



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Technology for flexible working: sources of evidence

This Briefing Note provides possible sources of evidence regarding available technology to facilitate flexible working. It seeks to support of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's on-going Inquiry.

Introduction

This Briefing Note is to support the Committee for Finance and Personnel's (CFP) *Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland*. One of the Key Objectives of the Inquiry is:

*To consider the range of options presented by new technology and workplace design to support flexible working practices, such as mobile working, teleworking, remote conferencing, hot-desking and satellite offices, and to examine approaches to monitoring and managing performance in such circumstances.*¹

This Note presents CFP with a range of potential sources of evidence in relation to the technology which is available to support flexible, remote and home-working practices. Information is presented as follows:

- Section 1 lists a number of sources of general expertise on flexible working; and,
- Section 2 provides specific sources of evidence in relation to security and safety.

1. Sources of expertise

1.1. The Telework Association

*The Telework Association was founded in 1992 to promote the benefits of telework and support individuals and organisations implementing this relatively new way of working. Since then the practice has grown slowly whilst the technology has changed dramatically. With broadband in the home, wireless hot-spots in public places and affordable 3G connections, it is now much easier to work remotely. Despite this, the incidence of teleworking is still low compared with the potential and the Association continues to promote it as good for individuals, employers, society, the economy and the environment. It does this by helping the media, government and other bodies to spread the word.*²

Specific members of the Telework Association team may provide particular expertise in relation to technology. Pen portraits are provided below:

Peter Thomson, Director of Research

Peter has been associated with Telework for the past 30 years having pioneered working at home with Digital Equipment where he was Personnel Director for 18 years. Having recognised the potential for telework to

¹ For full details on the Inquiry, see <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Committees/Finance-and-Personnel/Inquiries/Inquiry-into-Flexible-Working-Hours/> (accessed 20 November 2013)

² <http://www.tca.org.uk/content/about-telework-association>

*contribute to business success, when he left Digital in 1991 he set up the Future Work Forum at Henley Management College. He was the director of this centre for 15 years during which time it gathered information on the latest trend in work practices and the impact on organisations and management. He was instrumental in setting up the UK Telework Platform in the early '90's and was vice chairman of the DTI Special Interest Group on telework. He also ran the Telework World series of conferences during that period. Peter is now a Director of Wisework Limited, the leading consultancy in the field of flexible working. He regularly speaks at conference on the future of work and the impact of flexible working on management.*³

Brian Highton

*Brian Highton is a strong advocate of 'flexible working' practices. He believes that when properly applied, policies which give personnel more choice as to their work location and working times can significantly reduce operating costs for businesses, improve employee satisfaction, benefit the environment and strengthen local communities. Brian is Business Development Director of Cygnet Solutions Ltd., an IT services company with considerable experience in helping organisations operate with a 'distributed workforce'. Brian is a frequent speaker on the commercial, technical, legal and human issues relating to the distributed workforce and a regular contributor to the business and technical press.*⁴

1.2. Work Wise UK

Work Wise UK is a non-political, not-for-profit initiative, which aims to make the UK one of the most progressive economies in the world by encouraging Smarter Working practices to the benefit of business, employees and the country as a whole.

An increasingly complex world means that employers and employees have to strive to use their resources effectively. Employers wish to gain better productivity and employees wish to balance work-life pressures. Work Wise UK provides a central information service for the UK workforce, and champions the dissemination of key information and best practice throughout the programme.

The initiative brings together UK society, including the public and private sectors, professional bodies and trade unions to support the broader use of Smarter Working as a modern day approach to working life.

³ <http://www.tca.org.uk/telework-association-team>

⁴ <http://www.tca.org.uk/telework-association-team>

Working smarter is about the simple things that employers and employees can identify within their operation to reduce wasted time, wasted travel and wasted effort.⁵

1.3. Flexibility.co.uk

Flexibility aims to inform and stimulate debate about the changing world of work.

Flexibility brings together research and opinion about innovations in employment practice, organisational development, technological change and public policy.

Flexibility was first published in paper version in October 1993. Since then it has provided regular updates on the world of flexible work, with news, views, reviews, articles, links and other useful resources. It first went online in 1997, becoming one of the first online business journals.

The content of Flexibility is in large part based on knowledge gained through the implementation work and research projects carried out with other collaborators in the field of flexible work.

Flexibility.co.uk Ltd

In 2004, Flexibility was spun out as a separate venture, with the mission to extend the number of partners supporting its work, and helping to raise awareness of the impact and benefits of flexible working.

In 2011 assets were transferred to Flexibility.co.uk Ltd, a new company set up to take the mission forward and develop new ventures.⁶

2. Health and Safety

In the course of preparing this Briefing Note, RalSe has identified a number of publications relating to the health and safety of remote workers. This potentially very significant issue has not been covered in other RalSe briefings on the subject of flexible working, so a number of possible sources of expertise are identified here.

2.1. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. It has over 130,000 members internationally - working in HR, learning and development, people management and consulting across private businesses and organisations in the public and voluntary sectors.⁷

A CIPD publication *Helping managers support the health of remote and lone workers* reports that:

⁵ <http://www.workwiseuk.org/about/>

⁶ <http://www.flexibility.co.uk/about/index.htm>

⁷ <http://www.cipd.co.uk/cipd-hr-profession/about-us/>

...two-thirds of remote workers report psychological distress and experience more general symptoms of ill health compared with other employers. Some of the risks identified include longer working hours, fatigue and stress, lack of contact with fellow workers, sedentary working practices, poor diet, and also engagement issues.⁸

CFP may therefore wish to seek evidence from CIPD in relation to the health impacts of remote working. In particular, this finding seems to go against the general thrust of other evidence which points to better employee job satisfaction and motivation when given flexibility.

2.2. Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure

The Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) protects national security by providing protective security advice. Protective security is 'putting in place, or building into design, security measures or protocols such that threats may be deterred, detected, or the consequences of an attack minimised'. [CPNI] provide advice on physical security, personnel security and cyber security/information assurance. Most importantly, [CPNI] explains how these components combine together and reinforce each other - and their relationship to the threat. CPNI's protective security advice is built on a combination of things, including:

- what science tells us (our research and development programme)*
- our understanding of the national security threat*
- our experience and expertise*
- effective relationships with private and public sector partners*
- policy considerations.⁹*

Of particular interest to CFP may be the CPNI publication *Personnel Security in Remote Working: a Good practice Guide*, which provides guidance on good personnel security practice for remote working on a regular or permanent basis. The guidance is intended for employers (particularly managers, human resources and security departments) and employees in the national infrastructure.¹⁰

⁸ Resource summary available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/axa/helping-managers-support-remote-lone-workers.aspx>. Full text only available to CIPD members. (accessed 20 November 2013)

⁹ <http://www.cpni.gov.uk/about/>

¹⁰ http://www.cpni.gov.uk/documents/publications/2012/2012004-personnel_security_in_remote_working.pdf?epslanguage=en-gb (accessed 20 November 2013)

2.3. The British Security Industry Association

The BSIA's Lone Worker Forum consists of BSIA members who specialise in providing lone worker safety products and services to customers from a wide range of industry backgrounds.

According to the BSIA's website:

More than six million people in the UK work either in isolation or without direct supervision, often in places or circumstances that put them at potential risk. A wide variety of organisations and industry sectors employ people whose jobs require them to work or operate alone, either regularly or occasionally. Almost by definition, lone working can be both intimidating and at times dangerous, so the protection of lone workers involves a twofold approach; not only to provide safeguards but also to offer reassurance to the people involved.¹¹

The BSIA produces guidance for lone workers and for their employers. CFP may, therefore, be interested in seeking evidence in relation to issues affecting the Northern Ireland public sector.

¹¹ <http://www.bsia.co.uk/lone-workers/about-bsia-lone-workers> (accessed 20 November 2013)