

# Who speaks for whom at work: worker voice and social dialogue

## Summary of the impact:

Over the last few decades academic research has often neglected issues of power and influence concerning labour market institutions, employment regulation, models of collaborative partnership between workers, unions and employers, and systems for inclusion and wider stakeholder voice. Through a body of research involving international collaborators, Tony Dundon has provided evidence on new processes and forms of worker voice and social dialogue that can enhance decent work goals, expose labour market inequalities, and support collaborative employment partnerships.

The research was undertaken with policymakers, consultancies, employers, employer associations, trade unions, HR managers, workers, and shop steward and non-union employee representatives.

First, it impacted employee voice mechanisms at workplace levels. Second, it has impacted employee information and consultation policy, including European Directive transposition issues at national and organisational levels. Third, it has impacted labour market reforms for enhanced collective bargaining and work futures. Finally, it has impacted policies on accessing apprenticeship skills and learning in Ireland.

## Countries where the impact occurred:

Ireland, United Kingdom, Australia, USA, Mexico, China.

**Beneficiaries:** In terms of people and organisations: workers, trainees/apprentices, trade unions, multinational


corporations, labour market agencies. In terms of mechanisms and practices: policy on employee engagement, equality and diversity, voice channels, and collective bargaining.

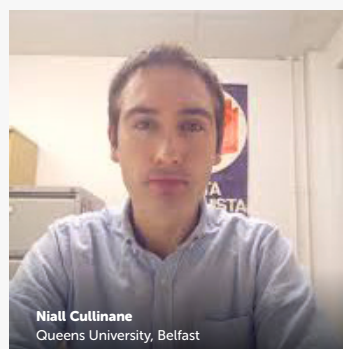
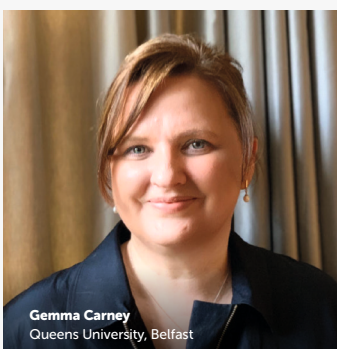
## Details of the impact

Many interpretations of impact can be disconnected from broader societal, ethical, and political contexts. For many university business schools, impact can relate exclusively to business interests. This includes negative ones such as corporate greed and actions that prop up neo-liberal orthodoxies. For example, cost cutting saves corporations money but negatively impacts people in communities because of job loss and inequitable treatments. Corporate innovation or performance appraisals may be no more than euphemisms for cost cutting and workforce reductions. Therefore, what research is about and whom it involves are, for impact, important human facets for equity and justice. The research contributes new insights concerning corporate behaviours and how employer groups function as dominant actors with 'power over' others in the labour market. The case is about 'worker voice and social dialogue'. It reviews impacts across three areas:

1. Voice mechanisms and union bargaining, both before and also post-2008 austerity
2. Impacts on employee information and consultation (I&C) policy formation, including European



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Directive transposition issues

3. Impacts on labour market reform for collective voice, work skills and learning

### 1. Voice Mechanisms and Union Bargaining

The research addresses evidence for fairer voice and trade union bargaining. This includes an Irish Research Council (IRC) funded project on vulnerable groups, undertaken with community and voluntary NGOs to enhance labour market inclusion and social partnership (Ref 1 & 2) (Source 1 & 8).

Another research project on union bargaining tactics specific to the manufacturing sector in Ireland (Ref 3) helped shape the outcomes of wage negotiations in a positive way for workers, with "115 agreements, covering 95 companies, affecting the pay of at least 2570 SIPTU members" in Ireland (Source 1). Further impacts connect with how trade unions developed their own learning curricula. For example, the SIPTU Education College confirmed that the research (Ref 3, 4 & 10), has had "a major impact in shaping our programmes" (Source 2).

There is also evidence that the research was used directly for more equitable employee voice mechanisms at the organisational level in different countries. For example, Medtronic implemented "significant changes at a global level to corporate employee engagement strategy" in Ireland, Mexico, and the US (Source 3). It was also reported to have had a positive impact on front line manager roles in Medtronic, allowing the company to "develop new coaching styles that would not have otherwise occurred without research results, with noticeable organisational benefits in terms of mutual gains and reciprocity" (Source 3). The Bank of China reported other impacts

from the research in at least 27 branches in China (Ref 5, 6 & 10), leading to "better retention, more positive working cultures and improved work-life balance" (Source 4).

### 2. Employee Information & Consultation Policy

Research from bi-lateral IRC-Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding was concerned with the transposition of EU employee information and consultation policy (Ref 4 & 7). The research impacted (in part) some of the measurement indicators developed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Britain's national equality body, for voice and participation (Ref 5, 8 & 10). The EHRC affirmed that: "research expertise in the field of employment rights, voice and participation thus supported the EHRC's work in a meaningful and impactful way" (Source 5).

Broader policy contributions are also demonstrated by Dundon being invited to report to a UK House of Commons Select Committee in 2019 on research produced with co-researchers from the Work & Equalities Institute, University of Manchester (Source 6a). Recommendations called on government to redistribute the gains from new technology and artificial intelligence in one sector, in order to better value worker status in other sectors, such as care workers. These recommendations specified better access to skills and learning for more equitable work futures (Source 6b).

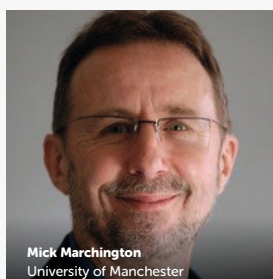
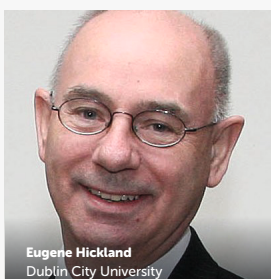
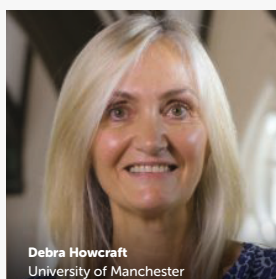
The research has also influenced employee I&C policy work of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (Ref 8). The CIPD is the leading professional body for HR practitioners in the UK and Ireland (and worldwide), with over 150,000 members responsible for designing and implementing HR policy. For example, the Head of Research for the CIPD

commented: "a direct impact of your research to date is that it is being used to inform the redesign of the CIPD's national survey of employees; being rebranded UK Working Life ... This survey is a major publication for the CIPD and a constant reference point in the media, and for HR practitioners and academics ... your research will have a further indirect impact by feeding into CIPD recommendations for UK employment policy, which potentially inform government thinking ... [and] ... influencing practice among CIPD members" (Source 7).

### 3. Labour Market Reform

The above two areas overlap with impacts on labour market reform, with research concerned with collective representation and work skills.

According to ICTU, the research "had a direct and sustained impact on trade union bargaining and organising strategies both in Ireland and across European jurisdictions" (Source 8) (Ref 3 & 4). For example, it provided ICTU with new knowledge insights of different concession bargaining approaches among separate employers, which was used to unpack the utility of multiple bargaining tactics across different corporate settings experiencing austerity. Further impacts show how social partnership structures can affect new policy changes (Ref 1, 2, & 5). For example, based on research expertise on social partnership, Dundon was invited to serve as a member of an expert panel to revise Irish Apprenticeships, whose report Apprenticeships and Training Ireland was published in 2013 (Source 9). According to the then Minister for Training and Skills, research "on labour market inclusion and social dialogue were valuable to key recommendations of the Commission. These have had a substantial impact on labour market activation for the country"



(Source 10) (Ref 2 & 5). This activation included an extension of partnership relations between employers, trade unions, and education and training providers to agree new clusters of skills (Source 10) (Ref 1).

The Minister added that this research has helped reform the “labour market for many young people in Ireland, thereby supporting the country’s competitiveness through positive labour market activation” (Source 10). The impact has contributed to almost a doubling of the number of people accessing apprenticeship training since the Commission’s changes have been rolled out: ‘from 8,300 in 2015 to 16,000 in 2019, with a 150% increase in the number of female apprenticeship trainees’ (Source 10).

### Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) Testimonial ‘A’ (Deputy General Secretary, Private Sector)
2. Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) Testimonial ‘B’ (Head of SIPTU College)
3. Medtronic. Testimonial (HR Director)
4. Bank of China. Testimonial (Director of Training, London)
5. Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Testimonial (Research Manager)
6. a. Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee (2019), ‘Oral evidence: Automation and the future of work’, House of Commons Select Committee Report (Ref HC 1093), 30th April. London
- b. Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee (2019), ‘Automation and the future of work’, House of Commons Select Committee Report (Ref HC 1093), 9th September. London;
7. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Testimonial (Head of Research)
8. Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Testimonial (Industrial Officer)
9. Report. Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, 2013, Department of Education and Skills, Dublin,

December

10. Minister for Training and Skills, Department of Education and Skills, Irish Government. Testimonial and confirmation of impact data.

### Underpinning research

The research in this impact case study is about who speaks for whom at work. The research involved asking questions to address gaps in understanding about how power relations are mobilised through both formal and informal voice channels. The cumulative body of research falls under three themes and phases.

#### a) Voice mechanisms and union bargaining

Research projects with Marchington, Wilkinson and Ackers looked at various forms and meanings of employee voice (Grant 5). The research addressed issues of strategic choice about worker voice, collecting new data across large multi-divisional organisations as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

The evidence contributed to debates about the multiple meanings and purposes of employee voice, charting how simultaneous and overlapping voice channels can coexist (Ref 5), some of which challenge vested employer interests while others undermine worker influence (Ref 8). The findings added new insights into how employers and corporations redefine employee voice within the context of vested interests. This included insights into tactics deployed by some anti-union employers to avoid bargaining and trade union recognition, and thereby diminish worker voices. Related research (Grant 1) extended knowledge of voice meanings and employment power resources.

The findings also included newer issues of fairer voice, new technologies and gig work related to the applications of equality, such as representative participation and informal social dialogue (Ref 1, Ref 3, Ref 9). The research into voice mechanisms and union bargaining informed research on the regulation of employee information and consultation policy.

#### b) Employee information and consultation policy (I&C)

Research on the transposition of employee information and consultation (I&C) regulations flowed from the above research (Ref 5; Ref 4). Co-funded research with Donaghey (and including Cullinane, Dobbins and Hickland) addressed new research questions about how organisations respond to new employment regulations across different sovereign jurisdictions (Grant 3).

The research added unique case study data of the corporations (and trade unions) that operate simultaneously across different European Union (EU) regulatory jurisdictions on the island of Ireland (e.g. the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland of the UK). The findings added new knowledge to ‘regulatory space’ debates across multiple levels of employment policy, positioning employer capture of regulatory power and constraints for workers to trigger their legitimate rights for voice (Ref 6, Ref 7, Ref 10).

Related research with Carney (Grant 4) also asked questions about the impact of social dialogue among civil society organisations with an interest in voice in the labour market. The findings addressed, among other issues, skills, training, and inclusion of wider groups of stakeholders (Ref 1; Ref 2). Both projects added new data concerning transnational regulatory policy for I&C and collaborative social partnership at national (government) level.

#### c) Labour market reform

The research on both the ‘meanings of voice and union bargaining’ and ‘I&C policy formation’ informed knowledge towards related research on labour market reforms.

A research project with Martinez Lucio (including Hickland and others) collected evidence about trade union bargaining responses across seven countries in manufacturing sectors, all of whom experienced austerity measures post-2008 global financial crisis (Grant 2).

This research contributed to three new insights. First, the evidence showed how



employment relations actors engaged with and responded to Troika-imposed austerity measures in each country (Ref 3). Second, the finding reported on the scope of labour market changes and how these affected bargaining tactics at the sector, multi-employer and enterprise-levels were developed (Ref 3). Third, the findings reported on outcomes of new bargaining under austerity. It pointed to new patterns (in different countries) of wage setting, new technologies, the politicisation of the future of worker skills, concession bargaining and the scope of considerable continuity alongside labour market changes (Ref 3; Ref 9).

### References to the research

1. Carney, G., Dundon, T., and NiLeime, A. (2012). 'Protecting the most vulnerable in an economic crisis: a participatory study of civil society organisations in Ireland', Voluntary Sector Review, 3(3): 329-346)
2. Carney, G., Dundon, T., and NiLeime, A. (2012). 'Participatory action research with and within community activist groups: Capturing the collective experience of Ireland's Community and Voluntary Pillar (CVP) in social partnership', Action Research Journal, 10 (3): 313-330
3. Hickland, E. and Dundon, T. (2016). 'The shifting contours of collective bargaining in the manufacturing sector in the Republic of Ireland: Government, employer and union responses since the economic crisis', European Journal of Industrial Relations, 22(3): 235-294 (ABS 3)
4. Donaghey, J., Cullinane, N., Dundon, T and Dobbins, T. (2012), 'Non-union employee representation, union avoidance and the managerial agenda', Economic and Industrial Democracy, 33 (2): 163-183 (ABS 3)
5. Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M., and Ackers, P., (2004). 'The meanings and purpose of employee voice', International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15(6):1150-1171 (ABS 3)
6. Dundon, T., Cullinane, N., Donaghey, J., Wilkinson, A., Dobbins, T., and Hickland, E. (2015). 'Double-breasting voice systems: an assessment of motive, strategy and sustainability', Human Relations, 68(3): 489 -513 (ABS 4)
7. Dundon, T., Dobbins, T., Cullinane, N., Hickland, E., and Donaghey, J. (2014). 'Employer occupation of regulatory space for the Employee Information and Consultation (I&C) Directive in Liberal Market Economies', Work, Employment & Society, 28(1): 21-39 (ABS 4)
8. Dundon, T., Martinez Lucio, M., Howcroft, D., Hughes, E., Keizer, A. and Walden, R. (2017). Power Dynamics in Work and Employment Relationships: the capacity for employee influence. CIPD Report. November. London: CIPD
9. Howcroft, D., Dundon, T. and Inversi, C. (2019). 'Fragmented Demands: Platform and Gig-Working in the UK'. In M. O'Sullivan, J Lavelle, J. McMahon, L. Ryan, C. Murphy, T. Turner & P. Gunnigle (Eds), Zero-Hours and On-Call Work in Anglo-Saxon Countries, Springer: New York.
10. Cullinane, N., Donaghey, J., Dundon, T., Dobbins, T., and Hickland, E. (2014). 'Regulating for Mutual Gains: Non-Union Employee Representation and the Information & Consultation Directive', International Journal of Human Resource Management, 25(6): 810-828 (ABS3).

### Grants and awards

1. Dundon (PI), Martinez Lucio, Howcroft, Keizer & Walden (2016), 'Employee influence and employment relations power' (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, CIPD), £20,000
2. Martinez Lucio, Koukiadaki, Távora (Coordinating EU PIs), Dundon and Hickland (PI covering Ireland) (2013-2014), Social dialogue during economic crisis: labour market reforms on collective bargaining in the manufacturing sector in Ireland (European Commission) €44,000.
3. Dundon (PI) and Donaghey (PI) (2008-2012), 'The impact of employee information & consultation on the island of Ireland; (bi-lateral Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) and Irish Research Council (IRC), €450,000.
4. Carney (PI), Dundon & NiLeime (2010-2012), 'Third Sector Lobbies: participatory strategies across the Life Cycle of Social Partnership' (Irish Research Council, IRC), €100,000.
5. Marchington (PI), Wilkinson, Dundon, Ackers (2002-2004), 'Management Choice and Employee Voice' (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, CIPD), £24,000

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2002-2015  
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2008-2019

**Details of staff conducting the underpinning research:** Tony Dundon, Professor of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Employment Relations, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick, and Visiting Professor, Work & Equalities Institute, University of Manchester. The research also includes collaborations with co-researchers: Prof Mick Marchington (emeritus, University of Manchester), Prof Adrian Wilkinson (Griffith University, Australia), Prof Miguel Martinez Lucio (University of Manchester); Prof Debra Howcroft (University of Manchester); Prof Jimmy Donaghey (University of South Australia); Dr Niall Cullinane (Queens University, Belfast); Prof Tony Dobbins (Birmingham University); Dr Eugene Hickland (Dublin City University); Dr Gemma Carney (Queens University, Belfast).

#### Underpinning research linked to UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth  
Goal 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure  
Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities