Committee for Finance and Personnel

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Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland:
Briefing from Nigel Oseland

13 March 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Finance and Personnel

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr John McCallister
Mr David McIlveen
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:
Dr Nigel Oseland   Workplace Unlimited

The Chairperson: I welcome Nigel Oseland to the Committee. Please make any opening comments on the inquiry and give your own perspective on it.

Dr Nigel Oseland (Workplace Unlimited): I will give you a bit of background to put the issue in context. I am a workplace strategist, a change manager and an environmental psychologist. I started my career as a civil servant.

The Chairperson: We will not hold that against you.

Dr Oseland: I worked in government research for the Building Research Establishment. I have worked with various consulting practices. I would have been appointed mostly to help people to implement flexible working or agile working. Two years ago, I established my own practice.

The Chairperson: Given your knowledge of the case studies outlined, what would the inquiry need to focus on in establishing how flexible working can best be implemented strategically in the public sector here?

Dr Oseland: The key issue is to understand why you are doing it. Over the past few years, the flexible working and agile working agenda has been hijacked by property and facilities management as a space-saving technique, and it was not initially intended as that. It was intended as a means of changing the culture, supporting different work styles and creating a different working environment that better supported the way that people worked.

You need to establish what you are trying to get out of it and not get trapped into being totally concerned about saving space and money. Do not get me wrong: it will save you space and money, but there are probably easier ways of saving space and money than going through a change process and implementing agile and flexible working. It is quite a journey to take people on. So, have a clear vision, be strong that you want to do it and then start to think about how you would implement it.

The Chairperson: Do you agree that a lot of it is common sense? People sometimes take four hours to drive to a meeting when that business could have been conducted over the phone, on FaceTime or using technology. That is just one example.

Dr Oseland: There are lots of examples. The paper that members have seen on flexible working benefits came about as a result of my clients asking, "What are the benefits? Why should we do it?" So I thought that I would bring some case studies together. As you see, there are many benefits. It is about creating a more productive, collaborative, interactive environment. It is about reducing the time wasted through travel, and not necessarily business travel. It may be that you reduce the time travelling between meetings and locations, but if you offer homeworking or occasional homeworking as an option, studies have found that staff like that. They are reducing their travel costs and travel time, and some of the studies have also found that people who homework tend to work for slightly longer. If they have saved two hours in travelling time, they will put some of that time back in, get the job done and work until the task is complete rather than thinking that they are doing a nine-to-five shift.

The other big benefit, which has not been talked about over the past few years during the recession, is sustainability. There is an old adage that the greenest building is the one that you do not build. If we can stop acquiring more space or consolidate the space that we use so that we are heating and managing less space, that can only be good for the environment as well as issues such as reduced travel.

The Chairperson: The paper makes a couple of references to Ernst and Young and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), which mention the benefits of high visibility between employees and clearer lines of sight. Will you elaborate on that?

Dr Oseland: There is almost a mixed message. One concern about implementing flexible working is how you manage people if they are not in the building and are homeworking. That always comes up as an issue. You would need to address how you train managers to manage people by results rather than by presenteeism. Those studies picked up on the fact that because they created a different environment, as part of the package it would have been a more open-plan environment. There would have been fewer offices. There would have been small, quiet rooms, and the managers would have sat out in the open-plan environment, and so on. They are reporting that those space changes help them to have more access to managers. However, that has to be balanced. Do not just send all your people home. That is not the right answer either. If you allow occasional homeworking, you need to think about how you manage your people slightly differently. There is some good Ofsted case study work that is worth reading, which has presented on how to manage remote workers.

The Chairperson: Are there any particular case studies that you want to highlight to the Committee?

Dr Oseland: For you guys, I guess I could focus on the public sector ones. I touch on some of them — for example, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, as it was called then, and the case study of its building, Petty France. That is a relevant case study for you. The paper refers to a co-authored guide on flexible working, funded by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), 'Working Beyond Walls'. The OGC is now the Government Property Unit. There are some good case studies in that publication, such as the Treasury building on Horse Guards Road. If I were you, I would focus on those public sector case studies.

There are also good lessons to be learned from quangos or companies that were Civil Service and are now in the private sector. I am thinking of organisations such as BT. In the early days, it did a lot of research to understand whether homeworking and flexible working worked for its organisation. A lot of the good metrics came out of some of its early studies. Its mentality was different from what it is now. It is in a brave new world now, but it went through quite a change process to get to where it is today, and some good lessons have been learned.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Any kind of change in culture is very challenging. I am impressed with the examples that we have seen, particularly of the open-space approach and the flexible working arrangements, in so far as they have been introduced. As for the challenges and the positives that

you have highlighted, what challenges must be overcome? What are the downsides that need to be managed?

Dr Oseland: I tend to split them into two areas. The first is the practicalities. Do you have the right technology that enables people to work remotely? That is standard. Is the space arranged to support agile working, and is there sufficient ancillary space, including breakout space and informal meeting areas? These are all ingredients of a good, flexible working environment.

Heavily paper-based offices, and dealing with their storage problems, is still one of the biggest issues that we come across when we carry out a change process. As companies are becoming paperless — or, rather, paper-light — it is becoming easier to implement agile working.

The big thing about flexible working is that you tend to have to leave your desk clear at the end of the evening so that it is available for other people to use. However, if you are heavily paper-based, that can cause issues that you need to be able to manage. Those are the technical and practical aspects that you need to deal with.

The second area is the attitudinal aspects, which include things such as trusting staff to work remotely and, as I mentioned, whether you are able to manage them working remotely and whether there is buy-in from all levels of the organisation.

Typically, we might find that senior executives would buy into agile working because they can see the benefits in productivity and cost savings. At the grassroots level, people get it because they believe that their work/life balance will be better, and they believe that they will be more productive because they can work from home and can write a report without any distractions. However, we find that we struggle when it comes to people in middle management. I empathise with middle managers because they learn how to manage on the job in a particular way and work themselves up through the ranks. Then we go in and say that we are going to change things and do them differently. I spend a lot of time and effort in getting middle managers on board, training them and making sure that they understand the downsides of flexible working, which is that because you cannot see people, you do not know whether they are being productive and effective. A lot of middle managers can do it, but sometimes they believe that it requires more of an effort for them.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: What about data storage and security?

Dr Oseland: I am not an expert in that area, but it used to be an issue four or five years ago. I tend to work alongside technologists so those issues do not seem as prevalent as they used to be these days. People still talk about it, but I have worked with public sector organisations in the London boroughs, and there seems to be a trend. My experience is that the trend seems to be moving towards thin client technology, which seems to have an extra level of security, rather than network PCs. It also means that people do not need a laptop and might be able to log on from their own devices, either a PC or a tablet. The companies that I have dealt with tell me that there is sufficient security to allow that to happen and that it is almost safer than carrying a laptop around with information on it. Things are changing, but that is not my area of expertise.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Gender equality is an issue, even with more traditional workplace practices. You mentioned the work/life balance. Some years ago, the concept of a glass ceiling for women made a big impression on me. When it comes to promotion opportunities, the tendency is to move towards the centre, and there is a need to relocate or travel to work to where headquarters staff are located. Have you encountered that in your study, and is the flexible working process inherently more gender-friendly?

Dr Oseland: I think that it is gender- and age-friendly. BT undertook a study in which it found that more mothers were returning to work for them than the average. I know people who have set up organisations to get mums back into work, and those mums might want to work from 10·00 am to 2·00 pm. It has the flexible working philosophy embedded in it. It is not about working nine to five every day; it may be about doing shorter hours or compressed hours. It may be that you want to do three days of eight or nine hours, and that would be your working week. If you can marry up people doing different shifts and part-time arrangements, there are space-saving benefits as well.

Other studies have shown that agile/flexible working is good for staff retention. People like it so they tend to stay with an organisation. It allows for changes in personal circumstances, and other

companies have said that it attracts a newer generation of worker who may have different views than some of us on the work/life balance.

The Chairperson: Will you comment on the open-plan environment? What are its pros and cons? When I have tried to work at home, I have had to hide away in a corner of the house where there are no noises or distractions. There is correspondence from a civil servant about this in our papers today. A lot of people cannot cope in that environment, so how do you accommodate it?

Dr Oseland: That debate is going to go on and on. We are talking about flexible working, of which open plan is a component, but the two are separate issues. I do not think that we, as an industry, have ever answered that open-plan versus less open-plan environment. We do not even like using the term "open plan" because it has derogatory connotations. We tend to talk about landscaped offices, and so on. We try to introduce different types of space with a flexible working environment. It is about choice of work setting. We try to balance the open plan with semi-partitioned spaces and perhaps introduce more quiet rooms and even more telephone booth-type rooms. Alongside that, we try to create spaces in which people can get away from the large open-plan spaces and break it up. As you said, by offering occasional homeworking, people can get that report done.

You might think that cafes would be a noisy and disturbing environment, but we have found that they are less disturbing because you are not with your colleagues, you are not listening out, and you do not feel as if you are being overheard. Actually, a noisy cafe environment can become quite a private space in a funny sort of way.

I am starting to do more research on topics such as personality differences and how personality affects the kind of working environment that we are used to. We know from research that more introverted people, for example, prefer calming, quiet spaces. They like doing detailed work, and they need that kind of environment. We also know that at the other extreme, extroverts like buzzy, stimulating environments. They are social animals and like to be with people. If you look at revenues and benefits or finance departments, for instance, you will find that different types of people prefer different environments. I do not think that we have ever recognised that truly because it is another level of complication.

You are absolutely right. I think that it is about providing choice and different work settings that support the space. You need to start by doing an analysis of what people do. You need to understand how they work now, and you need to work with them to try to understand how they might work in the future. From that, you can understand what their work activities are and where they are most productive performing those work activities. Then you can start to build up the space around that requirement.

Mr D McIlveen: Thanks, Nigel, for your presentation. Your paper states that flexible working seems to reduce absenteeism. That seems to be the pattern that had been highlighted. How can companies and organisations set that against ensuring that productivity remains high? What would be the benchmarks for that?

Dr Oseland: I will tackle the absenteeism issue first. Bear in mind that this paper is a collection of case studies, which tend to be the most positive. To my knowledge, no one has done a good, independent piece of research that looks at the pros and cons of open plan or flexible working. Case studies tend to focus on the positive, so we can look back on only the positive.

Organisations tell me that a reduction in absenteeism happens, for example, when people have a dental appointment and do not necessarily have to take half a day's leave or even half a day's sick leave. What they will do is work in the morning, attend their dental appointment and then go home and do more work. They may lose an hour out of the day rather than having to take half a day's leave.

Similarly if people have a bit of a sniffle, they may not want to travel to the office because it is not necessarily a good idea in case they gave everyone else the cold. However, they are quite happy to do some process work, e-mails or reading at home. That is where a lot of the work on reduced absenteeism comes about. People do not take sick leave because they do not feel that they need to because even when they are feeling under the weather, they can still do some work.

Travel disruption and the weather are slightly different issues, but if people can work from home, they will not spend a couple of hours trying to get into an office when they do not need to.

Mr D McIlveen: How is productivity gauged?

Dr Oseland: Productivity is, as we know, quite difficult to measure. In fact, a lot of people say that you cannot measure it. I disagree; I think that you can measure productivity, but it is difficult and time-consuming. The productivity metrics will be different for different organisations and even for different teams within organisations.

At one extreme, a measure of productivity is profitability. A few companies in the cases studies quoted gains in profitability — GSK, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and EC Harris — which they put down to a flexible working environment. Extraneous factors will be involved in that. Productivity and profitability are not just down to the environment. There are other factors such as motivational issues and the market. However, there are metrics. It is obviously different in a public sector organisation. If it was a corporate organisation, you could look at things such as utilisation rates, fees, ratio of overhead to fee earners. Lawyers are great because they put everything on a six-minute time sheet, so you know when they are productive and when they are not. There are metrics, but it is quite difficult.

Mr D McIlveen: Are those the sort of metrics that Centrica was using? I think that 96% of people working flexibly outperformed their office-based counterparts.

Dr Oseland: I think that the Centrica example was a perception. A lot of people will ask their staff whether they feel that the environment has made them more productive. I think that the Centrica result was based on a perception rather than a measure.

Mr D McIlveen: On the estate side of any company or organisation, have you identified drawbacks in reducing property portfolios? Are there advantages to workers having a base as opposed to working exclusively from a home environment?

Dr Oseland: I have never promoted going heavily on the homeworking. You need balance. You still need a base for bringing people together for training, mentoring, collaboration, interaction, instilling loyalty and all those good things. Some companies have perhaps pushed the homeworking too far and have lost those things. I know of one company that says that it now wants to get people back into the office. I do not want to name the company, but they know that they have pushed homeworking too far. So it now has a campaign to see how it can bring people back in to the office. You do not want people working in isolation. At the end of the day, you are all part of a single organisation, and there has to be that bonding and that gel. There is a balance, which is why we talk about occasional homeworking as and when required and do not make it the main option.

If you do your analysis and go into an organisation and find that the space is used for only 50% of the time, which is typical, those people are already mobile. If they are not at their desk, they are somewhere else. They might be somewhere else in the building — we call that internally mobile — and they might be at meetings or collaborating with colleagues in a different part of the building. Therefore, they are already mobile. You are then providing them with the kit appliance to support that: for example, making sure that they have the right space and the right technology.

If you go into an organisation and you do your utilisation studies and they are already sitting at their desk for 70% to 80 % of the time, that is a different situation. How can you introduce agile flexible working there? You have to look at the homeworking front, and that is a different game altogether. It is much better when the organisation is already mobile, and you are going in and supporting it and making it formal, rather than when you are trying to push towards mobility. However, you would be surprised: even with a lot of public sector organisations, the utilisation is down at 50% or 60%, and that gives scope for implementing desk-sharing.

Mr D McIlveen: I am touching on the point that Mitchel raised about the glass ceiling, and so on. Is there a risk, or have any studies been done around the effects on teamwork? It would be feasible that some roles have to be done in the office; they cannot be done outside the office.

Dr Oseland: Of course.

Mr D McIlveen: Have any studies been done on the impact on those who have the luxury — if you can call it that — of working at home and those who do not?

Dr Oseland: I have not seen anything published on that, although it does come up. It is more about equity or equality. If you offer homeworking to one part of your team, they could say that they cannot do it because they do not have the space at home or they have dependants at home and it would be a disruptive environment. There is a fairness issue, and that has been raised. With regard to flexible working, you have the right to ask to work flexibly, but you do not have the right to work flexibly. If your role suits such arrangements, and your manager is comfortable with it, he or she will allow you to do it. I do not think that that has been fully studied: it is more anecdotal evidence. When it comes up, you try to appease those people in other ways. There may be some alternatives for them. They could still work remotely, but maybe in a library, a café or something.

The Chairperson: What are your views on companies moving away from flexible working? There has been recent press coverage concerning Yahoo! and Google.

Dr Oseland: I am a little bit disappointed with Marissa, and I have not got to the bottom of it. The statement was that she stopped authorising homeworking. I do not know whether she is still allowing some kind of flexibility and agility in the office space, but it seems that she has a particular issue with homeworking. The way that it was managed was probably a bit misguided. At the end of the day, flexible working is all about trusting your staff to work when and where they are most productive. It is about getting the most out of them and, in return, giving them a better work/life balance, and so on. To put an edict out that you cannot do it and that if you want to home work, you are not right for the company seems a little bit strong. Interestingly, other people have come out and taken their own stance. Richard Branson blogged about it, and he thought that she was misguided. However, he accepts that some people like homeworking and others just do not get on with it. At the end of the day, it is about choice and balance, and I think that he was quite level-headed about it.

A couple of years ago when there was bad snow in Washington and the whole of the public sector in DC closed down for about two weeks, Barack Obama made a statement to say that he did not want that to happen again and that they needed to get their people tooled up to be able to work from home occasionally and to work remotely. There will always be different views on it. I would not be in the business of promoting agile working if I did not believe that it was beneficial; I just would not do that. This goes back to my opening statement. It is not just about saving space and money, so if you are doing it just for that reason, you are probably going to get into some kind of trouble later on. You have to have the intention that you want to change the way that people work and the culture.

The Chairperson: Which countries have got it right or are moving in the right direction in respect of the public sector embracing flexible working and homeworking?

Dr Oseland: As I say, I think that you have to go and look at the book that I mentioned, 'Working Beyond Walls', and at some of the case studies. As I say, all the ones that have been published tend to be quite positive, so it is quite difficult to unearth the bad news. I think that what tends to happen is that flexible working does not get implemented if it is not likely to work. You tend to do a feasibility study, where you look at the pros and cons — I guess that this is part of that — and you might then do a pilot study, where you test it on a small portion of your population, maybe 50 or 100 people, to see how they get on with any new technology and how the managers cope with managing those people. So, you test it at a small level before you roll it out. As people tend to go down that route, there are no bad stories, because it is never implemented if they do not think that it will work.

As you can see, there are plenty of success stories. The Department for Children, Schools and Families case study is a good example.

Mr Cree: I certainly found the case studies very interesting, but it is not an exact science, is it? In the EC Harris example, it moved to new headquarters because it thought that the corporate image was very important. That is quite a different thing altogether. We have a similar situation here where one of our Departments is moving to new headquarters. Perhaps the people there should all work from home. That might be a way of saving a lot of money.

Dr Oseland: I have to say that I do not think that that is the right solution.

Mr Cree: I say that with my tongue in my cheek.

Then there is the one from Morgan Stanley where one of its employees said that she enjoyed being in the office so much, she did not want to go home.

Dr Oseland: That was one of the comments in a questionnaire.

Mr Cree: It is interesting.

Mr Girvan: That says more about her home.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: You wonder what kind of home she comes from.

Mr Cree: You cannot go there.

In the summary at the end, you say:

> *"flexible working is easily justified by the property savings alone".*

I think that that is right. You go on to say:

> *"the additional benefits are considered a more significant driver for flexible working – they are just more difficult to demonstrate."*

That is the big issue when you try to look at it in a general sense; it is very difficult to do that. Do you see a situation emerging where flexible working will become a management technique rather than just an experiment? I think that all these explain, perhaps unkindly, why it has just been an experiment so far.

Dr Oseland: I think that it is unfair to say that they are just experiments. I take your point that this is a document of case studies, and as I said, it is not independent research; these are case studies. I accept that only the good news tends to get reported. When you hear about the bad stories, it is normally anecdotal or, as I said, it tends to get nipped in the bud before it even gets to implementation, because you normally get a feel that it is not going to stack up and work. However, there are lots of companies out there doing flexible working. This is not new. We looked at doing it in IBM in the early 1990s. Frank Duffy introduced it as a concept, and it has been around for nearly 40 years.

Mr Cree: It is actually a bit longer than that. I was involved in it in the 1980s, but it was more or less a novelty then.

Dr Oseland: Exactly. It has taken people a long time to get used to the fact that it is a viable solution and it works. I think that part of the reason why it works now and did not, say, five or 10 years ago is the technology. There was a lot of belief that the technology would enable and deliver, but it did not. However, I think that we have resolved that now. Now, the issue is more about the people. We have sorted out the technology; it is now about hearts and minds and changing the way in which people work. Let us go on that journey. Lots of large organisations do it successfully. It is unfair to say that it is an experiment. It has been proven in a lot of places. We do not have that full breadth of independent research.

Mr Cree: At the end of the day, it has to be a trade-off. Productivity is quite distinct from savings on property costs, running costs and all those sorts of things. That is really where it has to be. Do you agree?

Dr Oseland: I do. It always comes down to that. People tend to focus on the property savings because you can measure that. The finance director or the treasurer or whatever like those kinds of numbers: they can see them. When you start talking about improving interaction, collaboration and work-life balance, and you say that people are going to be happier and more productive, you are absolutely right: it comes down to the productivity question and whether you can measure it. Your colleague raised that issue. I believe that you can. There are smatterings of evidence to suggest that it is positive. I would like to be able to quote you a more detailed and independent study, but it is not there. There is an element of belief and trust that it will work. I understand that. As I said, you kind of collect your own data. You do your utilisation studies, and you look at the technology. It is almost about whether you are ready for change. You have to understand whether your own organisation is ready for a change. You need to ensure that you have all the tools and the attitude and everything lined up to allow you to do it. You kind of have to do it within your own sphere. Every organisation is different. Some of the issues that we come up against are so important for one organisation, but when

you talk to another organisation, they are just not on its radar. My advice is to listen to your own people, do your own study and see whether it is right for you.

Mr Girvan: Thank you for your paper. A lot of the case studies are related to private sector business. Knowing the private sector, it will not implement something unless it has some measurable outputs and it deems it to be successful. Some people believe that, in the public sector, you are paid well and whether you perform or do not perform, you get your pay anyway. That issue gets mentioned to you. People in the private sector sometimes get frustrated as a result of that. Some of those who do manual jobs cannot take up the advantage of flexible working. Some people in the public sector cannot have the flexibility of saying, "I am working from home today. I can log on to the computer, I can go away and do whatever I have to do, and I will be back." I am not saying that there are not mechanisms in place to ensure that they are working, but how do you deal with those who are disenfranchised because of that? There has to be some way of dealing with it. We have not put enough work into the public sector to identify when we are getting results from people. That is the problem.

We undertook a bit of work in another organisation that I am involved with. We found that, with 15% fewer staff, we received 20% more production in a year. We then identified what had been going on for the past number of years. It was whether people had been working harder lately or whether they were just working smarter. That is what we found. A lot of them seemingly felt that they were very busy before, but they were not actually achieving anything. It was the case of, "That is the way it has always been done; that is the way we have to do it." The private sector seems to have embraced it in some areas in which it knows that it can control it. If a salesman is not performing, he is not getting his bonus. Therefore, it is quite simple to deal with it. Most salesmen would probably be classed as having flexible working because they are in their own car and are maybe travelling here, there and everywhere. If they get a result, that is it. However, I am saying that it is not quite the same in the public sector, and we are looking at it from a public sector point of view.

Dr Oseland: Sure, but there are plenty of examples in the public sector where it has been successful as well. I have mentioned a couple, but you should also read 'Working Beyond Walls'. Actually, to some extent, a lot of the flexible working that has been adopted by the corporate organisations has been pushed by the Government. Obviously, there are austerity measures in place and they are looking for large savings, but I do not necessarily think it is the public sector following corporates. Corporates have adopted flexible working over the past few years because they have seen it happening in the public sector and thought, "Why can't we do it?" I would not necessarily put the public sector down by saying that it is following. In some cases, it is leading, and there are some really good examples of where it has been pushed.

How you deal with the disenfranchised people is all about the change process and communication. It is about having that clear vision and setting down the guidelines and rules so that people understand, if they are not able to be fully flexible, why that is. Perhaps it is the nature of their work, and there may be ways around it. What is quite interesting is that we always used to think that the people involved in processed work need to be at their desk in the office, whereas, actually, now there are organisations saying that, if it is processed work, they can monitor and measure it, so they do not have to be at their desk in the office, because it is easier to measure than things like more creative work, or people attending meetings one after the other, and so on. It is starting to change, but I do not have an answer to the question of disenfranchisement. I think it is unfair to say that the public sector is following. I think that, in some cases, the public sector is leading the way in flexible working.

Ms Fearon: My question is in relation to homeworking. Do you think there will be any added cost to the employee in home insurance, increased rates and liability if their home is being used as a business centre? In your experience, does that put people off converting to homeworking, or do businesses subsidise that?

Dr Oseland: You need to be careful and seek legal advice on that. A lot of organisations have not gone down the route of telling people that they are home workers now. What they have done is said that they are going to provide a flexible working environment, and that people have the choice to work in the office, occasionally work from home or work on the move, and so on. As soon as you designate their home as their place of work, it is all about health and safety checks, and they may actually be liable for some kind of business tax, and so on. So, seek legal advice. Most companies simply say that it is a choice to occasionally work at home; it is not that you are now a home worker. If you are going to make people home workers, it is a whole different ball game, so you would have to take different advice on that.

The Chairperson: Nigel, you referred to Barack Obama and the United States earlier. Are you aware of any legislation at federal level there that requires public sector jobs to be assessed for remote working?

Dr Oseland: No, I am not aware of any.

The Chairperson: I have another question as well. In another session, there was reference to software that can be used to measure productivity when people are working from home. Will you elaborate on that and how effective it is?

Dr Oseland: There is software available that looks at, for example, activity on a particular IP address, and monitors whether the machine is active, in effect. I worked with a company — a bank — that had installed that across its computers. We did check it, because my concern is that, just because you are at your desk, you do not need to be processing; you might be thinking or reading. We do other activities; we do not just type all day. So I was concerned that it was not representative of productivity. You might argue that it is the creative bits, when people get together and collaborate, where we are most effective, and the emails and the writing up is secondary almost, but that is another debate. Anyway, we did test it. We did things such as observation studies, where we looked, for example, at the time that people were spending at their desk and away from their desk. There was a correlation between occupancy activity and PC activity. Obviously PC activity was lower than actual occupancy, because people do not spend 100% of their time typing. However, that does not actually answer your question. You asked whether it is related to productivity. We used PC monitoring to measure occupancy utilisation. The jury's out on whether PC activity means productivity, as such. For the reasons I have just said, it is not just about output, it is about quality of output. Keyboard activity does not necessarily mean high-quality activity.

The Chairperson: I think it is a question of trust, as well, between the employer and the employee. Have there been any cases where employees have had a webcam on top of their computer at home so that the employer can keep an eye on them?

Dr Oseland: I have not seen that one. As I said, it has been about the processing. There is an element of distrust there. I do not know; perhaps if your role is one of processing, and by having that software on the PC, you do get occasionally to work from home, maybe you would be willing to do that. However, when we used the software, we were not allowed to have individual activity reports. Data is presented only at a team, function or group level. Data tends not to be given at the individual level, for privacy reasons. If you are thinking of going down that route, you may have to look into that further.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Nigel. That was excellent.

Dr Oseland: I hope that that was useful.