

**National College of Ireland
Project Submission Sheet**



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Signature: *Jonathan Joyce*

Date: 04/08/2024

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Research methods and Dissertation

The implementation of flexible working in the Offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission and the resulting policy effects on staffing and organisational outturns 2019 to 2022.

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date
Jonathan Joyce x21163774	MAHRM	04/08/2024

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Research Project Title:

The implementation of flexible working in the Offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission and the resulting policy effects on staffing and organisational outturns 2019 to 2022.

Author: Jonathan Joyce.

Student number: X21163774.

Award: Masters of Arts in Human Resource Management (MAHRM_08).

Awarding College: National College of Ireland.

Submitted to the National College of Ireland August 2024.

Abstract:

The implementation of flexible working in the Offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission and the resulting policy effects on staffing and organisational outturns 2019 to 2022. Author Jonathan Joyce.

This paper asks the question is flexible working, brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic, a success in the offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission. Has its implementation had an impact on the published objectives and outturn of the organisation? This research uses the secondary, publish, data contained in the DPC's annual reports and Revised Estimates for 2020 to 2022, these dates are pre and post COVID and remote working and provide an insight into staff numbers and published outturn. To assess the impact of the remote working policy on individual staff members a staff survey, based on the Remote Working In Ireland Survey, 2023 (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023), was conducted and its results analysed giving an insight into the continued success of the DPC. This research will assist the DPC in it future planning in relation to staff recruitment and retention. It gives important insight to what staff are thinking and feeling. It reinforces the positives and raises some areas of concern which will need further exploration and research.

This research has shown that for most employees, remote working is a success, it highly desired and one that they are willing to forego other benefits to obtain and retain. Analysis of the secondary data shows that the policy has not adversely effected the DPC, in fact its numbers have continued to grow. It is clear that remote working has benefited and enabled this growth.

Declaration:

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form (*Thesis/Author Declaration Form*)

Name: Jonathan Joyce

Student Number: X21163774

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Masters of Arts in Human Resource Management (MAHRM_08)

Title of Thesis: The implementation of flexible working in the Offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission and the resulting policy effects on staffing and organisational outturns 2019 to 2022.

Date: 1/07/2024

Material submitted for award

I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.

I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Acknowledgements:

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List of abbreviations:

DPC	The Data Protection commission
PWC	Price Waterhouse Cooper
AI's	Artificial Intelligence
WRC	Workplace Relations Commission
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
WDC	Western Development Commission
CPL	Computer Placement Limited
RTE	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
EU	European Union
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
KPMG	Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (Accountancy)
HR	Human Resources
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
SME's	Small and Medium sized enterprises
KPI's	Key Performance indicators
AO	Administrative Officer
HEO	Higher Executive Officer
NDP	National Development Plan
HELM	Health E-Learning and Media
NCI	National College of Ireland
REV	Revised Estimates Volume for the Public Service

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Paid employment has become flexible and is no longer tied to a physical office space or single geographical location. The emergence of telework, a form of work which allows an employee provide paid labour from anywhere, at home, satellite centres, remote work hubs are all now a viable option (Wang, Wang, Zang and Chen, 2023). Before the pandemic and enforced lockdown this form of working was used as a reward by employers, but the pandemic was the catalyst for changing the nature of where, when and how work is done; businesses were required to operate remotely in order to stay viable or just survive meaning there was no negotiations and the option was no longer a voluntary (Moretti, Menna, Aulicino, Paoletta, Liguori and Iolascon, 2020).

The changes brought about by the pandemic are not short-term, it is obvious that new work practices enabled and driven by new technologies will be the new working experience for employees. The 'big bang' approach (seismic change under pressure) taken by employers, which was needed at the time is no longer not enough.

Employers must normalise and formalise the changes of flexible working and new technology to accomplish their everyday goals and achieve targets. Taking this into consideration there is a very little study and theory about how to plan, organise and manage these new flexible technologically promoted working practices for workers and managers a like (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Big sections of the public sector were forced to work from home. Teleworking from home meant that public service provisions were secure lessening the disruption to critical services (Palumbo, 2020)

Published opinions over the last three years appear to support the idea that flexible working is here to stay. This paper will try to determine:

If flexible working has been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The Data Protection Commission (DPC), and

Are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee? Are there any obvious or resulting disadvantages to the employer or employee?

Any recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review.

The very nature of the work we do and how we do it is changing, currently this is an important topic in public policy. The interest in this subject, from business, governments and the general population, has grown in recent years. A series of factors have influenced this such as globalisation, climate and health. These are forces of change, but advances in technology is the most important one as it has the most far reaching effect on quality, quantity, organisation and how we work (Gonzalez Vazquez et al, 2019).

The Nature of work:

It is obvious that the structure of work had largely remained unchanged for the last two hundred years. Most working systems were set along the lines and lessons taught by the industrial revolution. Workers, based in a central location, traded their time with their employer rather than their productivity (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007), but the advent of COVID-19 has accelerated change beyond what was thought manageable or possible, within a very short time space, increased employee options in relation to when, how and where they work leading to unprecedented levels of flexibility. Alternative, flexible, hybrid or just non-standard work systems are simply options, for workers, to fulfil their roles outside of the traditional norms and restrictions placed on them by their employer in when they work, how much they produce in any given period and where they need to be to achieve their outturn (Kattenbach, Demerouti, & Nachreiner, 2010).

The amount of workers remote working from home increased to levels not experienced before. Working from home is more common for high-skilled service workers than the low skilled service jobs. PWC UK introduced a flexible working policy for its 20,000 workers, which meant they could divide their time between the physical office and home office (The Guardian, 2021). They also reconfigured their physical offices to encourage teams, collaboration and creativity when workers were in the office with café type meeting spaces (Curtis, 2023). How work is done has changed significantly for most of us and this change has advanced rapidly over the last five years leading to an emphasis on increasing employment participation through more flexible solutions and options. These options are of increased importance to society on many levels, environmentally, sustainability, and increased employment

participation opportunities for women, older generations, people with disabilities, carers and those marginalised in our society.

EU Directive 2019/1158 on work life Balance for parents and Carers has led the way in this area and has been transposed into Irish law, trying to increase participation in work. These changes in legislation and the global pandemic has changed, forever, the way most of us now work (WRC, 2024). Flexible or hybrid work models mean a variations between working fulltime in the physical office space and a fulltime remote set up for all staff. This leaves a lot of choice and working options between the two polar opposites for hybrid work arrangements. Some companies permitted some of their workforce to work from home with the other team members in the office while others have allowed more flexibility with defined ratio of days per week in the office and the balance working from their home office (Grensing- Pophal, 2021).

The civil service blended working policy is the result of changing work practices at home and in the office. It supports Government policy, commitments and supports the Civil Service by making it an employer of choice by supporting a diverse and innovative workplace that has work life balance and flexibility at its core. Government has directed that public sector employers offer 20% remote working with the Civil Service leading on this and providing leadership (DPER, 2022).

The speedy creation and expansion of technology, in the digital space, which was accelerated by the global pandemic has altered how, when and where we work. We know some people have been at home, remote working for years (Espita, Matto, Rocha, Ruta, & Winkler, 2022). This increase in Working from home has been made possible by digital technologies and this now means that it is increasingly important the these changes and the resulting effects are researched, how do employees manage through seismic work practice change and still maintain focus on the organisational goals working with continued common purpose (Högberg, and Willermark, 2024).

Clearly the nature of work is changing and as it does visions of humanoid like artificial intelligences (A.I's) replacing humans is suggested. This really does not, realistically, mirror how we as humans use and interact with technology on a daily basis but

rather flexible working does. Flexible or hybrid working offers a more realistic vision of people connecting over networks enabled by the use of constantly improving communications platforms, which are moderated and improved by A.I's (Gagné, Parker, Griffin, 2022). The 2023 Remote Working in Ireland Survey, conducted by Ollscoil na Gaillimhe and the Western Development Commission (WDC) found that in an access panel of 5,929 respondents, 59% have a hybrid working arrangement, 38% are working fully remotely and only 3% or 178 people out of 5,929 are on site for all of their working week. A full 92% said that option of remote/hybrid working options would be a significant influence in their decision to change employment (McCarthy, McGrath Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan & Mulrooney, 2023).

Flexibility can manifest itself in the physical and the psychological world (Matthijs & Izak, 2021) and is defined in the Oxford dictionary (2023) as the 'quality or characteristic (of a person or character) of being directed, flexibility, adaptability' on the psychological level and at a physical level, it is defined, as 'the quality of bending easily without breaking' and 'the ability to be easily modified' (Oxford dictionary, 2023). Both definitions of flexibility show the different aspects encased in the idea, the ability to change or bend without breaking but also the ability, and openness, to change. Even with the dramatic increase in its uptake there still remains a lack of study around the area of workplace flexibility and the different aspects of it (Matthijs & Izak, 2021). The research that has been done to date shows flexible working has a positive impact on employee's relationship with work, When, how and why it is done (Casper & Harris, 2008), but there is a clear lack of research into organisational policies, their implementation and how this effects the employer employee relationship (Chen & Fulmer 2017).

The CPL Salary Guide survey published in April 2024 and reported on, by RTE news, shows that over 60% of people who responded would refuse a job offer that did not include some sort of hybrid or flexible work pattern (Stedman, 2024). These sentiments and experiences were coming to the fore in other European jurisdictions as well, resulting in EU Directive 2019/1158 on Work life Balance for parents and Carers. This directive gives parents, with children up to eight years of age, the right to request flexible work arrangements which can include flexible hours of work, reduced working hours and flexibility in the physical location or place of work.

This Directive has been transposed into Irish legislation resulting in the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment referring it to the Workplace Relations commission (WRC) for the production of a code of practice for employers and employees. The resulting code gives directions on a person's rights to request flexible working arrangements for carers and certain categories of workers but also the right of all worker to request flexible working arrangements, rights that are set out in the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 and the Parental leave Acts 1998 to 2023 (WRC, 2024). Irish workers now have the right to request flexible working, reflecting their expectations and the trend in refusing to apply for work in organisations that do not facilitate such a request.

Growth of Flexible working:

The University of Birmingham Equal Parenting Project (Forbes, Birkett, Evans, Chung and Whiteman, 2020) found that managers have a more positive outlook on flexible working due to their lockdown experiences and will encourage more uptake of flexible working in the future. The decision for managers now is how to deal with two problems, how do we organise working conditions in an uncertain environment and as a consequence create a plan to maximise our productivity in the hybrid working systems of tomorrow where fully remote and fully in-person will be at opposite ends of a flexible rainbow of work options. If this can be achieved in the right way, organisations will be better able to recruit and retain talent and as a result increase opportunities, innovation and productivity, acting courageously now will define how we work in a more digitised and flexible world (Hilberath, Kilmann, Lovich, Tzanetti, Bailey, Beck, Kaufman, Khandelwal, Schuler, and Woolsey, 2020).

The evidence upholding the continuation of working from home cannot be disputed and the commonly supported working pattern of one to two days a week, working from home, seems to be the preferred pattern promoted in most published studies. With flexible working becoming more structured, enabled by advances in technology and online platforms we can expect productivity gains to be maintained and improved. If employers can see this productivity, resulting from working at home, as positive improving workers lives and wellbeing it is only a matter of time before flexible working is written into employment contracts in the future (Hensher, Beck

and Nelson, 2023). Social exchange theory studies tell us that employers who really care about their employees' health and wellbeing, is the beginning of a good social exchange partnership. The positives and the benefits are created for both parties, increased productivity, employee positivity and loyalty (Atalay and Dağıstan 2024).

The 2023 survey of 1,300 global CEO's found that they are not in the same mind as their employees. 64% of those surveyed are of the opinion that all employees will be back in the office, fulltime, by the year 2026 and 87% of respondents said they would treat employees in the office more favourably (May, 2023). The views expressed show the steadfast need for a physical office working presence held by CEO's against a generally positive conversation, centred on hybrid working, which is believed to have effected productivity positively over the last three years and which has been strongly embraced by younger generations of workers (KPMG, 2023).

The World Economic Forum (2023) has published a paper, online, discussing how flexible working believed to be for parents needing part time hours but this has changed as vast sections of society, current employees and those entering the market, have experienced work and its systems very differently to the work environment of their parents and previous generations due to the global pandemic. One thing is certain there is no going back, as millennials and generation Z's place flexibility above other work rewards possibly even pay.

Managers and their employers had traditionally used flexible working as a recruitment and retention tool (Eversole, Venneberg and Crowder, 2012) but this is an option open to all workers now under new legislation enacted in Ireland and workers can seek redress through the Workplace Relations Commission as a result (Irish Statute Book, 2023). The continuing movement of work online and the increase in flexible working, meaning when, where and how we work, is the future of working (Homberg, Lukeman and Abendroth, 2023).

The design and implementation of Flexible working, what was thought impossible turned out to be possible and the mandatory nature of it, forced employers to acknowledge that it works. (Gascoigne, 2021) In all outward appearances teleworking in the public administration sector has worked despite apprehensions

around lack of IT hardware and negative perceptions of workers (Madureira and Rando, 2022). Lasting change has been brought about by the experience of working through Covid-19. Employers were moved, without choice, to include more and disparate forms of flexible working to remain viable and working. This has led to an increase in hybrid, in person or online collaborative ways of working. This growth has been enabled and sustained by mobile advance information technologies (MAITS) offering quicker and probably more efficient ways of achieving outturns and organisational goals (*Human Resource Management International Digest*, 2023).

The growth in hybrid working was increasing, even before the pandemic. Groups of workers were already coalescing and becoming more dependent on technology to stay in touch and communicate both physically and virtually (Gilstrap, Srivastava and Gilstrap, 2022). It is the norm now for teams of workers to use physical and virtual platforms for transferring information and communications at different times and locations to achieve their organisational goals and have become more knowledgeable in doing so (Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas and Cohen, 2012).

The CIPD 2022 report on flexible and hybrid working has found there is an expectation that a fifth of the current, UK, workforce will remain and work from home fulltime. The pandemic has meant that almost half, 46%, of workers worked remotely all or almost all of time with only 37% of workers having no access to hybrid work. (CIPD, 2022).

Work Performance/Outturn:

Giving workers control in their work life, for instance when and how they work, has been acknowledged in research literature for a long time now. It has been written about in management studies for over fifty years. It can be seen in job characterisation theory and the idea of autonomy (Kossele, Perrigino & Lautsch, 2022) and was defined as long ago as 1975 in the Development of the Job Diagnostic Survey as “The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the employee in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 162). The two most important parts of work performance are task performance and contextual performance according to (Conway, 1999). How well an employee

carries out their work as categorised in their job or role description or work that feeds into the goals of the organisation is referred to as 'task performance' (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993), whereas contextual performance is the opposite. It refers to the behaviours at work which go beyond the job description, doing extra without being told, persistence in completing tasks, resilience, helping your team mates and co-workers (Sørli, Hetland, Bakker, Espevik, & Olsen, 2022).

What we want is to be productive. To make sure hybrid work is successful, employers have to establish and build an understanding of time and place which encourages productivity rather than stifles it. To achieve this they must take into consideration the key components of productivity, this starts with energy. Most employees are productive when they feel positive, healthy and mentally well and the opposite also applies, productivity drops when people feel exhausted, stressed or have unhealthy habits associated with their work. The other factor, in work, where concentration is central is focus. When a workplace, the context of work, allows an employee to focus their productivity increases (Gratton, 2021). Flexible working combined with autonomy increases an employee's contextual performance and improves work life balance and organisational results (Metselaar, den Dulk, & Vermeeren, 2023).

Productivity at work is a measure of employee skill, ability and the art of self-management, all needed by remote or hybrid workers in setting obvious metrics to ensure they attain the performance levels needed to do the job. The roll out of new technologies have enhanced the work environment enabling increased productivity (Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano, & Charalampous, 2019).

Are there other aspects to productivity? Why, when we talk about remote work, is the conversation focused solely on productivity rather than diversity, inclusion, satisfaction, happiness or access. Currently there is no standard measurement or formula for productivity while fluffy concepts like happiness impact a company's bottom line and productivity (May, 2023).

Research has shown that the connection between flexible working and remote working on employee performance is not direct and is directly affected by work life balance, the amount of autonomy they have contributing to their overall satisfaction (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019). If hybrid working is going to succeed, the employer

really needs to think about how work is done. This is more than just the wants and needs of the employee but also synchronise it with their work, their other team members, the goals of the organisation and its customers. An easier task when we were all in a physical office at the same time (Harvard & Gratton, 2021).

Research in the Harvard Business Review in 2023 has shown that remote worker across the world are more engaged than those in the physical office which leads to higher productivity and better performance. 41% HR managers, with flexible work policies, agree that productivity is up. This rapidly reduces with a greater requirement for presence on site. This creates a serious problem for business leaders, fully remote risks employee wellbeing while fulltime in the office means lower employee engagement and loss of productivity (Brecheisen, 2023).

Things are changing, where, when and how we work are all moving at the same time. This means team leaders are trying to create new ways of working, as team, without a template. This is no simple task, managers must know and understand the components of hybrid work and the positives and negatives associated with it. They must bring them all together to create a focus point enabling the necessary co-operation, co-ordination, drive and energy critical to being productive (Gratton, 2021).

There are positives for both employer and employee in remote working as productivity increases and workers become more engaged. This due to work taking place in an environment conducive to concentration (Staniec, Kaczorowska-Spychalska, Kalinska-Kula and Szczygiel, 2023). With employer interest in flexible work growing all the time, business need to consider the effect of imposing a single hybrid Working policy for all their employees as this can cause more problems than it solves. Research conducted by the Hackett Group in 2023 has shown this to be the case but when employers give their employees choice in the organisation of their hybrid working schedule, with their managers, the outcomes increasingly positive and lasting (Moody, 2024). If you apply social exchange theory to these positive behaviours it is because employees see worker friendly policies like flexible working as a sign that they are valued by their employer. This positive treatment of staff

creates a positive outcome on employee satisfaction, in their job, and improves their sense of commitment to the business (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019).

There appears to be a disconnection between what is happening, in relation to work outputs, and managers seeing the effects. Productivity grew significantly with the move to hybrid/remote working but these appears to be lagging now and not achieving the returns expected raising the question how do we maintain productivity levels in hybrid times. Looking at the tech and services industries the reality and understanding what is happening is not connected as a recent survey, of 20,000 people, by Microsoft found 87% said they were productive while only 12% of managers really believe that their workers are productive (Collet, 2022). Despite proposed benefits and the potential for positives related to remote working, the issues around remote work are neither obvious or spontaneous (Nwankpa and Roumani 2024).

The results of remote working for organisational productivity and worker innovation are unclear. Some studies have noted individual performance increases when remote working, through reduced sick leave and commute times. (Bloom, Liang, Roberts and Ying, 2015) Bloom et al also found in their 2015 study, "Does working from home work?" that productivity increased by 13%, for employees working remotely. During their nine month study the increase was made up of increased time spent working, a reduction in breaks taken during work hours and reduced sick leave aided by a quieter working environment with fewer distractions.

The new normal work system is flexible but this cuts down on social interactions, it decreases the opportunity for transfer of knowledge, creativity and innovation. Work in the future will become more flexible in nature meaning that employers and managers will need to know how these new systems will impact on productivity and work goals. A lot of previous research has looked only at the results of these changes on employee's satisfaction and wellbeing (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). For employers to stay relevant and retain talent in their organisations they must reassess their current employee development pathways and create new ones that work with and enhance the quality and traits of the flexible working model (Seo & Kim. 2024).

There would appear to be a growing wish, among, managers to return to the office as they are worried about employee management and performance while work is conducted online remotely (Bloom, Barrero, Davis, Meyer and Mihaylov, 2023). Managers are concerned about the perceived lack of creativity and collaboration amongst workers, published evidence on collaboration leans towards a negative impact caused by remote or flexible working (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015). A return to the office needs to be carefully thought out and have a proper strategy in place, without this organisation performance can be affected. Leadership must provide space for employees to air their views safely to enable this (Bogosian and Byrd-Poller, 2023).

In Canada, the Treasury Board, met with strong resistance when it publicly demanded public servants return to the office five days a week. Unions for public sector works were swift to disregard the call, stating members had worked from home for two and half years and had proven themselves to be effective and efficient (Woods and Pringle, 2022). Interestingly, when looking at who wants to return to the physical office, managers want to spend more time in the office than their staff. When making decisions on working from home, top level management teams and CEO's will not possess the level of information needed to decide on an individual basis, but in deciding on one policy, for all, the benefit is that the decision is equal and apply to everyone (Smite, Moe, Gonzalez-Huerta and Mendez, 2023). It is obvious, from the readings, that there is need for more analysis of the employer's wishes and reasoning, in relation to a return to the office and employee engagement, as this research has shown an imbalance in relation to research undertaken and articles published from their perspective.

The CIPD hybrid or flexible working practices study, published in 2022 found that 41% of employers who believed flexible work systems have grown also said that hybrid working is responsible for increased organisational efficiency and productivity, while 18% said hybrid working had a negative impact on productivity. These percentages were replicated across private, voluntary and public sector employers. Trends show that the bigger the business the more likely they are to see productivity increases than small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) due to hybrid working systems (CIPD, 2022). On the other hand it is reported in the "The future of work:

work engagement and job performance in the hybrid workplace” that the results of hybrid working systems (flexible/telework) on employee and organisational productivity are mixed, showing no obvious trend as results fall right across the spectrum – detrimental, no effect, to beneficial (Naqshbandi, Kabir, Ishak, and Islam, 2024).

Society has changed significantly due to increased availability and uptake of hybrid work systems, this process is ongoing and will become more pronounced with time. It can be seen in our cities morning traffic as few people chose to commute to the physical office, there is a significant trend showing employees moving out of large urban areas while boundaries between home and work life are smudged on a daily basis. Not with standing these outcomes (Fernald, Goode, Li, and Meisenbacher, 2024) found, in their research, that the move to hybrid work has had a negligible impact on productivity, it has not increased or stifled output. Studying worker productivity, in an Indian tech company of over 10,000 employees, prior to and during the pandemic (Gibbs, Mengel and Siemroth, 2023) found evidence that workers worked more hours to achieve the same result but were not necessarily more productive. They maintain their outturn while some dropped marginally. This suggest that workers were less productive while working from home but aimed to achieve the same targets just taking longer to do so.

Much of the current research shows hybrid working is a positive for innovation, productivity and work life balance. It reduces stress and the employee’s carbon foot print due to reduced commuting frequency (Russo, Hanel, & Van Berkel 2024). Hybrid employees engagement increases with flexible or hybrid work systems and employee engagement is an important tool to improve work output and organisational goals. Key performance indicators (KPIs) can be improved through engagement but Gallup found the best results were achieve by employees who had a flexible working system, a period of time or days in the physical office with co-workers and the balance working remotely (Hickman & Robison, 2020).

It has become apparent that performance reviews, as we knew them, were put on hold during the pandemic; can this continue? Or will a better way of measuring performance and productivity be created. How these are formed and implemented

raises serious questions for HR and may have a knock on effect on employee's contextual performance and productivity (Aguinis, & Burgi-Tian, 2021). In the future careful thought will have to be given to the possibilities offered by AI surveillance and employee monitoring as a means of measuring productivity. This raises ethical issues for all involved (Wilkinson, 2022). In the 2023 study 'The Impact of Work-from-Home on Employee Performance and Productivity: A Systematic Review' revealed that worker productivity and performance are linked to a myriad of factors, the type of work done, what industry and the set of individual home offices. The majority reported a positive impact working from home (Anakpo, Nqwayibana & Mishi, 2023).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology.

Morgan & Carcioppolo wrote in 2014 that there are many directions that can be perused on the voyage to a single goal and many of these can appear shorter or engage greater curiosity along the way, but it is true that there are many ways to achieving a goal and finally arriving at the desired destination – such is the case with research methods.

To try and understand the effects of the implementation of a flexible working policy on staff and the organisational outturns of the DPC a staff survey¹ of the Administrative Officer (AO) and Higher Executive Office (HEO) cohorts was carried out. The research also uses secondary information, published by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in the form of The Revised Estimates for the DPC for 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 giving staff numbers and budget allocation for the performance of the commissions functions along with the published DPC Annual Reports for 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022 giving the outturn numbers pre and post flexible working

Research philosophy:

¹ Appendix 1

Research is concerned with how we accumulate learning and knowledge, what kind of knowledge we are gathering and has it any relevance to how we view the world. Research into a production issue based on facts and numbers will take a different approach to research dealing with how attitudes and feelings affect the same production process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). There are three different approaches to research philosophy; epistemology, ontology and axiology and each is different in significant ways and effect or show us how the researcher thinks about conducting research processes.

Epistemology: This is concerned with what knowledge is within a specific area of study or rather what the researcher considers to be knowledge and how they come to the decision regarding, if and what is true. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

It is split into two areas

Positivism: If a researcher leans towards positivism then they would rather research an observable social phenomenon producing a law like generalisation (Remenyi, Williams, Money, and Swartz, 1998). Only an observable social reality can result in the production of knowledge in this view and to generate this knowledge an existing hypothesis is used which has been tried and tested and the results can, themselves be tried and retested in further research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). The research undertaken is done in an independent value free way, if possible, and the researcher is detached and independent. This point, it can be said, is not possible as a researcher can never be truly independent as trying to be independent in and of itself is taking a position (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

Realism: This is the epistemological point of view espousing that our senses show us the truth. Similar to positivism in the accumulation of data to create knowledge but believing that the senses are independent of the mind. There are two types of realism direct and critical; direct believe what we see is what we get and critical believes what we realise are sensations of what we see and not the things themselves (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

Interpretivism: This is the epistemological point of view espousing the belief that reality is subjective and it can only be understood by understanding reality as

perceived by the individual or group being studied, their reality is or maybe different to the next persons as it is shaped by a myriad of factors like age, socio economic back ground and family group. We understand or role in everyday life by giving them meaning just as we understand others by applying our understanding to their roles (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

Ontology: If epistemology is trying to ascertain what acceptable knowledge is in a given field of study then ontology is looking at the reality and the how this effects how the world works, there are two views objective and subjective (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

Objectivism states that reality exists outside the mind, independently. It is good at providing consistent results and applying the results achieved to other situations. Subjectivism deals with the personal experience and how this impacts on their reality and the collection of knowledge.

Axiology: This philosophy relates to the study of judgments, how we use them in everyday life and how they influence values and the effect that has on conducting research. (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). This seeks to understand the researcher's values as they relate to what is right and what is wrong and tries to calculate bias created by beliefs. Axiology makes the researcher consider questions like what can I do to ensure the participant's rights are respected? What are your ethical principles? How can I minimise risk (Alele, & Malau-Aduli, 2023).

The research paradigm of pragmatism believes in using the approach that works best for the proposed research at hand. The most important reason to adopt a research philosophy over another is the research question – one philosophy may be better than another to achieve and answer to the proposed question (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). Pragmatism believes knowledge is gained from real life, Human experiences gives this knowledge truth, truth changes over time, research should benefit society and believes in practical theory (HELM, University of Nottingham, 2024) and it is within this philosophy that my question lands. This study will look a real life decision makers and their views on flexible working. The research will consist of an online survey, a singular point in time, and report on their experiences and reactions to flexible work. These opinions may change with time

and I am sure they will as new approaches to the nature of work and what work means change.

Due the nature of the research undertaken and the method used to gather the primary data my philosophical approach is an epistemological one. I am researching a particular area of interest and concerned with what is the learnings we can gain from a recent workplace sociological shift to flexible working. My research leans towards positivism as the phenomenon being researched is currently very evident and visible in large swathes of Irish and the world's workplaces today. This workplace social phenomenon can be observed, it can be measured or aspects of it, and my research will produce knowledge and results which can be tested and compared to previous and future research.

Research Advantages:

By using an online survey, as the means of primary data collection, it provides me with large quantities of raw data in a short period of time, which obviously leads itself to quantitative analysis. It is possible to gather large amounts of data in a short period of time, in fact vast quantities of data are currently collected as a result of online platforms, social media and IT software. These platforms can use social media and email for delivery and responses. This means that surveys are faster and easier to create and analyse leading to an exponential increase in there use for research (Ball, 2019).

As people have increased access to high speed internet and its linked devices, like tablets and smartphones, their participation and response levels have increased this also increases the researchers access to an eligible access panel or group of research participants. Using an online survey is fast, easy and cost effective. There is a very low outlay as the delivery of the questions and the responses are recorded and organised automatically by the survey software which negates the use and or need for paid researchers to physically go out and interact with the public asking questions and compiling responses, while no physical data entry cuts down on data entry errors (Callegaro, Lozar Manfreda & Vehovar, 2015).

Online surveys seem to be the method of choice for completion by respondents, they can take their time and complete it at their convenience, without interruption (Callegaro, Lozar Manfreda & Vehovar, 2015).

Online participation by respondents allows a researcher to pursue many different hypotheses at the same time at no extra cost (Morgan & Carcioppolo, 2014). Online surveys also have the ability to reduce social desirability bias, this means respondents will not return answers they think you want to hear, rather respond with what they believe themselves to be true, because they are being watched or believe themselves to be judged. With no interviewer present this reduces social desirability bias (respondents producing answers they think you want to hear) (Phillips & Clancy, 1972). The choice of using an online survey means that the method of delivery is consistent, without any deviation, the questions are presented the same, it reduces confusion as multiple choices are not presented orally, less chance of miscommunication or misunderstanding. Hard or difficult questions that have multiple choice or list answers can cause confusion when delivered orally but if produced in a self-administered survey, such as online, they can be simplified and even made interesting to engage the respondent (Bernard, 2011). This format ensures that each and every participant of the survey has the same experience and gets the survey questions in very same format (Bernard, 2011) and finally the results can be downloaded and pasted into analytical software for analysis and production of results.

Research disadvantages:

There is a down side to online surveys as “(sample selection and question validation) are frequently overlooked by both casual and research users of online survey methodology” (Ball, 2019, pp. 413). This means that the data produced can be very biased or easily manipulated to meet the surveys goals which may mean the results are impossible to replicate. In short they are not objective or robust (Callegaro, Lozar Manfreda & Vehovar, 2015). The fact that there is no physical researcher present in the online survey can also be a disadvantage as responses cannot be explored or followed up with relevant questions, the respondent cannot seek clarification if confused or uncertain about language and questions (Ball, 2019).

Online surveys are not without pitfalls and raise worries in relation to the quality of the methodology used and equivalence to other similar research. There can be access problems for some sections of society with technical short comings or inequalities. Never the less online surveys, for research purposes should be held to the same standard as offline research (Stafford, and Gonier, 2007). Over representation of biased or non-representative responses is a problem for online surveys, people without internet will not respond – these could be low income, elderly or just geographical location (Bernard, 2011). While a particular socio economic group can be over represent due simply because of the online nature and invitation method used like social media leading to problems with sample bias (Alessi & Martin, 2010). As online surveys have become increasingly more common in research areas, people who study and read the results should understand the possibility for bias which it creates (Ponto, 2015).

To counteract the inherent pitfalls of online surveys I contacted The Western Development Commission and The University of Galway in relation to their longitudinal study, The National Remote Work Surveys, which commence in 2019 and have continued each year since providing interesting and insightful information and statistics into the way Irish people now work. I emailed the WDC on the 9th of April 2024 and they sought and received permission, from the University of Galway, and kindly shared their survey questions. This a validated survey which has been tried and tested, peer reviewed, free of bias and poorly worded questions. It is with this information, forming the basis of my survey, that I gratefully commenced my research.

The type of research method carried out in this paper is very common, cross sectional research, and by its nature allows for the study of measured variables at a point in time and how they relate. It is of course a disadvantage that it is simply a snap shot in time but the nature of this study does not allow for a more longitudinal approach. The data produced in this research will not be amended in any way, it will produce a series of answers which will produce observational results which in turn will be weighed against the published secondary data publically available for the years 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 for the DPC. If the access panel were smaller, a

qualitative interview may have been chosen but due to the numbers involved it is felt that a quantitative approach is needed. It is possible to breakdown the answers into subsets for further analysis if needed. It is beneficial in many ways but cross-sectional research only gets a snap shot at a singular point in time and can give only so much meaning to the data (Gable, 2014). This research sets out to explore and answer, if possible, the following questions:

If flexible working has been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The DPC, and

Are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee? Are there any obvious or resulting disadvantages to the employer or employee?

Any recommendations.

This is the first survey of its kind to be circulated to DPC staff in support of a fellow staff member writing a dissertation. It was agreed, in principle, with the Deputy Commissioner – Head of People and Learning that this type of research could be undertaken in April 2024 and final approval was granted by the Joint data Commissioners in May 2024. It was agreed that the survey could be circulated during the summer of 2024 to the Higher Executive Office and Administrative Officer cohort within the organisation. Concerns around anonymity, data protection and retention of results and research findings was address as a result. The survey questions were reviewed and cleared by Human Resources and any unrelated question or question resulting in personal identifiers being shared was omitted. The survey was then created on EUsurvey at <https://ec.europa.eu>, which created a unique link to the survey for completion.

As an introduction and before participating an email was circulated to the relevant staff cohort, it contained information on the nature of the survey, the reason for it, assurances in relation to GDPR and respondent anonymity, the safe storage of any and all information collected and finally the actual link to complete the survey. The email and survey assured the respondents that the work was not commissioned by the DPC rather it was an independent study which will not pre-empt or cause any change to the current, successful, flexible work policy in operation at the DPC. Finally the participants were assured that their choice to take part and compete the

survey was entirely voluntary and free of any work obligation. This was the first act in the online survey design, an introduction giving purpose, researcher's personal details, what participation was needed and ethical and managerial approval (Alessi & Martin, 2010).

Due to the numbers involved, as previously stated the collection of a quantitative data set is the chosen manner to answer the questions raised in this dissertation. A similar approach has been taken in similar studies (Rodríguez-Sánchez, J.L., Gonzales-Torres, T., Montero-Navarro, A. and Gallego-Losada, R., 2020; Palumbo, 2020; Curtis, 2023 and McCarthy, A., McGrath, L., Frost, D., O'Sullivan, M., Whelan, E., and Mulrooney, A. 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) to reference a tiny fraction. To try and conduct interviews for a qualitative study would have been too onerous given the time involved the disparate geographical locations of staff and the fact they operate in a flexible working environment and anchor days are different for all involved.

Ethics:

Research ethics is answering the questions raised about how we arrive at a research question, narrow it down and access an access panel of participants, how we collect, analyse and store the related data finally recording our findings in a moral and responsible way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

The research in this dissertation complies with the guidelines set out by the NCI and based on the *Belmont Report* (1979) published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research (NCI, 2024).

Respect for the person; this paper will treat the participants with respect, ensuring anonymity and relying on their informed consent. The purpose and content of the survey will be included in the introduction which allow the invited participant to accept or decline participation. No invitation will issue to a vulnerable person or person who have yet to reach majority. This formed part of the dissertation proposal and submitted to the NCI for approval.

Beneficence and non-maleficence; the well-being of the participants are paramount. Every effort has been made to protect their data and identity in consultation with DPC HR manager. The introduction will inform participants of the studies independence, it is not sponsored by the DPC or wider civil service and its conclusions will have no effect on current DPC or civil service policy as is. This study cannot impact the current flexible working policy in the DPC as it is based on the wider civil service policy agreed and signed off at interdepartmental level in agreement with the relevant Unions. My details are supplied in the introduction and participants are encouraged to contact me to discuss any aspect or fear as relates to the study and any participation therein.

Justice; this is all to do with fairness and how the balance of risk and benefit is placed upon the participants. The cohort of DPC staff canvassed makes up the largest grouping with the widest cross section of staff by length of service, experience and profession. Their selection was agreed in consultation with DPC HR managers and the Commissioners. Again there are no vulnerable participants in this cohort.

I have consulted the NCI ethics form and discussed an ethical approach with the DPC. I am satisfied that the research method chosen complies with both the DPC and NCI ethical guidelines. An ethical review form was submitted early in 2024 to the NCI clearly stating that the research proposed fell into category A, posing little or no ethical risk to anyone involved or participating in it. The NCI accepted the proposal without any recommendations.

Research Sample:

For the purposes of this research, I sought permission from the DPC, and it was agreed that the HEO and AO cohort in the organisation would be included. This cohort was chosen as they are the largest, with highest percentage of the long serving staff members, but also the cohort with the largest number of new entrants, spread across the widest aspects of the DPC and all geographical areas. A total number 12 AO's and 58 HEO's were invited to participate, 70 in total or a third of the entire DPC staff, with a total of 39 accepting and participating.

Research instrument:

It was decided, in consultation with the DPC, that the most effective way to conduct this research, with the least amount of disruption to working staff members was by a survey circulated to the selected staff cohort on internal email. A peer reviewed questionnaire, which has been tried and tested was sourced, from the Western Development Commissions and the University of Galway, it formed the basis of the Remote Working in Ireland Survey 2023².

The survey results will answer if flexible working has been a success for the employee based on their responses. These results looked at in conjunction with DPC employee numbers and organisational outturn in published secondary data, I hope, will show if the policy has been a success for the organisation and in doing so answer the first question raised in this dissertation “has flexible working been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The DPC”

It is hoped that the responses to the survey questions and answers supplied will show any clear advantages/disadvantages to the employee and employer in relation to productivity, employee satisfaction, retention, attractiveness of employment answering the second aspect of the research question, are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee?

The analysis of the survey returns in conjunction with published DPC REVs and Annual Reports, for the years under review, will form the basis of any recommendations.

Chapter 4: Data analysis.

There are four main types of data analysis, descriptive meaning what happened, diagnostic meaning why did it happen, predictive meaning what is going to happen and prescriptive which looks at what, why and what could happen to decide what is the best outcome (Stevens, 2023).

² Appendix I. Email seeking permission to use WDC survey questions.

The primary data used in this research was collected using an online survey, uploaded onto EUsurvey.eu, the returns of which allow the survey administrator to export the results into a Microsoft excel spreadsheet. I deemed this to be the most appropriate method and tool for the analysis of the resulting data. Excel gives the researcher the ability to sort, filter, highlight trends, create different types of charts, for emphasis and clarity, manipulate it and compare it with the secondary published data used in this study. It is cost effective and was available to me at the time and is a software package that I have used extensively over the years. It was decided early on that no interviews would take place as it was overly complicated, time constrained and too costly. This is a diagnostic approach, it will give a snap shot of what is happening and staff sentiment.

The data was cleaned, initially, when transferring to an excel spreadsheet. This means all partial surveys or entries with errors contained in them are removed and excluded from analysis. Before we can analyse data it must be cleaned and be ready to work with (Sheard, 2018). A total of 70 emails³ were sent containing an introduction and survey link with a completion rate of 55% or 39 unique responses. The data captured was the analysed using Microsoft excel pivot tables. Excel spreadsheets and statistical software, when used in quantitative data analysis support the researcher and can be used for data visualisation (University of York, 2024). A lot of collected raw data can be condensed down to its simplest form, numbers or counts of things. Calculating statistics like these, counts, averages, percentages are the type of data that spreadsheets are really good at (University of York, 2024). Pivot tables are a really important and useful feature in Excel. They give the researcher the ability to see meaning, patterns and importance of information contained in large data sets. The survey captured the respondent's views to flexible working at a singular point in time these results will then be used to compare and examine work outputs in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 for the DPC.

³ Appendix 6. Introduction email with survey link.

Research Findings:

The purpose of this research, as stated in the introduction, is to try to determine if flexible working has been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The DPC, and are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee or are there any obvious disadvantages and to make recommendations if there are any discernible from the data results and comparisons. The data used in this study is based on a staff survey, issued on the 10th of June 2024, looking at their experience of flexible working as it relates to their working and private lives. These results will then be compared to the, secondary data, published staff numbers, DPC budget and outturn as published in the DPC Annual Report and REV for 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. This should give an insight into work pre and post pandemic or rather pre and post flexible working on a Departmental level and the survey will show the effect at an individual employee level.

Employee numbers:

The total number of staff employed by the DPC never reached its stated target, as published in the REV, over the four years 2019 to 2022, a period looked at in this research. In 2019 the DPC employed 140 staff, out of a published target of 180 staff in the REV. By 2022 this had increased to 196 from a budget estimate of 260.

This is a 40% overall increase in the total number of staff over the four years examined. It is a very significant increase considering the period it covered, Ireland was in lockdown from March 2020 until mid-2021 and it was during this period that flexible working was introduced for Irish civil servants. The Chart below shows the published estimated staff numbers tracked by the actual number of staff employed as published in the DPC Annual Report.

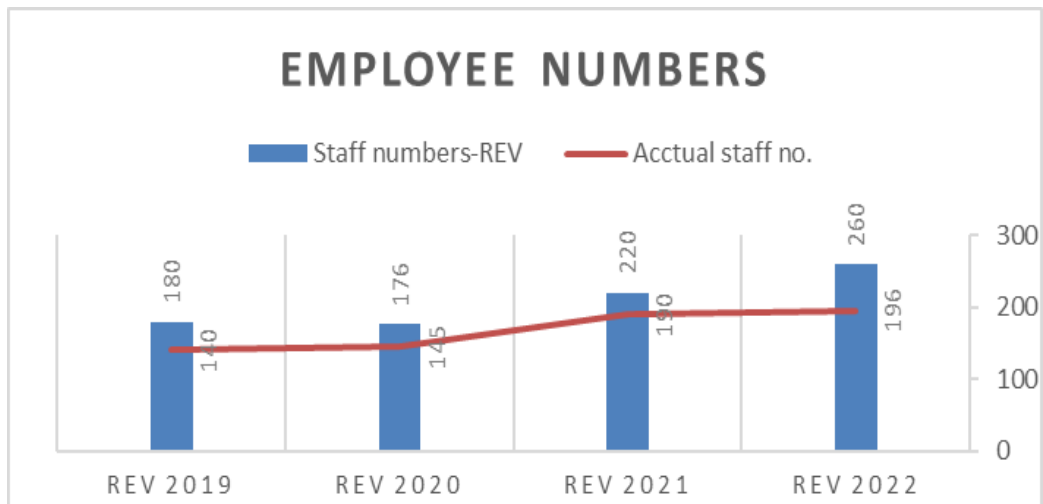


Figure 1. Employee Numbers.

It is clear that the significant increase in staff numbers happened in 2021 as they reached 190, an almost 36% increase on 2019. This reflects employee's attitudes and the fear of the great resignation. People reassessed their lives and employment options and looked for more balance. Being siloed at home showed people that there are other options. Economics tells us that people will not resign unless they can afford to and there are other options ready for them (people near retirement) like better wages and jobs being created which encourages staff to move. It could be the case that the Pandemic formulated the exact conditions necessary to create this large worker shift (Klotz, 2022). The DPC formulated its flexible working policy, as a necessity at this time, it implemented their policy and it was tried and tested. The Civil Service could not compete on salary but could on work life balance and staff numbers increased as a result. It should be noted that while the DPC staff numbers increased in the period observed they never achieved published estimate, it took two years, up to 2021, to exceed the 2019 estimate of 180 staff.

Budget and outturn:

The DPC budget increased year on year over the period in question from 15.3 million in 2019, to 17 million in 2020, to 19 million in 2021 up to 23 million in 2022. This equates to a 52% increase on allocated budget over the four year period reviewed.

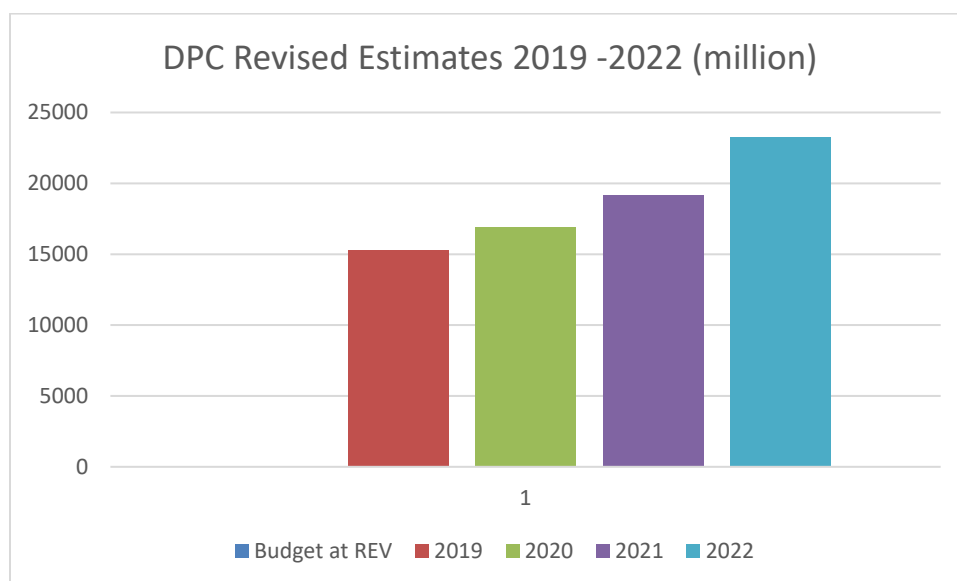


Figure 2. DPC Revised Estimates 2019 - 2022.

This large increase is reflective of the 40% increase in staff post pandemic which coincided with implementation of flexible working policy. The pay increase can be seen in the table below.

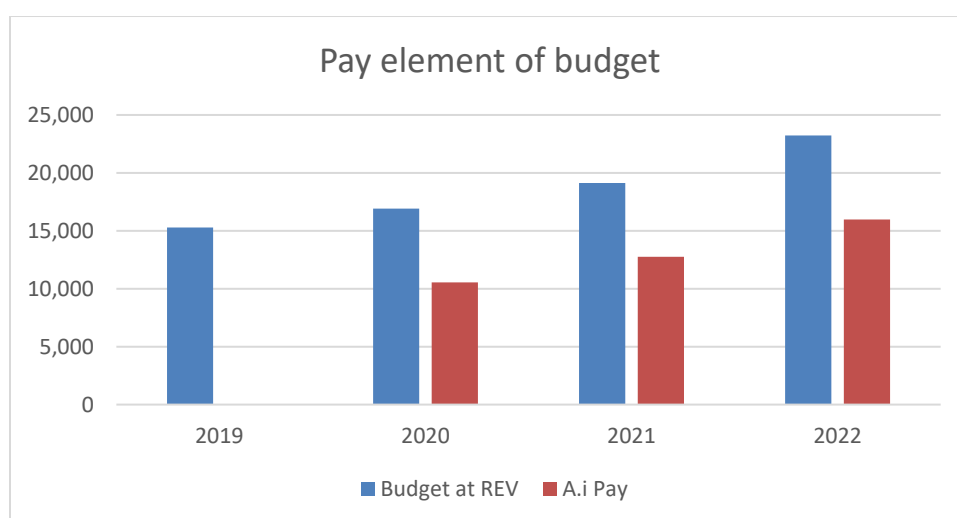


Figure 3. Pay element of DPC budget.

The pay element as a percentage of total budget in 2020 was 63%, 2021 it was 67% and in 2022 it was 69%. There are no numbers available for 2019 as the DPC was a unit of the Department of Justice and Equality, staff numbers and budget was included in their vote allocation until becoming a standalone vote in 2020 and making it an Independent office. The percentage increase, of total budget allocation for pay, grew by 6% over the four years. There is clear correlation here between staff number increases and the growth in budget to enable the overall growth of the DPC. Given wage inflation and the rise in cost of living this small percentage increase of total budget is a good return on investment.

Outturn 2019 to 2022.

The chart below shows the published outturn figures for the DPC over the four year period in question. It clearly shows a reduction in unique contacts with the organisation, this reduction coincided with the pandemic, a fall of just under 30%. The public engagement with the DPC decreased during this period and was slow to recommence. It is hard to formulate a reason for this based on these numbers alone.

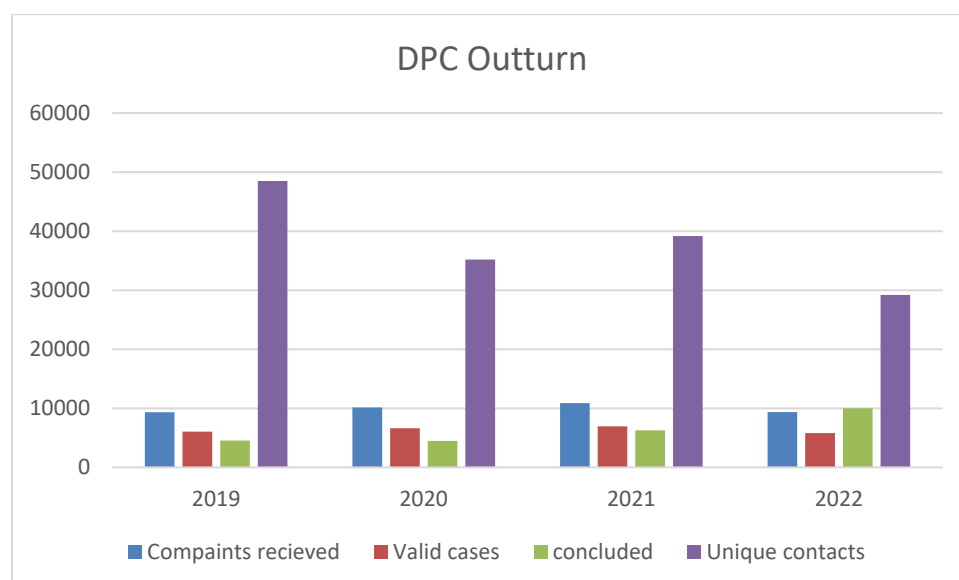


Figure 4. DPC outturn 2019 - 2022.

What is interesting and the chart fig. 4 shows this, is that number of complaints received, the valid number within that and the resulting cases concluded remained

relatively steady throughout even through lockdown. There is an increase in concluded cases in 2022 which is reflective of staff increases. More hands make light work. There is a 30% increase in concluded cases in the period 2021 to 2022. Cases concluded had remained steady at 4,500 for 2019 and 2020 but coming out of lockdown numbers increased to 6,000 in 2021 up to 10,000 in 2022.



These numbers show that the DPC was able to maintain output, even deal with increases, while working remotely. The implementation of flexible work actually increased their staff numbers and enabled them to increase their concluded cases and investigations resulting in greater organisational productivity. This is without doubt a success for the organisation. The first part of this dissertation question can be partially answered with the secondary data analysis “flexible working has been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The DPC” as the organisation has maintained its output and grown in size. The analysis of staff numbers shows that it has been able to attract talent consistently through a difficult period to all organisations to do the same. Something has enabled this success whether this was or is it a success for DPC staff will be looked at in the next section, the staff survey.

DPC flexible work survey findings:

Permission was sought and granted, by the DPC, to issue a staff flexible work survey. The survey issued by email along with an introduction to 70 staff members in the AO/HEO cohort. 39 officers took part and responded or a response rate of 55%. Research shows that the use of online surveys have grown in recent years with an average response rate of 44.1%, while results indicate that more invitations do not generate greater participation rather a targeted focused access panel does (Wu, Zhao, Fils-Aime, 2022). This would suggest that the response rate, though not ideal, is slightly above average, of greater interest is that the attrition rate was 0% as all who accessed the survey finished the tasks and were included in the final analysis. This is unusual, taking into account that attrition rates are defined, based on what is being studied and are commonly found to run between 15% and 30% of respondents subject to survey platform and length of task required (Stantcheva, 2023).

The question I wish to answer her is are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee? Are there any obvious or resulting disadvantages to the employer or employee?

Q.1: Are you currently working remotely/from home?

		Answers	Ratio
Yes		3	7.69 %
, I am working remotely			
Hybrid - I am working remotely sometimes and onsite sometimes		36	94.74 %
No, I am working onsite		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Staff working remotely

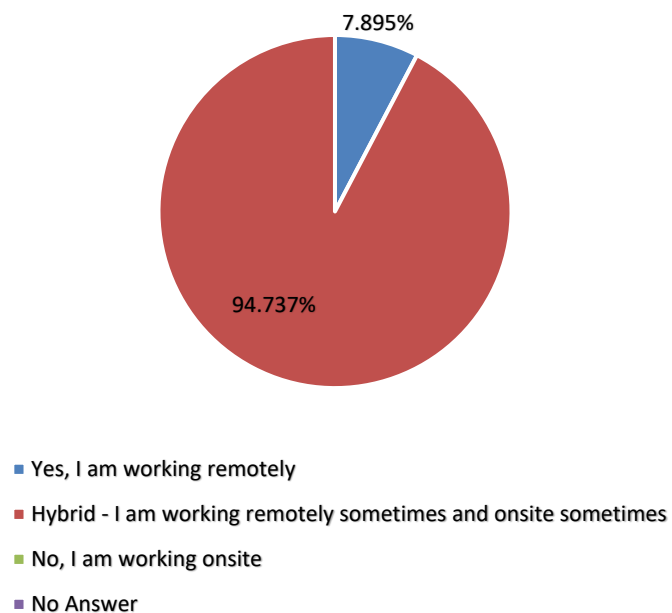





Figure 5. Staff working remotely

It is clear from the responses received that all the respondents have some sort of access to flexible working and utilize this option with 95% working onsite some of the time and a tiny minority fully remote. There was no negative response recorded for this question. The number of DPC staff working in the Office two days a week and three remotely is significantly above the national average at 35% of staff with the same option but none the less this is still the preferred option as reported in the 2023 Remote Working in Ireland survey (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O’Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023)

Q.2: How many days are you usually working in the office/onsite?

		Answers	Ratio
1 day per week		0	0 %
2 days per week		36	94.74 %
3 days per week		2	5.26 %
4 days per week		1	2.63 %
1 - 5 days per month		0	0 %
6 - 10 days per month		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Days in the office

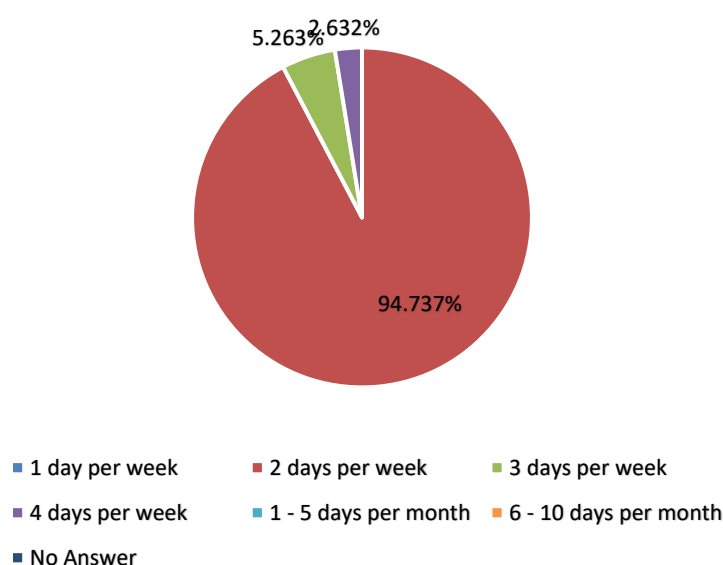








Figure 6. No. of days in the office

Q.2.The preferred option of flexible work is the one covered in the DPC flexible working policy, two anchor days in the office and three days remote working. A total of 95% of respondents partake in this flexible work pattern. This is also the pattern set out in the Civil Service Blended Working Policy, 2022, published with the aims of making the Civil Service and employer of choice, support business and set out health and safety obligations (DPER, 2022). The Participation in two days on site three days remote, at 95%, is nearly three times the national average, 35%, reported in the Remote working in Ireland Survey.

Q.3: What days do you usually work in the office/onsite?

		Answers	Ratio
Mondays		19	50 %
Tuesdays		19	50 %
Wednesdays		15	39.47 %
Thursdays		19	50 %
Fridays		3	7.89 %
It changes every week/month		2	5.26 %
No Answer		0	0 %

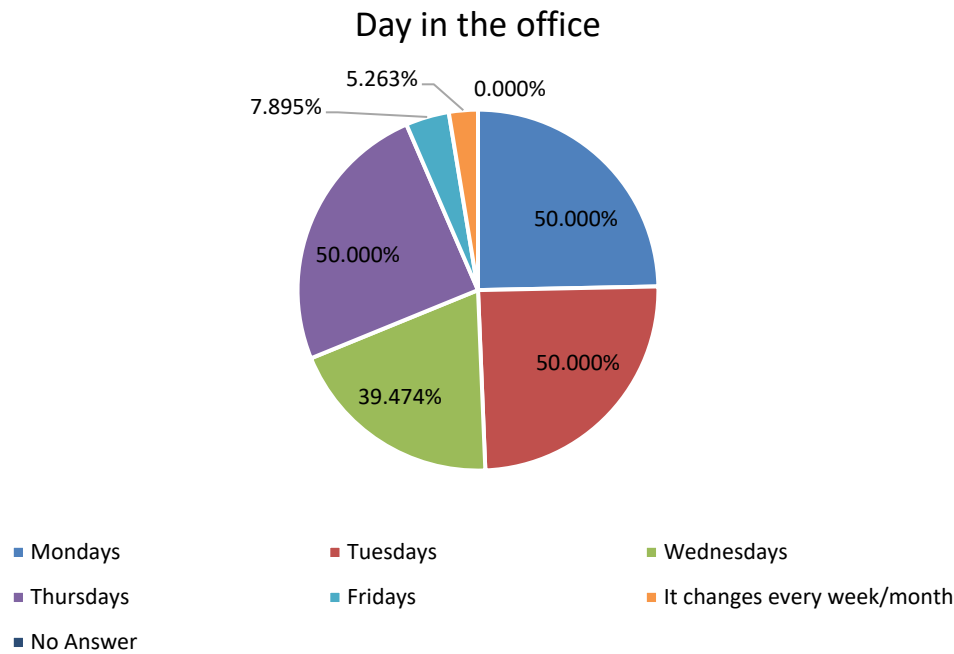



Figure 7. Days attended in the office

Q.3 The response to question three, what days do you usually work in the office? Show that the two anchor days are spread evenly over the week, 50% attendance each day with the exception of Friday with only 7% attendance. This ensures the business needs are met and teams can interact, socialise and exchange work/ideas. This differs from the national trend where midweek are popular with very low attendance on Mondays and Fridays (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023)

Q.4: Would you like to work remotely?

		Answers	Ratio
Yes-I would like to work remotely daily	<div style="width: 23.68%;"></div>	9	23.68 %
Yes-I would like to work remotely several times a week	<div style="width: 50%;"></div>	19	50 %
Yes-I would like to work remotely several times a month	<div style="width: 2.63%;"></div>	1	2.63 %

No-I do not want to work remotely		0	0 %
I already work remotely		11	28.95 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Would you like to work remotely?

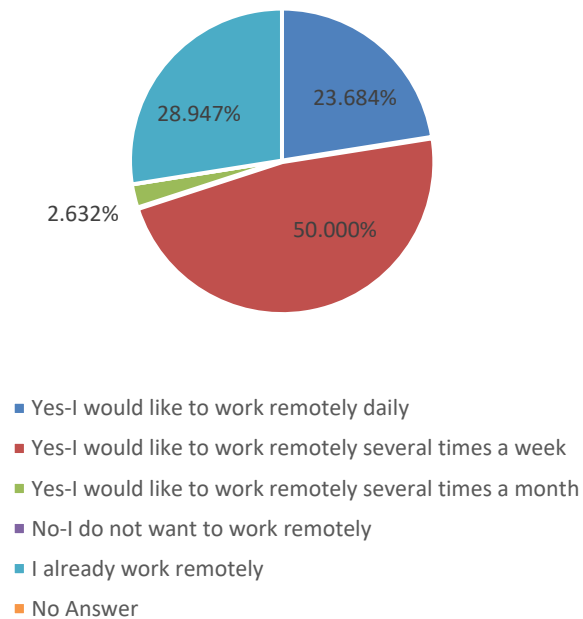








Figure 8. Work preference

Q.4 tells us that 29% of respondents would like to work remotely every day, while 50% would like to increase their remote working over and above the day's currently allowed by the DPC.

Q. 5: How many days a week/month would you like to work remotely? (Assuming a 5 day working week)

		Answers	Ratio
1 day per week		3	7.89 %
2 days per week		2	5.26 %
3 days per week		14	36.84 %

4 days per week		14	36.84 %
1-5 days per month		0	0 %
6-10 days per month		7	18.42 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %

How many days a week/month would you like to work remotely? (Assuming a 5 day working week) Ratio

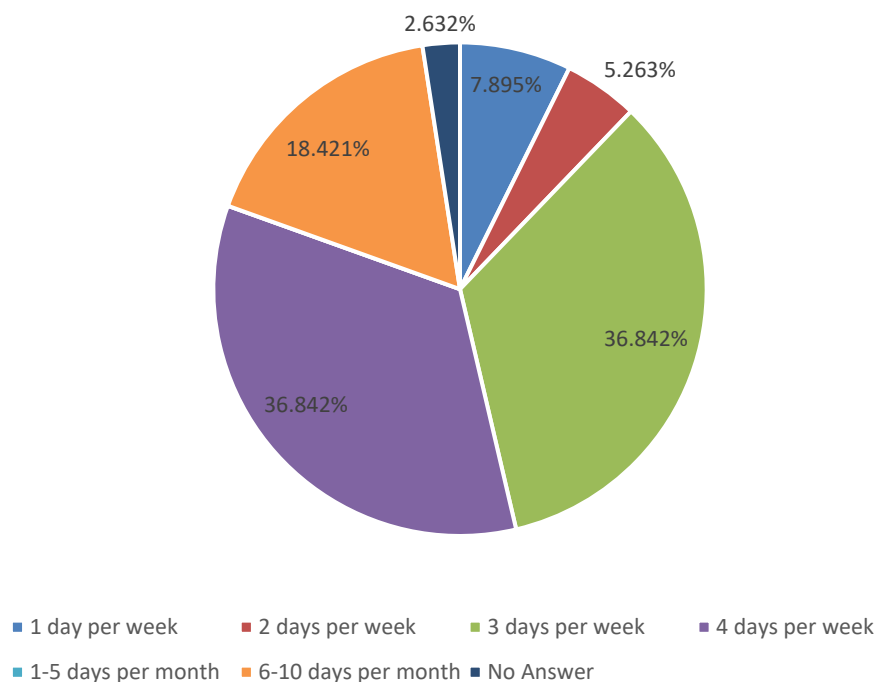


Figure 9. No. of work days, preference

Answers to Q.5 tell us that the preferred increase is 3 or 4 day's remote working with the balance in the office. There is an obvious desire for increased remote working but is this sustainable for the DPC? Can the service continue to deliver with fewer people on site? Employees clearly split on when they want to work remotely, 37% are happy with the current three day week while a further 37% would like it increased to four days remote and one day in the office. An increase to four days remote would raise questions for the employer in relation to team building, knowledge exchange and innovation.

Q.6: If you have the choice of location, where would you like to work remotely?

		Answers	Ratio
Home	<div></div>	29	76.32 %
Hub (i.e., work-sharing space)	<div></div>	1	2.63 %
A mix of home and hub	<div></div>	4	10.53 %
A mix of home and onsite	<div></div>	4	10.53 %
A mix of home/hub/onsite	<div></div>	5	13.16 %
No Answer		0	0 %

If you have the choice of location,
where would you like to work
remotely?

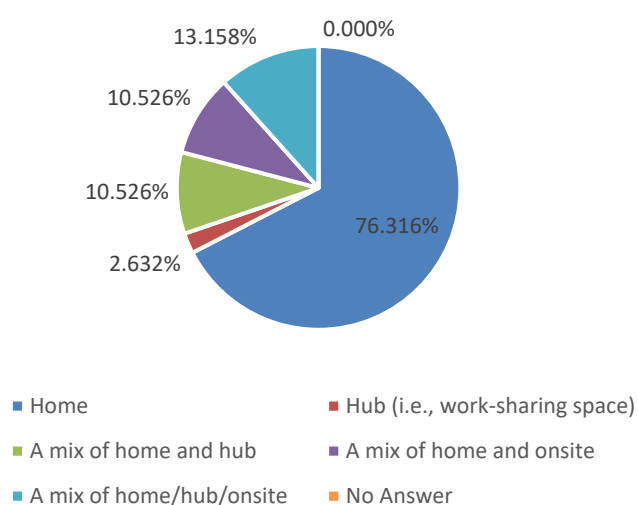


Figure 9. No. of work days, preference

The answer to question 6 is emphatic with 76% of respondents stating the home is their preferred work location. There is very little interest in Home and hub option 2.6% with the other options around the 10% mark. This reflected nationally in the 2023 Remote working in Ireland survey with 88.7% stating that they work remotely from home (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023).

Q.7: Are your remote work preferences being facilitated currently?

		Answers	Ratio
Yes	<div style="width: 86.84%;"></div>	33	86.84 %
No	<div style="width: 13.16%;"></div>	5	13.16 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Are your remote work preferences being facilitated currently?

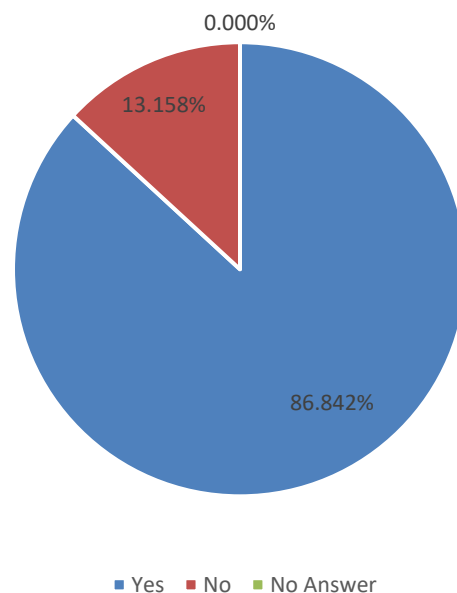





Figure 10. Are your remote work preferences facilitated?

86% of the respondents said that their remote working preference is being facilitated. This shows that the DPC flexible work policy is working for staff. The answers to question seven shows that even though staff are facilitated they would prefer greater flexibility or more time working remotely. The national Remote survey shows 72% of respondents are being facilitated with the flexible work preference (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O’Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). Based on these numbers the DPC has facilitate greater flexibility.

Q.9: Would remote/hybrid working be a key factor in your decision to change employer?

		Answers	Ratio
No		4	10.53 %
Yes, I would change my employer if my remote/hybrid working preferences were not met		33	86.84 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %

Would remote/hybrid working be a key factor in your decision to change employer?

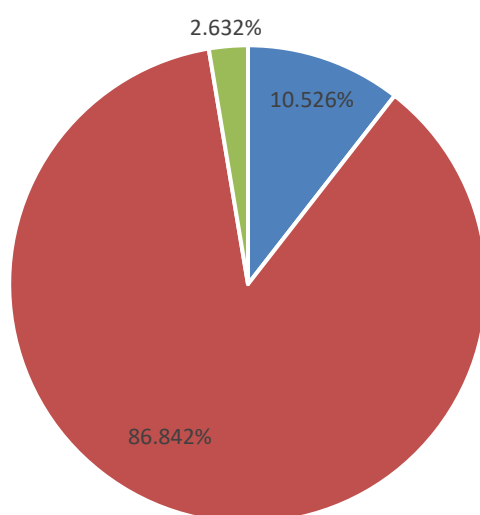


Figure 9. Is remote working key in changing employer?

87% of the respondents, the overwhelming majority, said that the ability to work remotely is a key element in their choice of employer. Only 10% said that it was not a consideration. This shows how quickly employee mindsets have change in relation to how and when they work. Younger generations are not tied to the office and do not feel the same pressure to be physically present at a desk to be productive. The following three questions explore this further. Asked if staff would change work if remote working was not an option even if it required a reduction in pay, Q.10, 29% said yes, 32% said maybe and 37% said no. This is a serious consideration and staff lean heavily towards leaving and accepting a loss. These results are replicated when

asked if they would accept less promotional opportunities, Q.11, and again they would accept a reduction in career opportunities, Q.12, if it meant that their flexible work/remote work options were allowed. Flexible work is without doubt an important part of employees lives now and has become an expectation when joining an organisation.


The 2023 Remote working in Ireland survey returns similar results for these questions, if slightly higher at 92% of respondents say remote working is a consideration. It finds that remote working has a serious impacts on employee decision making (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O’Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). The CPL Salary Guide survey published in April 2024 and reported on, by RTE news, shows that over 60% of people who responded would refuse a job offer that did not include some sort of hybrid or flexible work pattern (Stedman, 2024) which is reflected in these results and the choices employees are willing to make to work remotely.

Q.10: Will you change job even if this means a pay cut





		Answers	Ratio
Yes		11	28.95 %
No		14	36.84 %
Maybe		12	31.58 %
Don't know		1	2.63 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Q.11: Will you change job even if this mean less promotional opportunities

		Answers	Ratio
Yes		16	42.11 %
No		11	28.95 %
Maybe		10	26.32 %





Don't know		1	2.63 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Q.12: Will you change job even if it reduces your career opportunities

		Answers	Ratio
Yes		13	34.21 %
No		16	42.11 %
Maybe		7	18.42 %
Don't know		2	5.26 %
No Answer		0	0 %





The next seven questions look at work life balance and the corresponding results on productivity. 58% of respondents surveyed believe that remote working makes their job easier jumping to 89.47% in total who said it makes their life easier, a really interesting statistic as it reflects the trends in work life balance and people's concerns on how work impacts their home life.

Q.13: Working remotely make my job easier

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		22	57.89 %
Agree		10	26.32 %
Disagree		4	10.53 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %





A total of 84% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement which is really interesting but this highlights the constraints of an online survey. It does not provide an avenue to probe this response further, the answer is simply positive or negative – why?

Q.14: Working remotely makes my life easier

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		34	89.47 %
Agree		1	2.63 %
Disagree		1	2.63 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %





Again an overwhelming 92% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement which again is really interesting but again this highlights the constraints of on online survey as did the previous question. The survey does not provide an avenue to probe this response further unlike an interview, the answer simply positive or negative.

Q.15: Working remotely enables me to accomplish tasks more quickly

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		25	65.79 %
Agree		8	21.05 %
Disagree		3	7.89 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %





65.79% of respondents believe that the ability to work remotely has a positive impact on the speed or duration it takes them to complete work tasks. This is an interesting response and it would make an interesting study in the future, does the feel good effect of remote working increase a person's productivity? The trend in the answers lead strongly to the positivity felt by increased work life balance and would appear to strongly support the idea that flexible working combined with autonomy increases an employee's contextual performance, improves work life balance and organisational results (Metselaar, den Dulk, & Vermeeren, 2023).

Q.16: Working remotely increases my productivity

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		25	65.79 %
Agree		7	18.42 %
Disagree		3	7.89 %
No Answer		3	7.89 %




The same percentage of respondents, 65.79%, strongly said that remote work increased their productivity with 18.4% agreeing. This is a total of 84.19% believing that their productivity has increased. This belief can be linked to the 2022 increase in productivity in the DPC meaning the increase in employee numbers cannot be the only reason credited for the outturn activity, there are other causes and effects present.

Q.17: Working remotely reduces my work-related stress levels

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		24	63.16 %
Agree		8	21.05 %
Disagree		4	10.53 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %




63.15% strongly agree while 21.05% agree that remote work reduces their work related stress levels. This shows that the technology exists to complete tasks remotely, to stay in contact and collaborate. Employee trust these capabilities and have a proven record of getting tasks done.

Q.18: Working remotely gives me greater flexibility

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		35	92.11 %
Agree		1	2.63 %
Disagree		0	0 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %


92.11% of respondents said that remote working gave them greater flexibility this obviously relates to work and the completion of tasks but it is also reflected in their personal lives and this comes through in the responses to other survey questions. Again it is clear that flexibility is highly valued.




Q.19: Working remotely increases my work-life balance

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree		33	86.84 %
Agree		3	7.89 %
Disagree		0	0 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %

Work life balance has strongly increased due to remote or flexible working according to 86.84% of respondents along with 7.89% who simply agree, a total of 95% an incredibly strong response and one that is hard to argue with. The DPC has four office locations two in Dublin, one in Portarlington and one in Brussels making remote working an extremely attractive option or benefit.





Q.20: Your opportunity for promotion

		Answers	Ratio
Positively		5	13.16 %

Negatively		1	2.63 %
No affect		30	78.95 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %





The DPC has a clear flexible working policy in place which follows the terms and conditions as set out by DPENDR, meaning that any officer availing of flexible working cannot be disadvantaged by it. 13.16% of respondents believe that remote working has had a positive impact on their promotional opportunities while almost 79% believe that it has no effect at all. This is a positive for the DPC as it shows that staff believe that there are opportunities for them to progress in the organisation, remote working has not adversely effected or limited their chance in fact things are progressing as normal. This is good news showing employees satisfied with their career opportunities.

Q.21: Your career options

		Answers	Ratio
Positively		8	21.05 %
Negatively		2	5.26 %
No affect		26	68.42 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %





The response here is similar to the previous question. This is not a surprise as career opportunities and promotional opportunities are linked. 68.42% of respondents believe remote working, as operated by the DPC, does not impact positively or negatively their career options. It's work as usual.

Q.22: Your level of engagement with colleagues

		Answers	Ratio
Positively		5	13.16 %
Negatively		12	31.58 %
No affect		19	50 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %

This is very interesting. 50% of respondents say that remote working does not affect their interactions with colleagues. Younger generations are comfortable with online interactions through every day use of social media. They do not require the social aspect of an in person meeting or catch up. They are perfectly happy with email, im's, WhatsApp's and video calls. This reflects online surveys like the 2021 survey of line managers which found that they could work as easily and productively at home as in their physical office. Women fared better than men, parents or young people at e-working (Beňo, Hvorecký and Cagáňová, 2021).



Q.23: Your loyalty to your employer

		Answers	Ratio
Positively		21	55.26 %
Negatively		2	5.26 %
No affect		12	31.58 %
No Answer		3	7.89 %

55.26% of respondents felt that the ability to remote work positively affected their loyalty to the DPC. This reflects the earlier responses highlighting staffs reluctance to move to an employer who does not offer flexible work. Is it loyalty or fear of the unknown? If you apply social exchange theory to these positive behaviours it is because employees see worker friendly policies like flexible working as a sign that they are valued by their employer. This positive treatment of staff creates a positive





outcome on employee satisfaction, in their job, and improves their sense of commitment to the business (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019).

Q. 24: Does your organisation/employer have a remote/ blended/ hybrid work policy

		Answers	Ratio
Yes		37	97.37 %
No		0	0 %
In trial phase		0	0 %
I don't know		0	0 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %

This question and its response are self-explanatory. The DPC has a flexible work policy, it is advertised and staff and prospective staff are aware of it and its benefits. A response rate of 97.37 confirms this. The national response to this question was 75% of employees said their workplace had a policy in place (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023).





Q.25: When working remotely compared to working onsite, on average, do you:

		Answers	Ratio
Work the same hours		11	28.95 %
Work more hours		25	65.79 %
Work less hours		2	5.26 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %




This is a really interesting response, 65.79% of respondents believe they work longer hours when working remotely. The response nationally was 53% (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). This survey does not have the ability to tease this out further. Remote workers have access to the DPC flexi clock system and clock in and out just as they would if in the physical office. The

DPC does not employ software to monitor activity but line managers are expected, as part of their roles, to ensure their direct reports adhere to the Civil Service time and attendance policy. Any abuse would be highlighted on monthly clock reports circulated to managers and dealt with internally. Staff feel they are more productive but due to longer hours (Churchill, 2021). Research has shown that this is common for staff working remotely, it can take longer to achieve the same result. I do not believe this is the DPC case as my review of the DPC outturn for 2019 – 2022 clearly shows improvements and efficiencies once flexible work was introduced with the number of cases concluded increasing year on year.

Q. 26: Which, if any, of the following remote work supports are you aware of?

		Answers	Ratio
Remote work tax reliefs		26	68.42 %
DETE's Guidance for working remotely web page		2	5.26 %
Connectedhubs.ie		2	5.26 %
No Answer		11	28.95 %




Q.27: Are you aware of the right to request remote/flexible working/ WLB legislation

		Answers	Ratio
Yes		33	86.84 %
No		4	10.53 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %

DPC staff are highly educated and have gone through a competitive recruitment process to work in the organisation. A lot of staff members come from a legal background so it comes as no surprise that they are aware of their rights and up to date with current employment legislation and taxation. 68% said they were aware of the remote work tax reliefs which provides for the extra costs of electricity, heating and broadband while working from home. An even larger number, 87% were aware of their right to request a remote working arrangement under the recent transposition







in to Irish law of EU Directive 2019/1152 on Transparent and Predictable working hours in the European Union. They have a right to know when, where and for how long they must work. The national response to this question was that 95% of respondents were aware of the tax relief and their rights (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O’Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023).

Q.28: How will the right to request remote/ flexible work impact you?

		Answers	Ratio
I will be able to work remotely because of the legislation		7	18.42 %
No difference		30	78.95 %
No Answer		2	5.26 %

Again the DPC has a clear policy in place in relation to flexible work, employees are inducted and informed of its terms and conditions and this is reflected in the response rate of 79% of respondents replying that EU Directive 2019/1152 will not impact their current work patterns as it was already an entitlement, now it is a right.

Q. 29: How many employees work in your team (approx.)

		Answers	Ratio
less than 3		1	2.63 %
3-6		12	31.58 %
6-9		12	31.58 %
9-12		8	21.05 %
12-15		5	13.16 %
No Answer		1	2.63 %

The DPC staff work in small groups, specialized teams who interact on a daily basis resolving issues for Irish and European data subjects and data controllers. The success of the DPC as a whole is down to the sum of its parts

Discussion:

In many instances the results of the survey contained in this paper have been compared to the results of the Remote Working Study (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023) undertaken by The University of Galway and The WDC. It is important to note that 64% of the respondents, to that particular survey, work in the private sector while the DPC is part of the Irish Civil Service and these comparisons make for interesting reading. This paper set out to answer three questions:

- 1, if flexible working has been a success in a particular Civil Service organisation, The Data Protection Commission (DPC).
2. Are there any clear advantages to the employer and employee? Are there any obvious or resulting disadvantages to the employer or employee?
3. Make recommendations.

In setting out to answer them it has become clear that the nature of work, as society has come to know and expect it has changed and this is also true in the DPC. The nature of the work pursued in the DPC combined with the technological advances of the past ten years have made this change easier. EU Directive 2019/1158 on work life Balance for parents and Carers brought change to Irish legislation combined with the global pandemic resulted in permanent changes in the way most of us now work (WRC, 2024). The way the DPC employees work is unrecognisable from their working environment pre 2020, the move online, the reduction in paper, virtual meetings with colleagues at home and across Europe has increased productivity rather than stifle it. Surprisingly 50% of respondents said that it had no effect on their day to day engagement with colleagues, this reflects the change in how people socialise and move online and it feels like a natural progression for work to follow. The published outturn numbers for the DPC for the period 2019 to 2022 have shown a steady increase, matched by increased staff numbers and budget allocation. This shows that what the DPC is doing is working.

The initial review of the survey results were overwhelmingly positive towards flexible work which raised questions around validity but when compared to the 2023 Remote

Working in Ireland Survey the numbers are surprisingly similar. It compares and contrast against its peers in non-public sector organisations and reflects societal change which crosses private and public sectors. Nobody responded that they wanted to return to the office fulltime. There must be a cohort of people who want or prefer working in the office but none were represented in my results, only 3% of respondents in the Remote Working in Ireland Survey said they were on site 5 days a week (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). These results reflect the work of the access panel, staff with a legal back ground make up a majority of the DPC respondents while employees in finance, IT, Professionals and others make up 65% of respondents to the Remote Working in Ireland Survey. These roles do not require employees to be physically present unlike a trade's person on a building site.

It is clear from my results that flexible working has been and is a success for the employees of the DPC, it is what current and prospective staff want. It facilitates their life styles and career choices. It has a disproportionate influence on where they choose work and for whom. 55% of respondents said that the ability to work remotely had a positive impact on their loyalty to their employer. The survey did not specify or give a definition of loyalty but none the less this is an interesting response.

Flexible/remote work has also been an undoubted success for the DPC as an organisation as well. It has managed to increase its staff numbers year on year over the four years looked at. The responses to the survey make it clear that the ability to work remotely had a significant influence on prospective employees when choosing the DPC as an employer. While studying the DPC outturn it is clear that it productivity has increased and remote work has no adverse effect on its ability to engage with public, conduct investigation and finalise outcomes.

In answering if there are any clear advantages in having flexible work the answer is simply yes. The Irish Civil Service cannot compete with the private sector on wages when it comes to recruiting talent, wages and pay increases are negotiated through partnership and as the state is Ireland's largest employer it cannot be breached that means the Civil Service must be creative in the employment options it provides. The survey has shown that employees would forego pay to maintain or achieve a flexible work pattern.

People have refocused on what they want to do, how they want to do it and it is clear from the survey responses that their overwhelming desire is to do it remotely or more specifically at home. The ability to work remotely is an advantage for the DPC. If you apply social exchange theory to these positive behaviours it is because employees see worker friendly policies like flexible working as a sign that they are valued by their employer. This positive treatment of staff creates a positive outcome on employee satisfaction, in their job, and improves their sense of commitment to the business (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019). Interestingly employees claim that the work longer hours to get work done when off site. This is hard to prove, the DPC has a clock in system which records hours but not productivity. In any event productivity, what it is comprised of would be hard to quantify given the nature of the work but it is clear that DPC's main record outturn metrics have been maintained and surpassed with the introduction of remote working. Productivity at work is a measure of employee skill, ability and the art of self-management, all needed by remote or hybrid workers in setting obvious metrics to ensure they attain the performance levels needed to do the job. The roll out of new technologies have enhanced the work environment enabling increased productivity (Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano, & Charalampous, 2019). This an aspect that should be looked at sensitively.

Responses show that remote working has not had an adverse effect on career or promotional opportunities for DPC employees, this could be the result of other Public Sector employers implementing their own remote working policy but also due to internal promotion competitions as the DPC is a relatively new organisation, having separated from the Department of Justice and becoming independent in 2020. The specialised nature of the work and the legal background necessary makes it hard to source and replace staff increasing career opportunities within the organisation for those who want to progress.

The work life balance aspect of remote working is clearly a success for employees of the DPC, 90% said it makes their life easier, 66% said they get their work done faster, 66% believe they are more productive, 64% say it reduces work related stress, 92% said it gives them greater flexibility and 87% strongly agreed that it improved their work life balance. This is an obvious advantage, for the DPC, when it

comes to staff retention it is also a clear advantage for the employee, stress reduction and more time for family and other important aspects of their private lives.

The DPC comprises of groups/teams of less than twelve employees, the survey responses indicated that most worked in groups of nine employees or less. They believe that remote working does not have an effect on staff engagement but it is hard to see how this is true. How are inter personal relationships formed, how are inter team relationships built and maintained. The strong response here could relate to the employees even stronger desire for flexible working to remain and their opportunity to partake increase. Working remotely, being focused on a singular aspect of privacy law or its enforcement in a small team has the potential to create experts but also ones who are isolated, with the centralising of corporate knowledge. To combat this the DPC runs Communication Days (Comms Day) where the entire organisation meet quarterly, presentations, talks and updates are given in person. Everyone is kept on site and tea/coffee and lunch provided to encourage the social and knowledge exchange and interaction to help counter isolation and silos forming.

Chapter 5: Conclusion:

The question this paper asks relates to the implementation of flexible working in the Offices of the Irish Data Protection Commission and the resulting policy effects on staffing and organisational outturns 2019 to 2022.

Looking at the published outturns for the DPC for the 2019 to 2022, a period that coincided with the implantation of remote working throughout the Irish civil Service it is clear that it has been a success for the organisation. This has not been achieved overnight rather an incremental success building year on year. This can be seen in the increase in staff numbers from 140 staff in 2019 which had increased to 196 in 2022, a 40% overall increase in a very short period of time. The DPC was able to maintain its outturn for the period and this is reflected in the publish information in the REV over the four year period. The work load, number of complaints received, the valid number of cases with that contact and the finalised number of cases resulting remained level throughout the period. There was a large increase in concluded cases in 2022 possibly a reflection in the increase in staff numbers which

enabled a 30% increase on completed case relative to the previous year. What this proves is the DPC was able to maintain and even increase its outturn over the four year period while its staff were working remotely. During 2020 the entire staff cohort were working remotely and transition to flexible working once it was safe to do so. This answers the first part of the question posed in this research, flexible working and its implantation was a qualified success for the organisation based on published results.

It is also safe to say that flexible work has been a success for the organisations staff. This can be seen in their responses to the staff survey. It has been a success in its ability to attract new talent. It has been key in the retention of existing expertise explained in the responses to the work life balance orientated questions. Currently staffs flexible work preferences are being fulfilled, three days remote and two days in the office per week, this is a success. The option to work remotely is a key decision on whether to stay or change employer, to the extent that staff are willing to take a pay cut and reduce promotion and career opportunities. This is reflected in wider Irish society and in the results of the Remote Working in Ireland Survey (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). The ability to work remotely or have flexibility is now a greater consideration than pay.

If money makes the world go round the results of this staff survey show that staff value the benefits of flexible work more. Responses to the survey show that staff felt flexible work made work easier, what a great concept, 90% said that it made their lives easier, that is a massive success for employer and employee alike. Staff said the flexible working arrangements meant they could complete their work quicker, 64% said they were more productive with the same figure believing that it reduced their work related stress levels. Employee health and just as importantly their mental health is key to the business goals, it reduces sick leave, it reduces presenteeism, it reduced dissatisfaction, it makes the DPC a happier and better place to work. This is a tangible success one for both the staff and the DPC.

The advantages brought by flexible working are obvious with very similar results reflected in larger studies, like the Remote working in Ireland Survey (McCarthy, McGrath, Frost, O'Sullivan, Whelan, and Mulrooney, 2023). Staff retention, staff

satisfaction, work life balance and the associated health benefits to staff and the organisation. There are other surprising benefits to the DPC, staff found it easier to complete their work, they are able to do their work quicker and felt they were more productive but at a cost of working longer. Most of this is good, working longer hours has been supported in other literature but in this instance is difficult to prove or as the case maybe disprove and requires greater input from staff and their managers.

This paper did not set out to read as a simple confirmation project but it can be taken as confirmation of the hard work of management, that the survey results are so positive in their responses. These responses are reflected in Irish society more generally and show the changing nature of work and workers expectations, people will trade money for more flexibility. This is the key take away and what will ensure the continued growth of the DPC if managed correctly.

Recommendations:

1. Flexible working is a success in the DPC based on the survey returns of the access panel. The fact that it is available to all employees should be actively promoted and used as selling point in the recruitment market. DPC staff have taken it on board and incorporated it into their work and private lives and this has had a return on staff retention and loyalty to the organisation.

2. There are obvious strengths in relation to work life balance and the responses of the access panel, the quality of their home life has improved as a result of the remote work aspect. The flexible work policy is due for review and I would strongly recommend that it continue it in its current form at least. Consideration should be given to an increase of onsite days, possibly one week a month or quarter to encourage inter action with other teams, teams who they might not meet in person if their work days on site don't overlap? Inter personal and employee engagement is key.

3. Even though flexible working has been a great success I would not increase the amount of time or frequency available to work remotely from the current three days provided. This is to maintain the sense of connection with the employer and other employees to that end comms day has a significant role to play. There is an important piece of research or monitoring that needs to be done in the future answering the questions like could the frequency be increase from once a quarter? Is there a possibility of running a reduced or targeted version? Maybe by employee grade or speciality and mix it up to encourage interaction? These are questions that DPC management will be faced with in the future.

4. The aspect of employee productivity and employees perception that they are working longer, while remote, is interesting and something that should be looked at. This is not to suggest some sort of monitoring software be employed as this would destroy trust and raise all sorts of questions for the organisation but rather greater engagement with staff and their managers on the subject be carried out. Employee clock in and out times do not fully support the suggestion but simple clock times are a crude metric and do not cover all aspects of work undertaken or work related travel. There is a conversation to be had here to try and understand why employees feel this way, in responding to the survey they reported that they can achieve more in less time, it increased their productivity but consequently while working longer hours. Is there a problem of simply not being able to switch off or has remote working blurred the lines of home and office, maybe. The DPC has a right to switch off policy, a recommendation is that it be promoted and circulated again.

Cost to DPC:

There are no extra costs to the DPC based on the responses to this survey and the resulting recommendations. This is a confirmation that what is being done works. There are areas that can be researched further but within the confines of the existing HR staff cohort and budget. Simply put the DPC's flexible working policy needs to be managed. The savings made on the physical office space can be utilised elsewhere, IT hardware, connectivity and software that enables the DPC carry out its function remotely.

Pay roll growth is the only cost increase, this is built into DPC budget estimates as a result in increased contacts and areas of work, in particular the area of artificial intelligence. This will necessitate greater expertise and specialisation which will incur a cost. This is inevitable given the number of multinational social media companies that base their European headquarters in Dublin.

Learning reflection:

I have managed to complete my dissertation and submit it within the time allowed which is an achievement for me given I am working fulltime in a new job, in a new Government Department. I had reservation at taking this on but have persevered and reached the end. This is a significant personal achievement for me.

Time management was really important, right from the start in September with research methods. I was learning so much in my new work role and attending college virtually and in person that I had to keep it all in perspective and bite sized, manageable pieces. This I feel was key, trying not to get overwhelmed, remain grounded. I set out a timetable, I marked dates on my calendar with milestones to be achieved. I linked these to my meetings with my supervisor to enable me move forward and prevent myself from getting bogged down. A second persons input was critical to my momentum.

Independent learning was not difficult for me but the independence of doing an original piece of research was daunting without the constant reassurance of a course lecturer. Trying to keep it on track, my initial proposal fell when I was unable to access the data required and I had to start again. This was frightening but time pressure and the support of my Line Manager helped me keep focused.

The amount of reading needed to form a coherent literature review was daunting but once commenced the time and effort flew. I enjoyed reading the journals and articles, one leading to another, opening up different aspects or opinions on the topic of remote working. Looking back now I see the correlations between remote work and remote learning, it suits a lot of people, you can work it into your life style, it increases work life balance, more importantly it makes further education accessible.

I would not have gotten to this point if full time attendance was required. Online lectures in the evening makes this course accessible to all.

I have rediscovered just how enjoyable reading is. This was a revelation to me. I have kept it up by reading some of my old books, giving research a break for now.

If I had to attempt a similar task again I would put more thought and effort into the planning stage. What can reasonably be achieved in the period allowed, I would be more realistic. Is the information needed to complete the research freely available or accessible? I would discuss it more at work, if work related and distil the question down rather than trying to do it all myself and end up lost or not making sense.

I expected a higher response rate to my staff survey, I have learned to temper my expectations. My response rate was acceptable and higher than the average but given the topic and that staff knew me I thought more would partake. Looking back I think the responses I achieved were for that reason, people knew who I was and that I worked in HR. Research is hard and made harder when it is based on your own organisation and reflections on its employees.

There is a definite sense of satisfaction in the completion of this piece of work. I enjoyed it.

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Appendices:

1. DPC Flexible Working Survey 2024

Are you currently working remotely/from home?

- ☐ Yes, I am working completely remotely
- ☐ Hybrid - I am working remotely sometimes and onsite sometimes
- ☐ No, I am working onsite

How many days are you usually working in the office/onsite?

- ☐ 1 day per week
- ☐ 2 days per week
- ☐ 3 days per week
- ☐ 4 days per week
- ☐ 1 - 5 days a month
- ☐ 6 - 10 days a month or more

What days are you usually working in the office/onsite?

- ☐ Mondays
- ☐ Tuesdays
- ☐ Wednesdays
- ☐ Thursdays
- ☐ Fridays
- ☐ It changes every week/month

Would you like to work remotely / hybrid?

- ☐ Yes – I would like to work remotely daily
- ☐ Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week
- ☐ Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month
- ☐ No – I do not want to work remotely

How many days a week/month would you like to work remotely? (Assuming a 5 day working week)

- ☐ 1 day per week
- ☐ 2 days per week
- ☐ 3 days per week
- ☐ 4 days per week
- ☐ 1 - 5 days a month
- ☐ 6 - 10 days a month or more

If you have the choice of location, where would you like to work remotely?

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Hub (i.e., a work-sharing space)
- ☐ A mix of home and hub
- ☐ A mix of home and onsite
- ☐ A mix of home / hub / onsite

Are your remote work preferences being facilitated?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Would remote / hybrid working be a key factor
in your decision to change employer?**

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, I would change employer if my remote/hybrid working preferences were not met

If your remote working preferences are not facilitated:

	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't know
Will you change job even if it means a pay cut?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will you change job even if it means less promotion opportunities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will you change job even if it reduces your career opportunities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
Working remotely makes my job easier	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely makes my life easier	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely enables me to			
accomplish tasks more quickly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely increases my productivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely reduces my			
work-related stress levels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely gives me greater flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working remotely improves my			
work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How does working remotely affect the following:

Positively Negatively No affect

Your opportunity for promotion ☐ ☐ ☐

Your career options ☐ ☐
☐

Your level of engagement with colleague's ☐ ☐
☐

Your loyalty to your employer ☐ ☐
☐

Does your organisation/ employer have a remote / blended / hybrid work policy?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ In a trial phase
- ☐ I don't know

When working remotely compared to working onsite, on average, do you:

- ☐ work the same hours
- ☐ work more hours
- ☐ work less hours

Which, if any, of the following remote work supports are you aware of?

- ☐ Remote Work tax reliefs
- ☐ DETE's Guidance for Working Remotely web page
- ☐ ConnectedHubs.ie

Are you aware of the right to request remote/flexible working/ WLB legislation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How will the request remote/flexible working/ WLB legislation impact you?

- ☐ No difference
- ☐ I will be able to work remotely more often because of the legislation

How many employees work in your organisation (approximately if you do not know exactly)?

- ☐ Less than 10

- o 11-49
- o 50-249
- o 250-499
- o 500+

Ends

2. Permission sought to use WDC survey questions.

From: Jonathan Joyce

Sent: 09 April 2024 10:13

To: info@wdc.ie <info@wdc.ie>

Subject: 2023 Remote Working Survey

A chara,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name Jonathan Joyce, I am a part time MA student in the NCI, currently completing my dissertation on flexible working and its effect on organisational outturn 2020 -2022.

I was hoping you could supply a list of your survey questions, for 2023, if possible.

I have reviewed the published results online and can see them.

I wish to reference your work and credit your survey, in my work, if possible.

I am happy to share the results of my organisational survey and an electronic copy of my dissertation once completed with you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Jonathan Joyce,
MA student, National College of Ireland.
Mobile: 087 3188455

From: Deirdre Frost <deirdrefrost@wdc.ie>
Sent: 23 April 2024 14:21
To: Jonathan Joyce <x21163774@student.ncirl.ie>
Subject: RE: 2023 Remote Working Survey

CAUTION: DO NOT CLICK links or attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe..

Jonathan

Attached are the survey questions from the 2023 University of Galway- Western Development Commission Remote Working Survey.

Please cite material as appropriate.

Regards

Deirdre

Deirdre Frost

Policy Analyst/ Digiwest Project Manager

Western Development Commission

Newcastle, Galway

Tel: 086 605 3317

deirdrefrost@wdc.ie



3. Introduction email dated the 10th of June 2024

From: Jonathan X. Joyce

Sent: Monday 10 June 2024 16:05

Subject: Introduction. Masters research survey

A chara,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Jonathan Joyce, I am employed as an Administrative Officer in the People and Learning Unit of the DPC.

I am currently completing a Masters in Human Resource management, through the National College of Ireland.

As part of my Masters I must complete an original piece of research and I have chosen flexible working.

I have sought and gratefully been granted permission to complete this research, by the DPC, by way of an online survey of the AO/HEO cohort of DPC staff.

My research has not been commissioned nor is it sponsored by the DPC or any other Civil or Public sector body. It is independent and stand alone.

This research and its results cannot and will not influence or change current DPC policy nor will it have any input into current Civil Service policy in relation to flexible work.

Anonymity is assured.

Participation is totally voluntary but greatly appreciated.

The survey will be carried out using EUSurvey and the data recorded will be used in my research results. Stored, safely, on an external hard drive for 5 years to comply with the NCI's research and code of ethics and then destroyed.

Participation is by the attached survey link.

If you have any questions in relation to this please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/6f197b4f-8edb-098b-8051-086f5dadeb4e>

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Jonathan Joyce,



Jonathan Joyce

Oifigeach Riaracháin
Administrative Officer.
Employee & Industrial
Relations,
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