The Future Working Environment in the Public Service
Panel Discussion, 24th June 2020

- **Patricia Carey**, CEO, Adoption Authority of Ireland
- **Simon Claydon**, Director, People Policy and Programmes, HM Revenue and Customs
- **David Cagney**, Chief Human Resources Officer for the Civil Service
- **Maurice Buckley**, Chairperson, Office of Public Works
- **Daniel Gerson**, Head of the Public Employment and Management Team, Public Governance Directorate, OECD
- **Pamela Byrne,** Chair of ACESA and CEO of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland

Over 50 ACESA members attended the session

Each of the five speakers gave an introduction and overview:

Patricia Carey gave an overview of her experience at The Adoption Authority of Ireland.

- By 18th May, all of Patricia's team (30) were back at work.
- This needed the specialist assessment of the building, strict protocols around hygiene etc., and social distancing.
- Patricia spoke about the importance of communicating/engaging with staff at all times.
- Very important to be cognizant that the experience is different for all staff, often depending on personal circumstances. One size solution is not going to fit all.

Simon Claydon told the meeting that 75% of the HM Revenue staff were now working from home, with just 4,000 working in the office.

- He noted the incredible commitment of staff, and the widespread improvement in employee engagement.
- Within two days, VPN issues had been sorted. HM Revenue are successfully using Microsoft Teams.
- The organisation is gathering data from its staff on a consistent basis. This is key to learning lessons and bring staff with us.

David Cagney spoke about the huge challenge that was presented recently and how the Irish civil and public service had stepped up.

- The first priority for him had been ensuring that human resources needed to be agile enough to respond to the crisis, particularly with regard to health and social services.
- Engaging with staff through Trade unions was key. Engagement on a regular basis with Senior Public Servants was also critical to progressing issues and accelerating the response.

- Key challenge now to be considered is how do we manage a 'distributed workforce', whilst retaining productivity and ensuring wellbeing of staff and within this trust will be key..
- Need to be flexible and agile in the future

Maurice Buckley informed the meeting that 1 metre social distancing would allow for somewhere between 90 and 90% capacity in most public service workplaces.

- The OPW was closely monitoring what was happening in other countries so that we can learn from others experience.
- Government policies will have to revisited in light of learnings and experiences during COVID 19

Office space will provide the means for collaboration amongst teams, space to meet and engage but the need for everyone to have a desk in the new working environment, if remote working facilitated, will have to be challenged.

- Key to the future workplace will be a rigorous clean desk policy in organisations.
- There will need to be an acceleration of the delivery of services in comms, ICT, and possible use of location indications – many issues to be thought through.

Daniel Gerson said that is it clear that the future working environment will certainly not be purely office based.

- It boils down to making it work for people. What they need and want.
- Daniel spoke about the six learnings that the OECD have taken from the experience of Covid:
  - Remember staff have different experiences and capacity
  - Celebrate the successes - govts/public service have been heroic
  - Lots of learnings to harness (good and bad)
  - Deliberately design a new workplace that benefits from the best of both worlds (office and home)
  - CEO job has transformed - how do we make sure we are passing on those leadership skills and developing our management training
  - Next Crisis - can we use our learnings for what happens next and build in resilience

Pamela moderated a Q&A session. Among the key takeaways from the discussion were:

Some Key learnings:

- **Leadership** is key - how do we make sure CEOs are supported to have those skills?
- **Communication** is key all the time with your staff, bring them with you
- **Flexibility** for staff needs to be equitable - staff have different experiences and capacity
- Evidence of improvement in **employee engagement**
- **Data** is key - gather your data consistently
- **Staff engagement** key (including with Trade Unions)
- Essential we don't revert back to a **'normal'** that isn't **agile**

- 3-5-year strategies need to allow for organisations to **adapt**

The 3 ‘F’s:
Be forward looking - technology changes happening generally, how can they be integrated to improve delivery of public sectors
Be flexible - most public services designed for different era -need to be more flexible and agile
Fulfil - Recognise the mission of the public service. Opportunities for need to learn and go, our staff are individuals and have different wants and needs

ENDS