

Forget the glamour of TV series *The Split* legal work lends itself very well to working from home.

Over two years since Covid 19 first triggered a mass overnight experiment into working from home for office-based workers, many employers have now introduced permanent home working or hybrid working.

Turns out, contrary to what any number of employers thought when refusing flexible working requests, working from home productively is entirely possible.

Earlier this month, City of London law firm Stephenson Harwood introduced a whole new angle to the debate about working from home by introducing a policy that allows staff to work permanently from home provided they take a 20% pay cut.

The firm's staff can already work up to 40% of their time from home but this option doesn't come with a cut in pay. Even those who take the "100home80pay" option must come into the office once a month and the firm will pay the travel expenses of that. Interestingly, the 100home80pay option is not available to partners at the firm.

Who is going to take that sort of cut in pay to avoid three days of travel into the office?

A growing trend over the pandemic has been lawyers who live in the regions joining London law firms and earning London salaries, but not having to physically move to London. This has had a knock-on effect on recruitment and salaries for regional firms, who are now competing for staff with London law firms.

One Stephenson Harwood lawyer (not named) who joined the firm during the pandemic from a regional firm told RollonFriday that he gets to live in Bath and work for a City firm, earning more than at his regional firm even with the 20% discount. He is quoted as saying: "The best bit, though, is that I can be a better dad to my daughter and a better husband to my wife. For context, I work in the PE team and spent the last week working hard to get a transaction over the line but I did not miss a single bath time – neither my daughter's nor my own!"

Another Stephen Harwood lawyer quoted by RollonFriday was not so taken with the new policy, commenting that their billable hours had increased with working from home and they should not be penalised for that with a cut in pay.

The option of working from home 100% of the time could be attractive to working parents making the childcare juggle more achievable by stripping out the commute time. However, this does raise potential issues of rising pay inequality and discrimination as women statistically still have primary responsibility for childcare.

Legal work lends itself very well to working from home. Despite what you see in legal dramas like BBC's *The Split* where the lawyers spend a lot of time swishing around the corridors of fabulous offices in even more fabulous outfits, lawyers spend most of their day sat at their computers.

Watching lawyers type and read for eight hours a day doesn't make for good telly though. This is the "heads down" part of our work and it is by far the biggest part of our work.

There is however also a "heads up" element to our work, meeting our clients, training presentations and business development and a "heads together" part, talking with our colleagues, mentoring and training and managing them.

And whilst not impossible to do completely remotely, as our collective experience over lockdown demonstrated, these

elements are on the whole more effective when done in the room than on Zoom.

Bearing in mind that the 100home80 pay option is not available to partners, it seems to me that the message Stephenson Harwood is sending very clearly to those who aspire to partnership is that not being in the office three days a week for some in person “heads up” and “heads together” time could have a bigger impact on career than just a 20% pay cut.

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