FUTURE JOBS
IRELAND

Remote Work in Ireland
Future Jobs 2019

Minister's Foreword

This research was a deliverable under Pillar 4 of Future Jobs Ireland 2019, which is concerned with increasing participation in the labour force. However, as this report demonstrates, the impact of remote work is much broader than this. If remote work is embraced as part of innovation and technological change, it has the potential not only to increase participation in the labour force, but to improve productivity, attract and retain talent, and assist in the transition to a low carbon economy. So, it can contribute to the five key Pillars under Future Jobs Ireland 2019 that are crucial for Ireland's economic success. While remote work holds significant potential for Ireland and has the potential to improve the lives of many workers, I also recognise that it comes with risks that need to be carefully considered.

I would like to express my appreciation to the many groups and individuals who contributed to this research, including the members of the Steering Group established for this study, for their valuable knowledge and expertise.

Special thanks are due to Cavan Digital Hub for facilitating the Remote Work in Ireland Stakeholder Consultation Forum in July, the results of which informed the final report; Abodoo for their engagement and participation in the Consultation Forum; the Western Development Commission for their work in this area, including the Atlantic Economic Corridor Hubs Audit, which has greatly informed this report; Ibec and ISME for facilitating direct engagement with employers from a broad spectrum of organisations on the topic of remote work; the Small Firms Association for sharing their work to date on the benefits and challenges of remote work for employers; Grow Remote for facilitating engagement with the remote work community and promoting a high level of stakeholder engagement with this research from the outset; Indeed for providing us with insightful data and the many industry executives, academics and staff at expert organisations and State agencies who contributed their valuable time and insights through engaging with the project team over the course of this research.

Given all the initiatives currently underway across Government and in independent bodies on remote work, and the potential transformative impact of remote work, I am confident that future collaboration will drive beneficial change in this area.

Heather Humphreys TD
Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation
December 2019

Contents

Contents

Executive Summary

Background

This research paper on Remote Work in Ireland is a deliverable of Future Jobs Ireland 2019, which places a focus on fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions. Such solutions are increasingly a priority from a range of perspectives, from sustainability and positive environmental impacts, to increasing participation amongst women, older people and people with disabilities. In a time characterised by increased digitalisation, remote work is increasingly viewed as an intervention with the potential to widen the talent pool across Ireland, stimulate regional growth, lessen accommodation pressures in cities and support the transition to a greener economy. This potential has been highlighted in the Government's nine Regional Enterprise Plans for 2019-2020 and the Climate Action Plan.

Ambition 4.2 (i) of Future Jobs Ireland committed the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to:

'undertake research on the prevalence and types of remote working arrangements within the Irish workforce, and the attitudes towards such working arrangements, as well as the factors which inhibit employers and employees from partaking in these arrangements'.

The research has included desk research, quantitative analysis and engagement with key stakeholders, including employer representative bodies and remote work interest groups. As part of the consultation process, a Remote Work Consultation Forum was held in Cavan Digital Hub in July 2019. This was attended by stakeholders from across Government Departments, State Agencies, enterprises and the remote work community. In addition, a national Remote Work Employee Survey was conducted in October to capture the perspectives of employees across regions and sectors.

Defining Remote Work

The term remote work is still somewhat misunderstood owing to the wide range of different working arrangements it can encompass. This report has adopted the same definition as 'telework' described in the 2002 European Framework Agreement as:

- a 'form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis'.

The research is primarily concerned with two types of remote working solutions:

- **Homeworking,** where employees work from their homes.
- **Hub-working,** where an employee works from a hub close to or within their local community. This includes co-working, which involves attendance at a co-working space where collaboration and networking outside of one's team or organisation is encouraged.

Prevalence of Remote Work

Clear data on the current prevalence of remote work in Ireland is currently unavailable. In 2018, the Central Statistics Office undertook a pilot survey to inform the 2021 Census. The results of this pilot found that 18% of respondents worked from home, mostly one or two days per week. There have also been significant increases in job portal searches for remote work-related terms in recent years.

According to business surveys, enterprises are increasingly engaging in remote working solutions, the majority of which are on a weekly basis. These arrangements are more prevalent in larger companies, especially those in electronic services, financial services and other services, in the counties of Dublin and Cork, and in foreign-owned businesses. As engagement from enterprise has increased, more roles have been created which are either fully remote or have remote elements. Recent years have seen companies transitioning from in-office models to remote models, as well as the emergence of fully remote employers.

The uptake of remote work is also being facilitated by the growing number of hubs that have been established across the country with informal estimates putting their number at 300. According

to an audit undertaken by the Western Development Commission, a majority of hubs in the West offer facilities to remote workers, providing services including office space, hot desks, meeting rooms and networking/event spaces. However, remote work is usually part of a broader remit, with most hubs identifying as community enterprise centres, digital hubs or innovation centres.

A Remote Work in Ireland Employee Survey was undertaken for this report to address the lack of data around employee participation and gathered over 3,500 responses. However, the sample is skewed by a high response rate from the Finance and ICT sectors. Nevertheless, while the survey is not fully representative and likely overstates the prevalence of remote work, it does offer useful insights, such as:

- Remote work was found to be more prevalent in the Private Sector (63%), compared with the Public Sector (28%).
- 48.5% of respondents worked remotely, while 51.5% did not. 16.2% of total remote workers reported that they engaged in co-working, which was more popular in the Private Sector (19.1%, compared with 6.9% of public sector workers). Working remotely on a weekly basis was the most popular form (51% of all respondents, but 64.6% of respondents working in the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector).
- Engaging in remote work on a daily basis was the most common arrangement when excluding Finance, Insurance or Real Estate. This is driven by the ICT sector and the Professional, Scientific or Technical sector, which combined account for nearly 60% of overall respondents who reported to work remotely every day.

- Daily remote work is significantly less common in the Public Sector (10% of public sector responses). More sparse instances of remote work, on monthly or occasional bases, were more common amongst Public Sector respondents.
- Laptops were the most common device (85% of remote workers), followed by a desktop computer (8%). Self-identified remote workers were more likely to work using a device provided by their employer- although over a third used their own devices.
- Homeworking was the most popular mode (69.5%); a substantial proportion (20.7%) work remotely from multiple locations. The least common modes were working from a hub or co-working space (4.9%) and working when travelling (4.4%).

Current Initiatives

The research confirmed that while the full extent of remote work practices remains unknown in Ireland, its popularity is growing. There are a number of Government, independent and industry led initiatives and programmes aimed at facilitating and promoting remote work.

At Governmental level, these include the 2019-2020 Regional Enterprise Plans, which contain actions aimed at facilitating and promoting the uptake of remote work in hubs across a number of regions. Enterprise Ireland's new regional plan Powering the Regions also emphasises the importance of smart working and commits to the creation of co-working spaces across the regions. As part of this plan, Enterprise Ireland has also launched the three-year #Worksmartchallenge campaign to support 10,000 co-working and incubation spaces in regional locations. IDA Ireland is also pursuing opportunities to promote awareness and drive the uptake of homeworking amongst client companies, particularly in regional locations to support job creation.

The Department of Rural and Community Development is also undertaking extensive work around remote work to support rural regeneration, in particular through collaboration with the Western Development Commission, which has committed to the development and promotion of a cohesive network of enterprise and remote working hubs, resources and supports along the Atlantic Economic Corridor.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the body responsible for health and safety in the workplace in Ireland. The HSA states that an employer has the same responsibility for the safety and health of employees who work from home as for any other employees. This covers the provision of supervision, education and training and the implementation of sufficient control measures to protect the homeworker. The need for a review of Display Screen Equipment is likely to be reflected in the upcoming updated EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work. Therefore, it is possible that there will be changes in Health and Safety guidelines in this area in the future.

Skillnet Ireland has funded the development and provision of training on managing and working in remote teams, which will be delivered by the Irish Institute of Training and Development in early 2020. Technological University Dublin has also launched an NFQ Level 8 module on the Future of Work, which will aim to prepare students to understand, initiative and plan for the future of work within their organisations, including the management and deployment of remote working and learning.

The Small Firms Association has also published a flexible working policy and comprehensive guidance documents around flexible and remote work for employers, while Grow Remote, a volunteer-based community of remote workers, promotes remote work in Ireland, including through a remote jobs portal and community and rural regeneration initiatives. TechIreland also hosts a database of hubs on its website searchable by type and location.

International Policies

A number of international policies were considered in order to identify good practice and potential learnings, in particular from countries such as the Netherlands and Finland, which have a high proportion of homeworkers. Under the guidance of Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), employees in the United Kingdom have the right to request flexible working arrangements and employers must respond within 3 months. In the Netherlands, certain employees also have the right to request placement at a different location or at home and employers are restricted to an array of specific grounds that they can use to reject the request. In France a law mandates unions and employers to negotiate on certain areas, including the right to disconnect. The legislation leaves it to unions and employers to guarantee the efficiency of such a right in a manner that matches the way the business operates so that, in reality, the right to disconnect is not uniform. In New Zealand, all employees can ask at any time to change their hours, days or place of work. Finland will shortly introduce a new Working Time Act to give the majority of full-time employees the right to decide when and where they work for at least half their working hours.

Influencing Factors for Employees

The Employee Survey also highlighted influencing factors for motivations or remote workers, which highlighted two factors in particular: flexibility and reduced commuting times. 43% of respondents identified greater flexibility as their primary motivator for working remotely- this was the most popular motivator for those in the Private Sector and the second most popular in the Public Sector. At the Remote Work Consultation Forum, it was also highlighted as an area of importance in the context of striking a balance between work and family, particularly for women returning to the workforce.

Remote work, however, is also associated with longer working hours, work intensification and interference with personal life. This can lead to increased stress for workers associated with the inability to disconnect including difficulties for employee to switch off, prolonged working hours, lack of sufficient rest and remote workers being more likely to work when sick.

Reduced commute was a key motivator for remote workers in the Public Sector and the second most common reason in the Private Sector. It was a common reason across regions, particularly in the Mid-East and Midlands, and also came through as strong influencing factor for those who would like to start working remotely.

Cost effectiveness including mitigating childcare costs, by enabling a parent to be at home when working, was raised as a benefit. However, remote work is not regarded as a sustainable solution to affordable childcare. This was reflected in Employee Survey when just 4.5% of respondents cited childcare costs as their reason with this answer being more prevalent amongst women.

Potential health impacts on remote work emerged through desk research and stakeholder consultation. This included the wellbeing benefits of remote work such as higher morale, lower stress levels and lower absenteeism. The potential negative mental health impacts include loneliness, feelings of isolation and the potential negative physical impacts such as neck, back and shoulder pain from poor work stations. Therefore, remote work should not be seen as an inherently beneficial arrangement.

There was a clear emphasis in the Consultation Forum on the importance of organisational culture when implementing remote work arrangements. A mindset and culture which enables change was identified as a vital tool for business in introducing remote work policies. This include trust between managers and employees, communication and outreach. The Employee Survey also identified trust an enabler of remote work, and a lack of trust as a barrier.

Influencing Factors for Employers

Business can benefit from remote working arrangements by gaining access to a broader pool of talent, promoting retention, increasing productivity and improving cost-effectiveness while engaging in more sustainable ways of working.

Employee demand for flexible options such as remote work is growing, which in turn is boosting employer interest. This includes internal demand from employees, for motivational effects; and for new talent acquisition, where flexible and remote working options are increasingly important factors for those considering their future careers.

The adoption of flexible working solutions like remote work can create a more accessible working arrangement, opening roles up to people with caring responsibilities, older people and people with disabilities. By removing some of the barriers to work for a range of cohorts, the adoption of flexible work practices such as remote work can potentially allow employers to access a larger pool of talent.

Productivity can be improved if workers have the ability to work away from the office, particularly for demanding tasks that are difficult, complex and non-routine. Time can also be saved by not having to commute. However, adequate technology to enable and support remote work is necessary to improve productivity. This includes basic collaboration and networking tools, mobile devices and supportive network infrastructure.

Remote work can be cost effective. This includes reductions in overhead costs, allowing firms to reduce desks or engage with hubs to reduce the need for a large-scale headquarters. However, consideration needs to be given to the financial cost and investment of time into implementing change.

There are challenges for employers around the lack of clarity on how to implement a formal HR policy around remote work. Many organisations have reservations about having a policy in writing. For example, the inability to make all roles within an organisation remote and the potential equality issues that may arise from this. There is also a lack of clarity around Occupational Health and Safety requirements, leading to a fear of litigation. Ultimately there is a need for increased awareness and guidance across multiple areas for employers and employees.

Key Implications

This research has demonstrated that remote work is growing in popularity. It has the potential to improve productivity, attract and retain talent, increase participation in the labour force and assist in the transition to a low carbon economy. However, it is also associated with potentially negative mental and physical health impacts. In order to ensure that Ireland can reap the benefits that remote work has to offer; a number of important issues need to be addressed:

1. **Guidance**
   Multiple stakeholder groups identified the absence of official guidelines for employers, employees and HR professionals on the topic of remote work and many are unclear on how to manage the various aspects of what remote work entails. The main areas highlighted in the research are:

   - **Equality** – Employers would benefit from clear guidance which facilitates the introduction of a remote working policy including the setting out of fair and objective grounds for refusing a remote working request.
   - **Health and Safety** –A lack of clarity on Occupational Health and Safety emerged as a key influencing factor for employers considering the introduction of a formal remote working policy.
   - **Employment Conditions and the Right to Disconnect** - Employers would benefit from increased clarity and support in balancing their employees' right to privacy and the practical elements of performance measurement and monitoring working hours. Disconnecting from work is an increasingly important issue for employees engaging in remote working solutions.
   - **Data Protection** - Guidance is needed on balancing data security and cybersecurity when engaging in remote work, particularly given GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which offers enhanced privacy protection rights to individuals in relation to the processing of their personal data.
   - **Training** -Training for employees working remotely and for managers in managing distributed teams is a major enabler in the successful implementation of remote working policies.

2. **Data**
   In order to make informed policy in this area, up to date data should be gathered in the following areas:

   - **Employees** - There is a lack of national Labour Force data which captures the prevalence and types of remote work in Ireland. A dedicated periodic exercise in gathering data on people engaging in remote work across Ireland would provide insights to the nuance of these working situations and would provide a more secure basis to inform policy.
   - **Employers** - There is a need for quantitative evidence on employers engaging with remote working solutions. The collection of this data would help to create a fuller picture of the adoption of remote work which could be monitored to understand trends.
   - **Hub Infrastructure** - At present, there is no data available on the national infrastructure of hubs in Ireland. This acts as a key barrier to promoting the adoption of remote work in hubs. It would be beneficial if a national exercise was carried out to understand the number of hubs in existence, their classification, their offering, occupancy levels and awareness of the supports available to them.

3. **Collaboration**
   Increased collaboration would ensure a more cohesive Governmental approach to remote work which could be fully supported and understood across the stakeholders concerned. It would provide the opportunity for Departments and Agencies to build on and complement the work of each other. Increased collaboration could be achieved through the formation of Interdepartmental Group comprising of relevant Departments and State Agencies who could align national policies and strategies.

Policy Context

Future Jobs Ireland is a framework of focused medium-term ambitions which form a key part of Ireland's future economic agenda. Future Jobs Ireland, along with Project Ireland 2040, Global Ireland 2025 and the Climate Action Plan represents an integrated approach to prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future economy.

Future Jobs Ireland focuses on five pillars, namely:

1. Embracing Innovation and Technological Change

2. Improving SME Productivity

3. Enhancing Skills and Developing and Attracting Talent

4. Increasing Participation in the Labour Force

5. Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy

Ambition 4.2 of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 places a focus on fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions. This research paper on the topic of Remote Work in Ireland is a deliverable under Ambition 4.2 (i), which states the following:

'undertake research on the prevalence and types of remote working arrangements within the Irish workforce, and the attitudes towards such working arrangements, as well as the factors which inhibit employers and employees from partaking in these arrangements.'

There are a number of other deliverables under this Ambition, including the commencement of a national consultation on the extension of flexible working options to all employees; development of guidance to facilitate employers to offer more family-friendly working options; and the extension of unpaid Parental Leave.

Background

Flexible working solutions, such as remote work, are becoming a priority from a range of perspectives, from sustainability and positive environmental impacts, to increasing participation amongst women, older people and people with disabilities. This is reflected in the current Government approach as evidenced in Future Jobs Ireland and the Climate Action Plan. Due to increased digitalisation and the rising accessibility of new technology, flexible working options such as remote work are a visible feature of the Irish workforce and, increasingly, an expectation from employees. However, this was not always the case.

In February 1996, the Irish Times published an article entitled Death of the Office? This article detailed a landscape of empty offices across the US due to a surge in telework, a practice defined as "moving work to workers, instead of the other way round". [1] This was enabled by a new generation of computers with the potential to function as a "negative miracle" for the property market, as consumers and businesses favour cyberspace over high streets and offices. Focusing on the potential impacts of telework on property markets in cities across Ireland, the article seems to land on a conclusion of 'not yet'. While gaining popularity internationally and showing great potential to transform the way we work at that time, telework hadn't taken off in Ireland, and it was doubtful it would need to. Commuting times weren't long enough to necessitate it.

It only took a few years for the narrative around telework and commuting to shift. In November 1998 the Independent published Big Growth in Home-Working to Save City from Gridlock. This article framed the practice as a "simple but as yet under-exploited way of working" with the potential to bring information "to and from workers' homes on the information highway", removing the need for commutes. [2]

Just over a year later, the Irish Times published Teleworking Now Beginning to Make its Impact [3] written by Dr Gerard McMahon, DIT. This article marks a distinct tonal shift from Death of the Office? stating that telework is "here to stay". Far from a negative miracle, telework not only had the potential to improve productivity and contribute to economic growth, but could "help produce better and more rewarding work for many".

This last article was written in 2000, when telework was gaining traction in the public consciousness, marked by the European Framework Agreement signed in 2002 which committed EU member states to implement measures to solidify and promote the rights of teleworkers. Technology was becoming accessible and sophisticated enough that knowledge-based workers could now conceivably carry out their work outside the traditional office setting. "The trick", as McMahon wrote, "lies in how to get the traditionalists to move from here to there."

Over a decade later, there are 2,317,000 people in employment in Q3 2019. The national unemployment rate stands at just at 4.8%, as of October 2019. With the current labour force participation rate at 62.1% and remaining relatively constant over recent years while employment has grown, policy focus has turned to sustaining a highly skilled workforce and an inclusive, responsive labour market. With disruptive technologies rapidly transforming the world of work and potentially increasing the proportion of knowledge-based roles in Ireland, flexible options such as remote work is not just a viable option but, for many, an expectation. [4]

Moreover, with our cities becoming increasingly crowded leading to scarce and expensive accommodation and increased commutes, remote work is an intervention with the potential to widen the talent pool within Ireland, stimulate regional growth, lessen accommodation pressures in cities and support the transition to a greener economy. This potential was recognised and highlighted in of Future

Jobs Ireland, which calls for a research paper on the prevalence of remote work in Ireland, the types of remote work people are engaging in, and the attitudes towards remote work in Ireland. This includes the key influencing factors for employees and employers in engaging in remote work. This is a key deliverable under the Fourth Pillar of Future Jobs Ireland, which focuses on increasing labour market participation.

This report seeks to achieve this goal through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. In addition to the factors listed above, this report will also look at the definition of remote work, its history in policy, international practices, and the current initiatives underway to promote its adoption.

[1] Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/homes-and-property/death-of-the-office-1.30087

[2] Available at: https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/big-growth-in-homeworking-to-save-city-from-gridlock-26168077.html

[3] Available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/business/teleworking-now-beginning-to-make-its-impact-1.291040

[4] Source: Vodafone. 'The Future of Business in Ireland: A Conversation with SMEs'. 2018. Accessed at: http://ie-mktg.vodafone.com/future-of-business

Defining Remote Work

Remote work is a part of the broader umbrella of flexible work, which encompasses many arrangements such as flexi-time, parental leave, job-sharing and compressed hours. While many organisations in Ireland engage with some of these modes of flexible working, remote work is still not well understood. This is because remote work encompasses a number of different working arrangements and can mean different things to different people. The many phrases used in reference to remote work include e-Work, telecommuting, telework, hub-work, homework, co-working, hotdesking, smart working, intelligent working, mobile work, home office, virtual office, locationless work, and platform work.

Each of these phrases carry their own meaning and connotations. As a result, there is a lack of consensus on a definition for remote work, and proper terminology for the practice of working outside an employer's premises, enabled by technology.

There are several reasons for this, including the rapid development of these enabling technologies, attempts to distinguish the different ways in which employees can work remotely, and simple trends in terminology. Phrases such as e-Work, telework and telecommuting are often used in policy documents, particularly across the EU. However, these have given way in recent years to terms such as smart working and remote working.

This saturation of terms and lack of clear consensus on what remote work actually constitutes is problematic. It limits the extent to which employees can understand exactly what it would mean to request to work remotely, or employers' understanding of what facilitating remote work entails. A key feature of this project's early research, therefore, was establishing a clear working definition of remote work, what it constitutes and the implications it carries for those engaging in it.

The 2002 European Framework Agreement on Telework defines telework as "a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis." [5]

While the term "telework" does not quite fit the zeitgeist of a rapidly changing world of work, the definition above covers most forms of remote work. [6] As a result, the term "remote work" as appears throughout this report will be synonymous with "telework" and its definition under the European Framework Agreement, as well as "e-Work" which

has been the term most often used in Irish official documents on the topic. [7]

There are many forms that remote work can take as it functions as an umbrella term for more specific arrangements. This research is primarily concerned with two types of remote working solutions:

› **Homeworking** – The conventional model whereby employees work from their homes. This can include people who work solely from home and those who work from home some or most of the time.
› **Hub-working** – This is an arrangement where an employee works from a hub close to or within their local community, either exclusively or some of the time. This includes co-working, which involves attendance at a co-working space where collaboration and networking outside of one's team or organisation is encouraged.

The frequency of engagement with these arrangements, as explored later in this report, can range from daily to monthly, or occasionally.

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5 Social Partners' Framework Agreement on Telework. Accessed at: http://erc-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/LexUriServ.do_.pdf

6 C. Messenger, Jon & Gschwind, Lutz. (2016). Three generations of Telework: New ICTs and the (R)evolution from Home Office to Virtual Office. New Technology, Work and Employment. 31. 195-208. 10.1111/ntwe.12073.

7 It should also be noted that while the term "remote work" has in instances been used referring to work which is outsourced or offshored with the help of ICTs, where employees perform work remotely from their customers and not remotely from the employer's premises. This is not included in this report's definition of remote work.

Remote Work in Ireland: A Historical Policy Context

Remote work has a complex policy history with many stops and starts. The late 90's saw the first emergence of Government activity on remote work (then referred to as e-Work or telework) This was due to the increasing availability of ICT and broadband infrastructure, which saw several initiatives and workstreams emerge over the following years. In 1998, the National Advisory Council on Teleworking was established, which focused on the employment opportunities telework presented. Teleworking: The Shortest Route to Work was published shortly thereafter by the Dublin Transport Office, focusing on its potential impact on commuting.

The 2002 European Framework Agreement on Telework [8] set up a general framework at European level for teleworkers' working conditions and prompted member states to implement the agreement over the following years to 2005. The agreement highlighted several key areas of importance, which still bear relevance today, including:

- The voluntary nature of teleworking
- Employment conditions
- Data protection
- Privacy
- Equipment
- Health and safety
- Organisation of work
- Training of teleworkers
- The collective rights of teleworkers

The subsequent implementation in Ireland included an awareness-raising campaign driven by Enterprise Ireland; the publication of an ad-hoc QNHS Module [9] on Teleworking; and a renewed Code of Practice which was produced in 2004 by ICTU and Ibec. This revised code was to European standard and in compliance with the conditions set out the in the Framework Agreement. However, the Code of Practice was never signed or published. It has been observed that, as a result, the Irish social partners and Government may consider that the Framework Agreement has still not been formally implemented in Ireland. [10]

The years following the Framework Agreement saw little activity in the area of telework. This was due in part to changes in Government and a period of economic contraction meaning new ways of working were no longer a policy priority. Telework, now referred to as remote work, has only remerged as an area of interest in recent years, with a familiar trend of several workstreams with different end-goals in mind, from the potential to increase labour force participation to the potential to reducing carbon emissions.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs 2015-2017 included work to develop regional hubs with co-working facilities to stimulate regional growth. Future Jobs Ireland 2019 has placed emphasis on remote working as a way to attract and retain talent and to increase participation in an increasingly tight labour market. This was reflected under Pillar 4: Increasing Participation in the Labour Force, which called for this report. The Climate Action Plan, which was published shortly thereafter, cites the importance of remote work from an environmental point of view in reducing commuter transport energy use and carbon emissions.

While recent years have seen a new focus placed on the potential of remote and flexible work, the prevalence of remote work is still unknown in Ireland. This lack of clarity around engagement with remote work can be attributed to a number of factors, including on promotional initiatives rather than enabling policy, a lack of clear Departmental ownership and external factors such as economic contraction. These factors meant that while a lot of valuable work was undertaken in this area, it was fragmented and ultimately did not result in lasting policy direction, dissemination of guidance or the adoption of legislation- which are important enablers of remote work, providing security and a framework for employers and employees alike.

[8] Source: European Commission Press Release: Telework: new Agreement is good news for workers and business, says Commission. https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-02-1057_en.html

[9] Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey Module on Telework, Q3 2002. Accessed at: https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2002/qnhs_moduleonteleworkingqtr32002.pdf

[10] Source: Hynes, Mike. Telework Isn't Working: A Policy Review. The Economic and social review. 2014. 45. 579-602.

Remote Work Today

Prevalence of Remote Work

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

While clear data on the prevalence of remote work is unavailable, it is evidently growing in popularity across Ireland. The Census includes the question 'how do you usually travel to work'?' with one of the answers being 'work mainly at or from home'. This is a limited way to measure remote work as it only accounts for those working remotely from home. In reality, remote work can take place from a range of locations outside an employer's premises. According to the 2016 Census, 56,774 people (excluding those in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector) are homeworkers. This is an increase of 20% from the 2011 figure, which was 47,193.[11]

There is work underway to address the current lack of regular data collection on remote work. Following the consultation exercise and a pilot exercise the Central Statistics Office (CSO) have agreed to include a question measuring the number of days people work from home on a weekly basis in Census 2021. The question included in the pilot was "If you are at work, do you ever work from home?" with a box to specify how many days a week the respondent works from home.

The results of the pilot survey, which was undertaken in 2018 with 15,000 homes across Ireland, provide an insight into homeworking in Ireland. Among those at work, 18% worked from home. Of those working from home, doing so 1 day per week was the most popular practice (35%), followed by 2 days a week (13%) and 5 days per week (11%). Over 25% of respondents working from home did not state the days per week, which may be due to their work pattern changing on a weekly basis, or the instances of working from home being less frequent than on a weekly basis.

Number of days per week working from home among persons who indicated they worked from home %

1	35
2	13
3	6
4	3
5	11
6	2
7	5
Not Stated	**26**
Total	**100**

Source: Central Statistics Office, Census 2021 Pilot Survey, 2018

There are indications that remote work is growing in popularity amongst Irish jobseekers. Research, carried out by jobs portal Indeed for this report, reveals that the number of Irish people searching for jobs using the term 'remote working' increased by 171% in the year 2016-2017. [12]   Furthermore, there has been a steady increase proportionally in people searching for terms related to remote work. Searches on Indeed on remote work have more than doubled, increasing from 1.3 to 2.8 per thousand searches in the years 2016-2019. [13] This is detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Job Searches Related to Remote Work per Thousand in Ireland by Month, 2016 - 2019
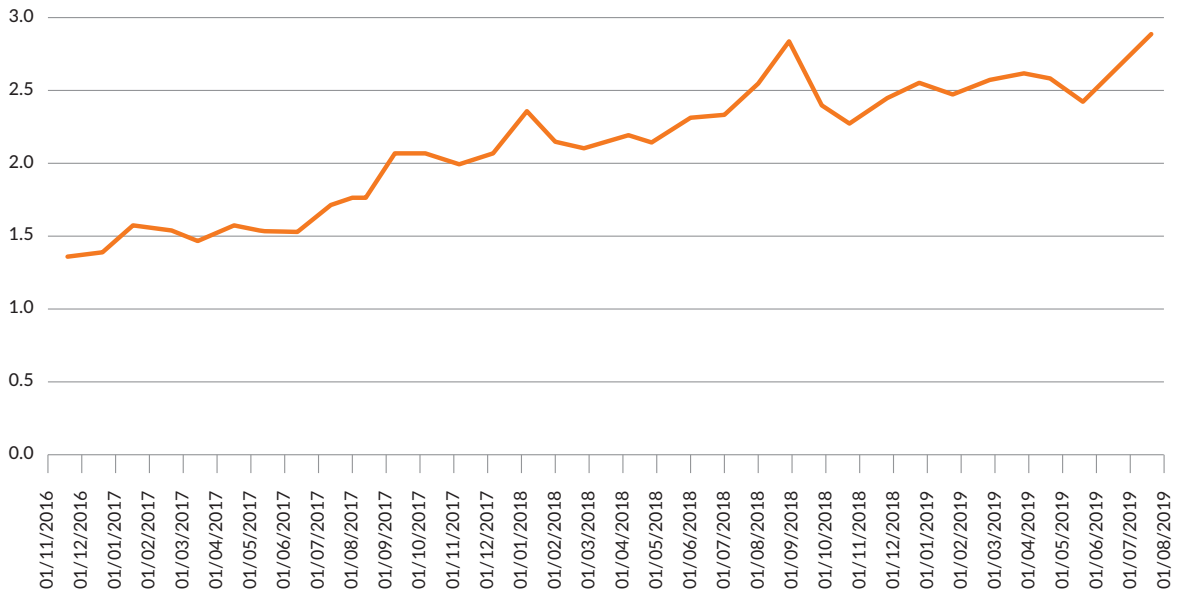
Source: Indeed, 2019

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Enterprises in Ireland are increasingly engaging in remote working solutions. In 2016 an Ibec survey of their membership found that 30% (110) of companies had a practice of remote work (referred to as e-working/ homeworking), on one or two days per week, while 5% have a practice of remote work five days per week. [14] The 2018 iteration of this report sees these figures rise to 37% (152) and 7% respectively. [15]

Larger companies tend to engage more with remote work, with 54% of businesses with over 500 employees practicing remote work, one or two days per week. The industries with the highest level of engagement with this solution were Electronic Services (69%); Financial Services (58%); and Other Services (40%). [16]

[11] Source: Central Statistics Office, Census 2016. Source: Indeed, The Year in Search. 2017. Available at: http://blog.indeed.com/2017/11/16/the-year-in-search/

[12] Source: Indeed, The Year in Search. 2017. Available at: http://blog.indeed.com/2017/11/16/the-year-in-search/

[13] Source: Indeed research. 2019.

[14] Source: Western Development Commission, e-Work Policy Briefing no 7. 2017

[15] Source: Ibec, Flexible Working Arrangements Report, 2018.

[16] **Please Note:** Other services include: hospitality, social care, facilities services, recruitment agencies and other service types.

Dublin (49%) and Cork (33%) were the counties with the highest proportions of businesses engaging in these remote work practices. Foreign-owned businesses also have higher reports of adoption of this solution (40%) compared to Irish businesses (33%).

As engagement from enterprise has increased, more roles have been created which offer remote work. According to data from Indeed, there has been a steady increase from 6.5 to 13.5 per thousand of job postings in Ireland offering remote work in the last 3 years, from late 2016 to the third quarter of 2019.

Many organisations are going in this direction. For example, Wayfair have made transitions from in-office models to remote models, announcing they would create 200 additional "virtual" jobs for Ireland in September 2018. [17] Recent years have also seen the emergence of fully remote employers such as Hotjar and Shopify, which have a full homeworking model with no physical office in Ireland.

However, most of the data available on employer engagement with remote working solutions refers to homeworking. As such, there is no data indicating the extent of business' engagement with hubs or co-working spaces in Ireland.

Figure 2: Remote Job Postings per Thousand in Ireland by Month, November 2016 - 2019
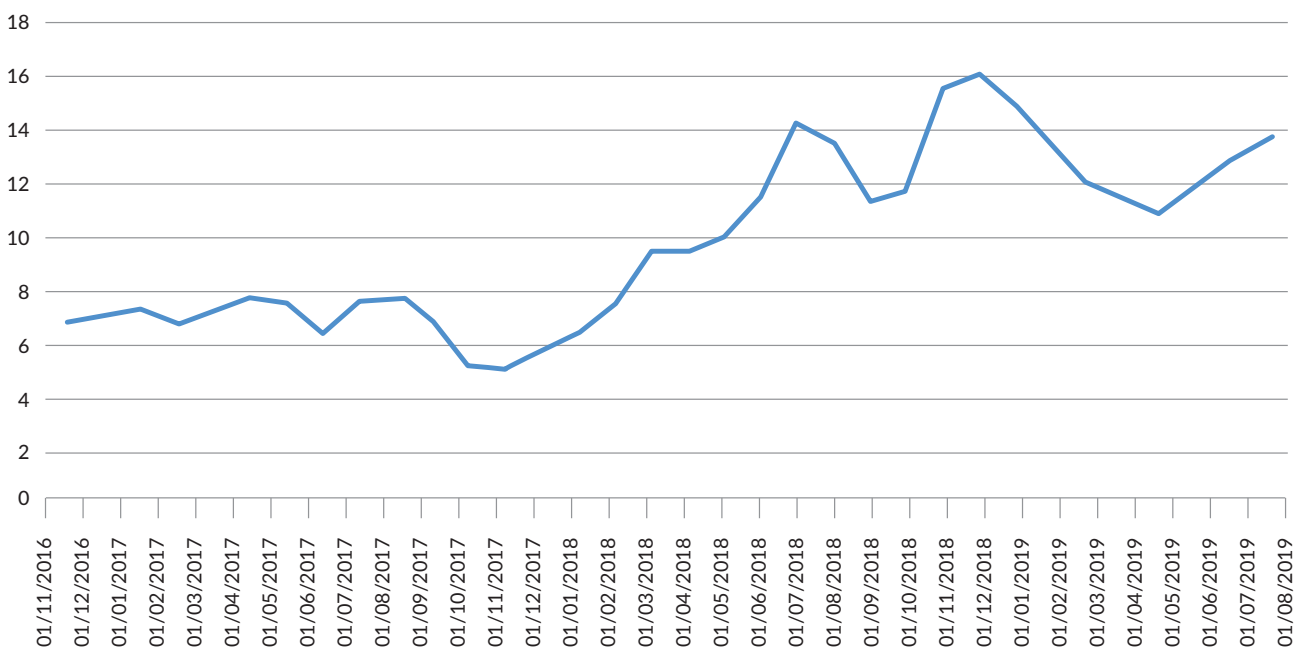
Source: Indeed, 2019

[17] Source: https://www.idaireland.com/newsroom/wayfair

HUB INFRASTRUCTURE IN IRELAND

There are a growing number of hubs with remote working facilities nationally, in particular outside of the Dublin region. Informal estimates in 2019 put the number of these hubs at 300. However, there is no official consensus on the number of hubs operating in Ireland, and indeed, little consensus on their classification and occupancy rates. This makes it difficult to measure the prevalence or effectiveness of hub-working in Ireland.

The informal nature of this estimate is an indication of the lack of data surrounding this network of hubs at present- their activities, their outputs and their effectiveness. The only audit of these hubs to date is that recently undertaken by the Western Development Commission, relating to 66 of the 101 hubs established in the Atlantic Economic Corridor. [18] In March 2019 the Department of Rural and Community Development announced €1m funding for the creation of a community network comprising the hubs in the AEC region.

The AEC survey found that a majority of those hubs offer space to remote workers (66 of 68 hubs). Services offered across these hubs include office space, single desks, hot desks, meeting rooms and networking/event spaces, with capacity for over 5,000 workers. Most of the hubs are community or social enterprise owned, with many established to avail of funding such as Rural Regeneration and Regional Enterprise Development, LEADER and Enterprise Ireland funding.

Remote working is only part of their broader remit- almost 60% of these hubs self-identify as community enterprise centres or co-working spaces, and 25% as digital hubs or innovation centres. A small number identify as e-hubs, working hubs, incubation hubs or remote working spaces. The lower number of digital or e-hubs is related to evidence of limited IT facilities and slower broadband speeds; most hubs, however, have audio-visual and video conferencing facilities. The survey identified limited knowledge among some respondents to questions relating to IT facilities, broadband speeds and back-up systems, indicating a requirement to support hubs in this area.

In terms of staffing, it was found that hubs based in larger towns and cities, and those co-located with third level institutions, employed full-time staff, whereas more rural hubs employed part-time staff and those on Community Employment Schemes. Hubs in less rural areas with full-time employees tend to have occupancy rates of over 50%. There are significantly higher occupancy rates in Limerick and Galway cities and larger towns.

The survey also identified issues with the client management and outreach of the hubs. Almost 75% of respondents have no Customer Relationship Management system in place, to enable tracking of clients and provide evidence-based reporting. Less than 40% meanwhile hold networking events more than monthly, which impacts on the development of hubs and their scope for increasing occupancy. Word of mouth is the main source of referral over marketing/advertising, while only half collaborate with state agencies and engage with Third Level bodies (which limits research potential) respectively. Related to this more limited engagement with Government (more so central rather than local government), funding was also identified as a major constraint to growth, although awareness of available funding streams was also identified as limited.

This survey is the only current survey of a significant group of hubs in Ireland, and the issues identified- lack of consensus on terminology, client management systems, advertising and availability or awareness of funding steams, limited knowledge on hubs' enabling systems – point to a need to gather information on hubs, their activities, outputs and effectiveness, across Ireland. This is reinforced by the absence of an official number of hubs in Ireland.

While this survey only applies to the Atlantic Economic Corridor, there is a growing number of hubs across Ireland. Many of these hubs have been involved with initiatives to connect them with high speed broadband. For example, the SIRO initiative between the ESB and Vodafone, which has delivered gigabit to hubs in rural Ireland. [19] There is also work underway to promote and connect hubs in Ireland, which will be detailed in the next section. However, a consensus on the number of hubs in Ireland, their classification and the supports that are available to them, would provide a basis for a platform to communicate their offerings nationally.

[18] This is an initiative stretching from Kerry to Donegal, containing 9 counties and 10 local authorities.

[19] Available at: https://siro.ie/about-us/gigabit-hubs/

Remote Work in Ireland –
Employee Survey

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) launched an online Remote Work in Ireland Employee Survey to address the lack of data on the topic. The Survey was released online in October 2019. The aim of the Employee Survey was to identify the types of remote work employees are engaging in, the biggest challenges and benefits arising for them, and the primary motivators for people who work remotely, or want to.

The Employee Survey was an open online survey which was promoted across all DBEI media channels and through the Gov.ie website. It was also distributed and promoted widely by representative bodies and remote work advocates across websites and social media platforms. As such, the sample is not representative of the labour force as a whole and this should be borne in mind when interpreting the results. However, despite this, the Employee Survey identified useful insights, which are considered in further detail below.

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

This anonymous, voluntary survey ran for two weeks, during which it accumulated a total of 3543 respondents based in Ireland from across sectors of the economy. Of those respondents, 56.1% of participants were female and 43.1% were male. [20] The majority of respondents to the Survey were aged between 35 – 44 (36.3%) and 45 - 54 (28.1%).

Figure 3: Employee Survey - Total Respondents by Age (%) Sample size: 3543
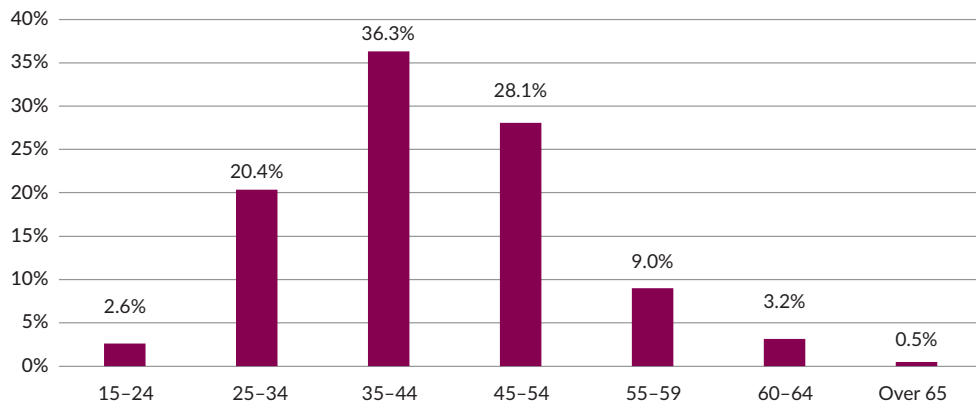
[20] Less than 1% (0.8) of respondents answered 'non-binary', 'prefer not to disclose', and 'other'. These results have not been included in the gender analysis as the sample size is too low to be considered reliable.

A majority of respondents resided in Dublin (42.8%), though all counties and regions are represented in the survey results. The least represented region is Mid-West, accounting for 5.1% of respondents. Most of the Survey respondents worked full-time (90.8%), with a small proportion working part-time (9.2%). A small proportion (6%) of respondents identified as self-employed. A range of organisation sizes are represented in the survey sample - the majority worked in companies with over 250 employees (60.1%), followed by 50-250 employees (20.8%) and companies with less than 50 employees (16.9%). Again, as mentioned above, the survey sample is not representative on this dimension of employment composition by company size.

The Employee Survey had respondents across both the Private (58.8%) and Public (41.2%) Sector. Remote work was more prevalent in the Private Sector, with 63% of the Private Sector respondents self-identifying as remote workers in comparison to 27.9% from the Public Sector.

SECTORAL DIFFERENCES

The Employee Survey gathered responses from all sectors of the economy, with a high proportion of respondents in employment in the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate and ICT sectors. These sectors accounted for 43.6% and 15.9% respectively of overall responses. [21]

**Figure 4: Respondents by Region (total)**   Question: Where do you live? Sample size: 3543

In the analysis, each sector was reviewed separately from total sectoral responses to ensure the overall results were not skewed. The majority of respondents from Finance, Insurance or Real Estate largely fell in line with remaining sectors' trends for each question. However, there are two areas where they did not – the frequency of remote work and engagement in co-working.

The overall proportion of respondents reporting that they engage in remote work daily is reduced significantly by responses from the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector. A high proportion of those working in this sector reported that they work remotely on a weekly basis (64.6%) compared to in the other sectors of the economy, who show a high

proportion of responses indicating they work remotely on a daily basis (44.8%). However, caution should be used when considering this result. This is not a representative sample, and stakeholder engagement and desk research indicates that daily remote work in Ireland is a much less prevalent than suggested by the survey results.

[21] It is important to note that these sectors account for 4.9% and 5.5% respectively of employment in the economy based on the most recent Labour Force Survey results (Q3 2019). As such, this sample does not present an accurate picture of the current labour force.

Figure 5: Breakdown of Private Sector Respondents (%) Question: What sector do you work in? Sample size:2081
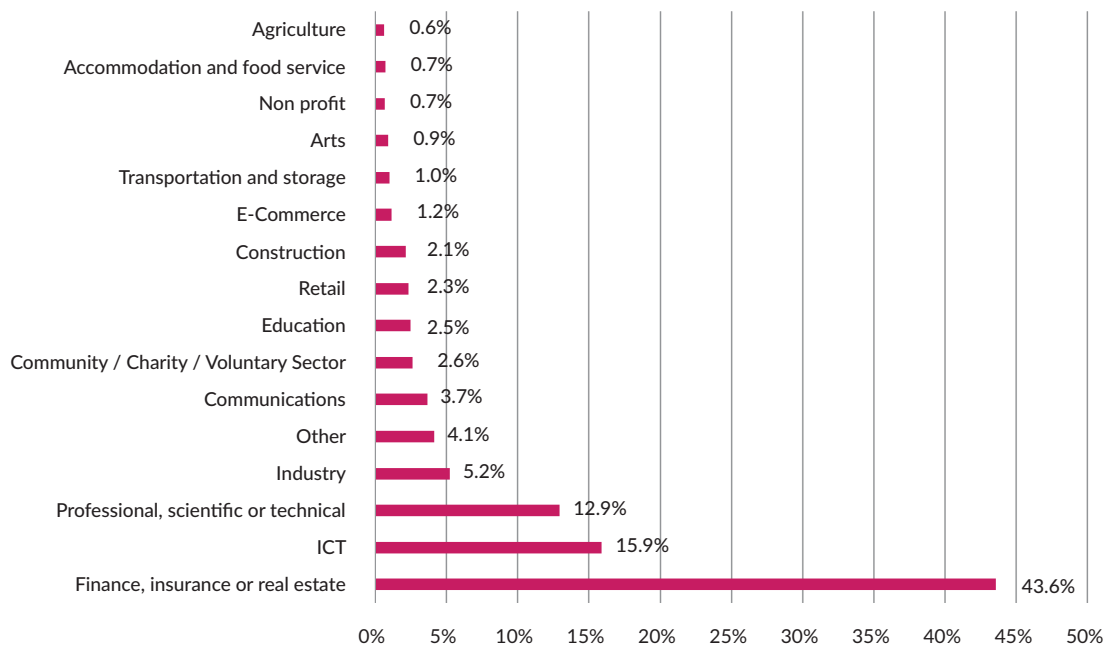
Engaging in remote work on a daily basis was the most common arrangement across all other sectors, accounting for 44.8% responses, while this was the least common arrangement within the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector, accounting for 6.7% of responses.

The otherwise high proportion of respondents working remotely on a daily basis is due to a large proportion of responses from the ICT sector and Professional, Scientific or Technical sector, which combined account for nearly 60% of overall respondents who reported to work remotely every day.

Therefore, while monthly and occasional arrangements have not been skewed by the level of responses from the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector, caution should be exercised when considering the overall results on the frequency of remote work, taking into consideration the large volume of respondents from the ICT and Professional, Scientific or Technical sectors who reported to work remotely every day.

As previously mentioned, a subset of hub-working which this research considers is co-working, which involves attendance at a co-working space where collaboration and networking outside of one's team or organisation is encouraged. When asked if they engaged in co-working, only 6% of respondents from the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector answered "no" compared to respondents from other sectors, 28% of whom answered "yes".

The large volume of responses from the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector and proportion of those within this sector who answered "no" when asked if they engaged with co-working skews the results of this question slightly.

Figure 6: Private Sector Breakdown: Frequency of Working Remotely - Finance, Insurance or Real Estate Sector Versus All Other Sectors (%)

Question: How often do you work remotely?   Sample size: 520 (Finance, Insurance or Real Estate); 793 (all other Private sectors)

Finance, Insurance or Real Estate

All Other Sectors

- 6.7% Everyday
- 21.5% Monthly
- 7.1% Occasionally
- 64.6% Weekly

- 44.8% Everyday
- 12.9% Monthly
- 3.5% Occasionally
- 38.8% Weekly

● Everyday ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Weekly
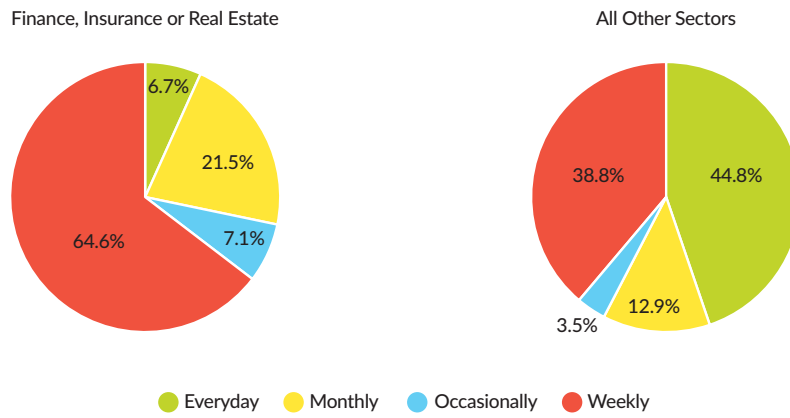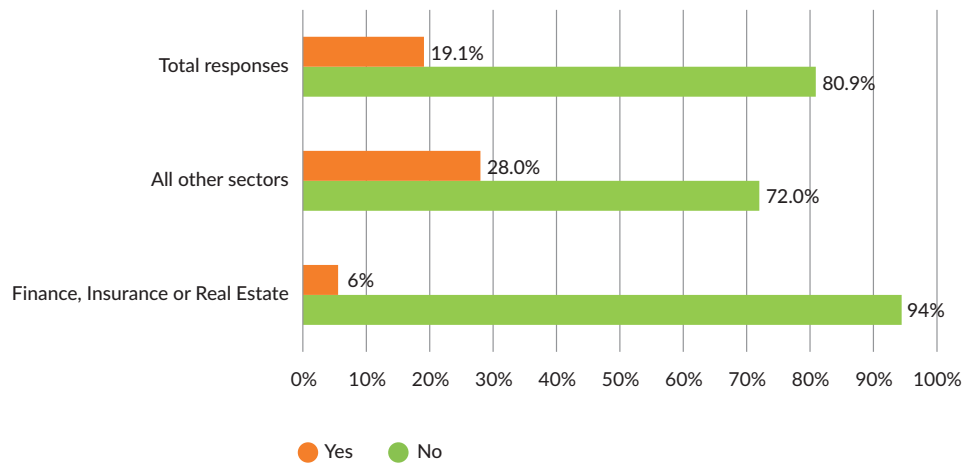
Figure 7: Private Sector Breakdown: Co-working - Finance, Insurance or Real Estate Sector Versus All Other Sectors (%)

Question: Do you engage in co-working? Sample size : 520 (finance); 793 (all other sectors); 1313 (total sectors)

Total responses: Yes 19.1%, No 80.9%
All other sectors: Yes 28.0%, No 72.0%
Finance, Insurance or Real Estate: Yes 6%, No 94%

● Yes ● No

TYPES OF REMOTE WORK
IN IRELAND

Of the Employee Survey's respondents, 48.5% (1720) worked remotely, while 51.5% (1823) did not. Respondents who self-identified as remote workers were then asked a series of questions on how they worked remotely, including frequency, location and devices used.

Of total remote workers surveyed, 16.2% reported that they engaged in co-working. Co-working was more popular in the Private Sector. When asked if they engaged in co-working, 19.1% of Private Sector workers answered "yes", in comparison to 6.9% of Public Sector workers.

Figure 8: Overall Respondents: Working Remotely and Not Working Remotely (%)

Question: Do you work remotely?

Sample size: 3543

● Work Remotely ● Don't Work Remotely
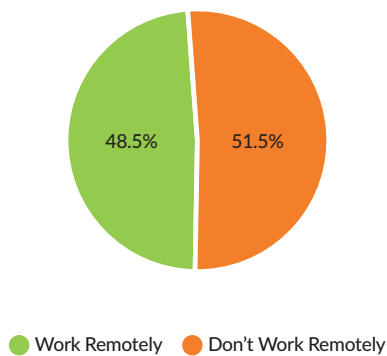
Remote Work: Frequency

Working remotely on a weekly basis was the most popular form of remote work, accounting for 51% of respondents. This was followed by daily remote work (25.1%), though as previously mentioned this is primarily driven by the ICT and Professional, Scientific or Technical sectors.

Daily remote work is significantly less common in the Public Sector, accounting for only 10.1% of Public Sector responses. Similarly, more sparse instances of remote work, on monthly or occasional basis were more common amongst Public Sector respondents. Men are slightly more likely to work remotely on a daily basis, as 29% male respondents answered "every day", in comparison to 22% of female respondents.

Figure 9: Remote Workers: Frequency of Remote Work (%)

Question: How often do you work remotely? Sample size: 1720

25.1%
17.9%
6.0%
51.0%

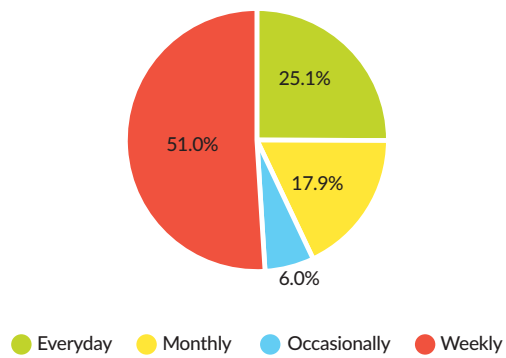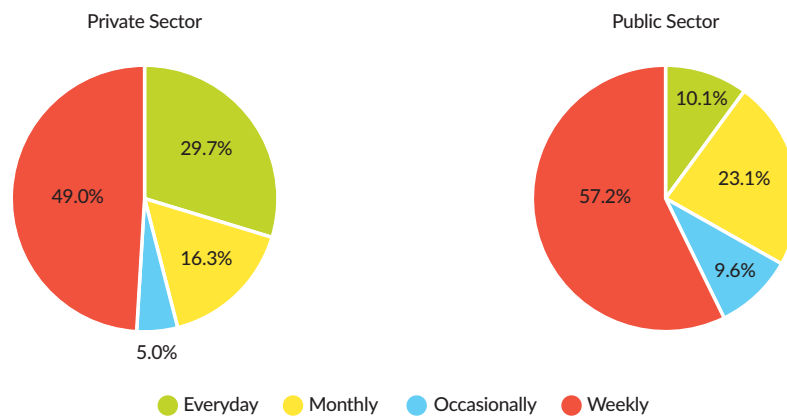● Everyday ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Weekly

Figure 10: Frequency of Remote Work in Public and Private Sectors (%)

Question: How often do you work remotely? Sample size: 1313 (Private Sector); 407 (Public Sector)

Private Sector

29.7%
16.3%
5.0%
49.0%

Public Sector

10.1%
23.1%
9.6%
57.2%

● Everyday ● Monthly ● Occasionally ● Weekly

Remote Work: Devices

Laptops were the most common remote working device, with 85% of respondents, followed by a desktop computer, which accounted for 8% of responses. Self-identified remote workers were also more likely to work using a device provided by their employer, although over a third used their own devices.

Figure 11: Types of Devices Used by Remote Workers (%)
Question: What device do you use when you work remotely? Sample Size: 1720
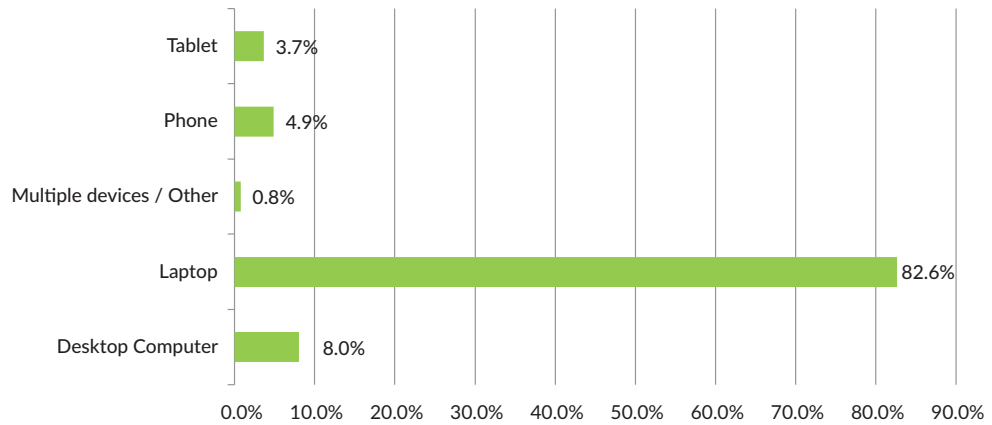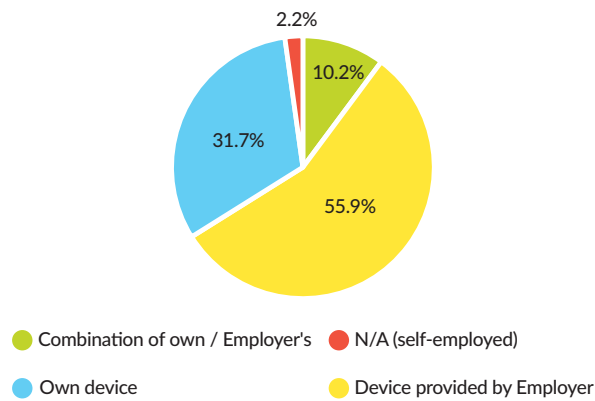

Figure 12: Provision of Devices used by Remote Workers (%)
Question: When you work remotely, do you use your own device or one provided by your employer? Sample size: 1720

Combination of own / Employer's ● N/A (self-employed)
● Own device ● Device provided by Employer

Remote Work: Locations

Homeworking was the more popular mode of remote work. The majority (69.5%) of remote workers surveyed work from home. In addition, a substantial proportion (20.7%) work in multiple locations when working remotely, which encompassed combinations of home, hub and atypical locations such as coffee shops. The least common modes were working when travelling (4.4%) and working from a hub or co-working space (4.9%).

Figure 13: Location of Remote Work

Question: Where do you work when you work remotely? Sample size: 1717

Legend:
- At a co-working space
- At a Hub
- At home
- I work remotely when I travel
- Multiple locations
- Other
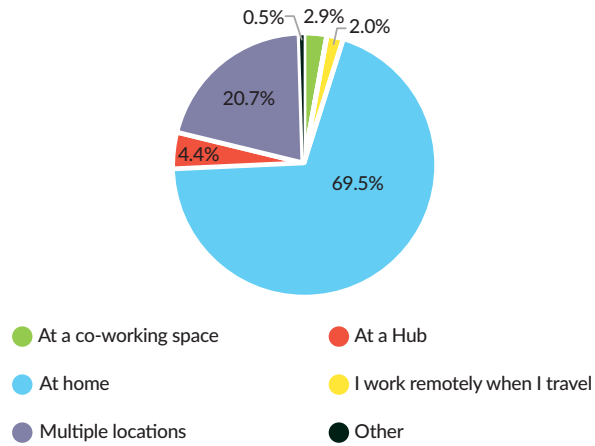
This survey also identified further findings in relation to remote work and the factors that influence remote work adoption, including the challenges and benefits associated with the practice. These are addressed later in the report in the 'Influencing Factors' section.

Current and Ongoing Initiatives

As of 2019 there are many initiatives and programmes underway aimed at facilitating and promoting remote work, coming in separate streams with linked but different end goals in mind. These range from Government reports and initiatives to independent and industry-led efforts. Some of these workstreams present evidence of collaboration between bodies, while others present opportunities for future collaboration. These initiatives, both Government and non-Government led, are detailed below.

STIMULATING REGIONAL GROWTH

A number of initiatives are underway from different bodies which support remote working practices, particularly the uses of hubs across Ireland, with the greater goal of supporting regional employment. For example, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation's Regional Action Plans for Jobs, which ran from 2015-2017. The Plans focused on realising the potential within regions to position them as key contributors to Ireland's national growth and the creation of employment. [22] They contained actions aimed at supporting hubs and encouraging entrepreneurship across regions.

Carrying on from the momentum built by the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, nine Regional Enterprise Plans [23] were launched in 2019 with the aim to grow and sustain jobs across Ireland. The plans contain actions aimed at facilitating and promoting the uptake of remote work in regional hubs over the year to 2020, including the following actions:

- **Midlands:** Establish and market a network of remote working hubs and enterprise landing space in the region that will form the basis of a value proposition to be developed and presented to companies in Dublin, Galway and elsewhere interested in second sites/remote working sites in the Midlands Region. As of November 2019, a network of 20 hubs is in place in the Midlands.
- **Mid-East:** Develop 10 flexible working spaces to facilitate remote workers and drive entrepreneurship in the region based on the MERITS [24] model. This project is on target and due for completion in Q4 2020.
- **Mid-West:** Create and roll-out a coordinated regional strategy to create a regional co-working Smart e-Hub network bringing talent and space together building on the region's value proposition as a location of choice to live and work. Work is currently underway in this area including the launch of DigiClare [25] , an initiative which has seen the opening of four e-hubs across the county, in Feakle, Miltown Malbay, Kilrush and Ennistymon.

- **South-West:** Assess the potential for a remote working initiative targeting particular sectors/companies. Work is ongoing to invite hubs in the South-West to join together in a Tech and Enterprise network. A role had been created to promote best practices locally and internationally to Tech and Enterprise Hubs.

- **South-East:** Develop a Smart Region initiative that uses technology as a vehicle for regional cohesiveness and enhanced impact in support of sustainable, coherent and inclusive economic development across the South-East. Work has begun on formulating The Smart Regional Joint Action Plan and this is due to be complete by the end of Q4 2019.

Work around facilitating and promoting regional hubs is also underway from The Western Development Commission (WDC), which is a statutory body which promotes social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). The WDC has undertaken extensive research on the topic of remote work, including the survey of AEC hubs previously outlined, and the publication of a detailed review of e-Work in the West in March 2017.[26] Its statement of strategy, 'Work Smarter, Live Better' 2019-2024 [27] commits to developing and promoting a cohesive network of enterprise and remote working hubs, resources and supports along the AEC.

[22] Available at: http://www.regionalapj.ie/en/

[23] Available at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Business-Sectoral-Initiatives/Regional-Enterprise-Plans

[24] This refers to the Mid-East Regional Innovation Think Space, based in Naas County Kildare.

[25] Available at: www.DigiClare.ie

[26] Available at: https://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/WDC_Policy-Briefing-no-7.pdf

[27] Available at: https://www.wdc.ie/about-us/wdc-strategy/

ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Enterprise Ireland is placing focus on remote working solutions, particularly the potential of hubs and hub-working, for enterprise development. This is closely tied in with stimulating regional growth, as reflected in its new regional plan 'Powering the Regions' [28] which is part of its strategy to build scale and expand the reach of Irish exporting businesses.

The plan proposes six new national initiatives which aims to futureproof the regions through enhanced productivity and resilience, driving new entrepreneurship, developing urban centres of growth, and supporting the expansion of scaling companies into the regions.

The plan emphasises the importance of smart working and commits to the creation of co-working spaces across the regions. For example, this includes developing an Innovation District in the Midlands to enhance capability and drive economic growth. The Innovation District will house a co-working Hub and RDI capability for the life sciences sector. It is also supporting the development of 10 smart working hubs in the Mid-East- including MERITS in Naas and Kells Tech.

With 'Powering the Regions' Enterprise Ireland also launched the #Worksmartchallenge, a three-year campaign to financially support 10,000 co-working and incubation spaces in regional locations with the following distribution:

- Midlands: 600 co-working and incubator spaces
- Mid-East: 1,300 co-working spaces
- Mid-West: 900 co-working spaces
- South: 1,400 co-working and incubation spaces
- South-East: 900 co-working and incubator spaces
- Dublin: 2,800 co-working and incubation spaces
- West: 1,000 co-working and incubator spaces
- North-East: 600 co-working and incubator spaces
- North-West: 500 co-working and incubator spaces

IDA Ireland has also recognised the potential of remote working solutions from an enterprise development perspective, although this is primarily focused around homeworking, as opposed to hub-working. There are many examples of IDA client companies that have successfully implemented work from home programmes, including Shopify, Amazon, Wayfair and Pramerica, and an increasing number of companies are considering homeworking as pressure on skills availability increases.

As of 2019, it is estimated that there are over 2,500 known homeworking jobs across IDA client companies' portfolios. IDA Ireland, facilitated by key stakeholders, is pursuing opportunities to promote awareness and drive the uptake of homeworking, particularly in regional locations to support job creation. This will extend to their new Statement of Strategy, which will be published in 2020.

[28]Source: Enterprise Ireland, Powering the Regions. 2019. Accessed at: https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/Publications/Reports-Published-Strategies/Enterprise-Ireland-Regional-Plan.pdf

REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE

For enterprise to fully avail of the benefits that remote work poses, several factors need to be considered in terms of rights and responsibilities and the regulations necessary to ensure that a proper remote working policy can be put in place. This need was recognised by the Small Firms Association (SFA) which, following an increase in queries on the topic of health and safety and employer responsibilities related to flexible work, published a detailed set of documents on the topic of flexible work and remote working. This includes a flexible working policy which employers can access online.[29]

The SFA flexible working policy acts as a template which employers can download and edit depending on their business needs. It covers remote working but also extends to flexi-time, compressed hours and part-time and term-time working. SFA also provides a comprehensive risk checklist [30] for employers engaging in remote working solutions, covering the following topics:

- Data Protection obligations
- Health and Safety requirements including bullying
- Equality issues to include reasonable accommodation and harassment
- Obligations under the Organisation of Working Time Act

- Updating contracts, policies and company handbooks

These resources provide an important framework for areas of consideration on the topic of remote work, drawing upon existing regulations set out by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA)- the body responsible for health and safety in the workplace in Ireland.

The HSA regards remote work as homework. Employees working from home are classified as lone workers on the HSA website [31], and refers the reader to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the UK, which has produced a more detailed set of guidelines for lone workers.[32] However, this is a broad category which usually involves employees working on-site with equipment or machinery and does not contain a lot of information that would be directly applicable to someone working from home.

The HSA states that an employer has the same responsibility for the safety and health of employees who work from home as for any other employees. This covers the provision of supervision, education and training and the implementation of sufficient control measures to protect the homeworker.

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[29] Available at: https://www.sfa.ie/Sectors/SFA/GSS.nsf/vPages/Smart_working~sample-flexible-working-policy-08-01-2019?OpenDocument

[30] Available at: https://www.sfa.ie/Sectors/SFA/GSS.nsf/vPages/Smart_working~checklist-for-working-remotely-08-01-2019?OpenDocument

[31] Source: Health and Safety Authority. Hazards – Lone Workers. Accessed at: https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Hazards/Lone_Workers/

[32] Source: Working alone: Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working. Accessed at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf

In line with this, the employer should accept liability for accident or injury of a homeworker as for any other employee, and also provides an online tool for risk assessment which contains guidelines and check lists on risk assessments for different types of businesses.[33] However, as homeworkers are broadly classed under the broad "lone workers" category, there aren't any dedicated sections for risk assessments for an employee working from home or from a hub.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Regulations 2007 outline the requirements in relation to Display Screen Equipment. It specifies that an employer has responsibility to:

- Carry out an analysis or risk assessment of employee workstations
- Provide information to employees in relation to measures which have been implemented
- Provide training to employees in the use of workstations before commencing work with display screen equipment
- Perform a further analysis or risk assessment where an employee transfers to a new workstation or significant new work equipment
- Ensure that the provision of an appropriate eye and eyesight test is made available to every employee

The HSA specify that a person with sufficient training, experience and knowledge should conduct a risk assessment and makes clear that it is not sufficient to allow employees to assess their own workstations.[34] A guide on what a suitable workstation looks like is also provided. However, these Regulations do not cover laptops or portable display screen devices.

Development in technology and its availability has broadened the definitions of workstation and display screens. As a result, EU Directive 90/270/EEC (Display Screen Equipment), which was initially established in 1990, is currently under review by the EU Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work. In addition, the need for a review is likely to be reflected in the upcoming updated EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work: Enhancing the Implementation of Occupational Safety and Health in the EU for the period 2021 – 2027. Therefore, it is possible that there will be changes in Health and Safety guidelines in this area in the future.

[33] Available at: https://www.besmart.ie/

[34] Source: Health and Safety Authority, Display Screen Equipment – HSA. Accessed at: https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Workplace_Health/Manual_Handling_Display_Screen_Equipment/FAQs/Display_Screen_Equipment_FAQs/Display_Screen_Equipment1.html

[35] These hubs will be located in Stranorlar, Co. Donegal; Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo; Tulsk Co. Roscommon and Swinford, Co. Mayo and will be operational in Q1 2020.

RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Extensive work is underway from multiple bodies to promote remote work as a tool for rural and community development, a large volume of which, similar to work from a regional development point of view, is focused on supporting the creation of hubs and the practice of hub-working.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) is currently undertaking a significant amount of work in the area of remote working to support the regeneration of rural areas across Ireland. The most recent work in this area has come through the launch of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), a commitment of €1 billion by the Government under Project Ireland 2040 to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 - 2027. The purpose of the fund is to support job creation in rural areas, address the de-population of rural communities and support improvements in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 people, and outlying areas. A number of projects have been supported by this fund since its inception, including the Digiwest initiative, which aims to establish a network of rural digital working hubs located in the AEC.[35] This project is the result of collaboration between DRCD, Local Authorities and the WDC.

One of the key potential impacts of facilitating remote work in rural areas is maintaining and developing communities. People can stay within their localities whilst pursuing their careers instead of moving or spend their workday in their community instead of commuting elsewhere. This potential has been recognised across a number of bodies.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment recognised this potential, launching a pilot Smart Community initiative in January 2019, with Tubbercurry, County Sligo as its first location. The aim of this pilot is to bring exposure to digital content and technology into a community, while highlighting the supports available locally and the opportunities provided by embracing technology. One of these opportunities is the chance to promote Tubbercurry as a remote working location.

Similar work is underway from Údarás na Gaeltachta, a body which sits under the remit of the Department of Heritage, Culture and the Gaeltacht. Gteic Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta is a network of 31 innovation and digital hubs to be developed across the Gaeltacht Area.[36] This includes six Gaeltacht islands and seven non-Gaeltacht islands to support the sustainability of off-shore island communities.

Gteic hubs provide hot desk and shared space facilities for remote workers in addition to fully equipped office spaces and incubation units with high speed internet access to facilitate innovation and concept development. The gteic project aims to stimulate job creation, to assist remote working, to encourage and enable the return of Diaspóra na Gaeltachta, to facilitate concept development and the growth of new business.

There are eight gteic hubs as October 2019, spanning from Cork (Ballingeary) to Spiddal (Galway), Belmullet (Mayo) and Gweedore (Donegal).[37] Information on these hubs and booking facilities are available on the Údarás na Gaeltachta website.

In addition to the establishment of new hubs and hub networks, work is also underway to transform existing centres of communities to encourage entrepreneurship and participation on a local level. This is the primary aim of the Work Matters at Your Library initiative [38] which was launched in September 2018 by Dublin City Public Libraries and their partners, Dublin City Council's Local Enterprise Centre, Intreo and City of Dublin Education & Training Board. This initiative will see hub spaces across Irish libraries with IT equipment, facilitating access to 500 online learning courses and a range of books on business, journals, newspapers, reports and databases.

This programme is included in the new public library strategy Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities.[39] The strategy states that over the coming years, library buildings will need the appropriate space and layout to accommodate a full range of facilities, equipment and technologies required to underpin library services and support all types of users – for

example, study spaces, adult learning zones, assistive technologies, innovation spaces, digital suites and hot-desk facilities.

The Strategy also aims to deliver the 'My Open Library' service to 100 libraries across the country. This programme offers extended opening hours, providing additional library access to members from 8am to 10pm, seven days a week, 365 days per year.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

As the world of work changes, new skills are required to fully realise the opportunities presented by technology and new ways of working. New programmes are now being introduced to ensure Ireland's workforce is equipped with the skills necessary to work within, or lead, teams that incorporate remote working.

For example, Technology University Dublin (TUD) launched a Level 8 module on the Future of Work in 2019. This module aims to prepare students to understand, initiate and plan for the future of work within their organisations'. The syllabus enables students to learn how to set up, manage and plan for employee engagement and learning in a globalized, virtual world. The delivery method is 60% physical (in person) lecture sessions and 40% online learning.

[36] Source: Udaras.ie, gteic Gréasán Digiteach na Gaeltachta. Site accessed 12/11/2019. Available at: http://www.udaras.ie/en/forbairt-fiontraiochta/gteic

When students have completed this module, they will be able to:

- Understand key communication technologies and apply these to remote working by:

- Knowing how to set up and manage virtual work.

- Developing an awareness of key trends.
- Fostering a set of practical virtual-team communication and management skills.
- Advise and manage remote-working and remote-learning deployments by:
- Understanding the legal and HR issues facing remote employers and employees.
- Sharing international best practices from companies who have successfully deployed virtual work.
- Contribute to the development of internal policies around virtual and remote working.

More work is underway in this area. For instance, Skillnet Ireland has funded the development and provision of training on Managing and Working in Remote Teams, which will be delivered by the Irish Institute of Training and Development in early 2020. It is envisioned that these courses will include:

- Developing Learning & Development and HR Professionals to build the capacity of the organisation to establish the protocols and policies to support successful remote working structures and associated work systems;
- Developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of managers to manage remote workers to ensure their team members are productive and supported to meet their own needs, the needs of the team, and those of the organisation; and
- Developing the skills and knowledge of employees to manage, motivate, and perform in a remote work environment, while, simultaneously, remaining connected with the organisation and delivering company objectives.

The end result of this project will be a programme of training for working in and managing a remote team.

PROMOTING REMOTE WORK

There is also a large volume of work underway which promotes the practice of remote work and employer engagement with these solutions. For example, members and leaders of Grow Remote have worked as advocates and promoters of remote work, with a perspective on community and rural regeneration which aligns closely with the work of both the Department of Rural and Community Development and Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Grow Remote is a Company Limited by Guarantee which has built a volunteer-based community of remote workers. Grow Remote formally launched in 2019 with a Remote Work Conference in the Junction, Offaly. Over this period, Grow Remote has undertaken an extensive amount of work aimed at promoting remote work in Ireland. This includes working collaboratively with the Smart Community committee in Tubbercurry to host a conference in April 2019. Grow Remote has also recently launched a remote jobs portal [40] which enables businesses to post remote or flexible roles and facilitates remote workers in finding jobs that match their preferences.

TechIreland is an independent not for profit established in 2017 which acts as a database for tech companies and tech hubs across Ireland. There are over 200 hubs on the TechIreland database, which are searchable by type and location. Each entry contains information on the hub and a link to its primary domain online, varying from websites to social media accounts. However, this is only a part of its primary objective, which is to promote Irish and Ireland-based innovation internationally online.

[37] Source: The Independent, Regional towns given new tech life as shared working spaces take root. 2019. Accessed at: https://www.independent.ie/business/technology/regional-towns-given-new-tech-life-as-shared-working-spaces-take-root-38625804.html Available at: https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/work-matters

[38] Available at: https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/work-matters

[39] Source: The Department of Rural and Community Development, Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities. 2019. Accessed at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/56d1d4-our-public-libraries-2022-inspiring-connecting-and-empowering-commun/

[40] Available at: https://remotejobsireland.com/

International Policies

Over the course of this research, a number of international policies were considered in order to identify good practice and learnings internationally. Amongst those considered are countries with a high proportion of homeworkers, such as the Netherlands and Finland, as well as examples of flexible working policies such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand. International examples of legislation to protect workers' rights to switch off is also explored, taking the recently introduced Right to Disconnect in France as an example.

UNITED KINGDOM (UK)

While the UK Government does not have a standalone remote working policy, flexible working (including homeworking) is addressed through Labour Market and Health and Safety policy.

According to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), a state body which provides information and advice to employers and employees on workplace relations and employment law, employees in the UK have the right to make a flexible working request if they:

- Have worked for their employer for at least 26 weeks
- Are legally classed as an employee
- Have not made any other flexible working request in the last 12 months

Under this law, employers are required to:

- Look at a request fairly, following the ACAS Code of Practice on flexible working requests
- Have a sound business reason for rejecting any request
- Make a decision within a maximum of 3 months

ACAS has published a Code of Practice on flexible working and work/life balance and more specifically, guidelines on homeworking.[41] The ACAS homeworking guide covers the potential challenges and benefits of homework and provides case studies along with detailed advice on setting up an employee to work from home and managing homeworkers effectively.

[41] Source: HSE. Homeworking – a guide for employers and employees. Accessed at: https://www.acas.org.uk/media/3905/Homeworking---a-guide-for-employers-and-employees/pdf/Homeworking-a-guide-for-employers-and-employees.pdf

The UK Health Service Executive (HSE) addresses homeworking in an online booklet, stating that a lot of work carried out at home is "low-risk, office-type" work.[42] Of the work equipment used at home, the employer is only responsible for the equipment that they supply.

THE NETHERLANDS

With the Flexible Working Act, which came into effect on 1st January 2016, the Netherlands have a comprehensive policy on flexible working in terms of both time and location-based flexibility.

Employees with at least one year of service with an employer which employs at least 10 employees are entitled to request placement at a different location or to work from home. In principle, the employer should honour such a request unless there is a "significant business or service interest" involved in not doing so. The employer might reject a request of a change of workplace based on a number of factors. These include if the change:

- causes safety problems
- causes roster problems
- leads to financial or organisational problems
- is not supported by sufficient work
- is not in line with an established formation or staff budget

Two years after a request has been denied, the employee is entitled to file a new request. These guidelines also apply to employees requesting an increase or decrease in their working hours.

Health and Safety policy in the Netherlands differs significantly from Ireland regarding remote working. If an employee works from home or from a different location (for example an internet café or flexible work location), an employer is less responsible, or not at all responsible, for their working conditions.

There are many potential learnings to be taken from this policy, which provides a framework for employees seeking to request a remote working arrangement and defines the employer's responsibility to provide a fair, objective reason for rejecting a request. This can potentially create a culture where the onus is on the employer to consider requests fairly, rather than employees to justify their request, while providing employers with guidance and support on responding to these requests.

FRANCE

In 2017, legislation was introduced in France to provide workers with the right to disconnect from work. The context of this legislation extends back to 2013, when a national cross-sectoral agreement on quality of life at work encouraged businesses to define periods when devices should be switched off. This right was subsequently made law in 2016 and is now regulated by Article L.2242-17 of the Labour Code in France. [43]

Under this Article, the mandatory negotiations about gender equality and quality of life at work have to plan, under specific conditions 'the terms for the full exercise by the employee of [their] right to disconnect and the setting up by the company of devices to regulate the use of digital tools, in order to ensure the respect of the rest and leave periods as well as that of personal and family life'.

If employers and unions do not reach an agreement, the employer must draw up a charter outlining the procedures for the implementation of the right to disconnect, including training and awareness-raising for employees and managers.

This legislation leaves it to unions and employers to guarantee the efficiency of such a right in a manner that matches with the way the business operates. As a result, the right to disconnect is not uniform and can manifest in several ways, according to the arrangement most suitable for a given business model.

While there is evidence of enforcement of this rule,[44] it has been observed that some companies have made agreements with their employees while others haven't.

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[42] Source: HSE. Homeworkers: Guidance for employers on health and safety. Accessed at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf

FINLAND

Finland has policies on flexible working for employees, though this has primarily applied to flexible working times under the Working Hours Act. However, this is due to extend to the area of remote working, as Finland will shortly be introducing a new Working Hours Act in 2020. This will give the majority of full-time employees the right to decide when and where they work for at least half of their working hours.

The new Act replaces the concept of a 'workplace' with a more neutral concept 'working place', which aims to better address contemporary ways of working. In practice this means that working hours will no longer be tied to a specific place of work, rather working hours will mean time spent working. This has the potential to significantly ease agreements concerning work done from home.

NEW ZEALAND

In New Zealand, under the Employment Relations Amendment Act (2014) all employees can ask at any time to change:

- hours of work (over a day, a week or year)
- days of work
- place of work.

An employer is obliged to give each request fair consideration and to respond to a given request no later than one month after receiving it.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment provides online toolkits for employers and employees on the protocol for requesting flexible working arrangements, responding to such requests and facilitating them should they be accepted. [45] This includes a 'request for flexible working arrangements checklist', which sets out the steps required in requesting flexible working arrangements.

FINDINGS

There is much work underway internationally in the area of remote work as a subset of flexible working, from legislative rights to request remote working arrangements to laws protecting people's right to switch off outside agreed working hours.

Stakeholder engagement has indicated that policies similar to those in the UK and the Netherlands are already being implemented in Ireland at company level, giving employees the right to request a flexible working arrangement and providing a framework for employees and managers to make, and respond to, such requests. That these practises are already operating successfully within Ireland provides evidence that the current legal framework in Ireland allows these progressive approaches. These approaches could also form the basis for national level guidance.

[43] Legifrance, Code du travail – Article L2242-17. Accessed 08/11/2019 at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCodeArticle.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006072050&idArticle=LEGIARTI000006901767&dateTexte=&categorieLien=cid

[44] Source: The Telegraph, British firm ordered to pay €60,000 by French court for breaching employee's 'right to disconnect' from work. 2018. Accessed at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/01/british-firm-ordered-pay-60000-french-court-breaching-employees/

[45] Available at: https://www.employment.govt.nz/workplace-policies/productive-workplaces/flexible-work/

Influencing Factors for Remote Working

Engaging in remote work can depend on several key factors, including the availability of broadband, the openness of employers to embracing flexible working models and the growing demand for skills within organisations. These key factors have been identified through a combination of desk research, the DBEI Remote Work in Ireland Employee Survey and direct stakeholder engagement. As part of this engagement a Remote Working Consultation Forum was held on 18th July 2019. It was attended by over 60 key stakeholders from across business, Government and the remote working community. The areas identified in this research differ for employers and employees, both of which are detailed further in this section.

Influencing Factors for Employees

Influencing factors for remote workers and people who wanted to work remotely were explored in the Employee Survey through questions about motivators, benefits, challenges, and barriers to remote work. Through these questions, two key influencing factors strongly emerged - flexibility and travel. Greater flexibility emerged as the primary motivator for those working remotely (43.5%) and the most common reason non-remote employees would like to do so (40.4%). This was followed closely by reduced commute, which accounted for 40.5% self-identified remote workers and 39.9% non-remote respondents. The motivating factors are detailed in Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 14: Motivating Factors for Remote Workers (%)
Question: What was your primary motivator to work remotely? Sample size: 1423
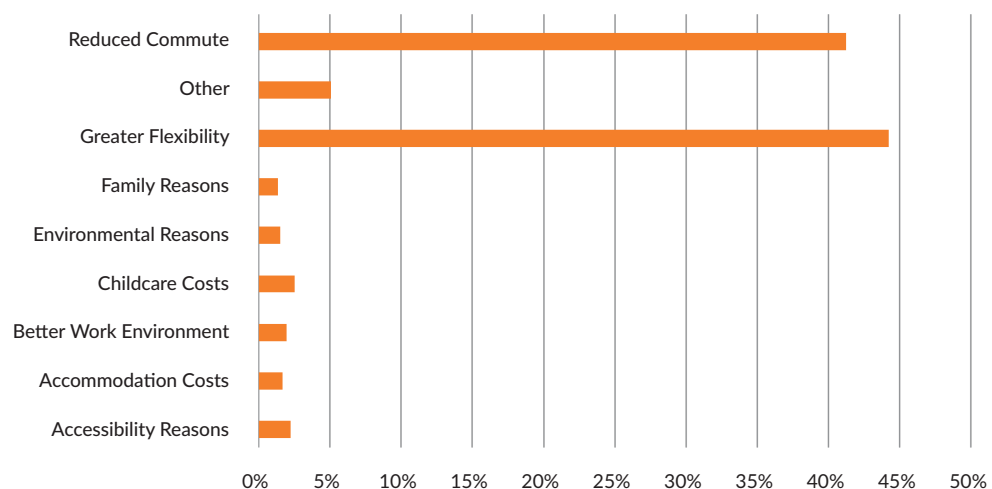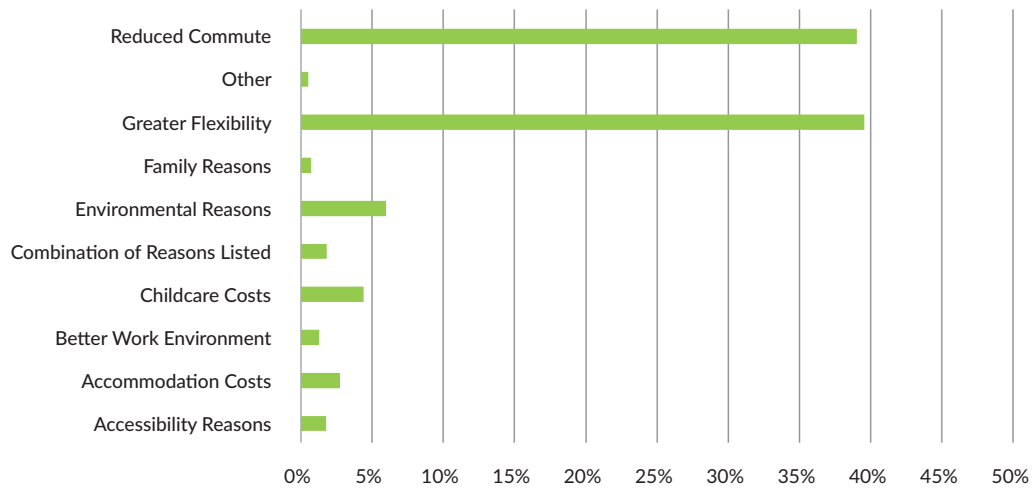
Figure 15: Motivating Factors for Non-Remote Workers (%)
Question: Why do you want to work remotely? Sample size: 1506

FLEXIBILITY

As evidenced in the Employee Survey results, flexibility is one of the key motivators for people engaging, or seeking to engage, with remote work, with 43.5% of respondents identifying greater flexibility as their primary motivator for working remotely. Flexibility was the most popular motivator for those in the Private Sector (45.5%) and the second most popular in the Public Sector (37.1%). Overall of respondents who don't work remotely but would like to, 40.4% identified greater flexibility as their reason for wanting to do so. Flexibility was identified as a primary motivating factor, for remote and non-remote workers, across age, gender, region and sector.

Flexibility was also identified as a key benefit of working remotely at the Remote Working Consultation Forum. This was highlighted as an area of importance in the context of striking a balance between work and family, particularly for women returning to the workforce. However, flexibility of working hours and place is not inherent when working remotely. The Eurofound and ILO report Working Anytime, Anywhere: The Effects on the World of Work (2017) argued that while remote work offers more flexibility, autonomy and productivity, it is also associated with longer working hours, work intensification and interference with personal life. [46]

This is supported by the 2018 research paper Striking a Balance: Reconciling Work and Life in the EU [47], which found that, while employees may be reluctant to leave positions where flexibility is offered, the relationship between remote work and work–life balance depends on a number of factors. The report found that remote work which substitutes for time in

the workplace facilitates the flexibility for work/life balance. However, when it results in extra work, the opposite is the case. Therefore, whilst remote working can certainly result in greater flexibility for employees, it is not without challenges that affect employee's work/life balance. Usually, there is greater flexibility for employees when the arrangement is voluntary and substitutional from time spent in the office, however this is not always the case.

[46] Source: Eurofound, Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of Work. 2017. Accessed at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/working-anytime-anywhere-the-effects-on-the-world-of-work

[47] Source: Eurofound Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU. 2018. Accessed at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2018/striking-a-balance-reconciling-work-and-life-in-the-eu

COST EFFECTIVENESS

The adoption of remote working solutions is often viewed as a more affordable option of living and working for employees due to its impact on several areas, which are detailed below.

Housing. For those living in cities, the cost of housing can be a major influencing factor when engaging in remote work. This is particularly relevant when considering that residential property prices and rents have been growing consistently across Ireland since 2013. [48] Living and working in cities can be especially expensive- for example, according to analysis of Daft data carried out by Indecon, the monthly average rent in Dublin is €1,772 - 45% higher than the national monthly average (€1,227). [49] Remote work provides opportunities for employees to live and work outside cities, reducing the expectation to move or commute into a city to pursue a career. This is reflected in the Employee Survey- of the 42 respondents who cited accommodation costs as their reason for wanting to work remotely, the majority were based in Dublin (85.7%).

Childcare: Mitigating childcare costs is often cited as a key benefit of working remotely. In Ireland, the net cost of childcare is 28% of the average wage of a couple, while the EU average was 12%. [50] It is therefore understandable that remote work could be linked with mitigating the need for childcare as it can enable a parent to be at home when working. However, this is not a sustainable solution to the cost of childcare. The amended Code of Practice on e-Working states that, while it facilitates and contributes to work- life balance, e-Working should never be used as a substitute for childcare. [51]

This is reflected in the Employee Survey, which showed that just 2.5% of remote workers cited childcare costs as their primary motivator for doing so. For those respondents not currently engaged in remote work, significantly more (4.5%) cited childcare costs as their reason for wanting to work remotely. Notably, of overall respondents who cited childcare costs as their primary reason for wanting to work remotely, 75% were female.

[48] Source: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Cost of Doing Business 2019. Available at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Cost-of-Doing-Business-2019.pdf

[49] Source: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Indecon Review of the Enterprise Agencies Economic Appraisal Model. 2017. Accessed at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Review-of-the-Enterprise-Agencies-Economic-Appraisal-Model.pdf

[50] Source: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Cost of Doing Business 2019. Available at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Cost-of-Doing-Business-2019.pdf

[51] Source: Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment, e-Working in Ireland: New Ways of Living and Working: Code of Practice. 2000.

While the cost of childcare is not a primary key driving factor for remote work, non-cost related family issues, such as increasing family time and time with children, emerged under this category in the Employee Survey. Therefore, while the cost of childcare is not a primary motivator for employees, remote work can afford parents increased family time and a better work/life balance, which is addressed later in this report.

Travel. Commuting time and its associated costs come through as a key influencing factor for employees when considering remote working solutions, both for those living outside cities and those living in cities. A recent study carried out by Indecon on behalf of DBEI states the average commuting time is estimated to be 30.5 minutes for those living in Dublin. [52] This study estimates a cost to the economy of commuting time for an individual in Dublin of around €4,000. Reductions in travel and its associated costs is explored further below.

REDUCED COMMUTES

The Employee Survey identified reduced commute as the key motivator for remote workers in the Public Sector (41%). It was the second most common reason amongst the Private Sector (40.4%). Reduced commute was a common reason across regions, though particularly high in the Mid-East and Midlands regions. In the Mid-East, 62.4% of respondents cited reduced commute as their primary motivator for working remotely. In the Midlands, 56% of respondents cited reduced commute as their primary motivator for working remotely.

Reduced commute also came through as a strong influencing factor for those who would like to start working remotely. This is most common amongst respondents living in the Mid-East (63.2%), West (43.3%) and Midlands (43.1%).

Over the course of this research there have been multiple viewpoints on the potential of remote work to reduce commutes and the emissions they produce. It has been observed that remote working does not necessarily ensure a person does not commute during their work day- for instance, hub-workers will still have to travel to the space they work from. However, recent research has indicated that the practice of remote work can reduce travel patterns. A 2018 study by the Belgian Federal Public Service Mobility and Transport considers the potential of telework to reduce travel for employees. [53]

At the time of the research, only 55% of teleworkers would make an extra trip during their teleworking day, which would often happen outside of rush hours. This provides evidence that working remotely has the potential to reduce commutes, which has benefits that range from environmental to personal health impacts.

[52] Source: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Indecon Review of the Enterprise Agencies Economic Appraisal Model. 2017. Accessed at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Review-of-the-Enterprise-Agencies-Economic-Appraisal-Model.pdf

[53] Source: https://www.leuvenpubliclaw.com/a-telework-cure-for-traffic-congestion-telework-policies-in-the-netherlands-and-finland-to-inform-a-belgian-prognosis/

HEALTH IMPACTS

The wellbeing-related benefits of remote work are well-recorded. A 2014 study by PGi found that 80% of respondents reported higher morale after engaging in remote work. 82% reported lower stress levels, and 69% reported lower absenteeism. [54]

However, remote work can also have physical impacts such as neck, back and shoulder pain. This emphasises the importance of a proper work station. Workplace Risk Assessments are important in this context- however, in practice these can be difficult to undertake in localised workstations.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work published guidelines on Workplace Risk Assessment for Teleworkers in 2008, [55] which included a checklist available to businesses to use as a model when carrying out risk assessments for employees who were teleworking. However, this publication pre-dates the most recent wave of digitalisation and does not account for more recent forms of remote work.

Mental health impacts such as loneliness, feelings of isolation and anxiety are also key factors which have come through in desk research and stakeholder consultation. In the Employee Survey, 12.1% of respondents who worked remotely cited mental health impacts as the biggest challenge of working remotely. This is explored further under Work/Life Balance.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

While there are many advantages associated with remote work and the flexibility it can offer, recent studies have shown it can also lead to increased stress for workers associated with the inability to disconnect.

This topic was of focus at the Key Stakeholder Consultation, where work/life balance was identified as both a key benefit and challenge of engaging in remote work. On one hand, it was identified that one's work/life balance can be enhanced by home or hub-working, due to the reduction of commuting time and proximity to the home. However, on the other hand, separating work and family life was also identified as a potential obstacle, both when working from or close to one's home.

This was further reflected in the Employee Survey, where work/life balance emerged as the key benefit of working remotely, accounting for 59.9% of respondents. The flexibility remote working provides, however, offers its own challenges to work/life balance.

When working remotely employees are potentially constantly available to their employers and pressurised by either their own work ethic or their manager. This can often result in difficulties for the employee to switch off. The results of this are prolonged working hours, and the lack of sufficient rest. Remote workers are also more likely to work when sick, termed "virtual presenteeism". [56] This emerged in the Employee Survey. When respondents were asked the biggest challenge of working remotely, "switching off / avoiding overwork" came through as the most common challenge of working remotely, with 46.7% of total responses. Of those who cited "a better work/life balance" as the greatest benefit of working remotely, 48.2% named "switching off / avoiding overwork" as the greatest challenge.

[54] Source: PGi Survey State of Telecommuting 2014. Accessed at: https://www.slideshare.net/PGi/state-of-telecommuting-2014-pgi-report/1

[55] Source: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, E-fact 33 - Risk assessment for Teleworkers. 2008. Accessed at: https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/e-facts/efact33/view

[56] Source: Eurofound. Flexible working in the digital age - Is everyone a winner? 2019. Accessed at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pt/events/webinar-flexible-working-digital-age

This is reflected in the recent Financial Services Union (FSU) Working Conditions Survey, which found that a quarter of respondents [57] are expected to answer calls and check emails outside of working hours. [58] Just over half of respondents felt that their employer had not put in place measures to prevent employees' over-use of technology for work purposes. Similarly, of those from the Finance, Insurance or Real Estate sector who responded to the Employee Survey, 44.3% cited switching off / avoiding overwork and a further 7.8% cited mental health impacts as the biggest challenges of working remotely.

These factors may lead to higher levels of anxiety in remote workers than those in traditional roles. Being conscious of the risks and creating an awareness about how managing this way of working is important in order to fully realise the benefits of its use. The provision of training to use systems and self-manage effectively is a way to prevent these impacts.

AVAILABILITY OF BROADBAND

An employee's ability to work remotely depends largely on the availability of broadband in their area. This was reflected in the Stakeholder Consultation. However, it did not come through as strongly in the results of the Employee Survey. When employees who would like to work remotely were asked their reason for not doing so just 4.2% (61) of respondents cited a lack of broadband access. Of these respondents, 23% (14) lived in the West, 14.8% (9) in the Border region and 13.1% (8) in the Midlands. The increased ability to work remotely is an expected key benefit of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan. The establishment of hubs and initiatives, such as Work Matters at your Library and the rollout of delivery of gigabit to hubs in rural areas [59], can act as solutions for those who wish to work remotely but cannot access high speed broadband from their homes.

CULTURAL FACTORS

The 2018 Vodafone survey found that 34% of employees in Ireland believe company culture is the biggest barrier to smart working. This aligns with the findings of the 2018 Flash Eurobarometer 470: Work-life balance [60] for employees where flexible work arrangements were available in their place of work, nearly one in three were discouraged from making use of flexible working arrangements by managers or supervisors. 18.7% of total respondents identified cultural factors as a major influencing factor in the Employee Survey. These respondents tended to work in large companies – 24.2% of those working in companies with over 250 employees cited cultural

factors as the reason for a lack of remote working policy, compared to 16.9% of companies with 50 – 250 employees and 12.7% of those with less than 50 employees.

This is reflected in the Remote Working Consultation Forum which strongly emphasised the importance of culture in implementing remote work. A mindset and culture which enables change was identified as a vital tool for business in introducing remote work policies, including trust, communication and outreach.

Trust was an aspect of workplace culture that was identified as being particularly important in enabling remote work. All stakeholder groups consulted cited that trust between employers and employees was both a key enabler and barrier to remote work adoption. Employers cited fears of the difficulty of managing the output of remote employees. Equally many respondents of the Employee Survey also cited that a lack of trust between employers and employees was inhibiting the adoption of remote work in their organisations.

[57] Please note: respondents to this survey were employees working in the Financial Services sector.

[58] Source: Financial Services Union. Technology, Work & Skills. The Impact of Technology on Employees. 2019. Accessed at: https://www.fsunion.org/download/pdf/fsu_ul_technology_work_and_skills.pdf

[59] Available at: https://siro.ie/about-us/gigabit-hubs/

[60] Source: European Commission. Flash Eurobaremeter 470: Work-life balance. 2018.

Influencing Factors for Employers

There are many influencing factors at play for employers when considering remote working solutions. These can range from business benefits such as accessing and retaining talent, increasing productivity and improving cost effectiveness while engaging in more sustainable ways of working. There are also challenges that still exist for businesses, such as a lack of clarity on how to implement a HR policy on remote work, access to guidance and cost-related factors such as ICT requirements. These are all explored further in this section.

EMPLOYEE DEMAND

Employee demand for remote working solutions is an increasingly important influencing factor for employers. This was identified as one of the key drivers of employers' adoption of remote work solutions during the Consultation Forum and through direct consultation with businesses. This driver has manifested in two ways. Firstly, there is demand from existing employees, which is often facilitated as it has been identified as having motivational effects.

Secondly, demand has also arisen for businesses when recruiting new talent, where flexible and remote working options are increasingly important factors for attracting new potential employees.

Employee demand for flexible options like remote work is undeniably growing- a 2018 Vodafone survey of 600 participants consisting of employees and Irish SME representatives shows that 33% of employees see flexibility, which was used synonymously with a remote working policy, as the top priority in their current job, a figure which rises to 50% for future roles. As such, it is also a key factor in a company's attractiveness, with 34% of respondents likely or very likely to move job for it. [61]

This comes through in our Employee Survey, which indicates a significant demand from employees who don't work remotely. Of the Employee Survey's respondents who did not work remotely, 82.7% indicated that they would like to.

[61] Source: https://n.vodafone.ie/business/smart-business.html

Figure 16: Demand for Remote Work Amongst Non-Remote Employees (%)
Question: Would you like to work remotely? Sample size: 1822

● No   ● Yes
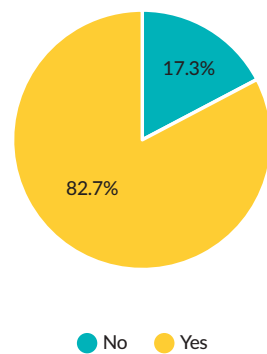
ACCESS TO TALENT

As previously outlined, while Ireland has experienced strong growth in employment over recent years, the participation rate, at 62.1% as of Q3 2019, has remained constant. This means that as demand for talent grows and the labour market becomes tighter, enterprises are placing focus on attracting and retaining highly skilled workers.

The adoption of remote working solutions is something employers can offer to achieve this- not only because it is a solution growing in popularity, but because remote work can remove some of the barriers to work for people with caring responsibilities, older people and people with disabilities by removing the need to travel into an employer's premises to work every day.

The potential for remote working to unlock access to talent was identified as an important influencing factor in the Remote Working Consultation Forum. However, it was acknowledged that this impact may differ across sectors. Solutions such as a dedicated recruitment platform for remote roles were suggested in this context, as this would open doors for businesses to find talent interested specifically in working remotely.

PRODUCTIVITY

A two-year study carried out on CTrip, a Chinese travel agency, which piloted a homeworking programme amongst 249 Call centre employees for 9 months, found that homeworking led to a 13% performance increase. [62] Approximately 9% of this increase was from working more minutes per shift due to fewer breaks and sick-days. The remaining 4% was due to more calls per minute, which employees attributed to finding it easier to concentrate in a quieter working environment.

A 2012 study from the University of Melbourne found that teleworkers are more productive if they have the ability to work away from the office, particularly on demanding tasks that are difficult, complex and non-routine. [63] Additionally, teleworkers will often make productive use of the time saved when not having to commute to the office.

This study also found that adequate technology to enable and support telework is required to improve productivity. As such, basic collaboration and networking tools, mobile devices and a supportive network infrastructure need to be in place in order

to achieve productive outcomes in the context of remote working.

This came through in the Employee Survey. Although it was not listed as an option, a considerable number of respondents cited a better working environment/ increased productivity when working from home both as a motivator for working remotely and the key reason respondents wanted to start working remotely.

This poses a key benefit of remote work for both employers and employees; for employers, it is a way to increase productivity and afford employees the option to carry out their work from a location they might find easier to concentrate in.

[62] Nicholas Bloom & James Liang & John Roberts & Zhichun Jenny Ying, 2015. "Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment."

[63] Source: Bosua, Rachelle & Gloet, Marianne & Kurnia, Sherah & Mendoza, Antonette & Yong, Jongsay. (2012). Telework, Productivity and Wellbeing. Telecommunications Journal of Australia. 63.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

As with employees, increased cost effectiveness is an influencing factor for employers, and reductions in overhead costs is a much-discussed benefit of remote work. For example, it is increasingly expensive to run a business from cities in Ireland, with the past year seeing a steady increase in commercial property prices and the cost of constructing office space. In the office rental market, in the last five years, prices are up 15.9% in Dublin (suburbs) and up 16.5% in Galway. [64] In this context, the adoption of remote work policies offers a potential solution to the rising costs of office space by allowing firms to reduce desks or engage with hubs to reduce the need for a large-scale headquarters. Companies have implemented remote working policies and seen these benefits. For example, Dell reports saving approximately $12 million per year in real estate costs by consolidating and creating more flexible workspace options globally. [65]

However, costs can still factor in elsewhere. The results of the Remote Working Consultation Forum reflected financial factors and the investment of time into implementing change as preventative factors for business. It was acknowledged that SMEs may not have the time to make the changes necessary to facilitate the introduction of a remote working policy without support.

HR POLICY

Difficulties implementing a formal HR policy on remote working was identified as a key influencing factor for employers. Employers experience barriers to establishing a HR policy on remote work and many organisations have reservations about setting out a written policy.

This is for a number of reasons, including the inability to make all roles within an organisation remote and potential equality issues that may arise from this. A lack of clarity on Occupational Health and Safety requirements also leads to fear of litigation in the case of an accident. This problem doesn't seem to be confined to Ireland; the 2014 EU Survey Enterprise New Risks recorded that only 29% of companies with employees working from home carry out risk assessments that extend to the home. [66] Employers must also comply with the Organisation of Working Time Act and tracking employee hours for someone working from home presents difficulties for businesses.

However, this is not to say that employees in organisations without remote work policies are not engaging in remote work. Stakeholder engagements have indicated this leads to ad hoc arrangements, which can potentially contribute to a 'nod and wink' culture around remote working, leading to employees feeling like they are 'getting away' with something. It is not uncommon for employees to work remotely on an ad-hoc basis. The Employee Survey reflected that of the respondents who worked remotely, 48.4% answered either "no" or "I don't know" to the question "Does your organisation have a remote working policy?".

According to the Employee Survey, these instances are more common in the Public Sector than the Private Sector. Over half of remote workers in the Public Sector (59.5%) do so without a remote working policy or an awareness of such a policy compared to 49% of those in the Private Sector.

[64] Source: Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Cost of Doing Business, 2019. Available at: https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Cost-of-Doing-Business-2019.pdf

[65] Source: CNN article. Dell really wants you to work from home … if you want. 2016. Accessed at: https://money.cnn.com/2016/06/09/pf/dell-work-from-home/index.html

[66] Source: European Risk Observatory, Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2). 2014. Accessed at: https://osha.europa.eu/en/european-survey-enterprises-new-and-emerging-risks-esener

Figure 17: Remote Workers' Answers – Does your organisation have a remote working policy? (%)

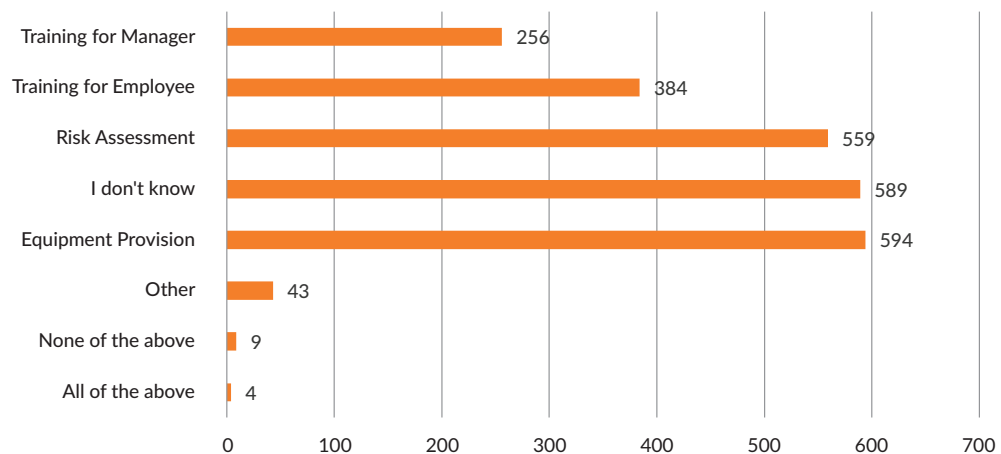Sample size: 1313 (Private Sector); 407 (Public Sector)

Public Sector

40.5%   59.5%

Private Sector

45.0%   55.0%

● No / I don't know   ● Yes
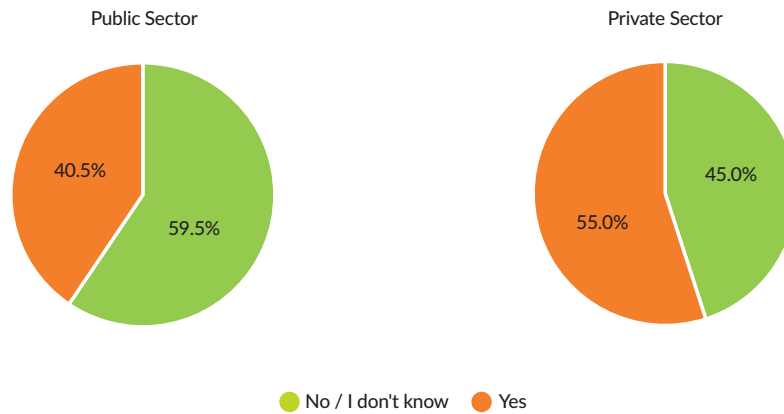
Respondents who indicated their organisation had a remote working policy were asked what areas were covered. [67] According to responses to this question, equipment provision and risk assessment were the most common areas covered by internal remote working policies. A large proportion of respondents clicked "I don't know", which decreases the reliability of Figure 17 when measuring those who are working in an organisation with no dedicated HR policy. However, it does indicate uncertainty about the components covered in their organisation's policy.

Figure 18: HR Policies - Areas Covered

Question: Which of the following areas does your organisation's HR Policy cover? Sample Size: 2438

|	
Training for Manager	256
Training for Employee	384
Risk Assessment	559
I don't know	589
Equipment Provision	594
Other	43
None of the above	9
All of the above	4

[67] **Please note:** When evaluating survey results, it is advisable to consider behavioural insights and biases that could impact the responses. This is particularly relevant for this question, as the first listed answer (equipment provision) was the most popular, followed by the second presented (risk assessment), and so on, excluding "I don't know" which was included in a number of responses. Therefore, the results below should be considered with caution.

Of those respondents who indicated their organisation did not have a remote working policy, 21.9% answered "cultural factors" as to why this was. Often employees highlighted lack of trust and resistance at top level under this category. However, the majority of respondents were uncertain as to why there was no formal remote working policy in place, with 53.1% answering "I don't know".

Figure 19: Reasons for a Lack of HR Policy (%)
Question: [if not] why doesn't your organisation have a remote working policy?   Sample size: 1131
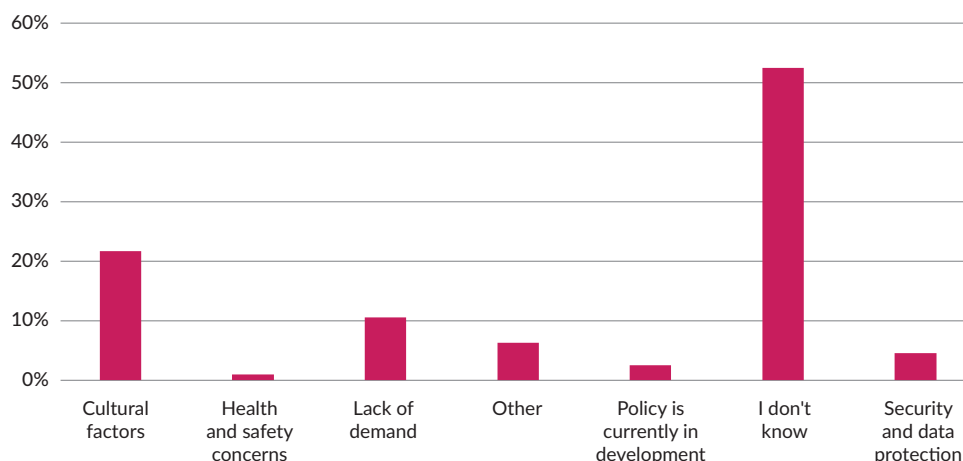
AWARENESS AND GUIDANCE

The need for support for employers and employees seeking to use remote working solutions was a topic of much discussion during stakeholder consultation, from the Consultation Forum to direct conversations with employers and employer representative bodies.

There are many possible impacts which may emerge when an employee works outside of a main office, both positive and negative. This has been reflected in direct consultations undertaken with employers, where the broad set of impacts has been cited as reason for the need for guidance in this area. This report has earlier outlined strong bodies of work in the area of employer guidance, such as the SFA checklist and draft policy, as well as the Code of Practice on e-Working. These documents outline a number of considerations for employers and employees that reflect the views arising from our stakeholder consultations. The key areas identified include:

- **Voluntary nature of teleworking:** Remote work should be voluntary for the worker and the employer concerned. Remote working arrangements may be required as part of a worker's initial job description or it may be engaged in as a voluntary arrangement subsequently.
- **Employment conditions:** Employees working remotely benefit from the same rights as comparable workers at the employer's premises. These rights are guaranteed by applicable legislation and collective agreements.
- **Data protection:** The employer is responsible for taking the appropriate measures to ensure the protection of data used and processed by the teleworker for professional purposes. This should reflect GDPR obligations.
- **Privacy:** The employer respects the employee's privacy. This includes regulations on the introduction of any monitoring systems, which need to be balanced with the Organisation of Working Time. This also, however, presents questions about carrying out risk assessment when an employee is working from home.

- **Equipment:** The employer is responsible for providing, installing and maintaining the equipment necessary for the remote worker, unless they use their own equipment.
- **Health and safety – including bullying:** The employer is responsible for the protection of the occupational health and safety of the teleworker. It is crucial that businesses conduct a risk assessment for employees who work from home or in a hub. Businesses will need to liaise with hubs so that they can provide them with the necessary information to conduct the risk assessment.
- **Organisation of work:** Workload and performance standards of an employee working remotely are equivalent to those of comparable workers at the employer's premises. The Organisation of Working Time Act is an important consideration in this regard.
- **Training:** Remote workers should have the same access to training and career development as comparable workers at the employer's premises and are subject to the same appraisal policies as these are their workers. Remote workers should receive appropriate training targeted at the technical equipment at their disposal.
- **The collective rights of remote workers:** Remote workers have the same collective rights as workers at the employer's premises.
- **Updating contracts, policies and company handbooks:** Once a business has decided to engage with remote working solutions, it is important that contracts, policies and company handbooks are updated to reflect this change. If an employee applies for and is offered remote working options, it is essential that their contract of employment is updated to reflect this new change.
- **Equality issues: Reasonable accommodation:** If a business engages in remote working, it should be open and available to all employees and the grounds for refusing their request must be objective and valid. It is essential that no one group is discriminated against under the nine grounds under the Equality Act. The SFA checklist suggests businesses should consider remote work when considering reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities.
- **Equality issues: Harassment:** Under the Employment Equality Acts, sexual harassment and harassment of an employee in the workplace is against the law. The act of unwanted harassment or sexual harassment relates to co-workers, the employer, clients, customers or other business contacts of the employer, including anyone the employer could reasonably expect the worker to come in to contact with. It extends beyond the workplace and includes conferences, training outside of the workplace and may extend to work-related social events. Therefore, the scope of these provisions includes remote working options.

Because of this, the presence of a dedicated overarching HR policy with measurable objectives and outcomes was identified as a particularly important enabler of remote work for businesses.

ICT REQUIREMENTS

ICT Requirements have come through as key challenges for both employees and employers. For remote workers the challenge lies in maintaining cybersecurity and accessing IT support when working outside of a main office. For businesses aiming to introduce a remote working policy, barriers may lie in access to the necessary technological infrastructure, including access to high speed broadband, the enabling software to work remotely and cybersecurity.

SUSTAINABILITY

Climate action has been increasingly focussed on in recent years, marked by the publication of the Climate Action Plan to move towards a more sustainable and clean future. As such, there is increasing onus on employers to reduce their carbon footprint, which has come through in direct consultation with business. The enterprise sector has a dedicated section under the Climate Action Plan, being tasked with reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 10%-15% by 2030. In order to meet this target enterprises must undertake initiatives within the work place and throughout their work practices as a whole that will result in the reduction of GHG. This has led to businesses considering remote work solutions to decrease harmful emissions and energy use.

Sustainability ties in with employee demand, as evidenced in stakeholder engagement and the Employee Survey. The proportion of remote workers who chose to do so for "environmental reasons" was low, representing only 1.5% of all responses. However, this rises to 6.1% of people who want to work remotely, indicating that reducing one's carbon footprint is becoming increasingly important to those considering their working situations.

Figure 20: Environmental Reasons as a Motivator for Remote Workers and Non-Remote Workers (%)
Sample size: 1423 (remote workers); 1506 (non-remote workers)
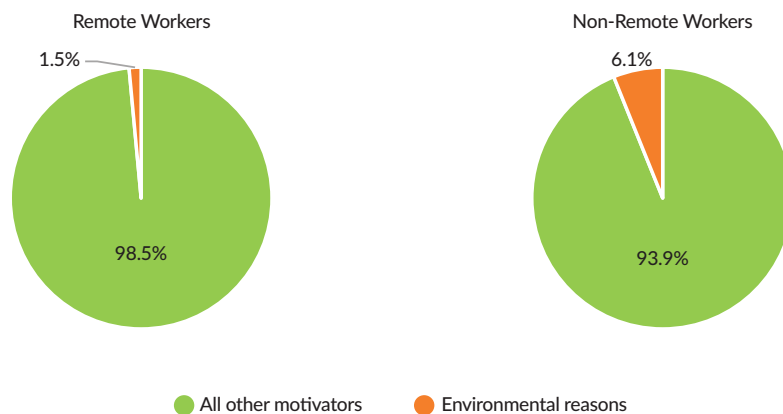
This is a significant pull for employers, and one with great potential. Considering that "reduced commute" is the key motivating factor for employees who work remotely, and a significant pull for employees who don't, there is a great synergy in business adopting remote work frameworks which enable employees to reduce their time in traffic and lower the emissions produced as a result.

MAKING IT WORK: USEFUL TOOLS FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

The current framework for engaging in remote work in Ireland is relatively informal. There are, however, a number of tools and resources aimed at enabling and promoting the practice available to employers and employees.

Finding or posting remote jobs:

- Remote Jobs Ireland, a curated list of remote job vacancies posted by employers in Ireland.
- Abodoo, an Enterprise Ireland client company that hosts a free to access smart matching careers platform for people and companies interested in remote roles.
- Abodoo also hosts an interactive Talent Heat Map, which outlines the location of talent and skills across Ireland. This enables employers to identify the location of talent when considering relocation or establishment of secondary locations.

Finding a hub or co-working space

- While there is no national portal for hubs at present, there a number of online databases of hubs with remote working facilities in Ireland such as TechIreland, and the list of co-working spaces on the Abodoo website.

Enabling software for online communication and collaboration

- The SFA website offers an overview of key programmes that enable remote working, including Canva (design), Evernote (notebook app), Zoom (video-conferencing), Trello (project management and team organisation) and Slack (real-time instant messaging)
- Other popular software programmes include Fetch Softworks, file transfer software, and Basecamp, an online project management tool.

Training/Workshops for Implementing Remote Working

- There are emerging consultancy offerings aimed at advising on the implementation of remote working solutions in Irish businesses. These include OperateRemote, which offers coaching, mentoring, workshops, and broader consultancy on remote working.

Locating fellow remote workers

- Grow Remote is encouraging the establishment of "chapters" in Ireland and internationally to connect remote workers, with the aim of increasing the number of employment opportunities available in local communities, particularly in rural areas. Grow Remote has also made the details on the location and membership of these chapters available online.

Key Implications

This research has demonstrated that remote working is a flexible working solution that is increasing in popularity amongst employers and employees. Whether it is working from home or from hubs, the prevalence of employees partaking in remote working arrangements is growing. The impacts of this are broad. As outlined, in embracing remote work as part of innovation and technical change, it has the potential to improve productivity, attract and retain talent, increase participation in the labour force and assist in the transition to a low carbon economy. These benefits correspond to the five key Pillars of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 that are crucial for Ireland's economic success. However, in order to ensure that Ireland can reap the benefits that remote working has to offer, a number of important factors should be considered going forward:

1. GUIDANCE

It is arguable that the historical lack of legislation or policy on remote work has effectively left the responsibility for its uptake to employers and managers. The lack of a clear framework or awareness of the options available to support them has presented a barrier to remote work. In particular, multiple stakeholder groups identified the absence of official guidelines for employers, employees and HR professionals on the topic of remote work.

It is clear that employers are under increasing demand from their staff to offer remote working solutions. However, many are unclear how to manage the various aspects of what this entails. As outlined, employers have concerns with encouraging remote working stemming from a lack of clarity on responsibility and ownership. This has resulted in many companies not committing to official HR-implemented remote working policies, but rather preferring staff to engage with remote working on ad hoc basis.

This is a point of contrast to other European countries who provide for employees to request flexible or remote working under clear structures. The main issues which have come through in the research undertaken in relation to this are detailed below.

1.1 Equality

The research undertaken has indicated that employers are hesitant to introduce a formal remote working policy as it may cause tension within their organisation as a result of requests being refused. There is a fear that this could give rise to equality issues if a remote working policy is not open and available to all employees. Not all roles are compatible with remote working arrangements, for example, an employee undertaking a large volume of manual tasks or who needs to be physically present on site may not be able to undertake their job remotely. Employers would benefit from clear guidance which facilitates the introduction of an open remote working policy including the setting out of fair and objective grounds for refusing a remote working request.

1.2 Health and Safety

A lack of clarity on Occupational Health and Safety emerged as a key influencing factor for employers considering the introduction of a formal remote working policy. Currently there is a dearth of guidance on both employer responsibility in the event of work-related accidents and risk assessments for employees working at home or in a hub. This has resulted in a fear of liability amongst employers which makes ad hoc worker arrangements seem like the "safer" option in responding to employee demand. Guidance in this area should include the topics of work-related accidents, balancing risk assessments with an employees' privacy and clear procedures regarding bullying and workplace harassment when an employee is working from a hub or co-working space.

1.3 Employment Conditions and the Right to Disconnect

Given that technology can create the impression that a worker is always available, it is particularly important that employers can ensure employees' right to rest is respected. As evidenced in the Employee Survey, which showed 46.7% respondents citing switching off/avoiding overwork as the biggest challenge of working remotely, disconnecting from work is an increasingly important issue for employees engaging in remote working solutions. Other countries provide an array of possible approaches to dealing with this issue. In Ireland, a consultation on the topic of the Right to Disconnect with employer and employee representatives will be launched shortly by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

1.4 Data Protection

Guidance is needed on balancing data security and cybersecurity when engaging in remote work, particularly given GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which offers enhanced privacy protection rights to individuals in relation to the processing of their personal data. Employers would benefit from a framework specifying the appropriate technical and organisational measures which need to be implemented to ensure that personal and sensitive data is kept confidential and secure for remote working. This includes data protection training for the employees engaging in remote work.

1.5 Training

A major influencing factor for employees and employers alike are the cultural factors which surround remote work. This includes trust between employees and managers when work is being undertaken remotely, maintaining visibility and managing relationships when working remotely. Training for employees working remotely and for managers in managing distributed teams would therefore be a major enabler in the successful implementation of remote working policies.

Employers would benefit greatly from clear guidance on how to address these issues. The recent checklist and sample remote working policy published by the SFA are important resources in this regard and would provide a useful starting point for official guidance for enterprises looking to introduce a remote working policy.

2. DATA

In order to make informed policy in this area, up to date data should be gathered in the following areas:

2.1 Employees

There is a lack of national Labour Force data which captures the prevalence and types of remote work in Ireland. As it stands there is no ongoing monitoring of employee or employer engagement with remote working solutions. While the CSO will be including a question on weekly homeworking in the 2021 Census, this research has indicated that there is a significant number of employees working from multiple locations which include home, hubs and atypical working locations.

There is also a large proportion of people who work remotely, not on a weekly basis, but monthly, or more occasionally. In this light, a dedicated periodic exercise in gathering data on people engaging in remote work across Ireland would provide insights to the nuance of these working situations and would provide a more secure basis to inform policy.

2.2 Employers

There is a need for quantitative evidence on employers engaging with remote working solutions. This gap will need to be filled in order to enable impactful, evidence-based work in this area. As with employees, it would be beneficial if data could be gathered on a regular basis on employers offering remote working solutions and the adoption of HR policies on remote working. The collection of this data would help to create a fuller picture

of the adoption of remote working which could be monitored to understand trends. This could be carried out within the Private Sector.

As an employer, the Public Sector has the opportunity to lead in this regard, through collecting data on the demand and appetite for remote working solutions across Departments, Agencies and State Bodies and their respective HR Units. This could provide a basis for further work in this area and would identify eexisting examples of Public Sector remote work practice and policies. In this regard, consideration could be given as to whether this is a question that could be included in the CSO's quarterly Labour Force Survey.

Work is already emerging in this area- the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment as an employer has recently introduced a formal e-Working Policy as a deliverable under the Department's HR Strategy and Resource Efficiency Action Plan, providing a clear definition of e-working and guidelines on requesting and implementing an e-Working arrangement.

2.3 Hub Infrastructure

At present, there is no data available on the national infrastructure of hubs in Ireland. This acts as a key barrier to promoting the adoption of remote work in hubs. As outlined earlier, the WDC has carried out a survey of hubs in the AEC. This work has been important in highlighting the issues arising in hubs in relation to the lack of consensus on: the classification of hubs, the number of hubs in operation, the availability and/or awareness of funding streams, client management and engagement in advertising.

It would be beneficial if a similar exercise could be carried out nationally to understand the number of hubs in existence, their classification, their offering, occupancy levels and awareness of the supports available to them. This would enable informed planning of hubs and provide a basis for a platform to communicate the offering of hubs nationally.

National data on the occupancy rates of hubs would also provide a useful tool for policymakers. Currently no such data is available on a national level. This data would help policymakers to understand the demand there is from employees to work in hubs. Based on the findings of the Employee Survey, the vast majority of remote workers (69%) are working from home. This was followed by those answering multiple locations (21%). Just 5% of respondents said they worked in hubs or co-working spaces. Similarly, employers provided mixed views as to whether they preferred their employees to work from home or from hubs. Understanding the demand for hubs nationally is a key dataset which is currently missing for policymakers.

3. COLLABORATION

As demonstrated earlier in this report, there is a large volume of work currently underway to promote remote working solutions across Government Departments and State Agencies. Whilst a number of policies and strategies relevant to remote working have been pursued across Government, this work has been undertaken from a variety of different perspectives. Undoubtedly, there has been some collaboration between the bodies pursuing this work to date, however collaboration has not taken place that involves all parties. This has created a fragmented landscape that has the potential to result in confusion on the definition, purpose and impacts of remote work.

Increased collaboration would ensure a more cohesive Governmental approach to remote working which could be fully supported and understood across the stakeholders concerned. It would provide the opportunity for Departments and Agencies to build on and complement the work of each other. It would also allow bodies to benefit from arising synergies and avoid duplication of effort and policy ambiguity. Increased collaboration could be achieved by formally connecting policymakers under an official structure. This could be achieved through the formation of Interdepartmental Group comprising of relevant Departments and State Agencies who could align national policies and strategies.

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland