

Chambers Ireland submission to the Department of Justice and Equality on Flexible Working under Future Jobs Ireland

January 2020

Chambers Ireland represents the largest network of businesses in the State. With chambers, located in every city and major town, we are uniquely positioned to understand the needs and concerns of Irish businesses and to represent their views. Drafted in correspondence with our Chamber Network and associated policy fora, which represent the Chambers and their member organisations, Chambers Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Justice and Equality on flexible working under Future Jobs Ireland. This submission outlines Chambers Ireland's perspective on flexible working, its impact on the business community and the potential for supporting higher labour participation around the country. It makes recommendations on ways in which workplaces can become more accommodating by addressing two main areas: the supports that could assist employers in introducing more flexible working arrangements, and actions that the Government can take to reduce the negative impact of flexible working place arrangements.

Introduction

Flexible working allows an employee to shape how, when and where they work. The forms it can take are limitless, encompassing a wide range of practices including part-time, remote working, flexi-hours, compressed hours, annualised hours, home-working and job sharing.¹ Some employers go further, abandoning core working hours or measuring their employees' performance purely by their outputs rather than time inputs under an arrangement known as ROWE (results-only work environment). These new modes of working are gaining popularity for a range of reasons, from improving quality of life and reducing cost of living to supporting sustainability by reducing carbon emissions, to increasing labour force participation amongst women, older people, carers, and people with disabilities.

As the nature of work and society changes, the way in which we work must also. The current labour force participation rate stands at 62.1% and has remained relatively constant over recent years.² With this, policy focus has turned to sustaining a highly skilled workforce and an inclusive, responsive labour market. This is because while unemployment continues to decrease, more jobs are created. In order to fill these new vacancies, demographics who are not currently part of the workforce, or captured in the unemployment statistics, need to be engaged. Although Ireland's unemployment rate currently stands at 4.8%,³ this does not mean that the remaining 95.2% are all accounted for in employment figures as many factors, such as caring roles in the home or those with disabilities who may not be able to work, are not taken into consideration.

It is quickly becoming an alternative to the traditional 9 to 5 office based employment with both employers and employees questioning the value or need to travel to work every day. A study carried out by Vodafone Ireland in 2018 revealed that one in three employees regard flexible working as a top priority in their current role, 50% in a future job and 34% were either likely or very likely to move jobs if they could avail of it, demonstrating the growing demand for more flexible and accommodating workplace practices.⁴ Flexible

¹ CIPD (2019), Enabling Flexible Working: Cross-sector case studies and practice highlights. Available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working-case-studies_tcm18-58762.pdf

² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveyquarter22019/>

³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentdecember2019/>

⁴ Vodafone Ireland (2018), *The Future of Business: A Conversation with SMEs*. Available at <https://n.vodafone.ie/aboutus/press/new-vodafone-ireland-study-shows-majority-of-sme-employees-in-fa.html>

working was regarded by respondents as being a top priority due to the benefits that it offers in terms of reducing costs of living, commuting times, and the opportunity to live and work outside urban centres where residential and commercial rents are continuing to rise.⁵

Due to increased digitalisation and the rising accessibility of new technology, flexible working options are becoming a visible feature of the Irish workforce and, increasingly, an expectation from employees. Increases in commuting distances to workplaces, the availability and cost of housing, transport, childcare and eldercare are just a selection of the reasons behind why we are focusing on this area. Chambers Ireland are advocating for the development of a national flexible working policy that is family, age and disability friendly to actively encourage increased labour activation, improving health, well-being and productivity across all sectors and enterprises.

Benefits of flexible working policies

Increased Labour Force Participation

The workplace environment, both in terms of policies and attitudes is a critical factor in coping with issues of work-life balance. Flexible working arrangements can greatly improve work-life balance, benefiting individuals, companies and wider society. This is reflected in the previous Government's approach as evidenced in Pillar 4 of Future Jobs Ireland (*Increasing Participation in The Labour Force*) and the Climate Action Plan. For the employer, benefits include greater attraction of workers from a larger pool of talent which is especially valuable in a tight labour market, staff retention, a more motivated workforce with fewer sick days and greater productivity overall. For employees, flexible working arrangements offer tangible benefits including a better work-life balance, in addition to providing employment solutions for those who would otherwise take unpaid parental or carers leave but cannot afford to do so.

The level of family-friendliness of the workplace, as measured in terms of the number of family-friendly and accommodating workplace policies, is significantly correlated with work satisfaction of both fathers and mothers, but more strongly for fathers.⁶ Therefore, it is important not only to view flexible working arrangements as a means to remove barriers to women's career advancement, as flexible working policies also play an important role in removing barriers to greater male participation in family life.

One of the striking features of recent developments in the Irish labour market has been the sharp and sustained increase in women's labour force participation and employment, although female labour market participation is still significantly lower at 68.1% compared to 88.2% for men. Changes in female employment together with an ageing population have brought the issue of reconciliation between work and caring commitments to the fore in Ireland, in a policy climate where state support for caring is relatively low, and government policy is predicated on there being one female in the home to care. The availability of leave and flexible working arrangements has been shown strongly to mitigate the effect of caring responsibilities on women's employment outcomes in addition to having a positive effect on male participation in caring roles and the stigmas previously associated with this. Moreover, a rise in female employment would help to address the longer-term challenge of the ageing demographic which may limit the potential future labour force

⁵ Vodafone Ireland (2018), *The Future of Business: A Conversation with SMEs*. Available at <https://n.vodafone.ie/aboutus/press/new-vodafone-ireland-study-shows-majority-of-sme-employees-in-fa.html>

Vodafone Ireland (2018), *Stimulating Regional Economic Growth: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Smart Working*. Available at: <http://vodafone.digitalmagazines.online/gigabit-hub-report/p/1>

⁶ Department of Justice (2002), *Fathers and Mothers – Dilemmas of the work-life balance: A comparative study of 4 European Countries*. Available at: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Fathers&Mothers.pdf/Files/Fathers&Mothers.pdf>

available to enable Ireland's economy to expand to its greatest potential in the decades ahead. Increasing female employment also results in higher earnings and contributes to career progression that positively impact on families' economic prosperity, social inclusion and health.

One of the ways in which men and women can combine work commitments and family life is to work part-time or to job share. While this practice is widespread for women in many European countries, both French and Irish respondents in a survey carried out by the Irish Department of Justice agreed that men who participate in family-oriented working arrangements (e.g. job sharing, part-time work) are viewed as being less serious about their career than those who do not.⁷ These attitudes are likely to continue to create a distinct barrier to men taking up flexible family-oriented working arrangements which could facilitate an improved work-life balance unless there is a defined national policy to address this.

Providing employees with greater choices to organise their work and caring responsibilities also reduces the risk of them leaving the labour market altogether. A study carried out by Eurofound in 2018 revealed that an employee is less likely to leave a position where flexibility is offered, even where doing so is more financially beneficial.⁸ Companies would benefit from the ability to access a wider talent pool, a more motivated and productive labour force and less absenteeism. In terms of access to a wider talent pool, flexible working arrangements can enable the retention of older staff, thereby allowing companies to continue to use the skills of experienced employees. Enabling older workers to remain in the workforce, if they so choose, may also help to ensure financial stability in later life and remove some of the State financial support costs which must be seriously considered giving the ageing population in Ireland.

Another, often overlooked, source of potential labour supply is to increase employment and retention rates of people with disabilities. Employment rates of people with disabilities are roughly half of those of able-bodied people.⁹ Flexible working arrangements will greatly benefit those with disabilities in accessing greater employment opportunities if they can work from home or remote working hubs that are sufficiently adapted for their needs. The extent to which people with disabilities feel left out of society varies considerably depending on whether they are employed or not. Those who have a job are less likely to report feeling isolated in society than long-term unemployed disabled respondents or those who are unable to work because of their disability.¹⁰ The system needs to recognise that there may be times when people with disabilities are not able to work or need to work fewer hours because of their disability. The "Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities 2017 Report" highlighted that when those at work, looking for a job, and those expressing an interest in work with a disability were asked what could assist them most in securing employment, flexible work arrangements were the number one feature.¹¹

Climate Mitigation

Climate action has been increasingly focussed on in recent years, marked by the publication of the Climate Action Plan to move towards a more sustainable and clean future. As such, there is increasing onus on

⁷ Department of Justice (2002), *Fathers and Mothers – Dilemmas of the work-life balance: A comparative study of 4 European Countries*. Available at: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Fathers&Mothers.pdf/Files/Fathers&Mothers.pdf>

⁸ Eurofound (2018), *Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef18065en.pdf

⁹ John Fitzgerald (2018), Encouraging more women into the workforce would benefit economy, *Irish Times*. Available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/encouraging-more-women-into-the-workforce-would-benefit-economy-1.3490919>

¹⁰ Eurofound (2018), *The social and employment situation of people with disabilities*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef18023en.pdf

¹¹ Department of Social Protection (2017), *Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities*. Available at https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/2017-03-04_MakeWorkPay_Report.pdf.

employers to reduce their carbon footprint, which has come through in direct consultation with business. It is estimated, on average, that 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions are produced per commuter per year. This is clearly at odds with the goals of both the Climate Action Plan and Project Ireland 2040, which underlines the transition to a low-carbon economy as the single largest investment priority. Flexible working arrangements can have a positive impact on climate change – less people on the road, means less pollution.

The enterprise sector has a dedicated section under the Climate Action Plan, being tasked with reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 10%-15% by 2030. In order to meet this target enterprises must undertake initiatives within the workplace and throughout their work practices that will meet these targets. It has been estimated that if just 10% of the working population were to work from home for 1 day per week, there would be a reduction of circa 10 million car journeys to work per annum.¹²

The 2016 Census revealed that the average commute for those at work rose to 28.2 minutes, having fallen between 2006 (27.5 minutes) and 2011 (26.6 minutes). Counties bordering Dublin had the longest average commuting time. Among workers living in Meath and Wicklow, it took, on average, nearly 35 minutes to travel to work, while Kildare commuters took just under 34 minutes. At the other end of the scale, average commutes of under 23 minutes were enjoyed by residents of Donegal, Sligo, Waterford and Kerry. Commuters in Cavan saw the biggest rise in their average commuting time, which rose by 8.8 per cent between 2011 and 2016 to over 28 minutes.¹³ It has been found that adding just 10 minutes each way to your daily commute is as bad for your overall job satisfaction as getting a 19 per cent pay cut.¹⁴ Working from home, walking to work and shorter commute times increase job satisfaction and shorter commute times make it more likely that an employee will stay with their job.

Lowering the Cost of Living

The wider introduction of flexible working is also being hampered by the nine-to-five mentality that demands employees are physically present during these hours even though they may be a lot more productive when working remotely or keeping flexible hours. Flexible working offers employers and employees the opportunity to live, work, grow their careers, contribute positively to their carbon footprint and congestion reduction and thereby, sustain local communities while unlocking access to skills across the country. For those living in cities, the cost of housing can be a major influencing factor when engaging in remote work. This is particularly relevant when considering that residential property prices and rents have been growing consistently across Ireland since 2013.¹⁵ Remote working (such as hub-working, working from home, and hotdesking) has the potential to remove some of the pressures currently experienced in the housing sector in larger towns and cities across Ireland by enabling employees to relocate to more affordable rural and regional localities, thereby lowering their costs of living. It is estimated that there is an improved productivity rate of 1.53% per employee per day arising from those workers that live in rural areas but commute to jobs in urban centres and work remotely on just a 1-day per week basis.¹⁶

¹² Department of Transport (2009), *Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020*. Available at http://www.smartertravel.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2012_12_27_Smarter_Travel_english_PN_WEB%5B1%5D.pdf#overlay-context=content/publications

¹³ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp6ci/p6cii/p6td/>

¹⁴ <https://info.uwe.ac.uk/news/uwenews/news.aspx?id=3713>

¹⁵ Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (2019), *Cost of Doing Business*. Available at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Cost-of-Doing-Business-2019.pdf>

¹⁶ Western Development Commission (2017), *e-Working in the Western Region: A Review of the Evidence*. Available at: https://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/WDC_Policy-Briefing-no-7.pdf

Furthermore, remote working has been characterised as one of the best ways for Ireland to address the combined needs of breathing life into rural Ireland and enabling people to live where they want to live while embarking on careers that may previously only have been accessible in urban centres. Vodafone Ireland highlighted in its 2018 report on *Stimulating Regional Economic Growth* that flexible working has allowed diverse and exciting indigenous businesses to create high-value, quality jobs locally, injecting revenue back into rural towns and reducing the migration of people to urban centres.¹⁷ Throughout the research, respondents described how remote working has revived local communities and supported other local businesses, increased pupil numbers in rural schools and members in GAA and other sports clubs.¹⁸

Recommendations

Chambers Ireland recommendations are grouped under two distinct headings: supports for employers to introduce flexible working arrangements, and the actions that the Government can take to reduce the negative impacts of flexible working arrangements.

Supports for Employers

SMEs make up 99% of enterprises here in Ireland. Of that 99%, only 9% offer remote, flexible, or smart working arrangements. Of those that offer flexible working, 61% reported increased profits, and 83% reported a productivity boost.¹⁹ Therefore, workplaces which offer an extensive range of flexible working policies are more likely to have above-average performance than those with no such practices.²⁰ This is evidenced in across a plethora of studies, including a landmark study cited in the Harvard Business review concerning call centre workers in a Chinese travel website called *Ctrip*. Employees at *Ctrip* were given the option to work from home for nine months. The study revealed that "people working from home completed 13.5% more calls than the staff in the office did-- meaning that *Ctrip* got almost an extra workday a week out of them."²¹ A further cited study found that employees who work from home three to four days a week are 33% more likely to "feel engaged" and 15% less likely to feel "not engaged" than employees who report to the office each day.²² Increased employee satisfaction has been proven time and time again to boost productivity.

A number of studies have suggested that the greatest impacts of flexible working arrangements are associated with 'bundles' of flexible working policies for employers and businesses to choose from to design their own models. Benefits may therefore be optimised when flexible working, for example, is part and parcel of a wider package of support which signals the value employers place on their staff. Supports for employers that should be included under Future Jobs Ireland are varied and numerous in number, as highlighted below.

1. *Delivery of High-Speed Broadband*

¹⁷ Vodafone Ireland (2018), *Stimulating Regional Economic Growth: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Smart Working*. Available at: <http://vodafone.digitalmagazines.online/gigabit-hub-report/p/1>

¹⁸ Vodafone Ireland (2018), *Stimulating Regional Economic Growth: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Smart Working*. Available at: <http://vodafone.digitalmagazines.online/gigabit-hub-report/p/1>

¹⁹ Vodafone Ireland (2018), *The Future of Business: A Conversation with SMEs*. Available at <https://n.vodafone.ie/aboutus/press/new-vodafone-ireland-study-shows-majority-of-sme-employees-in-fa.html>

²⁰ Department of Business, Innovation & Skills (2014), *Costs and Benefits to Business of Adopting Work Life Balance Working Practices: A Literature Review*. Available at <http://www.psi.org.uk/images/uploads/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf>

²¹ Nichola Bloom (2014), *To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home*, Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2014/01/to-raise-productivity-let-more-employees-work-from-home>.

²² Niraj Chokshi (2017), *Out of the Office: more People Are Working Remotely*, The New York Times. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/us/remote-workers-work-from-home.html>

All types of flexible working arrangements are dependent on the widespread availability of sufficient broadband connectivity. A study found that nearly one in four broadband users in rural Ireland use the internet at home in relation to their work (about 430,000 people) and one third have remote access to their company network for work purposes.²³ The same report went on to highlight that a quarter of those who work from home stated that their broadband connection was not sufficient to meet their requirements for remote/flexible working, and thereby limits the work-related activities that they can conduct f

The evidence cited from rural areas suggests that online participation for work is as prevalent, if not more so, than in urban areas, despite slower and sometimes insufficient broadband speeds in rural areas. This reinforces the need for the universal availability of quality broadband which can deliver more opportunities for flexible and remote working in regional and rural locations. Deployment should commence in those areas that have the lowest broadband speeds in the country.²⁴ The accelerated delivery of nationwide access to high-speed broadband should also encompass the upgrading of broadband and connectivity offered on public transport so that those commuting to and from work can begin and finish their workdays earlier while commuting.

2. *Increased roll-out of Co-working and Digital Hubs*

Co-Working and Digital Hub workspaces are frequently designed for people who will use a workspace infrequently, or teams only working on a particular project at a given time. The workplace fees can be hourly/daily/monthly/yearly based, and the price may also be variable due to changes in demand. Users can book a desk, meeting room, small office area, etc.²⁵ The level of flexibility is high in digital hub workplaces, mirroring the changes in employment trends in Ireland.

'Realising Digital Economy Opportunities' was a central theme of the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 and notable actions included developing a strategy for eHubs for entrepreneurship, eWorking and business growth. This has yet to be delivered. Chambers Ireland is calling on the Government and every local authority to support the existing co-working and digital hubs and drive development of new regional digital hubs to support flexible working, including actively supporting SME and start-up enterprises to relocate to affordable regional locations.

Government Action

1. *Modernisation of Regulations*

While flexible working arrangements present numerous benefits to employees, employers, and wider society overall, such workplace policies may potentially be harmful to businesses that offer flexibility if policies are not implemented in the correct manner. Lack of regulatory clarity, particularly in respect of employment law and health and safety regulation, could potentially lead to employers inadvertently failing to comply with existing legal frameworks.

²³ Amárach Research (2016), *Connected Futures*, Available at: <https://www.vodafone.ie/connected-futures/>

²⁴ Mayo, Leitrim and Roscommon are among the five counties with the slowest broadband speeds nationally. <https://www.thejournal.ie/broadband-speeds-ireland-3082026-Nov2016/>

²⁵ Rongrong Yu, Matthew Burke and Nowar Raad (2019), Exploring impact of future flexible working model evolution on urban environment, economy and planning, *Journal of Urban Management*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2226585618302140>

2. Review of Existing Legislative Framework Policy Guidance

For businesses to fully avail of the benefits of flexible working, several factors need to be considered in terms of rights, responsibilities and regulations that will be essential to establishing adequate flexible working policies. Employers would greatly benefit from clear guidance which facilitates the introduction of a flexible working policy which includes setting out fair and objective grounds for refusing flexible working requests.

There are also challenges for employers around the lack of clarity on how to implement a formal HR policy around remote work with many organisations having reservations about committing to a policy in writing. For example, the inability to make all roles within an organisation remote and the potential equality issues that may arise from this. Furthermore, a lack of clarity on Occupational Health and Safety has emerged as a key influencing factor for employers considering the introduction of a formal remote working policy.

❖ *Health and Safety Legislation:*

Ultimately there is a need for increased awareness and guidance across multiple areas for employers and employees. Currently there is a dearth of policy guidance on both employer responsibility in the event of work-related accidents and risk assessments for employees working at home or in a hub. This has resulted in a fear of liability amongst employers which makes ad hoc worker arrangements seem like the “safer” option in responding to employee demand.

Guidance in this area should include the topics of work-related accidents, balancing risk assessments with an employees’ privacy and clear procedures regarding bullying and workplace harassment when an employee is working from a hub or co-working space. By developing a legal framework in the area of flexible working arrangements it is envisaged that all employees will be better able to reconcile their professional and private lives, and companies will benefit from more motivated workers.

❖ *OWT Directive:*

The European Court of Justice (CJEU) delivered a significant judgement in May 2019 that employers must now have a suitable system in place to ensure that they are recording employees’ daily and weekly working hours. Ireland’s Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 (OWT) already requires employers to keep such records, however the trend towards flexible working raises several issues for employers regarding how to maintain proper records of employees’ working time as many employers do not have sufficient systems in place to ensure that they are complying with existing obligations. This may lead to Labour Court rulings, like the 2019 *Kepak v O’Hara* ruling,²⁶ which resulted in an award of €7,500 to an employee for the employer’s failure to adequately monitor working hours. Government must seriously consider the implications of the CJEU’s ruling and establish a defined system for employers to adopt that will sufficiently monitor the hours employees work, to avoid future legal disputes arising.

Chambers Ireland recommends that a working group be set up to include a variety of stakeholders from across Government departments, industry, business representative groups and insurance representatives to

²⁶ A&L Goodbody (2019), Recording “Working Time” – Important new EU decision clarifies the law. Available at: <https://www.algoodbody.com/insights-publications/recording-working-time-important-new-eu-decision-clarifies-the-law>

unravel the policy obstacles and commit to a national strategy on flexible working that supports greater uptake of flexible and agile working.

3. *Conduct Precise Research on Remote Working Statistics*

The Census includes the question ‘how do you usually travel to work?’ with one of the answers being ‘work mainly at or from home’. This is a limited way to measure remote work as it includes all those that are self-employed and work from home (such as childminders, home-based GPs, farmers and sole traders across all sectors) and not just remote and flexible workers. Moreover, the Census definition only captures those employees that work from home most of the working week and excludes those who work flexibly even one or two days per week, which some studies suggest is the most common pattern of remote working. As remote working is not clearly visible in official statistics, and because it is generally at the discretion of the employer and/or the line manager, it is not yet clear how extensive the practice is in Ireland though it is growing in popularity. Conducting precise research on the prevalence of flexible working in Ireland will enable the enhanced development of policies and guidelines for businesses of all sizes, across a variety of sectors to support successful adoption rates. Precise data on flexible working would further enable high-level international comparison of successful flexible working policies that Ireland could learn from, such as in the United Kingdom,²⁷ Austria, France,²⁸ and Malta.²⁹ Chambers Ireland recommends that Government promptly act on the deliverables set out in Future Jobs Ireland 2019 to “undertake research on the prevalence and types of flexible working arrangements within the Irish workforce, and the attitudes towards such working arrangements, as well as the factors which inhibit employers and employees to partake in such arrangements.”³⁰

4. *Training and Upskilling*

Through the National Training Fund, Government should target investment in training for line-managers and employers on how to implement SME-friendly agile work practices, which can include remote, flexible and compressed working hours. A manager will need to learn the skills to manage a team remotely just as much as an employee needs to learn how to work remotely. It is a completely different way of working, which needs a proper structure.

5. *Affordable Quality Childcare*

While significant progress has been made in addressing the affordability of childcare through the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme in November 2019, this investment needs to be sustained and increased over the next several years. In Ireland, the net cost of childcare is 28% of the average wage of a couple, while the EU average is 12%.³¹ It is therefore understandable that flexible work could be linked with mitigating the need for childcare as it can enable parents to balance caring responsibilities with working from home. However, this is not a sustainable solution to the cost of childcare and remote working should not be used as a substitute for childcare. Increased investment in the National Childcare Scheme must be partnered with a flexible workforce strategy that supports working families. Additionally, Chambers Ireland is calling for data

²⁷ House of Commons Library (2018), Flexible Working. Available at:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01086#fullreport>

²⁸ Eurofound (2017), Working time patterns for sustainable work, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at:

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1720en.pdf

²⁹ Eurofound (2018), Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at:

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef18065en.pdf

³⁰

³¹ National Competitiveness Council (2019), Cost of Doing Business in Ireland. Available at:

<http://www.competitiveness.ie/Publications/2019/Cost%20of%20Doing%20Business%202019%20Report.pdf>

on the exact cost of delivery of childcare provision to be published as soon as possible to ensure that further investment in this area contributes to making childcare more affordable for working parents and families.

Conclusion

Whether it is working from home or from co-working hubs, the prevalence of employees partaking in flexible working arrangements is growing. As outlined, in embracing flexible work as part of innovation and technical change, it has the potential to improve productivity, attract and retain talent, increase participation in the labour force and assist in the transition to a low-carbon economy. These benefits correspond to the five key Pillars of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 that are crucial for Ireland's future economic success.

The potential of flexible working arrangements to reduce work pressure and work-life conflict has important implications for employees' physical and mental well-being, in addition to benefiting employers through reduced absenteeism. Productivity can be improved if employees are entitled to work remotely and flexibly. Time can also be saved by not having to commute. However, adequate technology and connectivity to enable and support remote work is of primary necessity to improve productivity. Flexible working arrangements must be bolstered by Government led policy that clearly states the rights, responsibilities and limitations of these arrangements.

We remind policymakers and legislators that ahead of the introduction of a flexible working strategy, that there is an opportunity to engage with private sector business representation as a partner, and we believe there are practical benefits in this approach. Constructive engagement with the business community is instrumental in facilitating representative discussions on future pathways and actions in this regard. Through a collective discussion, policy is informed via ground-up engagement. Resilience and capacity building are key, and business needs to be supported in designing internal flexible working policies with a strong national regulatory and policy framework. Supports for flexible, inclusive workplaces that are family, age and disability friendly will encourage labour activation, improving health, well-being and productivity. We emphasise the value of public consultations and welcome future opportunities to engage on this and associated topics.