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Published online: 11 May 2022.

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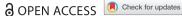
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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a large-scale change in the way university educators worked. This article examines tensions that shaped how educators adapted their teaching as they worked from home during the pandemic. The study is based on empirical data gathered at a large-scale, research-intensive UK university in the first weeks of lockdown. Activity Theory analysis is used to examine transformations in practice, how these changes were culturally and historically situated and materially and socially mediated. The themes identified are examined through a series of vignettes to pinpoint personal factors that influenced the expansion of work. This study's findings signal a call to action to support new forms of work through five policy actions related to personal factors that influence the work, life and wellbeing of educators. Going forward, there is a need for universities to develop and implement policies that take into consideration these five areas to support educators to expand how they work.

1. Introduction: university teaching during a crisis

1.1. How crises trigger changes in work

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a transformation in university teaching. As countries around the world moved into lockdown in early 2020, thousands of academics and professional services staff in universities had to use digital technologies for remote working. The pandemic was not the first international crisis to spark a major change in work. The SARS crisis in 2003 caused universities across east Asia to change how they worked to keep the economy buoyant while reducing the rate of infection (McNaught, 2004). In 2019, a white paper by the World Economic Forum predicted that crisis situations that trigger intense periods of change in work will increase sharply (see http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF%20HGHI_Outbreak_Readiness_Business_Impact.pdf). The Higher Education sector will have to find ways to learn to adapt to crises (Marinoni et al., 2020).

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In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to the closure of university campuses on an almost global scale (THES, 2020). In an attempt to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 virus, countries quickly introduced national social distancing rules which required citizens to stay at home, often under 'lockdown' conditions. To support students in continuing with their education under these conditions, many universities ended face-to-face teaching (lectures and tutorials) and transitioned to online teaching (UNESCO, 2020). This migration to online teaching represented a major change in the working conditions of hundreds of thousands of university academics and professional service staff (Hodges et al., 2020).

Teaching in lockdown was characterised by an abrupt shift from classroom interaction to online teaching and working from home (Hewitt, 2020). Most universities changed teaching over a period of days to ensure minimal disruption for students, affording little opportunity for academics to redesign teaching (Sahu, 2020). Most educators had little prior experience of online teaching (Jandrić et al., 2020) and had to learn how to change their teaching practice (Bao, 2020). Those who had previously taught online generally found it easier to assimilate online teaching as part of their professional identity (Gourlay et al., 2021).

Rather than teaching on campus in classrooms and offices, academics taught online from their homes (Crawford et al., 2020). A number of studies were published in the early stages of the pandemic examining teaching transition (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; Sahu, 2020). However, these studies focused on the effects of transforming teaching from face-to-face settings to teaching online, rather than considering moving the effects of moving teaching practice from the campus to the home environment. The situatedness of work means that teaching from home qualitatively is different from teaching on campus, generating opportunities for professionals to learn (Fuller & Unwin, 2004).

1.2. How the work environment influences learning

The work environment influences how professionals evolve their work (Fuller & Unwin, 2003) and effects the ways professionals expand their practice (Unwin & Fuller, 2004). This dialectic relationship between the work environment and learning makes it essential to consider the workplace as practice evolves, rather than treating the environment as inconsequential.

In work environments, there is a distinction between 'space' and 'place', with 'place' focused on intended activity (e.g., 'canteen' is associated with 'eating' while 'office' is associated with 'working') (Giddens, 1984; Harrison & Dourish, 1996). Thus, different places have a communally held sense of appropriate behaviour and provide a context for engaging in and interpreting action (Benford & Fahlen, 1993). Moving educators' work from the campus to the home environment is a fundamental shift in terms of the place of work (Littlejohn, 2020). Varied experiences were reported in terms of setting up a work environment in the home. These included assembling tools (computer, desk, chair, etc); connecting with other colleagues to retain the spirit of a work community; and creating and agreeing rules that govern the new work practices (Gourlay et al., 2021). Some educators reported working from home as positive, because they reduced the time and expense associated with commuting; were shielded from possible infection during the pandemic; spent

more time with family; had more flexibility about how they structured their day; and kept up-to-date with household chores (Kennedy & Littlejohn, 2020).

Some women academics, particularly those with caring responsibilities, appeared to be disadvantaged by working from home during the pandemic (Blaskó et al., 2020; Deryugina et al., 2021). Many could not carry out work from home at the same intensity as their male counterparts because of continual disruptions to their work from children (Andersen et al., 2020; Kennedy & Littlejohn, 2020). Even where childcare activities were shared, there is evidence that the additional housework often fell on women (Del Boca et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020). This impacted their ability to teach.

1.3. Teaching as a situated practice

Meaning-making activities such as teaching are shaped by the social setting and resources available (Rantavuori et al., 2016). Tensions evolve between following routine forms of practice in a new environment and turning practices into new, expanded ways of working (Rantavuori et al., 2016). This concept of expansive learning is appropriate for situations in which activity systems, such as universities, need to redefine themselves. In these circumstances traditional modes of learning, such as pre-defined professional programmes, are not enough to support educators in constructing the same object (teaching) under different circumstances. The theory of expansive learning is object-oriented, where the object is both resistant, bounded by entrenched values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships, and future-oriented. Activity system analysis provides an historical understanding of the interactions that took place as educators expanded their work practice while working from home.

Tensions within the activity system associated with the tools, rules, community and division of labour can be analysed to identify constraints and opportunities for growth (Engeström, 1999). Rules are any formal or informal constructs that constrain or allow activities to occur; communities are the social groups within which the subject operates; the division of labour are the various tasks that community members share (Engeström, 1993). Interactions of these components can cause tensions that can impede or support the attainment of the object (Engeström, 1996). This article uses this form of analysis to examine tensions as educators worked from home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This article lays out an Activity Theory analysis of narratives from educators to examine how their work transformed while working from home and how these changes were culturally and historically situated and materially and socially mediated. The next section outlines the method.

2. Materials and method

This study is based on empirical data tracing the experiences of academics and professional services staff within a large UK university, University College London (UCL), as they worked from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the data are from a single university, the findings can be generalised in ways that inform future policy. The research design underwent ethical clearance via the UCL Institute of Education ethics committee in accordance with BERA (British Educational Research Association) ethical guidelines.

On 26 March 2020, an email invitation was circulated by UCL's Deans to all staff to invite them to participate in an online survey gathering data about their experiences of working from home during the crisis. Participants were invited to write short, free-text narratives describing their experiences. Between March 26 and 30 July 2020, a total of 412 responses were received. These qualitative, free text informant responses were analysed using the Activity Theory framework.

Analysis was carried out in several steps within the framework of cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 2015). The activity system subject was defined as the educators while the object was defined as online teaching. The aim of the analysis was to develop an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the work settings and how these had shifted as academics moved to working online from home by analysing tensions within the activity system.

Narrative descriptions submitted by university educators with 1 or 2 rooms available for work were selected. These narratives were coded using the activity theory framework constructs of tools, rules, community and division of labour. Narratives were compared to historical ways of working on campus. By comparing past and current activity, tensions were identified. Data analysis was guided by the key questions: What are the main tools used when teaching online from home? What are the rules that influence the activity? What communities do people operate within while teaching online from home? What is the division of labour as people teach online from home?

3. Results: new social arrangements of teaching from home

The analysis surfaced a range of tensions educators faced in relation to the tools, rules, division of labour and communities that mediated their collective action.

3.1. Tools

When university campuses closed, educators had to create spaces for academic work within their home. One of the most important instruments for academic work is the office – an assemblage of tools essential for work, e.g., chairs, desks, computers, screens. Some people already had a home office, however many did not.

Home offices were created hurriedly through purchasing new equipment or reappropriating home equipment. This activity was characterised by a number of underlying tensions. Even where equipment was available, some informants described how limited home space made it difficult to accommodate and configure these in an ergonomically viable way. This tension seemed especially relevant for those living in small apartments or shared accommodation in London, where housing is at a premium:

> London living means living small. There is no space for working. I oddly feel more cramped and hemmed in at home than I did in the office. (informant 181, 2 rooms)

> I live in a tiny bedsit with no space for a desk. (informant 345, 1 room)

Informants described how they reappropriated home equipment for work. Dining tables or bedside tables became an office desk during the day and returned to the original,

intended use in the evening. This involved assembling, dismantling, then reassembling equipment to create a temporary workspace each day:

> We have had to readjust furniture to try to turn our living space and bedroom into work areas. (informant 158, 2 rooms)

> Sometimes I have to work whilst sitting on my bed or on the couch. (informant 409, 1 room)

Some educators reported working for long periods of time in poor ergonomic conditions, leading to physical ailments (e.g., back strain) or psychological stress:

> My 'office furniture' would not pass a health and safety inspection, and it sometimes crosses my mind that I may be inflicting long-term damage on my back. I have a printer, but am reading more onscreen than ever before, prompting similar concerns about my eyesight. (informant 346, 2 rooms)

Working from home shaped social arrangements as educators worked remotely, away from colleagues and students. These new social arrangements changed relationships, ways of interacting and working together.

Informants described their attempts to replicate face-to-face, classroom interactions while teaching remotely. Classrooms have tools such as computers, projectors, screens, chairs and tables that afford social interactions between educators and students. However, new social arrangements of working from home and being physically distant from students meant all interactions were mediated by digital tools such as MS Teams, Zoom or Blackboard. Limitations of the digital platforms to replicate face-to-face interactions raised concerns. For example, some educators were anxious about the possibility of students recording screenshots or videos without consent.

Body language and facial expressions are important visual clues that help guide educators' interactions with their students. However, when students switched their cameras off during teaching sessions, educators found it difficult to interpret how students were responding to their teaching. Reacting to this, some educators adjusted their teaching strategies in the same ways they would have done in physical classrooms:

> The lecturer cannot see the audience to gain clues as to engagement and understanding … Particularly with first year undergraduates they are often unwilling to ask for clarification, so one relies upon body language and facial expression to assess that. (informant 175, 1 room)

Many educators reported that interacting with students via a small screen and not having opportunity to observe the 'whole person' reduced their ability to assess student progress. Although it was possible to facilitate text-based or audio-based dialogue online, discourse mediated by technology had to be organised and was less spontaneous than in physical settings. This change in the social environment appeared to cause tensions.

Informants reported that changes in the social environment also made it difficult to facilitate one-on-one pastoral care for students who were struggling with their studies during the pandemic crisis. Educators who shared a home with a partner, children or housemates found it difficult to hold confidential conversations with students:

> [My partner and I working] close together means that we suffer from audio leak. If I speak, my voice is audible to anyone in a meeting with my partner, and vice versa. So we have allocated half of each day to activities requiring audio and spend the other half of the day undertaking tasks where we can work silently. (informant 386, 1 room)

A feature of the changes in the physical and social environment while working from home was the fusion of work and home communities in ways that had not been experienced before, as described in the next section.

3.2. Communities and rules

Social interactions within and across communities were altered by not being co-located with colleagues and students. When physically co-located on campus, staff and students often interact through spontaneous interactions. Informants reported that working online appeared to formalise exchanges and was exhausting. To address this tension, some communities set up informal, online 'meetups' to encourage spontaneous interactions:

> We've made a Microsoft Teams space and called it a virtual wine bar and 4 of us have been making a point of 'meeting' there every couple of days to ask how each of us is getting on – that helps. (informant 118, 1 room)

New social arrangements opened up opportunities to get to know colleagues in new ways and extended communities. Educators could connect more easily with colleagues and students located in other countries. They got to know their colleagues' partners, children and pets, who became a peripheral part of the work community. Some reported that they preferred working at home, because the environment was better:

> The condition of my office is not conducive to working well. At least at home I can keep warm/cool and have more control over interruptions. (informant 116, 1 room)

> My workspace is quieter (I share with three colleagues). I waste less time in water-cooler talk. I can work at hours that suit me (informant 269, 2 rooms)

By situating work in the home, the new social arrangements during lockdown brought together work and home communities in unique ways. People working in shared spaces at home had to negotiate the use of this space with others in their household. Those who had worked at home prior to the Covid-19 pandemic reported that this constant negotiation of how space would be used was not a 'normal' part of their work. Prior to the pandemic, other household members would be at school or work, but the crisis situation had brought people together at home:

> While I was used to online/remote working before, previously I could do this alone and from a quiet house. I am now trying to share space with my partner and our son, so we are juggling respective work responsibilities as well as home learning. (informant 285, 2 rooms)

> I work from home often anyway, so I have a routine established for this. However, it is harder to concentrate now that my partner is also working in the same space as me. (informant 103, 1 room)

To avoid having to negotiate continually the rules and behaviours associated with spaces, some educators created an area where they could work alone. Some converted a

cupboard or a garden shed into an office or classroom. Creating a designated workspace helped them feel they had more control over their work:

> I created a home office in a brick-built building at the bottom of my garden. This is a significantly better office space than I have at work as my desk at work is in an over populated shared office; which is difficult for me to work in, especially for focused work. (informant 276, 2 rooms)

Educators described how they moved around the house to work in different spaces in an effort to keep home and work communities apart. Where space was liminal there was a need for continual (re)negotiation around the purpose and use of space. These negotiations often focused around who within the household needed to not be disturbed at specific times:

> We have a decent office chair and desk and a nice big screen, which is comfortable and peaceful. I work here every other day as my husband and I swap – he's working at the dining table on a much less comfy chair. (informant 232, 2 rooms)

> My wife and me both have a lot of [online work] so have to move around to find quiet space to do that, but this also does get us moving. (informant 124, 1 room)

For some people, the connection of home and work communities led to reduced privacy. One educator (informant 337, 2 rooms) who shared a small flat with her elderly mother had no privacy because of carers visiting every day. Another (informant 334, 2 rooms) did not want to turn her camera on because of the 'inevitable mess' in her home caused by children, who sometimes came within line of sight of the camera.

Separating communities proved difficult for people working in open-plan spaces at home:

> This is my work space. You can see how compact the area is. This is a major challenge. It is also not private; this is my lounge. My husband works upstairs in the spare bedroom and can shut himself off: downstairs is semi open. (informant 160, 2 rooms)

> The only space to work is a large open place kitchen/living room. Frequent conference calls which [my wife and I] both need to have are very difficult to have in parallel and it is difficult to work when someone else [in the home] is having a conference call. (informant 67, 1 room)

Not being able to designate space exclusively for work created tensions due to different ways people utilised space. Some educators reported they found it difficult to reach a shared understanding with others in their household about the rules that governed their use of space.

Tensions associated with home and work communities were especially difficult for educators with children at home. Generally, young children did not develop a shared sense of how space should be used and what activities should take priority:

> These circumstances are different from normal, seeing that children and the rest of the family compete for space and internet – hence the usual calm surroundings of the day-time home no longer provide adequate office/thinking/working space. (informant 102, 2 rooms)

> One has to constantly grapple with mundane issues such as sharing space, and more important matters such as childcare and cooking/shopping all of which have become more complicated. (informant 260, 1 room)

Holding concurrent roles as an educator, a parent and running a household, led to tensions in the division of labour.

3.3. Division of labour

When educators work on campus, they tend to separate their roles as a parent, carer or partner from their work. However, working from home brought together these roles and responsibilities. Thus, educators with children and/or caring responsibilities found working from home and homeschooling exceptionally difficult:

> I think a lot of assumptions have been made – at least in the first week – that people were able to work from home, no consideration of childcare, caring for older family members, lack of space, comfortable desks and chairs … (informant 87, 1 room)

The difficulty of balancing work and childcare was described by both male and female informants. However, tensions in balancing work with childcare were emphasised more by women informants. There appeared to be a difference in the expectations placed on women, or at least on how these expectations were perceived. Balancing work and homeschooling appeared more demanding for women, necessitating major shifts in the way they lived and worked in the household. Even when caring responsibilities were shared with another working partner, some women informants perceived that their work demands were prioritised less by their family compared with the work of a male partner. This tension led to continual disruption of work:

> This has been challenging with a young child at home and no childcare available. I don't have a permanent workspace set up at home and would not regularly work at home at the same time as my partner, whose office I use when he is out. (informant 305, 2 rooms)

> Sharing a small space … with my son is a problem. I am also a main caregiver, all domestic jobs are on my shoulders, too. The worst is that I feel that people with better domestic situation will manage to keep their research and jobs going, while I will not. (informant 57, 1 room)

Not being able to switch seamlessly from one role to another led to problems with stopping work and making time for breaks:

> I have found it quite difficult working at home, as it makes it hard to separate work from my home life. … It really is rather depressing staying in a few small walls. (informant 236, 1 room)

Educators reported that working from home produced a feeling of 'never being away from work'. They developed strategies to help them feel as if they could leave work. For example, informant 192 described how she tended to work in one part of her home, and *once I'm finished, I don't return there for anything.* Some educators adopted other strategies, including hiding a laptop behind a sofa so it could not be seen when not 'in work'.

3.4. Discussion of new social settings for teaching

Analysis of the activity system provides an historical understanding of interactions that took place as educators expanded their work practice while working from home

following the approach by Engeström (1999). Under these new and unfamiliar conditions, educators began by following routine forms of practice they had used while working on campus, then evolving these practices into new, expanded ways of working over time. Educators began by assembling tools in ways that helped them recreate campus workspaces. They repurposed household furniture and equipment for work activities – dining tables became work desks and so on – as the home became the office and the classroom. The disconnection of work practice from traditional campus settings and repositioning of practice in the home led to physical and psychological stress, especially where space was at a premium or equipment was not available. Improvisation strategies were adopted to reduce these anxieties – e.g., separating work from home life by creating a space where work would not be interrupted or strategically positioning a camera angle during a video conference.

This superposition of work life and home life led to the development of a new relationship between the educator and the employer in which established values, attitudes and social relationships evolved over time through expansive learning. Educators reported how they evolved new social relationships as home and work communities became intertwined. Those who lived alone sometimes experienced isolation from support structures including the academic community, partners, family and friends. Where homes were shared, conflicting views on how areas of the home were to be used led to continual negotiation about the use of space with others in the household. The 'work persona' some educators adopt on campus was difficult to maintain while working from home, leading to stress. Educators had to negotiate rules with their family around behaviours at home, especially those who had young children or were homeschooling children during school closures. These stressful negotiations sometimes led to exhaustion and 'burnout'. This calls for universities to take a more holistic perspective on the values and attitudes associated with educator's roles in ways that take into account their whole life.

An holistic standpoint is particularly important for women who take on the burden of responsibility of care. More women report feelings of guilt associated with having to work while children are homeschooling. Employers have to recognise this anxiety and support educators, particularly women, in balancing work and home life, for example by shifting the pattern of hours normally worked.

It is noteworthy that the analysis of issues associated with the Tools, Community and Rules and Division of Labour, person-specific factors shape the kind of activities and interactions that the educators engage in. This analysis opens up a range of personal specific factors that shape the activities and interactions that are a product of each individual settings and, depending upon the readiness, interest and physical factors of informants, the learning processes and outcomes will be quite distinct. The next section provides an in-depth examination of these themes through analysis of two vignettes.

4. Results: cases illustrating new social settings

Vignettes assembled from the narratives of two educators who had limited space at home illustrate how the themes identified in the previous section develop differently, depending on the work and home context.

4.1. Robin's apprehension about working remotely

Robin (informant 175) is a full-time academic living with a partner and two children. Together they have one room available to work in. During lockdown Robin assembled a workspace at home in a short space of time to work in. Robin's home was not originally intended for work and had to be shared with another working adult. Therefore, the assemblage of objects brought together to create a workspace was not convenient.

Working from home made it more difficult to separate home from work:

> [Online teaching] breaks down important barriers between home and work. Especially in Blackboard [the online platform] – there does not seem to be a method to hide the background of one's location (unlike MS Teams). This means giving students an entirely unacceptable view into one's home. In my case it also precludes the other worker in the family from working in the only suitable space when I am teaching, as their screen often includes highly confidential documents – I have my back to them but students would be able to see them. That has been accommodated for a couple of weeks in an emergency situation but cannot be ongoing.

Robin viewed the material setting as a temporary, emergency measure. Creating a space for work in the home had not previously been part of work and created an additional burden:

> If we are expected to work from home more extensively, we need to be paid at a level to provide a suitable home working environment.

Robin had no prior experience of teaching online so transferred teaching practice from the physical classroom environment to the online space. Conventional lecturing practices form a strong part of academic identity and Robin was anxious about not performing as expected:

> Lecturing cannot be done online – the lecturer cannot see the audience to gain clues as to engagement and understanding. Pre-recorded lectures cannot have student questions to clarify, Blackboard lectures do not work well with so many students. Particularly with first year undergraduates they are often unwilling to ask for clarification, so one relies upon body language and facial expression to assess that.

While teaching on campus in the classroom, Robin would see through body language and facial expressions whether students were learning and would adapt teaching accordingly. These visual clues were not available when teaching online because students had their cameras turned off. This changed the dynamics of interaction:

> Seminars have less engagement by students – I get the sense they do not like talking so much when not in a group, especially students I know share spaces with other people, which means the sessions are less discursive.

> Tutorials have the same problems as seminars, but more acute when dealing with undergraduates where body language and physical responses to questions (looking through notes, etc.) give a good clue as to student preparation and understanding with which one can then engage.

Robin was concerned about students being disadvantaged because they were not able to afford good internet connection or because they did not have good internet in their location:

> Even if the staff member has a good internet connection, if any student does not, they either struggle to contribute or choose not to do so. If a poor quality connection may be connected with income, that is a barrier to learning and participation which is unacceptable.

Teaching online from home raised a number of concerns for Robin that are also evident in a second vignette.

4.2. Taylor's productive homeworking

Taylor is a professional services staff member who teaches in a laboratory. Taylor lives with a partner in a small house outside London. Before lockdown, Taylor commuted to campus every day. Taylor reported that working from home was more productive because commuting time was reduced:

> With the cost of accommodation in London most people need to live very far from [the University]. I realise that I spent my productive first 1.5 hours of the day just getting to [the University], which is a tremendous waste and at night when I want to continue working, I need to leave in order to get home at a reasonable hour. It eliminates the 3 hour commuting time. What really is the point of spending this time on multiple trains to do what you could have done much more efficiently at home?

Taylor worked in an open plan space on campus and had fewer interruptions while working from home:

> Before the lockdown I frequently took a laptop to remote parts of the building or the library just to be able to get some work done. Doing this from home instead is miles better and I am happy that I have been able to be so much more productive.

> Working from home has been amazing. Just sitting in front of just a laptop on an uncluttered desk with a specific task and goal in mind is already a huge advantage over trying to work on a task with other people in the room, a telephone and other tasks awaiting in plain sight. Obviously there are benefits of being physically at [the University], when there are specific tasks to be done only requiring a PC, then doing this at home is much better.

Rather than trying to replicate ways of working on-campus, Taylor changed work practice. This meant that working remotely from colleagues and students was not problematic:

> [The University] has loads of services which make remote working such as this a breeze such as OneDrive and Office 365 which can be accessed from every machine and even our own computers at home. The department provides laptops for mobile working. Teams is an effective way to hold meetings and communicate. A lot of the ways of working learnt from this pandemic can easily be incorporated into our regular working lives making us happier and more productive at the same time. When the lockdown is over, I hope that I can alter my coming in pattern in order to facilitate more productive use of time.

Educators like Taylor who experienced benefits of working from home are likely to want to retain these advantages long-term.

These contrasting vignettes illustrate contrasting experiences of educators while teaching from home. These vignettes exemplify the difficulties universities face in developing

and applying policy that supports all employees without disadvantaging some groups. The following section considers how policy could support a culture of expansive learning in ways that would support educators to retain the benefits accrued from working from home in an equitable way.

5. Developing policy to foster a culture of expansive learning in universities

This study used Activity Theory to analyse the expansive learning of university educators as they supported their students to continue their studies under lockdown conditions. The findings provide insights into expansive learning as educators (re)construct a familiar object (teaching) under different circumstances (working from home under lockdown conditions). Engeström's (2015) concept of situated activity helped to identify issues associated with the transfer of work from one physical and social setting (e.g., the workplace) to another (e.g., the home). The findings confirm the idea put forward by Rantavuori et al. (2016) that the social setting and resources available influence the meaning-making activities and expansive learning. The methodology allows important insights to be identified to guide policy decisions.

Future Higher Education policy should capitalise on the benefits of working from home and reduce inequalities in five ways:

First, although some educators described difficulties with working from home, others reported benefits. Benefits included not commuting, which allowed some people to be more productive, or spending time with loved ones, which was rewarding. Future policy should identify benefits for different groups of staff and enable them to be able to retain these advantages. It should examine individual reasons why working from home is stressful for some people and enable them to maintain and grow the benefits of working from campus.

Second, the repositioning of work practice in the home led to physical and psychological stress for some educators, especially those where space was at a premium or equipment was not available. Improvisation was more difficult for people who had limited space at home or who had caring responsibilities. University policy needs to be able to support people who work under these circumstances, involving them in helping to find policy solutions, whether assisting them with setting up workspaces at home or, alternatively, providing them with the space they need on campus.

Third, the superposition of work and home communities created new sets of social relationships. Some of these relationships brought home life and work life together in new ways, benefitting some educators and marginalising others. For educators to be at their most productive, university policy needs to take into consideration a more holistic perspective on their values and attitudes in ways that take into account their whole life.

Fourth, some educators provided emotional labour to students or family, which was unacknowledged and unrewarded. Others focused their labour around work activities that brought rewards, generating clear inequalities within the academic community. Universities should create policies that recognise caring responsibilities both within the home and also at work, whether caring for students or other staff. A clear reward

pathway has to be prioritised to incentivise educators to care for students and for colleagues and to recompense these forms of labour.

Fifth, educators need to be given opportunity to evolve their practice and to learn about the affordances of technologies in ways that transform practice, rather than simply digitising practices, such as recreating a campus lecture into an online lecture. Ideally, these opportunities would be integrated with work.

This study provides evidence that consideration of how personal factors influence the work, life and wellbeing of educators is important for future policy. Going forward, there is a need for universities to develop and implement policies that take into consideration the five key areas identified in this study to support educators to expand how they work.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Data availability

Qualitative data has been anonymised in line with ethical guidance. These data are not available open source to preserve anonymity.

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Appendix: Survey instrument

Consent to participate and publish

What is this project about, and do I have to take part?

You are being invited to take part in a research project about your experiences of changing how your work during this period of the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19). The study will inform how UCL can support academic wellbeing as people adjust to the rapid transfer to working from home and moving to online teaching and research. Your responses are important to help UCL understand the effects of these changes on our academic community. Participation is open to anyone at UCL and is entirely voluntary. You don't have to take part and we understand that everyone is adjusting to new ways of working. However, if you do take part, your responses will provide insights to the whole academic community about how we are adjusting.

What will taking part involve?

Participation will involve writing short narratives about your experiences and how you feel. These will take 10–15 min. You will also be invited to upload an image or photo that depicts your experiences of homeworking and teaching/ research online. You will also be asked to opt in to sending short narrative updates on your experiences each week and/ or participating in an online interview which will be one hour or less.

What will you ask and what will happen to the information I give you?

You will be asked questions about yourself, your role within UCL, how you work at home, moved your teaching online, the challenges you face and the strategies you use to overcome these. We recognise that these are unprecedented circumstances and you should feel free to disclose how you are working and the full range of technologies you are using, whether these are supported by UCL or not. We understand that for some colleagues the working day now includes activities such as the care of others and/or the educational needs of children who are now at home with you. The responses you provide will be analysed by researchers at University College London.

We will ask you for an email address so that we can contact you for the follow-up narratives. However, this email address will be removed from the rest of the answers you give before any analysis takes place and will be deleted as soon as the study finishes. Your email address will not be passed to any third parties. Your anonymous data will then be analysed by researchers from University College London (UCL) and will be used to inform staff support during Covid-19. Longer term analysis on the challenges and opportunities associated with use of digital technology during crisis situations will be published in scientific papers. Nobody will be able to identify you from the anonymous data we analyse or from any publications. This study has received approval from the UCL Research Ethics Committee.

How long will my data be stored for?

Your email address will be deleted as soon as the study finishes. All submitted images will have all personal information removed. Your anonymised data will be stored for 10 years by UCL after the end of the research, at this point the data will be reviewed, and if they are still deemed to be of public interest, they may be retained for longer. Again, this will only ever be anonymised data. It will not be possible to remove your information from existing data sets once those data sets have been anonymised, because even we would be unable to identify your data.

How do I find out the results and what support is available to me?

Insights will be disseminated regularly via the Covid-19 newsletter that is being circulated daily. For more information contact the project Lead, Professor Allison Littlejohn allison.littlejohn@ucl.ac.uk