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e-Working in the Western Region

A Review of the Evidence – Case Studies



WDC Policy Briefings: The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body promoting economic and social development in the Western Region of Ireland (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). WDC Policy Briefings highlight and provide discussion and analysis of key regional policy issues.



e-Work case study – a US multinational

An example of e-Working in practice is a US multinational in Galway, employing approximately 800 employees. Though there is no formal policy, the practice of e-working is a key part of working life in the company, especially for certain groups of staff. It is seen as improving productivity while at the same time improving 'work-life balance'.

e-working is most prevalent in the software division as the type of work lends itself to the practice. The software development team have varied work hours – they often work outside of core hours, in the evenings, developing software further and testing it remotely. Staff who e-work often engage in 'spot work' – discrete pieces of work such as conference calls to a different time zone, checking emails, coding and webinars are also undertaken remotely.

All equipment is supplied by the company and all software is integrated into the company's system with associated data back-ups, virus protection etc. Broadband of sufficient quality is needed at home to allow the flexibility of working outside of office hours. There are occasional issues with the quality of broadband connections when people are working from home. On these occasions voice calls are a substitute for video-conferencing.

Senior management believe that if e-working was not available, it would be very difficult to serve customers' needs. Some staff need to make calls outside of office hours, serving customers across time zones from Australia and New Zealand to Europe and the Americas. The company believes that by supporting staff e-working, it also leads to a more productive workforce, attracting better people and ensuring retention of valuable staff.

e-Work case study – Pixelcrush, Co.Donegal

Based in Letterkenny, Donegal and founded in 2012, www.pixelcrush.net is a full service design agency - with national and international reach. Clients include Donegal County Council, the Western Development Commission, Skillnets, Go Visit Donegal and clients as far afield as London and the Channel Islands. Situated in Letterkenny town, the company can access broadband services of sufficient quality which is critical to ensure the company can service its clients, wherever they are located.

Prior to establishing Pixelcrush, the company owner worked as an employee in several graphic design agencies with limited flexibility due to the 9-5 working hours. Pixelcrush now employs two people, one full time and one part-time and they both appreciate the flexibility of working from home. This has helped ensure better work-life balance as well as keeping costs down for the company.

e-Work case study – the employee perspective, Co. Roscommon

Brian is a Senior Client Services Consultant at Linedata (www.linedata.com), a global solutions provider for the Investment Management, Insurance and Credit sectors. Brian supports clients and their software applications, mostly remotely. Though the company has a policy of e-Working at a global level, no one at the Dublin office had engaged in e-Working prior to Brian. He started e-Working in July 2013 following a request to his manager as his personal circumstances had changed. His wife commenced employment in the West, where they had a house and they did not want to have to continue to pay for accommodation in Dublin also.

A trial e-Work period of 6 months was agreed. His normal work pattern is two days a week from home, and three in the Dublin office (apart from when he is elsewhere at a client's onsite location). Since the trial period, he has been e-Working continuously. Occasionally he works three days a week from home (two in Dublin office). Brian stays one night a week in Dublin using Airbnb. Brian works normal office hours and has autonomy to respond to clients as needed and deliver on his job requirements. Since Brian started e-Work, two other colleagues have also started to e-Work, one based in Navan, Co. Meath, the other in Blessington, Co. Wicklow. From a technical perspective there are no constraints to Brian e-Working.

For Brian, there are other benefits arising from e-Working. He can live in the family home and avoid paying additional rent. There are travel time savings, even with travel to the Dublin office, he still spends much less time commuting than if he was living in Dublin. If e-Working was not available, Brian feels he would have to reconsider his job so as to accommodate living in Ballaghaderreen.

e-Work case study – mykidstime.com, Co. Galway

Founded in 2007, www.mykidstime.com started as a listings website with kids activities for parents in the Galway area, which gradually expanded with listings in different counties before becoming national in 2011. As the company grew, it engaged parents in different areas who were responsible for delivering local content and sourcing advertising.

From the outset it was decided that the company would operate without an office, in part to keep costs down, but largely because there was no need. The employees all work from home and the philosophy of the company is to be very family friendly. The working hours are flexible, it does not matter at what time of the day or night the work is done, once it is done.

The company currently has two full-time and one part-time employee and engages a self-employed consultant. As well as operating a virtual office, the company considers itself an 'early adopter' of technology using applications to assist with operations and communications. For example, they use Slack to communicate, share information and files in a structured project environment. After growing a very large community of parents on social media and global visits to the website, the company is now developing new revenue streams while continuing to deliver content and blogs that parents value.

e-Work case study – Overstock, Sligo

Overstock.com is a US based online discount retailer headquartered in Salt Lake City, USA employing over 1,300 staff there. In 2013 it opened its first technology hub outside of the USA in Sligo, employing over 20 staff in its software development team. While there is no official e-Working policy the facility to e-Work is communicated to employees and potential employees. The frequency of e-Work depends on their role and is agreed between the team lead and Director of Software Development.

In general, e-Working is available to everyone but in practice approximately one fifth regularly work from home, while others do so on a more infrequent basis. Team leads are less inclined to work from home for extended periods as they need to be involved in a lot of 1:1 and team communication which is easier done face to face. For software developers and testers there is no restriction on the amount of time they choose to work from home. The company believes there are productivity gains in working from home in a quieter environment. However, the company recognises it does not suit everyone. Performance is checked and once proven to work well, is no longer monitored¹⁵.