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Flexible Futures Conference February 2024

Report

Scott Alexander, Facilitator, June 2024

Scott@AlexanderMediation.Net

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Introduction

The conference was designed to do a number of things:

- To set out a vision of where flexible working in Northern Ireland might be going in relation to policy. This was done through presentations by Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy, who discussed the new Economy Minister's vision for a good employment bill and by Mark McAllister, then Director of Employment Relations Services, LRA, who highlighted that flexible work options are likely to be seen as indicators of good employment and equality practices, worthy of inclusion in a Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland, currently being developed by the LRA.
- To show that research, although highlighting some challenges that need to be overcome, is largely positive about the role of flexible working in good employment, and that it helps recruit and retain staff. The researchers on our evidence panel were unanimous in their belief that flexible working is a positive force for good, economically, socially and productively. Although more research needs to be done to drill down into specific areas, the evidence thus far seems to point in only one general direction – that flexible working can work for both employers and employees and brings with it various consequential benefits around savings on fuel, travel time, travel time, work-life balance, office costs and more.
- To highlight case studies from employers that different flexible working options could work in favour of employers and employees alike, creative comparative advantages and great places to work that help attract and retain (happier) employees. Our business case panel did exactly that – with presentations and panel discussions from owners and senior managers who focused on the benefits of flexible working and explained how they dealt with any possible drawbacks they had faced along the way.
- To gather (and later promulgate via this report and elsewhere) the views, thoughts, tips, suggestions, experiences and more of largely private sector employers in Northern Ireland across a wide range of sectors and amongst employers of varying sizes. This was done through a series of workshop-style discussions on various questions in relation to flexible working issues led by experts in the field and LRA staff and board members. Those practical tips etc are set out elsewhere in this report.

The conference was a resounding success, with great feedback and lots of practical suggestions for implementing a variety of flexible working options that suit both employers and employees in Northern Ireland.

It's trite to state that no one size fits all, but it still goes to the core of this conference – by bringing lots of experts and employers together, we could discover myriad options that might not suit everyone but that there is such a range of options that there will be some that suit almost all employers and employees. And they must suit both employers and employees for them to work effectively.

Key Issues Raised by Speakers and Researchers

All of the speakers received great feedback from the delegates. All had their own perspective but, importantly, almost all attended a pre-conference dinner at which key issues were discussed and almost all attended the conference all day and heard the other speakers' presentations – this led to a more collegiate feel and a number of themes and agreements emerged.

Those were mirrored by the audience in their polls held throughout the day.

The full pack of speaker submissions may be found here:

[MASTER DECK - MORROWS.pptx](#)

Videoed highlight reel may be found here:

<https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/video/flexiblefutures24-highlights-video>

Some of the key issues raised included:

Do Employers have a Choice? Flexible working has likely moved from exercisable right to expectational requirement for employees and prospective employees. The change in GB to allow requests for flexible working from day 1 of the contract is both a reflection of reality and an economic necessity – employers who do not offer flexible working options are struggling to recruit and retain staff.

Impact of Lockdown: Post-pandemic lockdown, flexible working has gone far beyond hours, patterns and location - there are myriad options available that are seen as attractive to prospective candidates and existing employees.

Good Employment Charter: Flexible working will be a core component of the Charter for good jobs/work/employment being developed by the LRA. It will also be embedded in the new economic vision for NI – Good jobs, improved productivity, regional balance.

Performance and Productivity: The interview research evidence thus far shows no decrease in organisational performance while fully remote and there is no analysis of individual performance trends. Scientific research shows none to positive impact on employee & (virtual) team performance. Employers generally felt employee productivity was unchanged compared to pre-pandemic levels. Employees felt very strongly that their productivity had increased.

Collaboration: Interviews show that there are concerns with remote working about collaboration, but there is no data to support the concerns. However, scientific evidence does show that remote work may hinder collaboration and particularly less informal collaboration activities (e.g., brainstorming). There also appears to be less extra collaboration beyond your immediate team. How might employers counter this, other than demanding employees attend the office?

Culture: Interviews show that there are mixed views on the “culture” argument. However, there is no data to support the “culture” concerns. That is not to say there is none - scientific evidence shows that the effect on culture is not clear, but culture is not well defined or measured and data is limited.

Diversity, Equality & Inclusion: Interview evidence shows that people believe that hybrid/remote working creates access to a wider pool of talent for employers, increases diversity in hiring, but that there is no proactive management of risks. Scientific evidence shows that remote work can be both an opportunity & a risk. There are new opportunities to access employment. However, the risks of being excluded are greater (“double-burden”) and there may be challenges for employees who may struggle with online communication (e.g. neurodivergent).

Overall, evidence suggests that hybrid/remote can work well – but needs to be intentionally managed. Employers must:

- Use internal evidence to make better-informed decisions
- Train & support line managers
- Develop guidelines / policies to support (D&I!)
- Proactively manage collaboration

The Impact on Prospective Female Employees: Flexible working opportunities are essential for many carers. 60% of unpaid carers in NI are women. Women have a 70% chance of providing care in their adult life and are more likely to care early in their life. And 1 in 6 women in employment are providing unpaid care. Up to 180000 females could be excluded from the workforce unless more flexible options are available.

Difficulties combining employment and unpaid care has clear and lasting impacts on women in relation to career prospects and opportunities, identity, health & wellbeing, and finances.

Northern Ireland has the lowest rate of remote/homeworking across the UK.

What has improved? 44% of businesses reported that the quality of employee's work had strongly improved compared to Q1 2020. Employees more willing to work extra hours when needed. There has been improved staff wellbeing and retention.

Why Be Flexible? Employers should consider more flexible options in order to:

- Future-proof your business;
- Take the opportunity to re-think and re-configure workspaces;
- Evaluate tasks and working practices; Invest in management and training; and
- Preparing for societal change - there are no great signs that flexible options will disappear or become less attractive to employees.

Job share can work at the highest levels of organisations and comes with a number of advantages for the employer and the employees, provided there are open and honest communications between the three parties.

Four-Day Week: The idea of a four-day week is growing in popularity and surveys show that most offices are near empty on Fridays, so it might give some employers a competitive advantage to formalise it. Employers must work with suppliers and customers to ensure that any pilot works.

Spectrum of Flexibility

The suggestions from speakers and delegates alike suggest that employers and employees may consider a wide and seemingly inexhaustible spectrum of flexible working options that could enhance working lives and workplaces, such as those listed below:

Job sharing: Two people do one job and split the hours.

Remote working and working from home: Working from anywhere other than the employee's usual workplace. It can include working from home.

Hybrid working: A combination of working remotely and working in the employee's usual workplace or travelling to other locations to deliver services.

Part time working: Working less than normal or established full-time hours (usually by working fewer days).

4-Day Week: In its classic form, employees will have a 20% reduction in hours per week i.e. full time employees will work for four days rather than five but will continue to receive 100% of pay, provided productivity remains at 100%.

Compressed hours: Working full-time hours but over fewer days - for example a 9-day fortnight (an employee has a day off every other week and works longer hours on the other days). Some employers who have adopted a 4-day week also operate in this way, increasing hours over fewer days so that the number of an employee's contracted hours stays the same in any week e.g. 4 x 10 hours per day, rather than 5 x 8 hours per day.

Flexitime: The employee chooses when to start and end work (within agreed limits) but works certain 'core hours', for example 10am to 4pm every day.

Annualised hours: The employee has to work a certain number of hours over the year, but they have some flexibility about when they work. There are sometimes 'core hours' which the employee regularly works each week, and they work the rest of their hours flexibly or when there's extra demand at work.

Staggered hours: The employee has different start, finish and break times from other workers.

Phased retirement: Default retirement age has been phased out and older workers can choose when they want to retire. This means they can reduce their hours and work part time, sometimes receiving part of their occupational pension.

Zero-Hour Contracts: The employee is not guaranteed any hours and the employee is not obliged to accept any hours of work that are offered. Some employees like this extreme form of flexibility (e.g. to supplement income from other part-time jobs or to fit around exams) and some employers also like it (e.g. to fill in at short notice for absences). It works less well where employers impose conditions, such as employees not being able to work elsewhere, or where employees may be sent home without pay, having turned up for a work shift.

Combining Options and Being Flexible about Flexible Working: There are several reports that there are up to 300 types of flexible working, and these may include different types of contractual relationships between agency staff, workers rather than employees and gig-

economy workers or self-employed workers. They may also include banded or average hours of pay or could be a combination of a number of available options.

Further Reading and Recommendations

In addition to the findings and recommendations of speakers, readers of this report may be interested in the following recent online articles and publications, all of which point to flexible working in myriad forms being robust and a feature of future workplaces, notwithstanding some of the more recent attempts by some employers to enforce a return to full-time office working.

Almost 50% would refuse job offer with no remote work option - survey

RTÉ (17 June 2024)

Key Points: "Nearly half of Irish jobseekers would refuse a job offer if there were no hybrid or fully remote working options offered, according to new research from The Stepstone Group, the parent company of jobs website IrishJobs. This compares to a global average of 29%. The study found that 61% of jobseekers would turn down an otherwise attractive job offer from an employer if they received a negative impression during an interview."

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2024/0617/1455031-work-survey/>

Linked to this article...

How Work Preferences Are Shifting in the Age of GenAI: Decoding Global Talent 2024

BCG (13 June 2024)

Key Points: Workplace priorities continue to feel the influence of longer-term macro trends: an increased focus on climate and sustainability; a renewed commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; major demographic shifts; and the continuing appeal of global mobility. Collectively, these forces help shape a workplace that is continuously adapting to new realities and challenges. And even as these shifts proceed, workers and employers are digesting the most recent technological game changer: GenAI.

Employers must understand what matters to workers and job seekers. So, we sought answers to key questions:

- What do workers value most in a job?
- How do job seekers perceive their position and negotiating power on the labour market?
- Do people use GenAI? What impact do they think GenAI will have on their jobs, and what are they planning to do to ensure that they have marketable skills now and in the future?
- What should employers do to attract and retain workers?

<https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/how-work-preferences-are-shifting-in-the-age-of-genai#>

UK Remote and Hybrid Working Statistics 2024

Forbes (11 June 2024)

Key Points: A great source of statistics (some comparing pre and post-pandemic situations) on issues such as...

- Distribution of days worked from home over a week

- Employee and employer attitudes towards working from home
- Advantages and disadvantages of WFH
- Characteristics of remote workers, including factors such as age, education and income
- Out of hours work done

<https://www.forbes.com/uk/advisor/business/remote-work-statistics/>

30+ Insightful Hybrid Work Statistics [2024 Guide]

Officernd (10 June 2024)

Key Points: Hybrid work has become increasingly common in modern workplaces. Many statistics in 2024 (this article looks at several studies) ... highlight the shift toward the hybrid work model:

- Over a quarter of full-time employees now work in hybrid environments.
- 90% of CEOs claim that adopting a hybrid work model has reduced business costs.
- 77% of those who work remotely at least part-time report improved productivity.
- Hybrid workers can save an average of \$51 per day when they don't have to commute to work.
- Nearly two in five workers say they would quit a job if they had to work on-site just one day a week.

<https://www.officernd.com/blog/hybrid-work-statistics/>

Working from home UK statistics 2024

The Home Office Life (12 May 2024)

Key Points: Different statistics to the Forbes ones above and specifically focussed on WFH in the UK. Also has comparative stats for pre-pandemic. Key findings...

- 52% of business leaders surveyed believe that hybrid working is the most supportive environment for employee productivity
- 47% of female office workers and 44% of male office workers believe hybrid working is better for their mental health
- 53% of business leaders believe hybrid working helps employees better manage the costs associated with work
- 82% of men and women believe their employer now has a greater responsibility to offer health and wellbeing support post-pandemic
- 98% of employers have implemented a measure (like work socials, on-site gym access etc.) to encourage employees to come back to the office

<https://thehomeofficelife.com/blog/work-from-home-statistics>

Employment report reveals 2024 forecasts & anxieties

CFotech (1 May 2024)

Key Points: CFotech reports on a survey by People2people Recruitment, a recruitment and HR solutions firm in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK. The survey suggests that the fluidity of economics may be impacting on the return to the office and demands for flexible working:

Employees' expectations for a full-time return to the office in 2024 show mixed salary increase anticipations. Up to 12% expect a significant pay rise of over 20% if they are asked to return full-time, 37% foresee a moderate increase of 10-20%, 32% anticipate a modest 5-10% raise, and 19% predict a minimal increase of 0-5%.

Erin Devlin, people2people Recruitments VIC Managing Director, reflects on these changing trends, stating, "In 2024, under the cost-of-living crisis and given the current labour market uncertainty, job seekers favour career opportunities over everything else in job advertisements. In 2022 and early 2023, due to the many skill shortages, job seekers increased their salary and benefit expectations. Now that the power has shifted in employers' favour, job seekers' focus has moved towards long-term opportunities."

<https://cfotech.co.uk/story/employment-report-reveals-2024-forecasts-anxieties>

Hybrid working: Guidance for people professionals - How to plan and support effective hybrid working

CIPD (19 February 2024)

Key Points: A thorough guide to hybrid working for HR professionals in the UK, including practical advice on...

- Why Hybrid?
- How to plan hybrid working
- Legal implications of hybrid working
- Communication
- Technology
- Equipment
- Training and supporting managers
- Wellbeing
- Performance management
- Inclusion

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/planning-hybrid-working/>

2024 Global Workforce Trends: Discover the Emerging Developments Shaping the World of Work this Year

G-P (8 February 2024)

Key Points: Among the insights you'll discover are these top five trends that are likely to have the most substantial impact on businesses this year:

- Employees are ready to answer the call of the global growth revolution.
- Employee experience will be vital to build successful global teams.
- Employers must focus on total compensation.
- Soft skills will increasingly influence hiring decisions.
- The challenges of AI must be successfully bridged through upskilling.

<https://www.globalization-partners.com/blog/2024-global-workforce-trends/>

Flexible Working: Make Flexible Working Your Business

UK Government Help to Grow Campaign (no date provided)

Key Points: Official guidance to legislative changes in GB to make the right to request flexible working a day-one right for employees. Includes case studies and articles on the benefits of flexible working.

<https://helptogrow.campaign.gov.uk/flexible-working/>

The Flexible Working Report 2023-2024

Flexa (13 December 2023)

Key Points: Flexa analysed over 3m job searches and over 16,000 job adverts and concluded...

- Traditionally 'seasonal' benefits like summer hours, sabbaticals and Work From Anywhere schemes have become less seasonal in 2023, with more evenly distributed peaks and troughs in candidate demand across the year.
- The demand for mental health support in the workplace has never been stronger, with a +16% increase in November 2023 vs November 2022; and physical support in the form of WFH budgets has also become more popular this year.
- Candidate interest in remote working has increased this year on Flexa, but the supply of remote jobs isn't high enough to meet the demand.
- Flexible hours are less important to candidates than flexible location, but there is still demand for a small degree of time flexibility, more so than fully flexible hours.
- Alternative working patterns like part-time, compressed hours and job sharing are still in demand, but we've seen the real growth coming through the popularity of the 4-day week, with searches increasing +68% since this filter was introduced in February 2023.
- Fertility leave is a newer benefit but has been rising steadily in popularity this year. We expect to see more family-friendly benefits like workplace-supported tax-free childcare growing across 2024

https://prismic-io.s3.amazonaws.com/flexa/77db534e-dd15-4e73-b0a3-8af5a0328336_The+Flexible+Working+Report+23-24.pdf

Trends in flexible working arrangements

CIPD (12 April 2022)

Key Points: The CIPD saw moves towards flexible working growing some two years before the LRA / Timely Career Conference was held and the CIPD launched its #FlexFrom1st campaign to help increase flexible working opportunities in the UK. It has clearly worked. But in April 2022, the CIPD found that "Data shows homeworking continues to increase while other forms decrease or remain low."

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/flexible-working-trends/>

Flexible working: A job-share partnership

CIPD (12 June 2019)

Key Points: This case study found that...

- There needs to be honesty and trust between a job-sharing partnership for it to work successfully.

- Feedback between job-sharers is an important element of keeping on track with organisational and personal objectives. Continuous coaching also allows the job-sharers to grow and develop individually as well as together.
- Planning is vital, particularly when trying to perfect the handover and when thinking about the impact of the job-share on the rest of the team.
- There is a variety of benefits that the organisation can gain by introducing job sharing.

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/case-studies/flexible-working-job-share-partnership/>

Appendices

The Programme

Flexible Futures 2024 – The Programme...

8.45	Registration, Refreshments and Networking
	Morning Plenary Sessions Main Hall
9.30	Welcome and Housekeeping – Wendy Austin, former BBC journalist and broadcaster
9.45	Importance of Flexible Working to 10x Economy Strategy – Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy
10.00	Is Flexible Working an Indicator of a Good Employer? After its conference in February 2023 the LRA committed to developing a Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland. Flexible working (in its multiple forms) will be one of 10 pillars of any GEC going forward. Mark McAllister, Director of Employment Relations Services, LRA , explains why the LRA has concluded that flexible work options are likely to be seen as indicators of good employment and equality practices, worthy of inclusion in a Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland.
10.15	<p>The Evidence Panel</p> <p>Each of our experts has up to 10 minutes to discuss the current evidence of the benefits (and drawbacks) of flexible and remote working on workplaces and society from their area of expertise, followed by a panel discussion and questions from our invited audience.</p> <p>Panel members: Dr. Tatiana Andreeva, Associate Professor in Management and Organisational Behaviour, Maynooth University; Angela Phillips Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Carers NI, and Dr Ana Desmond, Senior Economist, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre. Our panel of research speakers are joined by Conor Curran, Head of Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing at QUB. This session will be introduced by Clare Moore, Equality & Social Affairs Officer, NIC-ICTU.</p>
11.15	Networking and Break
11.45	<p>The Business Case Panel:</p> <p>Each of our employers has up to 10 minutes to discuss their reasons for adopting flexible and remote working practices and the impact this has had on their organisation and their workforce, followed by a panel discussion and questions from our invited audience. Panel Members: Laura Walker and Chloe Fletcher, Co-Founders of The Job Share Revolution and former Senior Directors of Finance Transformation at Asda; and Kate Hulley, Owner Manager, Belmont Packaging, Wigan. Our panel of overseas’ speakers are joined by Jim Norris, Senior Leader - Human Resources, Allstate NI. This session will be introduced by Laura Dowie, Director of Timely Careers.</p>
12.45	Explanation of afternoon workshop sessions and options
12.50	Networking and lunch

Afternoon Workshop Sessions		
	Workshop Sessions Main Hall	Workshop Sessions Parallel Hall
1.50	<p>Option 1: We need your views, tips, best practice and more. Beyond 9 to 5: Navigating the Benefits of Flexible Work Arrangements: Discuss and record with your peers what you have done or commit to do in order to maximise the benefits to your organisation and employees of various flexible working arrangements. This session is led by Lesley Moreland, HR Consultant, and Frances Denny, Head of Business Operations at Exploristics, a company that resorted to flexible, hybrid and remote working way before covid in a (successful) attempt to address the skills shortage in NI and recruit and retain exceptional talent.</p> <p>Discussion Tables chaired by LRA Board Members</p>	<p>Option 2: We need your views, tips, best practice and more. Removing the Stigma of Part-Time Working. Discuss and record with your peers what could be done to make part-time working a more attractive and better-paid option to help achieve a fairer society and workplaces build on equality and diversity in practice. Might the language around part-time work be more positive? What are your suggestions? This session is led by Laura Dowie, Director of Timely Careers, whose mission is to remove the obstacles, anxiety and challenges that women who want to return to work often face.</p> <p>Discussion Tables chaired by LRA Board Members</p>
2.25	Comfort Break	
2.30	<p>Option 1: We need your views, tips, best practice and more. Managing Employee Expectations of Hybrid Working and WFH. Research in the Republic of Ireland shows that 44% of employees would change job, even if it means taking a pay cut, if their remote working preferences are not facilitated. Discuss and record with your peers what you have done or will have to consider in future in order to meet the desire of many employees to work from home or maximise remote working opportunities. This session is led by Ryan Calvert, Head of Human Resources, Sales & Marketing Recruitment at the MCS Group, recruitment specialists that has seen employers lose out on excellent candidates because they do not market flexible working opportunities.</p> <p>Discussion Tables chaired by LRA Board Members</p>	<p>Option 2: We need your views, tips, best practice and more. Managing Remote Teams: Strategies for Success in a Flexible Work Environment. Implementing flexible working policies is one thing, managing employees with myriad working patterns and locations is another thing altogether. Discuss and record with your peers what you have done to engage remote and other flexible workers and ensure that are both productive and happy with their flexible working arrangements. This session is led by Craig Thompson, renowned and award-winning podcaster and Director of Vibrant Talent, who believes a failure of employers to measure engagement levels of remote workers will inevitably lead to the creation of a generation of mercenaries who will work simply for the highest bidder and change jobs at the drop of a hat.</p> <p>Discussion Tables chaired by LRA Board Members</p>
3.10	Comfort Break	

Afternoon Plenary Sessions Main Hall	
3.15	Keynote Speech: Productivity, People, Planet: Trends Shaping the Future World of Work. The future world of work was already being redefined by digital technologies before the pandemic hit. Now, as old and new ways of working collide, we have a unique opportunity to rethink things to make work work for people, productivity and the planet, whilst harnessing the best of both real and virtual worlds, explains Nicola J Millard, Principal Innovation Partner, Enterprise CTIO at BT.
3.55	What Next? Don Leeson, CEO, Labour Relations Agency
4.00	Close

Biographies of Speakers

Mark McAllister

Mark has been with the Labour Relations Agency for 20 years working in all frontline services as well as the corporate services side of the organisation. Mark was appointed Director of Employment Relations Services in May 2019.

Prior to joining the Agency Mark was a legal academic and a regional trade union negotiator in the further and higher education sector from 1995 – 2000. He is an experienced mediator, author and contributor to employment law publications and a regular speaker on the employment law circuit in Northern Ireland.

Mark has worked in a variety of voluntary capacities such as community mediation and is a former Chair of Community Restorative Justice Ireland. In addition, Mark has held the post of Northern Ireland Convenor of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and the Chair of the Governance Institute (NI) Branch.

Mark has a variety of formal academic qualifications including a Master's Degree in Law and Public Administration. He is a member of CiARB and a Fellow of the Governance Institute (ICSA) as well as holding memberships in the Employment Lawyers Group (NI) and the Industrial Law Society.

Mark is a member of the GAA and his beloved club Kilclief Ben Dearg (the most visually spectacular club in Ireland on the coast of Strangford Lough) and he is a keen Irish rugby fan. He is steeped in industrial and employment relations and has retained his passion for making work better for all since he started employment many years ago.



Ian Snowden

Ian has worked in the Northern Ireland Civil Service for 31 years. Prior to joining the Department for the Economy, he had been Chief Executive of Land & Property Services for five years, where he was responsible for Land Registers of Northern Ireland, Ordnance Survey NI, Valuation Services, rating policy and the collection of business and domestic rates. During the pandemic, he led on the delivery of a major package of rate reliefs and grants for businesses affected by the restrictions to control the virus which provided £1.25 billion in support for the local economy. He has also worked on creating a register of all land and property owned by Northern Ireland departments and arms' length bodies and a new approach to asset management.

Before joining LPS, Ian worked the Department for Communities as Head of the Engaged Communities Group, where he was responsible for a wide portfolio that



included arts, culture, language policy, sport, museums, libraries, built heritage, community development, community based regeneration and social inclusion policy.

In DfC and the former Department for Social Development, he also worked for almost 18 years in Housing and Urban , working in some of Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged and segregated communities, including West Belfast and Londonderry.

Since 2015 Ian has led the co-ordination of Northern Ireland's response to the immediate and longer-term needs of Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian refugees being resettled in Northern Ireland. To date, 1,900 Syrians, over 100 Afghans and 3,000 Ukrainians have been successfully supported into new lives here.

Dr Tatiana Andreeva

Tatiana is the Associate Professor in Management and Organisational Behaviour at Maynooth University School of Business. She has also served as a Research Director in the School of Business for 2018-2023.



Her previous academic appointment was as associate professor of HRM and Organisational Behaviour at the St.Petersburg University Graduate School of Management (Russia). She has also held international appointments including as an External Examiner at University of Auckland Business School (New Zealand) and a Visiting Professor at Lappeenranta University Business School (Finland) amongst others. Tatiana earned her PhD from St. Petersburg University Graduate School of Management, where she also obtained her MSc (International Business) and BSc (Management).

Tatiana's current research focuses on the intersections of knowledge management, organisational behaviour and human resource management, with a specific attention to micro-foundations of organisational processes and peculiarities of the contexts in which these processes evolve. Her research has been published in journals such as *Human Resource Management Journal*, *Journal of World Business*, *Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Management and Organization Review* and *Journal of Knowledge Management*, amongst others. Her research project on the intellectual capital elements and knowledge management practices in Russian companies has received the Emerald / Baltic Management Development Association Borderless Management Research Fund research award.

Her teaching experience includes undergraduate, postgraduate

and executive education programs in knowledge management, organisational behaviour, research methods and cross-cultural issues.

Angela Phillips

Angela graduated in medicine from the University of Nottingham in 1995 and worked in a number of hospital posts in England and Northern Ireland before entering public health in 2001. She has a Masters in Public Health from University College, Dublin and worked in a number of Public Health bodies across Northern Ireland between 2001 and 2011 including the previous Eastern and Northern Health and Social Services Boards, the Health Promotion Agency, the Public Health Agency and the Institute of Public Health.



Angela has worked across all areas of public health including health protection, service improvement, research and health improvement/promotion but her passion has always been around addressing health inequalities and improving those social determinants which we know can severely impact a person's health and life experience. Angela left work in 2011 to focus on raising her two young daughters but returned to work to help with the contact tracing process during the pandemic. Whilst raising her daughters she also put her skills to use applying for funds/grants for a local playgroup and primary school.

Personally, Angela was diagnosed in 2004 with antiphospholipid syndrome (APS), a rare autoimmune blood clotting disorder, first described in 1983. APS has a wide range of symptoms affecting multiple systems. She has experienced first hand the difficulties in getting diagnosis and treatment plans for rarer diseases and in finding information and support. She has also navigated the difficulties in managing a long-term illness along with working and then raising a family. Her experiences have made her a strong advocate for APS and she is keen to see greater awareness of rare diseases and how to diagnose them amongst healthcare professionals and stronger clinical networks across the UK (and indeed wider) for rare diseases.

Anastasia Desmond

Ana first joined the Economic Policy Centre as a placement student during her undergraduate degree, where she went on to graduate with first class honours from Ulster University in Economics with Finance.

Ana re-joined the centre as an Assistant Economist and has since progressed to Senior Economist, now specialising in areas of research including regional & sub-regional development and labour market analysis.

Since the pandemic Ana has been heavily involved in work streams relating to remote and hybrid working which continues to be of interest in an ever evolving post-pandemic world.

Ana also is involved in the delivery of teaching modules within the Ulster University Business School



Conor Curran

Conor is a qualified employment lawyer and HR professional with over 15 years' experience of embedding effective D&I strategies in large complex organisations, having previously worked in the policing, justice and health sectors. In his current role as Head of Diversity & Inclusion, he has helped Queen's University Belfast develop a reputation as leader in Equality, Diversity & Inclusion best practice, both locally and nationally. A Russell Group University, with a workforce of 4,500 staff and 27,000 students from almost 100 different countries, Queen's is also widely recognised as Northern Ireland's top university and one of the country's most diverse organisations.



Laura Walker & Chloe Fletcher After trail blazing in flexible working within their organisations, Chloe and Laura came together as a jobsharing pair in 2021. After repeatedly being asked to share tips and advice, and realising the gap in knowledge of the benefits and practicalities of jobsharing, The Jobshare Revolution was born!

We now offer inspiration, advice and consultancy support to help organisations to drive gender equity through jobsharing. alongside this, we continue our Senior Finance role as a jobsharing pair.



After starting her career at Deloitte, **Laura** joined Asda as an entry level management accountant and progressed to Senior Director over a 10 year period including roles in Accounting, Commercial Finance and Head of Internal Audit

As an advocate for social justice, Laura is hugely passionate about her roles as trustee and treasurer of both Citizens Advice Leeds and Older Citizens Advocacy York.

She is also believes in sport for mental health and spends most of her free time running and cycling.

Chloe trained on the Cadbury Finance Graduate Scheme and progressed rapidly through the ranks, ultimately leading the Supply Chain finance team. She joined Asda to lead Ambient Logistics Finance and had a varied career, including Finance Director for George Clothing.

Chloe led the "Free Range Finance" programme to transform flexible working at Asda - which sparked a passion to do more

Outside of work, Chloe is a huge advocate of wellbeing and self development - as the Trustee of a mental health charity and a personal development coach.



Kate Hulley

Kate Hulley is Owner Manager of Belmont Packaging Ltd., a manufacturer of printed and plain corrugated packaging solutions. Belmont Packaging is a female-led, forward-thinking company with years of expertise and experience in creating custom branded packaging and imaginative box shapes and functionality.



Jim Norris

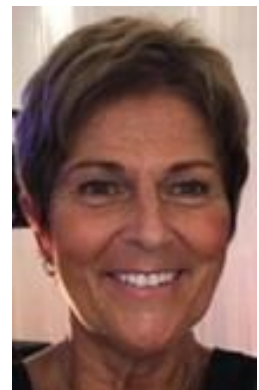
Jim Norris has over 20 years experience in Human Resources and a further 14 years working in manufacturing roles. Jim has been with Allstate since 1999 in a variety of HR roles and currently is Senior HR manager with responsibility for the HR and Talent Acquisition function for Allstate's Technology services with over 2,000 employees across three sites in Northern Ireland.

He is also an active member of Business in the Community (BITCNI) on the Business- Education Partnership board for North Belfast. Jim also represents Allstate Northern Ireland at the CBI Employment affairs committee.



Lesley Moreland MA, FCIPD

Lesley is a Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Personnel and Development and a European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Senior Assessor. She runs her own company (Lesley Consulting) which specialises in providing outsourced HR services. Lesley specialises on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing and business improvement through people projects. Prior to starting her own company Lesley worked in the IT sector for over 20 years and held various senior leadership positions within start-up organisations, responsible for driving change and business improvement through people.



Frances Denny

Frances uses her extensive knowledge and experience of supporting clinical development programmes to facilitate project delivery and oversee business operations at Exploristics.

With a BSc in Mathematics and a PhD in Statistics from Queen's University Belfast, Frances has over fifteen years' experience in biostatistics and modelling techniques supporting clinical development. Starting as a statistician at Exploristics in 2009, Frances has used her in-depth knowledge of statistics as applied to clinical development to inform and facilitate decision-making across business operations in support of project delivery for a wide range of therapeutic areas and study types.



Ryan Calvert

As a Psychology graduate with a CIPD Level 5 qualification, Ryan brings a strong foundation to his role in the HR and legal recruitment field. Leading the HR Recruitment Division and Legal Recruitment Division, he leverages extensive specialist recruitment experience to match the most talented professionals with exciting opportunities.

Ryan's expertise lies in understanding the HR skillset and its impact on organisations, ensuring a strategic approach to recruitment. His collaborative efforts span across the UK and Ireland, where he partners with a diverse range of organisations.



Known for his highly personable and customer service-driven approach, Ryan is committed to building sustainable working relationships with both candidates and clients. His dedication to excellence is evident in his role, contributing to the success of the recruitment divisions he oversees.

Craig Thompson

Craig is the Founding Director of employee engagement consultancy Vibrant Talent and creator of the Vibrant Workplace Forum, Vibrant Workplace Podcast and Vibrant Workplace Collective - an exclusive community of employers of choice granted access only after successful completion of the 12-week culture audit - the Vibrant Workplace Challenge.

Following a number of years in which he was responsible for the training and recruitment functions of the audience contact department of a major media organisation, receiving industry recognition in this time from the CCA and CIPD, he set Vibrant up to change the way the world works. He's since worked with clients with between tens and tens of thousands of employees across the Tech, Manufacturing, Hospitality & Catering, Utilities, Recruitment, Media, Advertising, Insurance, Internet and Telecommunications industries amongst others.



Craig's life's mission is to drive a movement toward a better working world for both employers and employees as he fundamentally believes a better experience of work for employees creates a better performing business for employers.

Nicola Millard

Once described as “human caffeine” on Twitter, Dr Nicola Millard injects a people-centred espresso shot to innovation and future strategy. Half social scientist, half technologist, all academic, she uses techniques from disciplines such as design thinking, psychology, anthropology, computing, behavioural economics and business consulting to generate data, provocations and stories to engage and create conversations from the board room to the front line. No frothy coffee; just solid research.



Formerly BT’s “futuresologist”, Nicola Millard concentrates on the intersection between future strategy, people, and technology – including debates about home and hybrid working, the impact of innovations such as artificial intelligence and the metaverse on how we might work, the psychology behind why we adopt technologies (or not), how expectations of customer experiences are evolving, and how contact centres and front-line jobs are impacted.

Nicola brings experience to the coffee table from a long and varied career at BT Group where she has worked in areas such as innovation, research, usability, customer service, marketing, and business consulting. She was involved with some BT firsts, including the application of artificial intelligence into BT’s call centres, BT’s experiments with home working, and helping to develop BT’s “net easy” customer score.

She is an award-winning presenter, with 2 TEDx talks and hundreds of conference panel, chair, and keynote sessions under her belt. She occasionally pops up on radio and TV around the world, including appearances on ‘Woman’s Hour’, ‘Tech Tent’, ‘The Media Show’, ‘The Genius of Invention’ and ‘Back in Time for the Weekend’ for the BBC.

Nicola Millard got her PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from Lancaster University in 2005 and has authored over 50 publications – including 1 book and numerous book chapters. She is a mentor at Cambridge Judge and an external examiner at Cranfield Business School.

She is a judge on numerous award panels, including the European Contact Centre & Customer Service, Institute of Customer Service, the CCMA, the BQF UK Excellence, & the Association of Business Psychology awards. In both 2020 & 2021 she was listed as one of the top 20 UK CX Influencers by Customer Experience Magazine

Key Questions Considered by Delegates on the Day of the Conference

The afternoon sessions were used to gather information and thoughts from delegates. Delegates were split into groups, led by an LRA board or staff member, and each group was given two questions to answer from the following options. Their ideas, suggestions, and insights in relation to the questions answered are set out in the next section.

Q. How do you strike a balance between offering flexibility and maintaining accountability for performance and results?

Q. What business benefits have you seen if you have adapted a flexible working model (e.g. retention, loyalty, profits, culture, performance)?

Q. How do you train and support managers to effectively lead and manage teams with flexible work arrangements?

Q. What key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics does your organisation use to measure the success of flexible work initiatives?

Q. Could you set out initiatives or resources set in place to address any potential downsides of remote work or employee well-being?

Q. What challenges has your organisation faced in implementing or expanding remote work and how have you addressed them?

Q. What measures are in place to ensure accountability and maintain a high level of output in a remote work environment?

Q. How does your organisation provide training and development opportunities for remote employees to enhance their skills and career growth?

Q. How can employers be motivated to view part-time positions as valuable contributors to the workforce?

Q. How can the language around part-time work be reframed to convey its value and importance within the organisation?

Q. How does your organisation promote collaboration and team building among remote and flexible teams, and do you find team collaboration is better or worse when people work remotely? What's missing / what else could be done to improve it?

Q. How has your organisation developed strategies to actively engage remote and flexible workers? What have you found has worked best? Is there anything which hasn't worked so well? What else do you think could be done?

Key Findings Delegate Consultation Sessions:

Q. How do you strike a balance between offering flexibility and maintaining accountability for performance and results?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Good communications and regular meetings between managers and reportees and within teams.
- Clarity around measurable outputs and objectives that must be achieved regardless of how working hours are structured or where the work takes place.
- Line managers need support and training in maintaining remote relationships with staff.
- Instructions must be evidence-based and data driven.
- A holistic approach to identifying positive levers on performance works best – people work in different ways and at different times.
- Employees need to have capable line managers – ones who can set and agree achievable targets, hold one to one meetings, have a coaching approach to engagement. Training and support should be given to managers.
- Teams need to have time set aside for team collaboration – it is all too easy for remote workers in particular to become isolated or demotivated.
- Success requires buy-in from the top and should involve case studies and research – evidence-based decision making convinces more people of the need for parameters etc.
- Employers and managers must know how to measure productivity and hold people accountable where they fail to meet targets.
- A mix of jobs in a team can help build understanding and lead to better decision making but can also make assessment of contributions to targets more difficult.
- Set objectives / targets should be SMART.
- Measuring performance can be easier to ignore when work is remote and it can act as a barrier to performance management being implemented.
- Employers need to consider ways to ensure the organisation's culture is developed where people are working remotely, or in different shifts etc. How do you ensure everyone is involved and those who are not always present feel involved and not isolated?
- Resistance from the top of the organisation can lead to resentment from those below. Consistency and acceptance that flexibility is good for all helps build feelings of trust.
- Flexible working is not just about remote working or WFH. Consider other options e.g. varying start times, job share, etc that might work better for some people.
- Productivity requirements are unique to each organisation, so regular communication within each organisation and sharing of information are vital. The importance of discussions/meetings should be emphasised.
- Engaging all in setting objectives is valuable if employers want employee-buy-in.
- Reports on team performance and results should be shared with everyone. This will engender team spirit and reduce surprises and misunderstandings.
- Try to show how goals fit into flexibility – who is accountable for what?
- Regular one to ones build trust and relationships between managers and direct reports. Finding times that work for both is essential.

- Good line management training is important, but benchmarking is also good practice – analysing how various similar teams perform can give you good insights that are based on evidence.

Q. What business benefits have you seen if you have adapted a flexible working model (e.g. retention, loyalty, profits, culture, performance)?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Talent, not location, is the important consideration. Great performers will perform well anywhere. If they need more tools because of specific factors, provide them.
- Flexible working is essential in retention and attracting talent. Just as flexitime was once seen as a great recruitment and retention tool, WFH and other remote working options are what candidates are looking for. They will either not apply or will leave if flexible working is not provided.
- Flexible working contributes to our culture of support for employee wellbeing. Employees need flexibility for a variety of reasons (e.g. health, family circumstances, travel and parking costs) and offering flexible working arrangements chimes with their personal needs.
- WFH can be helpful for some who need isolation to work on specific projects or types of work.
- Some employers might want to set limits on flexible options, such as employees could WFH for up to 20-100 days per annum.
- Other employers find no minimum works best for them – there is no one size fits all.
- Other employers have designated ‘collaboration’ days, either in or out of the office.
- Some employers find WFH allows staff to choose their bank holidays, so that there are no official closures and there will always be some staff available to deal with customer queries from outside the jurisdiction, for example.
- With many people WFH, use of relatively inexpensive online training is being used more often and can be tracked.
- More research may be required to frame policy that is both meaningful and benchmarked.
- Some have found that technical skills have improved as a result of WFH and employees are easier to engage, support & develop because getting people together online is easier.
- There are some legal conditions that need to be considered around workstations and assessments, but there are also opportunities to train and develop new skills, such as how to chair meetings, use tech, and how create trust and confidence remotely.
- There is a need to train managers on what is expected at the outset. Unfortunately, the straw poll conducted at the conference showed only 1-2% of organisations present had trained their managers in managing remotely.
- Managers need to share information, possibly more than before, to engender feelings of togetherness and inclusion.
- Clear protocols and tool kits work well for some organisations.
- Flexible working helps to retain talent.
- Not all roles align but that creates a chance to openly discuss reasons.
- Accountability comes when managers set out what they expect in outputs and those can be agreed with staff.
- The work-life balance provided by flexible working helps/builds loyalty.
- Performance is improved provided managers are supported & trained in how to measure outputs and the quality of outputs.

- Flexible working and WFH has provided opportunities to move or change styles of management to a more modern/transformational style that is attractive to younger generations.
- There is some data to support that emotionally intelligent managers will impact positively on the bottom line and add value to the organisation.
- It might be worthwhile mapping flexible arrangements, given that there are apparently 300+ flexible working options available:
[There are more than 300 ways to work flexibly – here are four tips to make it work for you \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/there-are-more-than-300-ways-to-work-flexibly-here-are-four-tips-to-make-it-work-for-you)
- Flexible working not only helps keep the staff member in work. It allows them to balance family, caring responsibilities, disability etc with work. It also helps retain the corporate knowledge, experience and provides mentors for newer members of staff.
- Some found that during covid lockdown everyone worked from home and productivity increased.
- Many found that staff were much happier because of the better home/life balance – which is reflected in loyalty/performance/retention.
- There are competitive advantages in offering flexible options. Failure to do so gives the competitive advantage to rivals.
- Using physical get-togethers to build culture elevates the days in the office and acts as a retention tool and team-bonding opportunity.
- Employers can either rid themselves of expensive, seldom used office space or can utilise it in other ways, such as reconfiguring offices for group work and social spaces or renting out certain areas no longer needed.
- Some employers cannot commit to full flexibility but have embraced 4-day-week summers that staff love without any impact on productivity.
- Job descriptions and terms of employment should be updated to reflect any changes and, although hard to implement or enforce, employers should retain the right to require staff to return to the office, at least for specific days or reasons.
- It's one of the big draws for working in government – we've had flexible working including flexi time, job share, part-time, condensed hours for years. Pay isn't as good as private industry, so the flexibility is viewed as a big benefit to retain staff and a big attraction in recruitment.
- As a manager staff enjoy being able to work alongside caring responsibilities or just to suit your body clock.
- Working from home is across the board now – parity, equality is better. It ties in with ESG and DEI commitments.
- The improved sense of work-life balance – not having to be constrained by 9-5 routine, allowing parents with school drop offs to continue working, is a real bonus in retention.
- Some found that performance hasn't dropped and some people work early every day but still deliver the work – only at their convenience and they are happier for it.
- The reduction in travel costs is very helpful for many staff, as is the reduced travel time.
- There are some issues regarding agile working and getting people together at the same time to work on projects.
- Managers get better technical skills and soft skills when dealing with flexible workers.
- Managers/employers need to create the right environment to boost levels of confidence that remote/flexible working is valued and staff are trusted.

Q. How do you train and support managers to effectively lead and manage teams with flexible work arrangements?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Frameworks are informed by experience – going from the organic to the defined
- Some used tool kits and technology such as ‘work week’ to keep track of worker location and support needs.
- Research and benchmarking to inform policy and procedure were seen as particularly important in examples of management of global teams across time zones; See management by orgs such as Open University who have managed huge teams of staff remotely for decades.
- Be clear about expectations and manage expectations through honest conversations and create trust as the underpinning value.
- Facilitate in-person conferencing/events on ‘hub’ days – the common day in office for most staff.
- Make training a priority – nearly more important than the flexible arrangements themselves.
- There needs to be a blend of technical and practical skills, as well as competencies, to engage, support and develop a flexible workforce.
- Set good examples, such as effectively chairing online/blended meetings protocols and guidance to equip managers.
- It is important to know the legal boundaries and minimum standards and to emphasise and enforce/deliver these.
- You may encounter issues such as confidence v fear – communication skills and sharing inspiring performance will boost confidence and overcome fears.
- Train managers to get to truly know their people – why they want flexible working and how this diversity will enable them to contribute more – building trust is the key.
- You need a balance of basic managerial skills and softer skills to engage staff e.g. open questions/less instructional.
- Don’t be afraid to address ‘fear’ – managers need to be confident and more curious to address deeper reasons/personal issues to get staff to open up and so equip them to deal with any problems.
- Be clear on what is expected – behaviours, standards, outputs.
- Continuously work on creating the right environment for trusting and open conversations.
- Remember – the manager is also a person, with their own vulnerability and needs, who requires authentic support.

Q. What key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics does your organisation use to measure the success of flexible work initiatives?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Employers need to invest more in regular employee surveys (which are now easier to do) and need to respond to those surveys.
- Consider using general indicators as opposed to or in conjunction with specific metrics:
- Retention/turnover levels and reasons for staying/leaving
- Sickness levels and reasons for absence
- No. of employees and profile availing of options engagement forum set up
- Post survey to all levels
- Develop a dashboard
- Survey/survey + respond to findings
- Consider wider indicators or benchmarking with other sections or employers
- Combine with other retention measures
- Measure wellness and not just sickness
- Are there recurring theme?
- Try varying options via pilots and measuring change: 2 days home/3 days office or 4-day-week or whatever works best for your organisation and employees
- Set and measure productivity or performance targets regarding outputs and behaviours
- Measure those who do not availing of flex options
- Ensure you have a flex policy with the right to vary

Q. Could you set out initiatives or resources set in place to address any potential downsides of remote work or employee well-being?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Good line managers make the difference in keeping staff engaged. Invest in managers.
- Set clear parameters.
- Build Trust and keep building trust – employees who feel trusted work better and stay longer.
- Emphasise that positives outweigh negatives in relation to retaining and recruiting staff.
- To reduce feelings of being switched on 24/7 managers need to set the good example and employers need to enforce it. The alternative is burn-out and turnover.
- ‘Treat staff like children and they will behave like children,’ so show trust.
- Provide informal support outside formal procedures e.g. Mental Health First Aiders/D@W Advisors etc.
- Ensure employment relations are at the table to help resolve issues.
- Remote working requires good connections, so help staff who struggle.
- Work on onboarding of new staff to minimise negative impact or feelings of isolation or lack of connectivity.
- It can be a cultural thing - remote working has enabled f/time working in some cases.
- Remote/flexible working has helped neuro diverse awareness and to make adjustments.
- Embracing flexibility – staff BBQ – home BBQ pack – brings people together and is authentic.
- One employer closed offices Mondays & Fridays and managed to double workforce on working days with no extra space required. Few people want to be in offices Monday & Friday – embrace it!
- Be more proactive with your well-being programme – people can become isolated more easily when they are not visible in the office.
- Use pilots for different options but be consistent. Different options for senior staff or certain staff can lead to resentment.
- Incremental moves from 1 day to 2 days to 3 days now in workplace was embedded but survey showed that stress at work increased.
- To be more productive it is imperative that you maintain culture of connection so that staff work for one another. Some have tried meditation, group walks, sharing photos, BBQs, phased back to works, focus on ADHD staff, wellbeing, wellness action plans; great induction/onboarding; social etiquette; free information; help with Technology (WIFI); questions over real estate downsizing office space; answering questions around employee wellbeing (long working); and more.
- Remote working was accelerated/introduced across the board because of lockdown – huge undertaking to get everyone a laptop and access to network – imbalance as some unable to work for several weeks.
- Accept that induction of new staff very difficult and that balancing over and under performance is difficult without specific targets.
- Some had to make an effort to collaborate – virtual tea breaks, not just meetings.
- Accept that not everyone had a suitable workspace – confidentiality, peace to work, health & safety – these issues need to be discussed and resolved.

- Employers need to be strict about work-life balance. If that means a right to disconnect policy is enforced, so be it.
- Isolation can have an impact on mental health – wellbeing programmes, resolving the lack of a hybrid policy was an issue – currently working to address this Backdrop – created branded teams, backdrop core.
- Work on develop of technology – unique ‘security’ networks/systems hardwire to reduce cyber crime etc.
- Use tech, like Teams or Zoom to ensure ‘team’ collaboration.
- Recognise the unfairness of opportunity – CSI lab – (summer sun splitting trees) - (education programme)
- Take advantage of the reduction of assets – but it will be balanced against the need for more tech.
- Boost the number and support/training for mental health first aiders.
- Ensure there is a wellness action plan as part of meeting individual

Q. What challenges has your organisation faced in implementing or expanding remote work and how have you addressed them?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- It's hybrid working – the clue is in hybrid. Expectations are that there is no need to attend workplace, but some want back more than others.
- Many employees find they are more productive without distractions but that is not the only issue: suitability, and health and safety of home working, including domestic violence, in some cases, also comes into play. There is no one size fits all option available.
- For remote working, responsibility for safety/wellbeing of employee; ensuring the equipment is fit for purpose/adequate i.e. workstation – all of these are important factors for which the long-term impact is not yet known.
- Working off the kitchen table without adequate chair, screen height etc could be causing injuries for which employers will eventually be found liable. Home working is not suitable without adequate equipment and risk assessments.
- Employees need skills for communicating online – there have been some questionable behaviours and lack of etiquette in front of camera.
- Technology adds additional costs, as does training.
- Some line managers can be very rigid around being in the office and are reluctant to grant requests for flexible/hybrid working. They are concerned about opening floodgates. But the policy should be that of the employer, not managers.
- Data protection is a genuine concern – safety measures must be made to minimise chances of cyber-attacks.
- Employees not switching off and doing additional hours, checking phones all evening etc could lead to future claims and burn-out if not handled correctly.

Q. What measures are in place to ensure accountability and maintain a high level of output in a remote work environment?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

Some think it is difficult to achieve a level of reassurance without creating a culture of suspicion rather than trust.

Others consider it to be the same as in person accountability. Why stigmatise it as different? Set output targets and expect them to be reached.

Employers need to support staff in managing time – the default is to do more and staff are more likely to over-work than under-work.

Clear conversations about priorities with regular check-ins that are supportive not invasive – tackle presenteeism culture – leadership must set this tone.

There is a danger of stigmatising flexible work by over-managing – staff who could be trusted before remote working can still be trusted.

Employers need to change focus – it's not a 'benefit' or an easy way out and if it is framed like this the presumption will be that flexible workers are less productive purely because they aren't in traditional 'clock-in, clock-out'. Employers need to move to a mindset where flexible working is the norm and a great way to work.

What's the purpose of the flexible or remote work? Maybe it makes the employee more productive, rather than simply meeting in-work standards. Be realistic about the benefits of flexible/remote working AND what is expected in return.

Q. How does your organisation provide training and development opportunities for remote employees to enhance their skills and career growth?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Learn from organisations who are fully remote.
- Ask the employee ‘what is your workstyle’?
- Use training tools to help employee establish norms and targets.
- Communication is key – talk and talk some more.
- Know their preferred learning styles – different methods suit different employees.
- Dedicated and set time and investment in training – make it deliberate and intentional, just as you would have pre-covid lockdown.
- Make training visible and expose outcomes and outputs across levels and layers of organisation.
- Emphasise unity of purpose and connection to brand, regardless of location.
- Ensure great onboarding experience and support process, regardless of location.
- Learn from big global firms who have ‘remote customers’ and how to engage remote employees who they have never met customers e.g. Amazon have never met their customers, yet they have brand followers and committed customers.

Q. How can employers be motivated to view part-time positions as valuable contributors to the workforce?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- It is important to share best practice stories and focus on benefits – diversity works and brings in wider considerations that full-time-only employees will not have thought of.
- Emphasise in recruitment that traditional, non-flexible roles are not all that's available. Assume that all jobs can be part-time, unless you can show a good reason for them not being so.
- Data & labour market impact could motivate public sector partial retirement numbers – it can be the sensible option for many employees. If they see it as the best options, it won't be seen as stigmatised.
- Part-time work has to be seen as a two-way thing: not just top down. Management have to extol the virtues, even go part-time themselves, and employees need to see it as a viable, valuable option.
- Set out core tangible numbers – productivity and focus on Job share = double the skillset and cover possible when someone is off or leaves.
- Focus PT/FT at recruitment decisions based on values, rather than just history.
- Share internal and external best practice stories with staff – highlight the value.
- Highlight that part-time work improves skills and widens pool of applicants by allowing more individuals to apply.
- AIB allows split shift work (morning/afternoon)
- If employers are aware of market expectations, they may be more inclined to offer part-time work as candidate-led.
- BITC has numerous case studies and best practice examples.
- Keep it simple and focus on benefits – employers are seeking skills, talent, different views and perspectives, rather than just filling hours with people who can work full-time.
- Consider a different view between headcount and FTE when actively advertising p/t roles.
- Can you go beyond simply advertising p/t posts with a welcoming statement?
- Over 50s favour flexible working conditions over pay (Hays survey)
- Ask existing staff what they think: staff surveys might throw up surprising demand or results.
- Placement students often stay p/t after placement year to finish degree. It's a way to maintain skills and assess potential staff.
- Consider compressed, rather than p/t hours – some people need full-time pay but want more days off.
- Smaller organisations can compete with other larger companies on hours and flexibility, whereas they often can't on wages, so could offer more Job share and other part-time options.
- Many women with successful careers don't want to press stop. Offering P-T work is a way to maintain skills and retain trained female staff, employees who may want more hours as circumstances change over the years.
- Just admit it – offering P-T options can be useful to help employers struggling to fill F-T roles.
- Be openly very supportive of p/t working.

- Consistency across departments or job functions can be the biggest challenge. View this as a problem to be solved and not an intractable matter.
- Value training for P-T, as well as F-T staff.
- It is a problem of mindsets. How can you communicate in a way that will shift mindsets that don't value P-T work or P-T workers?
- When promotion opportunities arise, assume they will be suitable for P-T work.
- Be alert to proximity bias – it works against P-T and remote workers.
- Appoint the right people to the decision-making positions, people who accept the value of P-T work.
- Train line management in values and value of P-T employment.
- Engage all staff in setting objectives, not just F-T.

Q. How can the language around part-time work be reframed to convey its value and importance within the organisation?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Why call it part-time? Why call it full-time? Are these terms relevant or fit for purpose anymore?
- Remove label, remove stigma.
- Be proactive – go to staff and ask them.
- In R&S – advertise hols, pay, flexible nature, varied hours' optional.
- Be open and transparent
- Have a zero-tolerance attitude to part-timer name calling: it's imbued with a lack of respect.
- Maybe the public sector telling private sector that they need to change isn't working? Perhaps emphasising the benefits of P-T working alone would be better?

Q. How does your organisation promote collaboration and team building among remote and flexible teams, and do you find team collaboration is better or worse when people work remotely? What's missing / what else could be done to improve it?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

- Sameness is not fairness. Equality should bring equity.
- Have more team discussions – there is a lack of understanding when people don't share views.
- Leadership is required - knowledge and life experience have an impact on others.
- Training of managers is vital. Neuro-divergent and other issues mean that managers need to be a ware of myriad factors.
- Use white boards, online and in-person to gather ideas – people like solving problems and like to be asked to come up with solutions.
- Value MS Teams and other meetings' Apps
- Vary in-person and online meetings, where possible and don't value one set over the other, though perhaps use them for different purposes.
- Think about and discuss with staff what should be social and workspace.

Q. How has your organisation developed strategies to actively engage remote and flexible workers? What have you found has worked best? Is there anything which hasn't worked so well? What else do you think could be done?

This question brought out the following points and suggestions from delegates – employers need to take time and consider:

All hands' meetings have been kept on post-covid. Involving everyone shows that everyone is valued. Some have all hands' meeting in the comms diary once a month.

Face to face meetings take place but mostly on MS Teams because it works.

Staff liked knowing about sales and targets – keep that up, regardless of where people work.

Some hold a weekly catch up from the MD. Some have other programmes & Teams' meetings. Each team has weekly huddles.

Some have created an environment team, who go for a walk and chat to each other. This clears the head, is healthy and builds team cohesion, but also engenders idea creation.

Accept that it is difficult now to get everybody in the office because they are rarely in the office together – the easiest way to get everyone together virtually and celebrate that.

One employer set up a remote contact centre – (pre covid idea) developed specific remote teams and focused on building team spirit and support. Very popular – incidental things – Easter egg on desk can also be done.

Trial and error is not a bad thing to do: see what works for employer and staff. Try a new initiative and get feedback. Ask staff – give them the choice. Involve people in what will impact on them and how they work.

You said, we did – survey remote workers.

Figure it out if there is a lack of collaboration – how to close the gaps between the desks in a more collaborative way. Technology can be your friend, but you need to be honest and accept things could be improved before staff can come up with a how.

Have physical meeting rooms with appropriate technology for hybrid meetings. Help remote workers feel involved and present.

Cost is a big factor – do what you can with what you've got.

Assume good ideas come from Slack donut

Hold random video call in pairs.

Embrace new technology, such as a Teams task planner.

Additional Comments from Delegates

Q. What is your key learning or takeaway from the event?

The survey comments from delegates largely reflected the discussions on the day – almost everyone found the event valuable and practical. Delegates discovered that, for the most part, employers in NI were well ahead of any legislative requirements and most had implemented a range of flexible working options, wherever possible. Most recognised the need to offer flexibility as a recruitment and retention essential element. Most found the variety of ideas inspiring, if somewhat bewildering in the sheer range of options available that employees might seek...

- Review of policies to see where we can enhance. Support for line managers.
- There is lots of good practice happening here that we should celebrate.
- That flexible working needs more thought.
- That NI is trying to embrace flexible working.
- I felt this event was more geared towards public sector or companies who are not as far down the line with their flexible working approaches. I did not benefit from this event and expected more new outputs.
- There is no one right template - every sector, organisation, individual has unique professional and personal preferences.
- In the absence of the NIA making a decision to mandate flexible working in NI, despite GB and ROI having made the decision, it makes it really difficult for SMEs to sell the benefits to Managing Directors etc and we eagerly await guidance from LRA in the interim period.
- I learned that our company is quite exceptional in our approach to flexible working. It will make life easier as the laws change as we are ahead of the legislative requirements.
- The event stimulated lots of productive discussions about flexible working and gave me plenty of food for thought. I'll hopefully be able to improve our guidance to highlight the many advantages that flexible working can bring to businesses and some of the challenges that businesses can identify and address to get flexible working right for their staff that can in turn improve and grow their business.