

Senedd Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Inquiry Response from Zoom Video Communications

[Remote Working: Implications for Wales](#)

Summary

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the way people live, work and communicate. An unprecedented number of people have gone online for the first time and embraced it in a way that they never have before - for many, as a means of home working. The number of people in the UK using Zoom has increased 20-fold from 2019 to 13 million.
- Technology has changed the world of work, and the trend towards flexible working which existed prior to the pandemic has been expedited: a recent YouGov poll found that four in ten UK workers want to continue home working after the pandemic. Our platform isn't intended to replace the office entirely. Instead, it's a tool to keep people connected when they're working remotely and for enabling flexibility for those who need it.
- Zoom recognises that Wales is unique to other parts of the world. That is why we are one of the few video-conferencing platforms to offer a real-time Welsh translation tool to allow meetings to take place bilingually, ensuring inclusivity for all participants.
- Zoom recognises the responsibility that it has to the safety and wellbeing of its users. We could not have predicted that video conferencing would become such a significant part of the working day, and it was not designed to be used in this way. Post-pandemic, as working patterns continue to evolve and possibly move towards a more hybrid home working model, Zoom will be a partner to business, government, regulators and other technology companies to develop the best practices and regulation as necessary to encourage the safe use of digital technology.

About Zoom

In the past year, at a time of unprecedented change, Zoom has stepped up to deliver services to governments, families and businesses across the world, transforming the way people live, work and socialise. Along the way, we have become a household name. But we realise with such growth also comes responsibility - to our users, and society more generally. That's why, at the core of our mission, lie three things: the safety and security of our platform; assisting in the delivery of world class public services; and continuing to support the economy.

Zoom is an American company that provides video conferencing tools and software. It was founded in 2011 and is headquartered in San Jose, California. We currently employ 3,400 people worldwide and are continuing to expand. We are continuing to increase our headcount in the UK as well as the number of businesses and organisations we service.

Our platform is based in the cloud and runs across mobile devices, desktops, and telephones. Key features of our platform include a chat function and breakout rooms for virtual meetings. We have two main levels of service. The first is the Zoom Basic Plan which is free and allows unlimited 1-1 meetings for up to 40

minutes. The second is Zoom Pro which allows unlimited group meetings with up to 100 people for as long as is required. For organisations that need more capacity, or that want to host webinars, we have additional services.

How can the benefits of remote working be maximised, and what can be done to mitigate any potential risks and negative impacts?

Technology has changed the world of work, and many of the trends towards flexible remote working, which had existed before the pandemic, have accelerated. As restrictions are lifted, we anticipate that many of the things that people have valued and become used to during this period will be retained: a recent YouGov poll found that four in ten UK workers want to continue home working after the pandemic. ([link](#))

This includes caregivers who can more easily fit work around looking after an unwell relative, and working parents who can more easily fit work around their childcare responsibilities. For many, some form of continued flexibility is desired and expected by employees, and technology can help enable this.

As we look to the future and the easing of lockdown restrictions, some of the benefits of home working can be retained, and we have already introduced a number of features to help workforces re-enter the office and adapt to the new normal as safely as possible. ([link](#))

Quality of working life

Zoom was founded to help businesses bring teams together, particularly those working in different parts of the world. All businesses have had to adapt to social distancing measures since the start of the pandemic, and we are humbled by this growth.

At the start of the pandemic, many people were working from home for the first time. This brought with it a fresh set of challenges for employers.

First, some teams needed urgent training on how to use new software. The Zoom Support Center continued to operate globally 24 hours a day, to support users over the web, in an online chat, and on the phone. Zoom trainers also host free and interactive live-training webinars daily across a range of time zones and languages. Our online guidance resource library also aims to provide unlimited free access to broader digital skills training on a range of topics, like how to address WiFi issues and schedule Zoom meetings from a range of other platforms to support those making the transition to remote working. ([link](#)) ([link](#))

Second, we all know how frustrating it can be to experience a frozen image and broken sound caused by a poor internet connection. We have developed technology to tackle this, including providing high-quality video that works in low-bandwidth environments, to improve services for users in rural or other off-the-grid locations. We believe access to high-speed broadband should be a long-term public policy priority as businesses continue to digitalise and adopt home-working practices.

Third, not everyone has access to a quiet, dedicated space at home for working - especially those with childcare needs and those who live in small or shared accommodation. We have introduced features to mitigate background noises and activity, including adjustable background noise suppression tools. However,

we recognise that technology alone is not the solution, and employers must recognise that external factors can impact employees' concentration, which may have an impact on performance.

Managing the blurring boundaries between life and work

As social distancing restrictions continue, the boundaries between work and home continue to blur. Individuals are juggling multiple roles and there's little time or space to reset, refuel or restore, posing a risk to mental health. We believe that employers have a responsibility to ensure that remote working does not have a detrimental impact on employee mental health, especially as video conferencing platforms were not originally intended to be used on a permanent, full-time basis.

We are aware of the responsibility we have to our users who are unexpectedly using video conferencing extensively as a result of lockdown measures and the pandemic. Zoom has partnered with charities, such as the American Heart Association, to create mental health and wellbeing programs, including webinars and resources for companies. This includes a 'happy hour' strategy that encourages employees to step away from their computers and spend an hour enjoying an activity outside or with loved ones. ([link](#))

How should Welsh Government work in partnership with the public sector, private sector and voluntary sector to deliver its remote working proposals?

Zoom is committed to helping the UK deliver its public services

We want Zoom to be used for the public good, not least when it comes to education, healthcare and the delivery of democracy. We will continue to be a long-term partner to any public service provider wanting to harness the opportunities of hybrid and remote working.

When it comes to education, in response to the pandemic, we removed the 40-minute call limit for any educational institution in the UK using Zoom's free basic accounts. This meant that children, students, and teachers across the UK could focus on learning in a new environment with access to unlimited secure meetings for up to 100 participants and additional benefits. We also provide secure video communications for virtual classrooms, office hours, and administrative meetings and our flexible education plans help meet the needs of individual institutions. In addition, we recently won the award for being the Scouts' Most Impactful Partner after hosting 110,000 virtual Scout meetings and helping scouting continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When it comes to healthcare, we are committed to supporting the NHS and GP practices in delivering essential services. Over the course of the pandemic, many healthcare providers successfully and quickly adapted to using video conferencing, with NHS Wales estimating that, since May 2020, over 80,000 video consultations have taken place. By enabling many non-urgent healthcare services to be delivered online, Zoom helps reduce patients' travel time and distance to appointments. Our video conferencing technology also provides many patients with better access to healthcare by enabling them to see specialists outside of their home region.

When it comes to the delivery of democracy, by using Zoom, Members of the Senedd have been able to represent their constituents remotely and continue debating the important issues of the day. We are committed to ensuring that democracy can continue to function regardless of the circumstances.

Zoom collaborates with stakeholders to make home working work for Wales

Zoom recognises the importance of the Welsh language, both in terms of ensuring inclusivity for all participants, and maintaining and protecting Wales' cultural heritage. Our live simultaneous interpretation feature, allowing users to run meetings in both English and Welsh, is one of the features we are most proud of and is ahead of a number of our industry peers.

The feature works in real-time on Zoom meetings and Zoom webinars, is easy to use, and enables compliance with Welsh language standards and regulation. It allows the host of a meeting to designate participants as interpreters. Interpreters can provide their own audio channels for the language they are translating to and attendees can select the audio channel to hear the translated audio in their language of choice.

For example, if the host is talking in English but another participant is able to translate what the host is saying into Welsh, attendees have the option to select which audio channel they wish to listen to. If they choose to listen to the Welsh channel, they can mute the English audio or listen to it at a reduced volume to hear intonation and tone.

The tool is currently being used by a number of local authorities across Wales, such as Powys, Ceredigion and Gwynedd, in order to facilitate bilingual meetings and enable the continuation of democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic. With access to democracy in mind, we're committed to Zoom being as inclusive as possible. That's why we've designed our platform to be inclusive of individuals with particular accessibility needs, and more information on this is available at <https://zoom.us/accessibility>.

Zoom will be a partner to the Welsh Government to ensure the wellbeing of remote workers

Zoom recognises the responsibility that it has to the safety and wellbeing of its users, and have taken extensive steps to continually reevaluate and improve our safety measures. We could not have predicted that video conferencing would become the sole means of communication between colleagues for many months, and it was not designed to be used in this way.

All employers have a responsibility to look after the wellbeing of their employees, and this extends to the use of technology that forms a part of their working life. In order to support their employees, companies should encourage best practice, such as regular breaks from screen time and setting aside a designated work space.

Post-pandemic, as working patterns continue to evolve and possibly move towards a more hybrid home working model, Zoom will continue to be a partner to business, government, regulators and other technology companies, as we develop the best practices and regulation necessary to encourage the safe use of digital technology.

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