

CIPD IRELAND SUBMISSION ON REMOTE WORKING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

CIPD Ireland welcomes the public consultation on remote working and the opportunity to share data and insight on this practice in Ireland.

CIPD, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, is the professional body for human resource and learning & development professionals. In Ireland we represent and are the voice of 6,000 HR and L&D professionals and are part of the CIPD international community of over 150,000 professionals.

CIPD Ireland, a registered charity, has a mission is to champion better work and working lives. We engage with HR leaders and practitioners from Irish and multinational organisations as well as academics and policy makers, on dealing with the challenges of the workforce and future workplace.

CIPD Ireland carries out annual research on HR, pay and employment practices in Ireland. We promote flexible working practices as a central tool in 'good work' and believe a lot more action is required by Government to progress this agenda. In this proposal we share our expert view on the issues and solutions, and our insights on how flexible and remote working is being approached by organisations in Ireland and be better supported by Government.

Our 2020 context

Covid-19 delivered remote working for much of the workforce in Ireland and other developed countries in 2020. With this remote working came a unique set of circumstances where face to face interaction across people's lives was restricted. For employees it delivered not just working from home, but this was aligned to reduced commutes, different working times and taking on different activities and more time in the home. Parenting/ childcare brought its own challenges, with many parents forced to work in shifts to maintain their jobs.

This episode has brought about a lived experience of remote working that has shown that individuals and organisations can perform in this environment and be effective and productive. It had positive results and negative impacts, and the sustainability of relationships, innovation and organisation culture in this context has yet to be proven.

The definition of remote working in this consultation is too narrow and serves to avoid addressing the real flexible working factors that our businesses and economy need for the future. Putting the onus on place – where work get done – is too fixed and traditional a view of the future of work. As we move forward from Covid-19 forced remote working, the supports for employers and employees, need to be more integrated and comprehensive.

The 2019 Future Jobs Ireland framework specifically calls out fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions and deliverables, and this philosophy needs to be integrated into Government guidance for employers and employees.

An all-government approach is required. Earlier in 2020 the Dept of Justice and Equality consulted on flexible working, adopting a strong parenting focus, and now the Dept of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is examining remote working. To most business and individuals these are not separate philosophies but require an integrated and consistent approach to how and where work gets done. As technology, AI and automation impacts the nature and ways of working, a more systemic effort to build the infrastructure to support flexibility and agility for individuals and organisations is what is needed across Government. Hence, we have referred to Government in this document, rather than a specific Department.

Public consultation on guidance on remote working

Our first and major concern in CIPD is the narrow focus which this consultation has adopted. Workplace change has been massive in 2020, for those delivering essential services, those losing their jobs and those working remotely. With its many benefits, CIPD considers flexible working should become the norm, as part of striving toward the future of work. More action is needed by Government, and employers, to increase the opportunity and uptake of the full range of flexible working arrangements to create more inclusive, diverse and productive workplaces that suit both the needs of organisations and individuals.

Even prior to COVID-19, the evidence for the effectiveness of flexible working practices has been well documented, see CIPD's [Megatrends: Flexible working](#) and the report of the UK's Flexible Working Taskforce (2019) [Flexible working: the business case](#). Part-time working has been the most popular and moving beyond that to real flexibility with a range of options has traditionally been a major challenge.

[Future Jobs Ireland 2019: Preparing now for tomorrow's economy](#) presented a framework for how Ireland can prepare for the economic and workplace challenges we face in the economy of tomorrow. It highlighted the uncertain future, that by 2025, our workers and enterprises will be operating in a changed economy and the need to shift our enterprise and

jobs focus to ensure quality jobs that will be resilient into the future, enabling the creation of highly productive, sustainable jobs and increased labour market participation. The framework aims to foster participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions and deliverables such as guidelines for employers on flexible working options and national consultation on extending flexible working options.

Future Jobs Ireland set the ambition

It is time to shift our enterprise and jobs focus to ensure quality jobs that will be resilient into the future. This is not just a question of more jobs, instead it is focused on enabling the creation of highly productive, sustainable jobs. It is also time to shift the way we work if we are to sustain and increase labour market participation.

Businesses and individuals require an integrated and consistent approach to how and where work gets done.

An all-government approach is necessary to address the flexible working agenda, with Departments working together, and not the single lens of one Department, such as a family friendly lens of the Dept of Justice and Equality. As the labour forces grows, becomes more diverse and [gets older](#), inclusive practices and

flexibility will be central tools for retention and performance

Ireland prides itself on the multinational corporations it attracts and sustains. These global organisations are managing across different jurisdictions, engaging with diverse practices and have to build both a global and local response and a consistent approach to the employee experience. The singular focus on the location of work in this consultation has to be widened so that effective guidance for employers and employees can be built to take account of internationalisation and its issues in a holistic way.

Defining flexible working

‘Flexible working’ describes a type of working arrangement which gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work.

Flexible working practices include:

- **Part-time working:** work is generally considered part-time when employers are contracted to work anything less than full-time hours.
- **Term-time working:** a worker remains on a permanent contract but can take paid/unpaid leave during school holidays.
- **Job-sharing:** a form of part-time working where two (or occasionally more) people share the responsibility for a job between them.
- **Flexitime:** allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work.
- **Compressed hours:** compressed working weeks (or fortnights) don't necessarily involve a reduction in total hours or any extension in individual choice over which

hours are worked. The central feature is reallocation of work into fewer and longer blocks during the week.

- **Annual hours:** the total number of hours to be worked over the year is fixed but there is variation over the year in the length of the working day and week. Employees may or may not have an element of choice over working patterns.
- **Working from home on a regular basis or remote working:** workers regularly spend time working from home or a local hub.
- **Mobile working/teleworking:** this permits employees to work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace.
- **Career breaks:** career breaks, or sabbaticals, are extended periods of leave – normally unpaid – of up to five years or more.

The list above isn't exhaustive. Flexible working can include other practices for example employee self-rostering, shift-swapping or taking time off for training.

Flexible working arrangements can be formal or informal. Some organisations chose to amend the written employment contract, and/or include flexible working policies in the employer's handbook. Some forms of flexible working were traditionally offered informally, for example in agreement with an employee's line manager.

Research on the current direction of flexible and remote working

CIPD Ireland conducts an annual [HR Practices in Ireland survey](#), and over 500 people professionals responded to the 2020 survey. The data was collected at the end of 2019 in advance of the COVID-19 pandemic and explored remote working practices at that time. About three quarters, 73% of respondents had experienced an increase in requests for remote working in 2019. From an employee perspective, remote working can have a positive impact on work-life balance, particularly where commutes are long. This was reflected in the survey responses where a key driver of demand for remote working was commute times (77%). A sizeable minority of organisations indicated that remote working has been incorporated into an attraction and retention strategy (38%). However, the actual incidence of remote working in 2019 was low with 71% indicating that less than 10% of their workforce work remotely.

In stark contrast, the [CIPD Ireland survey \(June 2020\)](#) on the impact of COVID-19, found that by the end of May, over half of organisations (52%) had more than 75% of employees working remotely, and in total, 64% of organisations reported that over 50% of employees were working remotely. The exciting finding was that, 70% of organisations were prepared to facilitate more employees to work remotely than before the crisis, and only 14% of respondents stated that they would not facilitate it. This demonstrated the shift of mindset that has been achieved. More details on our findings on the factors supporting and operating as barriers to remote working are in the Appendix.

Thus the COVID-19 pandemic experience has the capacity to fundamentally change future ways of working, as no longer will many roles/activities have to be tied to a specific desk or place of work, or even country. CIPD insights and other research, particularly [Remote working during Covid-19: Ireland's national survey initial report](#), (NUI Galway Whitaker Institute & Western Development Commission, May 2020) indicates a strong preference among employees for **blended working** options, where individuals benefit from a mix of working remotely some days and working with colleagues onsite other days. Among many/large employers, this is already leading to fundamental review of how and where work will be done, what are the work activities that achieve most from face to face interaction, and how to best develop talent in a more virtual environment.

The [CIPD Ireland survey \(June 2020\)](#) also explored whether organisations had asked employees about their circumstances / preferences for returning to the workplace. A high number, 66%, had engaged with employees at all on this matter. About half, 48% of organisations, had asked employees about their preference / circumstance for working remotely, and 40% had asked about health and wellbeing.

- The top three challenges of working remotely at present are:
 1. not being able to switch off from work
 2. collaboration and communication with colleagues and co-workers is harder
 3. poor physical workspace.
- The top three advantages of working remotely at present are:
 1. no traffic and no commute
 2. reduced costs of going to work and commuting
 3. greater flexibility as to how to manage the working day.

The key changes and improvements employees suggest that their manager and employers should make regarding remote working were:

- o **Assist with provision of better and more ergonomic physical workspace**
- o **Better management of video-conferencing**
- o **Reduce expectations and workload to more realistic levels**
- o **Regular communication and check-ins**
- o **Well-being**
- o **Managing annual leave and time off**

The majority of respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organisation is providing them with ergonomic and health & safety advice for working remotely.

How organisations are planning for the post-COVID-19 future

CIPD has regular engagement with HR Leaders across the range of sectors. Through summer 2020, many large organisations have shared how they are recognising the need and the opportunity to transform their organisations to embed new SMART ways of working for the future. There is now an opportunity to address and implement the much hyped technology-led *Future of work*. View the video of a recent [CIPD webinar on the future of remote working](#).

From our recent member engagement, the following points were made consistently:

1. When organisations asked employees about returning to the workplace employee surveys commonly indicated that small percentage wanted to return due to their circumstances (eg 10%). In practice when given the option to return, fewer took the option (eg 5%)
2. Similar to the NUI Galway & Western Development Commission research, in the main employees were seeking some kind of future blended /hybrid working model, with time to work from home and time to work on-site. However organisations were still facing some resistance from senior managers who would have reverted to office based working
3. Organisations were evaluating the impact of remote working on productivity and collating data to demonstrate the positive impact, mitigate any risks to convince senior managers
4. A number of individuals, were struggling, and working mothers were commonly called out
5. The agenda was moving to future ways of working, as Covid-19 was now recognised as here for some time and part of the day job. The focus was going on managing the environment, the risks and the fears.

A number of concerns were expressed about future remote working:

1. Sustaining diversity and inclusion, in terms of the workforce itself and the ways of working
2. Fears for the loss of sustenance in social networks where individuals do not return to the workplace and get to meet colleagues
3. Meeting the needs of different demographics, and particular concern for early career and graduates seeking a vibrant workplace and not set up for productive home working
4. Maintaining an innovative culture
5. Upskilling of managers, as virtual people managers, who have to support individuals and manage performance and creating sustainable career and development journeys.

Organisations were focussing on actions that need to be taken now

1. Addressing the health and safety and sustainability of remote working, the home working environment, looking at risk assessments and risk mitigation
2. Increased emphasis on well-being and supporting good mental health, shown through increase use of EAP, and many other supportive interventions for managers and employees

3. Encouraging the taking of annual leave for the sake of well-being, even if at home
4. Create remote working contracts for new starters
5. Building virtual processes, looking at training in lean/design thinking to support process development
6. Growing the culture by design – becoming more purposeful to embed the culture, be innovative, as fewer opportunities for it to happen by accident
7. Leading new ways to engage individuals and managers – virtual hackathons, communities of practice, etc
8. Developing and communicating with managers expected to lean in empathetically, increase communication and engagement
9. Using data on productivity during lockdown to convince managers of viability of sustaining remote working
10. Develop processes and interventions on innovation to make it happen purposefully as it is less likely not happen accidentally.
11. Revisiting the culture where it was not designed or aligned for working remotely, and creating resilient work process

Good guidance needs to take account of this myriad of practical concerns that large, small, public and private businesses are facing in the current environment.

Current guidance for working remotely during COVID-19 and recommendations

As we move forward from Covid-19 forced remote working, the supports for employers and employees, need to be more integrated and comprehensive. As mentioned, an all-government approach is needed, to address a wider flexible working agenda to support an integrated approach to how and where work gets done.

In terms of the supports available, remote and flexible working advice and support needs to be brought together in a more cohesive language and framework, to assist both employers and employees understand the requirements and preventative actions. CIPD recommends and is available to support a Government working party on the implementation of sustainable flexible working practices, under the Future Jobs Ireland framework and have it address the regulatory environment, the right to request flexible working, the parameters for refusing such requests, and other guidance. CIPD currently chairs the UK Government's Flexible Working Taskforce set up by the UK Government.

Throughout COVID-19, CIPD has been very responsive, providing supports, tools and advice to HR professionals on dealing with the array of emerging issues in dealing with the pandemic and lockdown. Supporting remote working has been particular popular in our [Coronavirus hub](#). We have run many sessions and also seen a significant increase in in-house training to support employees, teams and managers to operate virtually, and make effective use of the technology available.

However we are concerned that the wider upskilling and learning agenda slipped during the lock down, and now guidance has to include how to do this in a virtual environment and access to content. Support tools to develop line managers to understand how to manage flexible working and the skills to ensure such employees have full access to ongoing career and development opportunities. In addition supports will be needed around job and process redesign - as when different ways, places and hours of working are being considered, job and work programme adaptations are necessary and often overlooked. Employers would welcome research which would help them clarify job activities activities best done individually and those best done in a face to face collaborative environment and how these combine best.

Interesting, as virtual working changed fundamental ways of how people related, in many organisations a more decentralised form of leadership emerged, and a much stronger employee voice. We are encouraging members to look to retain these positive developments as they plan a transformation process for future ways of working.

The Government should commission research on the impact of flexible and remote working particularly at various stages of the employee life cycle and lifestage, with a focus on supporting diversity and inclusion. It should also lead by example by getting the public sector to create and sustain more flexible and remote working roles, ensure jobs are advertised as flexible, and put the support tools and guidance in place for HR, senior and line managers.

While technology access has improved, certain parts of the country found remote working a significant challenge, The Government has to push forward the strengthening broadband accessibility as this is a key enabler for not just flexible working but also green challenges with traffic and over population of cities.

Safety, Health and Wellbeing

Both employers and employees strive for safe working at home, and greater access to virtual training guidance on safe home working places and practices are needed. Not only are template forms for risk assessments required, but suggestions on low-cost ways to mitigate risks by both employees and employers. The advice to carry out a virtual online ergonomic assessment for each individual will come at a prohibitive cost for many employers at this point, so grants to access and manage this service will be required. Otherwise less profitable organisations, particularly Irish SMEs, could find this a barrier to using the advantages of flexible future focussed working patterns in order to drive growth.

Clarity on responsibilities and use of personal equipment appropriate to the work of the individual (PC, etc) where employees *choose* to work from home or *opt* for a blended approach is required. Balancing the sense of entitlement between those whose work requires them to be on-site versus those who work flexibly, on either an occasional or regular basis, is starting to emerge as a challenge. Indicators of a split in ethos and culture emerged as a concern during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Blended working, variability of hours, household and family interruptions and distractions, can lead to inattention and incidents so practical tips to manage these in the home or hub would be beneficial for employees.

Absence management

The [CIPD Ireland survey \(June 2020\)](#) on the impact of COVID-19 identified a significant decrease in the amount of sick absence (excluding Covid-19 illness) being reported during the lockdown. A massive 43% of respondents said that sick absence reporting had decreased, for another 41% it stayed at the same level and it only increased for 12% of organisations. The environment of home working, health awareness and being distant from others appears to have a positive impact on the health of the workforce, according to this data. However home working changes the boundary between work and home life, and illness can be hidden where individuals do not report it or go to their home desk when they are in fact too unwell to work.

Addressing this issue needs to be covered in future guidance, along with the requirement to take annual leave, as employees can risk reducing taking breaks when they are already in their home environment

Wellbeing

The management of wellbeing, mental health and stress is a growing concern of employers and needs to be given significant more attention. CIPD's annual [HR Practices in Ireland](#) surveys show these trends, and the factors contributing to absenteeism and stress related absence. Guidance on mitigating the behavioural and health factors are needed for all.

The Government has significantly invested in the **Healthy Ireland** initiative, but despite research and development work which CIPD has been involved in, the Workplace Wellbeing Pillar has regrettably been allowed to lag. Work to date has adopted a strong public sector ethos, and more private sector and SME input and the flexible working context should be included and this pillar launched and promoted.

There is useful call-out in the H&S FAQs on the need to manage sensitive groups, which should be expanded. However remote working in COVID-19 has shown us the extent to which personal and home issues emerge and have to be considered in the context of the employment relationship. Parenting, caring, health issues emerged. This situation needs to be acknowledged, and the consequences for individuals, personal data, performance and potential discipline have to be recognised.

Bullying and work-related stress

CIPD agrees with calling out bullying and work-related stress, as it needs to be clear from both employee and employer perspectives that these protections apply regardless of when and where work gets done. In our 2020 [HR Practices in Ireland](#) survey, over a third of respondents identified stress as contributing to absenteeism and 27% identified mental health as a contributor (the top contributing factor was acute medical conditions). These also needs to be addressed in the context of health and well-being mentioned above.

Managing the boundary around work for those based at home is complex and needs specific guidance. Guidance for employees should advise on the avenues and tools to self-manage boundaries and workload, and the steps to take when at risk of being overwhelmed. Guidance to improve relationships and support the management of conflict in a virtual environment are also needed. It is acknowledged that employers need to behave reasonably when individuals face difficult or demanding situations, and we have seen so many examples of this in 2020.

Employers should be encouraged to review all their policies and procedures especially around bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discipline and grievance to ensure that they provide adequate information and guidance for both employees and managers when operating in a remote working environment.

Employment conditions

The area of employment conditions needs a significant review to take account of increased remote and blended working. Benefits of remote working are not only about location, but ways of working and flexible working. The 2019 Future Jobs Ireland framework highlights our changing economy and the need to shift our enterprise and jobs focus to ensure quality jobs that will be resilient into the future, as well as fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions and deliverables. This philosophy needs to be integrated into Ireland's legal framework on employment rights, and the conflicting and disjointed set of rights need to be reviewed.

While employees in Ireland have a statutory right to request part-time working, there is no legal entitlement to be granted part-time working. There is no broad entitlement to even request flexible or remote working, which CIPD recommends, and we would like to see further progress on introducing this right to request, the parameters for refusing such requests, etc. The UK is due to introduce regulations requiring large employers to publish a flexible working policy or statement on their website. This initiative is a response to a public consultation process and will benefit both new and current employees. The UK are also looking at having the right to request flexible working a Day 1 entitlement and not service related.

The Government also needs to review other statutory restrictions including developments in parenting and carer's leave entitlements to increase the flexibility of take-up. These leaves provide time off, but except for unpaid parental leave there is no flexibility in how this leave can be taken. They generally require individuals to take them on a weekly basis, instead of being broken down to better meet personal and family needs. These and other social welfare regulations mitigate against part-time and flexible working arrangements and need to be revised.

Confirmation of employer rights and employee obligations have to be addressed when those working from home, either occasionally or regularly, are required to attend on-site and choose not to.

At European level, it is necessary to ensure that future legal developments under the EU Directive on flexible working has an ethos of increasing real flexibility for all employees.

Organisation of Working Time

A review and changes to the Organisation of Working Time Act is required. We hear continually from employers how it is operating against flexible and remote working, causing employers not to introduce those practices, and getting in the way of building trust. Trust and technology are two precursors to productive effective remote working, and OWT record-keeping requirements demonstrate mistrust and give the wrong message to employees.

The Government needs to consult on bringing in an opt-out mechanism for employees regarding recording working hours, once pay rates are above a certain threshold. It also needs to research the viability of initiatives such as the UK's OWT opt-out clauses and the approach being adopted in Finland whereby employees may be less restricted in when and where they work for 50% of their working hours.

Equality and diversity

Equality considerations mentioned have to be broadened out to address inclusion, as flexible working is a key opportunity to attract a wider profile of employees and marginal groups. Greater attention needs to go on the supports needed by vulnerable groups as it is expected that those on lower pay will have less access to a home environment conducive to remote working.

The increase in availability of flexibility means that employees with caring responsibilities of different kinds, or disabilities or health conditions, or those with different cultural expectations, or those who are looking to reduce hours and downshift as they move towards retirement, having a greater opportunity to find employment, progress or stay in work. Organisations that fail to provide inclusive flexible working opportunities will struggle to recruit, motivate and retain the workers they need, and find it challenging to boost diversity and inclusion. Lack of flexibility has been a significant contributory factor to the gender pay gap and subsequent gender pension gap, neither of which are showing improvements, but have been found to positively impact on improving the [gender pay gap](#).

CIPD's [HR Practices in Ireland](#) research identified that the fear of career impact is seen as a barrier to flexible working, in a context where traditional part-time and home working has become feminised and associated with motherhood. A clear message will be needed that remote working does not equal childcare.

While lockdown has demonstrated how remote working can work for many cohorts of employees, it is critical that organisations are encouraged to continue to promote it for general appeal, and to assess the ongoing impact of flexible working on promotion, development, reward and recruitment outcomes.

Overall CIPD Ireland research is finding that flexible working is emerging as growing priority among organisations and becoming more recognised as a tool to build agility, inclusion and address the gender pay gap. This trend was not visible in previous years.

Growth in interest in flexible working



CIPD HR Practices in Ireland, 2019

This trend continued in 2020, as in the survey, flexible and remote working is identified by 53% of respondents as a key priority, as well as a tool for inclusion. *The Appendix details our recent research on remote working and diversity and inclusion practices.*

In summary, where Government regulations mitigate against part-time, flexible and remote working, the implementation of employer solutions cannot on their own push the dial on flexible working unless regulations change. In particular social welfare regulations often do not support part-time working, and the requirements under the Organisation of Working Time legislation have been found to be contrary to flexible working practices.

Having trust and discretion is central to smart working and productive remote working. Embedding productive flexible working options for the future of our workforce and economy requires an integrated approach and an ambition to overcome difficult issues.

Appendix

HR PRACTICES IN IRELAND – RESEARCH FINDINGS RELATING TO FLEXIBLE WORKING AND DIVERSITY

Since 2017, CIPD Ireland has surveyed the HR Profession in Ireland to provide key insights into the context of HR practitioners, provide benchmarks on HR practices and policies, and demonstrate how the people profession is responding to workplace challenges. The survey findings reinforce the areas of talent acquisition and retention as central to the HR agenda and highlight issues such as flexible working that are affecting the workforce and the quality of work.

Since 2018 this research has been conducted in conjunction with the Department of Work and Employment Studies, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick. The surveys have over 500 respondents, and represent some of the most comprehensive data available in Ireland.

Below we provide links to the HR Practices in Ireland surveys. We comment specifically on relevant findings (with details that may not have been published) from the HR Practices in Ireland 2019 and 2020 research collated before the COVID-19 pandemic.

[HR Practices in Ireland 2019](#)

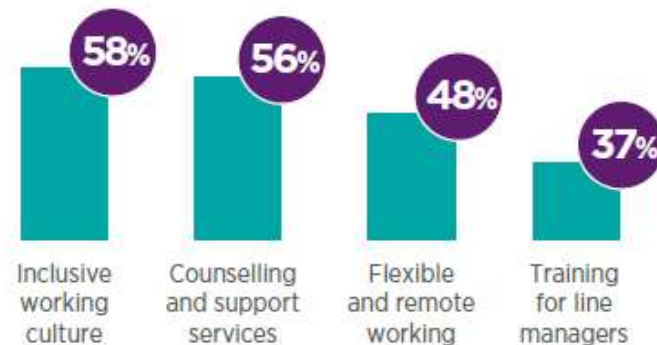
Our 2019 survey found that over 80% of respondent organisations offered some form of remote and flexible working. The majority, over 80%, viewed technological advancement as facilitating remote or home working, with 58% indicating that newer forms of working assist in the reduction in commute times and costs for staff.

However, in practice 50% of these organisations offered remote working on a limited basis. Taken together, the proportion of organisations offering some form of remote working is higher than that reported in 2018, indicating this is becoming a more prevalent feature in organisations. The situation regarding flexibility on ‘when’ work is done is similar, with 50% of employers offering flexibility but on a limited basis and over 30% indicating active or very active policies.

Over 40% of organisations indicate that their recruiting strategies are designed to increase diversity. Furthermore, nearly 60% of respondents indicate that their organisation actively promotes an inclusive working culture. Only 37% indicate that they have training and guidance for line managers in the area of inclusiveness. Only a third indicate that they actively engage in raising awareness of diversity issues among the workforce. This indicates that there is work to be done in many organisations in cascading the work of diversity and inclusion across the organisation. Overall the survey found a growing appetite for flexible working to help address the challenges of diversity and the gender pay gap.

Diversity and inclusion

Activities to promote inclusiveness



CIPD HR Practices in Ireland, 2019

HR Practices in Ireland 2020

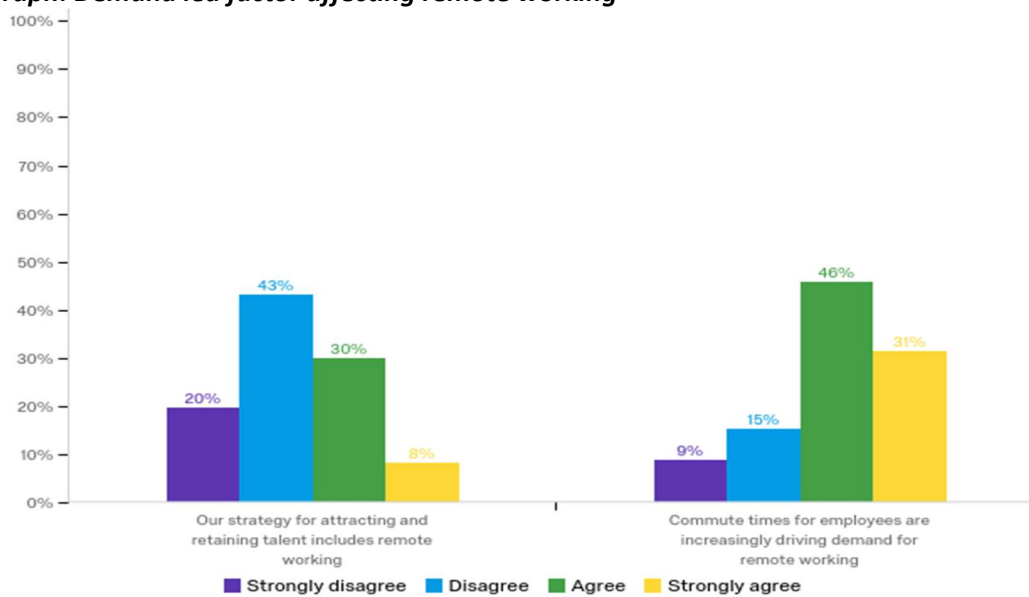
Flexible and remote working

In our 2020 survey findings, gathered prior to the COVID-19 pandemic coming to Ireland, 73% of respondents reported an increase in requests for flexible and remote working. A key driver of demand for remote working was commute times (77%). A sizeable minority of respondents also indicated that remote working had been incorporated into an attraction and retention strategy (38%). Private sector respondent companies are more likely to incorporate remote working as part of a recruitment and retention strategy than public sector respondent companies. However the incidence of remote working was low among respondents with 71% indicating that less than 10% of their workforce worked remotely.

Attitudinal barriers posed more of a problem for organisations than infrastructural factors with respect to the introduction of remote working, with 69% agreeing that there was a lack of buy in from the line and 69% indicating a lack of support for such initiatives on the part of senior management. Results were more mixed with regard to negative perceptions on the part of employees. Whilst 51% of respondents agreed that employees perceived negative outcomes from remote working, 49% of respondents disagreed with this statement. These findings raise concerns about the need to explain and support employers on implementing effective and compliant flexible and remote working practices. Remote working needs to be supported by an appropriate infrastructure, employee supports and also support from senior management if it is to be sustained successfully.

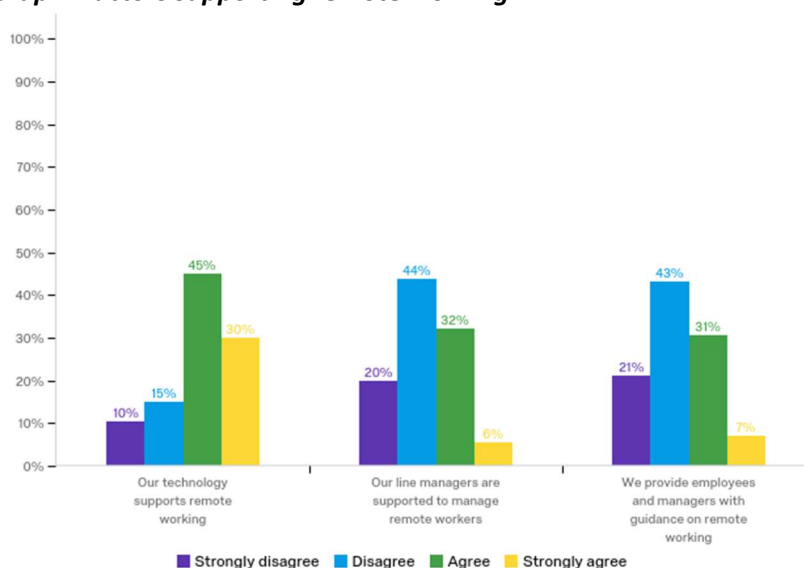
In relation to demand led factors for remote working, the findings clearly indicate that commute times are becoming a key factor in demand for remote working (77%). The majority of respondents (63%) indicate that remote working is not yet a key part of an attraction and retention strategy (38%).

Graph: Demand led factor affecting remote working



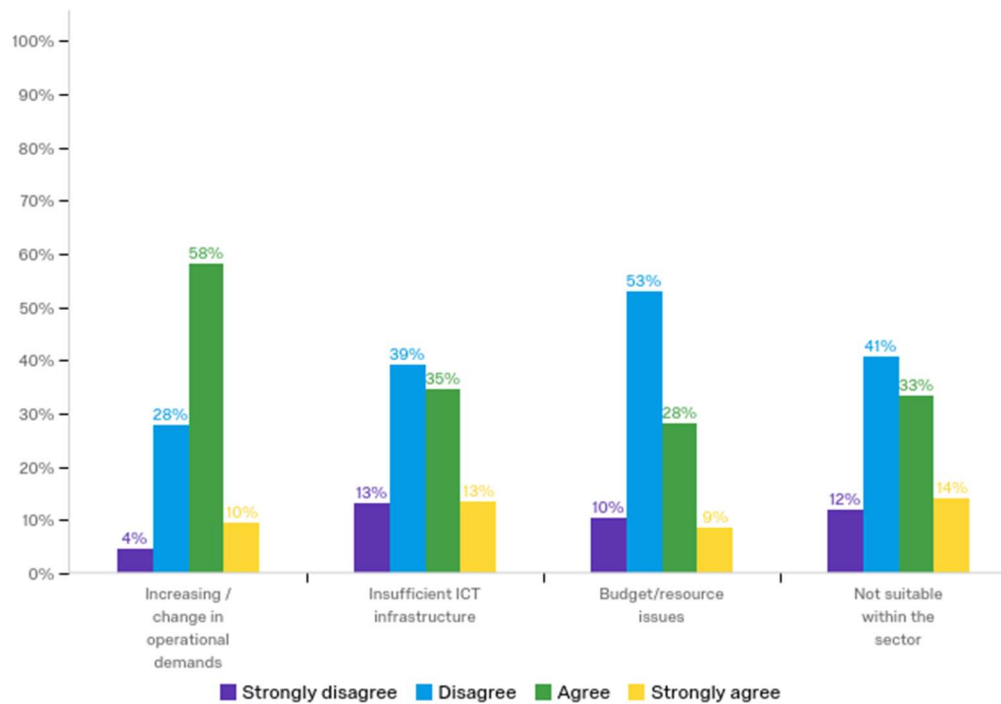
In relation to supports for facilitating remote working the results are mixed. While 75% of respondents believed their technology supports remote working, there was less positivity regarding the people management element of support. Two thirds, 64%, disagreed or strongly disagreed that line managers were supported to manage remote workers, whilst 64% disagreed or strongly disagreed that managers and employees were provided with guidance on remote working.

Graph: Factors supporting remote working



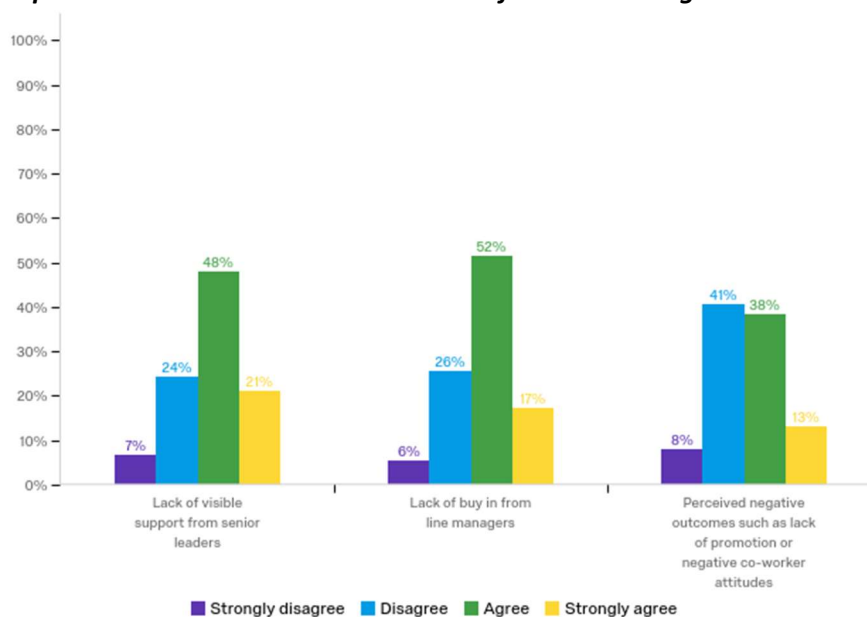
Respondents were asked what they considered the key barriers to remote working. In relation to ICT infrastructure, 48% of respondents believed they have insufficient infrastructure whilst 52% have such infrastructure in place, so the result is split in this regard. From the infrastructural/operational point of view the key barrier perceived by respondents was the pace of change of operational demands with 68% agreeing with this statement. Almost 47% of respondents answered that remote working was not suitable within their sector.

Graph: Operational barriers to remote and flexible working



From the results attitudinal barriers posed more of a problem for organisations with respect to the introduction of remote working. 69% reported that there was a lack of buy in from line managers (perhaps not surprising given the evidence of a lack of support and training for such managers in this regard). Also tellingly 69% of respondents indicated there was a lack of support for such initiatives on the part of senior management. Results were more mixed with regard to negative perceptions on the part of employees. Whilst 51% of respondents agree that employees perceive negative outcomes from remote working, 49% of respondents disagree with this statement. So even among the employee cohort who may aspire to work flexible, negative outcomes are apparent.

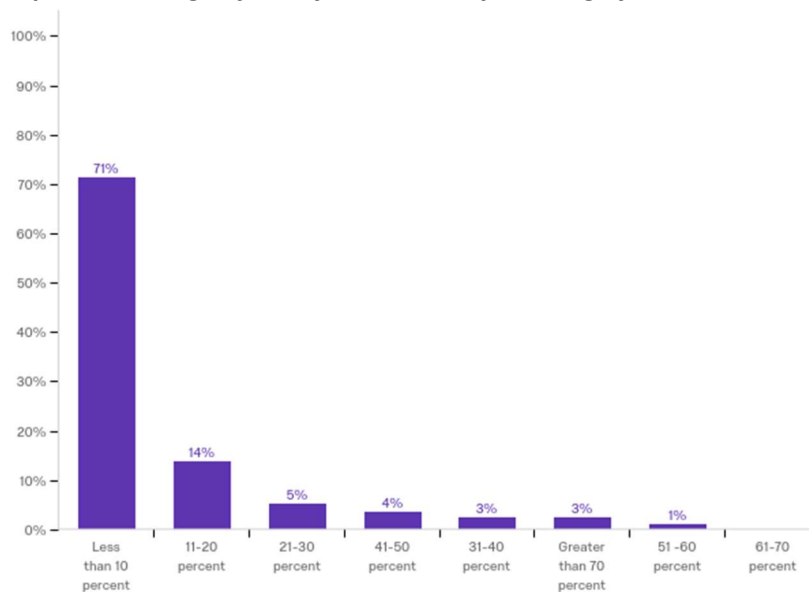
Graph: Attitudinal barriers to remote and flexible working



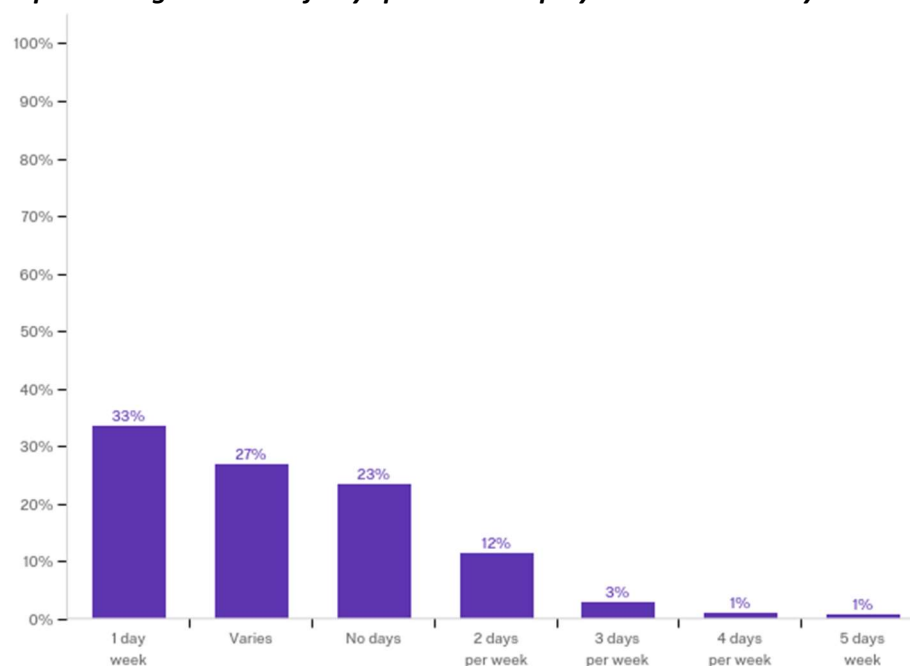
The survey asked respondents to indicate the proportion of people in their organisation who worked remotely and the average hours/days that they would avail of for remote working. The results indicate that remote working was the exception rather than the norm for many companies.

71% of respondents indicate that less than 10% of their workforce work remotely. Public sector organisations are less likely than private sector organisations to have people working remotely: 83% of public sector respondents indicate that less than 10% of staff work remotely as opposed to 67% of private sector respondents, demonstrating that there is work to be done to support remote working in the public sector. Overall, where remote working is available the data indicates that a sizeable proportion of employees who availed of such work, spent one or two days working remotely (45%)

Graph: Percentage of workforce currently availing of remote working



Graph: Average number of days per week employees work remotely

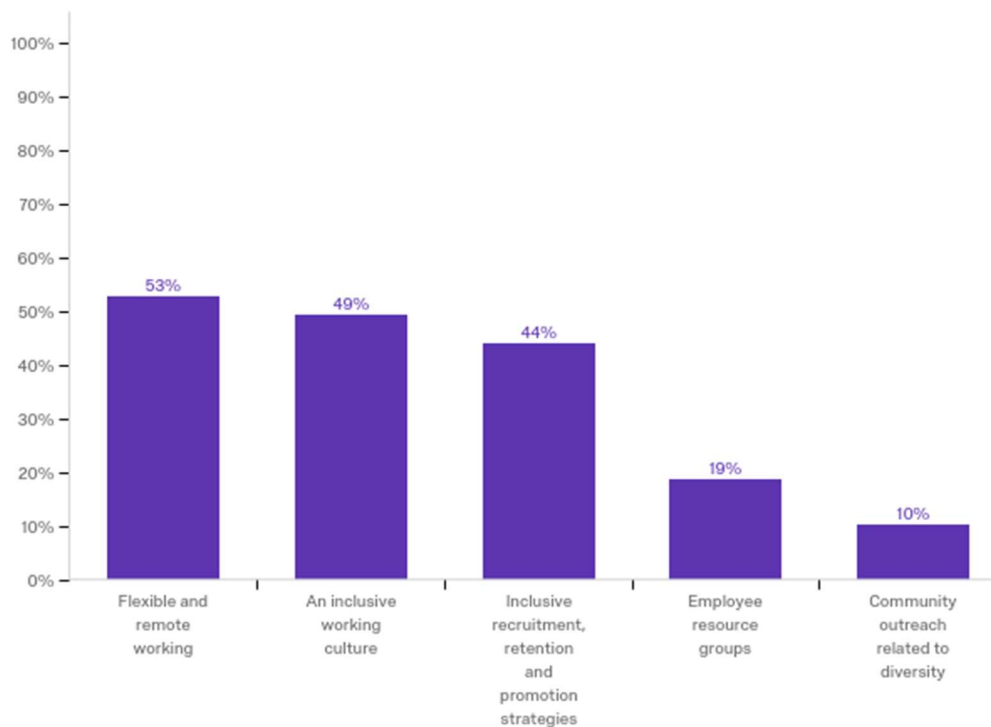


Diversity and inclusion

Over recent years Ireland’s workplaces have been becoming increasingly diverse from a gender, cultural and identity point of view. Apart from the moral and ethical imperatives for diversity and inclusion, workplace diversity has also been identified by research as adding value economically to organisations.

In the survey, flexible and remote working was identified by 53% of respondents as a key policy to promote a more inclusive workplace. The results indicate that organisations go beyond a compliance approach in that a sizeable proportion of respondents indicated that their approach is to create inclusive cultures (49%) and incorporate diversity and inclusion considerations within recruitment, retention and promotion policies (44%). There seems to be less emphasis by respondent organisations on extending diversity/inclusion policies into their wider community with 10% of respondents indicating that they engage in such practices.

Approaches in place to promote a more inclusive workplace



The success of diversity and inclusion policies is very dependent on the willingness of managers/employees to positively engage on this dimension of work. 40% of respondents indicated they have policies and practices in place to raise awareness among the wider workforce. Similarly a high proportion of respondents (43%) provide guidance and training for line managers in this regard. Whilst these are significant percentages, it would be hoped that as diverse workforces become more and more the norm that these levels would increase. A more recent innovative development in human resource management is the appointment of Diversity Officers/Champions. 18% of respondents indicate that they have already appointed a Diversity Officer.

One area recognized by international research as more problematic is the lack of diversity at senior roles in organisations. A potential solution for this is to put in place leadership development programmes specifically aimed at increasing diversity at higher organisation levels. A minority of respondents (27%) indicate that they utilize such a strategy.

Graph: Activities to promote diversity and inclusion

