

Employment Update: The Rise of New Working Practices Post-Pandemic

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With the easing of restrictions and the phased return to the office post-pandemic, employers have recognised the benefits of remote working and are now considering a new way of working - a hybrid approach, allowing employees the ability to work from home and in the office. With the roll-out of hybrid working becoming the new norm, a four-day work week is also at the forefront of discussions as the Irish government invests in research to support the effectiveness of a shorter working week.

Hybrid Working

The government's guidance "*Reframing the Challenge: Continuing our Recovery and Reconnecting*" (the "**Work Safety Protocol**") provides for a phased and staggered return to work from 20 September 2021 onwards. Whilst employers have been afforded the option to welcome employees back to the office, many have recognised the benefits of working from home. In August 2021, recruitment firm Morgan McKinley published a survey (the "**Survey**") recording the key benefits offered to employees and their responses.^[1] The Survey reports that working from home is currently the third most offered benefit nationwide by employers and the fifth most in demand benefit for employees.

Rather than employees being made to choose one option over the other, employers will likely offer a blended approach during this period of re-adjustment, as the country continues to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. That being said, employers ought to ensure compliance with updated legislation and Codes of Practice. In particular, employers should be aware of the right of employees to request remote working and the need to implement a remote working policy, should employees avail of this approach.

Four-day working week

A new trial programme launched in Ireland in June of this year which aims to test the effectiveness of a four-day working week. The trial is due to continue for six months and has been backed by the

government who have offered €150,000 towards the research. The trial has been largely driven by Four Day Week Ireland, a group of campaigners who are made up of trade unions, businesses, environmentalists, women's rights and civil society organisations, academics, health practitioners and global advocates.

A total of 17 organisations are taking part in the trial and a range of support has been afforded to these entities, which includes training and mentoring on how to implement the concept successfully. There has also been a range of research done, which shows that a shorter workweek can lead to higher levels of productivity, as well as boosting employee morale and well-being.[2]

Key takeaways for employers

It is evidently clear that employers and employees have recognised the benefits of working from home and even the potential of a shorter working week. Where employers are choosing to shift their ways of working to adapt to the post-pandemic world, it is important to consider their legislative obligations and to ensure that relevant policies are updated and/or introduced where required.

Employers should plan for the future and aim to put in place a framework which will govern their organisation's future ways of working. This framework should provide for training for employees who are appointed to manage a hybrid workforce and/or implement a shorter working-week, as well as education for employees on the policies that will govern their chosen approach.

For further information on how your business can prepare contact Bláthnaid at blathnaid.evans@ogier.com

[1] 2021 Ireland Benefits Survey: Employer & Employee by Morgan McKinley.

[2] International Labour Organization Research Paper on "Working time and the future of work".

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