

**10x Reasons and More for Good
Employment Relations in NI
Post Conference Report and Legacy Issues**

Scott Alexander and Alison Millar

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INTRODUCTION

The conference was held on 23 February 2023, thanks to funding from the Department for the Economy.

The conference title and theme was “10x Reasons and More for Good Employment Relations in NI” and it had first been mooted prior to the covid-19 lockdown.

The Labour Relations Agency invited experts in employment relations and good employment practices from the UK and Ireland to set out the conditions and inputs they believe are required to make a great place to work and do business.

The audience of invited guests were drawn from all sectors in NI and included many HR professionals and trade union representatives. The audience heard from researchers from leading universities, local and national government bodies who have implemented practices that have improved work and business prospects, and trade unionists who set out what they believe employers need to deliver on to create great places to work that lead to improved employment relations.

The LRA believes that the adoption of similar initiatives, tailored to the needs of Northern Ireland workplaces, whatever their size, could have a similarly positive impact here. But we also wanted the views of NI employers and employee representatives. This conference is seen as the first step in that process of consultation and development – a launch pad for future discussions in the hope that we can develop solutions specific to the NI economy.

We gathered the thoughts, ideas, suggestions and questions from our audience and put them on the day to our experts. We surveyed delegates and asked them if they would be prepared to help develop ideas.

We cannot ignore the fact that Northern Ireland is not in a good place at the moment. We have a political vacuum, a looming economic recession, and a cost-of-living crisis and associated industrial unrest. And yet, as we saw through the pandemic, there is strength in social partnership. The Engagement Forum on Covid-19, facilitated by the Labour Relations Agency, brought together business leaders, senior trade unionists and others in partnership to resolve serious workplace issues caused by the pandemic. This forum was – and still is – the envy of other jurisdictions.

The conference provided an opportunity to renew and refresh the spirit of partnership to address the issues facing Northern Ireland economy.

The feedback from everyone involved – audience, speakers, organisers and LRA staff – was exceptionally positive. This report highlights key takeaways and recommends options for the LRA Board to consider in order to build on that positive response and help grow the good employment framework upon which the 10x economy may be grown in Northern Ireland.

KEY ISSUES RAISED BY SPEAKERS AND RESEARCH

All of the speakers received great feedback from the delegates. All had their own perspective but, importantly, almost all attended a pre-conference dinner at which key issues were discussed and almost all attended the conference all day and heard the other speakers' presentations – this led to a more collegiate feel and a number of themes and agreements emerged. Those were mirrored by the audience in their polls held throughout the day.

The full pack of speaker submissions may be found here:

[LRA 2023 Conference MASTER TITANIC.pptx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Videoed sessions may be found here:

[Labour Relations - Titanic 2023 on Vimeo](#)

There Are Definite Links Between Good Jobs and Productivity, Innovation and Worker Wellbeing

This session, led by Professor Chris Warhurst based on research by him and Dr Sally Wright, led to consideration of these options:

- A new model of employment relations is proposed for Northern Ireland in which good jobs are a key feature.
- This project, commissioned by the LRA, is intended to help develop the business case for that new model.
- It examines the links between good jobs on the one hand and productivity, innovation and employee wellbeing/health on the other.
- Northern Ireland performs relatively poorly compared to the UK and smaller economies, including Ireland, on these important measures.
- There is no national statistical dataset in the UK that can be used for this purpose.
- Instead, we draw on a literature review of existing research with illustrations through case studies of companies in Northern Ireland.
- Use the Good Work measures of job quality adopted by ONS and recommended for use in Northern Ireland by NERI.

- Professor Warhurst's presentation is set out in the appendices and Board members may read his findings in full. There is more work to be done but his message was clear:
 - It's an important and necessary task to establish the business case for the new model.
 - Need to draw on existing research in the literature rather than a statistical dataset, though even here some evidence gaps that need to be filled.
 - Overall, and appreciating the variability amongst the research, findings indicate that good jobs have positive outcomes for companies.
- Significantly, key aspects of the new model are supported:
 - work (e.g. task autonomy, team working),
 - employment (e.g. learning, pay),
 - management (e.g. work design, management culture and style),

... though impacts vary by performance measure.
- As such Northern Ireland's businesses might benefit from improving the quality of their jobs as part of the new model.
- That being the case, the task now is to work out how to make common sense common practice in Northern Ireland.

It is this last point that links most of the themes of the conference. There are different options, and it is unlikely that one size will fit all, but those options are likely to benefit all organisations one way or another, whether they opt for a charter or Investors in People or Diversity Mark or adopt a 4-day week or flexible working or pay NLW+ or develop any of the myriad options available to bring employers and employees closer together and build trust and improve employee relations.

Good Employment Charters (and Other Frameworks) Improve Working Life and the Economy and are Good For Business

Following on from the research that showed that assessment models of good employment practices (of which good employment relations is both a subset and outcome) lead to improvements in productivity, diversity and inclusion levels, higher employment, better working conditions etc.

The conference focussed on four particular models: Good Employment Charter of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which was approved in March 2019 and continues to develop and grow; the nascent Belfast Business Promise - due to launch shortly after the conference; Investors in People - a long-established, multi-faceted model for assessing employee satisfaction and understanding or process levels and much more in employment; and the Diversity Mark - a specific assessment regarding diversity, equality and inclusion in NI workplaces.

All of the models have their uses and all allow employers to monitor progress. All focus on involving employees in their workplace. All are complex, so that organisations can focus on particular aspects that are achievable for them in their current or future circumstances. All have standards and different levels of achievement that employers may be assessed against. All offer incentives to achieve higher status. All are essentially seeking to embed greater standards into organisations. To paraphrase Professor Warhurst, achieving higher levels of assessment, if adopted in NI, should make common sense common practice in Northern Ireland.

To give a flavour of how best practice evolves, consider some of the developments in the GMCA Charter:

Membership requires employers to demonstrate excellent practice in key characteristics of employment practice, these are:

- Secure work.
- Flexible work.
- A real living wage.
- Workplace engagement & voice.
- Excellent recruitment practices & progression.
- Excellent people management.
- A productive & healthy workplace.

Each can be assessed separately, notwithstanding that the above standards are linked. There are three levels of membership. The Charter currently has 1300+ employers listed as supporters, of which 76 had reached 'Advocate' level at the time of the conference. The Implementation Unit had taken on extra consultants to help with assessment, such was the clamour for higher levels of membership.

The Charter now has many work streams and focussed areas, such as night time economy, bus franchising, hospitality, a good employment 'chatter' podcasts, its own Twitter feed, awards...

Regardless of what the NI model of good employment relations practice might be, it will develop over time and will need to be both a simple concept to grasp but flexible enough to provide encouragement to those who are not at the highest level. It will need support structures and must provide some sort of measurement of success and progress.

Recognise the Legacy of the Pandemic

Workplaces have changed since the pandemic. Attitudes to what constitutes a workplace have changed since lockdown.

There is ongoing debate about the benefits and drawbacks of homeworking and hybrid working for those who can work at home or away from the pre-pandemic workplace. Many who saw the immediate benefits of homeworking now point to longer-term impact on isolation, innovation and culture & learning, especially for newer employees. Others emphasise the costs to employees of homeworking and the dual costs to the employer of keeping workplaces open for hybrid workers when the offices are nowhere near full – the impact on the carbon footprint of less travel to work is offset somewhat by the need to heat workplaces and homes. Other speakers and delegates made reference to the need to risk assess homeworking – do employees have adequate equipment, are they likely to suffer long-term injuries if they do not, how can a home risk assessment be physically carried out?

There are undoubted benefits to the worker of working from home in relation to work-life balance and autonomy and an increasing number of job adverts include references to hybrid working. For many employers, an element of homeworking is here to stay (many had it before lockdown) and, if that is the case, they cannot ignore the fact that homes are now workplaces.

In response to the question, "Aside from pay, what is the number 1 issue raised by employees/unions in your organisation?" 58% of the conference delegates answered "Flexible/Hybrid Working". We have no figures on this subject before lockdown, but we can be sure it was not close to 60% on most unions' agendas.

In response to the question about place of work, 76% of the delegates said they worked at least part of the time from home and 9% said they worked fully from home. Our audience was comprised mainly of HR professionals and trade union representatives and it is perhaps not a surprise that many work at least partly from home. However, we can again be certain that the figure pre-lockdown would not have been close to 85%. Looked at from the other side of the equation, only 15% of respondents worked fully from home.

85% of respondents worked at least partly from home. We can be reasonably sure that most will have had a workstation risk assessment carried out in their normal workplaces. However, in response to the question, "If you and your colleagues work at least part-time from home, has a health and safety risk assessment been carried out on your home working environment?" the answer was only 43% positive, meaning 57% respondents had received no risk assessment on their home working environment. Imagine the furore (and risks) if over half of all organisational workplaces had no workstation risk assessments, yet the majority of employers in our survey seem content to ignore in what are clearly and legally now recognised as workplaces in the home.

The world of work and where people work has changed irrevocably. So, an exploration of the impact - good and bad - of flexible and hybrid working in NI workplaces would be an obvious topic to explore post-conference.

The Importance of Trust in Building Relationships and Success

A major theme to emerge from the conference was trust - the importance of trust and the importance of maintaining and building trust. Not only did almost all speakers emphasise it, but the delegate polls also showed that delegates saw it as the most important factor in good employment relations.

We carried out two-word cloud polls at the conference.

In the first we asked, "In 1-2 words, what do you think are the most important factors in achieving good relations between management and union representatives?" By far the most common word was 'Trust', closely followed by 'Trust and respect'.

Our second poll asked, "In 1-2 words, what do you think are the most important factors in creating a great place to work?" Again, the largest response by far was 'Trust'. In this poll it was followed by 'Flexibility' and then 'Inclusion and Culture'.

Many of the speakers spoke about the value of trust (which might have influenced the above polls?) and how unions and management that work together build trust which, in turn, leads to more working together for the common good. This requirement for trust to be at the heart of positive relationships was emphasised even though all the speakers recognised the more recent increase in industrial unrest. Those with trust tend to resolve issues more amicably and quickly.

So, another obvious area to explore post-conference is an analysis of trust in organisations and how much (or how little) it contributes to harmonious workplaces, how it can be strengthened or introduced, and to consider the impact of home and hybrid working on levels of trust. Further, if (as was suggested by many at the conference) trust is built by personal interactions, how might that be replicated in a world of hybrid working?

Social Partnerships Work

Our speakers from Wales and the Republic of Ireland could not speak highly enough of the importance of government, employers and employee representatives working together for mutual gain.

Following on from the comments above regarding trust, these speakers emphasised the impact of regular contact and discussions in building trust for that mutual gain. All saw tripartite working as at least ameliorating the worst aspects of recession and extremely helpful during the pandemic (something similar could be said of the Forum set up in NI) but they emphasised the longer term economic and sociological benefits of social partnerships. It obviously includes diverse opinions and, they argue, it leads to better, less divisive decision-making.

Developing a policy on Social Partnerships in the absence of a functioning Executive is difficult. However, if the evidence is as compelling as the speakers indicated at the conference, it is worth investigating the evidence for the benefits of social partnership. The Employment Relations Roundtable has a clear role in this area and we should explore the thoughts of members, with a view to producing a paper on the pros and cons of developing social partnerships in Northern Ireland.

The Importance of Training Managers

Several speakers emphasised the need to train managers in this rapidly changing world of work. Workplaces have changed, technology has changed, the pre-pandemic touchstones have all changed. Managers are required to implement new policies and ways of working and build trust in a hybrid world where they may never meet some employees in person. Are we setting them up to fail if training and support are not provided?

As part of any post-conference work, we should try to gather information of best-practice training for managers post-pandemic, particularly in relation to the key issues highlighted in this report – how to build trust; the impact of home and hybrid working; their role in social partnerships and building relations with employee representatives; and their role in any charters or equivalent frameworks adopted by employers.

Key Themes and Building Momentum for Developing Good Employment Relations and Good Employment in Northern Ireland

As can be seen from the above sections in this report, there were a number of key themes emerged from the conference. We have highlighted five and consideration should be given to developing these in a Northern Ireland context to maximise momentum and tie-in with the objectives of the DfE 10x Economy vision.

The first three themes focus more on relations between employers and employees. The final two have more to do with relations between employers and trade unions.

Good Employment Charters:

The LRA could investigate the benefits and costs associated with good employment charters – there are several options available in GB and various other assessment methods applicable in NI that build an understanding of best practice and employee contributions, such as Investors in People and Diversity Mark. Does NI need a separate good employment charter? Can it be built on the framework developed by GMCA, which has already greatly influenced the Belfast Business Promise? Should the LRA join the Belfast Business Promise as an employer in its own right in order to directly experience the costs v benefits arguments?

Hybrid Working in NI Workplaces:

It is undoubtedly the case that hybrid working is here to stay for many, including most, if not all, LRA staff. However, there is a lack of research into the impact - good and bad - of flexible and hybrid working in NI workplaces. Should the LRA or DfE commission research into this? Or should it be widened to consider the impact of the two opposite ends of hybrid working – homeworking only or workplace-based only employment? Is there a ‘best way’ for most employees?

The Importance of Training Managers:

Should the LRA gather information of best-practice training for managers post-pandemic, particularly in relation to the key issues highlighted in this report – how to build trust; the impact of home and hybrid working; their role in social partnerships and building relations with employee representatives; and their role in any charters or equivalent frameworks adopted by employers?

Building Trust Between Unions and Management in Workplaces:

Trust leads to better working relationships, fewer disputes, and more discretionary effort, especially when things are tough. It was the number one word used by speakers and audience in creating great places to work. Should the LRA engage with trade union and employer representatives on how trust between employers and trade unions can be strengthened or introduced, and (tying in with the paragraphs above) consider the impact of home and hybrid working on levels of trust between employers and trade unions? Further, if (as was suggested by many at the conference) trust is built by personal interactions, should we ask representatives how might that be achieved in a world of hybrid and homeworking?

Social Partnerships:

Should the LRA or DfE survey and investigate the evidence for the benefits of social partnership and perhaps seek the views of the Employment Relations Roundtable, with a view to producing a paper on the pros and cons of developing social partnerships in Northern Ireland in the event that the local assembly is re-established? Speakers from Wales and the Republic of Ireland were clear that tripartite decision-making works well and helps develop and stabilise the economy. Should we at least gather evidence for politicians to consider whether social partnerships might be a useful way to develop the economy in line with the 10x vision?

THE PROGRAMME

08.45–09.30 Registration and Coffee

09.30–09.40 **Introduction** by MC William Crawley and **Welcome Address** – Gordon Milligan OBE, Chair, Labour Relations Agency

09.40–10.00 **Opening Address** – David Malcolm, Interim Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy

10.00–10.25 **The Business Case for Good Employment Relations in NI** – Professor Chris Warhurst, Director, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick

10.25–10.50 **The Impact of Our Good Employment Relations Charter on the Local Economy** – Carol Halford, Manager – Good Employment Charter Implementation Unit Greater Manchester Combined Authority (This session will include an exclusive video presentation from Andy Burnham, Mayor of GMCA)

10.50–11.20 Tea/coffee break

11.20–11.45 **Effective Partnerships between Employers and Employees to Deliver Organisational Success: a HR perspective** – Peter Cheese, Chief Executive, CIPD

11.45–12.10 **Effective Partnerships between Employers and Employees to Deliver Organisational Success: a trade union perspective** – Patricia McKeown, UNISON

12.10–12.45 **Panel discussion with morning speakers.** Our panel is joined by Dr Sally Wright, Senior Research Fellow, Warwick Institute for Employment Research.

12.45 – 13.45: Lunch

13.45 – 14.15 **Knowledge Nuggets** – short, essential inputs from presenters, followed by collection of other ideas and questions from the audience:

Choice 1: The Cost of Conflict – Prof. Peter Urwin, Director, Centre for Employment Research, University of Westminster

Choice 2: The Value of Platinum – A case study on the value of investing in people – Eddie Salmon, IIP Assessor, and Sam Davidson, HR Director at Henderson Group

Choice 3: Securing Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces – Nuala Murphy, Director, Diversity Mark

Comfort Break and Panel Ideas/Question-Gathering

14.25 – 14.55 **More Knowledge Nuggets** – short, essential inputs from presenters, followed by collection of other ideas and questions from the audience:

Choice 1: Fair Work in Wales – Shavanah Taj, General Secretary, Wales Trade Union Congress and Hannah Blythyn MS, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership in the Welsh Government.

Choice 2: The Belfast Business Promise – Maria Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Programme Coordinator at Belfast City Council

Choice 3: IR in Ireland – Recommendations for change to the collective bargaining and the industrial relations landscape in Ireland - Patricia King, former General Secretary of ICTU and member of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) in Ireland

Comfort Break and Panel Ideas/Question-Gathering

15.00–15.30 **Panel Discussion** with afternoon speakers

15.30–15.45 **Closing Remarks and Future Engagement** – Don Leeson, Chief Executive, LRA

BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

David Malcolm, Interim Permanent Secretary, Department for Economy: David is a career civil servant who joined the NICS in 1987 directly from college. More recently, David led the Universal Credit team during the Covid crisis, before moving to DfE on promotion to lead the Management Services and Regulation Group in October 2020. Within this Group David has responsibility for the following areas; Central Services, EU Fund Management, Finance, Business Employment and Regulation, Insolvency Service and Corporate Governance.

Professor Chris Warhurst, Director, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick: Chris is an internationally recognised expert on job quality, skills and aesthetic labour. He is motivated by wanting to see better scientific and policymaker understanding of work and employment. He is Co-Chair of the ERSC-funded Renewing Work Advisory Group of Experts (ReWAGE), a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts and an Associate Research Fellow of SKOPE at the University of Oxford.

Carol Halford, Manager – Good Employment Charter Implementation Unit Greater Manchester Combined Authority: Carol has spent the majority of her career working on post 16 education and skills issues within the public sector. Roles included the planning and funding of provision within colleges and independent training providers and have been delivered at both an operational and leadership level.

Peter Cheese, Chief Executive, CIPD: Peter is the CIPD's chief executive. He writes and speaks widely on the development of HR, the future of work, and the key issues of leadership, culture and organisation, people and skills. Peter is a Fellow of the CIPD, a Fellow of AHRI (the Australian HR Institute) and the Academy of Social Sciences. He's also a Companion of the Institute of Leadership and Management, the Chartered Management Institute, and the British Academy of Management.

Patricia McKeown, UNISON: Patricia is the NI Regional Secretary of UNISON, the largest trade union in the UK and Northern Ireland. Patricia has held a wide range of elected positions within the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and is currently an elected member of both the NI Committee and the Executive Council of ICTU. Patricia has pioneered a range of partnership initiatives with employers in both the public and private sector over the past 20 years, including international initiatives with health unions and employers in the US.

Dr Sally Wright, Senior Research Fellow, Warwick Institute for Employment Research: Sally is a Senior Research Fellow at IER. She is an experienced mixed methods researcher with an established track record in managing large-scale research projects. She completed her doctoral studies in the field of job quality. She has published over 50 reports, book chapters, journal articles and working papers in her field. In October 2022, Sally became IER's Director of Graduate Studies.

Prof. Peter Urwin, Director, Centre for Employment Research, University of Westminster:

Peter has over 15 years' experience leading large-scale econometric evaluations for government departments and has been providing expert advice to HMRC for 15 years. Peter is an expert member of various Advisory Panels. He is Principal Investigator for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded study, Managerial competences, engagement and productivity; and the Nuffield Foundation study of Post-16 Educational Pathways.

Eddie Salmon, Client Services Director at Investors in People: Eddie is a highly experienced HR professional with over 25 years operating at a senior leadership level in both UK and International strategic and operational roles. He is a passionate advocate for advancing the people agenda. In his current role as Client Services Director at Investors in People he works with thousands of organisations of different sizes, sectors and across various geographical regions.

Sam Davidson, HR Director at Henderson Group: Sam is Group Human Resources Director for the Henderson Group, a local family-run business, ranked 3rd in the Ulster Business Top 100 Companies for 2022, which currently employs 5,100 colleagues across more than 100 sites in Northern Ireland. Sam has led the Human Resources team at Henderson Group during a phenomenal period of success and growth, adding more than 3,500 colleagues to the company since mid-2004 and seeing the Group pass the £1bn annual sales threshold in 2021.

Shavanah Taj, General Secretary, Wales Trade Union Congress: Shavanah is the General Secretary of the Wales TUC. She has served in the role in since February 2020. She joined from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), where she was the Welsh Secretary from 2013. From 2018 to 2019, she served as the President of the Wales TUC. She's a trustee for Fio, a grassroots theatre group that encourages young working-class people to engage with arts and culture.

Hannah Blythyn MS, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership: Hannah is the Member of the Senedd for Delyn in North Wales and was first elected to the Senedd (then National Assembly for Wales) in 2016. In November 2017 Hannah was asked to serve in the Welsh Government in the environment brief. Since then, Hannah has held two further roles in Government and is currently Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, leading on ground-breaking legislation to put social partnership on a formal footing in Wales. Hannah is proud to lead on the Welsh Government's work to make Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe.

Maria Robinson, Belfast Business Promise Programme Coordinator at Belfast City Council: Maria has 26 years' experience leading teams to deliver multi-faceted projects within the fields of economic development, employability & skills and community development within the greater Belfast area. Recently appointed as the Belfast Business Promise Programme Coordinator within the City and Organisational Strategy Department in Belfast City Council, Maria will build a team to focus on implementing this inclusive growth city charter with employers across the city. The charter is a key commitment by Belfast City Council within the Belfast Agenda, working in partnerships with other leaders across the city to help advance inclusive growth.

Patricia King, former General Secretary of ICTU: Patricia former General Secretary of ICTU. She is a former vice-President of SIPTU and also served as one of two vice-Presidents of Congress. A full time official with SIPTU for over 25 years, she was the first woman to serve as a national officer of the union when she was appointed vice-President, in May 2010. Patricia was a lead negotiator in both the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements. She played a leading role in the Irish Ferries dispute (2005/6) and in subsequent negotiations that saw an overhaul of employment rights law and the establishment of the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA).

Nuala Murphy, Diversity Mark: Nuala leads Diversity Mark - an Awarding Authority on diversity and inclusion across the UK and Ireland accrediting more than 150 businesses and close to 200,000 employees. A community builder and connector by nature - she has been a trailblazing leader for the diversity and inclusion in NI - from starting and scaling the Lean In Movement in Ireland, where she is now President Elect of UK and Ireland Council, to her leadership in the Ladies Who Launch movement. The Irish Times describes Nuala as one of the "next generation of female business leaders" and earlier this year, she was appointed to the Centre for Democracy and Peacebuilding's Fellowship Programme along with senior leaders from politics, business and civil society.

KEY QUESTIONS RAISED BY DELEGATES ON THE DAY OF THE CONFERENCE

Combined questions from delegates from Slido app and written on cards in the conference rooms... a number of these questions could be used to further explore opportunities to improve employment and employment relations in NI.

Chris Warhurst, Peter Urwin, Sally Wright & Morning Panel - Research, the Benefits of Building Trust and the Cost of Conflict

- Please say more about 'conflict confidence' and early mediation
- Would you recommend that all employers include optional third-party interventions, like mediation or coaching, in all dispute resolution procedures?
- Has there been any consideration of impact on those who fall within anxiety/depression cohort (50%+) who don't fall into the 'presenteeism' category but still try to give 100%?
- How can we identify opportunities for mediation rather than progressing to formal procedures?
- Are employees becoming more sensitive or are they just more realistic about their needs?
- How can the uptake of mediation be improved given that the success rates for outcomes seem relatively good?
- Do you have any recommended support services, counselling for those that have experienced bullying, sexual harassment?
- Is it inevitable that almost 40% (37%) of employees will experience conflict in the workplace? Can we reduce that figure?
- This research measures cost to business. But from an equality issue is it felt more by staff with protected characteristics. Any comments?
- Should the 5 day week be consigned to history, just like the 5 1/2 - 6-day week has gone for almost everyone?
- We hear a lot about good employment being good for business - without being too transactional, what can employers expect in return; what makes a good employee?
- Have the potential economic impacts of a 4-day work week? Is there a case for benefits for local economies?
- Any advice for companies dealing with the fallout resulting from squeezed wage differentials following implementation of the Living Wage?
- CIPD's research shows that many employees are open to mediation as an informal way of dealing with conflict but it's use hasn't increased over the years. Why not?
- Why is there a misassumption that we need to keep staff working from home motivated - it implies that the office is default seen as motivating.
- There has been an increase of workplace sexual harassment as a result of more online working. Any comments?
- WFH can lead to an increase in RSI's. Will employers meet the cost of providing suitable ergonomic office furniture @ home to ensure such injuries don't occur?

- I think the right ears are in the room, so how can we work to influence our organisations to put employee wellbeing and all issues discussed at top of board agendas?
- Employers are obliged to do a risk assessment for people who work from home. This does not mean that every person needs visited at home, or does it?

Carol Halford and the GMCA Good Employment Charter

- What is the range of organisation size who are members of the charter?
- What's the average timeline from supporter to member?
- Does Dame Carol Black support the Business Promise?
- Is there a difference in pay and tax for employees who flexibly work from home and those who have to work from home due to office closure for example?
- Voluntary sign up to charters is a good start but what about compliance and enforcement of good employment practices?

Eddie Salmon and Investors in People

- Is IIP now just a badge of honour for employers who don't actually practice what they preach?
- How do you explain the staff "satisfaction" of -10 in comparison to +40 where your business is unionised?
- With the 'pending' platinum accreditation – How will employees be rewarded other than feeling 'pride'?

Maria Robinson and the Belfast Business Promise

- The Belfast business promise - is it just Belfast or what geographical area?
- Can you express an interest in taking part in the Belfast Business Promise pilot or have the organisations already been chosen?
- Are there other councils within NI working towards developing a Charter?
- How do we get business leaders to move from a 'metrics will drive culture' mindset to a 'culture will drive metrics' one?
- Good industrial relations underpins and is the basis of good employee relations. So why is it sometimes seen as a barrier?
- When will Northern Ireland get its own good business charter and who will champion this?

Patricia King and Employment Relations in the Republic of Ireland

- What is your view on GB's Strike (Minimum Service Level) Bill?
- Is there any changes in strike legislation on the horizon in ROI as a result of the large number of strikes in the past number of years?
- How do you ensure "good faith engagement" in ROI and what is the remedy when it is not apparent?
- What is the date that the ROI Government has to transpose the Adequate Minimum Wage Directive?
- IR in Ireland - what one thing that would improve outcomes for employers and workers in NI would Patricia recommend should happen?
- The infrastructure for IR in the public sector in the South doesn't exist. To what extent does that hamper better IR in the North/UK?
- Can we stop assuming home working and managing remote workers is new? There are lots of organisations with good practice that relies on trust and relationships between employees and managers.

Shavanah Taj & Hannah Blythyn and Social Partnership in Wales

- Employment law is not devolved in Wales, but it is in Northern Ireland. What change would the Minister like to make to employment law if she had the power to do so?
- What is union density in Wales in relation to the overall population in Wales?
- Does Northern Ireland need its own unique model of good employment or is good/fair/decent work universal?

Orla McKeating and Diversity Mark

- Do you have any practical examples of what a job description that has been reviewed for inclusive language looks like? What has been removed?
- Which three criteria from your D&I assessment proves are essential for good employment or to be a good employer?
- How can fairly homogenous organisations really define themselves as diverse?

KEY FINDINGS FROM POST-EVENT DELEGATE SURVEY: COMMENTS FROM DELEGATES

The vast majority of delegates really enjoyed the conference and would help the LRA in developing where we should go next.

Over 50% of respondents were very satisfied with the conference. Only one delegate was dissatisfied: *"How boring it was."*

Over 80% of respondents found the Slido app useful and the same percentage would be prepared to be part of future consultations by the LRA on good employment practices and good employment relations.

Here are some of the more interesting comments from delegates...

Positive Comments

"There were so many in attendance who are willing to make employment relations better in NI. It was refreshing to see Patricia McKeown who is clearly passionate about trade unionism but she also has business acumen and is willing to work with employers."

"The afternoon workshops provided a great opportunity to mix and reflect on the morning discussions."

"Importance of positive employment relationship to business and jobs/careers but too easily taken for granted."

"I found all elements of the conference engaging and the CIPD session very informative, as were all the speakers."

"[My most important takeaway from the conference was] The critical importance of employers valuing, respecting and engaging with all employees openly and at all times reflecting the example of the Good Employment Charter of Greater Manchester Combined Authority"

"Really valuable in drawing together and illustrating the interdependencies of all the current work and practice in the space of good strategic ER in NI and the benefits/value added. Interesting to have the research context v strategic context at governmental level."

"There is some real commonality in the issues being faced across the various sectors. Conference like this allow for shared thinking."

"There is plenty of good work going on but much, much more to be done."

"In particular, the information shared by GMCA and Belfast about their employer partnership programmes and the wider societal impact was really beneficial."

Critical and Suggestions for Future Improvements

"[My most important takeaway was] How boring it was."

"It was a reminder of how easily an audience can be persuaded by style over substance. Peter Cheese speaking about well being as if this was some earth shattering new concept, Professor Warhurst not citing any of his sources when presenting his findings. Both presentations delivered with aplomb but the content was thin and the evidence base unclear."

"The conference lacked input from local businesses. It would have been more insightful to get the perspective of how local companies are dealing with key employment issues and bring the theory that was discussed on the day to real life."

"Behaviours - sometimes the behaviours of union representatives are aggressive and rude. I think this needs changed. So many employers find it hard to engage with people who demonstrate these type of behaviours. This I am sure needs taken on board by some employers too."

"[There was a] Lack of Private Sector. Most of the attendees were from the Unions or Public Sector, hence, some of the survey questions did not reflect a balance result."

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