

**A quantitative study on the effects of Covid-19 related
remote working upon Department of Social Protection
staff with particular regard to well-being, work/life
balance, and motivation**

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Abstract

This paper looks at the effects of remote working on the staff body of one large government organisation, the Department of Social Protection (DSP), Ireland. It gives a background to the remote working situation, looks at the current position, and potential future measures. It draws on the works of others who have examined the area and effect of remote working both before and during the pandemic. It looks at the focus of these studies and both past and recent findings.

It examines and assesses the results of a survey on the staff of the department's perceptions of their well-being, work/life balance, and motivation, and how this may have changed or developed after a year of remote working. The findings of this survey are measured against other relevant studies and surveys to give a more accurate representation of recent attitudes to, and perceptions of, remote working. For most department staff, due to Covid-19, remote working became mandatory where prior to the pandemic it would have been a rarity. Though there has been much study of the effects of remote working on the worker up to now there has been less focus on the effects of obligatory remote working. This paper examines the effect of mandatory remote working on the worker in the areas of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation, how these perceptions may change over time, and what can be learned from these findings.

The study found that largely DSP staff have improved levels of well-being and work/life balance but have relatively unchanged motivation levels. An improved work/life balance is the most important of the three areas studied. Where respondents have more free time and better control of their time, work/life balance is improved which is shown to underpin improvements in well-being and motivation.

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List of Abbreviations

TCO	TEMPORARY CLERICAL OFFICER
CO	CLERICAL OFFICER
SO	STAFF OFFICER
EO	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
AO	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
HEO	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
AP	ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OFFICER
PO	PRINCIPAL OFFICER
DSP	DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION
CSEES	CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Chapter 1: Introduction

In early 2020 the world slowly began to realise that the vague rumours emanating from China about a new, dangerous and easily transmittable virus were not going away. The rumours were not abating, and they were being replaced by factual news stories. Few were aware at that time that this was the beginning of a global pandemic that would have massive social and economic effects across the globe. As the virus spread and countries came to realise, and put in place the necessary actions to halt, or at least slow the spread, the follow-on effects were devastating across many sectors. Ultimately, enforcing social distancing measures came at a cost to the economy, lowering wages, and shrinking GDP that will have repercussions for a decade (De Bruin et al., 2020). Shops, bars, and restaurants closed, there was cancellation or postponement of sporting and cultural events, and many essential public services were scaled back to the barest minimum. As this was happening conversely there was major growth in certain areas of the tech industry. As consumers were pushed to use online shops as an alternative to the physical shops, the online retail market developed at an accelerated rate, advancing between 4 and 7 years over the course of 2020 (McKinsey, 2020). In a similar way remote working technology grew across all other sectors where office-based staff now had the potential to work away from the office. As of 2019, across the 27 member states of the EU, only 5.4% of workers worked remotely, and this number has been relatively unchanged since 2009. Since the outbreak of Covid 40% of the EU workforce is now working from home (European Commission, 2020) many primarily without adequate training or resources (Como et al., 2021). Most workers who are remote working are doing so because they must; their work can be done remotely, and they have the necessary tech to work remotely. There is no need for them to return to their workplace yet, government guidance is to work from home where possible, and so employers have in some ways 'closed' offices and directed staff to work from home until further notice. Studies have shown that staff that work from home are "more committed, enthusiastic and satisfied with their job" than their office-based colleagues (Felstead et al., 2017). There have been more recent studies, due to Covid, that show negative correlation between working from home and work/life balance (Palumbo, 2020) and job satisfaction (Möhring et al. 2020). This is two-fold and not just Covid related. Remote working has always been a challenge for employers and employees alike. The main appeal of remote

working is flexibility for the employee, though remote workers tend to work more hours per day and find it harder to detach at the end of the working day (Rose, 2019; Ergovan et al., 2021). When the benefit of flexibility is taken away remote workers are caught up in the negative aspects of remote working with few or none of the benefits. Mandatorily working remotely due to Covid with no option to attend the office has taken away that flexibility from many people. This paper examines how the staff of Department of Social Protection have managed after more than a year of remote working.

The DSP started affecting Covid measures around the middle of March 2020. The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was launched on 16 March 2020 and by Friday 27 March 2020 PUPs were issued to some 283,000 people on top of some 200,000 regular Jobseeker's payments (Gov.ie, 2020c). As of January 2021, the DSP were issuing PUPs to 460,000 people (Gov.ie, 2021a) and by March 2021 some 850,000 people had received PUPs (Gov.ie, 2021b). Unlike other government departments, and many private organisations, the DSP became busier overnight, with hugely increased workload, and with the added concerns and stresses of social distancing in the workplace, remote working, and other Covid measures placed on the staff.

From analysing dissertation survey data gathered from DSP staff, and with reference to texts related to this area of study, this paper sets about answering the following research questions:

For the staff of the DSP over the 15-month period (March 2020 – June 2021) how has the Covid pandemic and Covid related remote working:

- affected their well-being?
- affected their work/life balance?
- affected their motivation?

And further to this what measures can we put in place going forward derived from the learning of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Remote working or working from home can create unique challenges (Akkaya et al., 2021). Based on the literature there are many positive and negative aspects to remote working though mandatory remote working during a pandemic can be 'extraordinarily stressful' for many people (Ipsen et al., 2021). This study is primarily looking at how survey respondents in DSP were affected regarding well-being, work/life balance, and motivation. The following literature review displays the current thinking in each area.

Well-Being

Measuring and recording the effects of remote working is not as straightforward as the situation being either 'good' or 'bad' for the worker. Studies have shown a negative correlation between remote working and well-being (Parham & Rauf, 2020) but the many issues that may cause remote working to be stressful and detrimental to a worker's well-being may be offset by the added flexibility and autonomy that come with remote working (Curzi et al., 2020). It is a complex issue. Studies have shown that remote workers report positive and negative aspects to the situation (Oakman et al., 2020; Azimov, 2020). One study found that remote working did not seem to affect everybody in the same way and that their results seemed to vary considerably stating 'increased stress' and 'improved well-being' as outcomes (Oakman et al., 2020). Though their sample size was small, they were able to identify negative and positive effects caused by the isolation of working from home. This finding is echoed in another study (Azimov, 2020) where, though workers are suffering the negative aspects of mandatory remote working, they are inclined to state that the positive aspects of working remotely outweigh the negative aspects. There are tangible and intangible benefits to working from home (Prasad et al., 2020). A study carried out in the Netherlands found that employees who maintained overall healthy lifestyle patterns seemed to be more insulated from the negative effects of remote working whereas, conversely, those employees who were most negatively affected by remote working found this negative effect causing deterioration in their lifestyle, which in turn reduced their well-being (Pluut & Wonders, 2020).

Healthy lifestyle behaviours lead to better well-being and happier people but the negative aspects of mandatory remote working; challenges in work/life balancing, increased stress, and exhaustion, lead to less participation in healthier lifestyle habits. It can be a downward spiral if started and, though a healthier lifestyle cannot insulate a remote worker entirely from this, the effects are less negative the better the lifestyle of the respondent. An exercise program can help with the establishment of routine during mandatory remote working and work endorsed fitness programs can help remote workers' engagement levels (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). This is important, as job engagement and remote working have been found to significantly influence the psychological well-being of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic (Prasad et al., 2021).

The increased autonomy that comes with remote working has been found to relieve stress and emotional exhaustion (Charalampous et al., 2019). Paradoxically, the more autonomy a remote worker has, the more they strive to increase their own productivity and work longer hours thereby affecting their well-being (Curzi et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021). Studies show that people were far more likely to engage in unhealthy habits due to the sedentary nature of life in a pandemic although this is not always constant. A Spanish study found that as a period of lockdown continues a person's habits start to improve again (Lopez-Bueno et al., 2020).

It is not just physical health that is at risk when working from home. The isolation and blurring of work/life boundaries can have significant impact on mental health leading to exhaustion and burnout. Older studies found that remote working was linked with negative emotions in survey participants, though recent studies find that the opposite is true, and remote working is generally linked with positive emotions. This is largely due to increased tech that allows workers to be more connected than before (Charalampous et al., 2019). When working life and personal life have this increased ability and potential to become intertwined, it can be difficult to let go at the end of the day and continued attempts to separate the two, while being unable to, lead to more stress (Ergovan et al., 2021). Being able to fully disengage from work issues during personal time is referred to as 'psychological detachment' (Firoozabadi et al., 2018) and workers that can successfully detach gain more from their personal time, are more refreshed during work hours, and have better well-being (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021). The inability to detach is not a new problem, but in the new hyper-connected remote working

environment it has every opportunity to become increasingly worse. Increased connectivity compels workers to respond to work matters outside of their work hours (Charalampous et al., 2019). Occupational stress, increased through Covid, affects the psychological well-being of employees and must be managed (Prasad et al., 2021) as it is the 'primary well-being dimension' (Curzi et al., 2020).

There is a correlation between exercise levels and sleep and due to its prevalence in other studies sleep should be prioritized as a well-being concern (Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Lopez-Leon et al., 2020). Also, it should be noted, that though increased exercise has health benefits, studies are showing the negative impact on mental health of reduced exercise specifically due to Covid i.e. no commute, no training, closed gyms (Pears et al., 2021).

Remote workers should "adapt their lifestyle to working from home as opposed to letting working from home adapt their lifestyle" (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). Employee burnout becomes more of an issue as remote working is prolonged which must be a pressing concern for organisations. Employee well-being is beneficial to both organisation and employee in that it increases organisational performance through reduced absenteeism and staff turnover (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021; Como et al., 2021; Akkaya et al., 2021; Parham & Rauf, 2020).

In many ways the pursuit of the happy, healthy, motivated employee is about balance (Lopez-Leon et al., 2020) which is, in part, the reason why work/life balance is so important in this area, and why it receives so much attention in this study.

Work/Life Balance

'Work/life balance' is the term most used to describe the pursuit of equilibrium between a person's personal and professional commitments (Como et al., 2021) while minimising conflict between the roles (Akkaya et al., 2021). The health guidelines introduced due to Covid have caused workers to work from home exclusively since March 2020. Many find there is an overall benefit to their work/life balance due to the flexibility it brings (Charalampous et al., 2019; Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021) but there are myriad potential downsides (Parham & Rauf, 2020). It is unavoidable that many will try to multi-task work and family commitments during the working day causing considerable work/life balance challenges (Pluut & Wonders,

2020; Lopez-Leon et al., 2020). Also referred to as 'work-family conflict' and 'work-life integration', work/life balance, when out of balance, is associated with lower perceptions of one's own physical and mental health (Como et al., 2021).

The economic downturn led to reduced workforces. Due to the fear of losing one's job the worker is compelled to work even harder in the remote setting. Adding this to the longer workday, the lack of interaction with colleagues, and juggling work/life commitments, leads to emotional exhaustion (Bhumika, 2020; Prasad et al., 2020, Palumbo). One Italian study found remote workers were less stressed, but they were also less productive (Ipsen et al., 2021). It is interesting to note that Oakman noted associations between remote working and less exhaustion though this was inversely proportional to the amount of organisational and peer support received (Oakman et al., 2020). Managers and colleagues provide a stress-attenuating roll (Molino et al., 2020) and, with family and friends, they provide a support network (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). Those with low levels of support while remote working had increased emotional exhaustion (Charalampous et al., 2019).

A lack of a dedicated workspace can decrease a remote worker's work/life boundaries (Como et al., 2021). Mimicking the pre-Covid workplace and routine can help with maintaining the divide between work and personal life (Lopez-Leon et al., 2020; Aropah et al., 2020) as these boundaries can become unclear while remote working (Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021, Ipsen et al., 2021, Charalampous et al., 2019).

Despite the many benefits that remote working brings to work/life balance it can also hinder it (Akkaya, et al., 2021). Obscuring the divide between work and personal life is negatively associated with employee well-being. In a Dutch study, 63.5% of participants reported that division between work and private life was much more unclear than before Covid (Pluut & Wonders, 2020) and many remote workers have been found to overwork (Akkaya et al., 2021). This 'informal overtime' can have a negative effect on work/life balance (Parham & Rauf, 2021). Those with larger families likely have even less personal time to recharge (Como et al., 2021; Akkaya et al., 2021, Parham & Rauf, 2020) and it has also been found that those with children are more likely to struggle with work/life balance than those without (Pluut & Wonders, 2020) leading to the two no longer being 'separate spheres' (Lopez-Leon et al.,

2020). Studies have shown that if remote workers work only their working hours then remote working can be beneficial (Parham & Rauf, 2020).

For some, work/life integration can be positive, promoting flexibility and aiding their management of personal and professional commitments (Como et al., 2021). It can also increase job satisfaction and engagement (Akkaya et al., 2021) overcoming work/life balance challenges for organisation's employees (Parham & Rauf, 2020). Though the autonomy that comes with remote working can really change a worker's work/life balance for the better it does not suit all workers. If not well managed it can lead to remote workers feeling that they are either neglecting work, or neglecting family, which leads to guilt, stress, increased work pressure, and 'intensified work life conflict' (Putnam et al., 2013).

The pursuit of this 'balance' is the linchpin for successful remote working experiences – the balance is integral to increased well-being and motivation. Successful work/life balance prevents depression and encourages overall well-being (Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021). If the work/life balance is not resolved while working remotely, the divide between the two worlds is obfuscated (Parham & Rauf, 2021). This adds to the remote worker's inability to unplug entirely from work, thereby negatively affecting work/life balance, well-being and motivation (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021).

The reduction or elimination of commute times means that remote workers have less personal expenses and more personal time which does a lot to address work/life balance issues (Como et al., 2021; Parham & Rauf, 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021). Some studies since Covid have shown that workers find the flexibility of the new remote work situation, though mandatory, gives them more time to interact with colleagues, increasing their sense of community and well-being, while other studies of workers in the same situation showed the exact opposite (Parham & Rauf, 2020).

The use of the term 'balance' may be a misnomer as it is not about equal division of time, but more about controlled application of time to work and personal life as desired. This is an idealistic model as perfect 'balance' does not seem to be achievable (Como et al., 2021) but the concept is worth working towards.

Motivation

Motivation can be described as 'purposeful behaviour' (Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021). It encapsulates job satisfaction, productivity, and engagement and, with mandatory remote working during this pandemic, is more of a challenge for employers than ever before (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021). Studies have shown positive correlation between remote working and motivation mainly attributed to increased flexibility and autonomy (Parham & Rauf, 2020) but also negative correlations due to communication difficulties, loneliness, lack of support, and distractions (Ergovan et al., 2021). It can be difficult to manage and balance for many workers.

Motivation can be weakened by quick changes to the workplace and practices such as those brought by Covid. It affects the morale of workers (Azimov, 2020) and they must find a greater willingness to work in 'unusual times' (Palumbo, 2020). While remote working, though autonomy is increased, it has been found that work ability and co-worker interaction is lowered (Schade et al., 2021). These factors can have a huge influence on remote workers' engagement and motivation although studies have shown that remote workers can be as productive as their office-based counterparts (Como et al., 2021).

As stated previously, many remote workers feel increased pressure to overwork and to be 'always on' (Charalampous et al., 2019). This feeling of increased demand can lower motivation (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021) but, overall, the autonomy remote working brings can increase job satisfaction (Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021). Job satisfaction affects the productivity of the remote worker (Aropah et al., 2020) thus the more control remote workers have over their work the more productive they can be (Ipsen et al., 2021). Some studies have shown a 75% increase in productivity in those remote working (Ergovan et al., 2021) although decreased motivation and decreased productivity are also reported (Wang et al., 2021). Remote workers can find increased motivation in greater peace of mind, greater work efficiency, and saving on work related expenses (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021).

Increased motivation levels in remote workers do not last, with job satisfaction plateauing and decreasing over longer periods of remote working. Job satisfaction is maximised when remote working is both part time and flexible (Charalampous et al., 2019) which has not been possible for many to facilitate during the pandemic. Although the positive aspects of remote working can be many, the negative impact on motivation for remote working staff has been

exacerbated by the mandatory nature of remote working during this pandemic (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021). The situation has been static which is at odds with the flexible ideal of remote working. Adapting to remote working hinges on to what extent the new situation can assimilate itself to the previous situation in order to satisfy the work 'needs' of the remote worker. Do they still have the same level of engagement? Is their workload significantly increased? Do they still feel relevant? And do they feel their effort is acknowledged? Workers need to fulfil these needs to be motivated and committed in work (Schade et al., 2020).

Work commitment is also positively impacted by having informal social interactions with co-workers (Charalampous et al., 2019) showing further importance of maintaining social networks while remote working. It has also been found that employee motivation and creativity are negatively affected by a decrease in social interaction (Ergovan et al., 2021; Fritz & Cotilla Conceicao, 2021).

Social Impact

Remote working, whether mandatory or not, causes isolation (Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021) and reduced contact with colleagues and co-workers (Como et al., 2021) leading to the depersonalisation of work relationships (Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021). The social impact of remote working on the worker is hugely important and becomes more of an issue when the worker has no defined date to return to the office. Over longer periods of remote working workers can feel they are lacking support and communication from their colleagues (Ergovan et al., 2021). Even where remote workers reported the benefits of saving time, and increased freedom, the feeling of being socially isolated was 'most significantly' confirmed (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021).

The lack of social interaction with other colleagues is of the 'utmost importance' (Parham & Rauf, 2020) and is the 'most noticeable change' (Azimov, 2020). This 'impoverishment of social contacts' (Möhring et al., 2020) leads to isolation of the worker from managers and colleagues (Oakman et al., 2020). It is very much both the social and the professional aspects of dealing with colleagues that are missed. Though working from home is isolating (Lopez-Leon et al., 2020) a study carried out on remote workers showed that they were lonelier but less stressed than their office-based counterparts (Parham & Rauf, 2020).

This loneliness and decreased personal contact (Ipsen et al., 2021) is an ‘important challenge’ (Wang et al., 2021). Managers have been found to have an important role in this regard as the more they supported and acknowledged staff efforts the less isolation individuals experienced (Charalampous et al., 2019). The University of Derby found that online virtual ‘huddles’ can help alleviate the negative impact isolation can have on a remote worker’s well-being (Kotera et al., 2020) but online virtual interactions are not always sufficient in alleviating feelings of loneliness (Wang et al., 2021). Possibly the biggest negative aspect of remote working is the challenge of interaction with colleagues (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021; Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021; Como et al., 2021; Akkaya et al., 2021).

Remote working can affect workers in many ways but for most it seems to be a positive work arrangement with negative side effects. The positive aspect of this arrangement is lessened when the agency and autonomy of the worker is all but removed. The negative side effects are no longer on the side and become full effects of the arrangement. In this study the survey results will show which certain factors, as highlighted above, are affecting the staff of DSP and to what extent. It can then be seen if mandatory remote working affects certain remote DSP workers more than others and if this can be addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In order to ascertain how mandatory Covid related remote working has affected DSP staff, a large-scale survey was carried out. Utilising the survey method in studies of this nature puts emphasis on quantitative analysis. Large amounts of data from an organisation can be collected through many different methods such as telephone interviews, pre-published statistics, or, as with this study, an online survey. Once gathered the data is statistically analysed and by examining a representative sample of an organisation the data captured can disclose relationships and patterns across the staff body.

There are many benefits to quantitative surveying of large sample sets. Large amounts of information can be gathered quickly, and different variables are made available for study simultaneously (Ball, 2019). Various hypotheses can be investigated concurrently, and it can be an inexpensive way to conduct research (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014).

This is not without limitations. Gathering data like this is purely observational and the correlated data does not imply causation. Although a benefit in some ways, the cross-sectional approach only gets a snapshot of a situation at a certain time and yields little information as to the underlying meaning of the data (Gable, 1994). In this way cross-sectional studies are weaker than longitudinal studies (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014).

Cross-sectional research, such as this study, is a very common form of research as it allows the examination of the extent to which variables measured at the same time are associated with one another. There is, of course, no manipulation of data afterwards. It is purely observational research. Smaller scale research projects may be more suited to a qualitative approach, but often larger surveys use standardised questionnaires with selectable answers from a range. In the same way that qualitative surveys favour smaller sample sizes, quantitative surveys favour larger sample sizes. Survey data can then easily be broken down by subsets within the data for further analysis.

The aim of this research is to ascertain the views of DSP staff that have worked remotely, all or in part, since March 2020 and the introduction of Covid related measures in the DSP. Surveys have previously been circulated to departmental staff in support of staff writing their dissertations and it was agreed with the HR Manager that this survey could be circulated by

email in Summer 2021. The email circulated to staff carried information on the nature of the survey. Both the email and the cover page of the survey stated assurance that data would be collected anonymously, that the survey was an independent work (not commissioned by the DSP), and that participation was entirely voluntary.

Quantitative data is required to address the questions of this dissertation and has been used in related studies (Palumbo, 2020; Felstead et al., 2017; Molino et al., 2020; Aropah et al., 2020). Schade et al., 2021; Pluut & Wonders, 2020; Parham & Rauf, 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021). Given the enormous variety of workers across the DSP from age and gender, to work type and situation, job location and domestic situation, a qualitative approach would not have been appropriate and with this type of study “quantitative studies are necessary” (Molino et al., 2020). The DSP authorised the distribution of this survey which allowed for over 6,000 directly relevant candidates to be contacted to partake in the study. The findings of this research will be further studied and cross-tabulated in order to gain further insight into the effects on department staff.

Research Sample

The analysis is based upon data captured from the survey submitted to all DSP working staff as of July 2021. This cross-sectional survey provides a comprehensive picture of the remote working situation and mind-set of DSP staff as perceived by themselves. A “randomly selected, representative sample’ is the ultimate goal for survey research (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014). According to DSP statistics there were 6784 staff working in the department at the end of June 2021 (DSP, 2021). The email was sent to all active staff as of 1 July 2021. Though circulated to all staff there was a purposive sampling element to this survey process. The survey was directed at staff that had been working remotely in some regard since March 2020. From that email 771 staff navigated to the webpage and commenced the survey. Of that group 674 staff completed the survey with usable data which is 9.8% response rate from all staff. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) a population of 7000 would require a sample size of 364, therefore 674 usable surveys is more than adequate. This matches the calculation for a population of 7000 with a standard 95% confidence rate and 5% margin of error.

Survey sample as accurate representation of DSP

Outside of surveying respondents on the three main elements of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation, other questions were asked in order to get a better understanding of respondents' work and personal situation. This data was collected so that inferences could be drawn, and patterns may emerge in the data. A small number of questions in the 'Respondent Information' and 'Respondent Work Details' sections could be measured against available DSP staff data. Much of the data captured in these two sections could not be corroborated against any official database but questions 3 (Age), 4 (Gender), and 18 (Grade) can all be compared to internal staff data. In this way it is easy to see if the survey respondents could be viewed as a fair and accurate representative sample of the DSP staff body.

Stated Gender of Respondents

In this first demographic grouping question staff were given a choice of four answer; 'Male', 'Female', 'Prefer not to say', and, 'Prefer to self-describe'. The data regarding Male and Female responses, as stated in the survey, was matched against recent staff reporting (DSP, 2021). The relative percentage of responses gave a very close match on available DSP data although with a slightly lower proportion of male respondents and a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (Figure 1).

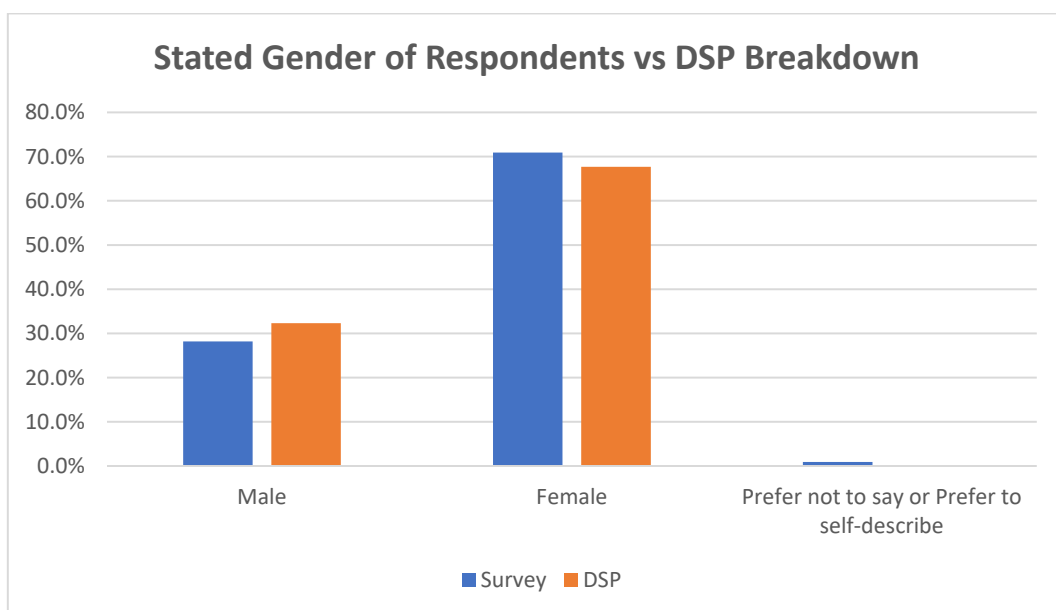


Figure 1- Stated Gender of Respondents vs DSP Breakdown

The number of responses for the latter two categories was few so, from a clarity and data protection point of view, they were combined into one category – ‘Prefer not to say or Prefer to self-describe’. This new category had a combined total of 0.9% of all responses.

Stated Age Profile of Respondents

The proportionate spread of age profiles across the survey respondents closely resemble the same data from DSP staff. Differences between the two data sets are minimal, the closest being in the 25-34-year olds. The slight over-representation of 45-54-year olds was matched by the slight under-representation of 55-64-year olds. As shown, the proportional representation is supportively similar (Figure 2).

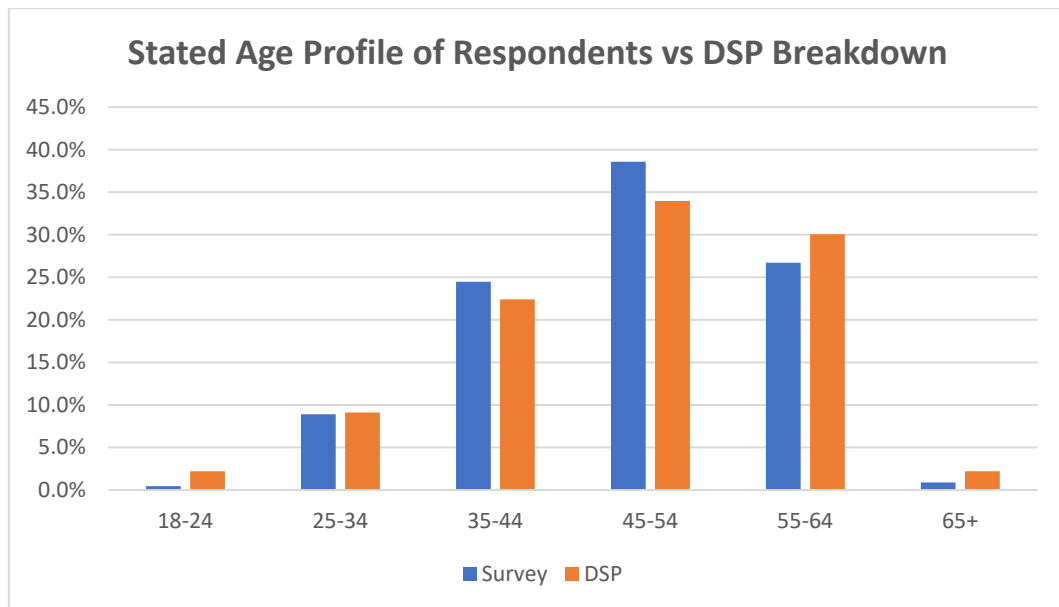


Figure 2- Stated Age Profile of Respondents vs DSP Breakdown

Though the data match here shows the accuracy of the survey sample the proportion of responses for 18-24-year olds was 0.89% and for 65+ it was 0.89%. For clarity of reporting and to avoid outliers these age brackets were joined with the adjacent brackets for analysis.

Stated Grade of Respondents

This again looks to be a fair and accurate spread across the respondent body, with all grades, as set out on the survey, represented in similar proportions. The notable outliers being the HEO and CO grades. HEO grade, though making up just over one fifth of the DSP (22%) accounted for over a third (34%) of all responses. Conversely, the CO grade, though making up 38% of the DSP staff body, only accounted for a quarter (26%) of all responses. It is also worth noting that the TCO grade only accounted for 2.2% of responses though they made up 9.3% of DSP staff at the time of the survey. There were no SO responses.

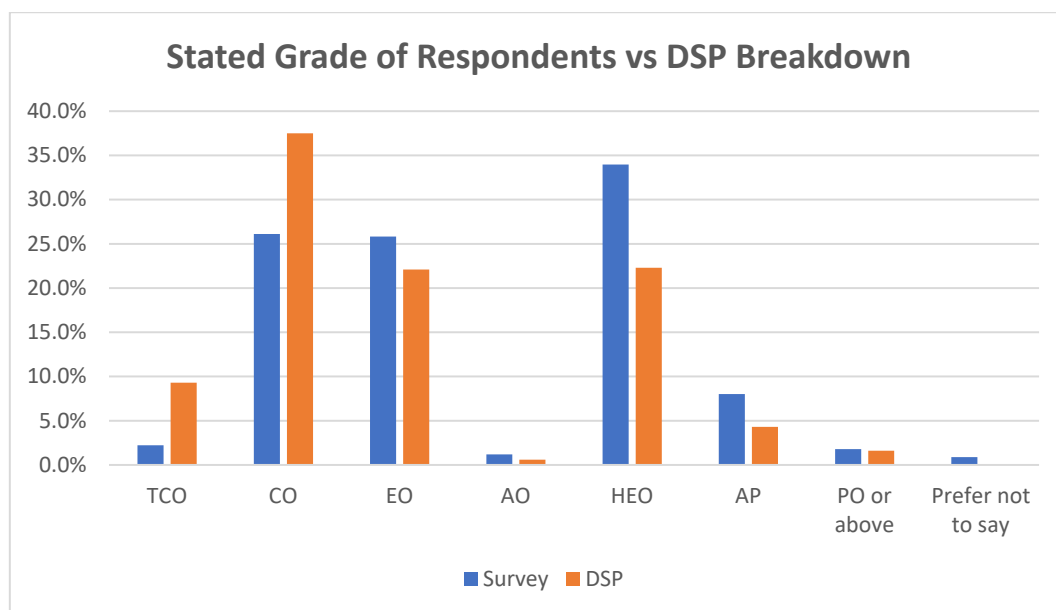


Figure 3- Stated Grade of Respondents vs DSP breakdown

All grades from EO and above are overrepresented in the survey and it is only the CO and TCO grades that are under-represented. This could be due, in part, to the section of DSP staff that this study was aimed at.

The survey began by asking all potential respondents two ‘yes/no’ questions before the full survey commenced. The first question was regarding the respondent’s agreement and consent to their data being used. The second question asked respondents to confirm that they are DSP staff, and that they have been working remotely “all or in part” since March 2020. The introductory information emailed with the survey link to all DSP staff, and the survey introduction, also mentioned that this survey was directed towards staff that have remote worked during Covid. The DSP was very much an essential service during this time and, though it shortened business hours, it could not close its public offices (Gov.ie, 2020b).

By May 2020 almost half the population (15+ years old) had experienced employment impacts and with 26.1% unemployment (CSO.ie, 2020) DSP had to maintain a customer facing service, albeit with reduced staffing levels. If it is taken that all staff were contacted and had the same opportunity and motivation to complete the survey, then it may be that CO and TCO grades were more likely to have not been able to remote work during Covid and were therefore unable to partake in the survey.

Given the accuracy of the data in these three main areas the survey sample set can be seen to be a fair and accurate representative sample of the DSP staff body. With this assurance the next steps are two establish the effects, if any, on this sample in the areas of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation.

Research Design

Questions were modelled specifically on the areas, highlighted through study of the literature in this field, that may either mitigate or compound the effects of remote working. Including the two agreement and consent questions on the first page the survey is comprised of 45 questions; 5 dichotomous 'Yes/No', 12 multiple choice, 7 free text, 20 graded multiple choice and 1 Likert Scale. The first two of these questions were 'Yes/No' questions for the respondents to give consent and to state that they had been working remotely (all or in part) since March 2020, as described on page 24.

The graded multiple-choice questions were used with 5 points and 3 points in their range of responses. The 5-point graded questions looked at how much the factor in question had changed, if at all, before or after the start of Covid/remote working. The scale goes from 'a lot more before', 'somewhat more before', 'unchanged', 'somewhat more since', to 'a lot more since'. The first two responses would be classified as 'negative' responses as the situation would be judged to have deteriorated since Covid/remote working. The latter two responses would be judged to be 'positive' responses as the situation has improved since Covid/remote working. The midpoint answer is a neutral response as the situation has neither deteriorated nor improved. A 5-point scale has 'optimal balance', requires the shortest reaction time, and tends respondents away from acquiescence bias and extreme response bias (Chyung et al., 2017). Although using a three-point scale is quite narrow in terms of

allowing respondents to select the most fitting answer, there are, once the respondent does not select 'Not Applicable', only 3 possible answers to these questions.

The main areas of their well-being, work/life balance, and motivation were questioned alongside how they felt their perceptions of these areas had changed while remote working. Similarly, other areas were queried too, in as much as they related. The survey was designed to evaluate the respondent's experience of Covid related remote working over several different areas. Most questions were multiple choice, single selection questions to align answers into readily reportable groups. The questions were based and/or heavily influenced by recent readings in the area of remote working and mandatory remote working since Covid. As shorter surveys have higher response rates than longer surveys (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014) the questionnaire was constructed in such a way that completion would take less than 10 minutes and thereby ensure minimal dropouts. The questionnaire was launched in July 2021 and was left open for a week. Discussed below, the areas queried in the survey were:

- **Respondent Information**
- **Respondent Work Details**
- **Well-Being**
- **Work/Life Balance**
- **Work Motivation**
- **Final Views**

Respondent Information:

Questions 3 – 12 are a mix of multiple-choice questions, free text (numerical) questions and one 'Yes/No' question in order to gain the respondents personal details. This page looked for age range, gender, household make-up and general location, and their proximity to any local amenities. No identifiable personal data was requested, and all demographic information was collected solely to identify trends between different groups based on demographic characteristics. As well as being demographic information there are certain elements that may prove relative to the study.

Respondent Work Details

Questions 13 – 18 are multiple choice questions to gather information on certain elements of the respondent's work details, notably their grade, the amount of remote working (if any) they had availed of prior to Covid and to what level this had changed. It enquired about the amount of customer-facing work the respondent would usually be involved in pre-Covid, and to what level this may have changed. It also looked for information on how the respondent's level of interaction with colleagues, co-workers and managers has changed since Covid.

Once the respondent's personal and work details have been captured the survey then questions how Covid related remote working has affected them. These questions specifically ask about their perceptions of different aspects that can influence, or be influenced by Well-Being, Work/Life Balance, and Motivation. All three sections culminate with a question regarding how they feel their perception of this has changed since they started remote working.

Well-Being

Questions 19 – 24 are set out so that they can be answered to varying degrees. This section gathered data on how much the respondent is making time for themselves, exercise, and hobbies/interests. It asks about the quality of their sleep, how stressful they are finding Covid, and their taking of sick leave. Question 25 is a 3-point scale question regarding how they perceived their well-being had changed since remote working.

Work/Life Balance

Questions 26 – 37 are a mix of 5-point scale questions, free text (numerical) questions, 'Yes/No' questions and one 3-point scale question. This is arguably the most important, or at least the most prominent, data set captured by the survey. It is impossible to conduct any study on how remote work affects staff without addressing their work/life balance. This part of the survey looks at the areas of workday length and how the respondent's commute time has changed. It also asks about whether respondents find it difficult to take breaks from work,

or to 'turn off' at the end of the working day, and if they find themselves working after hours or at weekends. Making social time for friends, family and co-workers is investigated as is their availing of Annual Leave. As with the Well-Being section, several relevant areas were touched on in order to ascertain patterns, causes and mitigations. Again, the final question is a 3-point scale question regarding how they perceived their work/life balance has changed since they started remote working.

Work Motivation

Questions 38 – 41 are 5 point and one 3-point questions. It is very important to gauge the respondent's perceptions of their current motivation level regarding their work. This section looks at how engaged they feel, how manageable they feel their workload is and how this has changed over time. This section also deals with how visible the respondent feels their work effort is, and how this may have changed. As with the sections above, this part culminates with a 3-point question asking how the respondent's perception of their motivation level may have changed since commencing remote working.

Final Views

Questions 43 & 44 are free text questions which adds some qualitative elements to the survey. Respondents are asked to highlight the most positive and negative aspects of remote working. These were included to give the survey scope beyond its structure and to bring an element of the respondent views to bear on the overall survey outcomes. The final question (45) asks about their preferred level of remote working in the future if they had the choice.

Data Collection Method

There are many ways to conduct a survey but more and more often nowadays surveys are being conducted online. More than ever during a pandemic where potential respondents are the length a breadth of a country, an internet-based survey is by far the most suitable choice. Evans & Mathur (2005) stated that the best reason to use an online survey is when a large

sample size is desired over a wide geographical area. But there are more benefits to online surveys than just their reach. Online surveys have many benefits due to speed, simplicity, cost, scope and flexibility (Ball, 2019). The perceived anonymity of completing the survey online also helps prevent social desirability bias (Larson, 2018). Considering this, the main research method used in this dissertation is analysis of primary data captured through a Survey Monkey survey that was submitted to Department of Social Protection staff in Summer 2021. In order to ensure that the correct people were responding to the survey participants were advised it was only directed towards certain staff of the DSP.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, it was transferred into Excel and all partially completed surveys or surveys that contain errors were removed. Before analysing data, it must be clean and suitable to work with (Sheard, 2018). Some respondents had left the survey prior to completion and some had left unusable responses in certain fields. From 771 that started the survey 674 completed it and gave usable data across all sections. Captured data was then studied through cross tabulation in Excel pivot tables. The Excel pivot table function is a widely accepted tool for quantitative data analysis. They can be used to perform analytical processing of data in order to gain valuable information. Each element of captured data can be cross tabulated against each other and thereby inferences can be drawn between different datasets in the study, the distribution of the data, or their correlation with each other (Momeni et al., 2017). Given the breadth and variety of responses to the two qualitative questions (Q43 & Q44) the data was examined and categorised according to the concerns, topics, or issues that were most raised. Completed tables of the positive and negative response categories are available at page 40.

Ethical Considerations

As there are human participants in this study a 'Human Participant Ethical Review Application Form' was submitted to the National College of Ireland on 25 January 2021. It was not considered that there would be any ethical issues or risks of harm or distress to participants in the proposed research nor would there be any participants that belong to any vulnerable

groups. Approval was sought and given by the DSP HR Manager for the staff body to be surveyed anonymously. In order to partake in the survey staff had to agree that they were staff of the Department of Social Protection, that they had been working remotely (all or in part) since March 2020, and that they consented to their survey data being used for research. Staff were also advised that the data would only be held for the length of the study and that their participation was entirely voluntary. No incentives were offered for partaking in the research which was entirely independent of the DSP.

Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation with this study is that it is a cross-sectional survey and not a longitudinal survey. This study is asking respondents to answer questions based on how their perception of a current situation may have changed compared to 15 months previously. With a limitation like this there may be issues of recall bias (Coughlin, 1990) which longitudinal studies guard against (Cronin et al., 2020). Had this been a longitudinal study these different aspects could have been measured across the DSP staff soon after commencing remote working, and then again, a year later. This was not achievable.

As it is a quantitative study it looks at the data presented as a snapshot of the DSP staff at one point in time. Although correlations can be drawn, and patterns emerge it cannot show the cause and effect. In order to study how individual respondents are affected or motivated a qualitative study would need to be carried out (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014).

As shown, the methods adopted have been utilised in many other similar studies and are the most efficient in gathering and analysing the data needed. The intention was to capture the necessary and relevant data from a representative sample of the DSP staff body and process this accordingly. This was carried out through a large-scale quantitative survey and subsequent cross-tabulation of the data. This is the most efficient and suitable methodology given the stated objectives. This has been completed and the findings are set out in the next chapter to see if the DSP data confirms previous findings in this area or does the data contain any irregularities, surprises, or new findings.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The aims and objective of this study is to ascertain the effect of Covid related mandatory remote working on the staff of DSP since March 2020. As stated previously this study will focus on the results of those surveyed who expressed some increase or decrease in their levels of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation, with discussion of neutral responses where necessary or of relevance to the study. These questions appeared at Question 25 (Well-Being), Question 37 (Work/Life Balance), and Question 42 (Motivation) and ask the respondent to state whether their own perception of their well-being, work/life balance, or motivation, has improved while remote working, deteriorated while remote working, or has remained unchanged. There is also a 'not applicable' option for any respondents that feel that some or all these questions do not apply. The numbers of 'not applicable' responses are not included for discussion but are included in the calculation of response percentages.

It is seen that 41% of all staff stated that their perception of their own Well-Being had improved (positive response) since starting remote working. Another 30% stated that it had remained unchanged (neutral response) while 22% stated that it had deteriorated (negative response).

Work/Life Balance responses were even more positive with 51% of all responses stating that their work/life balance had improved since they started remote working, though the other responses were not as diverse with neutral responses (22%) being just higher than negative responses (21%).

Responses regarding motivation diverged from the pattern above. A majority (58%) of all respondents gave a neutral response stating that their motivation level was unchanged while remote working. Again, other responses are close with positive responses of staff being more motivated now being just greater (19%) than the number of negative responses (18.5%).

The average DSP respondent has a more positive view of their own well-being and work/life balance since they started remote working while their motivation levels have remained unchanged. In the following results most respondents gave a neutral motivation response and therefore, when discussing motivation, focus will be on the positive and negative motivation numbers. All percentages discussed below are as a proportion of each category's total

response unless otherwise stated. Where a demographic has the highest or lowest proportion of positive or negative responses in a category, they will be viewed to have given the most positive or negative response. It is worth noting that though a demographic may be reported as having the lowest proportion of positive responses in a category, that demographic may still be returning an overwhelmingly positive return. Positive returns may be their largest segment but is a smaller proportion when compared to the positive responses of other demographics.

Personal Details

Respondents in the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups had the highest proportions of positive well-being responses and the lowest proportions of negative well-being responses. Younger respondents had the highest proportion of negative responses and the older respondents had the highest proportion of neutral responses. Similar results were found regarding motivation though, as stated above, the neutral responses are the most prevalent. Most of the older respondents gave neutral returns and the younger respondents gave a higher proportion of positive and negative responses. With work/life balance younger respondents gave the greatest proportion of positive responses which shrank as the age bracket increased. Conversely both negative and neutral responses were lowest with younger respondents and grew as the age bracket increased.

Although almost identical with around a fifth of both male and female respondents giving a negative response in all three areas, a greater proportion of female respondents than male gave positive responses across well-being and work/life balance. Females also gave a greater proportion of neutral motivation responses whereas males were slightly more likely to give a positive motivation response.

Domestic situation:

Married and Cohabiting respondents gave the highest proportion of positive responses and the lowest proportion of negative responses across all three areas. Single respondents returned the lowest proportion of positive responses and the highest proportion of negative responses across all three areas.

Respondents living with children had highest proportion of positive responses across all three areas. Those living with their partner or in shared accommodation had the highest proportion of neutral responses across all three areas. Respondents living alone or with parents had the highest proportion of negative responses and the lowest proportion of positive responses.

Respondents with children generally had more positive responses overall and those with more children (3+) had the most positive and least negative responses. Respondents with 1 – 2 children also had the highest proportion of negative responses across all three areas whereas respondents with no children, though similar in trend, were slightly more balanced and less extreme. Respondents with pre-school children returned a less positive work/life balance than those without.

Location of residence:

Responses were quite similar across all areas although some notable aspects overall. As proximity to a neighbour decreases both positive and negative responses increase, and neutral responses decrease. Those with amenities within walking distance have highest proportion of positive and lowest proportion of negative overall across the three areas. No notable findings here though those respondents not in the extremities (City/Rural) marginally returned most positive and least negative responses overall.

Work Details

As can be expected during Covid there has been a large organisational shift away from customer facing and towards remote working (Figure 4).

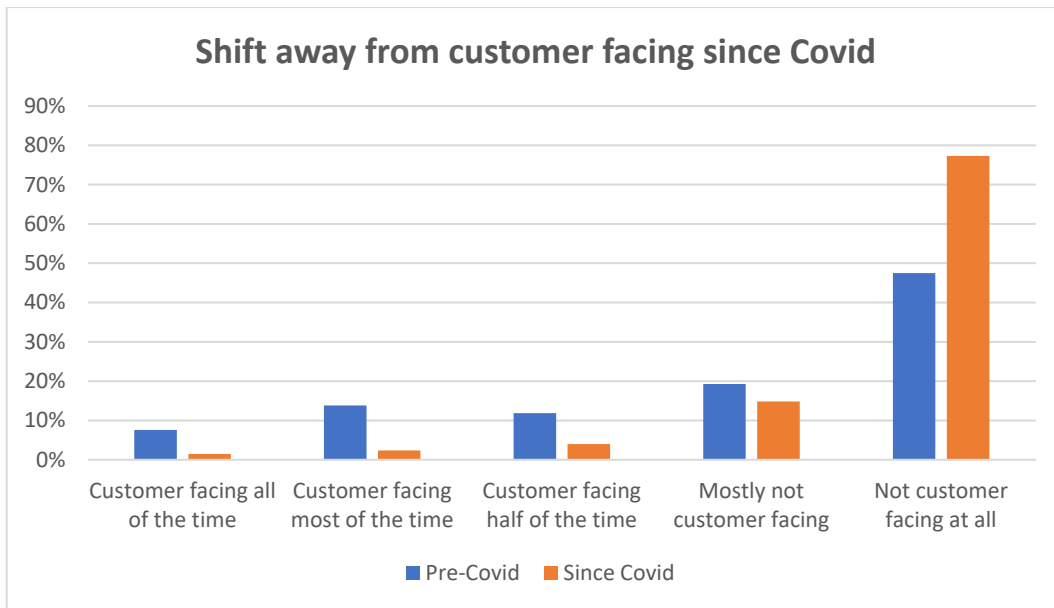


Figure 4- Shift away from customer facing since Covid

With such a move to remote working across all areas of the DSP (Figure 5), staff have been quite affected. There has been a large shift away from customer facing though a staff presence has had to remain in many offices. Positive responses are higher with respondents who are remote working more than half the time, and highest with those that are remote working all the time. Negative responses are most prevalent with those in a blended working pattern i.e. not 100% remote or office based.

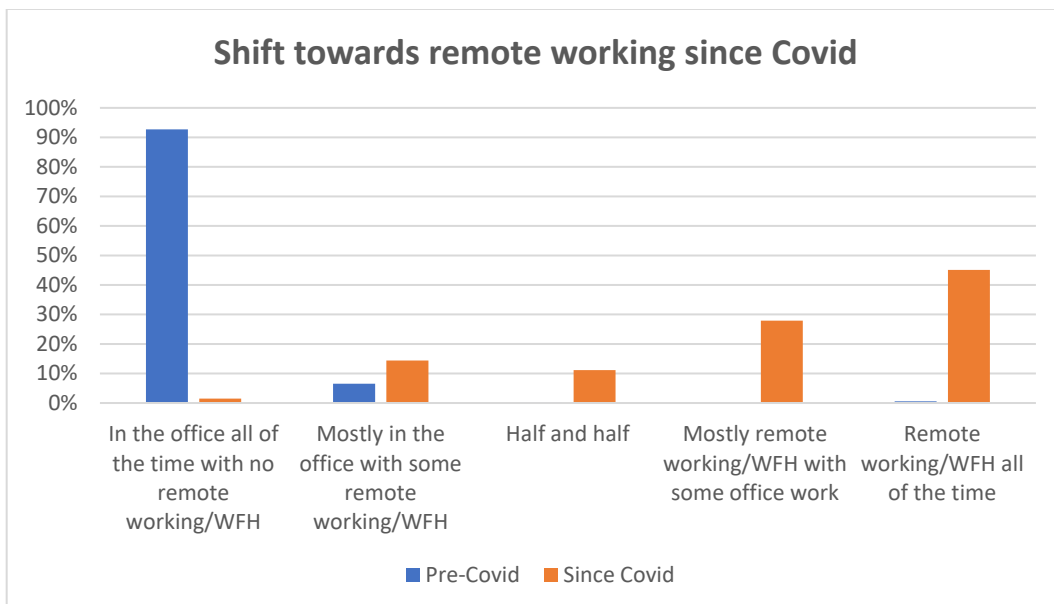


Figure 5- Shift towards remote working since Covid

It is notable that a greater number of respondents (99%) have access to and avail of blended working than originally worked exclusively in the office (93%) and that such change happened so rapidly and without forethought or preparation. Of these respondents 39% reported positive well-being responses while remote working compared to 22% negative. They also reported 51% positive work/life balance responses versus 21% negative, and 20% reported positive motivation responses versus 18% negative.

Levels of interaction with co-workers/managers were subject to change as the work environment changed and DSP staff moved to work remotely. Of those surveyed 73% reported a decrease in contact with those they work with, and over half of those reported a significant decrease. These respondents had the highest proportion of negative responses, and respondents that had increased contact with co-workers/managers returned the highest proportion of positive responses. Positive responses were highest with those where co-worker/manager contact had increased 'somewhat' compared to 'a lot'.

Lower grades have the highest proportion of positive responses overall and lowest proportion of negative responses across all areas. This is inverted as the grade increases. Those at the other end of the scale report the most negative and least positive responses overall.

Well-Being

Almost half (49%) of respondents find it easier to make time for themselves since Covid compared to almost a third (32%) that found it easier before Covid. Exercise is quite evenly split across all three respondent areas, as is Hobbies & Interests. These areas are linked and show similar results. Those that find it easier to make time for themselves, exercise and/or find they could spend more time on their hobbies were generally twice as likely to return a positive, and half as likely to return a negative, well-being response as those that found it easier before Covid. Similar results were found in the work/life balance and motivation responses although increased exercise correlated with higher motivation responses.

Just over half of all respondents reported no change to their sleep quality since Covid with the majority of those remaining reporting that they slept better before Covid. Again, those that sleep better since Covid would report twice the proportion of positive well-being

responses and half the proportion of negative well-being responses as those that slept better before Covid. Those that exercised less now than before Covid are twice as likely to report deterioration in sleep quality compared to those that exercise more since Covid. Conversely those that exercise more since Covid are three times more likely to report improved sleep than their counterparts.

The majority of those surveyed (70%) found dealing with Covid to be either 'somewhat' or 'very' stressful and challenging with the remainder quite evenly split between those that have been unaffected and those that feel less stress and have not found Covid challenging. Those that reported less stress since Covid were the most positive with an average of 75% of well-being responses being positive compared to an average of 7% of responses being negative. Those that experience more stress since Covid were most likely to return negative responses (29%).

A minority of respondents (6%) have had to avail of sick leave more than usual since Covid but the majority (60%) of respondents' sick leave needs have been unaffected. A third of all respondents have needed to take less sick leave than usual with a quarter of all respondents stating that they have needed to avail of sick leave 'a lot less than usual'.

Similar positive and negative response figures were found in work/life balance and motivation areas though it should be noted that positive motivation responses were generally in greater proportion than recorded under Personal and Work details earlier.

Work/Life Balance

Though a free-text box was used to collect the 'Commuting' data for this response, answers were collated into groups for clarity and ease of reporting. The grouped responses are more similar in size though the smallest cohort, 10+ hours, contains the most diverse answers with a small number of respondents returning pre-Covid commute times of 40+ hours per week. As will be seen, the reduction in commuting times was the most popular positive item, and item overall, in the qualitative responses (page 40).

The total amount of pre-Covid commute hours for the respondents amounted to 4398.25 hours per week (6hrs 32mins commuting time per respondent per week). For over 90% of

respondents their weekly commute time decreased a lot or has been removed completely. The number of commuters with '0' commute hours went from 1% of respondents pre-Covid to 51% of respondents since Covid. The new total commute times amounted to 978.15 hours per week (1hr 27mins commuting time per respondent per week). This constitutes a reduction of 5hrs 5mins or 78% for the average commuter per week.

There were varied responses to questions related to how DSP staff were adapting to the new remote working environment. Responses are split quite evenly regarding the length of the new working day with a third of responses in each of the three main categories i.e. the workday being longer before Covid, longer since Covid, or unchanged. Less than half of all respondents (43%) find that they are checking emails/working after hours or at weekends but 60% of respondents find it difficult to take breaks while working remotely. Slightly more respondents (45%) find it difficult to turn off at the end of the working day than those that do not (39%).

Although a varied response, those that found the work day longer before Covid, find themselves checking emails/working after hours, and do not find it difficult to take breaks or switch off at the end of the working day, gave the highest proportion of positive responses. Those that had opposite views returned the highest proportion of negative responses. Results similar to these were again found across the well-being and motivation areas.

Although less than half (43%) of respondents believe it is easier to make time for family since Covid it is still the largest segment in this area. A third (33%) believe it was easier before and about a quarter (24%) believe it is no easier nor more difficult. This differs slightly when it is concerning 'time for friends'. Two thirds of respondents (66%) found it easier to make time for friends before Covid and half (50%) stated that it was 'a lot easier'. Respondents in these two areas that found it easier to make time since Covid returned the highest proportion of positive responses, with contrary results from those at the other end of the scale. It was noted that the results were more exaggerated in the 'family' responses than the 'friends' responses.

80% of respondents found it easier to make time for co-workers before Covid while 17% find it no easier nor more difficult since Covid. The remaining 3% of respondents find it easier to make time for co-workers/colleagues since Covid which is raised as an issue in the qualitative responses (page 40). Though those that found it easier 'since Covid' had the highest

proportion of positive responses and those that found it easier 'before Covid' had the highest proportion of negative responses, responses overall were less diverse than with other questions.

The majority of respondents (62%) in this category feel that there has been no change in their ability to take Annual Leave since Covid, although most of the remaining respondents (33%) felt they were able to avail of annual leave more before Covid. Those that feel they can take leave report the highest proportions of positive responses. Those that feel it is more difficult since Covid reported the highest proportion of negative responses.

Although almost a fifth (19%) of respondents stated that their work/life balance is worse since Covid the majority (71%) state that their work/life balance is better since Covid, and over half of all respondents state that their work/life balance is better 'mainly due to remote working'. As was stated earlier Work/Life Balance responses overall positive with 50.7% of all responses stating that their work/life balance had improved since they started remote working, though the other responses were not as diverse with neutral responses (22.1%) being just higher than negative responses (21.4%). Similar positive and negative response figures were found in well-being and motivation areas.

Motivation

Half of respondents feel their work engagement level has not changed since Covid with a quarter of respondents each stating that they were engaged more prior to Covid or since Covid. Respondents that are more engaged since Covid gave the highest proportion of positive responses and those more engaged before Covid gave the highest proportion of negative responses.

Almost half (45%) of all respondents feel that their workload is no more or less manageable since Covid. Of the remaining responses 37% believe that their workload is less manageable since Covid, and 18% feel that their workload is more manageable. On average those that feel that their workload is more manageable since Covid have four times the proportion of positive motivation responses compared to those at the other end of the scale. Those

respondents had more than twice the proportion of negative responses than their counterparts.

Over half (56%) of respondents feel that the work they are doing is seen and/or acknowledged by co-workers and management as much since Covid as it was before. Just over a quarter (26%) feel it was seen/acknowledged more before Covid with the remaining 17% stating that it is seen more since Covid. Those that feel seen more since Covid have twice the proportion of positive responses than those that feel they were seen more before Covid, who have, on average, five times the proportion of negative motivation responses as the 'since Covid' respondents.

A majority (58%) of all respondents gave a neutral response stating that their motivation level was unchanged while remote working. Again, other responses are close with positive responses of staff being more motivated now being just greater (19%) than the number of negative responses (18.5%).

Similar positive and negative response figures were found in well-being and motivation areas.

Final Views

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE ASPECTS

As mentioned in the Chapter 3 (Methodology) the positive and negative qualitative responses were tagged and categorised. The responses are tabled (Table 1 & 2) below:

Table 1- Positive Responses

No.	Positive Responses	%
1	Less Commute	51%
2	Work life / Family time	34%
3	Better work time management / Flexibility / Autonomy	23%
4	Less distractions / Less office culture	12%
5	Health / Less Stress / Happier	7%
6	Costs (child minding, lunch, fuel)	7%
7	Home comforts / activities	6%
8	More manageable / workload	5%
9	Safety / Covid	4%
10	Childcare benefits	3%
11	Enhanced online connectivity / productivity / services	2%
12	Environmental	0.4%

Table 2- Negative Responses

No.	Negative Responses	%
1	Lack of interaction with colleagues (social & professional)	43%
2	Increased Workload / Longer Workday	15%
3	Work Logistics - Adapting work to WFH environment	14%
4	Technical / Equipment related e.g. broadband, no printer or laptop, etc.	11%
5	Isolation / Loneliness / Disconnection	11%
6	Lack of Support	8%
7	Communications	5%
8	Extra pressure	5%
9	Other Covid-19 related issues	4%
10	Lack of Activity / Health Issues	4%
11	Lack of interaction with DSP Clients	1%

The percentage allotted to each category reflects the percentage of responses in which each category appeared and therefore the total percentages when summed are above 100%.

FUTURE WORK PREFERENCE

There are five levels of response in this question and they should be looked at individually. The most popular option (36%) is to work remotely most of the time with some office-based work, closely followed by a 50/50 blended work pattern (29%). 100% remote working (19%) and mostly office based (14%) are quite close. Only 1% are looking for a full return to the office but issues regarding work logistics, isolation and co-worker interaction may make this a necessity for some.

Overall, and what would seem to be the most important point, is that 99% of all respondents would like to have some element of remote working in their work arrangement going forward, with 85% of respondents wanting at least half of their working time to be spent remote working.

Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis of findings

This chapter contains the analysis of the survey findings. There is also discussion of what these findings mean regarding the effect Covid related mandatory remote working has had on DSP staff. Responses have generally been positive. If not the majority then the largest segment of responses regarding well-being and work/life balance were positive. The largest single segment is comprised of neutral responses regarding respondents' motivation with 58% stating that their motivation level is unchanged. It is encouraging to see that even when positive responses are not the largest segment, motivation is not deteriorating but being maintained.

Personal Details

Male and Female responses were quite alike in that they had similar levels of negative responses across all areas. Female respondents tended to return more positive well-being and work/life balances than Males. This may be due to the flexibility aiding females with work/life balance (Parham & Rauf, 2020). This is contrary to findings at large in this area. Females have been found to have more issues addressing work/life balance (Palumbo, 2020). Women are also at greater risk of burnout due to increased household responsibility (Hjálmsdóttira & Bjarnadóttir, 2020). This causes manifestations of stress (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2020) and can result in mental health issues at a greater rate than men (Gurvich et al., 2020). It is encouraging that this is not seen in this survey at this time especially after such a sustained period of mandatory remote working.

Positive responses were also highest in the middle age ranges and less so with the younger and older age ranges. Some studies have shown how mental health impacts during pandemic can be greater in young people (Rens et al., 2021) as pandemic measures disproportionately affect younger people's mental health. Older respondents were the least affected i.e. the most neutral responses. This is in line with recent research which has shown that older people may be better equipped mentally to cope with the pandemic (Klaiber et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2021). Older respondents were also generally the highest proportion of smaller households i.e. 1-2-person group. This group is quite split. Those in the 1-person household

were more likely to be 'Single', 'Divorced', 'Separated', or 'Widowed', and also 'Living Alone'. These categories all returned high proportions of negative responses. Whereas those in a 2-person household were generally Cohabiting/Married and without children in the household. These respondents had the most neutral responses. It was generally the larger households, which tended to be Married/Cohabiting and with children, that gave the most positive responses as the larger household can provide a support network (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). Though respondents with children would be more positive, the opposite is the case with small children, and the younger the children the more challenging the situation (Del Boca et al., 2020).

The survey showed that proximity to neighbours or population density can affect responses. Those at the extremes are most affected, with those adjacent to neighbours or in a city returning similar responses to those most distant from their neighbour and living rural. Those who responded in the middle areas returned more neutral responses. Having amenities within walking distance was very much a positive factor in responses which three quarters of respondents had.

Work Details

Given the nature of DSP work there is a lot of customer facing. This changed significantly with Covid and half of those that had some element of customer facing were no longer customer facing. This is quite a change for the department and for many staff, but data shows that respondents were largely unaffected. Although lack of interaction with DSP clients is mentioned in the negative qualitative responses it is only 1% of responses. Working with clients increases feelings of connectedness and decreases feelings of social isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019) but this 1% did not expressly mention loneliness or isolation as a negative when surveyed.

Remote working levels are greatly increased across the DSP and, as can be seen from the Work/Life response regarding 'Attitudes to Remote Working' respondents view this in a very positive light. The greater the amount of remote work the more positive the response. (Charalampous et al., 2019; Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021)

Almost three quarters of staff stated that their level of interaction with their co-workers/manager had decreased which may be to be expected given the pandemic, but staff responses were still positive. Where contact with co-workers/managers increased there was an increase in positive responses, but this then decreased if the level of contact had increased 'a lot'. A lack of trust has caused some managers to micromanage thereby affecting staff engagement, motivation and productivity (HBR, 2020).

From the managers perspective the situation has been more difficult. They returned more negative results compared to lower grades who returned more positive results. According to Ipsen et al (2021) managers have been more challenged by the working from home situation than non-managers.

Well-Being

Levels of well-being were very positive with 41% of respondents reporting improved well-being since starting remote working, and a further 30% stating their well-being was unchanged. The results for those whose well-being has deteriorated since starting remote working (22%) are problematic.

The largest respondent segment stated that it was easier to 'make time for oneself' since Covid but regarding 'exercise' and 'hobbies & interests' the results were much more balanced. Those that have more time, exercise more, and can spend more time on hobbies and interests return the most positive responses but not everyone has the capacity for this while remote working, particularly for the DSP during this pandemic. Recreation and exercise are important for well-being (Mandolesi et al., 2018; Bernstein & McNally, 2018; Lopez-Leon et al., 2020) but personal time and energy are needed in order to actualise these elements.

Almost a fifth of respondents stated that both their workload was less manageable and that they found it more difficult to make time for themselves since Covid. This leads into self-defeating circle where remote workers overwork themselves leading to decreased well-being (Curzi et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021) and then do not have the time or capacity to engage in activities that would improve their well-being. This is linked to the Annual Leave question in the Work-Life balance responses (page 40). Those that feel that it is

easier to take annual leave since Covid report the most positive results but a third of respondents feel it is more difficult to avail of annual leave since Covid.

Although sleep experience among respondents was largely unaffected those that sleep better report far more positively. Sleep is important for personal, mental and physical health (Mandelkorn et al., 2020) and getting enough sleep is very important in order to maintain well-being, particularly during pandemic induced remote working (Lopez-Leon et al., 2020). But, again, this can be problematic due to the stresses of living through a pandemic. Studies have shown that around 40% of people surveyed experienced sleep problems during Covid (Jahrami et al., 2020; Barros et al., 2020). The positive correlation between sleep and exercise (Pluut & Wonders, 2020) is seen in DSP respondents where those that exercise less now than before Covid were twice as likely to report deteriorated sleep, whereas those that exercise more now than before Covid were three times as likely to report improved sleep. Not getting enough sleep can also lead to a build-up of stress hormones (Hirotsu et al., 2015).

Sick leave can increase due to the negative lifestyle effects caused by prolonged remote working (Pluut & Wonders, 2020) but it is also found that those that can work remotely take less sick days than those that cannot remote work (Ahmed et al., 2020). Ipsen et al (2021) recognised the pandemics potential for causing 'mental strain' but, though the majority of respondents have found Covid stressful and challenging, most have either maintained or improved elements of their lives that lead towards well-being.

Work/Life Balance

Respondents work/life balance reports were very positive with 51% stating that their work/life balance had improved since starting remote working and a further 22% stating that their work/life balance was unchanged. This leaves 21% that found that their work/life balance had deteriorated.

Less than half of respondents state that they are working a longer day while remote working. This is slightly at odds with other studies where most respondents had longer working days when remote working or were far more likely to work longer days than their non-remote colleagues (Tusl et al., 2021, Curzi et al., 2020). The majority (60%) stated that they had

trouble taking breaks, and 43% stated that they were working after hours. According to Statista 'not being able to unplug' was the biggest struggle for 18% of those surveyed in 2020. This has grown to 27% and is the number 1 issue for those surveys in 2021 (Statista, 2021). A European study on remote workers that found 59% of remote workers find themselves working 'during free time' (Curzi et al., 2020). This was mentioned as the second most negative aspect of remote working in the qualitative responses with 15% of responses mentioning elements related to increased workload and the longer workday.

Not being able to 'unplug' at the end of the day is an issue for 45% of respondents. According to Charalampous et al. (2019) individuals can get caught in a feeling of always being visible or active in place of being physically present. This was also stated as one of the biggest challenges for staff in a study on mindfulness in the remote worker (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021). It has been found that many remote workers struggle with overworking (Como et al., 2021) and the inability to 'turn off' at the end of the day (Akkaya et al., 2021). This can lead to an 'always on culture' (Charalampous et al., 2019). Though remote workers can find themselves overworked they still enjoy the flexibility that remote working brings (Como et al., 2021).

It was found that respondents generally found it easier to make time for their family, but more difficult to make time for friends, and much more difficult again to make time for co-workers. Making time for family is directly influenced by increased 'free' time due to less time spent commuting, and general Covid health measures, as is stated in the qualitative responses. Although remote working can make it more difficult to organise time for certain groups, it is worth noting that this is greatly impacted by the global pandemic and related measures. While respondents were able to make more time for family since Covid the fact that it was so difficult to make time for co-workers became the biggest negative in the qualitative responses (page 40).

The reduction in commuting times was the most stated positive of remote working in the qualitative responses appearing in over half of responses. It is equivalent to a reduction of 5hr 5mins commuting time for the average respondent per week. When taken that the standard workday in DSP is 7hrs 24mins it is clear why this is so heavily featured. Not only is there reduced fatigue (Palumbo, 2020) but reduced commute times and the extra time this

frees up is clearly beneficial to respondents. In a study where workers worked remote more than three days per week, they were found to have far greater work/life balance due to decreased commute times and more time to deal with family life (Como et al., 2021).

Motivation

Respondents felt, for the most part, motivated, engaged, and acknowledged. Though there is less positive movement in this area there is little negative movement either. Almost three quarters of staff feel that their work is seen and acknowledged by co-workers/managers at least as much as before Covid, even though interaction with co-workers/managers is largely reduced. Being 'seen' or feeling the need to be 'seen' is a common issue with remote working and can cause massive undue pressure on those that remote work. Acknowledgements from management can reduce isolation and promote engagement (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Past studies have shown that working from home during Covid significantly increased job satisfaction, only more so at the beginning and less so as the pandemic and the period of remote working progressed (Akkaya et al., 2021). More recent studies have shown motivation taking a 'significant hit' after working remotely for a year (Ergovan et al., 2021). This may be expected as motivation while remote working is mentioned as one of the main challenges for staff (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021) and some studies found that only 40% feel more motivated at home (Bockova & Lajcin, 2021). This can be largely due to the challenges of interacting with colleagues in the new remote environment.

Respondents to this survey were very much in line with the Civil Service Engagement Survey 2020 in showcasing a high level of motivation, engagement, and coping skills (Gov.ie, 2020a). The largest segment (50%) of respondents felt their workload was just as manageable since Covid and a quarter each returned that their workload was more and less manageable since Covid. Increased workload or inability to manage one's workload can lead to a lack of engagement (Upadyaya et al., 2016). Due to the largely unaffected segment of respondents the overall picture is one of unwavering motivation levels. This may be due to the increased work/life balance seen across DSP responses, as increased work/life balance has been seen to increase job satisfaction, employee engagement and motivation (Mas-Machuca et al., 2016; Bataineh, 2019).

Final Views

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Focus here is placed on the top 3 positive and negative aspects of remote working as raised by respondents. By analysing the top raised positive and negative issues a deeper understanding of the responses overall can be gleaned which can be the first steps towards recommendations or shaping a strategy in moving forward.

Table 3- Positive Responses (top 3)

No.	Positive	%
1	No/Less Commute	51%
2	Better Work/Life balance - More Family time	34%
3	Better work time management / Flexibility /Autonomy	23%

Positive responses:

1. Less Commuting

This is the most stated aspect across both positive and negative, is the time saved due less commuting. In the US alone 89 million hours are saved weekly by not commuting (HBR, 2020). Stated many times over the survey this extra time saved was directed to family, or exercise, hobbies/interest, and other activities. Ipsen et al. (2021) also found that the reduced commute was the biggest positive factor in their studies.

2. Better Work / Life Balance / More Family time

Mentioned by 34% of the survey and by 12.1% in Bockova & Lajcin's survey (2021) Work/Life balance generally scores higher with people with children (Ben Messaoud & Sen Gupta, 2021). Less than half of the survey respondents have children, so this response is much broader. Some responses mentioned more time for themselves or time spent at home. Many simply mentioned 'better work/life balance'.

3. Better work time management / Flexibility / Autonomy

This is simply that respondents were more in control of their own arrangements throughout the workday. There is mention of increased productivity and energy levels. This was also mentioned by a quarter of Buckova & Lajcin's respondents (2021).

Table 4- Negative Responses (top 3)

No.	Negative	%
1	Lack of interaction with colleagues	43%
2	Increased Workload / Longer Workday	15%
3	WFH Logistics	14%

Negative responses:

1. Lack of interaction with colleagues

The No. 1 negative in this survey and in others (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021) and is lack of interaction with colleagues. This is both social and work-related interaction. The hyper connected virtual remote working space though keeping everyone in close contact does not seem to be able to keep everyone connected as much as they would like (Wang et al., 2021). Workers can feel 'virtually connected but physically disconnected' (Como et al., 2021). Organisation must ensure that there is socialisation of their employees while remote working (Akkaya et al., 2021).

2. Increased Workload / Longer Workday

The increased workload, the longer workday and all that this entails as also mentioned by Bockova & Lajcin (2021). Although this is high on this list it has been seen to be offset by other responses. Some responses stated that even with a longer workday the average working day is still shorter due to having no commute and being content with that. Charalampous et al. (2019) state that individuals can overwork willingly as a trade-off for the added flexibility of remote working.

3. WFH Logistics

This is adapting to the new remote work environment. It is not particularly related to tech or lack of a dedicated home office, but more related to adapting work practices, procedures, and expectations to working remotely.

It should be noted that before being removed the 4th most popular (12%) positive answer and 11th most popular negative answer was 'nothing'.

Future Work Preference

There are five levels of responses to this question and the most popular option (36%) is to work remotely most of the time with some office-based work, closely followed by a 50/50 blended work pattern. Only 1% are looking for a full return to the office but issues regarding work logistics, isolation and co-worker interaction may make this a necessity for some.

Overall, and what would seem to be the most important point, is that 99% of all respondents would like to have some element of remote working in their work arrangement going forward, with 85% of respondents wanting at least half of their working time to be spent remote working. Other international studies show 81% of respondents wanting blended or exclusively working from home (Harvard Business Review, 2021) or that 57% would like to work from home 'more often' (Pluut & Wonders, 2020). Given the overall positivity of respondents in this study these results are not surprising. From studying the results of this survey remote working, whether mandatory or not, has been incredibly positive for staff of DSP.

Recommendations:

Respondents reported positive well-being and work/life balance, with unchanged motivation levels. It would be prudent to address the negative aspects while capitalising on the positive. As with Ipsen et al., (2021), this can be undertaken by addressing the 3 main positive and negative issues raised.

The top 3 positive responses are also linked in that they concern 'time'. When the remote worker has more time, or is more in control of their own time, then they are more positive, productive, and happy.

'Less Commuting' has been shown to be a massive benefit to respondents in this study and other studies that have been referenced. If, for logistical or other reasons, remote working was less available to workers, efforts should be made by organisations (DSP) to ensure that it is made available to all workers to some degree. When commuting times are as great as has been shown, and their reduction is the most positive aspect of remote working, then several days remote working a month, or even one a week, could benefit workers greatly.

The second point, 'Better Work/Life Balance / More Family time', is linked to the first in that it is, for a large part, a result of less commuting. In the positive qualitative responses, the majority of those that mentioned less commuting mentioned increased free time, family time, or as mentioned before, better work/life balance. By facilitating remote working to some degree organisations (DSP) are ensuring that the top two positives are a reality for workers.

The third aspect, 'Better work time management / Flexibility / Autonomy', comes with access to remote working. Those surveyed felt better able to manage their own working day and, in doing so, felt less stressed and more productive. This again is easily facilitated by some access to remote working.

The 3 top negative issues are linked in that they can be addressed by managers and co-workers actively engaging with, interacting with, and supporting each other. 'Lack of interaction with Colleagues' is directly and expressly addressed by regular engagement. As with other qualitative responses this is linked to several other issues raised i.e. 'Isolation/Loneliness', 'Lack of support', and 'Lack of Communication / Communication

difficulty'. These responses would not appear so high on the list if co-workers and managers were actively engaging with other on a regular basis.

Having an 'increased workload / longer working' day while remote working during Covid is an issue not unique to the DSP. It can mean that there are difficulties in maintaining the divide between home and work life, but it can also mean that some remote workers are not coping as well as others. Reaching out, touching base, regular check-ins all can help with alleviating some of the stress and burden that can build.

Issues with 'WFH logistics' are prevalent in all roles and situations and, in a rapidly changing work environment, there is no assurance that they can be resolved over time. These can be addressed by remote workers in similar situations sharing knowledge and experience on addressing common WFH issues.

There are two main takeaways from this study. The first is that remote working, mandatory or otherwise, is very much a subjective experience and workers will have differing remote working experiences due to a myriad of elements in their working and private life. The other main takeaway from this study is 'time'. Regardless of the working or private situation of respondents, saving time, reallocating time, and more freedom to organise their own time, is of the greatest benefit to the remote worker. The positive elements of remote working far outweigh the negative (Azimov, 2020). Of the three areas studied in this paper, work/life balance has consistently been shown to be the most important to respondents. Although factors under each area were not creating the perfect environment for positivity, responses were largely positive, or at least, had not deteriorated while remote working i.e. motivation. In this way a healthy work/life balance is the most important factor in this study and underpins the results from the other areas.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study has found that the staff of DSP have been mostly positively affected by Covid related remote working in the period March 2020 – June 2021 in the areas of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation. The survey and subsequent data analysis showed that the largest proportions of staff were positively affected in the areas of well-being and work/life balance, while motivation was largely unaffected. Respondents overall were most positive about improvements in their work/life balance.

Further research should be carried out, should the situation arise again, but with a qualitative longitudinal survey. In this way recall bias would not be an issue and cause and effect could be studied instead of quantitative inferences. As this study gained massively from the inclusion of qualitative data, a larger qualitative longitudinal study could be used in conjunction with the findings from this study to provide much deeper understanding in this area.

Had this pandemic happened fifteen to twenty years ago the reaction worldwide would have been vastly different. The ability for organisations to change to remote working at all, not to mention the rate that change occurred, was not then possible. The tech was in its infancy and not readily available. But as Covid occurred when it did, many organisations were not only able to quickly switch to remote working, but also to excel, as DSP did, in the face of new challenges, increased demand on services, and a rapidly changing and dynamic working environment.

The pandemic impacted respondents' lives not just with mandatory remote working. It overshadowed many aspects of everyday life from schooling to shopping to the level of interaction with friends and family. Considering this, the findings of this paper should not just be looked at as a study of remote working in general but of this specific instance of remote working against the Covid backdrop. Some of the more painful aspects of remote working for respondents have been exacerbated by adherence to public health guidelines. Though this is true, the positive and negative elements identified in this study have commonality across other similar studies. Many issues are universal whether the remote working is mandatory, during a pandemic, or otherwise. Some staff were relatively unaffected by Covid and the

subsequent health measures. Though their workday, commute, and workload may have been altered, they themselves were unmoved and could progress into this new way of working with some amount of aplomb. Others were affected both positively and negatively. It is important for the DSP, and all organisations, to be aware, wary and mindful of these elements as we move into the new way of working.

There are few, if any, studies of this nature that focus on large public sector bodies, particularly an Irish public sector body, that is largely customer facing but found it necessary to move to a remote working model virtually overnight. All carried out while the need for their services grew exponentially. This study adds to the knowledge in this field and enhances the understanding of how mandatory remote working can affect the worker. Overall, the situation is a positive one with remote workers adapting to the rapidly changed working environment, and finding improved, or at least unchanged, levels of well-being, work/life balance, and motivation.

Remote working is beneficial to both the employee and the organisation and should be an option for all workers to some extent going forward. Engagement, interaction and support are key, whether it is coming from the professional or personal side of life. Ensuring employees are engaged and supported must be the goal of all organisations. The most significant positive finding from this study is that when people remote work, they have more time, and that goes a long way to giving them a healthier work/life balance.

The most important negative takeaway from the survey is that co-worker interaction, both social and professional, is crucial. This can be positively addressed and is not some unachievable goal. Endorsing a culture of support and engagement between staff, management, and teams is the way forward, particularly as remote working becomes more and more a part of the global workplace. This should not be something for organisations to be wary of, for if they facilitate remote working, they are addressing staff work/life balance issues. And if they encourage and instil values of communication, support, and engagement, they will have motivated staff with good well-being regardless of if they are working in the office, home, or anywhere.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of Survey and Results

Survey Results

674 Completed Surveys

Confirmation and Consent

1	I agree to participate in this survey and I consent to my survey data being used for academic research	Percentage
	Yes	100%
	No - exit survey	0%

2	I am a DSP staff member and due to Covid I have Worked From Home / Remote Worked all or in part since March 2020.	Percentage
	Yes	100%
	No - exit survey	0%

1. Respondent Information

3	Age	Percentage
	18-24	0%
	25-34	9%
	35-44	24%
	45-54	39%
	55-64	27%
	65+	1%

4	Gender	Percentage
	Male	28%
	Female	71%
	Prefer not to say or Prefer to self-describe	1%

5	Marital Status	Percentage
	Single	18%
	Cohabiting	11%
	Married	63%

Divorced	4%
Separated	3%
Widowed	1%

6	Since Covid I have mostly been living..?	Percentage
	Alone	11%
	With parent(s)	5%
	In house/apartment share with others	5%
	With spouse or partner	22%
	With spouse/partner and children	54%
	Single parent with child(ren)	2%

7	How many total people (adults and children) live in your household?	Percentage
	1-2	37%
	3-4	46%
	5+	17%

8	How many children in full time education live in your household?	Percentage
	0	52%
	1-2	38%
	3+	10%

9	How many preschoolers live in your household?	Percentage
	0	89%
	1+	11%

10	The location of your dwelling is...?	Percentage
	Housing estate / apartment complex or similar - nearest neighbour is adjoining/very close	56%
	Group of close dwellings - nearest neighbour is >100m away	15%
	Group of close but spread out dwellings - nearest neighbour is >500m away	18%
	Solitary dwelling - nearest neighbour >2km	10%
	Remote dwelling - nearest neighbour >5km	1%

11	Do you have local amenities within walking distance i.e. shops, playground, places to exercise?	Percentage
	Yes	74%
	No	26%

12	What would best describe where you live?	Percentage
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City	7%
Suburb	23%
Town	22%
Village	13%
Rural	34%

2. Respondent Work Details

13	Prior to Covid my work was...?	Percentage
	Customer facing all of the time	8%
	Customer facing most of the time	14%
	Customer facing half of the time	12%
	Mostly not customer facing	19%
	Not customer facing at all	47%

14	Since Covid my work is...?	Percentage
	Customer facing all of the time	1%
	Customer facing most of the time	2%
	Customer facing half of the time	4%
	Mostly not customer facing	15%
	Not customer facing at all	77%

15	Before Covid I worked....?	Percentage
	In the office all of the time with no remote working/WFH	93%
	Mostly in the office with some remote working/WFH	7%
	Half and half	0%
	Mostly remote working/WFH with some office work	0%
	Remote working/WFH all of the time	1%

16	Since Covid I work....?	Percentage
	In the office all of the time with no remote working/WFH	1%
	Mostly in the office with some remote working/WFH	14%
	Half and half	11%
	Mostly remote working/WFH with some office work	28%
	Remote working/WFH all of the time	45%

17	Since Covid the level of interaction between me and my co-workers/manager (face to face, phone, video calls, etc.) has...?	Percentage
	Decreased a lot compared to before Covid	42%
	Decreased somewhat compared to before Covid	31%

Stayed the same	14%
Increased somewhat compared to before Covid	8%
Increased a lot compared to before Covid	6%

18	I am a	Percent- age
	TCO	2%
	CO	26%
	SO	0%
	EO	26%
	AO	1%
	HEO	34%
	AP	8%
	PO or above	2%
	Prefer not to say	1%

3. Well-Being

19	Making time for yourself. What statement most accurately describes you?	Percent- age
	I found it a lot easier to make time for myself before Covid	18%
	I found it somewhat easier to make time for myself before Covid	15%
	I am able to make the same amount of time for myself now as I did before Covid	19%
	I find it somewhat easier to make time for myself now than before Covid	28%
	I find it a lot easier to make time for myself now than before Covid	21%

20	Exercise	Percent- age
	I used to exercise a lot more before Covid	13%
	I used to exercise somewhat more before Covid	20%
	I exercise the same amount now as I did before Covid	31%
	I exercise somewhat more now than I did before Covid	23%
	I exercise a lot more now than I did before Covid	12%

21	Hobbies or other interests	Percent- age
	Since Covid I have had no time to give to my hobbies/interests	9%
	Since Covid I have had to reduce the time spent on my hobbies/interests	27%
	Covid has not changed the amount of time I spend on my hobbies/interests	34%
	Since Covid I have spent somewhat more time on my hobbies/interests	22%
	Since Covid I have spent a lot more time on my hobbies/interests	8%

22	Sleep	Percentage
	I slept a lot better before Covid	12%
	I slept somewhat better before Covid	16%
	I sleep the same now as I did before Covid	52%
	I sleep a lot better now than before Covid	9%
	I sleep somewhat better now than before Covid	11%

23	Well-Being and Stress. How have you been affected by Covid?	Percentage
	I have found Covid to be very stressful and challenging	19%
	I have found Covid to be somewhat stressful and challenging	50%
	I do not feel my stress levels have been affected positively or negatively by Covid	16%
	I feel I have been somewhat less stressed since Covid and it has not been very challenging	9%
	I feel I have had a lot less stress since Covid and it has not been challenging at all	5%

24	Sick Leave (not directly related to Covid i.e. not due to having Covid, or issues related to vaccination, etc.)	Percentage
	Since Covid I have needed to avail of sick leave a lot more than usual	2%
	Since Covid I have needed to avail of sick leave somewhat more than usual	4%
	Since Covid the amount of sick leave I avail of has been unaffected	60%
	Since Covid I have needed to avail of sick leave somewhat less than usual	9%
	Since Covid I have needed to avail of sick leave a lot less than usual	24%

25	Your perception of your own well-being since commencing remote working	Percentage
	I feel I had a more positive perception of my own well-being when I started remote working than I do now	22%
	I feel my perception of my own well-being has remained unchanged since I started remote working	30%
	I feel I have a more positive perception of my own well-being now than when I started remote working	41%
	Not applicable	7%

4. Work/Life Balance

26	Without taking your work commute into account, your average work day...	Percentage
	...was a lot longer prior to Covid?	14%
	...was somewhat longer prior to Covid?	18%
	...is no longer or shorter now than before Covid?	35%

...is somewhat longer since Covid?	25%
...is a lot longer since Covid?	8%

27	Before Covid how many hours would you spend commuting for work in an average week?	Percentage
	0 to 2 hours	20%
	Up to 4 hours	18%
	Up to 6 hours	20%
	Up to 8 hours	14%
	Up to 10 hours	14%
	More than 10 Hours	13%

28	Since Covid how many hours do you spend commuting for work in an average week?	Percentage
	0 to 2 hours	80%
	Up to 4 hours	12%
	Up to 6 hours	4%
	Up to 8 hours	1%
	Up to 10 hours	1%
	More than 10 hours	1%

29	Since Covid do you find yourself checking emails or working after hours or at weekends?	Percentage
	Yes	43%
	No	57%

30	Do you find it difficult to take breaks from work while working remotely/WFH	Percentage
	Yes	60%
	No	40%

31	"When working remotely I find it difficult to 'turn off' at the end of the working day".	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	14%
	Agree Somewhat	32%
	Neither Agree or Disagree	16%
	Disagree Somewhat	15%
Strongly Disagree	24%	

32	Social Family Time	Percentage
	It is a lot easier to make social time for family now than before Covid	19%
	It is no easier or more difficult to make social time for family since Covid	24%
	It is somewhat easier to make social time for family now than before Covid	25%
It was a lot easier to make social time for family before Covid	20%	

It was somewhat easier to make social time for family before Covid	13%
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33	Social Time with Friends	Percent- age
	It was a lot easier to make social time for friends before Covid	50%
	It was somewhat easier to make social time for friends before Covid	16%
	It is no easier or more difficult to make social time for friends since Covid	18%
	It is somewhat easier to make social time for friends now than before Covid	10%
	It is a lot easier to make social time for friends now than before Covid	7%

34	Social Time with Co-workers	Percent- age
	It was a lot easier to make social time for co-workers before Covid	65%
	It was somewhat easier to make social time for co-workers before Covid	15%
	It is no easier or more difficult to make social time for co-workers since Covid	17%
	It is somewhat easier to make social time for co-workers now than before Covid	1%
	It is a lot easier to make social time for co-workers now than before Covid	2%

35	Taking Annual Leave.	Percent- age
	I felt able to avail of Annual Leave a lot more before Covid	19%
	I felt able to avail of Annual Leave somewhat more before Covid	14%
	There has been no change in how I avail of Annual Leave since Covid	62%
	I feel able to avail of Annual Leave somewhat more since Covid	4%
	I feel able to avail of Annual Leave a lot more since Covid	2%

36	Covid, Remote Working & Work-Life Balance	Percent- age
	Since Covid my work-life balance has been better mainly due to remote working	56%
	Since Covid my work-life balance has been better but not just due to remote working	15%
	Since Covid my work-life balance has been worse mainly due to remote working	9%
	Since Covid my work-life balance has been worse but not just due to remote working	10%
	Since Covid my work-life balance is unchanged	10%

37	Your perception of your work-life balance since commencing remote working	Percent- age
	I feel I had a better work-life balance when I started remote working than I do now	21%

I feel my work-life balance has remained unchanged since I started remote working	22%
I feel I have a better work-life balance now than when I started remote working	51%
Not applicable	6%

5. Work Motivation

38	Your motivation regarding your work	Percentage
	I felt a lot more motivated about work prior to Covid	14%
	I felt somewhat more motivated about work prior to Covid	11%
	My motivation regarding work has been unchanged since Covid	55%
	I feel somewhat more motivated about work since Covid	13%
	I feel a lot more motivated about work since Covid	7%

39	Work Engagement	Percentage
	I felt engaged in my work a lot more prior to Covid	15%
	I felt engaged in my work somewhat more prior to Covid	11%
	I feel my level of engagement is unchanged since Covid	50%
	I feel somewhat more engaged in my work since Covid	16%
	I feel a lot more engaged in my work since Covid	9%

40	Your Workload	Percentage
	I feel my workload was a lot more manageable prior to Covid	17%
	I feel my workload was somewhat more manageable prior to Covid	20%
	I feel my workload is no more or less manageable since Covid	45%
	I feel my workload is somewhat more manageable since Covid	14%
	I feel my workload is a lot more manageable since Covid	4%

41	The work I do is/was seen and acknowledged by my co-workers and management....	Percentage
	A lot more prior to Covid?	13%
	Somewhat more prior to Covid?	13%
	To the same level as before Covid?	56%
	Somewhat more since Covid?	12%
	A lot more since Covid?	5%

42	Your perception of your level of motivation since commencing remote working	Percentage
	I feel I was more motivated when I started remote working than I am now	19%
	I feel my motivation has remained unchanged since I started remote working	58%

I feel I am more motivated now than when I started remote working	19%
Not applicable	5%

6. Final Views

43	What has been the most positive aspect to remote working for you?	Percentage
	Commute	51%
	Work life /Family time	34%
	Better managed work time / More productive / flexibility / workflow	20%
	Less distractions bad side of office	12%
	Health / Stress improvement / Happier	7%
	Costs (child minding, lunch, fuel)	7%
	Home comforts / activities	6%
	More manageable / workload?	5%
	Safety / Covid?	4%
	Child minding	3%
	Autonomy	3%
	Nothing	3%
	Online Services (training / meetings) – travel for meetings / online work processes	2%
Environmental	0%	

44	What has been the most negative aspect to remote working for you?	Percentage
	Lack of Interaction with colleagues	43%
	Increased Workload / Longer Day / Breaks	15%
	Work Logistics in new working environment	14%
	Nothing	12%
	Technical / Equipment related issues	11%
	Isolation / Loneliness / Disconnect	11%
	Support levels – Management / Training / Organisation	8%
	Communication Issues	5%
	Extra pressure regarding work visibility	5%
	Other Covid-19 related issues	4%
	Health / Diet / Activity Level issues	4%
	Interaction with DSP Clients	1%

45	Given the choice how would you like to work in the future?	Percentage
	100% remote working/WFH	19%
	Mostly remote working/WFH with some office based work	36%
	50% remote working/WFH and 50% office based	29%
	Mostly office based with some remote working/WFH	14%
	100% office based work	1%