An Roinn Fiontar,
Trádála agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

CONNECTED
TEAMS

An Action Plan to Support Effective Blended Team Working in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Contents

Executive Summary

The aim of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's ConnEcTEd Teams programme is to identify and promote behaviours that support effective blended working for teams, targeting five key areas:

1. Maintaining team/organisation-wide connectedness and trust;
2. Ensuring effective and efficient information flows;
3. Enabling continued on-the-job training and coaching;
4. Facilitating remote collaboration and innovation; and
5. Supporting employee wellbeing.

This report details the key findings from the programme. It also sets outs the Department's action plan to nurture a blending working environment that supports organisational performance, team connectivity, employee engagement and wellbeing.

To date, the ConnEcTEd Teams programme has involved a range of initiatives including a competition for best practice remote team behaviours, a Peer2Peer network for new joiners (linking them with longer serving members of staff) and the adoption of a more collaborative approach to internal training and development sessions.

The cornerstone of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative is our action research project involving pilot teams from seven Divisions across the Department. The project commenced in February 2021, almost a year after staff shifted to working remotely due to the onset of the global pandemic. Through a series of facilitated workshops each team assessed its current remote working performance, developed a shared vision of future performance and agreed a set of actions needed to achieve that vision. After an implementation period, they reflected on progress made and agreed next steps to address the remaining challenges and opportunities for achieving the aspired change. The workshop facilitators, GrantThornton, our external project partner, provided global expertise on teamwork in remote settings and change management. They supported the teams to engage in challenging conversations in a confidential manner.

Senior leaders from across the Department also participated in facilitated sessions that focussed on building a shared understanding of the strategic opportunities and challenges presented by blended working for DETE and to identify the skills required to be effective leaders in a new hybrid work environment.

Our research tells us that our staff value feeling connected to their team (92%) and to the wider Department (77%). As a Department, we recognise the importance of taking steps to adapt and respond to the new ways of working.

In each of the thematic chapters, we have set out a number of organisational level actions which will be implemented through the ConnEcTEd Teams implementation process.

It is clear that individuals and teams also have a responsibility to play their part in making blended working a success. This report acknowledges that a simple, 'one size fits all' approach is likely to yield limited results. Therefore, in conjunction with the organisation-wide initiatives, it will be necessary for teams to work together to tailor additional solutions appropriately, so they continue to meet business needs effectively while taking account of specific business unit / Divisional challenges and opportunities.

For this reason, the report also includes a menu of suggested actions for consideration by individuals and for teams under the headings "What can I do?" and "What can my team do?". These serve as examples of proactive steps that can be taken. They can be selected from and customised locally to ensure achievement of business objectives and support for staff development and wellbeing[1].

A summary of the key findings under each of the thematic areas is set out below along with the relevant organisation-wide actions for implementation.

Sustaining Connectivity and Trust

Key Findings:

- The majority of ConnEcTEd Team project participants value feeling connected to their team (92%) and to a lesser extent the organisation (77%).
- While two-thirds feel connected to their team, only a half of ConnEcTEd Teams participants feel connected to the organisation.
- Self-reported productivity while working remotely increased for 42% and remained the same for 46%. Staff productivity as reported by managers increased by 46% and remained the same for 50%.
- Remote working appears to have created or exacerbated silos between teams and within teams.
- Online meetings are more transactional, task-focussed and rigid in format than onsite meetings.
- Junior staff appear more likely to be isolated, particularly from colleagues outside their team.

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1. The complete set of proposed actions for individuals and teams are collated under Appendix 1: ConnEcTEd Teams Cheat Sheet

Actions:

No.	Action	Owner(s)
1	In advance of the implementation of the Blended Working Policy, all Senior Management-led teams will convene as a group to; a) reflect on the remote working experience; b) consider the challenges of blended working; and c) agree and implement actions to support effective and efficient blended team working.	Senior Managers (to be determined locally as to whether PO/AP led)
2	Establish a ConnEcTEd Teams Implementation Group, comprised of representatives from across the Department to oversee implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams action plan and to share best practice. The Implementation Group will be chaired by an Assistant Secretary, who will act as the ConnEcTEd Champion for the DETE Management Board. In addition, to overseeing progress on the 26 organisation-level actions, the Group will work to promote the menu of activities proposed for implementation by teams and individuals.	Management Board to Nominate representatives
3	Leadership will role model best practice blended working behaviours by routinely working from remote settings, committing time and effort to nurturing team connectivity and by creating opportunities for staff, particularly those in more junior grades, to engage with colleagues in the wider Department.	Management Board and POs
4	Articulate clearly what the office offers. Department Leaders will actively communicate the benefits of being onsite and support the creation of an environment that realises these benefits. **Senior Management will:** i. Request people managers to deliberately structure team engagements to maximise the impact of onsite work. ii. Encourage regular "All-in-Days" for teams (with full regard for social distancing requirements) to build team bonds and support effective collaboration and on-the-job training.	Management Board and POs i. POs/APs ii. POs/APs
5.	The transition to blended working is a fundamental change in the way we work and cannot be understated. Change Management training for staff across the Department will be strongly promoted and supported, particularly in the period of transition prior to the full introduction of Blended Working.	Learning and Development Unit / Senior Management (POs/APs)

Ensuring Effective and Efficient Information Flows

Key Findings:

- Ensuring effective information flows within teams was ranked as the least challenging area of team performance across the five thematic areas examined. With 54% ranking it effective and 15% very effective. Performance was weaker in terms of information flows across the organisation (effective 49%, very effective 8%).

- Respondents prioritised the need for clearer communication (35%) and access to more user-friendly and modern I.T. systems (26%) as the key actions needed to support improvement in this area.

- The Department's intranet (BOB) and the Secretary General's weekly all staff emails were recognised as key tools for sharing information at Department level. There was general positivity towards the roll out of eDocs and its potential to support enhanced knowledge management.

- A need for a better platform to support real-time communication within teams or groups was identified.

- There is a concern that relevant information from Senior Management meetings is not always communicated effectively to more junior staff.

Actions:

No.	Action	Owner(s)
6.	Department Leaders will reiterate the expectation that a schedule of team/ Divisional meetings is embedded into the routines of all business areas. i. Team meetings will be structured to ensure staff have appropriate opportunities to share views and ask questions. ii. Regular Divisional-wide meetings will be held to support knowledge sharing and create synergies between Business Units.	Management Board and POs i. People Managers ii. Assistant Secretaries
7.	Review and enhance structures in place to cascade relevant information throughout the Department. It is important that key messages intended for top-down communication to all staff are relayed consistently from managers to their teams (e.g. monthly Secretary General and Principal Officer meeting). Staff engagement is ongoing to inform how routine corporate communications should evolve as we move into a blending working environment. i. The annual Senior Management Forum is a touchstone event in the Department's calendar attended by staff at Assistant Principal level and above. Consideration will be given to recording plenary sessions /keynote speakers at these events in the future for the benefit of all staff.	Communications Unit / Management Board i. Learning and Development Unit
8.	Establish Communities of Practice. A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest in a particular field (for example legislation, procurement, customer services). Involvement in these groups will provide members the opportunity to learn from each other and the chance to develop skills in a particular area whilst boosting staff engagement levels. The roll out of MS Teams across the Department has the potential to support the creation of virtual CoPs through the use of group channels and chat functions, document sharing etc.	Implementation Group
9.	Continue to support the work of the Knowledge Management (KM) sub-group of Innovate@ ETE. The KM Group is undertaking significant work to support the wider Department by developing and promoting the Knowledge Store, facilitating remote collaboration, enhancing networking opportunities, and is currently preparing a template to assist units in developing procedure manuals.	Management Board

Enabling continued Training and Coaching

Key Findings:

- The majority of ConnEcTEd Team respondents felt remote working had no impact on the quality of OtJ training received (59%), however a notable minority (28%) indicated the impact was negative.

- Similarly, a third of respondents felt remote working has reduced the frequency with which they accessed formal L&D opportunities while 59% felt there has been no impact.

- Among the cohort of people managers' surveyed, 58% had received no training regarding managing remote teams. 42% reported spending less time in 1-to-1 meetings with their direct reports and 32% said they had reduced the time spent coaching their staff while remote working.

- Workshop participants emphasised that the casual, unstructured learning that occurs from working alongside colleagues is difficult to replicate in the virtual environment.

- The significant increase in VC usage has, in many cases, provided junior staff access to external meetings they would not ordinarily attend. This was seen as a very useful development opportunity. Furthermore, some staff reported attending more conferences and seminars while working remotely, as the time and costs associated has reduced considerably when these shifted to online delivery.

- Participants felts that the content of online / virtual training is often less engaging and more challenging to absorb than onsite sessions, particularly when these are delivered using a purely lecture-style approach.

- The challenges facing new recruits to the Department was a key focus of discussions. There was concern that the Department-wide and business unit level approach to induction has not been adapted sufficiently to respond to the remote working environment.

- The Peer2Peer initiative has proved an effective means for new staff to meet colleagues, build networks and grow their knowledge of the work of the Department.

Actions:

No.	Action	Owner(s)
10.	Ensure blended working does not become an obstacle to continuous learning and development. People managers will actively encourage staff to avail of training opportunities and senior management will model strong coaching behaviour. i. The responsibility of People Managers to ensure their staff have access to continuous development opportunities will be highlighted. ii. The establishment of the Learning and Career Development Community of Expertise as part of the HR Operating Model will play a central role in ensuring that informal and formal training adapts to meet the needs of the blended learning environment. iii. HR Business Partners will support Senior Management to explore and address training needs.	People Managers/Senior Management (POs/APs) i. Learning and Development Unit / HRBPs ii. HR Unit iii. HR Business Partners
11.	Training for people managers with an emphasis on leading blended teams and enhancing coaching skills will be prioritised. i. The Learning and Development Unit will work closely with The Manager Development Subgroup of Innovate@ETE to explore how to maximise the impact of this action.	Learning and Development unit/ Senior Management i. Learning and Development Unit/ Manager Development Subgroup
12.	Adapt the structure and mix of learning interventions provided to respond to blended working. This will include enhancing the emphasis on collaborative learning sessions to support and sustain remote engagement and supporting greater access to interactive presentation tools such as Mentimeter, across the Department.	Learning and Development Unit
13.	Exploit the potential of on-demand training by expanding the range of "How to" videos on BOB and developing an easily accessible library of recordings of "Lunch and Learns" and Information sessions.	Learning and Development Unit / ICT Unit/ Trainers
14.	Ensure that those delivering training sessions at Business Unit Level are given access to recording functions on the relevant virtual meeting platform. This will support the development of team / function specific training libraries and facilitate knowledge management.	ICT Unit / Business Unit Trainers
15.	Review the current Department approach for inducting new starters to ensure it provides optimum outcomes for new recruits and the receiving unit, taking into account challenges that arise in the blended working environment.	HR Unit
16.	Develop a team New Starter Protocol. In addition to the Department induction checklist, team protocols will map out the steps that will be taken locally to support the new recruit in settling in.	Senior Managers (POs/APs)
17.	Extend the existing buddy system. Ensure that people new to teams, not just new to the Department, are assigned a colleague to act as their go-to person to assist them in settling in and answer questions as required for the duration of their induction period.	HR / People Managers
18.	Establish the Peer2Peer network on a permanent basis continuing to promote participation to new joiners and longer serving members of staff as a means to build cross-Divisional links. Continue to expand the networks activities in response to participant demand.	Organisation Design and Development Team

Facilitating Remote Collaboration and Innovation

Key Findings:

- A third (31%) of ConnEcTEd Team survey respondents felt that working remotely made it more difficult to be innovative or creative.
- 54% were of the view that their teams had collaborated effectively while working remotely, however, collaborative activity appears to be focussed on proactive information sharing rather than problem solving.
- On average teams spend just 14% of their time in virtual team meetings generating ideas and problem solving.
- The survey results and workshop discussions identified a need for more sophisticated tools to support real time virtual collaboration.

Actions:

No.	Action	Owner(s)
19.	Continue to prioritise and spotlight the work of Innovate@ETE which enables colleagues to collaborate at Departmental level to make positive changes to how we work, find solutions to challenges and provide opportunities to turn good ideas into reality.	Management Board
20.	Highlight the whiteboard functionality of MS Teams with a "How to" video and short article on BOB to maximise the impact of this action.	Organisation Design and Development Team
21.	Senior Management will support and engage with the Department wide trial of the online collaborative platform, Mural and seek opportunities to test it within teams. i. Promote the tool by delivering introductory training sessions and preparing short articles on BOB.	Senior Management (POs/APs) i. Organisation Design and Development Team

Supporting Employee Wellbeing

Key Findings:

- According to the ConnEcTEd Teams baseline survey, 64% of respondents felt their wellbeing was supported or very well supported while working remotely. Concerningly over a third (36%) felt they received little or no support in this regard.
- Staff feel their colleagues and their managers are the most important workplace wellbeing support which emphasises the importance of strong team connectivity in terms of employee wellbeing.

- While some staff reported a better work/life balance, workshop discussions revealed many had experienced increased workloads, longer working hours and difficulties in disconnecting from work. Concerns were raised that the heightened demands on staff that arose due to the pandemic have become normalised.

Actions:

No.	Action	Owner(s)
22.	Appoint a dedicated Wellbeing Officer to drive the implementation of the recommendations set out in the "Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework" and to lead on Departmental Wellbeing initiatives that will be reviewed in light of the move to a blended working environment.	Management Board/ Business Services Unit
23.	Progress the Department's Right to Disconnect Policy.	HR
24.	Provide clear and unambiguous messaging about the requirement of staff to take breaks. Senior Management will visibly model the desired behaviour and consider actions such as updating their online status to display when they are taking a break or "@lunch".	Management Board / Senior Management (POs/ APs)
25.	Restate the Department's policy regarding restricting non-essential emails or phone calls outside of agreed working hours.	Management Board
26.	Support key Department personnel to become Workplace Mental Health First Aiders so they can effectively assist staff encountering mental health issues and guide them effectively towards appropriate supports.	HR / Wellbeing Team

ICT Actions to Support Effective Blended Team Working

- The Department's 2020 ICT strategy included plans to pilot MS Teams and subject to success roll out across the Department. The findings from the ConnEcTEd Teams action research project contributed to the decision to bring forward the pilot and make this technology available to all staff in July 2021. The functionality provided by this platform includes enabling staff;

  » to voice call or video call each other at a click of a button;

  » set up group "channels" and "chats" to engage with a number of people in real-time; and

  » access to collaborative whiteboards in all MS Team Video calls.

- As part of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative, a Department-wide trial of an online collaborative tool "Mural" has been launched. The tool enables teams to collaborate visually using a digital canvas which can be pre-set using a range of templates designed to facilitate remote innovation, support project management or map processes.

- To support greater online engagement in training sessions, a collaborative presentation tool is now used regularly in internal Learning and Development events including Induction programmes, Lunch and Learns and Information sessions. This allows for online attendees to vote, comment, build word clouds and ask questions of the panellists which display on screen in real time. Use of break-out rooms is now also standard practice to encourage peer learning and debate.

Impact Assessment – Action Research Project

The action-research methodology used in the ConnEcTEd Teams pilot project represented a new approach for delivering staff engagement programmes within the Department. It is important to assess the impact of the intervention.

- 97% of respondents believed their team benefited from participation in the project and 87% of people managers felt that there are lasting benefits from their team's participation in the project.

- The top benefits identified by participants were the opportunity to have constructive discussions about the way they work and improved connectivity for the team.

- The survey results indicate improvement in teams' performances across all thematic areas but most notably in the areas of innovation, on-the-job training and coaching and team connectivity.

- Data from people managers suggests they reverted to having more regular one-to-one meetings with direct reports, aligning with previous onsite routines.

- The percentage of participants who regarded themselves as "thriving" in the remote working environment increased from 21% at the start of the project to 44% at the end.

1. Introduction

Eighteen months ago the world of work as we know it underwent sudden and fundamental change. Few organisations, regardless of sector or scale, where untouched by the disruption of the global pandemic. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment was no different. Necessity demanded a radical and swift overhaul of how and where we do our work.

The commitment and dedication of our staff ensured that within a very short timeframe we were able to reinstate our full offering of services to businesses and citizens while protecting the health and welfare of our employees through the widescale adoption of remote working. Across the Department, in every Division and Business Unit, we found new ways to deliver upon our strategic objectives, enhancing our skills set and engaging with new technologies along the way.

However, the transition was not without its difficulties. A staff-wide survey in July 2020 found that while nearly all respondents (95%) identified benefits from homeworking, 89% of staff identified challenges. The most significant challenge identified by staff (23%) related to the lack of interaction with colleagues and feelings of isolation. 57% of people managers surveyed said they were finding it more difficult to manage their teams in the remote setting.

The Department led the development of the National Remote Working Strategy, Making Remote Work[2]. The Strategy sets out the Government's intention to enable remote, blended and flexible working arrangements become a significant and sustainable part of the workplace in the longer term.

As the Department with lead responsibility for the Strategy and as employer that values employee wellbeing, by Q4 2020 it was clear to DETE leadership that some form of remote working would become a permanent feature of how the Department operates and supports its workforce in the long term.

This aligns with the Department's Statement of Strategy. Goal 6 of the Strategy sets out that we will *"Build an innovative and agile department with a strong public service ethos"*. We will achieve this in part by establishing a blended working environment that helps staff to achieve a positive work/life balance, while maintaining effective service delivery.

As a Department we want to support people in reaching their potential, to nurture team effectiveness and successfully pursue the Department's strategic goals. Blended working should not act as barrier to achieving these things.

We have worked closely with colleagues across the civil service to assist in the development of the Blended Working Framework which will provide the basis for the Department's Blended Working Policy.

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2. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, "Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy", January 2021.
   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/51f84-making-remote-work-national-remote-work-strategy/

Establishing sustainable blended working, in a post-pandemic environment, represents a challenge that is new and distinct from the enforced move to full-scale remote working that arose as a result of COVID-19.

The Blended Working Policy will put in place procedures and parameters to facilitate and co-ordinate this change. However, the success of the policy will be largely dependent on how our organisational culture and our people adapt and respond to the change.

We know from the work of leaders in change methodology, such as Kotter and Kouzes and Posner that to achieve sustainable transformative change, people must be placed at the centre of the process. The Department's Management Board recognised that in shifting to a new way of working, the customary approaches to staff development, team effectiveness and manager engagement would need to be reconsidered.

Therefore, in October 2020, the Management Board approved the launch of the ConnEcTEd Teams programme with the aim of identifying and promoting behaviours that support effective remote/ blended working for teams. Based on feedback from the staff survey, the work of the Department's COVID-19 Working Group and engagement with senior management the programme targeted five key areas:

1. Sustaining team/ organisation-wide connectedness and trust;
2. Ensuring effective and efficient information flows;
3. Enabling continued on-the-job training and coaching;
4. Facilitating remote collaboration and innovation; and
5. Supporting employee wellbeing.

The ConnEcTEd Teams programme includes a range of centrally co-ordinated initiatives such as a competitive call for best practice ideas, the establishment of a Peer2Peer network for new recruits (linking them with longer serving members of staff), establishment of ConnEcTEd Corner on BOB (DETE intranet) which signposts resources for teams seeking to enhance their remote/blended work practices and the adoption of a more collaborative approach to internal training and development sessions.

The most significant element of the ConnEcTEd Teams programme was an action research project. The project provided seven pilot teams (one from each Division) access to external expertise, provided by the project partners GrantThornton. Facilitators worked with each of the teams to assist them to assess their existing remote working behaviours and supported them to develop a tailored menu of actions to enhance team effectiveness in remote/blended working environments. In total almost 80 staff participated in the project.

Senior leaders from across the Department also participated in facilitated sessions that focused on building a shared understanding of the strategic opportunities and challenges presented by blended working for DETE and to identify the skills required to be effective leaders in a hybrid work environment.

This report details the key findings from the ConnEcTEd Teams programme. It builds on the lessons learned to put forward actions that should be considered by individuals and teams seeking to embed effective blended working behaviours. It also sets out actions for implementation at organisational level with the aim of nurturing an excellent blended working environment that proactively supports the Department's strategic objectives.

The ConnEcTEd Team programme aligns with the objectives of the ongoing HR Operating Model pilot project which seeks to boost strategic capacity within Civil Service HR[3]. DETE is one of three pilot Departments participating in the project that will empower HR to become an impactful business partner utilising evidence-based decision making to support staff, managers and leaders to drive organisation performance, develop our people and their careers and build a positive and inclusive organisational culture.

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3. For more information on the HR Operating Model project see Appendix 3: Glossary of Initiatives.
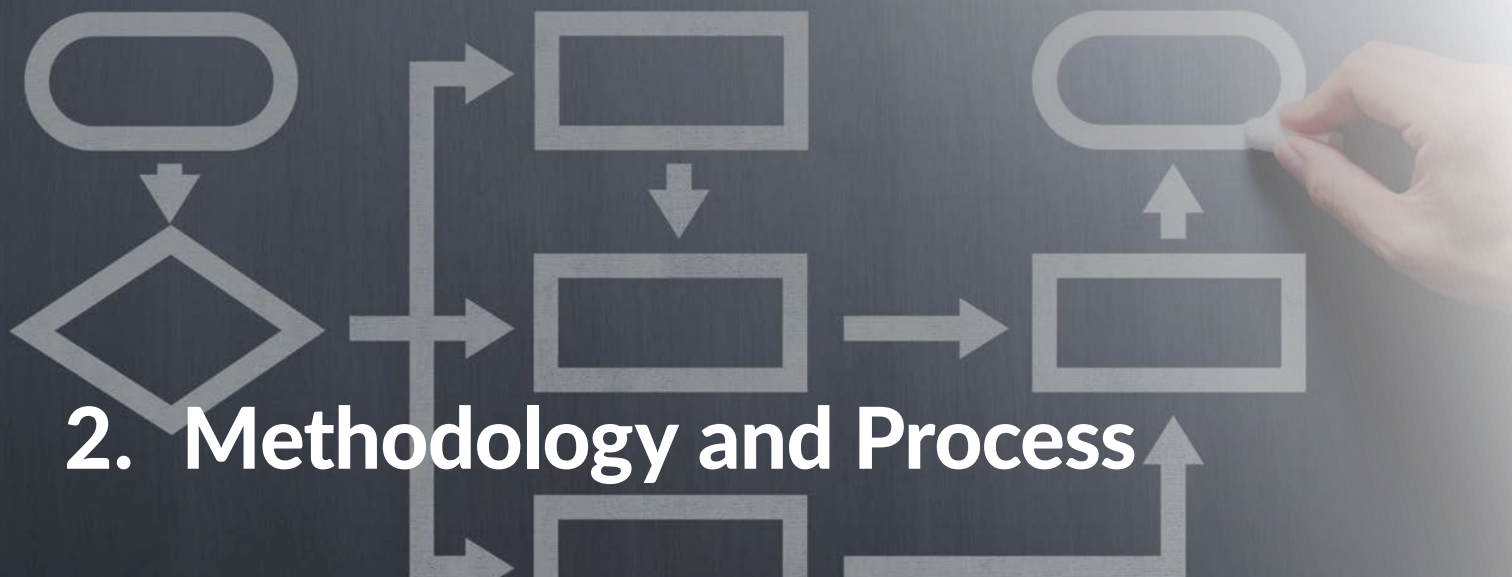
2. Methodology and Process

Background

Our staff surveys[4] and the work of the Department's COVID-19 Working Group identified a number of benefits that arise from working remotely. These include more flexibility, less commuting and the potential for greater work-life balance. As we move towards a post-pandemic working environment, blended working offers the opportunity to retain these benefits in a pragmatic way.

Beyond personal benefits, a wide-scale adoption of a more blended approach, where employees combine onsite and remote locations in the regular working patterns, can deliver significant positive impacts at national level. As noted in the National Remote Working Strategy these include lessoning the strain on public transport, reducing emissions and supporting regional development.

However, realising these potential gains and making blended working a sustainable part of the future world of work is not a forgone conclusion. In addition to putting in place clear policies that set out the procedures and parameters to facilitate blended working, organisations need to ensure they have a supportive culture.

According to the CIPD, the professional body for Human Resources and Development, attitudinal barriers pose a greater challenge to supporting effective blended working than infrastructural factors. The CIPD recommends when preparing to move to a blended model that organisations should seize the opportunity to consider how best to reframe their culture, talent management and development and social support to best nurture the intended future ways of working[5].

This people-centric approach to change, advocated by the CIPD and others, has its groundings in established best practice change methodologies such as Kotter's Eight Step Process for Leading Change[6] and Kouzes and Posner's Practices of Exemplary Leadership[7]. These models informed the development of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative which placed people at the centre of the change process.

As an action research project, the seven teams were each individually supported to assess their existing performance, develop a shared vision and to agree a plan of action to achieve it. After an implementation phase, the teams reflected on progress made before reviewing and adjusting their action plans taking into account lessons learned and any new challenges or opportunities that had arisen.

The timing of project (February 2021 – June 2021) is noteworthy. The project started almost a year after staff first moved to remote working. By which stage, most of the technical barriers (such as access to devices/ video conferencing facilities, remote access to restricted systems etc.,) had long been addressed. This allowed teams to concentrate their efforts on identifying behaviours that could best support effective remote working. Furthermore, following a period of very intense demands on the Department, in light of the impact of COVID-19 on employees and businesses, there was greater scope for staff to look to the future and consider what a blended working environment may involve for the organisation.

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4. Two Department-wide surveys were undertaken by the DETE HR Policy Team in July 2020 and May 2021 to assess the impacts of remote working and establish the attitudes of staff.
5. CIPD, "Creating a Culture of Remote Working post COVID-19", Dublin, June 2020.
6. www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/, see all Appendix 2: Change Management and Leadership Theory
7. www.leadershipchallenge.com/research/five-practices.aspx see all Appendix 2: Change Management and Leadership Theory

Programme Stakeholders

The Pilot Teams: The Department's Assistant Secretaries each nominated a team from their Division to participate in the action research project[8]. These 'pilot teams' were led at Assistant Principal or Principal officer level and were drawn from a range of policy and operational areas. There was a geographical spread with Dublin-based teams, a Carlow-based team and a Dublin/Kilkenny bi-located team among those selected. There was also significant variety in terms of each teams' key stakeholders. Having such a diverse selection of teams engage in the project provided a richness to the inputs received, reflecting the variety in experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by teams across the wider Department.

The success of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative hinged on the participation, creativity and efforts of the pilot teams. Without their dedication and commitment to the project it would not have been possible. In all, almost 80 staff participated in the project across the seven pilot teams, which were:

- Brexit and Investment Screen Unit, Trade Division;
- Business Services Unit, Corporate Services Division;
- Employment Permit Team, Workplace Regulation and Economic Migration Division;
- Enterprise Agencies and Programmes Unit, Indigenous Enterprise Division;
- Enterprise Strategy Unit, Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness and Evaluation Division;
- Intellectual Property Unit, Innovation and Investment Division; and
- Register of Beneficial Ownership Unit, Commerce, Consumer and Competition Division.

ConnEcTEd Champions: Each team nominated a member to become their ConnEcTEd Champion. The role of the Champion was to co-ordinate the implementation of the agreed action plans. They played a critical role, providing an ongoing link between their teams and the DETE/ GrantThornton project management team.

They were supported to drive team activity, leading through influence. The ConnEcTEd Champions network provided the Champions with access to change management training and additional support and guidance from both GrantThornton and the DETE Project Management Team. Through the network the Champions shared the experiences, challenges and successes of their teams as they progressed through the project. The network provided peer support to the Champions and a helpful fora to seek advice and discuss issues as they arose.

External Project Partners: Following a public procurement process, GrantThornton was selected as the external partner and provided global expertise in relation to both remote/ blended working and change management. The GrantThornton project team designed and delivered the content of the interventions for the action research project, as well the Leadership and Management Board Workshops. At the end of the project, GrantThornton prepared a paper presenting their key findings and proposed a number of recommendations as to how DETE could further support effective blended working. GrantThornton's paper informed the content of this report and the nature of the ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan[9].

Steering Group: The role of the Steering Group was to provide oversight, expert guidance and support to the Programme Management Team. The Group provided a fora to test and challenge the ConnEcTEd Teams process, progress and findings with key stakeholders.

DETE Management Board: The Department's Management Board approved the proposal to develop the ConnEcTEd Teams Programme and inputted to its design and content. Support from the Board was essential to secure pilot team participation and buy-in to the action research project. Management Board was updated and consulted regularly throughout the project and held a dedicated session focussed on the themes of the initiative in June 2021. In October 2021, the Board was presented with the key findings of the programme and agreed to the implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan.

Programme Management Team: The ConnEcTEd Teams programme is sponsored by the Department's Head of Human Resources and managed by the Organisation Design and Development Team. The Programme Management Team designed the overall portfolio of initiatives and is responsible for managing their delivery including the action research project, the Peer2Peer network and the promotion of interactive virtual meeting and collaboration tools. This team will be responsible for supporting the work of the ConnEcTEd Team Implementation Group.

Implementation Group: A ConnEcTEd Teams Implementation Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level, and composed of representatives from the eight Divisions will be established to oversee the delivery of the Action Plan and to support the sharing of best practices across the Department.

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8. The seven pilot teams were drawn from each of the Divisions existing in the Department in February 2021. The participation of pilot teams in the ConnEcTEd Team project predates the established of an eight Division – the EU, Digital & Access to Finance Division.
9. See Appendix 1 for the complete ConnEcTed Teams Action Plan,

Project Process and Timeline

Date	Interventions
Dec '20	**Competition for Ideas:** Teams were invited to submit short video clips outlining actions they had taken or suggestions they had to promote team connectedness while working remotely. These were shared on the Department's intranet site, BOB.
Jan '21	**ConnEcTEd Corner:** A dedicated space on BOB to provide regular updates to staff about the initiative and to highlight range of resources related to remote and blended working. It also promoted relevant training courses, conferences and seminars.
Feb '21	**Launch event:** A launch event was delivered to welcome and inform programme participants about the project ahead. As well as an overview of the project process, a virtual 'escape room' was designed to reflect key challenges for remote/ blended team working. Participants were split into their seven teams and worked together to solve puzzles in a race to be released from their 'breakout rooms'.
	Access to an online portal of resources: All pilot team members were granted access to Grant Thornton's online Learning Management System 'WeLearn'. From this pilot members could access a range of resources aligned to the five key themes and further support to develop their remote working practices. As well as a selection of e-learns, 'Ted Talks' and links to publications and videos, the team members were sent regular 'spotlights', drawing their attention to relevant content associated with the themes.
	Baseline survey of participants: Members of the seven pilot teams were invited to complete a survey about their experience of remote working over the previous year. The purpose of the survey was to provide a profile of the remote working behaviours of each of the teams and to highlight areas which could be targeted for enhancement during the project. In addition, this survey provided data which would act as a baseline, against which the impact of the project would be mapped. Participants were invited to complete a second survey with a similar set of questions after the final workshops in May.
Mar '21	**Delivery of workshop 1:** In the first round of workshops, teams developed their roadmaps by working with their facilitators to consider there 'as is' situation in terms of remote team working. Then they collaborated as a group to agree a shared vision of an enhanced future way of working.
	Delivery of workshop 2: Pilot team members were encouraged to consider their roadmaps and survey results and identify actions that could take them from their 'as-is' position to their desired 'to-be' position.
	The establishment of a ConnEcTEd Champion Network: At least one ConnEcTEd Champion was nominated from each pilot team. The Champions were the key point of contact for each pilot group and were responsible for reporting on their teams' progress in implementing their action plans.
May '21	**Delivery of Workshop 3:** The final pilot workshops provided teams the opportunity to reflect the actions taken, challenges encountered and outcomes achieved. They also discussed the likely implications of a move to blended working and considered what actions would support the team in preparing for that transition.
	Leadership Workshop: A two-hour session was delivered for senior leaders (Principal Officer Grade) from across DETE. This session encouraged participants to reflect on their remote working experience to date, and provided an opportunity to look ahead and consider what leadership skills would be required in a blending working environment.
June '21	**Completion of a second survey:** Members of the seven pilot teams were invited to complete a second survey, using similar questions from the first survey, so that a comparative analysis could be undertaken and any changes in results considered.
	Delivery of a workshop to Management Board: The workshop included an update on the ConnEcTEd teams project, a summary of outputs from the Senior Leaders workshop and allowed members the opportunity to consider how best to implement blended working to support sustainable organisational effectiveness.
Oct '21	**Approval of Report and Action Plan:** DETE Management Board were presented with the ConnEcTEd Teams report which detailed key findings of the programme and proposed 26 recommendations for implementation across the organisation. Management Board approved the report and instructed that the recommendations be translated into an Action Plan. Delivery of the plan will be overseen by a cross-divisional implementation group.

3. The Remote Working Experience

Widescale remote working is a relatively new phenomenon for many organisations in Ireland. A national survey in April 2020 found that 87% of respondents were working completely remotely following the outbreak of COVID-19. This aligned with an internal DETE survey in July 2020 which found 86% of staff were working fully remotely. However, while 51% of respondents to the national survey had never worked remotely prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, within DETE this figure rose to 70%.

Only 4% of DETE staff had a structured formal arrangement that facilitated remote working prior to March 2020, with 25% working remotely occasionally or on an ad hoc basis. The introduction of lockdown in response to COVID-19, therefore represented a significant change in how and where our staff worked, how they interacted with each other and with stakeholders, and how the Department as a whole operated.

In this section, we look at the DETE staff experience of working in a fully remote setting. In addition, to reviewing the ConnEcTEd Teams baseline survey results and contributions to the team workshop discussion, we also draw on results of two Department-wide surveys which were undertaken in July 2020 and May 2021. These surveys give a broader picture of staff attitudes throughout the Department.

Attitudes towards Remote Working

At the start of the action research project, members of the seven participating pilot teams were surveyed about their experience of remote working to date. The survey response rate was 93%.

Figure 1: Baseline Survey Results, "How are you feeling about remote working?", March 2021[10]
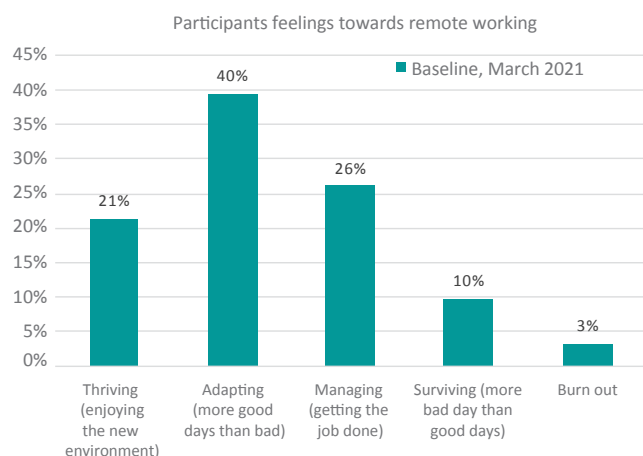
10. NUI Galway and Western Development Commission, "Remote Working – Ireland's National Survey, Phase III Report", May 2021

The survey was undertaken in March 2021. A year after first switching to remote working 40% placed themselves in the 'Adapting' category. While this meant that they were having more good days than bad days, this cohort of staff still felt a sense of ongoing change and adjustment to the new way of working. Just over a fifth (21%) categorised themselves as "Thriving". A concerning 13% of respondents were either "Surviving" or "Burnt out".

In all three surveys, (both Department-wide staff surveys and the baseline ConnEcTEd Team survey) the lack of social interaction with colleagues and increased isolation was consistently ranked as the biggest challenge faced by staff while working remotely.

In the pilot teams survey, staff placed the lack of a commute as the number one benefit to remote working (31%) followed by better work/life balance (27%) and flexibility of working times (20%). (This was in-line with both of the Department-wide surveys where the question was presented in slightly different terms).

The pilot participants were asked, when it is safe to return to the office, how many days of the week would they like to work remotely. A significant majority opted for three days a week (56%). Just over a fifth (21%) would like to work outside the office two days a week. 18% would like to be at home four or five days a week, while 5% would want to be at home one day a week. This order of preference is in line with the most recent Department-wide survey.

Acknowledging Mixed Experiences

Given the smaller number of participants, the ConnEcTEd Teams survey enabled a greater level of qualitative inputs from respondents.

In their comments about the experience of remote working, respondents were overwhelmingly positive, however, many highlighted that full-time remote working had had a negative impact on team connectedness and individual wellbeing. There was also a shared acknowledgement that people's experience varied significantly and that some staff found it more difficult due to intensified workloads or pressures external to work.

> *"For me this has been a positive experience... I'm well aware that this hasn't been the same experience for everyone and it is difficult to provide blanket statement around remote working".*
> — *ConnEcTEd Teams Baseline Survey*

This mixed experience of remote working was also reflected in the discussions held during the first workshops with the pilot teams. This was visually captured through the use of an interactive presentation tool. Participants were asked to submit one word which best described their experience of working remotely over the previous 12 months. The word cloud in Figure 2 collates the responses from all seven workshops, with the size of the word positively corresponding to the frequency with which it occurred.

Figure 2: Reflection on a Year of Remote Working
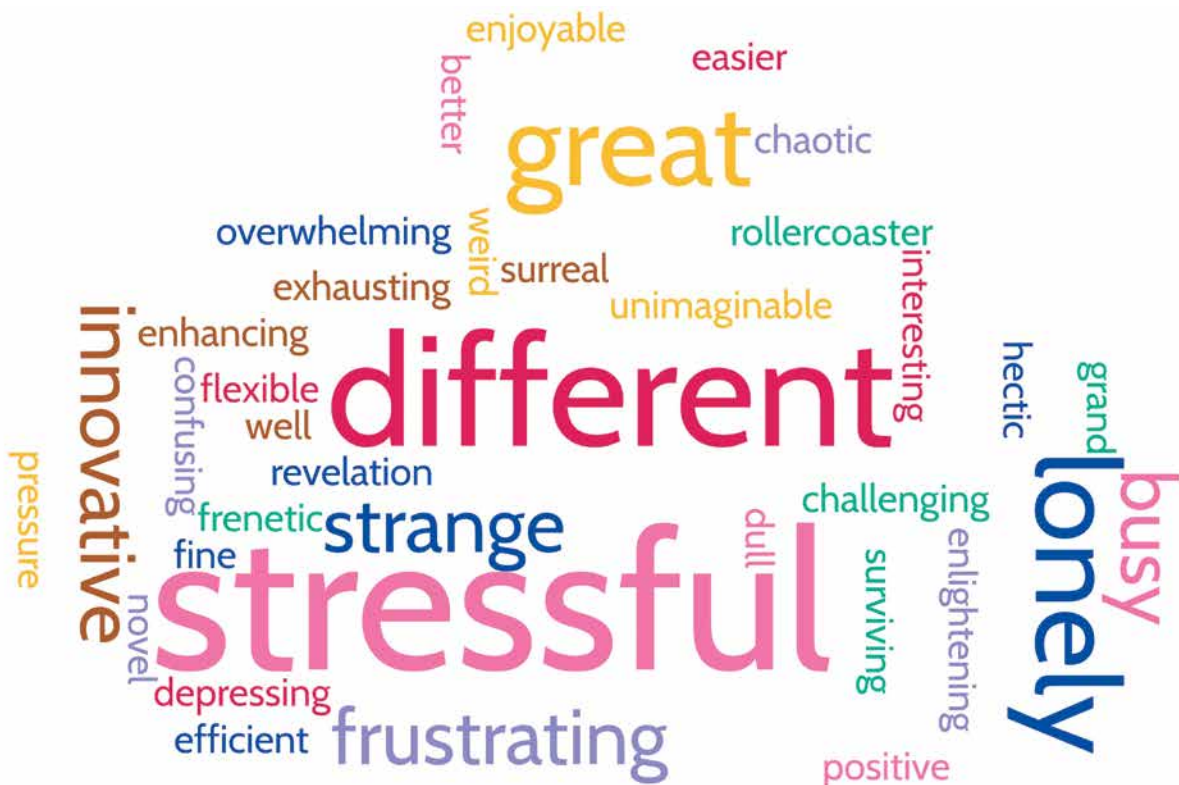
The prominences of certain words such as "stressful", "lonely", "different" and "great" are clear. A closer look also reveals a disparity in the experiences of staff. It was notable in the workshops that these differences occurred within teams as well as between teams.

When asked what had surprised them about the experience of working from home, a number of key themes emerged from across the pilot teams.

Figure 3: What Surprised Staff about Switching to Remote Working

Harder at times to pick up information	How well you can connect on phone calls	More difficult to communicate
More social interaction	Greater work life balance	Getting more work done
Harder to brainstorm	Thought would be a better work life balance but harder to switch off	Volume of work and unrealistic timelines
How I can still work as effectively as I do when I'm in the office	How well it has actually worked and how much I enjoy working remotely	How easily I have adjusted to working remotely

Participants were generally surprised at how adaptable they and their teammates had proven to be and how seamless the transition to remote work was.

While some participants called out an improvement in their work-life balance, a key theme that emerged was an increase in workloads, longer working hours, a blurring of the lines between work and home, and increased pressures for participants and their teams. These sentiments were echoed by participants at the Senior Leadership workshop and at the ConnEcTEd Champions Network.

There was a widespread recognition by participants in the Senior Leadership workshop of the significant effort and commitment shown by staff since remote working commenced. They noted that staff had responded positively to very challenging circumstances and exhibited high levels of agility and flexibility.

The Principal Officer cohort acknowledged that the experience to that point had not simply been of 'remote working' – but of working remotely during a pandemic. This brought with it a set of unique challenges and pressures that should cease once the current health crisis is over. It is important that when considering the future working environment, the focus is on a post-pandemic environment where solutions are sustainable.

Recommendations for Individuals and Teams

It is important that in seeking to support effective blended working we acknowledge that a 'one size fits all' approach is likely to yield limited results. It will be necessary for teams to work together to tailor solutions appropriately, so they meet the business need effectively while taking account of local challenges and opportunities.

Therefore, the recommendations that are put forward in this report for consideration by individual staff and teams represent a menu of options. These can be selected from and customised locally to ensure achievement of business objectives and support for staff development and wellbeing.

4. Sustaining Connectivity and Trust

The importance of employees feeling connected to their colleagues and to the organisations they work for has been studied for decades from both a social and economic perspective. It is recognised as positively influencing staff performance and reducing staff turnover. Similarly, studies have found higher levels of trust within organisations are linked to high productivity, less stress, lower absenteeism and greater levels of job satisfaction among employees.[11]

According to the baseline ConnEcTEd Teams survey, 92% of participants regard feeling connected to their team as important or very important, with 77% placing a similar value on connection to the wider Department.

Over the past 18 months, the feelings of connection and trust have been challenged by consistent remote working. We know, for example, that casual conversations as people start and end formal meetings or pass each other in hallways help to build important bonds. Video conferencing, however, can be less conducive to small talk.

Studies show lack of physical contact between people we engage with can unconsciously be interpreted as a signal of untrustworthiness[12]. On the reverse research has shown that working in geographical proximity to colleagues enhances interaction, team commitment and trust[13]. These in turn positively drive team performance.

Team Connectivity

In March 2021, two thirds (64%) of ConnEcTEd Teams participants felt connected or very connected to their teammates when working remotely. A notable cohort (29%) were neutral on the matter, however, 7% felt disconnected from their teams.

A more nuanced perspective emerged from qualitative responses to the survey and engagement at workshops.

11. Zak, P.J., 2017, "The Neuroscience of Trust – Management Behaviours that Foster Engagement", Harvard Business Review, January – February, 2017.

12. Mortensen M and Garnder H.K., "WFH is Corroding Our Trust in Each Other", Harvard Business Review, 10 February 2021, HBR.org

13. Bruneel, J., Spithoven, A. and Maesen, A., Building Trust: A Matter of Proximity?, Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research, Volume 27 / Issue 15, December 2007.

> *For 46% feeling connected to their team is important, with a further 46% regarding it as very important.* — *ConnEcTEd Teams Baseline Survey*

Teams with a higher shared perception of team-connectivity placed significant value on the importance of using varied communications and trying to replicate onsite interactions as much as possible while working remotely. For some, this included continuing to organise opportunities for team social activities, albeit in a virtual setting. However, the Department-wide survey in May 2021 found that 45% of staff are rarely or never in social contact with colleagues while working remotely.

Amongst the pilot teams and the senior leadership cohort it was observed that the richness of onsite meetings had been eroded. Virtual meetings tend to be more transactional, task focussed and static in nature. In the workshop with Principal Officers, there was a recognition of the need to consciously nurture less formal or rigid virtual engagements and to facilitate more discursive interactions.

It was also noted that while many staff continued to work closely with their direct line manager, remote working had created greater distance between junior and more senior staff, with less opportunity for direct interaction.

Access to functioning webcams was noted as an issue for a small number of staff. This issue has since been addressed with all staff working remotely provided with devices with built-in webcams.

For many of the participating pilot teams, the initial ConnEcTEd Teams workshop was the first opportunity they availed of to reflect on the impact of remote working and to consider whether there was an alternative way of doing things. Feedback from the workshops indicated that the act of collectively engaging in this process was an effective way of linking teammates to each other, building a better understanding of varying perspectives and forging trust.

> *"The workshop reminded me that great team environments don't just happen. You have to consciously work at it".*
> — *Pilot Team Leader*

A number of Principal Officers flagged that in the blended workplace, people managers will need to be aware of the potential negative impact of unconscious bias toward staff who they encounter onsite versus those working remotely. They also considered the logistics of team meetings in blended settings with a number highlighting negative experiences of hybrid meetings (where some participants are in the same physical space while others join online).

There was strong support given to the idea of 'All in Days' for teams as this would help build and maintain connectedness and support collaborative interactions. However, it was noted that this is likely to present logistical challenges, as the staff numbers have increased across the organisation, meeting spaces are limited and in the short-term social distancing requirements will persist.

Participants were keen that the IT environment that has been built in response to remote working is maintained and further developed so that the infrastructure supports effective and efficient blended working behaviours. This should include enhanced access to video conferencing facilities within formal meeting rooms.

A large majority (92%) of respondents to ConnEcTEd Team survey felt trusted by their managers while working remotely. In qualitative responses to the survey and in the ConnEcTEd Team network, however, concern was expressed that some managers monitor the activity status of their reports closely. It was suggested that this has facilitated a "green light" culture where staff are anxious to avoid appearing inactive or "Away" during the working day.

A significant cohort of people managers (42%) reported spending less time in 1-to-1 meetings with their direct reports and 54% said they had found the lack of visibility of staff challenging or extremely challenging. This echoed the findings of the Department-wide survey in May 2021 which found that 51% of people managers find it more challenging to manage teams remotely.

Productivity

In terms of productivity, a number of global surveys have found that employees and senior managers believe productivity to have increased since the introduction of widescale remote working. However, it will be some time before the quantitative data is available to confirm or refute this. The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council has noted that any productivity effect is likely to differ over time and across contexts[14].

When surveyed, 44% of ConnEcTEd Team participants felt their productivity had increased or increased significantly in the previous year with 46% saying it had remained the same. Only 10% reported a reduction in their own productivity.

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14. The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council, "Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2020", September 2020

While respondents may be prone to positivity bias when considering their own productivity, it is noteworthy that when People Managers were asked about their staff's productivity over the previous year their results were largely similar. 50% said their staff were as productive as they had been prior to remote working, while 46% noted an increase in productivity. Only 4% felt there had been a decline in the period.
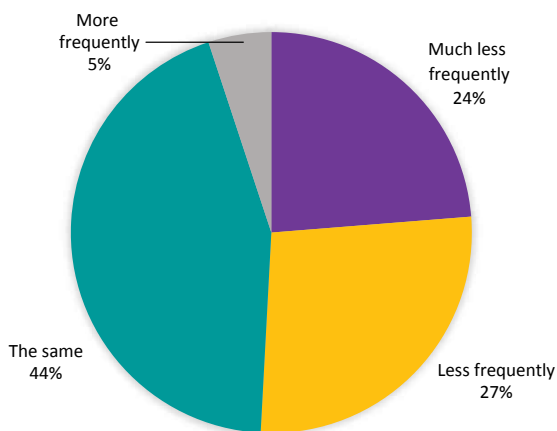
During the Senior Leadership workshop the enhanced / sustained levels of productivity delivered during lockdown were acknowledged. It was noted that staff had displayed significant agility, responding positively to the high levels of trust placed in them. Some participants highlighted the importance of continuing to display high trust levels in staff as we move towards a blended working future.

Organisational Connectivity

International research into the effect of remote working on work relationships indicates that organisational connectedness has declined significantly. For example, analysis of anonymized data collected from global usage of Microsoft and LinkedIn services and a survey of more than 30,000 people in 31 countries revealed that the shift to remote work shrunk people's networks. Specifically, when lockdown began people focussed on connecting with people they previously met with regularly, while engagements with those they saw less frequently reduced significantly. According to the researchers this means organisations have become more siloed[15].

When asked about connection to the wider Department only half of ConnEcTEd Teams participants (51%) felt connected or very connected and almost a fifth (19%) felt disconnected or very disconnected. Furthermore, since moving to remote working, 51% said they were in contact with colleagues in other Divisions less frequently.

The experiences of the survey respondents aligned with the discussion among senior leaders at their workshop. The Principal Officers noted that even within Divisions there was a notable decline in interactions between Teams and Units. They felt this decline was even more pronounced among more junior staff.

The ConnEcTEd Champions also noted that junior staff were more isolated from colleagues elsewhere in the Department. Regardless of whether working onsite or remotely, senior staff have greater opportunities to engage in work-related interactions with colleagues in other Divisions. Junior staff often link up with colleagues outside their team in less formal settings such as coffee or lunch breaks. The Champions highlighted that junior staff generally did not have hosting rights on the Department's video conferencing platform and were disinclined to ask managers to set up non-work-related meetings so they could meet socially with colleagues in other units or Divisions.

As corporate mobile phones are offered as standard only to limited senior grades, those at more junior grades were also disadvantaged in terms of telephone contact with colleagues.

The recent roll-out of MS Teams across the Department not only provides easy, one-click video conferencing capability to all staff but also enables staff to "call" each other via their direct access device at no financial cost to them.

Through a number of different engagements, (Department-wide survey, People Strategy discussion groups and Senior Leadership Workshop) staff called for greater support for building formal and informal networks across the Department.

Figure 6: Baseline Survey Results, "Since working remotely, how frequently do you connect with different divisions?"

15. Baym, N Laron, J. and Martin, R, "What a Year of WFH Had Done to Our Relationship at Work", Harvard Business Review, March 2021.

Theme 1 Actions: Maintaining team / organisation-wide connectedness and trust

Examples of Actions Implemented by Pilot Teams:

- Re-establish a routine of regular full team meetings.
- Undertake an audit of staff directory and Team page on BOB to ensure fully up to date and schedule regular review.
- Make more frequent use of short, informal VC connections and phone calls to replicate office engagements between team members as much as possible.
- Set up a team WhatsApp group.
- Schedule a weekly virtual tea break where teammates can log-in during an agreed timeframe and catch up with colleagues.

What can I do?

- Update your MS Team status daily to reflect whether you are in the office or working remotely.
- Make sure your profile picture is on your Microsoft profile and Staff Directory.
- Reach out to a colleague you haven't been in contact with for a while.
- Suggest and organise a social activity for your team (taking account of relevant social distancing requirements).
- Write an article, submit a photograph or get involved in a discussion on BOB.
- Join the Peer2Peer network and meet colleagues from across the Department.

What can my team do?

- Plan for change and for success. As we prepare to return to work under a new Blended Working Policy, make time for the team to meet and discuss the best way to remain connected to one another and the wider organisation. It is an ideal time to develop a Team Charter. To do this, the team come together to agree how they intend to work together to achieve the team's objectives. They should articulate the behaviours that are expected of teammates and the standards they will set to ensure that the team works as effectively as possible.
- Small talk is a big deal! Just because a meeting is happening online does not mean it has to be entirely task-focussed. Regularly build in time to check-in with each other. This will not only support connectivity but will help build confidence and provide opportunities for staff to raise issues or request advice in areas where they need assistance.
- Make the most of your time together. Online meetings are great for sharing information or providing updates but are less conducive to problem solving. Where possible, structure schedules so onsite meetings are used for brainstorming and working through difficult issues.
- Try to avoid hybrid meetings. Having some staff in the same room and others join remotely is sub-optimum and can lead to miscommunication. If you are having hybrid meetings try to address any imbalances by making sure online attendees are given equal opportunity to input and avoid sidebar or off-camera conversations between onsite participants.

Actions

No.	Action	Owner(s)
1.	In advance of the implementation of the Blended Working Policy, all Senior Management-led teams will convene as a group to; a) reflect on the remote working experience; b) consider the challenges of blended working; and c) agree and implement actions to support effective and efficient blended team working.	Senior Managers (to be determined locally as to whether PO/AP led)
2.	Establish a ConnEcTEd Teams Implementation Group, comprised of representatives from across the Department to oversee implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams action plan and to share best practice. The Implementation Group will be chaired by an Assistant Secretary, who will act as the ConnEcTEd Champion for the DETE Management Board. In addition, to overseeing progress on the 26 organisation-level actions, the Group will work to promote the menu of activities proposed for implementation by teams and individuals.	Management Board to Nominate representatives
3.	Leadership will role model best practice blended working behaviours by routinely working from remote settings, committing time and effort to nurturing team connectivity and by creating opportunities for staff, particularly those in more junior grades, to engage with colleagues in the wider Department.	Management Board and POs
4.	Articulate clearly what the office offers. Department Leaders will actively communicate the benefits of being onsite and support the creation of an environment that realises these benefits. **Senior Management will:** i. Request people managers to deliberately structure team engagements to maximise the impact of onsite work. ii. Encourage regular "All-in-Days" for teams (with full regard for social distancing requirements) to build team bonds and support effective collaboration and on-the-job training.	Management Board and POs i. POs/APs ii. POs/APs
5.	The transition to blended working is a fundamental change in the way we work and cannot be understated. Change Management training for staff across the Department will be strongly promoted and supported, particularly in the period of transition prior to the full introduction of Blended Working.	Learning and Development Unit / Senior Management (POs/APs)

5. Ensuring Effective and Efficient Information Flows

Studies have consistently shown that organisations with strong communication processes and efficient information flows achieve higher job satisfaction for employees and greater overall strategic effectiveness[16]. Nearly all ConnEcTEd Team participants (98%) regard effective and efficient information flows as important (34%) or very important (64%) to their role.

ConnEcTEd Teams survey participants ranked their team's performance across the programme's five thematic areas. In each of the teams, participants ranked performance highest in the area of internal information flows. On average, 69% of respondents felt that information flowed effectively or very effectively within their team. However, when considering the quality of information flows across the organisation this figure fell to 57%.

When asked how information flows could be improved, respondents prioritised the need for clearer communication (35%) and access to more user-friendly and modern I.T. systems (26%) rather than increasing (17%) or decreasing (3%) the frequency of communication.

Information Flows within Teams

Discussions at the workshops reinforced the key themes from the survey as there was general satisfaction in how information was shared and accessed within teams. A number of participants referenced the ongoing rollout of eDocs (a new document management system) across the Department and felt it would further strengthen how information is managed and shared by teams.

Most of the pilot teams held regular team meetings and this was regarded very positively by participants. However, it was accepted that there are a number of challenges in terms of communicating in a remote working environment. In particular, it was observed that it can be more difficult to communicate a process or task in remote settings. This was something that participants at the Senior Leadership Workshop also identified as problematic.

> *"Something that would usually take me two minutes to ask someone to do in the office, can involve several emails and phone calls to explain when working remotely"*
> — *Participant, Senior Leadership Workshop*

16. Hargie, O. , "The Importance of Communication for Organisational Effectiveness". Ulster University, Jordanstown, June 2016.

The emergence of silos within teams was also something that was remarked upon by a number of participants. This is perhaps not surprising. For example, in one workshop it was noted that when working onsite, non-confidential issues are often discussed and progressed in open plan offices. Teammates who are not directly involved in the activity are kept "in the loop" by nature of sharing the same physical space. In remote settings, however, access to these discussions and updates has a tendency to become more restrictive by default rather than by design.

There was widespread acknowledgement and appreciation for the continued enhancements in technology to support remote working in DETE in the period since March 2020 and for the significant efforts of the ICT team to support staff throughout the period.

In the initial weeks of lockdown, however, virtual meetings were often poor quality and many staff participated in video conferencing for the first time. There was, therefore, a lag until the infrastructure caught up and Video Conference (VC) etiquette became established. We know from staff engagement that in these early days of remote working many teams moved towards having meetings with smaller groups of participants. By the time pressure on the organisation's network eased and people became more comfortable engaging in virtual meetings, a new norm of smaller meetings had emerged and often remained unchallenged. Participants in the action research project noted that meetings within teams had become more restrictive and this was regarded as having a negative impact on connectivity.

A number of contributors to the survey and workshops noted that neither email or the existing instant messaging service (Skype) provided optimum real-time communication with the full team to facilitate quick sharing or requesting of information.

The recent introduction of a new platform (MS Teams) to the Department allows for the establishment of permanent groups of users which can instantly be contacted via groups channels, forums, online voice calls or video conferences.

Information Flows across the Organisation

Engagements with the pilot teams and the ConnEcTEd Champions emphasised the importance of BOB (DETE intranet) as a central hub for updates on developments across the organisation and access to information regarding business units and internal policy and procedures. However, it was noted that there is an inconsistency regarding the level of detail provide by business units and the frequency with which this is updated. The Secretary General's weekly All Staff email, introduced early in the pandemic, was also referenced as an effective way to ensure high level information is consistently circulated across the Department.

The cascade of relevant information from Senior Management through teams, however, was identified as an area in need of improvement. In particular, the monthly meeting of the Secretary General with Principal Officers was recognised as an important forum for discussion of organisational level issues.

However, participants expressed dissatisfaction that key messages from these meetings are not routinely shared within all teams and that some staff are reliant on colleagues in other Units to "fill them in".

It was suggested that given reduced ad hoc interactions between colleagues in different Divisions and fewer causal networking opportunities, there is a need to build and support initiatives that create sustainable links between colleagues and facilitate effective knowledge sharing.

While acknowledging that Video Conferencing (VC) quality is occasionally poor, there was a recognition that it also presents opportunities to enhance links between teams, Divisions and third-party organisations. In particular, some participants noted that the increased use of VC had significantly reduced the isolation of colleagues overseas and that it would be vital post COVID-19 that progress made in this area was not reversed.

Examples of Actions Implemented by Pilot Teams:

- Restructure team meetings to facilitate more exploration and discussion of issues rather than a "round robin" of updates.
- Establish a Slack channel for teammates to connect and interact on an informal and ongoing basis.
- Develop a virtual "People Wall" using OneNote to allow teammates share up to date information with colleagues (i.e. working pattern, leave dates, key project milestones, as well as hobbies and photographs).
- Invite key stakeholders from other units to attend relevant team meetings to build a shared understanding of specific subjects.

What can I do?

- Check that the work you are involved in is captured correctly on your team's Business Unit page on BOB.
- Ensure you complete your eDocs training and that you understand your team's approach to knowledge management.
- Take advantage of opportunities to get involved in cross-Divisional Working Groups such as Innovate@ETE.

What can my team do?

- Review the schedule and structure of team meetings. While more frequent meetings of sub-teams may be expedient, it is important to maintain a regular schedule of full team meetings to support connectedness, support knowledge management and avoid the emergence of silos.
- Ensure relevant communications from senior management meetings (such as Divisional Management Committees/ PO Monthly Meeting) are shared with all staff. Consider adding these updates as standing items to team meeting agendas.
- Don't let emails dominate your team's communication. Ensure all staff are encouraged to use voice or video calls as appropriate to enhance the richness of communication. This will support efficient and effective information flows and enhance problem-solving and collaboration capabilities.
- Ensure your team has an identified Information Officer who is responsible for ensuring correct knowledge management and file storage procedures are in place and assists colleagues to ensure these are fully implemented.
- Host an "Open Door" team meeting. Invite stakeholders from other teams and Divisions to a team meeting to boost organisation-wide connectedness. The purpose of this will be to increase understanding of your team's work, build relationship and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Actions

No.	Action	Owner(s)
6.	Department Leaders will reiterate the expectation that a schedule of team/ Divisional meetings is embedded into the routines of all business areas. i. Team meetings will be structured to ensure staff have appropriate opportunities to share views and ask questions. ii. Regular Divisional-wide meetings will be held to support knowledge sharing and create synergies between Business Units.	Management Board and POs i. People Managers ii. Assistant Secretaries
7.	Review and enhance structures in place to cascade relevant information throughout the Department. It is important that key messages intended for top-down communication to all staff are relayed consistently from managers to their teams (e.g. monthly Secretary General and Principal Officer meeting). Staff engagement is ongoing to inform how routine corporate communications should evolve as we move into a blending working environment. i. The annual Senior Management Forum is a touchstone event in the Department's calendar attended by staff at Assistant Principal level and above. Consideration will be given to recording plenary sessions/keynote speakers at these events in the future for the benefit of all staff.	Communications Unit / Management Board i. Learning and Development Unit
8.	Establish Communities of Practice. A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest in a particular field (for example legislation, procurement, customer services). Involvement in these groups will provide members the opportunity to learn from each other and the chance to develop skills in a particular area whilst boosting staff engagement levels. The roll out of MS Teams across the Department has the potential to support the creation of virtual CoPs through the use of group channels and chat functions, document sharing etc.	Implementation Group
9.	Continue to support the work of the Knowledge Management (KM) sub-group of Innovate@ETE. The KM Group is undertaking significant work to support the wider Department by developing and promoting the Knowledge Store, facilitating remote collaboration, enhancing networking opportunities, and is currently preparing a template to assist units in developing procedure manuals.	Management Board

6. Enabling continued on-the-job training and coaching

The Department's commitment to investing in learning and career development to enable all staff to grow and develop is highlighted under Goal 6 of the Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 and is also called out in *Building Resilience*, the DETE People Strategy 2021-2024 as part of our efforts to become an Employer of Choice.

Among ConnEcTEd Teams survey respondents, 78% regard on-the-job (OtJ) training and coaching activities as important or extremely important in supporting them to develop in their current role. While the majority of respondents felt remote working had no impact on the quality of OtJ training received (59%), a notable minority (28%) indicated the impact was negative. In terms of the quality of coaching received, 65% found that remote working had no impact while 19% registered a negative impact.

Of those that were people managers, 42% reported spending less time in 1-to-1 meetings with their direct reports and 32% said they had reduced the time spent coaching their staff while remote working. 39% of people managers felt that the lack of face-to-face interaction was the biggest barrier to coaching staff in the remote working environment.

The workshops revealed mixed experiences of OtJ training while working remotely. Workshop participants emphasised that the casual, unstructured learning that occurs from working alongside colleagues is difficult to replicate in the virtual environment.

Participants noted that when working onsite a significant amount of learning occurs when someone encounters a new task or issue for the first time and a colleague talks them through the process in a casual, unstructured engagement. There was agreement that it may be more challenging to request or access this type of guidance when people are not working in the same physical space. Staff, particularly those who are new to a team, may be less likely to reach out for assistance in virtual settings. Some experienced staff also indicated they felt less confident delivering training to colleagues remotely.

On the upside, a number of participants noted that the use of VC for meetings has facilitated greater access to external meetings for junior staff. Attendance at meetings with important external stakeholders was recognised as valuable on OtJ training which can be more difficult to support in physical settings.

Formal Learning and Development

With regard to formal training, only a third of respondents indicated that remote working reduced the frequency with which they accessed L&D opportunities. 59% stated there had been no impact on their uptake of formal training. However, data from the Learning and Development Unit reveals that expenditure on formal training courses fell by 46.7% in 2020 compared to 2019. The uptake of OneLearning training courses almost doubled in 2020, however, this was due to completions of the mandatory Return to Work online course for staff returning to the office to carry out essential duties (accounting for 60% of OneLearning courses completed by DETE staff in 2020).

In the workshop discussions it was widely recognised that there were a lot of formal learning and development opportunities available while working remotely. However, there was a general agreement that the content of online / virtual training is often less engaging and more challenging to absorb than onsite sessions, particularly when these were delivered using a purely lecture-style approach. Participants called for a greater variety in the format of online training offered, and in particular requested more interaction with and between learners.

The majority of people managers (58%) who participated in the ConnEcTEd Teams baseline survey had received no training in relation to leading remote or blended teams. In both 2020 and 2021, Learning and Development Unit promoted such courses but with limited uptake.

Figure 6: Baseline Survey Results, "What training have you received onleading remote teams?"
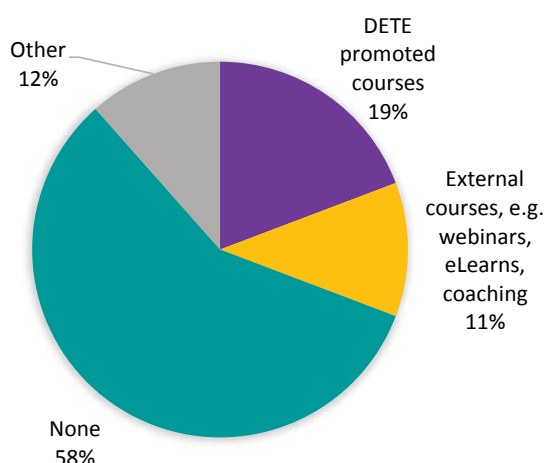
A number of staff highlighted advantages that have accrued from virtual work in terms of greater access to seminars and conferences. As travel is no longer required it reduces both the time commitment and cost and often there are less restrictive attendance numbers. (This is particularly relevant for overseas events). Several staff noted they had availed of virtual training opportunities that would not have been viable if they were delivered in person. The ability to access recording of sessions was also seen as a benefit, enabling staff to screen content at a time that is convenient for them.

In January, 2020 over 100 staff opted to attend the first ever DETE Global "Lunch and Learn" session where staff from the Trade Division based in Beijing, Berlin, London and Washington D.C. presented on their work and their experience of representing the Department overseas. To enable widespread participation at this virtual event, a collaborative presentation tool (Mentimeter) was used allowing the online attendees to vote, comment and ask questions of the panellists which displayed on screen in real time. This event showed how technology can be exploited to connect staff across the organisation in an impactful and meaningful way. It also provided a template for subsequent Department-wide virtual training and development sessions.

Supporting New Starters

The ConnEcTEd Teams survey results revealed that 15% of participants had joined the Department in the previous 12 months. Most of these had never met their teams in-person. It became clear during the workshops that there was also a significant number of staff who were new to their teams due to promotions or general staff movements.

It was acknowledged that the remote working environment presented challenges to those who are new to the organisation or new to a role in terms of building relationships, getting to grips with the work and difficulties around training and upskilling.

It was noted that on occasions staff were unaware there had been a new addition to their team as the arrival of a new team member was not communicated to them. (Notably, the first visual contact one new starter had of their teammates was at a ConnEcTEd Teams workshop.)

The importance of people uploading their profile photographs to the online Staff Directory and ensuring business unit details are kept up to date on BOB (DETE Intranet) were recognised as being particularly helpful to people new to the Department or a team.

At the senior leadership workshop participants highlighted the challenges in embedding new staff into the organisational culture while working remotely. They anticipate that when we move to a blended environment this will remain a difficulty.

Significant efforts have been made to promote the "Buddy System" which requires People Managers to pair new starters with more established colleagues on their team[17]. The buddy's role is to actively support their new colleagues through their settling in period. Unfortunately, feedback from the pilot teams and wider engagements with staff indicate that there is uneven implementation of this important step in the formal induction process.

Examples of Actions Implemented by Pilot Teams:

- Create an induction folder for new joiners to the team which is regularly updated with key information to smooth orientation of new staff members.
- Ensure the team hosts a "Welcome Tea Break" the week a new staff member arrives.
- Adopt screen sharing and video conferencing as the main channel for delivering training to a colleague.
- Identify and support key staff to undertake "Train-the-Trainer" training with a focus on delivering sessions to colleagues working in blended environments.
- Hold monthly Subject Matter Expert (SME) information sessions on specialist topics rotating the host role to each team member.

Peer2Peer Network

The Peer2Peer Network was established in March 2021 in response to some of the challenges faced by new starters. It also seeks to address, a least to some degree, the reduced cross-Divisional interaction occurring in the remote and blended settings.

Each month recent recruits to the Department are paired with longer serving staff members from another Division. The pair meet up (virtually, to date) for an informal chat or coffee break. The sole objective of the conversation is to introduce the new starter to a friendly face and to learn about another part of the Department.

The network currently has 91 active members and has facilitated over 180 meetings since March 2021.

- A recent survey of Peer2Peer participants found that;
- Over 90% would recommend the Network to others;
- The number one benefit listed by participants was that it is a great way to get to know colleagues. Other benefits included that its useful for building networks, improving connection to the wider Department and learning about work of other units;
- 95% of new joiners would consider participating in the Peer2Peer programme as longer serving member of staff after 12 months in DETE;
- 97% of longer serving members are interested in expanding the networking opportunities offered to staff; and
- Staff based in regional offices highlighted the effectiveness of the initiative in building links between staff regardless of geographic locations. They highlighted the importance of continuing to facilitate Peer2Peer meetings using video calls post-COVID.

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17. For more information on the DETE Buddy System see Appendix 3: Glossary of Initiatives.

What can I do?

- Consider your learning and development needs and discuss relevant training opportunities with your manager ensuring your agreed development plan is captured in your PMDS.

- Take time to make direct contact with anyone new to your team to introduce yourself and welcome them to the team.

- If you are assigned as a buddy to a new starter make sure you are proactive. Contact them regularly to see how they are settling in. Make sure they are included in all relevant meetings and that they are able to access all files and systems required. Consider organising a team coffee break to introduce the new staff member and welcome them to the team.

What can my team do?

- Try to replicate the office environment with a virtual "ask in the open plan". Consider setting up a group channel or chat on MS Teams which can be used as a first stop for people to ask relevant teammates for guidance or assistance with a task.

- Prioritise in-person delivery of internal training. Structured internal team training sessions should be delivered onsite where possible (subject to social distancing requirements) and where this is not possible ensure staff use video calls and screen sharing. Encourage engagement through use of break-out rooms and interactive presentation technology.

- Host regular team information sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to share learnings and best practice across the team. The sessions may profile specific topics where team members present on their areas of expertise and encourage discussion among teammates about challenges and opportunities. They could also be used to spotlight a new tool/system/process encouraging staff to share useful tips or tricks they have discovered.

- Develop a team New Starter Protocol. In addition to the Department induction checklist, the team protocol should map out the steps that will be taken locally to support the new recruit in settling it. This should include ensuring details regarding new starters are communicated to teammates prior to their arrival. It may involve preparation and regular updating of a New Starter folder which would include short bios of team members and their areas of work, team meeting schedules and routines, overview of key stakeholders and other important information.

Actions

| No.	Action	Owner(s)
10.	Ensure blended working does not become an obstacle to continuous learning and development. People managers will actively encourage staff to avail of training opportunities and senior management will model strong coaching behaviour. i. The responsibility of People Managers to ensure their staff have access to continuous development opportunities will be highlighted. ii. The establishment of the Learning and Career Development Community of Expertise as part of the HR Operating Model will play a central role in ensuring that informal and formal training adapts to meet the needs of the blended learning environment. iii. HR Business Partners will support Senior Management to explore and address training needs.	People Managers/ Senior Management (POs/APs) i. Learning and Development Unit / HRBPs ii. HR Unit iii. HR Business Partners
11.	Training for people managers with an emphasis on leading blended teams and enhancing coaching skills will be prioritised. i. The Learning and Development Unit will work closely with The Manager Development Subgroup of Innovate@ETE to explore how to maximise the impact of this action.	Learning and Development unit/ Senior Management i. Learning and Development Unit/ Manager Development Subgroup
12.	Adapt the structure and mix of learning interventions provided to respond to blended working. This will include enhancing the emphasis on collaborative learning sessions to support and sustain remote engagement and supporting greater access to interactive presentation tools such as Mentimeter, across the Department.	Learning and Development Unit
13.	Exploit the potential of on-demand training by expanding the range of "How to" videos on BOB and developing an easily accessible library of recordings of "Lunch and Learns" and Information sessions.	Learning and Development Unit / ICT Unit/ Trainers
14.	Ensure that those delivering training sessions at Business Unit Level are given access to recording functions on the relevant virtual meeting platform. This will support the development of team / function specific training libraries and facilitate knowledge management.	ICT Unit / Business Unit Trainers
15.	Review the current Department approach for inducting new starters to ensure it provides optimum outcomes for new recruits and the receiving unit, taking into account challenges that arise in the blended working environment.	HR Unit
16.	Develop a team New Starter Protocol. In addition to the Department induction checklist, team protocols will map out the steps that will be taken locally to support the new recruit in settling it.	Senior Managers (POs/APs)
17.	Extend the existing buddy system. Ensure that people new to teams, not just new to the Department, are assigned a colleague to act as their go-to person to assist them in settling in and answer questions as required for the duration of their induction period.	HR / People Managers
18.	Establish the Peer2Peer network on a permanent basis continuing to promote participation to new joiners and longer serving members of staff as a means to build cross-Divisional links. Continue to expand the networks activities in response to participant demand.	Organisation Design and Development Team

7. Facilitating Remote Collaboration and Innovation

A range of global surveys undertaken since March 2020 indicate that both employees and senior management believe innovation has been negatively impacted as a result of remote working[18]. The National Competitiveness Council has suggested that this decline in innovation is likely due *"to less close-knit teams, workers feeling more distant from company culture and less collaboration[19]."*

The ConnEcTEd Team baseline survey results reveal that 54% of participants felt their teams' remote collaboration had been effective or very effective. However, when examined further in the workshops, it became clear that team collaboration activity was focussed on proactive information sharing rather than problem solving. Only 36% of survey respondents felt their teams were innovating effectively while working remotely. Almost a third (31%) of respondents felt that working remotely had made it more difficult to be innovative or creative.

Based on responses to the survey, the average pilot team spends 57% of their time in team meetings exchanging information and 14% brainstorming or being creative. This linked to discussions in the workshops which highlighted that online meetings have a tendency to be more task-focussed and transactional compared to the richer and more engaged interactions that happen on-site. During the Senior Leadership session, participants highlighted the need to strengthen skills and capabilities for collaborative, problem-solving in remote and blended environments.

Figure 7: Baseline Survey Results: In team meetings, how is time split across activity types?
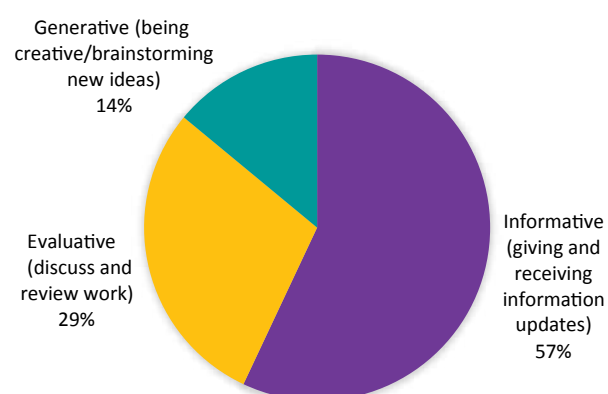
During engagements with staff (team workshops / Champion Networks/ launch event) various collaboration tools were used to support engagement and to showcase the variety of tools available. These included OneNote, Mentimeter and Mural.

18. Forbes, "Work from Home Fallout: Productivity U, Innovation Down", Joe McKendrick, October 2020.
19. National Competitiveness and Productivity Council, Bulletin 21-3 "Remote Working: Implications for Competitiveness and Productivity", May 2021.

When asked how collaboration and innovation could be better supported, some workshop participants suggested their teams needed to regularly allocate time for this type of activity. The importance of visually displaying ideas during brainstorming sessions was highlighted and it was noted that the Department's preferred VC platform offered limited functionality in terms of a virtual whiteboards. The roll out of MS Teams has since addressed this issue as all MS Teams meetings have a whiteboard which participants can use collectively.

In addition, as part of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative, a Department-wide trial of an online collaborative tool "Mural" has been launched. The tool enables teams to collaborate visually using a digital canvas which can be pre-set using a range of templates designed to facilitate remote innovation, support project management or map processes.

Examples of Actions Implemented by Pilot Teams:

- Set up a collaboration working group to discuss how the whole team can best collaborate together.
- Bring the team together for a monthly collaboration session focussed on a specific topic or work underway and brainstorm ideas about best to progress.
- Explore collaboration functionality on existing IT tools and examine other options that may be appropriate for use within the team.
- Set up an "Ideas Wall" on OneNote where colleagues can share ideas and suggestions they have.

What can my team do?

- Make time for collaboration and innovation. Convene regular team meetings where the focus is to brainstorm ideas in relation to a specific issue, challenge or priority.
- Create an Ideas Space. This will replicate Innovate@ETE's Staff Ideas process at local level. The Ideas Space can be a live document, a virtual whiteboard or an MS Teams channel where colleagues can put forward ideas for change. Undertake a regular review and discussion of these ideas at team meetings.
- Use virtual whiteboards to engage team members in the collaborative process and provide a visual stimulus and record of discussions.
- Ask your Division's Mural Coordinator to demonstrate the tool to your team and consider how you can use it effectively to encourage collaborative interactions across the team, Division, Department and with external stakeholders.

Actions

No.	Action	Owner(s)
19.	Continue to prioritise and spotlight the work of Innovate@ETE which enables colleagues to collaborate at Departmental level to make positive changes to how we work, find solutions to challenges and provide opportunities to turn good ideas into reality.	Management Board
20.	Highlight the whiteboard functionality of MS Teams with a "How to" video and short article on BOB to maximise the impact of this action.	Organisation Design and Development Team
21.	Senior Management will support and engage with the Department wide trial of the online collaborative platform, Mural and seek opportunities to test it within teams.	Senior Management (POs/APs)
	i. Promote the tool by delivering introductory training sessions and preparing short articles on BOB.	i. Organisation Design and Development Team

8. Supporting Employee Wellbeing

As a responsible employer that cares about its staff, the Department is committed to supporting employee wellbeing and to embedding the principles set out in the "Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework[20]".

The Framework highlights the importance of Departments and Offices developing their own customised health and wellbeing programmes to enable them to effectively respond to the individual needs and characteristics of their organisations.

It has long been understood that promoting wellbeing can help prevent stress and create positive working environments where individuals and organisation can thrive. Wellbeing is a fundamental enabler of employee engagement and organisational performance. A recent survey by the CIPD, however, found that more than 80% of organisation were concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on employees' mental health[21].

As we return to the office, it can be expected that some of the concerns regarding isolation and lack of social interaction will diminish. However, it will be important that efforts are made to ensure teams have meaningful engagements when onsite and similarly that when working remotely, colleagues do not feel excluded or detached from the wider team.

In 2019, a Wellbeing Team was established with cross-Departmental membership and has since become a subgroup of Innovate@ETE. In early 2020, the Wellbeing Team developed the Department's Wellbeing Framework which identifies a range of activities to be progressed under four key headings; – Physical Fitness, Mental Fitness, Nutrition and Social Wellbeing. The Wellbeing Team has continued to progress these activities and promote employee wellbeing insofar as remote working has allowed. Throughout lockdown it has hosted a range of webinars that have included topics such as building resilience, overcoming challenges for parents working from home and dealing with anxiety and mental health struggles.

While 64% of respondents to the ConnEcTEd Teams baseline survey felt that their wellbeing was supported or very well supported while working remotely, it is concerning that over a third (36%) felt they received little or no support. Colleagues (29%) and Managers (26%) were regarded as the most helpful wellbeing supports in the workplace. This emphasises the importance of strong team connectivity in terms of employee wellbeing.

20. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, "Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework", 2021.
21. CIPD, Wellbeing at Work Factsheet, 2021.

> *Colleagues and Line Managers are regarded as the most helpful wellbeing support*
> *— ConnEcTEd Teams Baseline Survey*

Wellbeing resources (BOB pages, webinars and newsletters prepared by the Wellbeing Team) were also well regarded with 24% listing them as important. Some mentioned concern that the people who are most likely in need of wellbeing supports are the least likely to access them due to being overworked and under pressure. In some workshops, it was noted that in the remote environment it is more difficult to identify when someone is struggling and managers made need training support in this area.

In the workshop discussions it was clear that some felt working remotely resulted in a better work/life balance, giving them more time to spend at home with family. However, a key theme that emerged was an increase in workloads, longer working hours, a blurring of the lines between work and home, and increased pressures for participants and their teams.

It is worth noting that the rights of employees to disconnect and switch off from work have been recently detailed in the Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice on The Right to Disconnect[22].

During the senior leadership discussion, participants stressed that it will be important that blended working is delivered in a way that supports wellbeing and that some of the behaviours which have become normalised during the pandemic, due to a significant intensification of demands on the Department, should not be allowed to become embedded in the organisational culture longer term.

In qualitative inputs to the survey and in workshop discussion, a number of participants indicated that that stakeholder expectations had increased since the introduction of remote working. For some staff the removal of commuting time has been replaced by longer working hours. Others noted that in the remote world because staff are 'always at their desk' there is often an expectation that emails are responded to immediately and tasks are actioned as soon as they are issued, regardless of attendance at online meetings or other priorities.

Examples of Actions Implemented by Pilot Teams:

- Arrange customised team resilience training sessions.
- Rotate monotonous tasks around the team.
- Schedule regular 'walk and talk' breaks, where team members are paired on a rotating basis and catch up while out for a quick walk.
- Collate and share list of wellbeing resources across the team.
- Create and send a wellbeing survey to the team to assess what actions should be prioritised.
- Each month rotate responsibility for organising a fun team social activity to a different member.
- Invite team members to contribute their favourite songs to a team playlist.

22. Workplace Relations Commission, "Code of Practice for employers and employees on the Right to Disconnect", April 2021.

What can I do?

- Check out the wide range of resource on the Wellbeing homepage on BOB. This includes links to videos of webinars on a range of wellbeing related topics.
- Avail of the OneLearning online Introduction to Mindfulness course.
- Consider getting involved in one of the many DETE social groups such as the book club, chess club, walking group, choir and the Department Social Club.
- Make sure you talk to your Manager to let them know if you are feeling stressed or struggling. If you do not feel comfortable discussing this with your Manager, the Employee Engagement team in HR are on hand to provide support and advice.
- Avail of the Civil Service Employees Assistance Service. The CSEAS provides a wide range of free and confidential supports to staff in the Civil Service and is designed to assist employees to manage work and life difficulties.

What can my team do?

- Take having fun seriously. Social interaction is key to building connections and trust within teams. It also promotes job satisfaction. Activities should vary from regular casual coffee breaks to more structured activities such as quizzes, virtual scavenger hunts and team play lists.
- Facilitate regular conversations about wellbeing at team level and in 1-to-1 direct engagements.
- Consider including a tagline on all emails sent from the team that indicates a response is not expected outside of the recipients normal working hours.
- Explore options to rotate monotonous or unrewarding tasks and examine options to temporarily share workloads where colleagues are under particular strain.

Actions

No.	Action	Owner(s)
22.	Appoint a dedicated Wellbeing Officer to drive the implementation of the recommendations set out in the "Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework" and to lead on Departmental Wellbeing initiatives that will be reviewed in light of the move to a blended working environment.	Management Board/ Business Services Unit
23.	Progress the Department's Right to Disconnect Policy.	HR
24.	Provide clear and unambiguous messaging about the requirement of staff to take breaks. Senior Management will visibly model the desired behaviour and consider actions such as updating their online status to display when they are taking a break or "@lunch".	Management Board / Senior Management (POs/APs)
25.	Restate the Department's policy regarding restricting non-essential emails or phone calls outside of agreed working hours.	Management Board
26.	Support key Department personnel to become Workplace Mental Health First Aiders so they can effectively assist staff encountering mental health issues and guide them effectively towards appropriate supports.	HR / Wellbeing Team

9. Enabling Connectivity through Technology

The focus of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative is on identifying and developing behaviours that support best practice blended team working. However, as a key enabler of effective and efficient working, it is important to consider how technology can be used to enhance connectivity while physically dispersed.

Throughout the project, there was widespread acknowledgement and appreciation for the continued enhancements in technology to support remote working in DETE in the period since March 2020 and for the significant efforts of the ICT team to support staff throughout the period.

Participants were keen that the IT environment that has been built in response to remote working is maintained and further developed to support effective and efficient blended working behaviours. It was suggested this could include enhanced access to video conferencing equipment in DETE offices. It is noted, however, that such investment could only prudently be undertaken once best practice, Department policy and behavioral preference with regards to hybrid meetings is properly established.

Within the workshops, teams also discussed the need for more dynamic and interactive tools to help them work online as a group and interact together in real time.

Beyond issues related to the quality of broadband connectivity, the following were identified as significant technological barriers to effective blended working;

- The lack of widespread access to corporate phones for staff below Assistant Principal grade limited the connectivity of more junior staff, particularly to one another;
- The perceived formality associated with accessing virtual video conference "rooms" discouraged staff from having ad hoc, short face-to-face conversations to discuss issues or explain tasks;
- The inability of team members to quickly engage the group in real time made it difficult to replicate the office environment where staff can "ask a question to the open plan" and get an immediate response;
- The Department's preferred VC platform offered limited functionality in terms of a virtual whiteboards which made brainstorming activities more challenging in virtual settings;
- Engagement with online presentation or training sessions is made more difficult by lecture style delivery of presentations.

Key actions implemented

- The Department's 2020 ICT strategy included plans to pilot MS Teams and subject to success roll out across the Department. The findings from the ConnEcTEd Teams action research project contributed to the decision to bring forward the pilot and quickly make this suite of technology available to all staff. The functionality provided by this platform enables all staff;
  - » to voice call or video call each other at a click of a button;
  - » set up group "channels" and "chats" to engage with a number of people in real-time;
  - » to engage in static chats which creates an opportunity for ongoing discussions without the need for all participants to be immediately present or available; and
  - » access to collaborative whiteboards in all MS Team Video calls

- As part of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative, a Department-wide trial of an online collaborative tool "Mural" has been launched. The tool enables teams to collaborate visually using a digital canvas which can be pre-set using a range of templates designed to facilitate remote innovation, support project management or map processes.

- To support greater online engagement in training sessions, a collaborative presentation tool is now used regularly in internal Learning and Development events including Induction programmes, Lunch and Learns and Information sessions. This allows for online attendees to vote, comment, build word clouds and ask questions of the panellists which display on screen in real time. Use of break-out rooms is now also standard practice to encourage peer learning and debate.

10. Impact Assessment

The action-research methodology used in the ConnEcTEd Teams pilot project represented a new approach for delivering staff engagement programmes within the Department. It is important to assess the impact of the intervention.

Members of the seven pilot teams were invited to complete a second survey once they had completed their three workshops.

At a general level, 97% of respondents believed their team had benefited from participation in the project. Furthermore, 87% of people managers felt that there are lasting benefits from their team's participation in the project.

The participants identified several benefits of the project, with the top two being the opportunity to have constructive discussions about the way they work (26%) and the improved connectivity (24%).

Figure 8: Primary Benefit Identified from Team Participation in ConnEcTEd Teams, June 2021
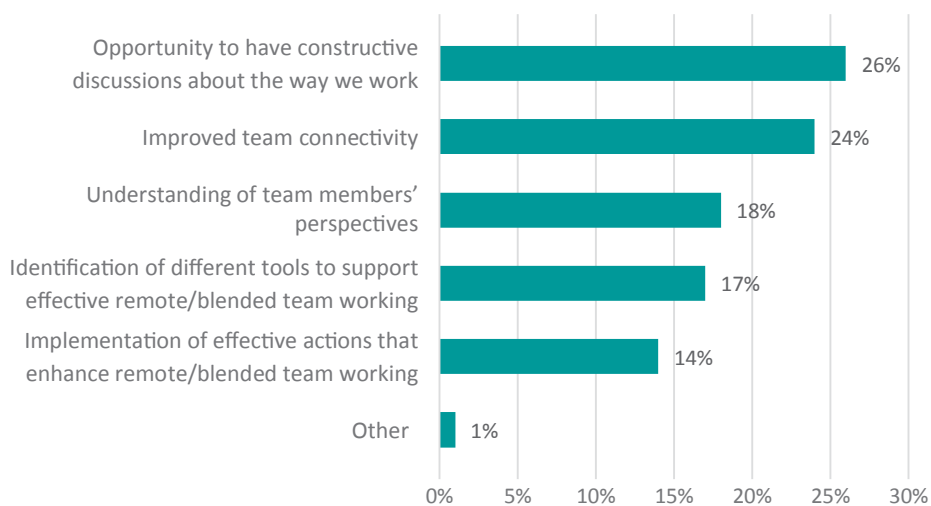
The format of the conclusion survey largely replicated the baseline survey undertaken at the outset of the programme. In both surveys participants were asked to rate their teams' performance across the key thematic areas.

Figure 9 below shows the percentage of participants that rated their team's performance as positive or very positive.

Figure 9: Positive or Very Positive Assessment of Team Performance by Participants, March 2021/ June 2021
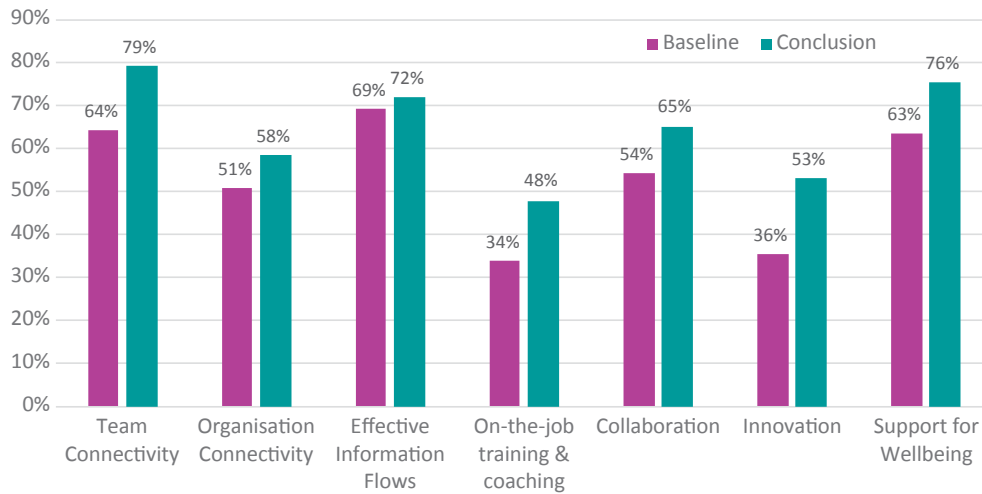
The results of the conclusion survey indicate an improvement in performance across all thematic areas as assessed by participants with the most notable improvements in innovation, on-the-job training and coaching and team connectivity.

The baseline survey identified the feeling of isolation and the lack of face-to-face interaction as the most significant challenge arising from remote working. This was overtaken by network connectivity in the conclusion survey.

> *"Participation gave us the opportunity to acknowledge that fostering team connectivity is important."*
>
> *"It's been important to take the allocated time aside and assess what we can do better."*
>
> *"The project brought the fundamentals of good team work to the fore and has helped me focus on being the best manager I can for my staff."*
>
> — *Qualitative responses, ConnEcTEd Teams Conclusion Survey*

There was no change to the proportion of respondents that felt trusted by their manager while working remotely (92%). However, the percentage of people managers who found the lack of visibility of their staff challenging fell from 54% at the outset of the project to 34% at the end.

In the baseline survey, 42% of people managers reported having less frequent 1-to-1 meetings with direct reports while working remotely, this figure fell to 21% in the conclusion survey. The number hosting these meeting with the same frequency as they did in the office shifted from 43% to 71%.

During both surveys, participants were asked to indicate how they felt about remote working.

Figure 10: "How are you feeling about remote working?", March 2021 / June 2021
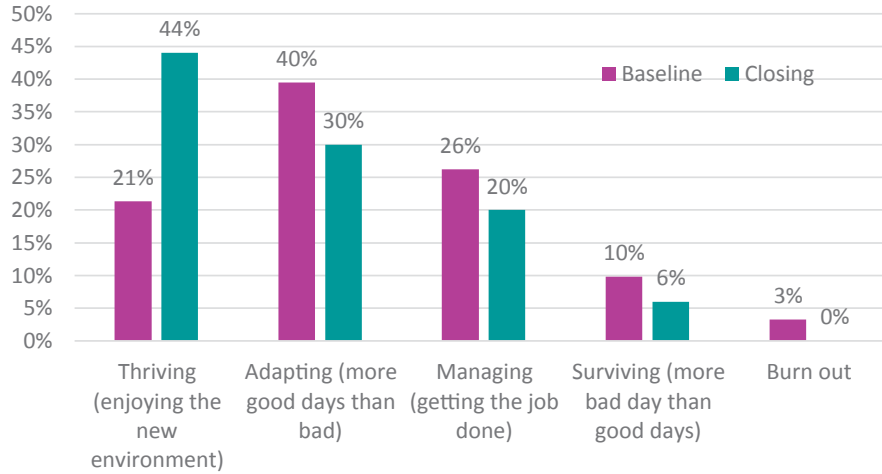
The closing survey revealed a significant increase in the cohort of participants who felt they were thriving (44% up from 21%), while the other four categories saw a decline in the number of participants that aligned with them.

11. Implementing the Action Plan

The DETE Management Board are committed to making blended working a success for the organisation and for its people. They have therefore requested the implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan[23] which is composed of 26 actions spread across the five thematic areas of the programme;

- Maintaining team/organisation-wide connectedness and trust;
- Ensuring effective and efficient information flows;
- Enabling continued training and coaching;
- Facilitating remote collaboration and innovation; and
- Supporting employee wellbeing.

Under Action 2 of the plan, Management Board has agreed to establish a ConnEcTEd Teams Implementation Group, comprised of representatives from across the Department to oversee implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams action plan and to share best practice. The Implementation Group will be chaired by an Assistant Secretary, who will act as the ConnEcTEd Champion for Management Board.

Each Assistant Secretary is required to nominate two representatives to the Group. As noted in the report, strong leadership is vital to build support and role model the desired behaviours required to support effective blended team working. Therefore, one of the representatives selected from each Division should be of Principal Officer Grade. This representative will be responsible for ensuring that progressing the ConnEcTEd Teams action plan is a standing item for discussion at Divisional Management Committee meetings.

The report also notes the somewhat limited opportunities for less senior grades to formally engage with colleagues in other Divisions. The action research element of the ConnEcTEd Teams programme highlighted the valuable inputs and outcomes achieved through facilitating engagement of junior staff in strategic initiatives. The second nominee should therefore represent staff at more junior grades within their Division.

The Implementation Group will be responsible for engaging with Action Owners to agree an implementation timeline and to receive updates on progress. In addition to overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan, the Group will be charged with sharing best practice in terms of supporting effective blended working across the Department. This may involve extending the menu of activities which teams and individuals can undertake to support effective blended working, as well as awareness building initiatives.

The Group will meet once every two months and will provide an update on the action plan progress to Management Board on a quarterly basis. After 12 months, the Group may deem it appropriate to put forward recommendations for future actions, taking account of the blended working environment that has developed in the interim period and the experiences of employees, teams and senior management.

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23. See Appendix 1 for the complete ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan.

Appendix 1: ConnEcTEd Teams Action Plan

No.	Action	Owner(s)	Timeline (TBC)[24]
Sustaining Connectivity and Trust			
1.	In advance of the implementation of the Blended Working Policy, all Senior Management-led teams will convene as a group to; a) reflect on the remote working experience; b) consider the challenges of blended working; and c) agree and implement actions to support effective and efficient blended team working.	Senior Managers (to be determined locally as to whether PO/AP led)	
2.	Establish a ConnEcTEd Teams Implementation Group, comprised of representatives from across the Department to oversee implementation of the ConnEcTEd Teams action plan and to share best practice. The Implementation Group will be chaired by an Assistant Secretary, who will act as the ConnEcTEd Champion for the DETE Management Board. In addition, to overseeing progress on the 26 organisation-level actions, the Group will work to promote the menu of activities proposed for implementation by teams and individuals.	Management Board to Nominate representatives	
3.	Leadership will role model best practice blended working behaviours by routinely working from remote settings, committing time and effort to nurturing team connectivity and by creating opportunities for staff, particularly those in more junior grades, to engage with colleagues in the wider Department.	Management Board and POs	
4.	Articulate clearly what the office offers. Department Leaders will actively communicate the benefits of being onsite and support the creation of an environment that realises these benefits. **Senior Management will:** i. Request people managers to deliberately structure team engagements to maximise the impact of onsite work. ii. Encourage regular "All-in-Days" for teams (with full regard for social distancing requirements) to build team bonds and support effective collaboration and on-the-job training.	Management Board and POs i. POs/APs ii. POs/APs	
5.	The transition to blended working is a fundamental change in the way we work and cannot be understated. Change Management training for staff across the Department will be strongly promoted and supported, particularly in the period of transition prior to the full introduction of Blended Working.	Learning and Development Unit / Senior Management (POs/APs)	

No.	Action	Owner(s)	Timeline
Ensuring Effective and Efficient Information Flows			
6.	Department Leaders will reiterate the expectation that a schedule of team/ Divisional meetings is embedded into the routines of all business areas. i. Team meetings will be structured to ensure staff have appropriate opportunities to share views and ask questions. ii. Regular Divisional-wide meetings will be held to support knowledge sharing and create synergies between Business Units.	Management Board and POs i. People Managers ii. Assistant Secretaries	

24. To be developed by Implementation Group in consultation with Action Owners.

7.	Review and enhance structures in place to cascade relevant information throughout the Department. It is important that key messages intended for top-down communication to all staff are relayed consistently from managers to their teams (e.g. monthly Secretary General and Principal Officer meeting). Staff engagement is ongoing to inform how routine corporate communications should evolve as we move into a blending working environment. i. The annual Senior Management Forum is a touchstone event in the Department's calendar attended by staff at Assistant Principal level and above. Consideration will be given to recording plenary sessions /keynote speakers at these events in the future for the benefit of all staff.	Communications Unit / Management Board i. Learning and Development Unit	
8.	Establish Communities of Practice. A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest in a particular field (for example legislation, procurement, customer services). Involvement in these groups will provide members the opportunity to learn from each other and the chance to develop skills in a particular area whilst boosting staff engagement levels. The roll out of MS Teams across the Department has the potential to support the creation of virtual CoPs through the use of group channels and chat functions, document sharing etc.	Implementation Group	
9.	Continue to support the work of the Knowledge Management (KM) sub-group of Innovate@ETE. The KM Group is undertaking significant work to support the wider Department by developing and promoting the Knowledge Store, facilitating remote collaboration, enhancing networking opportunities, and is currently preparing a template to assist units in developing procedure manuals.	Management Board	

Enabling Continued Training and Coaching			
10.	Ensure blended working does not become an obstacle to continuous learning and development. People managers will actively encourage staff to avail of training opportunities and senior management will model strong coaching behaviour. i. The responsibility of People Managers to ensure their staff have access to continuous development opportunities will be highlighted. ii. The establishment of the Learning and Career Development Community of Expertise as part of the HR Operating Model will play a central role in ensuring that informal and formal training adapts to meet the needs of the blended learning environment. iii. HR Business Partners will support Senior Management to explore and address training needs.	People Managers/ Senior Management (POs/APs) i. Learning and Development Unit / HRBPs ii. HR Unit iii. HR Business Partners	
11.	Training for people managers with an emphasis on leading blended teams and enhancing coaching skills will be prioritised. i. The Learning and Development Unit will work closely with The Manager Development Subgroup of Innovate@ETE to explore how to maximise the impact of this action.	Learning and Development unit/ Senior Management i. Learning and Development Unit/ Manager Development Subgroup	
12.	Adapt the structure and mix of learning interventions provided to respond to blended working. This will include enhancing the emphasis on collaborative learning sessions to support and sustain remote engagement and supporting greater access to interactive presentation tools such as Mentimeter, across the Department.	Learning and Development Unit	
13.	Exploit the potential of on-demand training by expanding the range of "How to" videos on BOB and developing an easily accessible library of recordings of "Lunch and Learns" and Information sessions.	Learning and Development Unit / ICT Unit/ Trainers	

14.	Ensure that those delivering training sessions at Business Unit Level are given access to recording functions on the relevant virtual meeting platform. This will support the development of team / function specific training libraries and facilitate knowledge management.	ICT Unit / Business Unit Trainers	
15.	Review the current Department approach for inducting new starters to ensure it provides optimum outcomes for new recruits and the receiving unit, taking into account challenges that arise in the blended working environment.	HR Unit	
16.	Develop a team New Starter Protocol. In addition to the Department induction checklist, team protocols will map out the steps that will be taken locally to support the new recruit in settling in.	Senior Managers (POs/APs)	
17.	Extend the existing buddy system. Ensure that people new to teams, not just new to the Department, are assigned a colleague to act as their go-to person to assist them in settling in and answer questions as required for the duration of their induction period.	HR / People Managers	
18.	Establish the Peer2Peer network on a permanent basis continuing to promote participation to new joiners and longer serving members of staff as a means to build cross-Divisional links. Continue to expand the networks activities in response to participant demand.	Organisation Design and Development Team	

Facilitating Remote Collaboration and Innovation			
19.	Continue to prioritise and spotlight the work of Innovate@ETE which enables colleagues to collaborate at Departmental level to make positive changes to how we work, find solutions to challenges and provide opportunities to turn good ideas into reality.	Management Board	
20.	Highlight the whiteboard functionality of MS Teams with a "How to" video and short article on BOB to maximise the impact of this action.	Organisation Design and Development Team	
21.	Senior Management will support and engage with the Department wide trial of the online collaborative platform, Mural and seek opportunities to test it within teams. i. Promote the tool by delivering introductory training sessions and preparing short articles on BOB.	Senior Management (POs/APs) i. Organisation Design and Development Team	

Supporting Employee Wellbeing			
22.	Appoint a dedicated Wellbeing Officer to drive the implementation of the recommendations set out in the "Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework" and to lead on Departmental Wellbeing initiatives that will be reviewed in light of the move to a blended working environment.	Management Board/ Business Services Unit	
23.	Progress the Department's Right to Disconnect Policy.	HR	
24.	Provide clear and unambiguous messaging about the requirement of staff to take breaks. Senior Management will visibly model the desired behaviour and consider actions such as updating their online status to display when they are taking a break or "@lunch".	Management Board / Senior Management (POs/ APs)	
25.	Restate the Department's policy regarding restricting non-essential emails or phone calls outside of agreed working hours.	Management Board	
26.	Support key Department personnel to become Workplace Mental Health First Aiders so they can effectively assist staff encountering mental health issues and guide them effectively towards appropriate supports.	HR / Wellbeing Team	

Appendix 2: ConnEcTEd Teams Cheat Sheet

Throughout the report a number of actions are suggested for consideration by individuals and teams seeking to support effective and efficient blended working. For ease of reference, these are collated below.

What can I do?

to Sustain Connectivity and Trust

- Update your MS Team status daily to reflect whether you are in the office or working remotely.
- Make sure your profile picture is on your Microsoft profile and Staff Directory.
- Reach out to a colleague you haven't been in contact with for a while.
- Suggest and organise a social activity for your team (taking account of relevant social distancing requirements).
- Write an article, submit a photograph or get involved in a discussion on BOB.
- Join the Peer2Peer network and meet colleagues from across the Department.

to Ensure Efficient and Effective Information Flows

- Check that the work you are involved in is captured correctly on your team's Business Unit page on BOB.
- Ensure you complete your eDocs training and that you understand your team's approach to knowledge management.
- Take advantage of opportunities to get involved in cross-Divisional Working Groups such as Innovate@ETE.

to Enable On-the-Job Training and Coaching

- Consider your learning and development needs and discuss relevant training opportunities with your manager ensuring your agreed development plan is captured in your PMDS.
- Take time to make direct contact with anyone new to your team to introduce yourself and welcome them to the team.
- If you are assigned as a buddy to a new starter make sure you are proactive. Contact them regularly to see how they are settling in. Make sure they are included in all relevant meetings and that they are able to access all files and systems required. Consider organising a team coffee break to introduce the new staff member and welcome them to the team.

to Support Workplace Wellbeing

- Check out the wide range of resource on the Wellbeing homepage on BOB. This includes links to videos of webinars on a range of wellbeing related topics.
- Avail of the OneLearning online Introduction to Mindfulness course.
- Consider getting involved in one of the many DETE social groups such as the book club, chess club, walking group, choir and the Department Social Club.
- Make sure you talk to your Manager to let them know if you are feeling stressed or struggling. If you do not feel comfortable discussing this with your Manager, the Employee Engagement team in HR are on hand to provide support and advice.
- Avail of the Civil Service Employees Assistance Service. The CSEAS provides a wide range of free and confidential supports to staff in the Civil Service and is designed to assist employees to manage work and life difficulties.

What can my Team do?

to Sustain Connectivity and Trust

- Plan for change and for success. As we prepare to return to work under a new Blended Working Policy, make time for the team to meet and discuss the best way to remain connected to one another and the wider organisation. It is an ideal time to develop a Team Charter. To do this, the team come together to agree how they intend to work together to achieve the team's objectives. They should articulate the behaviours that are expected of teammates and the standards they will set to ensure that the team works as effectively as possible.

- Small talk is a big deal! Just because a meeting is happening online does not mean it has to be entirely task-focussed. Regularly build in time to check-in with each other. This will not only support connectivity but will help build confidence and provide opportunities for staff to raise issues or request advice in areas where they need assistance.

- Make the most of your time together. Online meetings are great for sharing information or providing updates but are less conducive to problem solving. Where possible, structure schedules so onsite meetings are used for brainstorming and working through difficult issues.

- Try to avoid hybrid meetings. Having some staff in the same room and others join remotely is sub-optimum and can lead to miscommunication. If you are having hybrid meetings try to address any imbalances by making sure online attendees are given equal opportunity to input and avoid sidebar or off-camera conversations between onsite participants.

to Ensure Efficient and Effective Information Flows

- Review the schedule and structure of team meetings. While more frequent meetings of sub-teams may be expedient, it is important to maintain a regular schedule of full team meetings to support connectedness, support knowledge management and avoid the emergence of silos.

- Ensure relevant communications from senior management meetings (such as Divisional Management Committees/PO Monthly Meeting) are shared with all staff. Consider adding these updates as standing items to team meeting agendas.

- Don't let emails dominate your team's communication. Ensure all staff are encouraged to use voice or video calls as appropriate to enhance the richness of communication. This will support efficient and effective information flows and enhance problem-solving and collaboration capabilities.

- Ensure your team has an identified Information Officer who is responsible for ensuring correct knowledge management and file storage procedures are in place and assists colleagues to ensure these are fully implemented.

- Host an "Open Door" team meeting. Invite stakeholders from other teams and Divisions to a team meeting to boost organisation-wide connectedness. The purpose of this will be to increase understanding of your team's work, build relationship and identify opportunities for collaboration.

to Enable On-the-Job Training and Coaching

- Try to replicate the office environment with a virtual "ask the open plan". Consider setting up a group channel or chat on MS Teams which can be used as a first stop for people to ask relevant teammates for guidance or assistance with a task.

- Prioritise in-person delivery of internal training. Structured internal team training sessions should be delivered onsite where possible (subject to social distancing requirements) and where this is not possible ensure staff use video calls and screen sharing. Encourage engagement through use of break-out rooms and interactive presentation technology.

- Host regular team information sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to share learnings and best practice across the team. The sessions may profile specific topics where team members present on their areas of expertise and encourage discussion among teammates about challenges and opportunities. They could also be used to spotlight a new tool/system/process encouraging staff to share useful tips or tricks they have discovered.

- Develop a team New Starter Protocol. In addition to the Department induction checklist, the team protocol should map out the steps that will be taken locally to support the new recruit in settling it. This should include ensuring details regarding new starters are communicated to teammates prior to their arrival. It may involve preparation and regular updating of a New Starter folder which would include short bios of team members and their areas of work, team meeting schedules and routines, overview of key stakeholders and other important information.

to Facilitate Remote Collaboration and Innovation

- **Make time for collaboration and innovation. Convene regular team meetings where the focus is to brainstorm ideas in relation to a specific issue, challenge or priority.**
- **Create an Ideas Space. This will replicate Innovate@ETE's Staff Ideas process at local level. The Ideas Space can be a live document, a virtual whiteboard or an MS Teams channel where colleagues can put forward ideas for change. Undertake a regular review and discussion of these ideas at team meetings.**

to Support Workplace Wellbeing

- **Take having fun seriously. Social interaction is key to building connections and trust within teams. It also promotes job satisfaction. Activities should vary from regular casual coffee breaks to more structured activities such as quizzes, virtual scavenger hunts and team play lists.**
- **Facilitate regular conversations about wellbeing at team level and in 1-to-1 direct engagements.**
- **Consider including a tagline on all emails sent from the team that indicates a response is not expected outside of the recipients normal working hours.**
- **Use virtual whiteboards to engage team members in the collaborative process and provide a visual stimulus and record of discussions.**
- **Ask your Division's Mural Coordinator to demonstrate the tool to your team and consider how you can use it effectively to encourage collaborative interactions across the team, Division, Department and with external stakeholders.**
- **Explore options to rotate monotonous or unrewarding tasks and examine options to temporarily share workloads where colleagues are under particular strain.**

Appendix 3: Change Management and Leadership Theory

The design of the ConnEcTEd Teams initiative is underpinned by Change Management and Leadership Theory, particularly the work of John Kotter and also James Kouzes and Barry Posner. The models they developed are summarised below.

Kotter's 8 Step Process for Leading Change[25]

1. Create a Sense of Urgency: Leaders take a series of actions to communicate to stakeholders why it is critical that change take place and convince them the change needs to happen quickly.

2. Create a Guiding Coalition: Identify a group of willing allies that will play a critical role in spearheading the desired change.

3. Develop a Change Vision and Strategy: Clarify how the future will be different from the past and how the future will become a reality through initiatives linked directly to the vision.

4. Enlist a Volunteer Army: This group composed of individuals from a variety of levels within the organisation are invested in making the change initiatives successful and want to assist others to see the value of the initiatives and to take action to support them.

5. Enable Actions by Removing Barriers: Actively removing barriers such as inefficient processes and hierarchies enables people and groups to work across silos and generate real impact.

6. Generate Short Term Wins: It is important to generate successes, even small-scale ones, early on and to communicate and track these throughout the change process. This builds momentum and will help sustain longer term commitment to the overall change programme.

7. Sustain Acceleration: After initial successes, it is important to consolidate gains and implement more change. Increased credibility will can make it easier to improve systems, structures and policies.

8. Institute Change: Anchor the changes in corporate culture by making continuous efforts to ensure the change is seen across all aspects of the organisation.

Kouzes and Posner's 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership[26]

1. Model the Way: Leaders define the behaviour standards and then exemplify them. They provide clear signposts for others as to what the expectations are.

2. Inspire a Shared Vision: Leaders create and share an uplifting vision of the future which engages others and helps them to see their role in that future.

3. Challenge the Process: Leaders act as agents of change, constantly challenging the status quo and pushing for continuous organisational improvement. They encourage risk taking and experimentation and allow for mistakes which they regard as valuable learning opportunities.

4. Enable Others to Act: Leaders recognise the importance of mutual trust and respect to sustaining significant efforts. They build collaborative environments with spirited teams that are empowered to take action.

5. Encourage the Heart: Leaders know that achievement requires hard work and commitment. They celebrate success and the contributions required to achieve it.

25. Kotter., J.P. "Leading Change", Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, 1996.
26. Kouzes J and Posner B, "The Leadership Challenge – How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organisations", San Francisco, 2012.

Appendix 4: Summary of Initiatives

Buddy system

As part of the induction process, each manager assigns an existing staff member to act as a "buddy" to the new recruit on their team. The buddy helps the new employee to settle in to the Department and acts as their go-to person for any informal questions they might have about their new role. The buddy checks in regularly with new joiner throughout their induction period.

Peer2Peer

Is an informal networking initiative established as part of ConnEcTEd Teams project in March 2021. It was set up as a response to some of the challenges faced by new starters, when starting a new job remotely. Peer2Peer also aims to support greater informal cross-Divisional interactions.

Each month, recent recruits are paired with longer serving member of staffs from other Divisions. They get together for a virtual informal meeting or coffee break. The sole objective of the meeting is to introduce the new starter to a friendly face and to learn about another part of the Department. The pairings are rotated each month to allow participants to enhance their network across Divisions.

Currently, the initiative has over 90 participants and has facilitated over 180 meetings.

The Human Resources Operating Model (HROM) Project

This project is examining how Human Resources services can be enhanced within the Civil Service and will implement a new delivery model to better support the evolving business needs of the sector. As outlined in The Civil Service 2030 Renewal Strategy, the new operating model will boost capacity and provide a more consistent, sophisticated and modern approach to delivering a strategic HR function.

DETE is one of three Departments participating in the pilot phase, alongside the Department of Social Protection and the Civil Service HR Division within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. HROM will introduce some changes to HR structures and processes, including the establishment of Communities of Expertise in key HR knowledge areas and the roll out of HR Business Partnering to strengthen the strategic role of HR within Civils Service organisations.

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