think about what actions you could take to improve it, and what support you might need.

### 3.1.1 Your physical wellbeing: signs of stress

The medical profession uses measures such as body mass index, blood pressure and cholesterol levels to determine physical wellbeing, but feeling physically well means different things to different people. If you have a long-term medical condition, for example, your personal sense of your physical wellbeing may differ from what's considered medically 'normal'.

As modern life has become more and more hectic, and the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a whole new set of things for us to worry about, we may have become used to feeling stressed nearly every day. A small amount of stress or anxiety might help us be more productive, according to what is known as the Yerkes–Dodson law, illustrated in Figure 5.

**Figure 5** The Yerkes–Dodson law.

However, too much stress can have a negative impact on our health and productivity. These physical signs can be a useful indicator of whether you might be too stressed:

- **Headaches** – frequent/chronic headaches have been linked to high levels of stress, but other triggers for headaches include dehydration, lack of sleep or high alcohol consumption.
- **Frequent illness** – being stressed has a direct impact on the immune system, making you more vulnerable to infections, but your diet and physical activity level can also affect immunity.
- **Low energy/fatigue** – energy levels naturally vary throughout the day, but feeling like you're constantly running on empty, to the extent that performing simple tasks is a challenge, could be a sign that you're too stressed; however, insufficient sleep, dehydration, low blood sugar and anaemia are also factors that affect energy levels.
- **Insomnia** – trouble sleeping, because you can't 'switch off' your mind or you're tossing and turning at night, are classic indicators of high stress levels. Good sleeping habits are a key component of wellbeing and reduced sleep can also cause low energy and headaches and impact your immune system.
- **Digestive issues** – physical symptoms such as diarrhoea and constipation can manifest as a result of too much stress, or if you already live with Irritable Bowel Syndrome or Inflammatory Bowel Disease, stress can worsen your symptoms.
- **Appetite** – changes in appetite, whether that's feeling more or less hungry than normal, could be a response to excessive stress.

Most people experience some level of stress in their daily lives, but it affects us in different ways. If you feel like you are too stressed, start by considering the source of that stress. If it's work related, could you speak to your line manager about decreasing your workload? If your personal life is the issue, could you find some more time to look after yourself?

Simple self-care approaches to dealing with stress include meditation, breathing techniques, yoga and other mindfulness-based activities. Many organisations offer such activities to employees in a variety of online and offline formats – your Human Resources team should be able to point you towards these. However, if you are regularly experiencing the physical symptoms mentioned above, it's also advisable to contact your GP or healthcare provider to clarify the cause of your symptoms as many of these can be signs of other underlying health issues, such as diabetes, nutritional deficiencies, the menopause, and discuss the best course of action.

### 3.1.2 Your digital wellbeing

It was mentioned earlier that this course would examine wellbeing from a digital perspective, informed by the 'Digital Wellbeing' element of Jisc's individual digital capabilities framework (Jisc, n.d.). Let's look at this now.

Digital wellbeing is a term used to describe the impact of technologies and digital services on people's mental, physical, social and emotional health.

(Jisc, 2019a)

Hybrid working, communication and digital collaboration can sometimes be challenging or demanding, and can affect your wellbeing.

It can be more difficult to develop organisational culture and build trust in hybrid working environments. Culture and trust are built through human connections, and, as humans, we have had to adjust to be able to develop these, both in person and in a digital virtual world.

As new ways of working evolve, it is worth asking questions such as: Have we adapted? How is it different now? If you think about how you work with your colleagues and your



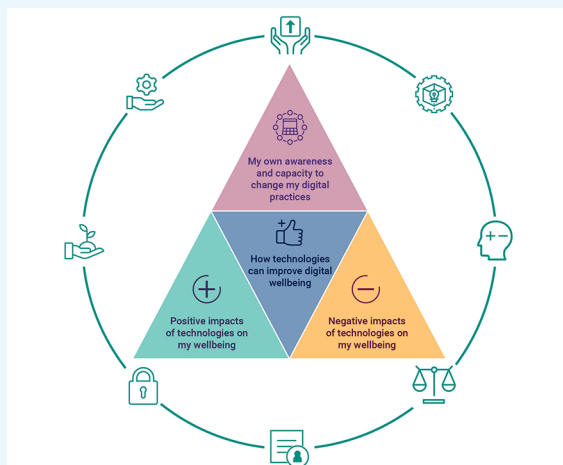
organisation in a post-COVID-19 context, you may find that your culture and trust naturally evolved as you adapted to hybrid ways of working. As hybrid working evolves, you may find that you and your colleagues are going into the office more, either due to organisational requirements or personal choice. For teams that have a hybrid approach, it is important to remember that some people will still be remote workers and ensuring that they continue to feel connected is important. Considering how you work with your team to make the most effective use of digital technologies can help with this.

#### Activity 4 The impact of digital technologies on your wellbeing

 Allow about 30 minutes

Look carefully at the diagram below.

1. Consider how technologies can affect your digital wellbeing at work by identifying positive and negative impacts they have had, either from your own experience or those you've observed in colleagues.
2. What capacity do you think you have to change your digital practices to improve your wellbeing?



**Figure 6** Four aspects of digital wellbeing for individuals.

You can make some notes in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Discussion

Jisc's 'Digital Identity and Wellbeing' capability includes the capacity to:

- look after personal health, safety, relationships and work–life balance in digital settings
- use digital tools in pursuit of personal goals (e.g. health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities
- act safely and responsibly in digital environments
- manage digital workload, overload and distraction

- act with concern for the human and natural environment when using digital tools.

How does this relate to your response to this activity?

Jisc (2019b) have stated that for individuals in an education context, digital wellbeing 'links closely to their personal and social digital wellbeing and to developing and managing their professional and personal digital identities and footprints.'

Now watch the video in which Sas Amoah, Digital Media Producer at The Open University, shares how he manages his digital wellbeing.

Video content is not available in this format.



The Jisc model focuses on four contexts of your digital wellbeing – social, personal, learning and work – that can help you consider areas you might want to focus on. These are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Digital wellbeing context	Positives	Negatives
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing isolation</li> <li>• Building and maintaining relationships</li> <li>• Reducing loneliness</li> <li>• Full participation and connection with family, friends and wider communities</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for inclusion (e.g. disabled people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyberbullying</li> <li>• Online grooming (e.g. sex, radicalisation)</li> <li>• Exclusion and/or accessibility (e.g. gender, age, poverty)</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a positive identity</li> <li>• Building self-worth</li> <li>• Enjoyment (e.g. games, fun, interactions, music)</li> <li>• Convenience/time saving (e.g. shopping)</li> <li>• Access to new ideas/inspiration</li> <li>• Tools for physical health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative comparison with others</li> <li>• Addictive online behaviours (e.g. gambling, porn, checking devices)</li> <li>• Passive consumption</li> <li>• Access to illegal activities/materials</li> <li>• Personal data breaches</li> <li>• Lack of access and/or being left behind</li> <li>• Lack of sleep</li> <li>• Impact on physical health (e.g. eye strain, posture, lack of exercise)</li> </ul>

Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative ways to learn</li> <li>• Online collaborative learning opportunities</li> <li>• Engaging learning activities</li> <li>• Practising digital skills for employment</li> <li>• Learning digital skills for new careers/career change</li> <li>• Increased access to learning</li> <li>• More engaging assessment and feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of digital skills</li> <li>• Digital overload</li> <li>• Negative impact of compulsory online collaboration</li> <li>• Time learning new technologies not the subject</li> <li>• Inappropriate use of technologies</li> <li>• Lack of choice (e.g. told which technologies to use)</li> </ul>
Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved communication</li> <li>• Global collaboration</li> <li>• Flexible working</li> <li>• Tools to manage workload</li> <li>• Tools to make things easier</li> <li>• Creating positive online professional identity</li> <li>• Link to other professional/subject networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital overload</li> <li>• Always on (24-hour access)</li> <li>• Changes to job roles/activities</li> <li>• Automation of tasks (e.g. redundancy)</li> <li>• Poor ergonomics</li> </ul>

(Jisc, 2019c)

Some of the recommendations Jisc suggests to help improve your digital wellbeing are:

- Ask for training and support on the digital systems and tools relevant to your role, so that you can use them effectively and safely
- Take time to explore and understand your digital preferences and needs
- Consider the impact of digital activities on your own health and the health of others
- Manage your digital workload by learning how to use tools effectively, managing your emails and avoiding distractions
- Create a positive digital identity.

Many of these will be explored in Sections 4 and 5 of this course.

## 3.2 Supporting your colleagues' wellbeing

The last section asked you to consider your own wellbeing at work. Now it's time to think about the wellbeing of others – your colleagues.

### Activity 5 How can you help others?

 Allow about 20 minutes

Read this short article (500 words) titled [How can I support my colleagues?](#), from Scotland's National Wellbeing Hub (no date), then spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

1. Have you tried any of the suggestions in the article? If so, how successful were they? What sort of response did they elicit?
2. To what extent do you feel responsible for supporting your colleagues' wellbeing at work?
3. What other actions, ideas, approaches and strategies have you identified as having the potential to improve the wellbeing of your colleagues?

You can make some notes in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

### Discussion

Even if you don't have any formal responsibility for supporting your colleagues' wellbeing, if you think back to the PERMA model, helping others – having a positive impact on their wellbeing at work – is an easy way to add more meaning to your working life.

Some of the activities mentioned in the article will be explored in more depth later in Section 5.

A useful approach for helping others, especially when working in a team, can be to create a 'team working agreement' that all team members contribute to. This can help to support team and individuals' wellbeing. Section 4 of [Hybrid working: digital communication and collaboration](#) provides guidance on how to create a team working agreement'.

## 3.3 Leading wellbeing

If you are in a leadership role, you should be:

- looking at the bigger picture, keeping up with trends in workplace wellbeing and setting strategic priorities in a high-level, proactive way rather than reacting to individual situations
- considering the wellbeing of your people over the entire employee lifecycle, e.g. including caring responsibilities, pregnancy (and pregnancy loss), menopause, and chronic health conditions
- modelling behaviours that support workplace wellbeing, i.e. practising what you preach
- facilitating your managers, by taking responsibility for their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their teams.

In a digital context, Jisc (2019b) have identified eight good practice principles for organisation-wide approaches to digital wellbeing:

- provide inclusive and responsive services that support digital work or learning activities
- incorporate digital wellbeing into existing policies and strategies, particularly accessibility and inclusion policies
- provide safe physical and online environments



- comply with the duty of care to staff and students in relation to digital work or learning activities
- meet ethical and legal responsibilities in relation to accessibility, health, equality and inclusion
- provide appropriate training, educational opportunities, guidance and support for participation in digital work or learning activities
- understand potential positive and negative impacts of digital work or learning activities on wellbeing
- provide inclusive and accessible digital systems, tools and content.

These are broad principles and consideration should also be made in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The CIPD suggest:

To achieve genuine inclusion there must be positive action, including measures under the Equality Act 2010 to address past, present, and potential discrimination and barriers to enable and empower:

- Equal access
- Equal opportunities
- Equal treatment
- Equal resources
- Equal outcomes
- Equal impact

(CIPD, n.d.)

For some examples of actions that you could take to enact these principles, you can download the full Jisc briefing paper for senior leaders and visit the gov.uk [Equality Act 2010: guidance site](#). Jisc also published a briefing paper on digital wellbeing aimed at practitioners, which emphasises that:

Although education organisations have a duty of care to make sure their employees and students have a safe, legally compliant and supportive digital environment to work and learn in, individuals have responsibility for aspects within their control and should take appropriate steps to ensure they achieve and maintain a positive approach to digital wellbeing.

(Jisc, 2019c)

Jisc's advice may be intended for a digital context, but it applies equally to hybrid working. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has six 'Simple Changes' relating to wellbeing that you, as a leader, could implement at your organisation. Follow the links below to find out more (open them in a new window/tab so you can easily return here).

### Box 1 Simple Changes #21–22, 24–27

Simple Changes #21 [Take stock of mental health in your workplace.](#)

Simple Changes #22

[Provide mental health and suicide awareness training for all staff.](#)

Simple Changes #24 [Provide lockers for your employees.](#)

Simple Changes #25 [Have a flexible working policy.](#)

Simple Changes #26

[Encourage your employees to take breaks and eat away from their desk.](#)

Simple Changes #27 [Encourage walking and standing meetings, where appropriate.](#)

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022b)

The culture within your organisation can affect wellbeing. Developing an inclusive and supportive culture requires leaders to consider how they could create healthy environments, with psychological safety and effective communication. Visit the [Hybrid working: skills for leadership](#) course within this collection to explore this in more depth.

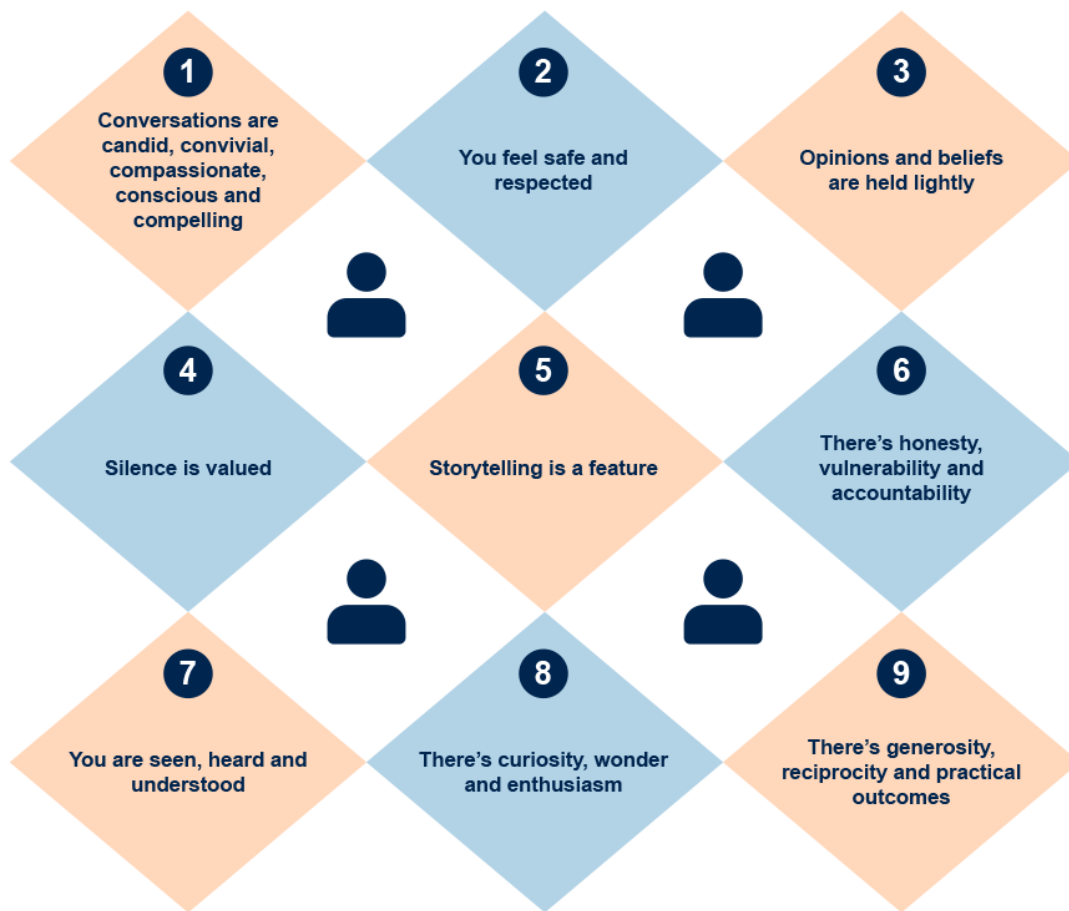
### 3.4 Conversations about wellbeing

Effective leaders recognise the need to embed wellbeing and inclusion throughout the different levels of an organisation. Leaders and managers can help to build an inclusive and supportive culture of psychological safety in which staff feel able to share their experiences and needs in the workplace.

The conversations you have about wellbeing are an important aspect of enabling and modelling behaviours that support workplace wellbeing. Conversations about personal or sensitive matters require you to build trust, to be honest about the support you/the organisation can provide, and to use your judgement for agreeing next steps. While there is always a need to consider how much should be shared, taking a more empathetic approach, and using active listening can lead to better conversations.

Empathy and active listening are explored in more depth in the [Hybrid working: skills for leadership](#) course that is part of this collection. That course may be useful in helping you develop your awareness and skills in taking a human-centred approach (Berry, 2022) when talking to others. In Figure 7 Berry suggests 9 essentials for human-centred conversations:

## 9 essentials for human-centred conversations



**Figure 7** Human being-centred conversations, adapted from Berry (2022).

Many organisations have appropriate networks in place to support both employees and line manager to start to have better conversations. In this final activity we focus on bringing together the learnings from the course and ask you to reflect on how you feel about personal conversations and explore how you might share your own experiences (as an individual), and approach sensitive conversations (as a leader or manager), to support your staff and develop more effective workplace support.

### Activity 6 Better conversations

 Allow about 30 minutes

Having conversations about personal matters in the workplace can be difficult. As an individual you may not be ready to share what might be happening in your life, for many reasons, and as a manager you may not know how to start a conversation with a member of staff to ask if something is wrong. Often it is only at the point where something 'happens' – such as behaviour that is out of character, poor performance or unexpected absence – that starting a sensitive conversation becomes unavoidable.

Feeling able to openly share a personal experience in the workplace can take time, and often only happens once the individual has first spoken to close friends or

family, then to trusted work colleagues, and eventually to their line manager. In the case study below, we use the example of miscarriage to help you consider how you might approach sensitive conversations at work.

### **Case study: miscarriage and the workplace**

There is increasing evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on progress in gender equality. You can explore issues affecting women in the section on Inclusion considerations for females in the

[Hybrid working: organisational development](#) course within this collection.

Women's health issues linked to fertility are common, be these difficulties conceiving, complications during and after pregnancy, or menopause. Miscarriage is a sensitive subject because the societal norm in the UK is not to disclose that you are pregnant before 12 weeks, yet many miscarriages happen in the very early stages of pregnancy. This can lead to people going through a grieving process that others are not aware of. The Tommy's National Centre for Miscarriage Research works with universities and hospitals and is dedicated to understanding more about the reasons for, impact of and prevention of miscarriages. Research by Tommy's has suggested that both women and their partners have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) around miscarriage:

At nine months, none of the women with healthy pregnancies had PTSD, anxiety, or depression. But among women with early pregnancy loss:

- almost one in five (18%) had PTSD
- one in six (17%) had anxiety
- one in 20 (6%) had depression.

Farren J, Jalmbrant M, Falconieri N, et al, 2020

In video below Esther Spring, Learning Lead - Digital and Innovation, and Dr Nick Barratt, Director, Learning and Discovery Services at The Open University, discuss her experience of miscarriage and the support she received in the workplace.

As you watch the video consider how you might approach a similar situation, and what support your organisation has in place. It could be helpful to think about how you feel, listening to what Esther experienced, as being aware of how you might feel and react could influence how you approach similar conversations in the future.

Then consider Nick's reflections of the experience, at the end of the video.

**Trigger warning:** Please note that this video discusses the process and impact of miscarriage in detail.

Video content is not available in this format.



Having watched the video, and considering Nick's reflections, how might you approach sensitive conversations, and what support issues might you encounter in a hybrid or remote-only workplace? You may wish to make notes in the box below:

*Provide your answer...*

In the next video Nick and Esther discuss how organisations and managers can support their staff in relation to wellbeing and inclusion. Consider the different approaches that could be taken, and the impact that situations could have on both individuals and managers. As you watch the video reflect on your own and your organisation's approach to wellbeing and inclusion and consider what you could do differently.

Video content is not available in this format.



You may wish to make notes in the text box below about areas for further research, and conversations with others that could be beneficial to develop better working practices.

*Provide your answer...*

The following resources may be helpful, if this a topic you wish to explore further:

- [Fertility Network \(fertilitynetworkuk.org\)](https://fertilitynetworkuk.org)
- [Fertility and causes of infertility | Tommy's \(tommys.org\)](https://tommys.org)
- [Miscarriage and the workplace - The Miscarriage Association](#)
- [Baby loss information and support | Tommy's \(tommys.org\)](https://tommys.org)
- [menopausesupport.co.uk – Supporting You Through Change](https://menopausesupport.co.uk)
- [The Menopause Charity - Menopause Facts, Advice and Support](#)
- [Home – Mental Health At Work](#)



## 4 Work–life balance and overload

Section 3 touched on some aspects of work–life balance and overload. This section will look at the day-to-day practicalities of managing these issues in a hybrid working environment.

Mobile digital technologies, smart devices, superfast broadband and cloud computing mean that for many people, work is now just a click away, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This ‘always-on’ culture makes it challenging to maintain effective workload management and keep a healthy work–life balance. This challenge was intensified by the pandemic forcing many of us to create an ‘office’ within our own homes.

In a recent CIPD (2020) survey, 86% of respondents identified the ‘inability to switch off during out-of-work hours’ as the main negative effect of technology on wellbeing. This was closely followed by the stress resulting from technology failure (70%).

To maintain our wellbeing in the face of all this, we need strategies in place to stop us burning out.

In the following video Grace Emiohe from The Open University shares her experiences of maintaining her own wellbeing.

Video content is not available in this format.



### Activity 7 Monitoring your online/onscreen working time

If working remotely for some or all of your time has meant that you’re not sticking rigidly to traditional office hours, it’s important to keep track of how long you are spending online/onscreen, to ensure you don’t unintentionally become an always-on worker.

Over the next week, try to make a note of your ‘screen time’, whether that’s using a computer (desktop or laptop), a tablet, a smartphone or any other kind of work-related digital technology. Count each device separately. You might want to take a break from the screen to record your time with a pen and paper!



Pay particular attention to times when you weren't planning to work, but the affordances of technology meant that you ended up doing it anyway. For example, when you were sat on your sofa watching TV in the evening, but had your smartphone next to you, and when a work notification popped up, you couldn't stop yourself from checking it.

Also try to note whether you felt that the online/onscreen time was particularly **positive** (e.g. it made you feel satisfied at your productivity) or **negative** (e.g. reading 'out-of-hours' emails made you feel stressed or angry). If it caused no strong feelings either way, you don't need to note that.

At the start of the week make a note of what you expect the balance to be, then at end of the week, review your notes to identify how much time you spent online/onscreen, and what impact the emotional responses you noted had on your wellbeing.

Make some notes summarising your experience, including whether the balance was as you expected, in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

.....

### Discussion

Did you record more or less time than you expected?

Were the activities that caused negative emotions (if any) unavoidable, or could you take action to reduce these?

Did any of the activities create a positive sense of connection or community with your colleagues? Or were there things you felt would have been done more effectively in person/away from a screen?

## 4.1 Managing email – and its alternatives

Do you dread opening your email inbox? Do you feel like you spend so long each day reading, responding to and administering email that you have no time to do your 'actual work'? If so, you're not alone.

Email is a digital tool and, like all tools, learning how to use it more effectively, familiarising yourself with its strengths and weaknesses, and exploring different techniques and approaches in using it will help you minimise any negative impact on your mental wellbeing – and that of your colleagues.

### When is email the best tool for the task?

What is the purpose of your email, and is it time-sensitive? For example, if you have a question that needs a quick response, would online chat, a phone call or a video call work better?

Depending on your organisation's policies and guidance for use of third-party tools, the provider's terms and conditions, group chat tools such as WhatsApp/Messenger/Signal can be useful if you need to discuss something with multiple contacts but don't want to generate a lengthy and confusing email chain. However, you need to be mindful of use of the tools, especially sending messages outside of working hours, and be aware that not

everyone has a mobile phone for work, or uses their personal devices for work, so they may not welcome such exchanges on a personal device.

If your email is a regular update for an audience that includes a mixture of internal and external contacts, would a blog or social media post be more effective?

Essentially, when used well, email is a great way to communicate with colleagues asynchronously – without needing to be on the same platform or free at the same time.

## Email formatting and features

Emails have a subject line for a reason. If your email has a precise but concise subject line, the recipient(s) will immediately know what it relates to and can prioritise it accordingly. It will also help to stop that email getting overlooked in an overstuffed inbox full of messages with vague or empty subject lines.

How long is your email, and how is it structured? People who receive a lot of emails will skim the contents for the most important points, so it's important to make any key messages or actions unmistakable. Bullets or bold text can help with this. No one wants to read an email essay, so get to the point quickly and use concise sentences and short paragraphs.

## Check before you send!

It's all too easy to send emails on impulse, but realising you made mistakes, omitted important information, or used a misjudged tone in them can be hard to recover from.

Before you click 'send', check that you're sending it to the right person or people – and that you've chosen the correct option between 'reply' and 'reply all'. Make sure you've only addressed it to the people that it is absolutely relevant to and haven't copied in people who don't need to engage with its content. One of the biggest contributors to email overload is copying in everyone with even the slightest connection to the subject. This is a waste of their time and yours.

## When to send an email?

In the 'always available' culture we've mentioned previously, with some people using mobile devices and working more flexibly, including at weekends or across different time zones, emails can arrive in your inbox any time of the day or night. This has led to debates about whether you should only be allowed to email during 'core' working hours.

The duty of care for employees' and colleagues' wellbeing means that it is now essential to have an awareness of the impact of emails received outside of core hours. Regularly sending or receiving emails outside core hours could indicate a workload issue that should be discussed. Individuals may feel obliged to reply, especially if they have linked their work email account to their personal device(s). Emails that contain 'bad news' can lead to upset and worry, especially if the sender cannot be contacted in a timely manner. However, due to flexible working patterns, not allowing emails to be sent outside of core hours could also have an impact on wellbeing. To address this, you could encourage the practice of drafting emails outside core hours to be sent within core hours, using the 'send later' scheduling tools now available in most email systems.

## Imposing order on your email chaos

- Establish a strategy or schedule for reading and responding to email, e.g. if you feel that it's taking over too much of your working time, try checking your emails only at certain times of day, during your normal working hours.
- Share your strategy with others, so they know not to expect an immediate response if they contact you via email.
- Use folders to organise what you can't delete – these could be as simple as Action, Waiting, Reference and Archive, or you could create a folder for every project you work on.
- Consider setting up rules to send certain emails directly to those folders.
- Use your personal email account (if you have one) for all non-work email.

## Email alternatives

Use of Microsoft Teams seems to have increased rapidly in the HE sector as a consequence of the pandemic, thanks to its 'one-stop shop' functionality. Some people now use it as their primary communication tool, instead of email, and it can be very useful for working collaboratively and synchronously. However, used without care, it can be just as much of a pest as email: interrupting work and sending endless notifications, for example. It also doesn't yet seem to have established the sort of etiquette that email has been developing over the last few decades.

A notable feature of platforms like Teams (see also Slack and Discord) is that they allow you to set a 'status' that indicates to other people whether you're available to talk, busy working on something, temporarily 'away' or offline. However, some people may feel pressure to keep this constantly up to date, or worry about being seen to be productive, especially when working from home – as you'll see later in Section 4.3, which covers the problem of presenteeism.

## 4.2 Video meetings: the good and the bad

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the way we work has been the stratospheric rise in the use of video conferencing as a means of communicating or holding work meetings. Google Meet™, Microsoft Teams and – perhaps most notably – Zoom (see below) have all reported huge increases in traffic since 2019. The jury is still out on whether this is a positive change or not, but here are some good and bad aspects of video meetings that have been identified.

### The good

In a recent article, the Microsoft 365 Team outlined what they view as the ten benefits of using video conferencing (Microsoft, 2022):

1. Improves communication.
2. Helps build relationships.
3. Saves money.
4. Saves time.
5. Streamlines collaboration.
6. Improves efficiency.
7. Increases productivity.

8. Makes scheduling meetings easier.
9. Creates consistent, accurate records.
10. Enables live events.

How many of these reflect your own experience of meetings moving online? What other benefits (if any) have you identified?

## The bad

If working on campus meant your days were often filled with back-to-back meetings, you might have imagined that working from home (or another remote location) would have changed that for the better. However, for many people those in-person meetings have been replaced with even more prolific video calls.

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, articles about ‘Zoom exhaustion’ or ‘Zoom burnout’ started to appear. This reflected the negative wellbeing impact experienced by many people while meeting in person was restricted, with video calls being used for work meetings as well as maintaining social lives. There is even a ‘Zoom fatigue’ Wikipedia page, which notes that ‘the phenomenon of Zoom fatigue has been attributed to an overload of nonverbal cues and communication that does not happen in normal conversation’ (Wikipedia, 2022).

The question of should cameras be on or off is frequently discussed, and while there are benefits to having cameras on to aid non-verbal communication and some aspects of accessibility, it is accepted that depending on technical reasons, the purpose of the meeting, or individuals’ needs, it is not essential. You will dig a little deeper into how this affects some people more than others in the section on neurodiversity later in this course.

Online security and safety are a consideration for video meetings. Most organisations will be using trusted systems, but participants need to be mindful of the information shared and what is visible in their background, or who else can see/hear the conversation, to avoid confidential information being inadvertently shared. If a meeting is being recorded, permission from all participants should be gained first, and access to the recording considered.

Finally, when video calls fail – especially at a crucial point in a work meeting or event – that can be another source of anxiety for remote/hybrid workers. ‘Technology failure’ was the second most common negative effect of technology on wellbeing mentioned by respondents to the CIPD (2020) survey.

## 4.3 The problem of presenteeism

This is how the CIPD view presenteeism and leaveism, which you’ll consider further in the next activity:

Presenteeism (people working when unwell) and leaveism (employees using allocated time off such as annual leave to work or if they are unwell, or working outside contracted hours) are not the signs of a healthy workplace. With debate continuing about the wellbeing risks of an ‘always on’ culture and the rapid increase in homeworking, organisations need to ensure that the boundaries between people’s work and home lives do not become blurred.

(CIPD, 2022)

### Activity 8 Has presenteeism gone digital?

 Allow about 30 minutes

Read this article (1500 words) titled [Why presenteeism wins out over productivity](#) from BBC Worklife (Lufkin, 2021). As you read it, keep the following questions in mind:

- To what extent was presenteeism an issue in your workplace pre-COVID, and how has that changed over the last two years, with increased remote and hybrid working?
- What impact does it have on your personal wellbeing?
- What impact does it have on your team or department?
- If you're a manager or a leader, what steps are you taking to tackle presenteeism?

Note down the key points that resonate with you. You can use the box below.

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

According to the CIPD's April 2022 report *Health and Wellbeing at Work 2022*, working when ill (presenteeism) remains prevalent – and is even higher for those working from home (81% versus 65% among those in a workplace). This culture can result in mental ill health and increased stress for employees, which can lead to long-term sickness. It is therefore a problem that cannot be ignored if your organisation is to succeed.

It is important that organisations do not abandon the benefits of flexible working, which has been opened up to a much wider range of employees than before the pandemic. Finding the right balance might take a period of experimentation in which employers and employees try out a range of options before choosing to permanently adopt what works well. However, a culture of presenteeism should never be part of this.

## 4.4 Establishing boundaries

When you're a home-based worker, it's not always obvious to family, friends or other members of your household when you're working and when you're not, and when you can or cannot be interrupted – you need to make it clear where your boundaries are.

Some people don't mind receiving emails or messages outside of traditional office hours, but others prefer to keep work and non-work distinct. Which camp do you fall into?

If you want that work–life separation, consider only accessing your emails during your working hours, and not having emails available on personal devices, if you have a dedicated work device. Include a short message about your working practices in your email signature, which will help manage your colleagues' expectations around response times.

Use the wellbeing features – such as 'do not disturb' settings – on your digital devices to minimise notifications, identify times when you won't look at them, or even consider switching them off completely outside your working hours. This idea of 'digital

disconnection’ – a counterpoint to the issue of presenteeism – is a hot topic in the human resources and occupational health sectors at the moment, as you will see in the next activity.

In terms of the on-site aspects of hybrid working, what boundaries are there in relation to coming in to the office? Does your organisation or department have stated expectations around attendance at on-site meetings? If you no longer have your own designated desk in your organisation’s offices, are there clear guidelines about where and when you can work on site?

### Activity 9 Digital disconnection

 Allow about 30 minutes

Read [What is the right to digital disconnection?](#) (1300 words) on the ifeel website (Rodríguez, 2022). ifeel is a business that offers emotional wellbeing resources to organisations.

As you read it, note down the key points that resonate with you and your experience of hybrid/digital working. You can use the box below to capture your thoughts.

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

For some people, like those who have significant caring responsibilities or are living with chronic illness or disability, hybrid/digital working has opened up new possibilities for more flexibility in their working schedule. However, the danger remains that employees feel pressured to work longer hours, e.g. those who mainly fulfil their contractual obligations early in the morning/late at night and/or at weekends may still feel obliged to attend meetings or respond to communications received during traditional office hours.

## 4.5 Positives and negatives of digital work wellbeing

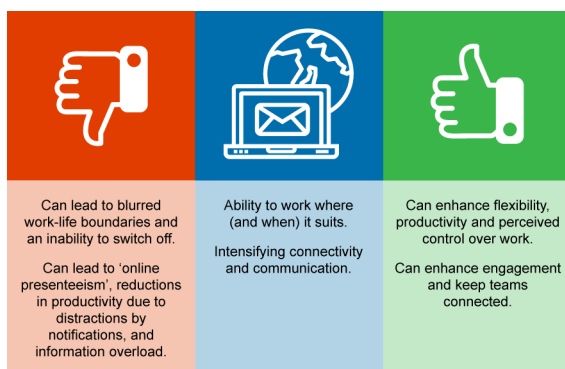
Figure 8 is an infographic from Jisc that summarises the positives and negatives of digital work wellbeing from the perspective of their individual digital capabilities framework.



**Figure 8** Digital work wellbeing.

This course hasn't yet dealt with all the points included in the infographic. Some of them (like communication) are covered in later sections; others will be touched on but labelled differently; and some are beyond the scope of this course. You may wish to use Jisc's terms to do some independent research on the topics not covered here.

A different way of depicting the potential positive and negative impacts of remote working and technology on work–life balance has emerged from research undertaken by Dr Lara Pecis of Lancaster University's Management School and Work Foundation, a think tank associated with that HEI (Pecis and Florisson 2021). This is shown in Figure 8.



**Figure 9** Positive and negative impacts of remote working.



This diagram more closely reflects this course's approach to wellbeing. In the next section we look more closely at social wellbeing in a hybrid workplace.

## 5 Social wellbeing at work

Employee social wellbeing has become more widely acknowledged over the past year as many workplaces have had to do a virtual pivot. Not only have more and more employees been working from home or remotely, but there has also been a heightened sense of job uncertainty, so it's more important than ever for businesses to focus on improving the social wellbeing of their team, so individuals are satisfied socially and feel as though they belong.

(People Value, 2022)

The foundation of social connection is communication, so let's begin by exploring how communication – and miscommunication – can affect social wellbeing at work.

### 5.1 Communication in a hybrid working world

In the workplace, developing effective communication skills will enable you as an individual to interact more effectively with colleagues and others, as well as improving your chances of gaining promotion or securing new employment. This is true whether you are based in a large, open-plan office or working from your home or another remote location.

There is also significant evidence, from the 1970s onwards, to support a link between effective communication in the workplace and enhanced job satisfaction. Clampit and Girard (1993) analysed the construct of communication satisfaction and concluded that:

Communication satisfaction factors provide an effective way to distinguish between employees who are in the upper and lower parts of the spectrum in terms of both job satisfaction and self-estimates of productivity.

(Clampit and Girard, 1993)

More recently, a study of nurses in paediatric intensive care units – a particularly high-pressure working environment – also concluded that:

There is a relationship between effective communication and job satisfaction that needs to be of a greater importance for organizations to achieve a higher success.

(El-Gawad, 2013, p. 2662)

If those around you are communicating effectively and you have a clear sense of what's expected of you and how you can contribute in the workplace, it makes sense that you are likely to feel more satisfied; therefore it has a positive impact on your wellbeing.

Effective communication gives clear benefits to the individual, but there are significant benefits for the organisation too. If communication is poor, reduced job satisfaction and productivity can have a significant impact on the business. For example, when 4,000 people were surveyed by Think Feel Know Coaching, 46% said that they were 'unsure of what was being asked of them by their line manager when given tasks' (Woods, 2010). The same study estimated that up to 40 minutes per individual per day were wasted because of this. Using these figures, an average company with 1,000 employees could have as many as 83 people doing nothing every day (Woods, 2010).

When there is uncertainty or change within an organisation, employees can feel ill-informed about the impact on their roles. If their concerns are not addressed and vital information is not communicated, staff morale will be affected. This can lead to a lack of trust and engagement, which can result in low productivity and absenteeism.

For an organisation to embrace effective communication, every individual, from senior managers to new trainees, must play their part.

Sometimes miscommunication is the problem. The video in the next activity suggests some simple rules for avoiding this.

### Activity 10 Miscommunication

 Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the following TedEd video on miscommunication.

Video content is not available in this format.



Now use the box below to note your own experiences of miscommunication.

What impact do you think the hybrid working practices in place since the emergence of COVID-19 (e.g. meetings via video call) have had on miscommunication?

*Provide your answer...*

### Discussion

The video mentions four practices that can improve interactions and avoid miscommunication:

- Recognise that there is a difference between passive hearing and active listening.
- Listen with your eyes and ears as well as your gut.
- Take time to understand the perspective of the person/people you are talking to.

- Try to be aware of your own perceptual filters.

The next time you are discussing a difficult issue with colleagues, try to put these ideas into practice. See if it makes a difference.

Throughout your life you continually change how you speak and what you speak about. Each situation you find yourself in will require a slightly different method of communication. You've just reflected on situations when communication faltered and resulted in misunderstanding. Did any of your experiences with miscommunication involve colleagues of a different generation to you? If so, the next section may help to explain that.

## 5.2 The influence of generational traits on communication

In HEIs it's common to see employees of multiple generations working side-by-side. While our character traits and work habits are shaped by our personalities, not by our age, there are historical and social influences that have affected each generation. Understanding these influences can help to improve intergenerational communication and inclusion and avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes.

Depending on who you ask there are currently four or five generations represented in the workplace, commonly defined as follows:

- Traditionalists (sometimes called the Silent Generation) – born between 1928 and 1945.
- Baby boomers – born between 1946 and 1964.
- Generation X – born between 1965 and 1980.
- Generation Y (also known as Millennials) – born between 1981 and 1996.
- Generation Z – born between 1997 and 2012.

Each generation comes with its own set of assumed characteristics based on the environment in which its members were raised, e.g. post-war, during financial crisis, etc.

The amount of technological development that has happened between the birth of the first traditionalists and Gen Z was so vast that it has created two entirely different life experiences. When Baby Boomers first got a job, a computer at each desk wasn't commonplace, whereas Millennials and Gen Z have never known a world without one.

(Rice, 2021)

Let's briefly look at some of the key work-related stereotypical differences that have been identified for each group. These are generalisations, and do not automatically apply to everyone in a particular age group, and you may disagree with them, based on your own experience and approach.

### Traditionalists

Traditionalists are known for their strong work ethic, they appreciate job security and are more accustomed to formal attitudes in work environments rather than relaxed, flexible work environments.

## Baby boomers

Baby boomers enjoy face-to-face communication and printed information. They are loyal to their job and treat it as a priority in their life, focusing on career progression. They are willing to take risks at work to achieve success. They expect respect for their job title. Many of them are now at traditional retirement age, and the pandemic is thought to have accelerated retirement rates.

## Generation X

Gen X shook up the traditional workplace with their independence and entrepreneurial spirit – they are the ‘start-up’ generation, valuing autonomy and innovation. They want respect for their ideas and are focused on results. They are also credited with introducing the concept of work–life balance and they lean towards ‘working to live’ rather than ‘living to work’. They tend to communicate at work via email or instant messaging, and favour soft copy documents over hard copy.

## Generation Y/Millennials

Millennials are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. They are focused on skills, especially creativity, and they value meaningful work in a relaxed environment. They expect their employers to have proactive and positive attitudes to sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion. They are comfortable using technology to acquire just-in-time knowledge. They prioritise friendship and involvement.

A commonly discussed characteristic of ‘millennials’ is their desire for more feedback than previous generations. This can be very positive, but does require a different approach to communication from other generations.

## Generation Z

As the newest generation to the workforce, the workplace characteristics of Generation Z are less well researched and defined than the other groups. However, one thing is certain, they have only ever known a digital world. The COVID-19 pandemic came at a critical developmental stage for Gen Z – normally this would have been the time when they would be making new connections and transitioning into adult life, but that was dramatically affected by lockdowns and other restrictions. They are disproportionately employed in industries such as hospitality and retail so many of them lost their jobs during the pandemic. They value authenticity, transparency, innovation and personal growth.

## What this means for your communication approach

Generational characteristics can lead to various challenges in the workplace. Adapting your communication style and content to the needs of your audience is an important consideration in this context.

In the video below, contributors share their insights to working across generations and how you can build more inclusive workplaces.

Video content is not available in this format.



### 5.3 Building and maintaining work relationships

Connecting with people you work with, whether they are full-time colleagues or occasional participants, means being able to build a bond that stimulates their interest and engagement. Communication often serves two purposes: conveying information and/or an interpersonal function. The interpersonal function relates to developing confidence, trust and rapport with others, which are essential aspects of building and maintaining successful working relationships.

The technical name for small talk is 'phatic communication'. Examples are 'Hi, are you OK?' or a comment about the weather. Questions or comments such as these are not meant to elicit detailed responses, but they do serve a social purpose. Phatic talk openings to dialogue are important in establishing goodwill, collaboration and cohesion between people.

Communication involves not only the words you use, but also the accompanying paralinguistic features such as pace, volume, rhythm and intonation of speech, all of which add to meaning.

Non-verbal communication features include gestures, proximity and eye contact. These contribute to effective communication.

Hand gestures are often used by speakers to accentuate the rhythm of their speech and give emphasis to certain words. They can also be used to point inwardly to magnify the first person (i.e. 'me', 'I' or 'personally') or outwardly to those listening (i.e. 'you').

Head gestures are often used by listeners in a dialogue to show they are listening.

You can partly control the feelings you exhibit, but hiding your innermost emotions can be hard – our faces leak information as numerous micro-expressions involuntarily flicker across our face.

It is also important to consider cultural differences when communicating. A multicultural society requires an awareness that cultures have different styles of verbal and physical

communication, and an ability and sensitivity to respect these styles and adjust your communication approach appropriately.

### Activity 11 The impact of hybrid on communicating with colleagues

 Allow about 10 minutes

Due to the pandemic, many of us are now working with people we have never actually met 'in real life', and increasingly with those from other cultures. Watch the video from the British Council.

View at: [youtube:AXUJv8rTYbo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXUJv8rTYbo)



Source: [British Council on YouTube](#)

Reflect on the video and think about the aspects of communication described above. If you have access to a recording of a meeting you attended, watch it and think about the behaviours demonstrated by its participants. Then consider how hybrid or digital-only working arrangements have affected your ability to build and maintain work relationships, and whether you have adapted how you communicate, especially with those from other cultures?

You can make some notes in the box below.

*Provide your answer...*

## 5.4 Avoiding isolation

Social isolation is a challenge often associated with remote working. While some people may actually prefer working away from a busy office, it's important to ensure that individuals and teams still have people or networks that they can reliably speak to. As part of a virtual team in a virtual working world, it's easy to become invisible.

In some organisations the increase in hybrid and remote working means that full-capacity, open-plan offices where everyone had their own designated desk have been transformed into bookable hot-desking areas. This means that when you do arrange to go into the office, you might be the only person in the room all day, which could make you feel isolated or uncomfortable.

Check in regularly with your line manager and if you work in a matrix management situation, establish regular contact points with any other colleagues you're doing work for, making sure both you and they understand the deliverables, the objectives, and when and how you need to deliver them.

If you used to have team-based social events in the office, have you tried virtual team events? These could be as simple as a half-hour tea or coffee break via video call, where you have the sort of conversations you might have had previously in the office kitchen, or it could be something more involved like a virtual scavenger hunt. You can find more



examples and inspiration for virtual team building activities at [teambuilding.com](https://teambuilding.com) (make sure to open the link in a new tab/window).

## 5.5 Social media safety issues

Section 3 touched on your digital wellbeing, and preventing isolation, building and maintaining relationships and reducing loneliness were all identified as positive aspects of digital activity. These can be achieved by participating in social media and social networking. However, there are also safety issues associated with social media, particularly around inappropriate posting. This could be as a result of you inadvertently or deliberately posting inappropriate content, or it could be inappropriate responses to your social media activity.

Your organisation should have guidance on what is permissible on social media, with the consequences of not following this advice made very clear.

You may receive negative responses from other social media users. Comments that do not agree with your views or perspectives are perfectly acceptable, but you may find yourself overwhelmed by a 'backlash' of comments, or even a victim of cyberbullying or harassment. If so, you need to consider how to, or even whether to, respond to this.

### Box 2 Support and guidance

There are numerous resources online that provide support and guidance if you're exposed to negative behaviours, or you're worried about your own behaviour. You may wish to take some time to explore those listed below:

- [Cyberbullying and online harassment advice | The National Bullying Helpline](#)
- [Help Center | The Cybersmile Foundation](#)
- [Welsh Government Online Safety guidance | Welsh Government](#)
- [I'm being harassed by someone on social media. What can I do? | Metropolitan Police](#)
- [Social Networking Sites | Get Safe Online](#)
- [Dealing with online harassment | Support, health and wellbeing, University of York](#)

## 5.6 Psychological safety

Psychological safety is about individuals feeling empowered to share ideas and opinion without fear of reprisal, discrimination or humiliation. It's a key aspect of a positive organisational culture and a key contributor to your workforce's wellbeing.

Signs of a psychologically unsafe workplace include hesitance to speak openly and honestly, reluctance to admit to making mistakes and an overall air of low motivation. People can feel unsafe in any situation or working at any level – it's not just an issue for staff in junior roles.

To achieve a psychologically safe working environment there needs to be trust between employees and managers, and between colleagues. The

[\*Hybrid working: skills for leadership\*](#) course that is part of this collection explores in more detail how to develop that trust. The aspects of communication mentioned earlier in this section can contribute to the establishment of such trust, as can a good support network. Some organisations have wellbeing ambassadors to help with this.

As a manager or leader, when it comes to safety, don't ask your team members to do anything that you wouldn't do. Be mindful of their concerns and provide reassurance. Encourage participation and contribution from all team members.

It may seem paradoxical, but while you want people to feel able to speak freely, that doesn't mean 'anything goes'. It's important that aggression, bullying and belittling behaviours are acknowledged and dealt with promptly.

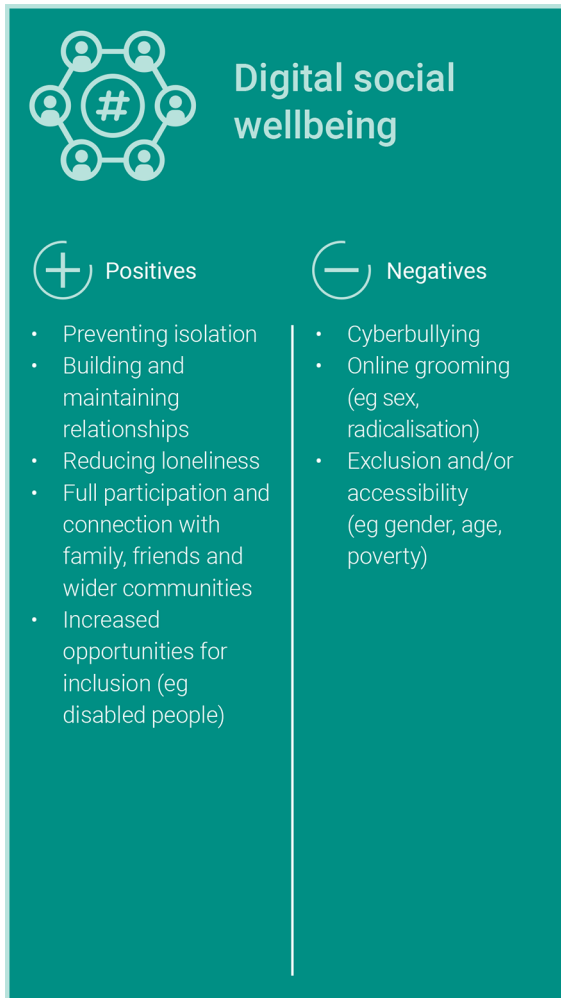
## 5.7 Cybersecurity for hybrid working

When you were completely office-based, your organisation's IT team probably took care of your cybersecurity needs. But if you're now partly or entirely based at home, you need to pay more attention to cybersecurity threats yourself – not least because IT teams may also be working in a range of locations, which could affect the services they offer and their response times. Key principles to follow are:

- Use antivirus and internet security software – your organisation may be able to provide you with this, but if not, there are a range of free and paid-for options available.
- If you live with others – especially children – keep your devices locked or password protected when you are away from them.
- Consider covering your webcam when you're not actively using it, as they can be accessed by hackers. If you use a separate webcam (i.e. not built in), unplug it when it's not in use.
- Use a virtual private network (VPN). If you are accessing work servers from home, this is probably something your organisation already insists on.
- Use your organisation's centralised cloud/server storage for important files, don't just save them locally.
- Make sure your home Wi-Fi is secure, using a strong password. Information on this should've been provided with your router. Alternatively, your internet service provider (ISP) should have guidance on their website.
- Make video meetings private by requiring a password for entry, or only allowing someone with administrator permissions to admit guests – you may remember 'Zoom bombing' attacks hitting the headlines during the first lockdown.
- If possible, avoid working near any voice-controlled devices to avoid the possibility of remote listening-in.
- Be conscious of what's visible behind you during video calls. You may want to use a physical screen or virtual on-screen blurring to avoid revealing sensitive or personal artefacts.
- Use strong and secure passwords and consider using secure password managers for creating and storing your passwords.
- Make sure software and operating systems are up to date and have the latest security patches installed.

## 5.8 Positives and negatives of digital social wellbeing

This section of the course concludes with another Jisc infographic, this time summarising the positives and negatives of digital social wellbeing. Note that many of these points apply more widely to all types of hybrid working, not exclusively to digital work.



**Figure 10** Digital social wellbeing.

As you can see from the figure, Jisc highlights increased opportunities for inclusion as one of the positives of digital social wellbeing – and exclusion and accessibility as negatives. The next section of the course explores these topics.

## 6 Inclusion

Let's start with a quotation from Inclusive Employers, a membership organisation founded in 2011 for employers who are committed to prioritising inclusion and creating truly inclusive workplaces.

Inclusion is a broad subject and is a term that trips of the tongue of many. However, people have different understandings of what the word means. ... Many people use the words inclusion, diversity and even equality interchangeably. ... At Inclusive Employers, we focus on workplace inclusion. For us, inclusion is an overarching culture encompassing diversity, equality, and many other aspects of our working lives.

(Inclusive Employers, 2022)

This course has similarly taken the approach that diversity and equality sit under the umbrella of inclusion. This includes accessibility and digital inclusion, which are increasingly important topics thanks to the 'hybridisation' of higher education workplaces that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and growing concerns about the digital divide.

In the video below, contributors share insights into considerations for digital inclusion.

Video content is not available in this format.



### 6.1 Exploring inclusion

People are often so busy thinking about their own point of view that they cannot see the point of view of others. People also tend to judge the ideas of others rather than trying to understand them. As academic researcher Michàlle E. Mor Barak (2017) explains in their work, we have difficulty accepting that others may achieve the same result in a different or a better way.

However, bringing a mix of different people from various backgrounds together is an important factor in finding and implementing creative solutions to problems. Thinking 'outside the box' and interacting with diverse colleagues improves people's ability to work in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (this description is commonly shortened to the acronym 'VUCA').

Inclusion in the workplace means making the most of diversity in staff and students. It increases the depth and range of behaviours, capabilities and skills that the organisation can use in order to respond to the needs of a VUCA environment. In fact, a leader who is able to manage and engage a company's heterogeneous workforce can obtain a unique competitive advantage and deal with leadership challenges more effectively.

As you will see in the next activity, an organisation becomes an inclusive workplace when it accepts and makes use of the diversity of its workforce. This diversity could include accent, age, caring responsibilities, colour, culture, visible and invisible disability, gender identity and expression, mental health, neurodiversity, physical appearance, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity/paternity and family status and socio-economic circumstances, or any intersection or combination of these, as well as other personal characteristics and experiences.

## Activity 12 Leadership strategies for (global) inclusion

 Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the video at the link below on 'global inclusion' by Ernest Gundling, co-founder and managing partner at Aperian Global.

[What is global inclusion?](#) (open link in a new/tab window so you can return easily).

What does Gundling mean by 'global inclusion'? Make some notes in the text box below.

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

The way that Gundling addresses global inclusion incorporates the following:

- To include people of different race and gender.
- To work together with people from different functions and generations.
- To be ready to cross the barriers.
- To find ways to include people from an expert area to help in other areas.
- To invite the unexpected.
- To look for new sources of information.

In this video, Gundling discusses global inclusion, which he says not only refers to race and gender, but to areas such as functional and generational differences. For example, being a technical expert doesn't mean you have no opinions on marketing, sales, or any other areas that you don't have a strong knowledge or engagement with. In this example, you need to be ready to cross the barriers and find ways to include technical experts to help the company in other areas too.

Gundling also offers some strategies for inclusion that leaders and managers can use, such as:

- look for new sources of information
- challenge their assumptions
- ask people to think about their network so as to expand it
- invite the unexpected.

Barak (2017) defines an inclusive workplace as one that:

- **values and utilises the differences of the individual and groups** – ultimately, it will aim to modify the organisational values and norms to accommodate its employees
- **works with the surrounding community and contributes to the community** – the organisation acknowledges that it does not have responsibility only to its stakeholders but to the wider society
- **works with individuals, groups and organisations from a variety of national and cultural backgrounds** – the organisation seeks to develop international collaborations so as to further expand the possibility for diversity
- **seeks ways to support disadvantaged groups** – the organisation will seek to hire and train people that belong to underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

You will probably notice that Barak goes a step further than Gundling – who speaks about internal inclusion – and also presents the importance of external inclusion.

In order for a leader or manager to achieve inclusion in a global and turbulent environment, they need to look at both internal and external inclusion. They need to find ways and practices to accept, welcome and equally treat groups or individuals from different backgrounds, and at the same time respond to the needs of their community or organisation.

If inclusion is the ‘overarching culture encompassing diversity, equality, and many other aspects of our working lives’, diversity is ‘the mix of people’ (Inclusive Employers, 2022). The next section explores various attributes of that mix.

## 6.2 Valuing diversity

In their 2013 article ‘Great leaders who make the mix work’, Boris Groysberg, an academic researcher, and Katherine Connolly, a research associate in the organisational behaviour unit at Harvard Business School, discuss the importance of diversity and inclusivity.



**Figure 11** Diversity and inclusion within the workplace.

Groysberg and Connolly (2013) explain that diversity should be perceived as an investment in the most important assets of the organisation's balance sheet: the people. Diversity is about investing in people. Diversity is necessary because it allows an organisation to stay competitive, to seek the best possible ideas and solutions, and continue to innovate and grow. Moreover, by harnessing diversity, employees feel valued and are therefore more willing to support the aims of the organisation, serve the 'customers' (students, in an HEI context) and work together.

At the same time, diversity may create dissent and challenge people's way of thinking, leading them into deep inquiry or breakthrough.

In the video below, contributors discuss how to value diversity and create more inclusive workplaces.



Video content is not available in this format.



### Activity 13 Diversity in your workplace

 Allow about 45 minutes

Watch and listen to the following videos and audios in which contributors share their experiences of diversity in the workplace.

Video content is not available in this format.



Audio content is not available in this format.



Video content is not available in this format.



Consider your current working environment (or a previous one) and list some examples of the diversity among colleagues or students (or other 'customers').

*Provide your answer...*

### Discussion

How did you find the task? There are no right or wrong answers here, but your list may have included some or all of these categories (Ahmed, 2018):

- race and ethnicity
- age and generation
- gender and gender identity
- sexual orientation
- religious and spiritual beliefs
- disability and ability
- socioeconomic status and background
- thinking style and personality
- personal life experience.

Although you might not have thought of the final two categories, the diversity that they bring to the workplace can present challenges. For example, Ahmed describes the possibility of a team with introverted personalities struggling with giving a monthly presentation. He also suggests that the life experience of someone who

has seen active service in the armed forces might bring particular issues to the workplace.

Understanding this breadth of diversity should help you to identify many occasions when you have experienced some level of diversity both in and outside of work.

## 6.3 Intersectionality

Diversity includes all identities. It is about the representation of difference. Whether you identify by your ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics you may have noted in the last activity, you have many identities and you are part of many communities. Why does this matter in the workplace? Because each identity provides a person with a relative level of privilege over, or disadvantage to, any other person – this means every person has a specific level of disadvantage in society based on their converging identities.

‘Intersectionality’ is a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe this. Watch the video at the link below to learn what it means and what impact it can have on health and wellbeing.

[Intersectionality and health explained](#) (open link in a new/tab window so you can return easily).

## 6.4 Neurodiversity

As the world pivoted towards online meetings, advice proliferated about how to run such meetings effectively, such as requiring participants to have their cameras on throughout the meeting to show they are fully engaged. This might have been well intentioned, but everyone in your team or department is different and has different needs, so what works well for some may be a source of anxiety for others. Taking time to understand those varying needs is important to fostering wellbeing in your workplace culture.

Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one ‘right’ way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.

(Baumer and Frueh, 2021)

The term ‘neurodiverse’ has been adopted to cover people with a range of neurological conditions and specific learning differences – for example, autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia and Down’s syndrome – that mean they need to develop coping strategies to function in a world designed for the neurotypical.

As a leader or manager, you can make your workplace more inclusive by:

- not making assumptions about preferences or needs – ask the individual
- not equating ‘camera on’ behaviour or eye contact with attention being paid
- considering recording meetings for later review – with the consent of participants
- communicating clearly – avoiding sarcasm, euphemisms/metaphors and subtext
- being sensitive to sensory requirements, e.g. related to sound or movement
- providing clear, concise, step-by-step instructions for tasks
- not making last-minute, unexplained changes to plans or schedules.

- sharing meeting agendas in advance and asking participants if they feel comfortable or if there are adjustments that would be beneficial for them.

Watch the video below in which Becky May explains her experience of being neurodiverse.

Video content is not available in this format.



## 6.5 How to harness diversity

So, how do you create or maintain a diverse organisation? Groysberg and Connolly (2013) present eight organisational practices that seem to be effective at harnessing diversity:

1. Measure diversity and inclusion: be aware of the level of diversity in the organisation. Collect data to measure what you are doing well and what can be improved in order to make the organisation a more diverse and inclusive place.
2. Hold managers accountable: diversity and inclusion should be among the goals of the organisation. For example, incorporate the goals as part of the manager's professional development, provide training and engagement activities.
3. Support flexible work arrangements: offer benefits that help employees balance professional and personal commitments, provide greater flexibility of working hours, allow transitional periods, offer childcare support etc.
4. Recruit and promote from diverse pools of candidates: searching for talent at the hiring stage is the starting point but it is also very important to maintain this talent afterwards.
5. Provide leadership education: provide leadership development opportunities for everyone in the organisation and seek to support less advantageous or represented groups. Offer diversity training and opportunities for external education and development.

6. Sponsor employee resource groups and mentoring programs: offer less structural approaches to professional development through resource groups, networks, mentoring programs etc.
7. Offer quality role models: a varied array of leaders indicates that an organisation is committed to diversity and offers role models to identify with.
8. Make the position of the chief diversity officer count: create a chief diversity and inclusion officer position and ask for the CEO to maximise its effectiveness.

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has a Simple Changes resource related to improving diversity in your workplace. Follow the link in Box 3 to find out more.

### Box 3 Simple Changes #39

Simple Changes #39

[Have initiatives to recruit people from groups that are under-represented in your workforce.](#)

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022b)

## 7 Equality

As mentioned in the introduction to this course, one of the goals of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* is 'A More Equal Wales', defined as:

A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic circumstances).

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022d)

Achieving greater diversity in your organisation, both in leadership/decision-making roles and in the broader workforce, is one step towards this goal, but diversity and equality are not the same thing. Equality in the workplace is about equal opportunities for everyone, which means equal chances to:

- apply and be selected for posts (pre-employment)
- be trained and promoted while employed
- have your employment terminated equally and fairly.

Equity must also be borne in mind. While equality gives everyone the same resources and opportunities, equity ensures that individuals are allowed resources and opportunities according to their needs and circumstances.

In order for a leader or manager to achieve inclusion in a global and turbulent environment, they need to look at both internal and external inclusion and also recognise that they themselves represent difference(s) to others.

In the UK, the key piece of legislation protecting people's rights to such equal opportunities is the *Equality Act 2010*. Denying the right to equal opportunities in the workplace is effectively discrimination, which is unlawful under the Act.

A body called the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established in 2007 to promote and protect the workplace rights covered by the Act. The EHRC replaced the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality.

The *Equality Act 2010* specifies nine areas that it terms 'protected characteristics'. These are (in alphabetical order):

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marital or civil partnership status
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (including colour, nationality, ethnic and national origin)
- religious background
- sex
- sexual orientation.

You will probably recognise that these are very similar to the categories identified by Ahmed (2018) in the discussion from Activity 12. Before exploring some of the protected characteristics in more depth, here's a short activity to clarify the difference between equality and equity.



### Activity 14 Equality or equity?

 Allow about 15 minutes

Read the short article (650 words) titled [Equality and Equity](#) on the Social Change UK website. Then spend a few minutes trying to think of an example of how equity has contributed – or could contribute – to greater equality in your own organisation. Conversely, you might have an example of when equity was used incorrectly; if so, how would you address this?

You can make some notes in the box below.

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

As the conclusion to the article notes:

Equality and equity may be inherently different but are also bound together. In order to create true equality of opportunity, equity is needed to ensure that everyone has the same chance of getting there. However, we must act cautiously when dealing with equity; providing too little to those who need it and too much to those who do not can further exacerbate the inequalities we see today.

(Social Change UK, 2019)

## 7.1 Protected characteristics: tackling discrimination

As mentioned in the previous section, the *Equality Act 2010* specifies nine areas that it terms ‘protected characteristics’. The next section of the course will explore aspects of one of these (disability), but in terms of discrimination, two UK organisations have an array of resources and references on each of the protected characteristics:

- the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), an independent public body that receives funding from the government to work with employers and employees to improve workplace relationships
- the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), a UK professional body for human resources and people development.

### Activity 15 Explore anti-discrimination resources

 Allow about 90 minutes

Visit each of the resources linked below to gain an overview of each of the protected characteristics covered by the *Equality Act 2010*.

- [age](#) (CIPD)
- [disability](#) (CIPD)
- [gender equality \(sex discrimination\)](#) (CIPD)



- [marital or civil partnership status](#) (National Union of Journalists (NUJ): there is an ACAS report on this topic, but it is a 30-page PDF file)
- [pregnancy and maternity](#) (ACAS)
- [race](#) (CIPD)
- [religion and belief](#) (CIPD)
- [sexual orientation, gender identity and gender reassignment](#) (CIPD).

You should spend at least 10 minutes on each characteristic, but if you wish to spend more time exploring this topic, there are additional CIPD and external resources at the bottom of each page.

Conversations related to protected characteristic require a sensitive and empathic approach. Often these involve situations that the person may not feel comfortable discussing, or potential concerns that they wish to raise about the organisation's approach. Many organisations are becoming more aware and have appropriate networks in place to support both employees and line managers to start to have better conversations.

## 7.2 Accessibility at work

Accessibility means different things to different people, so let's start this section by interrogating your understanding of the term.

### Activity 16 What does accessibility mean to you?

 Allow about 10 minutes

Spend a few minutes noting down the words you associate with accessibility at work. Try to come up with at least one, but no more than ten.

Then pick your favourite word – the one that best encapsulates what accessibility means to you.

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

Figure 11 shows a word cloud containing some common words associated with accessibility.



**Figure 12** Words relating to accessibility.

Did you think about accessibility in relation to removing physical obstacles, or were you considering it in terms of website usability standards, for example? In a hybrid working world, both are important.

Here's one definition of accessibility:

Accessibility is about removing barriers from a workplace or work function, so that everyone has equal access to the location, tools and tasks required to perform their role.

(Office Reality, 2022)

Your organisation has a moral duty to make sure nobody is excluded from taking an active part in working life, and a legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled staff and job applicants (potential employees). Exploring those duties in detail could be a substantial course in itself – the aim here is just to summarise key aspects of accessibility in a hybrid working context, and provide you with links to more detailed resources that you can explore in your own time.

## 7.3 Making physical workspaces accessible

The *Equality Act 2010* places a legal duty on education providers, employers and service providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' within the workplace to allow disabled people to take part in education, use services and carry out their day-to-day workplace activities. In hybrid work environments physical and online workspaces need to be considered together, both in terms of the your organisation's and the employee's remote physical workspaces, and the activities that can be done in either or both a physical and an online environment.

In terms of physical workspaces, the design or layout of a building (including space between desks and other furniture, the arrangement of conference rooms, etc.), how you access it (e.g. parking and signage) and what's inside it (e.g. desks, chairs, lighting, toilet facilities) are just some examples of factors that may present a physical barrier for a person with a disability. With regards to improving wellbeing, are there spaces in or around the buildings where employees can go to rest or recharge?

If your physical workspace is a university campus, how would you describe it in terms of accessibility? The Scope resource in the next activity will help you with this.

### Activity 17 Finding out if a workplace is accessible

 Allow about 15 minutes

Scope is a charity that campaigns for equality for disabled people. Read their [Find out if a workplace is accessible](#) page (Scope, 2022), and then try to answer the questions for your own physical workplace (if you have one).

You can make some notes in the box below.

Provide your answer...

#### Discussion

How did your workplace measure up? Were you surprised by anything Scope asked you to think about? How many of them had you previously considered as potential accessibility issues?

If you think there are issues to be addressed at your workplace, Scope also has a page containing a range of useful information about [reasonable adjustment at work](#).

Thinking about the wider accessibility of university campuses, an organisation called AccessAble has worked with over 100 universities to produce what they call a 'Detailed Access Guide', which lets people with disabilities know what access will be like when they visit the campus, including routes into the sites and what is available inside. AccessAble (originally called DisabledGo) was set up in 2000 by Dr Gregory Burke, as a result of his own experiences as a wheelchair user and disabled walker. You can visit the [AccessAble](#) website to find out whether your own HEI is included.

## 7.4 Making online workspaces accessible

The *Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018* came into force in September 2018 and imposed duties on public sector bodies – which includes most HEIs – to ensure that their websites meet approved accessibility standards, and to publish an accessibility statement on each website to confirm that the standards have been met. There were three key dates to meet the requirements, the last of which was in June 2021, so in theory this should be standard practice at your organisation now.

Jisc produced an [Accessibility regulations – what you need to know](#) guide for colleges and universities in December 2019, updated in January 2020. If you want to explore that in your own time, it's approximately a 45-minute read.

If you would like to explore an example of a statement, you can find the [Accessibility statement for OpenLearn](#).

There is also another OpenLearn course, [Accessibility of eLearning](#), which you might be interested in studying. Although it is primarily aimed at education professionals involved in developing online learning materials for students, it contains material of more general interest around disability, usability and accessibility.

### Activity 18 Aspects of online accessibility

 Allow about 40 minutes

Visit each of these short sections from *Accessibility of eLearning*. As you read, consider how they could be applied to your online/virtual workplace(s) to improve your user experience and that of your colleagues.

- [considering disabled people](#)
- [usability and accessibility](#)
- [special resources or universal design?](#)
- [keyboard and mouse alternatives](#)
- [alternative content](#)
- [quick ways to improve accessibility](#)

You can make some notes in the box below.

Provide your answer...

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has two Simple Changes resources related to improving online accessibility. Follow the links in Box 4 to find out more.

### Box 4 Simple Changes #77–78

Simple Changes #77

[Use plain English and Welsh as standard in any documents intended for the public.](#)

Simple Changes #78

[Use a variety of accessible, inclusive engagement methods and formats.](#)

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022b)

## 8 Building and maintaining a supportive and inclusive hybrid workplace

Before 2020, the phrase 'hybrid workplace' might not even have been in your vocabulary:

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers took swift action to create a mentally healthy workplace – often while simultaneously navigating the challenges of an entirely remote workforce for the first time. Now, as workplaces adopt a hybrid model, in which they combine remote and onsite working, employers again need to face the challenge of how to care for the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce – this time in a hybrid model.

(Deligiannis, 2022)

As we are adjusting to hybrid working, the needs of organisations are evolving, and it is important to continually reflect on and review your ways of working to ensure that your workplace has the necessary systems and strategies in place to properly support wellbeing and inclusion for all staff, whatever your model of hybrid looks like.

### 8.1 Making wellbeing and inclusion a priority

One way of making wellbeing a priority is to work with an organisation like Mind, whose Workplace Wellbeing Index is a benchmark of best policy and practice in wellbeing. Watch the short video at the link below to find out more about this.

[Our Workplace Wellbeing Index](#) (open link in a new/tab window so you can return easily).

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has a Simple Changes resource that recommends reviewing your organisational policies to ensure opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of your workforce are optimised. Follow the link in Box 5 to watch a video case study on the actions one company takes to provide a healthy workplace for its staff.

#### Box 5 Simple Changes #23

Simple Changes #23

[Review your policies to ensure you're optimising opportunities to improve your employees' health and wellbeing.](#)

(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2022b)

If you're really not sure how to make workplace wellbeing a priority, Zest for Work (2022) have some tips in their article ['What is workplace wellbeing and how to start?'](#).

### 8.2 Benefits and costs of maintaining workplace wellbeing

Every organisation depends on having healthy and productive employees, so if you support the wellbeing of your staff, they are far more likely to achieve your business goals. As noted in the introduction to this course, in the HE sector, those goals affect not just the employees of your organisation, but also your students.

Jisc's 2021 report, *Student and staff wellbeing in higher education*, highlights four principles for wellbeing in HE:

- **Wellbeing is for everybody: a whole population approach** – We are all affected by our mental wellbeing and that of others.
- **Wellbeing is a lifelong project: a whole life approach** – Wellbeing doesn't start when someone becomes an undergraduate and stop when they graduate or become an employee. It needs lifelong learning and lifelong skills development to build resilience.
- **Wellbeing is embedded in all activities: a whole curriculum approach** – Universities are health organisations as well as learning organisations. For individuals to thrive and learn, health gain cannot be separated from learning gain.
- **Wellbeing is a collective endeavour: a whole university approach** – The whole-university approach values the contribution of all. It moves mental wellbeing away from being the sole concern of student health and mental health support services and involves the entire community. This takes sustained effort and leadership.

## 8.3 Benefits and costs of inclusion, equality and equity

Why is inclusion of benefit to your organisation? According to Inclusive Employers:

All evidence proves that organisations focused on building a more inclusive culture attract and retain a wider diversity of talent.

The inclusive culture then empowers diverse talent to think differently and share their experiences and perspectives, which in turn is a key driver for innovation, development and engagement.

(Inclusive Employers, 2022)

Meanwhile, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) stated:

When an organisation supports the principle of equal opportunities for all, employees can rest assured that they will not be discriminated against in the workplace. Employees are more committed to working hard when they know that they have equal opportunities for advancement and there are no barriers to job progression.

Also, knowing that they are evaluated solely on their on-the-job performance and measurable merits empowers employees and encourages them to do their best.

(EOC, 2022)

## 8.4 Where does hybrid working fit in?

Remote working during the pandemic brought some workers real benefits to their wellbeing and work-life balance, which they are not keen to give up now that work from home guidance is coming to an end. Last year saw a 50% increase in the number of tribunal cases appealing refused flexible working requests. In a context where flexibility is increasingly important to workers, employers who don't proactively offer longer term flexibility risk losing valued staff.

(Florisson, 2022)

As mentioned earlier, diversity and inclusion is important in the workplace to promote high performance in teams. As workforces change the ways they work to increase remote working and hybrid approaches, it's important to listen to those diverse voices to prevent inequities in working models.






### Box 6 Remote working case studies

The case studies linked to below are examples of what some Welsh organisations did to respond to lockdown restrictions on office-based working. They include examples of the opportunities and challenges people faced, and what the organisations are planning around diversifying ways of working in the future. You don't need to read each example, but select at least two to gain alternative perspectives.

- [Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council](#)
- [Disability Wales](#)
- [Race Equality First](#)
- [Theatr Clwyd](#)
- [Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust](#)

There are many reasons why people may or may not be keen to return to working full-time in an office. Whichever model your organisation adopts, all communities need to be heard, with their needs and reasons for different working models understood. This is enshrined by the Five Ways of Working (see Table 4) that emerged in response to the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*, in particular 'Involvement' and 'Collaboration'. These two ways of working value involving and working with others to ensure the diverse representation of communities to help achieve the wellbeing goals set out in the Act.

**Table 4**

	<b>Long-term:</b> The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
	<b>Integration:</b> Considering how the public body's wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the wellbeing goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
	<b>Involvement:</b> The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.
	<b>Collaboration:</b> Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.
	<b>Prevention:</b> How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.



## Conclusion

This course began by quoting Barbara Bassa, a Programme Director at Advance HE, who observed that the quality of the university student experience starts with the quality of services provided by university staff. Throughout the course, you have been reflecting on how the staff at your organisation are coping with the transition to increased digital/hybrid ways of working, as well as considering the impact of the post-COVID-19 'pivot to online' on your and their wellbeing, and the processes and practices that resulted from it.

You should now have a better understanding of what 'workplace wellbeing' means in a hybrid working world, specifically:

- whose responsibility it is
- the challenges involved in creating and maintaining it
- the benefits that nurturing wellbeing can bring to your organisation.

How employers respond to the wellbeing of workers through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond will be key to maintaining employee engagement and productivity and reducing absence and/or staff turnover.

EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) is often derided as 'political correctness gone mad' or a box-ticking exercise for legal requirements, but this course has emphasised the critical role it plays in achieving a culture of wellbeing. Making your organisation inclusive, diverse and a champion of equal opportunities is more than a moral or legal duty, it is an investment in the most important asset your organisation has: the people who work there.

This course is part of the [Supporting hybrid working and digital transformation collection](#), which you may wish to explore further.

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