

Consultation Paper

Donegal Remote Working Strategy

June 2020



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council

Introduction

Covid-19 has transformed how we live and work and has forced us to rethink our 'normal' way of doing things.

Early indications suggest that there is an opportunity for locations such as Donegal to position itself as a real and meaningful alternative to city life offering a superb quality of life with fresh air, open spaces and vibrant communities with excellent infrastructure including high speed broadband connectivity and other flexible working solutions such as a network of digital hubs.

The purpose of this paper is to garner views and insights from a range of key stakeholders on remote working opportunities for Donegal. These views and insights will feed into a new Remote Working Strategy for Donegal that will set out a structured approach on how best to maximise the opportunities presenting for Donegal as a remote working destination of choice on the island of Ireland.

This strategy is being led by Donegal County Council's Economic Development Unit and will be developed and delivered in partnership with a range of stakeholders including the Donegal Digital Action Group.

What is remote working?

Remote working is an umbrella term encompassing various agile working methods that allow employees to work from home, hub or a hybrid (mix of home and hub).

Why remote working?

Research prior to Covid-19 found that remote working grew globally by 400%¹ in the last decade and bearing in mind that Covid-19 has resulted in a huge change in the way people work, indications suggest that this scenario is presenting new considerations for businesses across the globe, including for multi-national companies and there is a growing appetite for more flexible and innovative working solutions. In fact, a recent survey of 317 global business leaders by Gartner revealed that 74% expect to move previously onsite employee's remote post COVID-19.²

This presents opportunities for regions such as Donegal in positioning itself as a remote working location of choice for companies and workers.

¹ <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-remote-work-rose-by-400-in-the-past-decade/>

² <https://www.gartner.com/en/finance/trends/cfo-responses-to-coronavirus>

Policy context

Future Jobs Ireland has placed emphasis on remote working to attract and retain talent and to increase participation in an increasingly tight labour market through flexible working solutions. Such solutions are increasingly a priority from a range of perspectives, from sustainability and positive environmental impacts, to increasing participation amongst women, older people and people with disabilities in the workforce.

With a growing emphasis on digitalisation, remote work is increasingly viewed as an intervention with the potential to widen the talent pool across Ireland, stimulate regional growth, lessen accommodation pressures in cities, reduce congestion and facilitate the transition to a greener economy. This potential has been highlighted in the Government's nine Regional Enterprise Plans for 2019-2020 and the Climate Action Plan 2019.

Influencing factors for employers

Our research has found a range of factors influencing employers' decisions on remote working. These include:

Proximity to innovators: Some large organisations use coworking spaces so their employees can be close to and easily interact with innovative start-ups. Curating the mix of employees, start-ups, entrepreneurs, freelancers, researchers and academics can provide real innovation opportunities for large multinationals.

Networking opportunities: Many employers encourage employees to network beyond their own teams as much as possible. From educational seminars, social gatherings, business briefings and wellness programmes, companies in remote working hubs can gain access to extensive networks.

Reduced costs: Companies can avoid spending time and resources on expensive leases, cleaning, and utility bills and lower costs leads to higher profits. Our research has found that lease flexibility is one of the key driving appeals of remote working while research also indicates that remote workers have lower salary expectations than city workers.³ According to a survey by the Global Workplace Analytics, 37% of remote workers would take a 10% pay cut to continue working from home.⁴ A further study by Stanford University found that profitability increased by 21% when remote working was introduced to half the workforce of a large telecommunications firm.⁵

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2020/05/21/44-would-take-10-pay-cut-to-work-from-home-forever/#200faaa753e9>

⁴ <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics>

⁵ <https://nbloom.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj4746/f/wfh.pdf>

Flexibility: Remote working provides organisations with flexibility, for example companies can place a project team near a target market for a short duration. Companies are also better equipped to spot emerging trends and new opportunities from remote working hubs, as it stimulates collaboration among likeminded people.

Talent acquisition and retention: Access to skilled talent is one of the key challenges facing multinational companies and a survey by Zapier.com, revealed that 74% of the workforce would prefer to quit a job for one that offers remote working.⁶ Many organisations aim to attract and retain staff by offering them the chance to work remotely.

Increase productivity: A study by Stanford Professor, Nicholas Bloom, into the productivity of Ctrip, China's largest travel agency, revealed that remote workers were 13% more productive than office employees, the equivalent of almost an extra day a week.⁷ A more recent survey by Airtasker found that remote workers work an additional 1.4 days per month than their in-office employees. The study also revealed that long commutes caused 1 in 4 respondents to quit a job at some point.⁸ Furthermore, a Flexjobs survey found that 74% of remote workers are more productive.⁹

Sustainability: There is an increasing awareness that there is a need to operate in more sustainable ways to reduce carbon footprints. Talented people can work from their local areas, reducing congestion, greenhouse emissions and commuting times. This will result in a lower cost of living, preservation of existing natural resources and improvement in infrastructure while also maintaining the social and economic fabric of towns and villages and allowing services to be maintained.

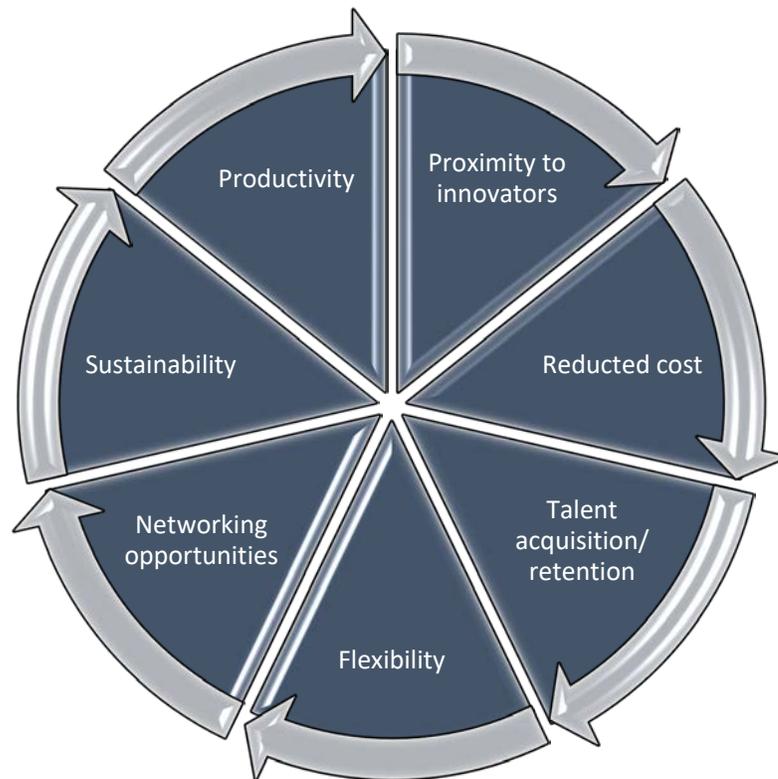
⁶ <https://zapier.com/blog/remote-work-report-by-zapier/>

⁷ <https://nbloom.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj4746/f/wfh.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.airtasker.com/blog/the-benefits-of-working-from-home/>

⁹ <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/remote-work-statistics/>

Fig 1: Key factors influencing employers decisions on remote working



Influencing factors for employees

There are many influencing factors for employees including reduced costs in terms of travel, housing and childcare, reduced commuting time and improved work/life balance resulting in better quality of life.

In addition, remote working opens-up opportunities for greater participation in the workforce including for women, people with disabilities and older people.

High Speed Broadband connectivity in Donegal

High Speed Broadband (30+Mbs) is currently available in all towns and villages across Donegal, with gigabit fibre optic services available in Buncrana, Letterkenny, Ballybofey, Stranorlar and Donegal Town. In addition, there are gigabit fibre services available to 27,000 households on the perimeters of these towns and villages on a separate commercial network. All commercial networks are open access with many different service providers operating in a competitive market.

There are diverse backhaul routes in and out of the county offering resilience and security of connectivity and direct access onto the Trans-Atlantic Fibre optic connection to North America through Letterkenny.

There are core Metropolitan Area Networks in the Gweedore Industrial Estate, Letterkenny, Bundoran, Buncrana, Ballyshannon, Ballybofey/ Stranorlar, Carndonagh and Donegal Town.

Donegal County Council is supporting the roll out of the National Broadband Plan (NBP), which will deliver High Speed Broadband (150+Mbs) to all areas of the county defined in the NBP Intervention Areas.

Remote Working hubs in Donegal

There are a number of Remote Working Hubs in Donegal with plans for additional facilities across the county. These facilities vary in their type of offering but all provide co-working opportunities including hot desks, dedicated desks, office space etc.

Fig 2 below lists the existing remote working hubs that we are currently aware of:

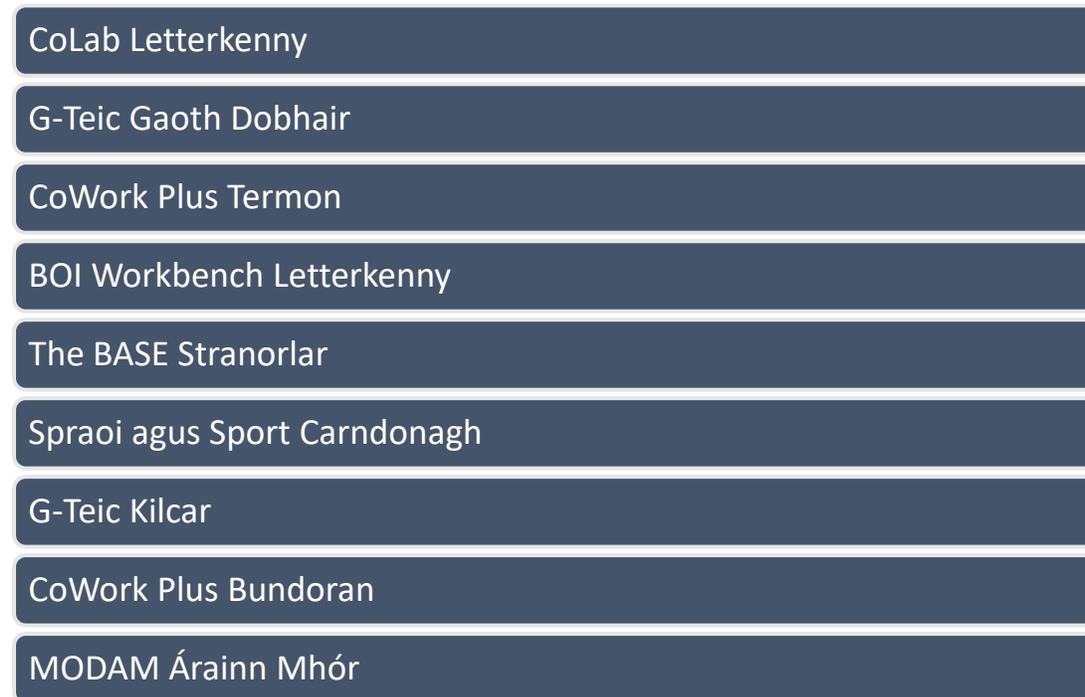


Fig 2: Remote Working Hubs in Donegal

Have your say

We are currently preparing a Remote Working Strategy for Donegal and want to hear from you.

Your views and insights will feed into this strategy that will set out a structured approach on how best to maximise the opportunities presenting for Donegal as a remote working destination of choice on the island of Ireland.

To guide your submission, it would be helpful if you could consider the following questions:

1. What does Remote Working mean to you?
2. What do you consider are Donegal's key strengths as a remote working location?
3. What do you think are Donegal's key weaknesses as a remote working location?
4. What areas or considerations should the Donegal Remote Working Strategy focus on to enable Donegal to position itself as a location of choice for remote working?
5. What actions can you/your organisation undertake to enable Donegal to position itself as a location of choice for remote working?

We welcome any other comments or suggestions in relation to this subject area.

You can make your submission by email to economicdevelopment@donegalcoco.ie or you can send it by post to:

Economic Development Unit
Donegal County Council
County House
Lifford
Co. Donegal

The deadline for receipt of submissions is **Friday 26 June 2020**.

Related Documents

[Remote Work in Ireland, Future Jobs Ireland 2019](#)

[Remote Working during Covid-19, Irelands National Survey](#)