UL STAFF SURVEY

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SUMMARY REPORT
September 2020

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Introduction

Below is a summary report of the UL Staff Survey on Remote Working, carried out in July 2020. The purpose of this survey was to gather information on how staff are experiencing working remotely in the changing environment posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. All responses to the survey were anonymous and treated with the strictest confidence. The survey responses were collated to highlight issues staff are experiencing with remote working, and to identify any equality and diversity issues that need to be addressed by the University. This report highlights some of the key findings, however an analysis of the full survey (in particular the extensive detailed comments provided by respondents) is ongoing. The combined results will feed into the creation of a Remote Working Policy for the University of Limerick.

A total of 1,224 people responded to the survey.

Response rates by gender

1,187 respondents provided information on their gender. 776 (65%) were female, 367 (31%) were male and 44 (4%) were non-binary or preferred not to say (NOTE: the non-binary and prefer not to say groups were combined for the analysis, as were the Professional, Administrative, Technical and Support staff groups, to ensure the anonymity of respondents).

Response rates by position and gender

Table 1 shows the response rates by role and gender. 42% (n = 479) of respondents were Professional/Administrative staff, 34.5% (n = 396) were Academic staff, 11% (n = 129) were Research staff, 6.5% (n = 75) were Technical staff, 2.5% (n = 29) were Support staff, 3% (n = 30) were in other roles, and 1% (n = 9) were PhD students.

81% (n = 389) of Professional/Administrative staff who responded were female, as were 52.5% (n = 208) of Academic staff, 60.5% (n = 78) of Research staff, 44% (n = 33) of Technical staff, 72% (n = 21) of Support staff, and 60% (n = 18) of staff in other roles.

	Prof./ Admin.	Academic	Research	Technical	Support	Other	PhD Student	Total
N	479	396	129	75	29	30	9	1147
Female	389 (81.2%)	208 (52.5%)	78 (60.5%)	33 (44.0%)	21 (72.4%)	18 (60.0%)	4 (44.4%)	751 (65.5%)
Male	79 (16.5%)	165 (41.7%)	49 (38.0%)	42 (56.0%)	7 (24.1%)	9 (30.0%)	4 (44.4%)	355 (31.0%)
Other	11 (2.3%)	23 (5.8%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.4%)	3 (10.0%)	1 (11.1%)	41 (3.6%)

Table 1: Response rates by position and gender.

Response rates by Faculty and gender

34% (n = 246) of respondents were in S&E, 33% (n = 241) were in EHS, 22% (n = 157) were in AHSS and 11% (n = 80) were in KBS.

Table 2 displays the response rates by Faculty and gender. 448 of the 724 respondents (62%) across the Faculties were female. 52% (n = 127) of respondents from S&E were male versus 33% (n = 26) in KBS, 26% (n = 62) in EHS and 24% (n = 38) in AHSS.

	S&E	EHS	AHSS	KBS	Total
N	246	241	157	80	724
Female	110 (44.7%)	178 (73.9%)	110 (70.1%)	50 (62.5%)	448 (61.9%)
Male	127 (51.6%)	62 (25.7%)	38 (24.2%)	26 (32.5%)	253 (34.9%)
Other	9 (3.7%)	1 (0.4%)	9 (5.7%)	4 (5.0%)	23 (3.2%)

Table 2: Response rates by Faculty and gender.

Caring Responsibilities (non-childcare)

28% (n = 214) of female respondents have non-childcare caring duties either within or outside of home versus 18% (n = 66) of males. There is a larger proportion of staff who were in the non-binary/prefer not to say group (4% of total surveyed) who also have caring duties outside of childcare (34%, n = 14).

	Female	Male	Other	Total
N	758	359	41	1158
No	544 (71.8%)	293 (81.6%)	27 (65.9%)	864 (74.6%)
Yes, outside of home	174 (23.0%)	49 (13.6%)	10 (24.4%)	233 (20.1%)
Yes, within home	40 (5.3%)	14 (3.9%)	4 (9.8%)	58 (5.0%)
Both within and outside home	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.3%)

Table 3: Non-childcare caring responsibilities by gender.

Challenges encountered

Almost 80% (n = 1,116) of staff who responded have encountered challenges while working remotely; 80% (n = 587) of females, 75% (n = 261) of males and 94% (n = 33) of those who were non-binary/preferred not to say.

Challenges encountered by gender

Staff scored challenges encountered on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = is not a challenge and 10 = is a very significant challenge. Males and female staff members scored most challenges very similarly. Those in the non-binary/prefer not to say group tended to have higher scores on average, however the numbers responding to many of the questions by those in this group were small.

Childcare scored highest on average in terms of challenges encountered. The median score of staff who responded (n = 455) was 8 (IQR: 2 to 10). 25% of all staff who responded scored this challenge as 10. The distribution of scores across the genders was very similar, although females (n = 300) and those in the non-binary/prefer not to say category (n = 18) gave a median rating of 8 (IQR: 2 to 10) versus a median rating of 7 (IQR: 3 to 10) for male staff (n = 137).

Increased workload and being unable to switch off from work both scored second highest in terms of challenges encountered, with a median score of 7 (IQR: 4 to 9) for increased workload and median score of 7 (IQR: 5 to 9) for inability to switch off from work for all staff who responded. The distribution of scores was very similar for males versus females (median scores of 7 for both groups on both challenges), and slightly higher on average for those in the non-binary/prefer not to say group (median score of 8 on both challenges).

Challenges encountered with home-schooling was the primary difference between the genders. Female staff (n = 272) gave a median score of 7 (IQR: 3 to 10), while male staff (n = 123) gave a median score of 5 (IQR: 2 to 8). Those in the non-binary/prefer not to say group (n = 12) gave a median score of 8.5 (IQR: 2.5 to 9).

Frequency working from home

53% (n = 574) of respondents had never worked from home prior to COVID-19, and a further 25.5% (n = 276) only worked from home every now and then. 21% (n = 231) of respondents regularly worked from home prior to COVID-19.

Frequency working from home by gender

Female staff and staff in the non-binary/prefer not to say group were less likely to have previously worked from home than male staff. 58% (n = 416) of female respondents and 64% (n = 21) of those in the non-binary/prefer not to say group had never worked from home versus 41% (n = 137) of males. 24% (n = 168) of females and 31% (n = 105) of males worked from home every now and then. 18% (n = 129) of female staff worked from home regularly prior to COVID-19 versus 28% (n = 93) of males.

	Female	Male	Other	Total
N	713	335	33	1081
Never	416 (58.3%)	137 (40.9%)	21 (63.6%)	574 (53.1%)
Every now and then	168 (23.6%)	105 (31.3%)	3 (9.1%)	276 (25.5%)
Several times a month	49 (6.9%)	42 (12.5%)	6 (18.2%)	97 (9.0%)
Several times a week	54 (7.6%)	32 (9.6%)	3 (9.1%)	89 (8.2%)
Daily	26 (3.6%)	19 (5.7%)	0 (0.0%)	45 (4.2%)

Table 4: Frequency working from home by gender.

Frequency working from home by position

There were large differences in the frequency of working from home for different staff members. 79% (n = 455) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff reported that they never worked from home prior to COVID-19 versus 37% (n = 45) of Research staff and 19% (n = 73) of Academic staff.

Academics were most likely to have worked at home every now and then (40%, n = 153). Only 15% (n = 87) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff reported working at home every now and then, while 29% (n = 35) of Research staff reported the same.

These patterns were similar for males and females within each job role.

	Academic	Prof/Admin/ Tech/Support	Research	Total
N	384	574	121	1079
Never	73 (19.0%)	455 (79.3%)	45 (37.2%)	573 (53.1%)
Every now and then	153 (39.8%)	87 (15.2%)	35 (28.9%)	275 (25.5%)
Several times a month	77 (20.1%)	10 (1.7%)	10 (8.3%)	97 (9.0%)
Several times a week	61 (15.9%)	7 (1.2%)	21 (17.4%)	89 (8.2%)
Daily	20 (5.2%)	15 (2.6%)	10 (8.3%)	45 (4.2%)

Table 5: Frequency working from home by position.

Transition to working from home

29% (n = 305) of staff who responded said they have adjusted well to working remotely, and 13% (n = 140) have found it very enjoyable and productive. 25% (n = 267) of respondents found the transition difficult at first but have adapted to it. 23% (n = 245) of respondents reported that they are still adjusting, while 9% (n = 93) have struggled to cope.

Similar patterns were apparent across male and female staff.

Transition to working from home by position

More Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff who responded found the experience very enjoyable and productive (17.5%, n = 98) than Academic staff (9%, n = 34) or Research staff (7%, n = 8).

More Academic staff reported that they were still adjusting to remote working (32%, n = 121) than Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff (17%, n = 93) or Research staff (26.5%, n = 31).

More Academic staff who responded struggled to cope (16%, n = 59) than Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff (4%, n = 23) or Research staff (9%, n = 11).

Transition to working from home by position and gender

Fewer female Academic staff report having adjusted well than other groups (18%, n = 34).

Higher proportions of female Academic staff (22.5%, n = 43) and female Professional/Admin/ Technical/Support staff (31%, n = 131) reported finding remote working difficult at first but have adapted to it than male staff in the same groups (male Academic staff: 13.5%, n = 22; male Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff: 18%, n = 22).

Female Academic staff were more likely to report that they were still adjusting to remote working than other groups (36%, n = 69).

Advantages to working remotely

89% (n = 943) of staff who responded saw advantages to working remotely.

Advantages to working remotely by gender

A marginally higher proportion of female staff who responded cited advantages to working from home, 92% (n = 642) of females versus 85% (n = 280) of males and 64% (n = 21) of those in the non-binary/prefer not to say group.

	Female	Male	Other	Total
N	697	330	118	1060
No	54 (7.7%)	50 (15.2%)	12 (36.4%)	116 (10.9%)
Yes	643 (92.3%)	280 (84.8%)	21 (63.6%)	944 (89.1%)

Table 6: Advantages working remotely by gender.

Advantages to working remotely by position

A marginally higher proportion of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff who responded (92%, n = 517) saw advantages to working remotely than Academic (87%, n = 331) or Research (80.5%, n = 95) staff.

	Academic	Prof/Admin/ Tech/Support	Research	Total
N	379	561	118	1058
No	48 (12.7%)	44 (7.8%)	23 (19.5%)	115 (10.9%)
Yes	331 (87.3%)	517 (92.2%)	95 (80.5%)	943 (89.1%)

Table 7: Advantages working remotely by position.

The top advantages of working from home for staff who responded (irrespective of gender or position) were:

1. No traffic, parking issues or commute: 71% (n = 791).
2. Reduced work/travel costs: 43% (n = 481).
3. Flexibility in managing workload: 43% (n = 473).
4. Increased productivity: 31% (n = 339). This was more important for Professional/Admin/ Technical staff, where 37% (n = 214) said this was an advantage versus 24% of Academic and Research staff.

Ability to work effectively

35% (n = 365) of staff found it difficult or somewhat difficult to work effectively, while 40.5% (n = 421) found it easy or somewhat easy.

Ability to work effectively by position and gender

Female Academic and Research staff were particularly impacted, with 55% (n = 106) of female Academics and 51% (n = 35) of female Research staff reporting that they found it difficult or somewhat difficult to work effectively. In contrast, 43% (n = 69) of male Academic staff and 38% (n = 17) of male Research staff found it difficult or somewhat difficult to work effectively.

Male Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff were marginally more likely than their female counterparts to report that they found it difficult or somewhat difficult to work effectively (28%, n = 34 of males versus 20%, n = 83 of females).

43% (n = 121) of Academic staff with caring duties, 13% (n = 57) of Professional/Admin/ Technical/Support staff with caring duties and 31% (n = 26) of Research staff with caring duties said they had a decrease in productivity.

Supports needed for working remotely

Top 5 supports needed (all staff)

1. Finance scheme to purchase equipment (58%, n = 641)
2. Access to the office (52.5%, n = 582)
3. Training supports for remote working (35%, n = 388)
4. Clarity on workload (33%, n =370)
5. Guidelines on impact of COVID on progression/promotion (31%, n = 342)

Supports needed by position and gender

The top 2 supports required by all staff, regardless of position or gender were

1. Finance scheme to purchase equipment
2. Access to the office.

Female Academic staff were particularly concerned about supports for clarity on workload (50%, n = 104) and guidelines on the impact of COVID on progression/promotion (47%, n = 98). Male Academic staff also listed these as key support requirements, however to a lesser degree: 37% (n = 61) requested guidelines on the impact of COVID on progression/promotion and 35% (n = 58) requested clarity on workload. 39% (n = 82) of female and 33% (n = 55) of male Academics requested training supports for remote working.

Both female and male Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff were particularly concerned about training supports for remote working (females: 39%, n = 171; males: 34%, n = 43). 27% (n = 119) of female and 27% (n = 35) of male staff requested clarity on workload. 24% (n = 108) of female and 22% (n = 28) of male staff requested guidelines on the impact of COVID on progression/promotion.

Both female and male Research staff listed clarity on workload as an important support (females: 29.5%, n = 23; males: 31%, n = 15). They listed training supports for remote working (females: 24%, n = 19; males: 22%, n = 11) and guidelines on the impact of COVID on progression/promotion on their career (females: 24%, n = 19; males: 22%, n = 11) as key supports they required. Research staff also listed regular communication from their manager as important (females: 22%, n = 17; males: 31%, n = 15).

		Academic	Prof/Admin/ Tech/Support	Research
Finance scheme to purchase equipment	*Female*	120 (57.7%)	242 (54.6%)	38 (48.7%)
	Male	117 (70.9%)	80 (62.5%)	22 (44.9%)
	Other	14 (60.9%)	6 (50.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Access to office	*Female*	112 (53.8%)	242 (54.6%)	20 (25.6%)
	Male	97 (58.8%)	70 (54.7%)	22 (44.9%)
	Other	13 (56.5%)	5 (41.7%)	1 (50.0%)
Guidelines on impact on prog./promotion	*Female*	98 (47.1%)	108 (24.4%)	19 (24.4%)
	Male	61 (37.0%)	28 (21.9%)	11 (22.4%)
	Other	13 (56.5%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Clarity on workload	*Female*	104 (50.0%)	119 (26.9%)	23 (29.5%)
	Male	58 (35.2%)	35 (27.3%)	15 (30.6%)
	Other	10 (43.5%)	5 (41.7%)	1 (50.0%)
Training supports for remote working	*Female*	82 (39.4%)	171 (38.6%)	19 (24.4%)
	Male	55 (33.3%)	43 (33.6%)	11 (22.4%)
	Other	6 (26.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)

Table 8: Top 5 supports needed for remote working by position and gender.

Meeting frequency

The largest proportion of staff who responded met virtually weekly (41%, n = 409). 25% (n = 245) met virtually every 2-3 weeks, 20% (n = 203) met monthly and 7% (n = 69) met daily. 7% (n = 67) of staff reported never meeting their colleagues virtually.

Meeting frequency by position

Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and Research staff reported meeting more regularly than Academic staff. 52% (n = 279) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and 44% (n = 46) Research staff met weekly versus 24% (n = 84) of Academic staff.

The largest proportion of Academic staff met every 2-3 weeks (36%, n = 128) versus 19% (n = 99) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and 17% (n = 18) of Research staff.

A further 32% (n = 113) of Academic staff met monthly versus 13.5% (n = 72) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and 17% (n = 18) of Research staff.

Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff were more likely than Academic or Research staff to meet daily (11%, n = 60) versus 1% (n = 3) and 6% (n = 6) respectively.

Of potential concern is that 16% (n = 17) of Research staff reported never meeting colleagues virtually.

	Academic	Prof/Admin/ Tech/Support	Research	Total
N	356	532	105	993
Never	28 (7.9%)	22 (4.1%)	17 (16.2%)	67 (6.7%)
Monthly	113 (31.7%)	72 (13.5%)	18 (17.1%)	203 (20.4%)
Every 2-3 weeks	128 (36.0%)	99 (18.6%)	18 (17.1%)	245 (24.7%)
Weekly	84 (23.6%)	279 (52.4%)	46 (43.8%)	409 (41.2%)
Daily	3 (0.8%)	60 (11.3%)	6 (5.7%)	69 (6.9%)

Table 9: Meeting frequency by position.

Impact of working remotely on relationships with colleagues

The majority of staff (78%, n = 751) reported that working remotely has changed how they work with colleagues.

Male Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and Academics in the non-binary/prefer not to say group were most likely to report changes. 87.5% (n = 98) of male Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and 94% (n = 16) of Academics in the non-binary/prefer not to say group reported that how they work had changed.

Key themes in the staff comments include:

1. Less opportunity for informal interaction and there is reduced interaction overall.
2. Difficulty connecting/feeling connected with a group.
3. Lack of social connection.
4. Note that some staff reported that being online has improved communication and has increased productivity.

Academic staff were least likely to still feel part of their team with 43% (n = 140) of respondents reporting that they did not feel part of their team versus 28% (n = 141) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff. 38% (n = 36) of Research staff also reported not feeling as much a part of the team as previously.

Female staff and staff in the non-binary/prefer not to say group were more likely than their male counterparts to report not feeling as much a part of the team (see Table 10).

Key themes in the comments include:

1. Changes in relationships between colleagues (more "transactional" interactions now).
2. Feeling closer to a smaller group of colleagues but more distant from larger group/institution as a whole.
3. Feeling more isolated/distant from colleagues.
4. Some teams are making big efforts to stay connected.

		Academic	Prof/Admin/ Tech/Support	Research	Total
Female					
	No	75 (45.2%)	113 (29.3%)	27 (49.1%)	215 (35.4%)
	Yes	91 (54.8%)	273 (70.7%)	28 (50.9%)	392 (64.6%)
Male					
	No	53 (36.8%)	24 (21.6%)	9 (24.3%)	86 (29.5%)
	Yes	91 (63.2%)	87 (78.4%)	28 (75.7%)	206 (70.5%)
Other					
	No	12 (75.0%)	4 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (57.1%)
	Yes	4 (25.0%)	6 (60.0%)	2 (100.0%)	12 (42.9%)

Table 10: Feel part of the team by position and gender.

Despite the challenges, 91% (n = 581) of staff who responded would like to work remotely in some way going forward. 51% (n = 593) of staff would like to work remotely several times per week, 23% (n = 222) would like to work remotely several times per month and 15% (n = 142) would like to work remotely daily. 11.5% (n = 111) do not want to work remotely.

Availability of equipment required

32% of staff (n = 359) reported not having all the equipment needed to work from home.

The majority (79%, n = 761) of staff who responded have a dedicated workspace at home.

Most staff who responded had adequate broadband to work efficiently (84.5%, n = 801).

Availability of equipment by position

35% (n = 140) of Academic staff, 33% (n = 192) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff and 21% (n = 27) of Research staff reported not having all of the equipment they needed.

26% (n = 90) of Academic staff and 28% (n = 28) of Research staff do not have a dedicated workspace at home. 17% (n = 89) of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff do not have a dedicated workspace at home.

A quarter (25%, n = 85) of Academic staff do not have adequate broadband to work efficiently.

Key themes regarding broadband access in the staff comments include:

1. Broadband tends to be available but speed/quality/consistency is a huge issue. Cost is also a barrier for some staff.
2. Several staff need to hotspot from their mobile phone.

Summary

Female staff had more non-childcare caring responsibilities outside the home than male staff.

The biggest challenges encountered by staff were childcare, increased workload, and an inability to switch off from work. The biggest difference between male and female staff in terms of challenges encountered was around home-schooling; female staff found this a greater challenge than male staff.

Almost 80% of Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff reported never working from home previously. Male staff were more likely to have worked from home to some degree prior to COVID-19 than female staff.

Although Professional/Admin/Technical/Support staff had less experience working from home prior to COVID-19 than Academic staff or Research staff, they appeared to adapt better to working remotely.

More female staff reported finding working remotely difficult initially but had adapted than male staff.

Almost 90% of staff reported advantages to working remotely, in particular avoiding traffic, commuting, and parking in and around UL.

Key supports for all staff included a finance scheme to purchase equipment, access to the office, clarity on workload, guidelines on the impact of COVID on progression, promotion and recruitment, and training for remote working.

Female Academic staff were particularly concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their career progression.

Academic staff met virtually much less frequently than other staff members. A significant proportion (16%) of Research staff reported never meeting their colleagues virtually.

A third of staff did not have the required equipment, approximately a quarter did not have a dedicated workspace at home, and a quarter of Academic staff who responded reported not having adequate broadband to carry out their job effectively.