

Fórsa wants “mature, evidence-led” discussion on hybrid working

ANDY PRENDERGAST

Éamonn Donnelly, Deputy General Secretary of Fórsa, told the union’s civil service divisional conference this week that any discussions on hybrid/blended working in the Civil Service should be informed by analytics, and not subject to “arbitrary decisions”.

Mr Donnelly was referring to a dispute that arose at the Department of Social Protection, earlier this year, when Department employees were told they would have to increase their office working days (see [News Analysis in IRN 06/2025](#))

That direction to DSP employees drew a strong response from unions at the time, and the decision was paused. The parties subsequently referred the issue to the conciliation and arbitration board, the Civil Service dispute resolution mechanism.

This week, Fórsa’s Civil Service division said any review of blended working “should evaluate a broad range of factors, including public service delivery outcomes, workforce productivity, environmental impact, quality of life and caregiving flexibility.”

Mr Donnelly said: “What we’re looking for is a mature discussion based around analytics, about the benefits – or otherwise – to the worker, to the workplace, to the employer, to productivity, to climate, to traffic congestion and wellbeing.

“Blended working has proven benefits that cannot be ignored. Workers, the public, and the environment are better served by an evidence-led approach – not arbitrary decisions,” he said.

Fórsa member Cathal Kelly cited survey research by his own union branch, which found four-fifths of those with caring responsibilities, if they were required to work an additional day in the office, would have to make changes to care provision arrangements in the morning before traveling to work. Most respondents said additional office-based work would have a negative impact on their productivity.

UK STUDY

A recent study by the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College London and King’s Business School illustrates changing public sentiment. It found that just 42% of workers would comply with a five-day return-to-office requirement, down significantly from 54% in early 2022 (see [IRN 20/2025](#))

Mr Donnelly said that study was part of a growing body of research that confirms blended working is no longer a temporary response to crisis but a permanent feature of modern employment: “What employer places a higher value on staff spending time commuting to and from the office than working productively outside of the office?”

Mr Donnelly added that today’s meeting of the Civil Service General Council included a discussion on blended work and analytics, and that the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) is considering engagement in a process on that basis.