

HEALTH & SAFETY TIMES

NEW CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

**COALITION CAMPAIGNS FOR
FOUR-DAY WORKING WEEK**

**TAPPING INTO TELEWORKING REGULATIONS
ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS
THE NATION'S HEALTH CONCERNS**



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EDITOR'S COMMENT



The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly thrown the world of work into a spin and has seen the introduction of new methods and models of working across all sectors of Ireland's economy.

The latest initiative has seen the launch of new programme for employers to pilot a new four-day working week to trial the effectiveness of a four-day working week for staff with no loss of pay.

Under the plan, to start in January, organisations will receive supports, training and mentoring on how to make the concept operate smoothly during the six-month trial period.

'Health & Safety Times' takes an in-depth look at the new pilot programme, launched in June by the 'Four Day Week Ireland' campaign – a coalition of businesses, unions, academics, environmentalists and NGOs. It claims that positive results will be delivered for business while also providing employees with the right work/life balance, without any reductions in pay or productivity.

'Four Day Week Ireland' is part of the international campaign to establish the four-day week concept, which has also been introduced by countries such as Spain and Scotland, and was first launched here in September 2019 by the coalition.

So, in effect, it's not a new concept in Ireland as evidenced by companies who have successfully been operating the four-day working week, such as recruitment firm ICE Group and software company 3D Issue. Both businesses, located in the West of Ireland, noted increased productivity and an opportunity to reward and retain staff, since moving to a four-day working week in 2019.

Ireland's first ever public opinion poll on the issue last year (published by trade union Fórsa) found that three-quarters of respondents supported a Government exploration of its introduction, while almost half the number of Irish employers said it would be feasible to trial it in their own workplace.

The new pilot programme is also set to run in a number of other countries, including the US, the UK and New Zealand, co-ordinated by the Four Day Week Global group.

Grace Heneghan
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The new statutory sick pay scheme means that all workers will now have the right to be paid for up to 10 days of sick leave per year by 2025. Under the new plans agreed by the



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Government, the scheme will be phased in over a four-year period to help employers to plan ahead and manage the additional cost.



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Organisations may not be fully aware of the steps to ensure employees have proper remote working set-ups, writes Andy Mackin, CEO of Mackin. He highlights the importance of ergonomic assessments to critically assess

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TÁNAISTE SAYS COVID-19 VACCINATIONS TO REMAIN VOLUNTARY

The Government is urging employers and employees to use the updated guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, with businesses now reopening.

Launching the updated Work Safely Protocol in May, the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar, confirmed that vaccination will not be made mandatory.

“Vaccination will remain voluntary so it’s important that employers have guidance on how to manage any unvaccinated workers. This document gives that information,” he said.

The updated public health advice provides guidance on ventilation and vaccinations as part of the range of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and the community, as well as information on the use of antigen testing in the workplace, as issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and the Department of Health.

The Work Safely Protocol (which is the second revision of the Return to Work Safely Protocol, first published in May 2020), also contains links directing employers and employees to a range of government departments and agencies where

additional and more detailed information and guidance can be sourced.

The updated protocol sets out the minimum public health measures required in every place of work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to facilitate the re-opening of workplaces following temporary closures and the ongoing safe operation of such workplaces.



To download a copy of the updated protocol visit <https://bit.ly/3vLBvcS>

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME AND WELLBEING APP FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

A free and confidential 24/7 helpline and wellbeing app has been launched to provide construction workers with information, advice and guidance on mental, physical and financial wellbeing matters.

The helpline and app were launched, via webinar on 3 June, by the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity, and the charity is now working with the CIF to promulgate the helpline amongst its members.

“A large proportion of construction workers are either self-employed or work for small businesses. They do not have access to an employee assistance programme (EAP) for support.

“One of the charity’s key objectives is to reduce suicides of those working in the construction sector. The 24/7 Construction Industry Helpline delivers an EAP to all workers and is complimented by a supporting helpline app,” noted Lighthouse CEO Bill Hill.

“By making all the services free and confidential, the charity aims to remove two of the key barriers to people seeking help. The final barrier to overcome is the stigma of using such



services often inherent in stoic masculine belief,” he added.

The webinar showcased the services provided by Lighthouse, while a panel discussion on the implications of the Government’s Return to Work Safely Protocol included representatives from the charity, the CIF, the Considerate Constructors’ Scheme and experts from the Irish construction sector.



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FÓRSA EXPRESSES CONCERN ON GARDA DRUG TESTING PLANS

Fórsa, which represents civilian staff in An Garda Síochána within the union's Civil Service Division, has expressed its concerns over plans by An Garda Síochána to introduce mandatory drugs testing.

In a recent statement, Fórsa official Thomas Cowman said Garda management had unilaterally issued a HQ directive stating that all Garda staff will be subject to mandatory drugs testing and that testing will commence no sooner than six months after the publication of this policy.

He added: "Fórsa deplores the use of illicit drug use in any employment, as it puts at risk the safety, health and welfare of staff in the workplace. However, the union's members cannot be subject to testing for drugs without reason and a legal basis for doing so.

"The union has not been informed of any proposed drug testing process, and Fórsa has not agreed to the internal Garda policies on substance abuse. Fórsa members in An Garda Síochána are civil servants and, as such, come under the agreed 'Civil Service Alcohol and Drugs Misuse' policy which, in Fórsa's view, is the

appropriate mechanism to manage the issue of any alleged misuse of drugs in this area," he said.



HEALTHY WORKPLACES GOOD PRACTICE AWARDS TO LIGHTEN THE LOAD'

With judging set to get underway at national level for the Good Practice Awards for 2020-2022, two winners from Ireland will be announced later this year, before they will then be entered into the pan-European competition, with overall winners announced in 2022.

The Good Practice awards scheme is one of the main elements of the latest European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) campaign – 'Healthy Workplaces: LIGHTEN THE LOAD for 2020-2022' – highlights and promotes best practice in relation to the prevention and management of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) in the workplace.

With millions of workers throughout Europe suffering from MSDs, it remains the most common work-related health problem in Europe. MSDs affect the musculoskeletal system and can present in the tendons, muscles, joints, blood vessels and/or nerves of the limbs and back. Symptoms include pain, discomfort, numbness and tingling in the affected area and can differ in severity from mild and periodic to severe, chronic and debilitating conditions.



For further information visit: <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en/get-involved>

The awards scheme serves to recognise businesses and individuals committed to occupational safety and health in promoting practices. Previous winners have included businesses in manufacturing, construction,

hairdressing and the healthcare sector.

All entries must show evidence of real and demonstrable improvements in safety and health in relation to work-related MSDs, effective participation and involvement of workers and their representatives, and transferability to workplaces in other Member States, in different sectors and of different sizes.

Frank Power, HSA Ergonomist (Inspector), said that MSDs are the most prevalent of all work-related injuries in the Irish workplace.

"The key aim of the awards is to share best practice examples of how organisations manage ergonomic risks, through consultation with workers, risk assessment and the introduction

of innovative engineering and/or organisational improvements in the way work is carried out. These best practice examples should highlight how businesses aim to prevent and manage MSDs in the workplace."



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IRISH WATER TAPS INTO 'ISO 45001' STANDARD CERTIFICATION

Irish Water's certification to the ISO 45001:2018 standard for Occupational Health and Safety management systems has coincided with an important milestone for Irish Water, as earlier this year it reached 2.5 million hours without a lost-time employee incident.

Neil Lenehan, Irish Water's Acting Chief Technical Safety Advisor, said that they remain fully committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff, contractors and delivery partners, during these unprecedented times.

"It's paramount that we consistently work to achieve the highest safety standards. This award provides us with the confidence in a successful journey to date and ensures we can continually strive for ways to improve in a consistent and sustainable manner."

The ISO 45001-2018 certification followed a rigorous 18-month process that saw Irish Water's project team collaborate with colleagues across the organisation to improve

safety behaviours and develop a proactive safety culture, modelled on best practice. The certification was awarded after a robust auditing process.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) there are more than 2.78 million deaths a year due to occupational accidents or work-related diseases, in addition to 374 million non-fatal injuries and illnesses.

ISO 45001 is the world's first international standard for occupational health and safety, which provides structure and ensures effectiveness, efficiency and continual improvement in an organisation, by creating consistency and results built around best practices.

Similarly structured to other ISO systems, ISO 45001 builds on the success of earlier international standards such as OHSAS 18001, the ILO-OSH Guidelines, various national standards and the ILO's international labour standards and conventions.



For further details on ISO 45001 certification visit <https://bit.ly/3gHfLKH>

GOVERNMENT MUST RECOGNISE SCALE OF MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS – IBEC

Ibec has continued its call on the Government to recognise the scale of the mental health crisis, following the extended period of home working and isolation since March 2020.

Ibec said that the Government needs to take concrete steps to support a partial and gradual return to office work in a way that enables employers to address cases of most acute isolation risk.

Ibec CEO Danny McCoy said: "The impact of isolation on the mental health of our workforces as a result of the pandemic is something that needs to be carefully addressed by employers and government alike.

"Many of our members have reported employee mental

health issues as the single biggest challenge facing their organisations. Younger workers, in particular, are suffering significant mental health issues, which will have long-term implications for society and the public health system," he added.

"Greater clarity is needed in the return to office protocols and how the safety and wellbeing of people at work can be securely managed as we begin to reopen our economy."

Sophie Moran, Senior Executive for Ibec's KeepWell programme, said that "there's still a way to go in terms of strategising for a return to the workplace and looking at how wellbeing can be supported throughout this process."



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COALITION CAMPAIGNS FOR FOUR-DAY WEEK SCHEME

Under a new pilot programme, employers are set to introduce a four-day week for their employees over a six-month period starting in January 2022. The pilot is being organised by the Four Day Week Ireland campaign, which claims the initiative can deliver positive results for business and provide a work/life balance for employees. Report by Deirdre O'Flynn.

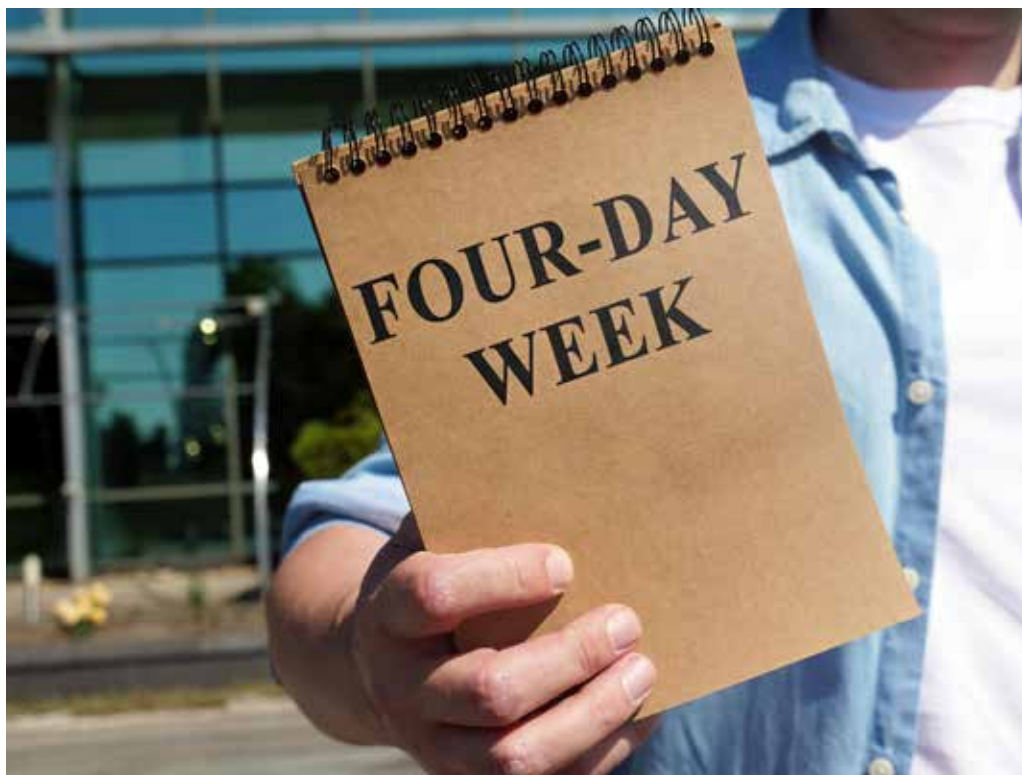
The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown the world of work into a spin, with the introduction of new models of working across all sectors of the economy. However, it may also now be an ideal time for employers and employees to consider a four-day working week in the future.

A four-day week can deliver positive results for business and provide the work/life balance employees want post-Covid, according to Four Day Week Ireland, who launched the pilot programme on 22 June for employers to trial the effectiveness of the scheme.

Four Day Week Ireland is the Irish leg of an international campaign to establish a four-day week, without any reductions in pay or productivity, and Irish trade union Fórsa is part of the coalition behind the initiative.

Last year, Fórsa published Ireland's first ever public opinion poll on the four-day week. Three-quarters of respondents said they supported a Government exploration of its introduction, while almost half the number of Irish employers said it would be feasible to trial it in their own workplace.

Fórsa's campaign director and chairperson of Four Day Week Ireland, Joe O'Connor, told *'Health & Safety Times'* that as the nature of work has changed, "technology and globalisation



Fórsa published Ireland's first ever public opinion poll on the four-day week in 2020.

have introduced new ways of working, yet people are still working the same hours".

In fact, a fourth industrial revolution is upon us, O'Connor said, pointing to a 2017 report by PWC, which noted that artificial intelligence would boost Ireland's GDP in 2030 by 11.6% or €48 billion.

NATIONAL PILOT PROGRAMME

"Within this context, the four-day week campaign is part of the debate about sharing the benefits of productivity increases with workers. It draws on experiences internationally, including New Zealand, where companies are using the '100/80/100' model – 100 per cent productivity on 80 per cent of the time with 100 per cent pay. It's about linking productivity to results rather than time at a desk."

O'Connor said that the campaign wants "a gradual, steady, managed



Joe O'Connor, Fórsa's campaign director, said they want "a gradual and managed transition to a shorter working week for all workers in the private and public sectors".

transition to a shorter working week for all workers", adding that the union hopes to involve public and private sector employers in a national four-day week pilot programme, which is currently in the late stages of development.

He added that this will lead to innovation by organisations and employees, with reduced working time being better for business, better for workers, better for women, and better for the environment, according to the coalition.

The next step is the roll-out of a pilot project with the US and New Zealand. "Companies in the three countries are set to introduce the four-day week at the same time, allowing comparability and shared experiences.

"This will be backed up by research with UCD and Boston College, with the ultimate aim of measuring the effects of the approach."

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

The four-day week has been successfully introduced in a number of companies worldwide, including here in Ireland.

Two companies – both located in the West of Ireland – have expressed

increased productivity as a result of introducing a four-day working week.

ICE Group is a leading recruitment, training, and outsourced services company, with offices in Galway, Limerick, and Sligo.

"We depend on our people and felt that if we gave something back, it would make a huge difference to the sustainability of our organisation," Margaret Cox, Director of ICE Group, told *'Health & Safety Times'*.

The organisation introduced the four-day week for its 50 staff members in July 2019. "After a year-and-a-half, productivity increased 27 per cent, sales increased and unplanned attrition declined. And the number of single-day absences fell to three days in one year across the whole company. And we also estimate a 20 per cent saving on transport emissions."

ICE Group operates a three-day weekend – employees work either from Monday to Thursday, with a Friday-Saturday-Sunday weekend, or alternatively they work from Tuesday to Friday, with a Saturday-Sunday-Monday weekend. "We still provide our services over 5.5 days, including Saturday, but we moved into part-time to cover the weekends."

A CULTURE CHANGE

"The teams made the decision. It was a culture change – for it to work, everyone needed to be focused on its success and, for us, it was so important that we do whatever we have to make it work.

"It has been absolutely brilliant. We call the day off our 'Genius Day' – having an extra day at the weekend gives people space and they are energetic, enthusiastic, and focused when they

THREE ROUTES TO ACHIEVE THE FOUR-DAY WEEK

The Four-Day Week Ireland Steering Committee includes representatives from ICTU, Fórsa, Friends of the Earth Ireland, the National Women's Council of Ireland, Maynooth University, ICE Group, and the UK and international four-day week campaigns.

The coalition says there are three routes to achieving the four-day week:

1. Good business leadership, combined with market and labour market factors, which will increase the attraction of the four-day week to companies.
2. Reduced working time, without loss of pay or productivity, through negotiations between management and unions in organisations where collective bargaining takes place.
3. Government as a large employer leading by example, supporting private companies that introduce reduced working time, and legislating where appropriate.

For further information on the campaign in Ireland visit www.fourdayweek.ie



"We felt that if we gave something back, it would make a huge difference to the sustainability of our organisation" – Margaret Cox, Director of ICE Group (www.icegroup.ie)



The 'Four-Day Week' concept was launched in September 2019 by Four Day Week Ireland – this coalition of businesses, unions, academics, environmentalists and NGOs is campaigning for a shorter working time across sectors of the economy.



Paul McNulty, CEO of 3D Issue, a digital content experience software company based in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, says that the four-day week has allowed him to reward and retain staff. (www.3Dissue.com)

come into work," Cox noted.

Customer service has remained high, with clients fully briefed. "We developed a strong handover protocol", so that one employee hands over to another on Thursday night if Friday work is required with a particular client.

"There's been huge goodwill and clients recognise that we have the energy to deliver our service to them."

STAFF REWARDED AND RETAINED

Paul McNulty, CEO of 3D Issue, a digital content experience software company based in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, said that the four-day week has allowed him to reward and retain staff.

"We've been working on a new product in the last few years, which took a lot of work, and I was looking for a way to reward the staff," he explained to

'Health & Safety Times'. "The four-day week allows me to compete with bigger corporations in terms of retaining my staff. It has worked well; there has been no loss of employees since we started the four-day week in 2019. Nor has there been any loss in productivity, in fact productivity has increased over what we did in the five-day week."

McNulty also runs the Monday-

LOCAL AUTHORITIES URGED TO PILOT THE FOUR-DAY WEEK PROGRAMME

Fórsa has written to the chief executives of all local authorities in Ireland, asking them to engage with the four-day week pilot programme.

The union's local government conference on 12 May heard from Andrew Barnes, Chief Executive of New Zealand firm Perpetual Guardian, who said his company had doubled per capita productivity and halved sick leave rates since it adopted a four-day week in 2018. He said the policy had helped Perpetual Guardian maintain productivity and profitability during the Covid lockdown.

Barnes established the '4-Day Week Global' foundation to support businesses and campaigners, following the successful introduction of the four-day week in his company,

"This is the model for employment in the 21st century; thousands of companies worldwide, including household names like Microsoft and Unilever, have followed our lead and experimented with the four-day week."

He said that it is an issue facing workers all the way across the world, regardless of country and culture, "because there's a mismatch between the amount of time we spend working and the amount of time we spend with our families and communities".

Barnes said the Covid experience of a rapid shift to remote working had boosted the case for the four-day week by removing "a barrier of trust" regarding time management and productivity.





“As a relatively new concept, the emerging evidence is mixed, and for some organisations the complexity and cost of managing a four-day workforce over a five-day working week has been prohibitive,” according to Maeve McElwee, Ibec’s Director of Employer Relations.

Thursday and Tuesday-Friday model, arranging it so that each role is always covered.

“Job applications have increased five-fold now because we offer the four-day week,” he said, adding that 3D Issue is unique in that area due to this.

“As long as people are getting the market rate, the satisfaction with that lessens after a while.

The extra day off is more valuable – that value may be in reduced childcare costs, peace and quiet for parents while children are in school, or an extra day off to get over the weekend.”

THE RIGHT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

According to Ibec’s Director of Employer Relations, Maeve McElwee, the accelerating pace of change in Irish workplaces has driven the adoption of new technologies and facilitated many new ways of working.

“The experience of flexible and remote working has grown significantly as a result of the Covid pandemic, and many organisations are now considering how they might incorporate the benefits of new work structures for the long term,” she said.

“The Four-Day Week model is one practice that may

GOVERNMENT TO FUND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP TO ASSESS IMPACTS

As part of the pilot programme, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications will fund a research partnership to assess the economic, social and environmental impacts of a four-day working week.

The researchers will examine the impact of a shorter working week on private sector companies and public sector employers as they pilot a four-day week over six months. The research will explore the impact of a shorter working week on productivity, wellbeing, job satisfaction, environmental footprint, and household division of labour.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Employment Leo Varadkar said: “The Covid-19 pandemic has caused us to rethink and re-evaluate how we work. It’s been shown that huge numbers of people can be just as productive while working at home rather than having to come into the office every day, and it has accelerated the shift towards more flexible and family-friendly working hours.”

This new research call will provide an opportunity to address these impacts in the specific context of the Irish economy. “The idea is ambitious, to achieve the same outcomes and productivity, for the same pay with 20% fewer hours worked.” He noted that while it may work for some sectors, he said it was hard to see how it would work particularly in health, education and manufacturing for example.

“However, we need to keep an open mind when it comes to innovations in the world of work. This research being commissioned by the Government will give us a much greater understanding of the potential of this idea and that’s why the Department has agreed to co-sponsor it.”

Minister for Environment Climate and Communications Eamon Ryan said: “We want to find out more about how we can keep some of the gains made in terms of less commuting and more family time. A four-day week could help us cut carbon emissions and air pollution, improve people’s work-life balance and support gender equality. We need to look at the potential and assess the impacts of such a change, and this research will help us figure that out.”

Up to €150,000 will be made available to support this research. The two government departments will formally open the call on 1 July, at which time the full evaluation criteria, terms and conditions will be provided. It is anticipated that the call will remain open to proposals until 15 July 2021.

provide the right work/life balance for some organisations. The idea behind this practice is that whilst working hours reduce, productivity increases or remains the same, at a minimum.”

However, McElwee noted that as a relatively new concept, the emerging evidence is mixed, adding that for some organisations the complexity and cost of managing a four-day workforce over a five-day working week has been prohibitive.

“In other organisations, flexibility is considered more broadly with policies tailored to reflect the many different types of flexible working requests that employees may need, rather than a one-size-fits-all model,” she claimed.

NEW CODE PUTS RIGHT TO DISCONNECT INTO PRACTICE

Ireland's new Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect means that employees may now switch off from work outside of normal working hours, and should any problems or issues arise, they are entitled to raise the matter with the Workplace Relations Commission.

Developed by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), the Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect immediately came into force on 1 April – the same day it was published by the government.

The Code gives employees the right to switch off from work outside of normal working hours, including the right to not respond immediately to emails, telephone calls or other messages.

"The pandemic has transformed working practices, and many of those changes will be long-lasting.

"Although much of the pandemic's impact has been negative, particularly for those who have lost jobs, income or whose businesses have been closed, it also offers an opportunity to make permanent changes for the better, whether that's working more from home, having more time with the family, or more flexible working hours," the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar, noted, on bringing the new Code into law. The following rights are enshrined in the

Code with:

- The right of an employee to not have to routinely perform work outside their normal working hours.
- The right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours.
- The duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (e.g. by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours).



Employees now have more options to work outside of traditional hours, which many people have availed of during the pandemic.

"The Code of Practice applies to all types of employment, whether working remotely or not. It will help employees, no matter what their job is, to strike a better work-life balance and switch off from

work outside of their normal working hours,” the Tánaiste noted.

The Code reflects the Workplace Relations Commission’s objective to achieve good working relations between employers and employees, promoting compliance with relevant employment, equality and equal status legislation, early dispute resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services, and adjudication on complaints and disputes.

Due to greater flexibility provided by the new Code, employees now have more options to work outside of traditional hours, which many people have availed of during the pandemic. And it reflects the fact that many Irish employees are part of a global network, requiring contact with colleagues around the world.



The right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours is one of three main rights enshrined into the Code.

‘RECHARGE THE BATTERIES’

Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail, Damien English, TD, said: “The right to disconnect has never been more important following a seismic shift in work practices this time last year, as Government asked people who could work from home to do so in the interest of suppressing the virus.

“The publication of the Code of Practice is a positive step in providing practical guidance on the right to disconnect. It will ensure that both employers and employees are aware of their requirements and entitlements and understand how they apply, especially when it is time to unplug and recharge the batteries by switching off properly from work, especially in a remote working scenario.”

The Director General of the WRC, Liam Kelly, commented: “Disconnecting from work and work-related devices necessitates a joint approach by employers and employees. While placing the onus of management of working time on the employer is appropriate, individual employee responsibility is also required.”

In accordance with the provisions of Section 20(4) the Workplace Relations Act, 2015, 37 submissions were received as part of the public consultation process, and considered in the Code’s development.

The Commission had also engaged with representatives of both employers and employees, including IBEC and ICTU, in finalising this Code of Practice.

The Tánaiste is now encouraging employers to engage proactively with employees to develop a policy suited to their own needs.

PLANS TO PLACE THE REMOTE WORKING REQUEST INTO LAW

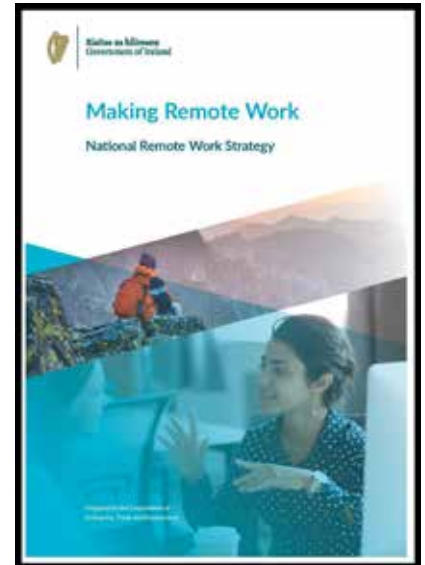
In addition to the new Code of Practice, the Tánaiste is now inviting views on his plans to put the right to request remote working into law. Both form part of his commitment to create more flexible and family-friendly working arrangements, including remote working and working more flexible hours.

They also build on the ‘Our Rural Future’ plan – the Government’s blueprint to transform rural

Ireland, by facilitating more people to work remotely and flexibly.

“This will provide a clear framework around which requesting, approving or refusing remote work can be based. In putting this into law, we recognise that remote working doesn’t work for everyone or for every organisation, so the Government will take a balanced approach with the new legislation,” he outlined.

Currently in Ireland, all employees may ask their employers for the right to work remotely, but there is no legal framework around which a request can be made and how it should be dealt with by the employer. This new law will set out clearly how these requests should be facilitated as far as possible.

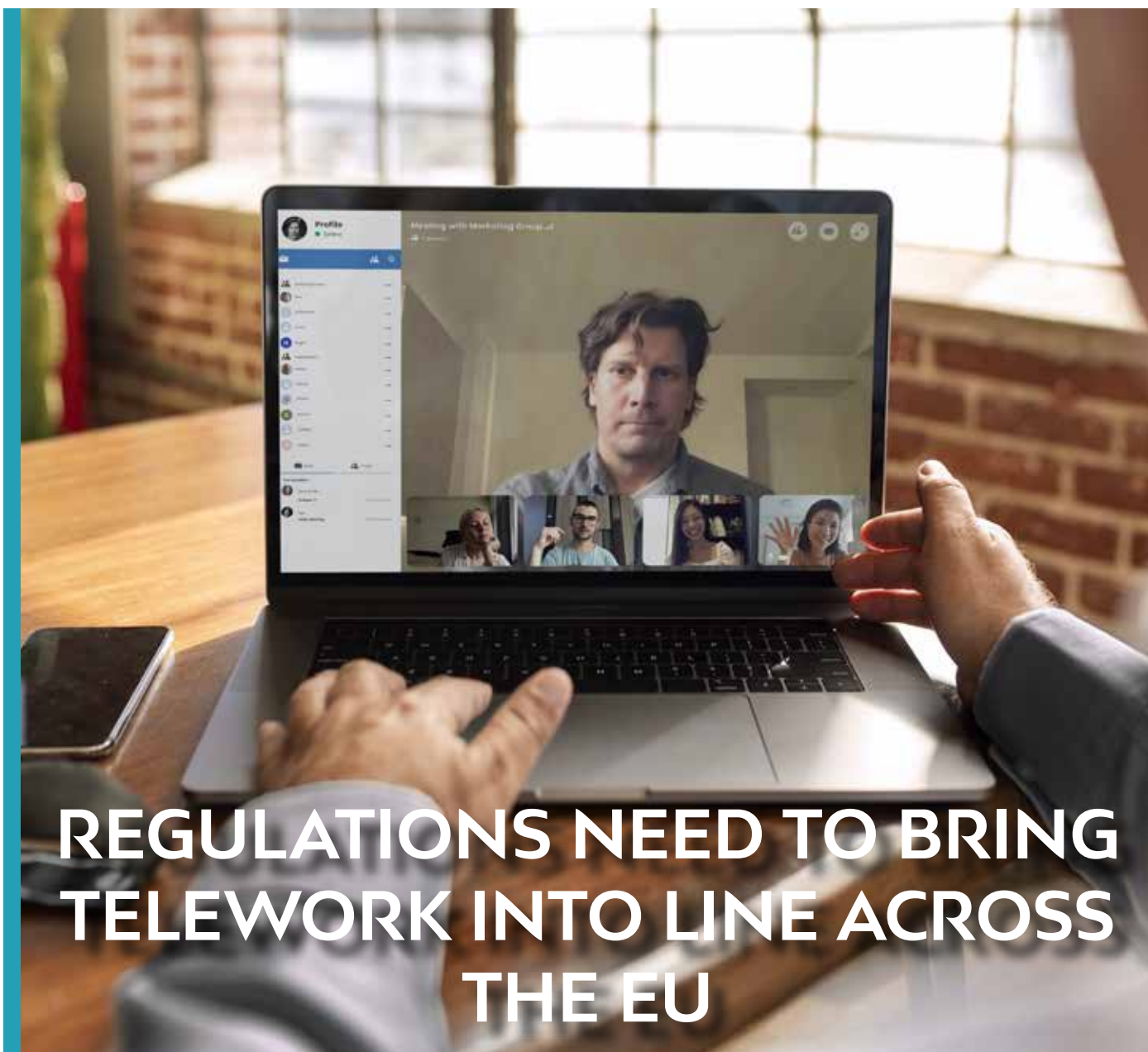


Government has committed over the course of this year to:

- Legislate to provide employees the right to request remote working.
- Introduce a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails and switch-off time.
- Invest in remote work hubs, ensuring they are in locations that suit commuters and are close to childcare facilities.
- Explore the acceleration of the National Broadband Plan.
- Review the treatment of remote working for the purposes of tax and expenditure in the next Budget.
- Lead by example by mandating that home and remote working should be the norm for 20% of public sector employees.

And not all work lends itself easily to remote working, for example where a worker needs to be physically present on site, interact with others, or use location-specific specialised machinery or equipment. In cases where remote work is suitable, a hybrid or blended model with a combination of remote work and onsite work may be the preferred arrangement.

Some organisations may prefer a model where employees are required to come on site only a few days a week or month, while some will need a core of ‘anchor’ people to be in the office or on site most days because they need to be. The new law will look at how all of these possibilities can be facilitated.



REGULATIONS NEED TO BRING TELEWORK INTO LINE ACROSS THE EU

The widespread and rapid adoption of teleworking in response to the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 exposed gaps in the legislation governing telework arrangements across EU Member States. In some cases, it was too restrictive, while in others there was no regulation in place. With different approaches taken by each state, will the EU now bring them all into line?

Governments scrambled to put temporary measures in place to cover the emergency situation and the urgent need to enable workers to work from home.

Now that the pandemic is receding and wholesale telework seems to be here to stay, governments are faced with the need to properly regulate such arrangements. Member States are following different paths, but the EU

might step in to promote some level of standardisation.

Most workers who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic say they would like to continue to do so occasionally or full time even when it is safe to return to the office, while a considerable number of companies concede that this is a feasible prospect.

It is likely, therefore, that as many as one out of five employees in Europe

will be working remotely regularly or occasionally for the foreseeable future.

This means that Member States need proper legislative frameworks to regulate telework arrangements – for example, to establish their voluntary character and the employer's obligation to provide equipment. There is also a need to protect employees from the risks of telework, such as long working hours and infringements of privacy.



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In some cases the legislation explicitly states that employees working remotely are insured against accidents, or that employers should guarantee a safe working environment, even outside their premises – as is the case in Austria and Germany.

POST-PANDEMIC REGULATIONS

Prior to the pandemic, around two-thirds of Member States had implemented regulations on telework at national or sectoral level, either through legislation or collective agreements. Generally, the content drew on the framework agreement on telework agreed by the European social partners in 2002.[1]

The shift to telework in 2020 sparked debate in most Member States around the necessity to introduce new and permanent regulations, or to adapt existing regulations to address the challenges and opportunities of teleworking in a post-pandemic world.

However, an actual update of telework regulatory frameworks is not happening in all Member States, and among those that are acting, the approaches adopted vary.

Just a few countries have already amended their legislative frameworks, whether totally or partially. One notable example is Spain, which adopted Royal Decree-Law 28/2020 in September 2020, introducing comprehensive legislation covering remote working.[2]

Austria passed a new federal law in March 2021 to partly amend existing labour legislation by introducing a definition of 'home office' and provisions regulating it.[3] The Irish government took a different approach, introducing a code of practice for employers and

employees on the right to disconnect in April 2021.[4]

The debate is ongoing in Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Portugal and Malta, some of which have announced

drafts of laws. Meanwhile, Croatia, Germany and Poland are in the middle of the legislative process.

THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

The legislative moves vary across the EU, with some aspects receiving more emphasis than others, depending on country.

The right to disconnect is a key concern for many. This refers to employees' right to switch off from work outside normal working hours and not to respond to incoming messages from work.

The term, though seldom used in legislation, has become popular in public and policy discourse. Spain's legislation does use it, as does the code of practice introduced in Ireland, which focuses specifically on this aspect by requiring employers to develop a 'Right to Disconnect' policy.

In other countries, the measures passed or proposed are intended to guarantee decent working conditions and generally require the agreements between employers and employees regarding telework to clearly define working hours and rest periods.

Germany's draft law on mobile working states the obligation of employees to record their working hours but also clarifies that it is intended as a form of protection for them.



Temporary emergency measures have allowed employees to work with their personal devices, but long-term provisions oblige employers to provide the necessary equipment.

THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

The organisation and monitoring of working time is a key issue included in these new legislative texts. These generally recognise the right of employers to monitor and control employees who are working remotely but require that employees' right to privacy is respected at the same time.

New regulations guarantee the balance between the two rights in different ways. The Spanish law, for instance, states that companies must respect employees' dignity and privacy when implementing measures to monitor and control them.

It also provides for inspections of employees' workspaces by the employer if the place chosen by employees is different from their home – but states that the procedure must not impose a disproportionate burden on people using the property, including the worker.

By contrast, the Austrian law addresses employees working from home and forbids inspections of employees' home offices by the labour inspectorate.

PROVISION OF IT EQUIPMENT

Another important issue is the provision of IT equipment. The temporary emergency measures have usually allowed employees to work with their personal devices, but long-term provisions oblige employers to provide the necessary equipment.

Alternatively – or even additionally, in a few cases – the employer may meet this obligation by covering employees' expenses for equipment and also for the cost of domestic utilities such as heating and electricity.

In Romania, an amendment to its national fiscal code introduces a fiscal incentive for employers who decide to cover employees' teleworking expenses, exempting these from tax and making them deductible from the company's annual profit.

DISCRIMINATION AND HEALTH RISKS

The new legislation in many cases is alert to the risk of discrimination against teleworkers and explicitly refers to teleworkers' rights to equal remuneration, working conditions and career opportunities.

Sometimes, this consists of a generic acknowledgement that all the rights and obligations of employees working at the employer's premises extend



The Code of Practice introduced in Ireland focuses specifically on an employee's right to disconnect, by requiring employers to develop a 'Right to Disconnect' policy.

to employees working remotely. It is legitimate to assume that such provision also implicitly guarantees the health and safety rights of teleworkers.

However, in some cases, the legislation states that employees working remotely are insured against accidents, or that employers should guarantee a safe working environment, even outside the employer's premises – as in Austria and Germany.

The new law in Spain goes even further in that it considers protection against social isolation, a common risk of working remotely for long periods.

ROLE FOR THE EU

The challenges of telework vary little from one Member State to another, but the way they are addressed differs quite a bit. Among those few countries that have passed new legislation, regulatory frameworks have not been updated to the same extent, through the same procedures or at the same pace. This reflects the diversity of work cultures and practices.

However, EU co-ordination of the regulations of Member States could establish minimum standards aimed at better protecting workers' health and employment conditions. This could be done by adapting the existing social partners' framework agreement or adopting new regulation at EU level.

If high levels of telework are here to

stay, it is likely to lead to an increase in cross-border teleworking – something that so far has not been addressed in the new national legislation nor at EU level. This could, however, have implications for social security rights and working conditions.

This is a synopsis of a blog entitled 'As Member States take different approaches to regulating telework, will the EU bring them into line?' published by Eurofound on 31 May 2021.

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MAJORITY OF EMPLOYEES FAVOUR WORKING REMOTELY

More than 95 per cent of employees in Ireland prefer to continue with some form of remote employment once the coronavirus pandemic ends, according to the findings of a new survey, which revealed that close to one in 10 people has already relocated or moved house, since working from home gave them more options.



The national remote working survey in Ireland, led by researchers from NUI Galway and the Western Development Commission, revealed that among those who could work remotely, 95% were in favour of working from home on an ongoing basis to some extent.

The majority of those (53%) said they would like to work remotely several times a week, 32% would like to work fully remotely with 10% favouring to work from home several times a month.

And furthermore, those who would like to work fully remotely (32%) represents a substantial increase on the first national survey conducted in April 2020, when it was then 12% in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown.

The overwhelming majority (95%) is a significant increase from the 83% in last year's survey who wanted to continue to work remotely for some or all of the time.

The number of respondents working fully remotely fell from 87% in April 2020 to 75% at the end of April 2021, due to a greater mix of onsite and remote working in the latest survey.

Led by the Whitaker Institute at NUI Galway and the Western Development Commission, the second annual national remote working survey in Ireland once again gained huge interest, and gathered responses from more than 6,400 employees.



"Appetite for fully remote or hybrid working is the preference of the vast majority of respondents," noted Prof Alma McCarthy, NUI Galway.

It was also the first survey to attain the views of managers' on the impact of remote work on their teams, with over 2,100 managers sharing their views and plans for remote work post pandemic.

The study revealed that managers felt differently to their employees when it came to remote working – 44% said it was more difficult to manage their team

remotely, while 12% believe that remote working negatively impacted their team's productivity; 47% per cent of managers found no difference between managing their team remotely compared to onsite.

In relation to worker productivity, 44% of team managers believed that remote working positively impacts the productivity of their team, and the same



"The roll-out of more than 400 hubs under the National Hubs Network will offer a suitable workplace close to home. A key challenge for leaders in organisations is to ensure that people who choose to work remotely are treated equally in terms of development and promotional opportunities"
– Tomás O Síocháin, CEO of the Western Development Commission.

proportion believe that remote working makes no difference to the team's productivity.

TOP THREE ADVANTAGES

The most popular relocation destinations are in the West (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon), the South-West (Cork and Kerry) and the Border Region (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo).

According to the survey's findings, the top three advantages of working remotely by employees were greater flexibility, the belief that 'life is made easier' and an increase in productivity. However, within the context of work-life balance, 51% of respondents said that they work more hours when they work remotely compared to working onsite, while 45 per cent said they work the same hours.

Three-quarters of the organisations surveyed have not decided how their teams will work once the pandemic ends. Of the 25% who had decided, 78% will work to a hybrid model.

The study also found that 45% of team managers believed they did not get the training required to manage their team remotely.

NATIONAL HUBS NETWORK

The survey was led by Prof Alma McCarthy and Noreen O'Connor from NUI Galway, and Tomás Ó Siocháin and Deirdre Frost at Western Development Commission.

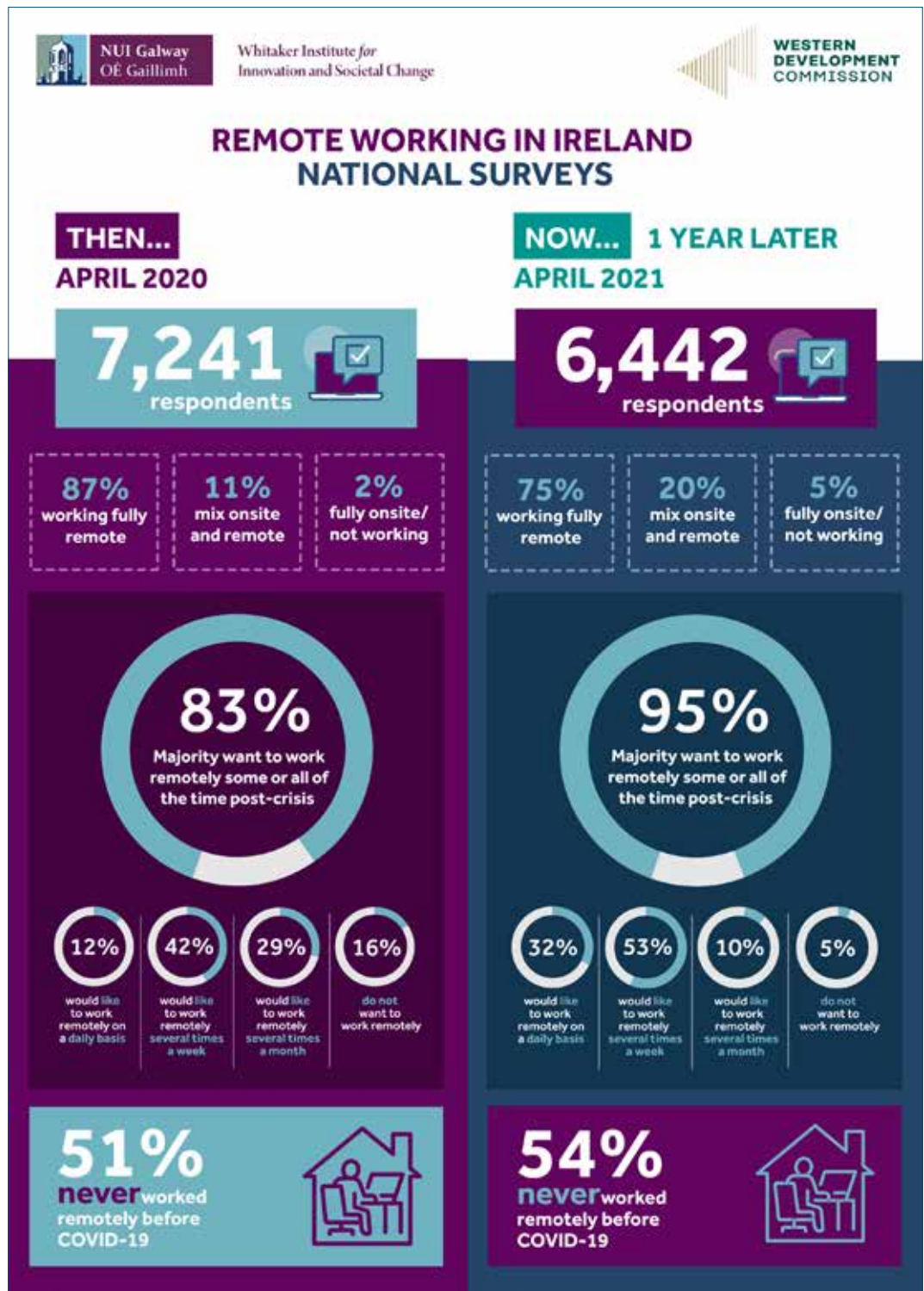
Prof McCarthy, Head of the J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics at NUI Galway, said: "We added a new module to ask questions about managing teams remotely for those who have people management responsibilities.

"To our knowledge, the latter forms the first national survey to gather information about team manager perspectives. It is interesting to see that the appetite for fully remote or hybrid working is the preference of the vast

majority of respondents."

Tomás Ó Siocháin, CEO of the Western Development Commission, said: "The findings indicate a clear appetite to continue to work remotely. This will mean significant change for the way in which people work and the way that organisations support that work.

"The roll-out of more than 400 hubs under the National Hubs Network will offer a suitable workplace close to home. A key challenge for leaders in organisations is to ensure that people who choose to work remotely are treated equally in terms of development and promotional opportunities."



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THE FACTS ABOUT THE COVID VACS!

As the government's Covid-19 vaccination strategy gathers pace, employers may find themselves facing a new dilemma: what to do about those employees who choose not to be vaccinated against Covid-19. Report by Deirdre O'Flynn.



A recent survey of nearly 1,000 Irish people, conducted by Ipsos MRBI on behalf of the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IHPA), found that people aged 25-34 were least willing to receive the vaccine. Overall, one in ten of the survey respondents were unsure about getting a vaccine – and one in five 18-24-year-olds were still undecided.

However, employers cannot insist that all employees are vaccinated. "People have a Constitutional right not to take the vaccine," said Shane Dunphy, Managing Director of Sensible Safety, a health and safety training company based in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

Dunphy is referring to an individual's Constitutional personal right to bodily integrity. In addition to this, the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 provide for protection from discrimination on grounds including disability or religion – so employees can invoke these reasons for choosing not to be vaccinated.

And, given that many younger people will not be eligible for vaccination until later in the year, any change to their work circumstances on the grounds of non-vaccination would constitute discrimination on the grounds of age.

"It's vital for the employer to have a conversation with employees – listen to their concerns, don't give an opinion, and then do an appropriate risk assessment arising from the conversation," said Dunphy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

That risk assessment should be in line

with the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment's Work Safety Protocol (a revision of May 2020 Return to Work Safely Protocol).

It outlines measures to suppress Covid-19 in the workplace – measures that Dunphy claimed will have to continue to be implemented until December, and possibly into 2022. These measures include "staying two metres apart, wearing masks, social distancing, and employers may require people who are not vaccinated to take a PCR test at the employer's cost", he said.

Such PCR testing would fall under the employer's responsibility under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005) to provide a safe place of work, to carry out risk assessments to identify health and safety risks, and to minimise identified risks. And whilst an employer may know if an employee is vaccinated, that information is not for public consumption – though it may be the subject of canteen talk.

"So, employers will have to have robust policies in place around bullying and isolation," said Dunphy, adding that employers cannot put all the unvaccinated staff on one shift, as that would amount to discrimination.

EMPLOYERS' DUTY OF CARE

Employers also have a duty of care around employees' mental health and to listen to their concerns and address how to deal with those concerns, noted Dunphy. "Those conversations need to happen pretty quickly – and discreetly – after people return to work – and they may be through questionnaires rather than group talks.



Shane Dunphy is MD of Sensible Safety, based in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

"As well as updating their risk assessments and safety statements, staff will also have to be retrained on Covid protocols on their return to work. We may get to a place where Covid is similar to the normal flu, but it is also likely that we will be in a place where 80 per cent of the population is vaccinated, and 20 per cent is not.

"So, the likes of physical distancing, ventilation, wearing masks while moving around the office, changing the mask during the day, cleaning and hand-washing regimes should be standard. And, if you are coughing, sneezing, or have a high temperature, you need to stay at home.

"Treat everyone as if they are non-vaccinated and follow the lockdown protocols for the foreseeable future – for now, behaviour can't change as the risk is still there."



THE NATIONAL AMBULANCE SERVICE



COVID-19 Response

On 4th March 2020 the NAS responded to the COVID 19 emergency, the NAS moved quickly to perform COVID19 home testing by redeploying front-line ambulance clinicians from emergency response to COVID19 testing, as solo responders in Rapid Response Vehicles (RRV). NAS staff were trained in nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal swabbing and sample handling, supply chains for testing kits and PPE were put in place, and arrangements made to facilitate expedited transport of completed tests to the National Virus Reference Laboratory.

NAS then introduced 'pop-up' testing centres to allow for testing of large groups of people in a controlled environment and further developed into static site testing with our colleagues in community health.

The NAS has been maintaining normal operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has additional responsibility for COVID-specific initiatives. At a very early stage in the COVID-19 pandemic the NAS was determined to be a key provider of COVID-19 testing, and has carried out in excess of **308,000** tests (07:00hrs 8th Feb 2021). This includes testing in home, community and residential care settings. The NAS also implemented a dedicated COVID-19 command centre with increased clinical capacity, supported by the introduction of an identification system which allows staff on the 112/999 call system to assess patients who may be COVID-19 positive. COVID-19 specific Pre-Hospital patient assessment and treatment protocols were put in place which emphasise treatment at home and ensure transport to an acute hospital is reserved for serious or life threatening cases.

CAREERS IN THE NAS



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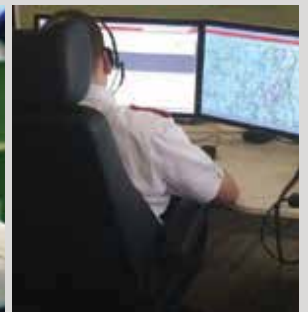
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NEW SICK LEAVE SCHEME PHASED IN OVER FOUR YEARS

Ireland's new statutory sick pay scheme means that all workers will now have the right to be paid for up to 10 days of sick leave per year by 2025. Under the new plans agreed as recently announced by the Government, the scheme will be phased in over a four-year period to help employers to plan ahead and manage the additional cost. Report by Grace Heneghan.



The Government's new statutory sick pay scheme will be phased in over a four-year period to help employers, particularly small businesses, to plan ahead and manage the additional cost.

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD, recently announced the details of his new law to give all workers the right to paid sick leave. The scheme will start off with three days per year in 2022, rising to five days payable in 2023 and seven days payable in 2024, and employers will eventually cover the cost of 10 sick days per year in 2025.

"Ireland is one of the few advanced countries in Europe not to have a

mandatory sick pay scheme. And although about half the number of employers provide sick pay, we need to make sure that every worker, especially lower paid workers in the private sector, have the security and peace of mind of knowing that if they fall ill and miss work, they won't lose out on a full day's pay," noted the Tánaiste.

POSITIVE LEGACIES OF PANDEMIC

He said that this scheme can be one of the positive legacies of the pandemic as "it will apply to illness of all forms and not just those related to Covid".

The Government has approved the drafting of the General Scheme of the Sick Leave Bill 2021, which will be the

latest in a series of actions that have improved social protections for workers and the self-employed over the last five years, including:

- Paternity benefit,
- Parental leave benefit,
- Enhanced maternity benefit,
- Treatment benefit, and
- The extension of social insurance benefits to the self-employed.

Statutory sick pay will be paid by employers at a rate of 70% of an employee's wage, subject to a daily threshold of €110 (based on 2019 mean weekly earnings of €786.33 and equates to an annual salary of €40,889.16). It can be revised over time by ministerial

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order in line with inflation and changing incomes.

The rate of 70% and the daily cap are set to ensure excessive costs are not placed solely on employers, who in certain sectors may also have to deal with the cost of replacing staff members who are out sick at short notice.

MINIMUM LEVEL OF PROTECTION

The General Scheme of the Sick Leave Bill is primarily intended to provide a minimum level of protection to low paid employees, who may have no entitlement to company sick pay schemes, or are not entitled to illness benefit.

The legislation will expressly state that this does not prevent employers offering better terms or unions negotiating for more through a collective agreement. "This reform is part of the pandemic dividend, the more inclusive economy and fairer society we are going to build once the pandemic is over.

"It's not right that people feel forced to go to work when they are sick and it's not good for public health. I know how difficult the past year and a half has been for workers and employers alike," the Tánaiste noted.

"We are only now getting back on our feet and are not yet out of woods. By phasing this in over a four-year period, we are taking a balanced approach to plug a well acknowledged gap in our social protections, while also responding to the cost concerns of small businesses in the current economic environment. The scheme is designed to

IRELAND IS SECOND-WORST COUNTRY IN EUROPE FOR SICK PAY

Ireland is one of the worst countries in Europe for sick pay, second only to Malta, while Iceland comes out on top, according to an analysis of the best and worst performing countries by The Compensation Experts.

The very low ranking is due to the fact that Ireland has no legal minimum sick pay. Instead, the amount of sick pay which an employee is entitled to is determined in their contract.

The Compensation Experts analysed sick-pay packages across every country in Europe and ranked them based on their minimum and maximum figures. It says that sick pay has become a contentious topic in recent times, with countless Europeans required to take time off work to recover from illness as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, there's very little consistency across Europe, in terms of sick pay, with some nations offering benefits far better than their continental neighbours. Undertaking research to reveal the sick pay packages of every European nation, each country has been ranked on how well they compensate their nationals in times of ill health.

For more information on which countries top the charts and those at the bottom of the league table visit <https://the-compensation-experts.co.uk/european-sick-pay/>



be fair and affordable with the minimum complexity and administrative burden for employers."

Other features of the scheme are that an employee will have to obtain a

medical certificate to avail of statutory sick pay, and the entitlement is subject to the employee having worked for their employer for a minimum of six months.

QUALIFYING FOR ILLNESS BENEFIT

Once entitlement to sick pay from their employer ends, employees who need to take more time off may qualify for illness benefit from the Department of Social Protection, subject to PRSI contributions.

Statutory entitlement to sick pay will be phased in as part of a four-year plan and will initially be for three days per annum in 2022. This will effectively fill the gap in coverage caused by Illness Benefit waiting days. Closing the gap of current waiting days before accessing Illness Benefit will minimise the numbers of sick employees presenting for work.

This four-year plan takes account of the current economic climate and the existing financial pressures on businesses. The number of days will increase incrementally with the goal that employers will eventually cover the cost of 10 sick days per annum in year four.



"Ireland is one of the few advanced countries in Europe not to have a mandatory sick pay scheme," according to Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD.



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H&S PROFESSIONALS VOLUNTEER TIME AND EXPERTISE

National Volunteering Week on 17-23 May presented an ideal opportunity for the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) to thank members who give their time voluntarily on the committees of its branches, districts and sections. Here we take a look at the voluntary work of some IOSH members who are based in Ireland.

Volunteers continue to contribute enormously to society, from charity fundraising to organising clubs and associations.

They are recognised each year during National Volunteering Week – a celebration which takes place during the third week of May.

Non-profit organisations are managed by voluntary boards of trustees, and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) is no exception.

Representing over 47,000 health and safety professionals worldwide, the organisation has several branches and districts in Ireland, each with its own

committee of volunteers.

Whether they act as chairs, treasurers, communications co-ordinators, mentors or in other voluntary capacities, they share a deep conviction in keeping members informed, updated and motivated.

Meetings to discuss important topics and professional developments don't just happen, and briefings don't appear from thin air. They are the result of dedicating huge amounts of time, care, energy and thought. IOSH members are so much the richer for the hours put in by the volunteers, and IOSH can achieve far more – for many more people – than it otherwise could.

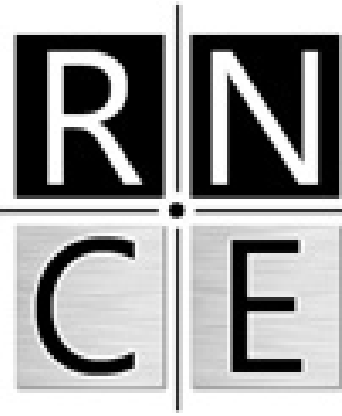
TO INFLUENCE AND TO ENABLE

Speaking to IOSH volunteers, you could be forgiven for thinking that volunteering can be a full-time job in itself. You can be extremely busy, depending on the particular voluntary role that you have and it means being accountable to



For Deirdre Sinnott McFeat, Chair of IOSH South Eastern District Branch, the cliché of “wanting to put something back into the profession” initially led her to give her time.

Richard Nolan
civil engineering



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“Having a network that puts on events and conferences about topical subjects is vital for raising our professional standards” – Yvette Moffatt, who chaired the Ireland East Branch for four years and remains an active committee member.

others. So, what is it that makes IOSH members take on this extra set of tasks and responsibilities?

For Deirdre Sinnott McFeat, Chair of the South Eastern District of IOSH's Ireland South Branch, the cliché of wanting to put something back into the profession was what initially led her to give her time. “I wanted to reinvigorate the safety conversation and re-engage the profession,” she says.

However, as she herself developed professionally, her focus began to change. Now she is concentrating on using her experience and national and international contacts to enrich the South Eastern District and its membership.

“I’m an influencer and an enabler. I influence committee members to give back to the IOSH cause and I try to help them with their personal and professional development. I enable volunteer networking opportunities, peer support, opportunities to learn and develop expertise, and the promotion of health and safety topics in the local area.”

SUPPORT FOR OTHER MEMBERS

Having chaired the Ireland East Branch for four years, Yvette Moffatt remains an active committee member, and understands that her role is vital in providing support for other members.

“I realised that many health and safety professionals tend to be in a team of one in their organisations. It’s really important to be able to talk to peers and mix with like-minded people – to vent and

discuss, get support and share ideas.

“We’re all as good as our learning, so having a network that puts on events and conferences about topical subjects is vital for raising our professional standards. That’s one of the reasons I got involved in the committee,” Yvette notes.

Ruth Donohoe, who succeeded Yvette, has been Chair of the Ireland East Branch for more than three years. She had been a committee member for some time, inspired by a commitment to deliver value to the membership – ensuring that members are informed about the latest guidance and any new developments in the field.

Asked why she wanted to take on the role of Branch Chair when it became available, Ruth replies that she wanted to challenge herself. At that time, the situation in her workplace was that she had no direct reports or need to manage a budget.

Her voluntary role offered her “a great opportunity to acquire new experiences and skills”, a view echoed by Yvette: “Volunteering has helped with my professional development. You need – or soon learn – marketing and organisational skills.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

With volunteering, there is a passion, a commitment and a determination to do something well, not because of the promise of a financial reward, but due to some less obvious return. Deirdre gains great satisfaction in knowing that her contribution can make a difference.

“With more than 23 years of experience in regulatory occupational safety and health, I have a position of influence and authority and I feel that I can use this to good effect to, for example, attract high-quality speakers to our meetings,” she says.

Yvette measures it in terms of a sense of achievement and fulfilment, and this seems to be a common factor for many IOSH volunteers: “When you finish running an event and people come up to you to saying, ‘that discussion really helped my thinking and I’m going to introduce that process or practice in my workplace’ – that’s a real satisfaction.”

One of Yvette’s main goals is to see graduate members move on to Chartered status quickly, rather than years after achieving Grad status.

So, she decided to join the IOSH Mentoring Scheme and since then has helped three Graduate members to gain Chartered status – an achievement of

which she is justly proud.

Ruth is clear about her responsibility to the health and safety profession and enthusiastic about wanting to get more people involved.

“I think that the profession always has to move forward, to be aware of what’s coming up next. Being part of the committee, and especially as Chair, gives you a role in helping to shape the future of the profession – you’re active in that process, rather than a passive recipient. You produce rather than consume.”



Current Chair of the Ireland East Branch for more than three years, Ruth Donohue was inspired by a commitment to deliver value to the membership.

COMMUNITY OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE

A commonly-held feeling among the volunteers is a sense of shared endeavour, mutual support and collective identity. “Even though we have different roles, I wouldn’t say that I manage committee members; as they are more like friends. It’s very collegial and we work closely to ensure the best outcomes for the membership,” Ruth points out.

“It’s great working with committee members, and we pool our knowledge from different work areas. You learn a lot from others.” As Yvette notes, joining in with others is one of the highlights of voluntary work: “Benefiting from this teamwork is second to none.”

If you know someone whose volunteering for IOSH deserves recognition, perhaps consider nominating them for one of IOSH’s Presidential Awards. For criteria <https://iosh.com/more/our-gov-structure/presidential-team/awards>



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INMO CAMPAIGNS FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

A mental health and wellbeing initiative has been launched by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) to bring awareness and education around mental health supports to all INMO members. It follows recent research findings which revealed that 91% of survey respondents had experienced mental exhaustion while off duty.

This 12-month 'Let's Talk About It' campaign, launched by the INMO in partnership with Cornmarket, was created on the back of a comprehensive research project that looked at the wellbeing of nurses and midwives.

The research identified key themes affecting overall wellbeing including workplace and organisational stressors, COVID-19 stressors, physical health impacts, mental health impacts and knowledge of available services.

Key findings from the research:

- As a result of the Mental Health Impact from COVID, 91% of respondents stated they had experienced mental exhaustion while off duty, and 61% of respondents had considered leaving their healthcare profession*.
- 98% of respondents want mental health support tailored to nurses and midwives**.
- Up to 50% of respondents don't know where to access free mental health support for nurses and midwives**.

Based on these findings, the INMO collaborated with Cornmarket to create an educational awareness campaign that would provide INMO members with access to practical advice and support. An online digital hub has been created with access to informational programmes, podcasts, webinars and events, helpful articles and video content and research.

FATIGUE AND BURNOUT

The supports will also include bespoke content to help INMO members identify the signs of fatigue and burnout, tips for managing mental and emotional stress, therapy tools and content on the impact of night shifts.

Campaign Ambassador Bríd O'Meara is a Mental Health and Wellbeing Consultant, a registered psychiatric and general trained nurse with over three decades of experience working in Mental Health in Ireland.

She said that the 'Let's Talk About It' campaign was important in today's climate, not least given the events of the past year. "The aim is to create awareness amongst INMO members of

the indicators of compromised wellbeing and provide access to tailored practical advice and information on supports available.

"As a psychiatric and general nurse, I'm thrilled to be involved with this initiative as it is so close to my heart. I know this campaign will bring more awareness to mental health and provide supports to our incredible healthcare professionals."

BENEFICIAL SUPPORTS

The initiative will drive awareness and education and also partner with trusted mental health experts and wellbeing programmes to deliver beneficial supports. The collective includes Zevo Health bespoke resources, Aware Life Skills CBT programmes, '50808' Text About It, Employer EAPs and the INMO 24-hour Counselling Phone Line.

Karen McGowan, INMO President, said: "Our members are healthcare professionals working in incredibly difficult circumstances; 91% of our members had experienced mental exhaustion when they were off duty, while 61% thought about leaving the profession*.

"This campaign will encourage members to utilise the services available to them, while starting a conversation around the serious need for mental health and wellbeing support for frontline workers."

The initiative will also include a podcast series with former nurse, Norah Casey, whom McGowan said will help build trust and education through normalisation and shared experience. "This will be one of many elements of the campaign and one that will hopefully resonate well with our members."

Clodagh Ruddy, Head of Client Services at Cornmarket, said: "As the administrator for the INMO Salary Protection Scheme for many years, Cornmarket has a unique understanding of the conditions which cause claims. With this in mind, an initiative around mental health and wellbeing was built into the scheme during its last review."

** Cornmarket's Let's Talk About It Research Project (April 2021), based on responses from 2,642 nurses and midwives from the INMO Covid-19 Mental Health Survey (October 2020).*

*** Cornmarket's Shape the Initiative Survey (March 2021), based on 1,134 responses from INMO Income Protection Scheme Members.*

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STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS HEALTH CONCERNS



As part of the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan (2021-2025), the Government will link in with businesses and employers, public bodies and organisations, sports and voluntary groups, communities and families across the country as part of a cross-government approach with a special emphasis on health inequalities, and to enable people to live healthier lives.

Building on the success of the Healthy Ireland Framework, which was published in 2013, the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan contains 56 actions across six themes, which will be implemented over the next five years.

Each action has a lead government department from across 14 separate Government Departments. In the first seven years of implementation, Healthy Ireland through its partnerships has built cross-society foundations which will help it deliver into the future.

This latest Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan provides the latest roadmap on the provision of access to services, healthy environments, with the ambition of promoting resilience to ensure that everyone can enjoy physical and mental, health and wellbeing, to their full potential.

Following the launch of the plan in May, Taoiseach Micheál Martin noted that as Ireland begins to slowly emerge from the pandemic, now more than ever people have a greater focus on their health, and an understanding of their overall sense of wellbeing and how it can be impacted so greatly.

“Healthy Ireland gives us a vision of how we as a society can work together to bring about a healthier Ireland where everyone can enjoy physical and mental, health and wellbeing, to their full potential.”

He said that the government will be placing a special emphasis on health inequalities in this plan, to make sure that all people are enabled and empowered to live healthier lives.

SETTING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

The plan was launched on 11 May by Health Minister Stephen Donnelly TD (pictured above), and Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy Frank Feighan TD.



Taoiseach Micheál Martin said that as Ireland begins to emerge from the pandemic, “people have an understanding of their overall sense of wellbeing and how it can be impacted so greatly”.



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Healthy Ireland The next 3 years

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18



Sláintecare Healthy Communities established in disadvantaged communities

Initiatives developed to address health inequalities implemented in 18 areas by 2022 and roll-out to more groups progressed.

4,500



People benefitting from the Sláintecare Age-Friendly Healthy Homes Scheme

The new scheme will help older people to live in their own home with dignity and independence for as long as possible.

14



Government Departments with enhanced involvement on the determinants of health

Government Departments will have ownership of actions across Government on the determinants of health.

5+



New policies developed to promote and improve public health and wellbeing

The evidence-led policies and action plans will address sexual health, physical activity, nutrition, obesity, alcohol and mental health promotion.

500



More GAA clubs providing the holistic Healthy Clubs model to members and communities

An action plan to drive participation among other sporting organisations will be developed and implementation evaluated.

30



Third-level institutions implementing the Healthy Campus programme

Toolkits and evaluation guidelines to support local programmes will be produced and models of best practice will be identified.

communities bearing a higher burden of chronic disease with increased levels of mortality.”

LOCAL AND NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Minister Donnelly said that this plan aims to address those communities most impacted by the social determinants of health through the inclusion of a new Sláintecare Healthy Communities programme, working in particular with local authorities, other government departments, NGOs, and the HSE to tackle health inequalities.

Minister Frank Feighan pointed out that partnership has been the cornerstone of Healthy Ireland.

“COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of bringing together key players and stakeholders, to work together to a common goal, both at a local and a national level. This next phase of Healthy Ireland will build on these partnerships,” he added.

Laura Magahy, Deputy Secretary at the Department of Health with responsibility for the implementation of Sláintecare, including Healthy Ireland, said: “One of the key principles of Sláintecare is to promote health and wellbeing and prevent illness and this principle embodies all that Healthy Ireland seeks to achieve.

“The Healthy Ireland Framework provides the architecture to address the social determinants of health, and thereby prevent chronic disease and other

Minister Donnelly said: “Healthy Ireland is a core part of the implementation of Sláintecare, in particular on keeping people well in their own homes and communities, and helping people to stay out of hospital for as long as possible.

“National policies and strategies have been developed and are being implemented across a range of health

behaviours that impact the health and wellbeing of our people, including physical activity, obesity, smoking, alcohol, sexual health and skin cancer. All this work has set very strong foundations on which to build for the next five years.

“We know that health and wellbeing is not evenly distributed across the population with our most deprived

avoidable illness and incapacity. We have ambitious plans over the next five years and I look forward in particular to the Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme.”

To download the plan click on

<https://bit.ly/3wt9hVr>

For further information email

healthyireland@health.gov.ie

SPOTLIGHT ON REMOTE ERGONOMIC ASSESSMENTS

Many organisations may not be fully aware of what they need to do to ensure employees have suitable remote or home working set-ups, writes Andy Mackin, CEO of Mackin. He says that more Irish employers need to undertake remote ergonomic assessments with each employee to critically assess work stations, and to act before any preventable issues arise.



According to a study from the Royal Society for Public Health in February 2021, one in four employees still work from home from either a sofa or a bedroom; 39% had developed musculoskeletal problems while 60% found that their physical activity decreased.

In March 2020, many professionals across Ireland found themselves sitting at kitchen tables, in their bedrooms or using desks squeezed into whatever space they would fit.

There was an initial perception that this was a short-term change under lockdown and we would be returning to the office in a matter of weeks or, at worst, months.

Since then, Ireland still has one of the highest proportion of remote workers

in Europe. According to a March 2021 survey conducted by Eurofound, over 40% of Irish workers work remotely, at least part of the time.

With the Government's National Remote Work Strategy giving workers the right to request to work remotely, it's clear remote and blended working practices are here to stay and Irish

employers need to plan accordingly.

The home office is an extension of the workplace. It is essential that employers understand employees' physical work set-ups and provide the right guidance and assistance to maintain their health and productivity.

Remote ergonomic assessments are a vital step in achieving this.



Remote assessments can help prevent both short-term and long-term injuries that can increase company liability to employees working from home.

EMPLOYER'S DUTY OF CARE

At Mackin, we have found that many organisations are still not fully aware of what they should be doing to ensure their employees have suitable work set-ups at home. There has been a sharp increase in incidences of injuries associated with the working from home environment.

A February 2021 study from the Royal Society for Public Health found that over one in four are still working from home from either a sofa or a bedroom; 39% had developed musculoskeletal problems while 60% found that their physical activity decreased.

Ergonomic assessments are a legal obligation and are critical to keeping employees safe and well. However,



A review of an employee's equipment should include the correct chair, desk and monitor set-up.

while organisations no longer have the same access to many employees' work stations, these need to be carried out virtually and documented appropriately.

Worryingly, it has been our experience that the majority of businesses have not carried out an assessment of any type, which leaves them hugely exposed. Remote assessments can help prevent both short-term and long-term injuries that

can increase company liability to employees working from home.

APPROPRIATE ACTIONS TO TAKE

Remote Ergonomic Assessments are the only way that you can be certain that your remote employees have the information and equipment they need. If they don't, you can then advise them on the correct and appropriate actions required to remedy any potential issues.

These assessments should be carried out with each employee over a video call so that their set-up can be analysed in real-time and questions asked.

Depending on the organisation and the employee, items to be covered include:

- Review of employee's equipment including:
 - o Correct chair and correct set-up
 - o Desk and monitor set-up
 - o Keyboard and mouse set-up
 - o Cables and electronics
- Assessment of overall work environment from lighting to proper use of space.
- Questions on behaviours and habits including posture, rest breaks, physical activity etc.

Issues raised during an assessment should be referred to the appropriate team members to make sure that the correct assistance or help is made available. All health and safety policies should also be updated to include a dedicated policy on remote working.

From what we have seen, many companies have not put the plans in place to deal long-term with a hybrid and remote workforce. Now is the time to critically assess and act before preventable issues arise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As CEO of Mackin, Andy has responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the organisation, and also works with many clients across all sectors in Ireland, the UK, Europe and the US.

He holds a Diploma in Health and Safety from UCC, a Certificate in Training and Education from NUI Galway, and has over 20 years' experience in Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). In 2020, Andy Mackin was a finalist in the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

Originally from Dundalk, he has been living in Cork since 1985. He served for 21 years as a member of the Irish Naval Service and, during this time, qualified as an electrician. It was here that he gained his initial experience with risk management and developed his appreciation of EHS.

His company offers two business service offerings through Mackin Talent and Mackin EHS. Mackin Talent provides custom talent management solutions for companies across IT, financial and healthcare sectors; while Mackin EHS offers a range of environmental health and safety consultancy and training services. In May 2021, the company was announced as one of the finalists of the Cork Chamber's Company of the Year awards in the Large Business category.

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HOW WORKPLACES WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF WORK



Many organisations have found themselves operating entirely or partially on a remote basis over the last year, and there are decisions to be made on the extent to which this will remain the case as employees return to the physical workplace, writes Anthony Hickey, Organisational Culture Analyst with Great Place to Work Ireland.

Where the future of work is concerned, there is a tendency to speak as though we have already arrived at our destination, or that we are mere passengers on the journey, with little influence over our trajectory. Neither are true, both assumptions disempower organisations and the individuals who comprise them.

The position we find ourselves in as we begin to emerge from the shadow cast by the pandemic presents a rare and exciting opportunity. It is possible now, to be agents of change and exert influence that will guide how we work for years to come.

It is the organisations at the forefront of their industries, those who push the boundaries of organisational culture

Amongst Ireland's Best Workplaces, an average of 75% of employees agree that:

Management involves people in decisions that affect their jobs or work environment.

Amongst Ireland's Best Workplaces, an average of 81% of employees agree that:

Management genuinely seeks and responds to suggestions and ideas.

that will be looked at to determine the shape that the future of work is taking. This bears reflecting on, the future is not prescribed, it is shaped through rigorous planning and informed actions.

Many organisations have found

themselves operating entirely or partially on a remote basis over the last year, and there are decisions to be made on the extent to which this will remain the case.

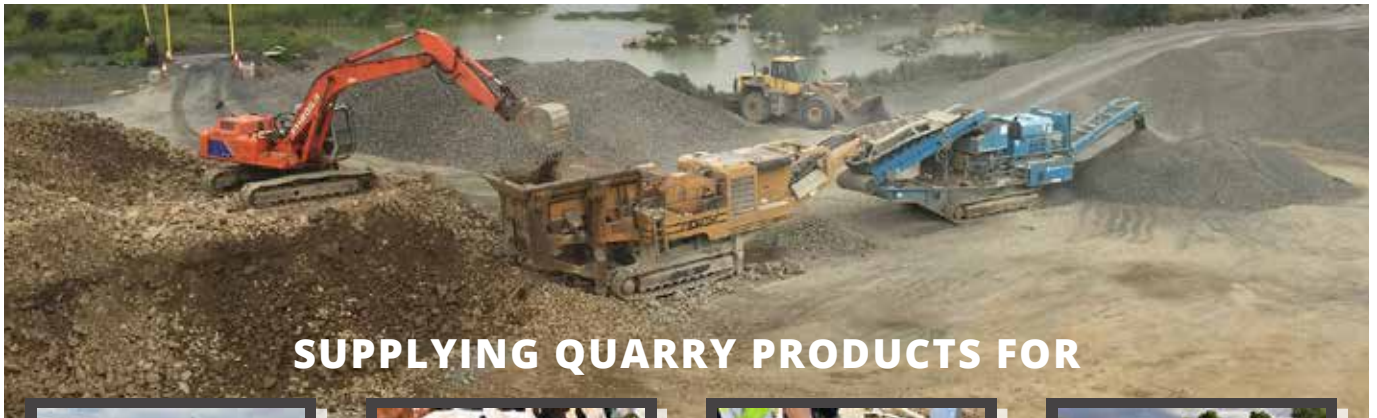
It is how an organisation arrives at those decisions that will shape the culture moving forward. The means through which choices are made and communicated will play a major role in the success of any model, whether that be fully remote, on-site, or hybrid.

From this data (on the left), drawn from the combined responses of tens of thousands of employees, it is clear that a 'Great Workplace' is one where employees are given a voice and opportunities to shape their environment.

Of course, it is not possible to involve employees in every decision, leaders will always need to make choices that guide

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When restrictions end, will you continue to facilitate remote working, and if so, what will be the role of the office in your way of working? The time is fast approaching where organisations will need to provide the answers to these questions.

Solutions for Organisations

- Communicate your intention to develop future working arrangements.
- Hold focus groups to understand the associated challenges and opportunities.
- Draw on survey data to understand the areas to focus on and develop actions plans.
- In a hybrid model, collaborate to determine reasons for coming together on-site.
- Trust that suggestions from employees are genuine, valuable, and well-intentioned.

Naturally, it is first and foremost necessary to continue to deliver for customers, clients and external stakeholders. Ensuring continuity of service in this area will always be a priority, but there is much room for flexibility when this is occurring. Work in conjunction with your employees to shape your shared future, and your

customers will surely feel the benefits of an empowered, engaged workforce.

For our part at Great Place to Work, we will be with you every step of the way. This is very much a shared journey for us, and we will be here to offer guidance and support through our consultations, publications, and webinars. Our role will be to leverage this brand to shine a spotlight on organisations that continue to create Great Workplaces, whatever form they take.



For further information please visit www.greatplacetowork.ie

the direction of the business, but on this issue in particular, it is beneficial to draw on the perspectives of staff members.

Questions for Organisations

- When restrictions end, will you continue to facilitate remote working?
- If so, what will be the role of the office in your way of working?
- How did you arrive at those decisions?
- Have you integrated lessons learnt from the last year into your plans?
- If so, where did you draw those insights from?

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The time is fast approaching where answers to these questions will be needed. Do not wait and see what others are doing, as it is Great Workplaces that will set the standard here. Continue to engage with employees to determine what will work for your organisation.

Leverage those tried and tested communication tools to arrive at a decision as a group.



“Continue to engage with employees to determine what will work for your organisation” – Anthony Hickey, Organisational Culture Analyst with Great Place to Work Ireland.

INSPIRING EMPLOYEES IN THE POST-COVID-19 WORKPLACE

With offices set to reopen over the coming months, some employees may be chomping at the bit to meet up with their workplace colleagues, while others may need to be coaxed back, writes Dan Harding, CEO of 'Sign-In App'. Here he outlines the steps which companies may take to ensure that all employees will want to re-establish collaboration and connection.



A recent survey *'THE RISE OF THE HYBRID WORKPLACE: A Global Survey of Executives, Employee Experience Experts, and Knowledge Workers'* confirmed that nearly every employee is worried about returning to work, with concerns about touching shared office devices, social distancing, cleanliness, and more. Yet, just nine per cent of workers expect to return to the office full time.

It's clear that both employees and employers alike are keen to explore the opportunity of hybrid working, keeping face-to-face contact within some form of an office environment – or touchdown space – a core part of the working experience, even if only for a few days each month.

If companies want to re-engage employees with the physical workspace, they need to start planning now. Instead of waiting for the current restrictions to end, it's time to brush off the office and policy cobwebs and put plans in place ahead of the long-awaited return to the office.

Employers need to consider the steps required to make employees feel safe, supported and motivated in the new hybrid environment, and to check employees' physical and mental wellbeing, and intervene if necessary.

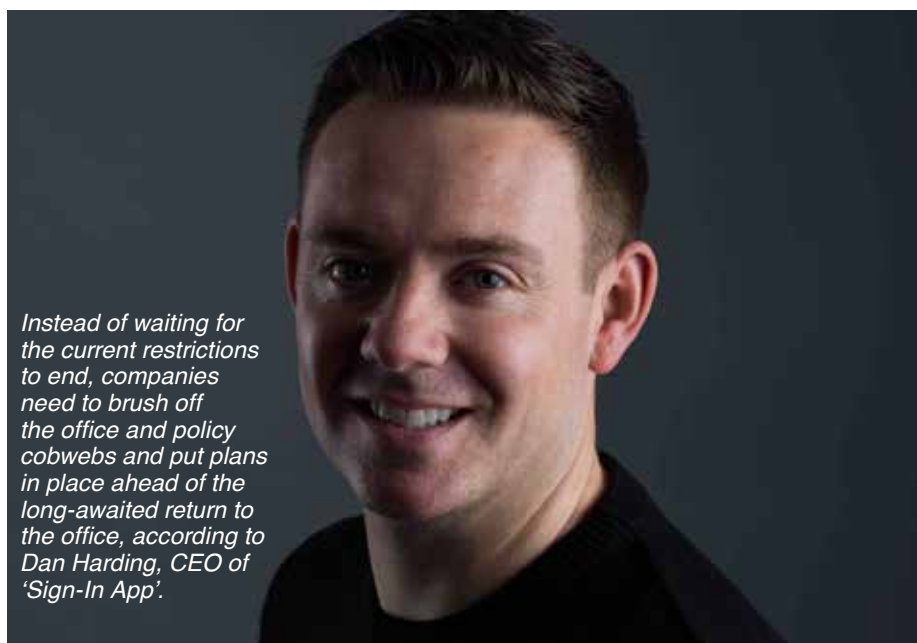
This is not about extra hand sanitiser or one-way systems. Companies need to actively communicate plans with their employees on how they view the new workspace – including how and when it is used.

This is about reimagining the office concept for the better – employer duty of care must receive the same treatment.

KEEPING EMPLOYEES IN THE LOOP

From recreation rooms to shared working spaces, employees need to feel confident that the business has a handle on social distancing.

They want to know how their employer plans to keep track of both staff and visitors on site at any time to meet contact tracing requirements.



Instead of waiting for the current restrictions to end, companies need to brush off the office and policy cobwebs and put plans in place ahead of the long-awaited return to the office, according to Dan Harding, CEO of 'Sign-In App'.



The survey outlines the impact COVID-19 has had on the work environment, the current state of remote workers, their concerns about returning to the office, and the role technology can play in supporting businesses in their transformation to the hybrid workplace. To download a copy click on link <https://bit.ly/3zvWe7G>

And they want to be able to seamlessly collaborate with colleagues regardless of their location in a flexible way. These factors need not be overwhelming for businesses, as innovative, cloud-based technology solutions that are straightforward to deploy and operate hold the key to unlocking the hybrid working future.

Simple apps can be used to sign in to the building, using contactless technology to minimise interactions. This provides a company with accurate and up-to-date information about every employee, visitor and contractor on site at any time. If any individual becomes ill or tests positive for COVID-19, the business has immediate access to the contact details of anyone who has been potentially exposed, allowing effective contact tracing and isolation.

In addition, the app can be used by employees to book desks in advance – with clear rules set to control capacity in every area. For example, in a pod

of four desks, only two can be made available at any one time – all done electronically.

Meeting spaces can be limited to specific numbers – enforcing the rule of six, for example. Showing employees that the space is safe and controlled is a great way to boost their confidence about returning to the office, especially for the first time.

ENSURING STAFF WELLBEING

Adding health questionnaires to the sign-in and out process is also a simple and effective way of keeping track of mental and physical wellbeing.

Obviously,

essential COVID-19 questions such as whether someone is running a temperature or has a cough will be standard requirements within most offices for the foreseeable future.

However, this facility can also be used to check an individual's mental wellbeing, especially if they are using the app to sign in and out of work at home, as well as in the office. In addition to checking that employees are not working excessive hours at home – something that has raised concerns over the past few months – managers can use the app to gain a better understanding of how people are coping with the changing working world.

How are they managing working from home? Do they have ideas about how to improve the collaborative workspace? In a working world that is in an unprecedented transition towards a hybrid environment, this information can provide companies with vital insights to



THE SIGN-IN APP: Marketed as the smart and safe way to sign in, the app allows staff, contractors and visitors to sign in and out of the workplace, in addition to booking desks and meeting rooms. From smartphone contactless sign-ins to RFID and QR code scanning, users may choose a sign-in option that suits their needs. For details visit <https://signinapp.com/>.

inform new policies and procedures that will help to safeguard employees and create a productive workforce.

It's important to keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, no set framework for the new working environment and what will work for one organisation may require further process iterations for the next.

So, what better time than now to consider how the office can be changed for the better, to improve morale, collaboration and productivity through a flexible culture that works for all, underpinned by innovative and adaptable technology solutions.

CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

Few companies expect to welcome the entire workforce back to the office on day one, but many may well be surprised by the reluctance of some individuals to return to any co-working space. Employee expectations of the working world have changed for good so employers need to not only adapt working spaces accordingly, but also their approach to HR and duty of care.

Technology is set to play a key role in this strategy, not only in managing the capacity and safety within the physical office space but also in building confidence and providing a chance to check in with employees and understand what they need to be productive and happy in the office or at home.

HSENI REPORTS DROP IN WORKPLACE FATALITIES

The 21st Annual Report of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) has revealed a significant decrease in fatalities and major injuries in the workplace from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Derek Martin, Chairperson of the HSENI, said he was very encouraged by the reduction in the number of deaths and serious injury during the reporting year.

"The HSENI team and our partners have worked with dedication and determination to make the workplace safer," he noted.

Across all sectors there were 11 deaths, compared with 13 the previous year, which recorded a further death from an incident in 2018-19.

The number of major injuries, which are often life-changing, fell to 290, representing a reduction of 11%, while the number of reportable injuries saw a decrease of 5% to 1,811.

“Our shared resolve remains firm to see further reductions. Working together with our partners and industry bodies we can help everyone to stay safe at work. We will continue to raise awareness of issues in the workplace which are associated with chronic ill-health.”

Martin noted that as the 2019-20 financial year drew to a close, the development of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the organisation and



Derek Martin, HSENI Chairperson.

its activities became apparent.

"The versatility and expertise of HSENI's staff was evident as the nature of the organisation's inspectorate and advisory work is now focused primarily on COVID-related incidents and queries."

INTERAGENCY PARTNERSHIP

During 2019-2020, HSENI carried out 5,399 inspections which resulted in 247 enforcement notices being issued. The Major Investigations Team led 14 successful prosecutions which resulted in fines totaling £602,500.

HSENI's Chief Executive Robert Kidd said: "HSENI remains focused on keeping everyone safe in the workplace by stopping unsafe working practices. Despite a demanding year that saw the additional challenges of COVID-19, excellent progress has been made.

“An unprecedented number of complaints in relation to COVID-19 concerns were received during the final weeks of 2019-2020. HSENI played an important role in supporting co-regulators and assisting industry to implement public health guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

"Our work with partners in the agricultural sector has seen fatalities reduce to one compared to seven in the previous year. Sadly, the number of fatalities in the construction sector increased from three in 2018-19 to four during this reporting period."

Kidd noted that the HSENI's work to reduce occupational ill-health has developed as a result of working with a number of external organisations.

"We have continued to develop our educational programme by delivering



For further information visit www.hseni.gov.uk

over 100 promotional events, seminars, lectures and workshops.

"We dealt with over 6,550 direct calls to our helpline, while almost 100,000 visitors used our website to download publications. HSENI is grateful to those who share our ambition to make Northern Ireland's workplaces as safe and healthy as possible, and who have contributed to the achievement of the outcomes set out in our annual report."



Robert Kidd, HSENI Chief Executive.

BODY CAMERAS TO BOOST SAFETY OF AMBULANCE CREWS

Thousands of ambulance crews across England will be provided with body cameras as part of a crackdown by the National Health Service (NHS) to reduce attacks on staff. The introduction of the cameras comes alongside data that 3,569 ambulance staff were physically assaulted by the public last year – 30% more than five years ago.

Following successful trials in London and the North East, the NHS in England will roll out the cameras to crews in the 10 ambulance trusts across the country – three years ahead of the NHS Long Term Plan target.

Medics will wear the cameras and be able to press a button to start recording if patients or the public become aggressive or abusive, with filming made available to police where needed. The announcement follows the launch of the first ever national Violence Prevention and Reduction Standard at the start of the year, with every NHS trust in England expected to publish a plan to tackle violence towards staff.

Prerana Isaar, NHS Chief People Officer, said: “Every staff member has the fundamental right to be safe at work and it is our priority to eliminate violence and abuse. As well as reducing incidents towards our staff, these cameras are a vital step towards ensuring our people feel safe too.”

“The fact that we are rolling them out to all ten ambulance trusts three years ahead of schedule is testament to our commitment to tackling this problem and is nothing less than our staff deserve.”

DE-ESCALATING SITUATIONS

Initial trial findings have shown that the cameras make staff feel safer and can assist in de-escalating situations where they're faced with someone being aggressive towards them.



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Emergency ambulance crew member Gary Watson, who works for London Ambulance Service, has been wearing a body camera as part of a trial that was launched earlier this year at four ambulance stations in South and North London, in which crews wear the devices.

Gary was violently assaulted by a drunk patient in January 2018, while on duty. He suffered a torn ligament and serious injuries to his face, throat and neck in the attack. Two other medics were also injured and a fourth was badly shaken. A man was convicted, receiving a suspended sentence.

“These cameras are needed, and wearing one makes me feel safer. They act as a deterrent and will also help provide evidence if there is an attack. We go to work to help people, not to be assaulted. It's disgusting that a minority think it is ok to behave in such a violent way,” he said.

Garrett Emmerson, Chief Executive of London Ambulance Service, said: “Whilst the vast majority of our patients and the public treat our crews and call handlers with immense respect, a small minority do not. In the last year, over 600 of our ambulance crews were the victim of physical abuse whilst providing care to Londoners.

“We very much welcome NHS England's decision to accelerate the roll-out of body-worn cameras nationally, which we hope will both deter incidents and ensure the appropriate prosecution and sentencing of those who attack our people.”

The roll-out comes after a year in which NHS staff have treated more than 400,000 COVID patients while continuing to see millions of patients for non-COVID conditions and to successfully deliver the world's first vaccination programme.



Emergency ambulance crew member Gary Watson, who works for London Ambulance Service, has been wearing a body camera as part of a trial that was launched earlier this year.

RISE IN ASSAULTS AGAINST EMERGENCY WORKERS IN WALES

Assaults on emergency workers in Wales are on the rise, as new data reveals that more than 4,240 assaults were committed against emergency workers, including police, fire and ambulance crews, representing a 10% monthly average increase from April 2019 to November 2020.

Assaults ranged from kicking, punching and head-butting, to spitting, slapping, biting and verbal abuse. More than half (58%) of incidents took place in South East Wales, and over a third (37%) were committed by people under the influence of alcohol.

There were 629 (15%) assaults on Welsh Ambulance Service staff over the 20-month period, from paramedics to control room staff. Among them was paramedic Darren Lloyd, who was assaulted by a patient in Bangor, Gwynedd, in April 2019, a result of which the man was jailed for 16 weeks.

Darren said: "We'd been called to a man who was reported to have taken an overdose, so we administered an antidote to try and revive him. When he came to, he punched me

twice and said: "You've f***ed up my last hit!" I was caught unawares, I wasn't ready for it."

"Patients put their trust in you and we put our trust in patients, so when something like this happens, it catches you off guard. It puts you on edge and it changes you. It makes you hyper-aware at other jobs now, and you question everything a lot more. You question why it happened and what you did wrong."

Jason Killens, Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service, said: "Our ambulance crews are there to help people, but they can't fight for someone's life if they're fighting for theirs. Our crews might have no choice but to leave a scene if their personal safety is compromised. A split-second act of violence can have a devastating and long-term impact on our staff, both physically and emotionally."

Two thirds of the assaults (66%) over the 20-month period were committed against police officers, one third (33%) of which resulted in injury.



TRADES UNION CONGRESS SLAMS MOVE TO TIE UP UNIONS IN RED TAPE

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has warned that the government is attempting to tie up unions in red tape, after the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Department recently announced a raft of reforms.

In a ministerial statement on employment rights, BEIS Secretary Paul Scully announced plans for a new "workers' watchdog" to take over responsibility for tackling modern slavery, enforcing minimum wage, and other issues.

The government said this, as yet unnamed regulator, would be a "one-stop shop will improve enforcement and ensure employees and businesses know where to go for help on workers' rights." However, the TUC indicated changes to the

role of the trade union certification officer announced by BEIS the same day exposed the government's real agenda.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said: "This pandemic has brutally exposed the terrible working conditions and insecurity many in Britain face. Millions have turned to unions to protect their jobs, defend their rights and keep their workplaces safe. But rather than cracking down on bad employers, the government is trying to tie unions up in more red tape."

She said that ministers should be working with unions to improve working lives – not looking for new ways to undermine them.

NEW STANDARD ON PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING AT WORK

With psychosocial hazards now increasingly recognised as major challenges to health, safety and well-being at work, the UK's National Standards Body has published a new standard to provide recommendations to organisations on how to prevent work-related psychological ill health in their workers and other relevant interested parties.

The new occupational health and safety management standard (ISO 45003) is the latest international guidance published by the British Standards Institution (BSI) for managing psychosocial risks at work.

For organisations, the impact of psychosocial risks includes increased costs due to absence from work, reduced ability to work effectively and increased staff turnover, as well as damage to the organisation's reputation. Effective management can eliminate or mitigate these risks and lead to benefits such as improved engagement, enhanced productivity and organizational resilience and sustainability.

Scott Steedman, BSI's Director-General of Standards, said: "The global pandemic has put new pressures on people whose employers expect them to work from home or in challenging new working conditions. This business standard is a consensus of good practice for organisations everywhere, providing off-the-shelf advice so that they can enhance the wellbeing of their employees whilst striving to meet business needs, a win-win outcome."

The committee*, which includes experts from 40 countries, developed this international standard to be practical and easy

to understand for every organisation, including those without a dedicated occupational health and safety or human resources function. It is applicable to organisations of all sizes and in all sectors, for the development, implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of healthy and safe workplaces.

*ISO/TC 283 Occupational health and safety management
<https://www.iso.org/committee/4857129.html>



The pandemic has demanded that people adapt to new challenges like remote working, increased isolation and changing priorities.

HEALTH AND CARE STAFF BURNOUT AT 'EMERGENCY' LEVELS

Staff burnout in the NHS and social care has reached emergency levels and poses a risk to the future of services, MPs have warned.

In a highly critical report published on 8 June, the Commons Health and Social Care Committee called for immediate action to support staff who are exhausted from working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

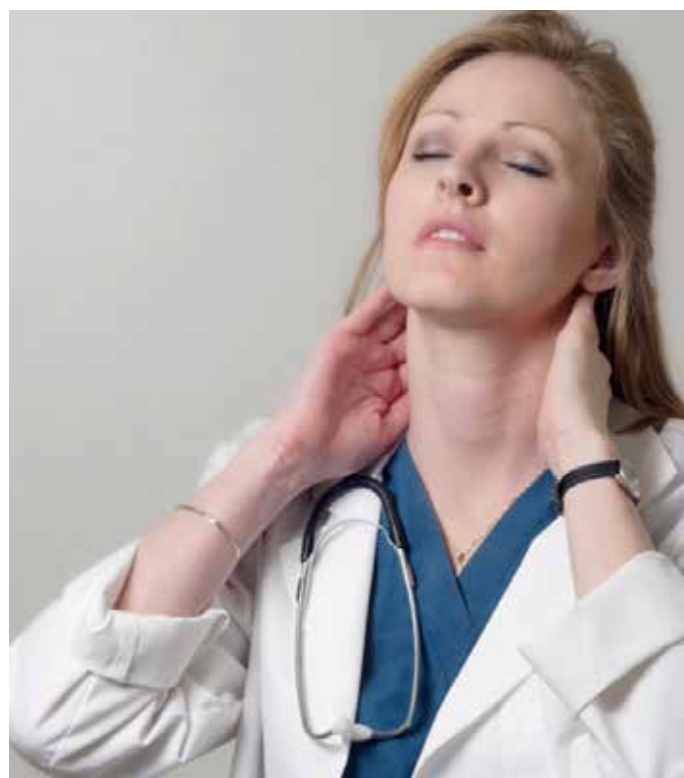
"Burnout will not be solved without a total overhaul of the way the NHS does workforce planning. The least we can do for staff is to show there is a long-term solution to those shortages, ultimately the biggest driver of burnout," according to the report.

The committee said the problems existed before the pandemic - although coronavirus has worsened the pressures. Last July,

the health and social care committee - made up of MPs and chaired by former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt - launched an inquiry to look at the issue, including the level of burnt-out amongst NHS staff.

The latest report said one of the main problems was that there was no accurate "workforce planning" forecast of how many staff the NHS needed for the next five to 10 years. It said there needed to be a "total overhaul of the way the NHS does workforce planning" and there should be annual reports published on how many workers the NHS would need for the next five, 10 and 20 years.

According to the NHS staff survey in 2020, 44 per cent of staff reported feeling unwell as a result of work-related stress in the previous year.





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WIDESPREAD WORKFORCE VACCINATION IS NOT YET SUFFICIENT CONTROL – BOHS

The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) is emphasising to members that widespread workforce vaccination is not yet a sufficient control to allow for the removal of other COVID measures.

Over recent months, while lockdown restrictions have been in place, workplaces have been the frontline for the control of the spread of the pandemic.

Social distancing, testing and good ventilation remain the key to preventing the spread in the workplace. Vaccination is likely to have a significant impact on workplace transmission as well.

However, BOHS warns that simply relying on vaccination over the coming months is a risky strategy for employers and may contribute to outbreaks, undermine the public health benefits of the vaccine programme, or even land the employer in hot water legally.

BOHS President, Kelvin Williams, said that until the virus is



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Health Protection

not as widespread in the population, vaccination alone will not be sufficient.

“Suppressing the risk of asymptomatic infection is not only important to protect workers themselves, but also to reduce the amount of virus in circulation and the potential breeding grounds for new variants. The vaccine promises light at the end of the tunnel, but we are not out of it yet,” Williams added.

For more advice on workplace vaccination and return to work issues visit <https://www.bohs.org/covid-19-hub/>

EMPLOYERS ‘MASSIVELY UNDER-REPORTING’ COVID DEATHS

The number of people who have died of work-related Covid-19 is being “massively under-reported” by employers, according to a new report from the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

‘RIDDOR, Covid and under-reporting’ has highlighted a huge discrepancy between Covid work-related deaths, as reported by employers and data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Public Health England.

Between April 2020 and April 2021 the ONS revealed that 15,263 people of working age died from Covid, but the union pointed out that the legally-required reports filed by employers revealed that just 387 of these deaths came from workers contracting Covid at work.

The union said the under-reporting under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences

Regulations 2013) badly undermines health and safety enforcement during the pandemic.

The TUC believes the true number of work-related deaths is much higher, “especially considering the high number of breaches of safety protocols seen during the pandemic and the high numbers of outbreaks”.

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady said that under-reporting has made it much harder for regulators to track where outbreaks are happening, and allowed bad bosses to get away with flagrant labour rights abuses.”

She added: “The government must fix the deficiencies in how workplace deaths, illnesses and injuries are reported. Ministers must fund enforcement bodies properly to recruit and train qualified workplace inspectors, inspect more workplaces, and prosecute companies that don’t keep their workers safe.”

LONG COVID COMPENSATION DECISION COULD TAKE A YEAR

A decision on whether key workers with long Covid should get compensation could take more than a year, government advisers have told the BBC, with the admission coming after 65 MPs and peers wrote to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson asking for the illness to be made an ‘occupational disease’ eligible for state compensation.

More than one million people in the UK are thought to have long Covid, including over 120,000 healthcare workers. While NHS staff with long Covid receive full pay for a year in England and Wales – and longer in Scotland and Northern Ireland – many employees in the private sector only get 28 weeks’ Statutory Sick Pay, while many insecure and low paid workers don’t qualify for even this.

Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran, who chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group on Coronavirus, said she wants long Covid to be classed as an ‘occupational disease’ which would allow sufferers to be awarded a benefit according to their degree of disability – called an Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB).

However, Dr Lesley Rushton, Chair of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (the body that advises the government on whether it should classify an illness as an ‘occupational disease’) recently told BBC Radio 4’s ‘File on 4’ programme that such a recommendation could take a year. She said the Council is hampered by a lack of research and data, with a major issue in proving that someone got Covid through their work.

CANADA: VIRTUAL 'XXII WORLD CONGRESS' NOW OPEN FOR REGISTRATION



From 20-23 September, the prevention community will gather together in Toronto to address this global priority at the XXII World Congress on Safety and Health at Work.

With prevention on everybody's mind, within the past year, safety and health at work has emerged as the critical issue around the world.

It is quite appropriate then that the XXII World Congress will embrace the theme of 'Prevention in the Connected Age: global solutions to achieve safe and healthy work for all' in September.

The three main topics on the agenda will be as follows:

- Innovations in Addressing Longstanding Safety and Health Challenges.
- Implications of the Changing World of Work for Occupational Safety and Health.
- Advancing a Culture of Prevention.



For further information and registration details visit <https://www.safety2021canada.com/>

MALTA POLICE DEPLOYS BODY-WORN CAMERAS TO ALL FRONTLINE OFFICERS

The recent deployment by Malta Police Force of body-worn cameras to all frontline officers across Malta is part of the country's transformation strategy to modernise the police force while increasing trust and transparency with the community.

The five-year service contract with Motorola Solutions for the comprehensive video solution includes evidence management software to process captured video footage securely and the new Holster Aware feature, which allows the camera to start recording automatically once a weapon is drawn.

"Every day, these body-worn cameras will capture evidence, deliver transparency and increase the efficiency of our workflows. In high-stress situations, often faced by our officers, this technology will capture critical footage of what's happening on the scene without impacting our officers' focus, or attention," according to Malta Police Commissioner Angelo Gafà.



Integrated with VB400 cameras, the new Bluetooth-activated Holster Aware sensor detects if an officer removes their weapon from its holster and automatically activates the officer's body-worn camera to start recording.

When this occurs, the body-worn cameras of those officers in close proximity will also activate, providing a holistic view of the situation from multiple perspectives. As part of the agency's workflow, the video footage will be directly uploaded, securely stored and organised using Motorola Solutions' VideoManager evidence management software.

"Malta Police joins police agencies around the world in adopting our integrated body-worn video and cloud-based evidence management solution to increase transparency and allow police officers to focus on keeping communities safe," noted Michael Kaae, Motorola's Regional Vice President of Europe.

Motorola Solutions' VB400 body-worn cameras are widely adopted by frontline emergency teams including national police forces in France, Belgium Police, Romanian Police, Romanian Border Police and multiple police forces across the UK.

USA: NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL MOVES TO IMPROVE BUILDING CONSTRUCTION SAFETY

New York City Council has recently introduced five construction safety bills and thousands of proposed amendments to the city's building construction codes, aimed at protecting construction workers and the public, according to New York City's Department of Buildings (DOB).

Previous safety efforts by DOB, including the implementation of an unprecedented construction safety training requirement, resulted in a 34% decrease in injuries on building construction sites from 2018 to 2020, DOB noted in a press statement.

One of the bills – 'Intro 2278' – calls for all general contractors to be licensed by DOB and would require license applicants to meet certain qualifications. It also would allow DOB to take disciplinary action, including suspending and revoking licenses, against contractors, if necessary.

Under 'Intro 2263', DOB-licensed site safety co-ordinators or managers would be required on major construction projects that are seven stories and higher. Meanwhile, 'Intro 2276' would require DOB-licensed construction



superintendents to serve full-time alongside SSCs or SSMs on worksites that are seven stories and higher.

Another safety bill 'Intro 2264' is aimed at enhancing safety requirements for professionals performing cold-formed steel light-frame construction work, while 'Intro 2262' would permanently prohibit the use of stand-off brackets for C-hook suspended scaffold installations.

In addition, 627 new or expanded changes to existing codes have been proposed, along with thousands of minor

changes.

If implemented, they'd be the first comprehensive update to city construction codes since 2014, the statement notes.

The proposed code revisions include those related to construction safety, elevator safety, emergency response, fire protection, and building system

construction and inspection.

"We must strive for safety through thoughtful legislation that incorporates the input from a wide range of stakeholders," noted New York City Council member Robert E. Cornegy Jr, Chair of the Housing and Buildings Committee.

"I do not accept that construction deaths are inevitable. I do not accept that buildings should explode from gas leaks or that elevator mishaps lead to death."

AUSTRALIA: 'HUGE STEP FORWARD' ON WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Australia is to introduce a new law to tackle hazards to mental health at work, in what unions have described as a 'huge step forward', with federal and state workplace health and safety ministers having agreed the need for the new law.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) welcomed the decision to regulate psychosocial hazards, saying it will have a significant impact in preventing mental illness, sexual harassment and gendered violence in the workplace. The regulation on psychosocial hazards will place a positive obligation on employers to minimise and eliminate hazards to mental health from the workplace – just as they are required to in relation to physical hazards.

"Up to 45 per cent of mental health issues are attributable to work – requiring employers to take preventative action on this is a massive step forward. This will include tackling the causes of sexual harassment at work, a key step in making work safe for women," according to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien.

"Years of campaigning from working people and their unions, along with the support of mental health and gender equality organisations have gone into winning this regulation – it will make Australian workplaces safer for future generations of workers," he added.

O'Brien said a failure to agree the need for nationwide industrial manslaughter law was a disappointment, with laws already in place in some states. "We will continue to fight for industrial manslaughter legislation. Workplaces in Tasmania, SA and NSW would be safer for workers if employers could be held accountable for preventable deaths. It should not matter what postcode your loved one dies in as to whether you receive justice," he noted.



ACTU's Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien said a failure to agree the need for nationwide industrial manslaughter law was a disappointment. "We will continue to fight for industrial manslaughter legislation," he added.

PPE SERIES PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON ‘PROTECTING WORKERS, PROTECTING LIVES’

A unique nine-episode docuseries about personal protective equipment (PPE), which aims to protect workers and save lives, from the International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) – the association for PPE and technologies – features experts from SGS, the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company.

The ‘Protecting Workers, Protecting Lives’ series puts the spotlight on the PPE industry and features key influencers from manufacturers and distributors, testing labs and specifiers, end users and standards setters.

They all discuss the new standards in safety equipment, the impact of technology and why training and education are crucial for protecting a diverse workforce.



To view the episode on YouTube visit <https://youtu.be/eFFzPIFCOUI>

USA: SURVEY EXPOSES HEALTHCARE WORKER SAFETY CONCERNS

A George Washington University survey of frontline healthcare workers during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic has found many reported unsafe working conditions and faced retaliation for voicing their concerns to employers.

“This survey gives a voice to US health care workers who have been on the frontlines of Covid-19,” said David Michaels, a professor of environmental and occupational health at the George Washington University and former administrator of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Michaels, an adviser on the study, added: “Healthcare workers have valuable first-hand knowledge about this pandemic and this report offers recommendations that could help keep the US on a steady course now and in the future.”

About 1,200 health care workers from all 50 states and the District of Columbia took part in the survey. They expressed frustration with unsafe working conditions, especially the unavailability of adequate personal protective equipment. Respondents also described instances of retaliation and at times bullying for voicing their safety concerns to employers.

There was a perception that employers prioritised hospital profits over worker safety and created an unhealthy work environment where workers felt devalued and threatened.

“The responses to the survey contain important insights that cannot be gleaned from statistics alone. Workers voiced a range of experiences during the first few months of pandemic, including those that were positive and others that were excruciating,” claimed Nathan L McCray, a lead author of the report.

TRADE UNIONS HAVE ROLE TO PLAY TO COMBAT VACCINE HESITANCY

As Covid-19 continues to rage through India, ravaging Turkey and killing thousands in Brazil, it has become clearer than ever that “none of us are safe until all of us are safe”, according to the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC).

ITUC Deputy General Secretary Owen Tudor has said that unions “have a key role in combatting what some call ‘vaccine hesitancy’, especially among those communities most likely to be worried about whether to get the vaccine”.

Writing in the online publication ‘Equal Times’ (www.equaltimes.org) Tudor points to a recent study conducted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, which found that “health and social care workers who felt under greater pressure from their employers to receive Covid-19 vaccination were more likely to decline it”.

He noted that trade union leaders, whether national or in the workplace, have a key role to play. “We need to mobilise our millions of workplace representatives to ensure that worried workers get the message from someone just like them, as ‘Unite’ the union in Britain and Ireland has done, getting the



message out through what the union calls its ‘standing army’ of 30,000 workplace reps.

“Unions need to ensure that – rather than employers or governments compelling workers to get vaccinated – workers are encouraged and enabled to get vaccinated when it is offered, not forced,” he said.



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