



**DL837 BA in NEW MEDIA STUDIES**

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**NAME:** Holly O'Sullivan

**STUDENT NUMBER:** N00193099

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## How COVID-19 has Changed the Future of Office Jobs and Remote Work in Ireland: A Look at the Positive and Negative Impacts



JCDeaux Office Space

By Holly O’Sullivan

Insights from Irish Workers on the Benefits and Challenges of Remote Work and Its Effects on Office Jobs

The COVID-19 pandemic has eminently changed the way people work around the world, and Ireland is apart of this demographic. The need for social distancing during the early days of the pandemic and throughout the pandemic, many companies had to pivot to remote working to ensure their business continued to flourish. As the country continued to battle the COVID-19 virus, the future of office jobs and remote working has been significantly impacted in the aftermath of COVID-19. This article will explore the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on office jobs and remote work in Ireland, including the challenges and benefits of remote work and its effects on employees and companies, with interviews from two employees

in JCDeaux, both being IT Help Desk Administrators and other quotes from anonymous sources who work in similar roles within a different company.

Before the pandemic, remote work was not a widespread option in Ireland and was relatively unused as a mainstream means of carrying out employment. However, the sudden shift to remote work because of the pandemic brought about positive impacts on employees and companies in Ireland. One of the most notable advantages of remote work is the flexibility it offers employees in terms of work, schedule and location.

One of the most significant changes that happened due to the pandemic was the reduction in commuting. According to the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service(EGEES), the results suggest that in a scenario where 25% of ‘white-collar’ workers work from home on a given day, total car commuter trips could fall by 17%<sup>1</sup>. This would help lower carbon emissions drastically and would positively impact those commuting outside of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). An anonymous source who works in the IT sector stated, “The impact of remote working post-pandemic has greatly benefited my life as I only have to commute to the office twice a week as opposed to three times a week, and as someone who likes to save money and is environmentally aware this transition of a hybrid between remote and in-person work has benefitted me greatly as I also live outside of Dublin and the commute is rather long”

Remote work has had a positive impact on the environment. With fewer employees commuting to work, there has been a significant reduction in carbon emissions. According to a report by the Irish Environmental Protection Agency, Lockdown measures in response to the

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Harry. 2022 “Transport Emissions Cost-Benefit Analysis,” in *An Evaluation of the Impacts of Remote Working*. Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, p. 29.  
<<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-impacts-of-remote-working.html>> [accessed 6 April 2023]

COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a 15.7 per cent decrease in Transport emissions, the largest sectoral emissions reduction due to the reduction in commuting<sup>2</sup>.

According to a survey conducted in 2020, of those who could work remotely, 52% were currently working hybrid, 40% fully remotely, and only 8% were fully on-site most companies in the country had to shift to remote working due to the pandemic. This shift allowed employees to save time and money on commuting and provided more flexibility for employees to balance their work and personal lives. The vast majority, about 88%, of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their organization must provide remote or hybrid working options to attract staff. Additionally, around 90% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that their organization must offer remote or hybrid working options to retain staff.<sup>3</sup>

Another positive impact of remote work is that it allows companies to expand their talent pool beyond their immediate geographic area. This expansion can lead to increased diversity and a more skilled workforce, ultimately benefiting the company's bottom line. Eddie works in IT at JC Deaux. He also shared his thoughts on the beneficial nature of working remotely "Remote work has given me the ability to structure my day in a way that works for me. I can take time to train the interns' whether that be online or in person when I need to, and I can work from anywhere with an internet connection, and it gives our company the opportunity to have a diverse workforce regardless of where our employees are based in the country"

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<sup>2</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. 2021. "News Releases 2021," *Epa.ie* <<https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2021/pandemic-restrictions-less-peat-and-more-wind-energy-lead-to-reduced-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-2020.php>> [accessed 6 April 2023]

<sup>3</sup> The Impact of Remote Working." 2022. Social Justice Ireland in *National Remote Working Survey* <<https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/impact-remote-working>> [accessed 6 April 2023]

Remote work has also allowed companies to save on overhead costs such as office rent, utilities, and equipment. This cost-saving benefit has enabled companies to redirect funds to other areas such as employee training, marketing, and research and development. However, despite saving on overhead costs for the company working from home means an increase in home costs such as Electric and Gas. Despite this, it is highly probable that the significant rise in home electricity consumption for lighting and desk usage, which amounts to 6,961 tonnes, will be balanced out by a corresponding decrease in electricity usage at the office, as employees are not utilising office resources such as charging their laptops or printing there. This is because it is impossible for workers to be physically present at both locations simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

While remote work has brought about several positive impacts, it has also resulted in several negative effects on employees and companies in Ireland. One of the most significant negative impacts is the blurring of lines between work and personal life. According to a study 2022 Remote Working in Ireland Survey by the Western Development Commission, 49% of respondents indicated that they work more hours remotely working compared to working onsite.<sup>5</sup> Noel O’Sullivan, IT Help Desk Administrator, commented on this, stating, “At the beginning of the pandemic, it was difficult adjusting to working from home as we are an outdoor advertising company we needed people out on the streets to adjust the digital billboards from a company perspective and from a personal perspective I found I was working more hours outside of work as we had to provide people with laptops and mobiles which meant I had sort this out outside of work hours being the head of my department I had to drive to drop off the phones at that time

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<sup>4</sup> Williamson, Harry. 2022 “Household emissions impact from remote work,” in *An Evaluation of the Impacts of Remote Working*. Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, p. 29. <<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-impacts-of-remote-working.html>> [accessed 6 April 2023]

<sup>5</sup> Mccarthy, Alma, and Noreen O’Connor. 2022. “2022 Nation Survey Findings” *Western Development*. <<https://westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Remote-Working-Survey-Report-2022-final-updated.pdf>> [accessed 6 April 2023]

you could only travel if it were an essential journey, and I experienced burnout at the beginning however, the company did combat this, and the issue was resolved in the early days of the pandemic, however, were difficult”

This finding suggests that remote workers in Ireland may struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance due to the lack of separation between work and home life. Remote workers may feel like they have to be constantly available and responsive to work-related requests, leading to burnout and stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many businesses in Ireland to adapt to remote working in order to comply with public health guidelines. While this new way of working has brought about many benefits, it is important to consider the negative effects it can have on both employees and the economy as a whole.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in teleworking, which has further increased the effects of remote work on employees' mental health. The implementation of social distancing measures, such as the closure of schools and workplaces, has disrupted daily routines, restricted face-to-face social interactions and led to increased loneliness and social isolation. As a result, the mental health of individuals in Europe has been adversely affected. For instance, a French survey of 2,000 employees revealed that 18% of teleworkers displayed symptoms of severe anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders. Notably, women reported a greater decline in their mental health. These findings highlight the urgent need for organizations to prioritize mental health support for remote workers during and after the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Surveillance, Special Focus .2021. “The Impact of Teleworking and Digital Work on Workers and Society,” *Europa. Eu* <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662904/IPOL\\_STU\(2021\)662904\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662904/IPOL_STU(2021)662904_EN.pdf)> [accessed 6 April 2023]

This feeling of social disconnection can lead to a decline in mental health and productivity, as cited by Brian Pennie, who also lectures on the Neuroscience of Mindfulness in UCD and on the Neuroscience of Addiction in TCD. He stated that “In terms of awareness of the need to focus on people’s wellness, I think the ball was already moving in this direction, but Covid has certainly given a big nudge to how we look out for people’s anxieties in a work context” (Pennie,2021)<sup>7</sup>

Employee burnout is a global concern. In a survey of over 1000 respondents by Deloitte, 77% say they have experienced burnout at their current job.<sup>8</sup> This issue was highlighted by Simon Brooke, Writer at Sage Ireland, who stated that "With more people than ever working from home, the growth of ‘always on’ culture and an increasing need to improve productivity, it’s hardly surprising that more and more people are feeling stressed and exhausted” (Brooke,2023)<sup>9</sup>

A report by the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) found that footfall in city centres had decreased by up to 75% due to the shift towards remote working, resulting in a decline in revenue for businesses and potential job losses. The report also found that 65% of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ireland were negatively impacted by the pandemic and that many of them faced significant challenges in adapting to remote work and online sales.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dermody, Joe. 2022. “Remote Workers at High Risk of Anxiety, Warns Neuroscientist,” *Irish Examiner* <<https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-40977698.html>> [accessed 7 April 2023]

<sup>8</sup> Bradshaw, Ryan. 2023. “Startling Remote Work Burnout Statistics,” *Apollo Technical LLC* (Apollo Technical) <<https://www.apollotechnical.com/remote-work-burnout-statistics/>> [accessed 7 April 2023]

<sup>9</sup> Brooke, Simon. 2023. “How to Help Your Employees Tackle Digital Burnout and Improve Work-Life Balance,” *Sage Advice Ireland* (Sage) <<https://www.sage.com/en-ie/blog/digital-burnout-help-employees-work-life-balance/>> [accessed 7 April 2023]

<sup>10</sup>Power,Jim. 2020 “Significance of the SME sector in the Irish Economy” *Isme.ie* <<https://isme.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LOCAL-JOBS-ALLIANCE-REPORT-May-20-2020.pdf>> [accessed 9 April 2023]



### Empty meeting space during COVID-19

Remote work has become a prevalent feature of the modern Irish workforce due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report from IDA Ireland, the number of jobs in remote working in Ireland is expected to grow by 25% in the next few years. This shift towards remote work has been accelerated by the pandemic, with companies recognizing the benefits it can offer both employees and businesses. A member of the design team in an unnamed company stated, “As we are a digital advertising platform, remote work is ideal as getting in contact with clients across the world is made easy by means of Microsoft Teams and other online communication platforms like Slack and has even enabled us to hire employees who don’t live in Ireland making our workforce more diverse and expanding our pool of clients”

Andrew Barnes, the founder of New Zealand-based company Perpetual Guardian, argues in his book "The 4-Day Week" that remote work can increase employee productivity and reduce burnout. Barnes states that "with remote work, people can better balance their work and personal lives, which can lead to higher productivity and a reduction in absenteeism."(Barnes,2022) <sup>11</sup>

This idea is also shared by Sara Sutton, the CEO and founder of FlexJobs. According to Sutton, remote jobs are likely to remain a significant part of the job market despite a reported 25% decrease in remote job postings over the last year. She argues that the pressure on employers to offer remote work as a means of attracting and retaining talent will continue to exist, making remote work a desirable option for job seekers. While job postings for remote positions may have decreased recently, Sutton notes that the reasons why job seekers value remote work are unlikely to change, indicating that the demand for remote work may remain high in the long term.<sup>12</sup>

However, while remote work has many benefits, there are also challenges that must be addressed. According to a survey conducted by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), The world of work has gone through the biggest transformation for over a generation, and a new era has begun: 44% expect to move roles in the next 12 months, inflation is fuelling wage demands, concerns over burnout are growing, and the adoption of hybrid working has some way to go.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Barnes, Andrew. 2020. *The 4 Day Week: How the Flexible Work Revolution Can Increase Productivity, Profitability and Well-Being, and Create a Sustainable Future* (London, England: Piatkus Books) accessed 16 April 2023]

<sup>12</sup> Tsipursky, Gleb. 2023. "Remote Career Seekers Should Be Hopeful about the Future," *Forbes* <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/glebtsipursky/2023/02/21/remote-career-seekers-should-be-hopeful-about-the-future/?sh=6f3dbf371317>> [accessed 16 April 2023]

<sup>13</sup> ACCA. 2023. Global Talent Trends Survey Reveals Accountancy Talent Crunch.". *Accaglobal.com* <<https://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/news/2023/february/talent-trends-survey-reveals-accountancy-crunch.html>> [accessed 16 April 2023]

In conclusion, remote work is expected to continue to grow in Ireland in the coming years. While it offers many benefits, such as increased productivity and a wider pool of talent, it also poses challenges that must be addressed. By investing in policies and measures that support remote work, companies can ensure that it remains a sustainable and viable option for their employees.

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