

**LabourRelations**agency  
improving employment relations

# Flexible 20 Futures 24

Thursday 14 March 2024  
Stranmillis University College



# Programme

## 8.45 Registration, Refreshments and Networking

### Morning Plenary Sessions Main Hall

9.30 **Welcome and Housekeeping**  
**Wendy Austin, former BBC journalist and broadcaster**

9.45 **The Importance of Flexible Working to the Minister's Economic Vision**  
**Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy**

10.00 **Is Flexible Working an Indicator of a Good Employer?**

After its conference in February 2023 the Labour Relations Agency committed to developing a Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland. Flexible working (in its multiple forms) will be one of 10 pillars of the charter.

**Mark McAllister**, Director of Employment Relations Services, LRA, explains why the Agency has concluded that flexible work options are likely to be seen as indicators of good employment and equality practices, worthy of inclusion in a Good Employment Charter for Northern Ireland.

10.15 **The Evidence Panel**

Each of our experts will discuss the current evidence of the benefits (and drawbacks) of flexible and remote working on workplaces and society from their area of expertise, followed by a panel discussion and questions from our invited audience.

Panel members:

- **Dr. Tatiana Andreeva**, Associate Professor in Management and Organisational Behaviour, Maynooth University;
- **Angela Phillips**, Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Carers NI; and,  
**Dr Ana Desmond**, Senior Economist, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre.

Our panel of research speakers are joined by **Conor Curran**, Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Staff Wellbeing at Queen's University, Belfast.

## 11:15 Networking and Break

11:45 **The Business Case Panel**

Each of our employers will discuss their reasons for adopting flexible and remote working practices and the impact this has had on their organisation and their workforce, followed by a panel discussion and questions from our invited audience.

Introduction: **Laura Dowie**, Director of Timely Careers.

Panel Members:

- **Laura Walker** and **Chloe Fletcher**, Co-Founders of The Job Share Revolution and former Senior Directors of Finance Transformation at Asda.
- **Kate Hulley**, Owner Manager, Belmont Packaging, Wigan; and,
- **Jim Norris**, Senior Leader - Human Resources, Allstate.

# Programme

12:45 | Explanation of afternoon workshop sessions and options

12:50 Networking and lunch

**Afternoon Workshop Sessions** (Discussion Tables chaired by LRA Board Members)

13.50 Workshop Sessions Main Hall

**Option 1:** We need your views, tips, best practice and more. **Beyond 9 to 5: Navigating the Benefits of Flexible Work Arrangements:** Discuss with your peers what you have done or commit to do in order to maximise the benefits to your organisation and employees of various flexible working arrangements. This session is led by **Lesley Moreland**, HR Consultant, and **Frances Denny**, Head of Business Operations at Exploristics, a company that resorted to flexible, hybrid and remote working way before Covid in a (successful) attempt to address skills shortages and recruit & retain exceptional talent.

Workshop Sessions Parallel Hall

**Option 2:** We need your views, tips, best practice and more. **Removing the Stigma of Part-Time Working.** Discuss with your peers what could be done to make part-time working a more attractive and better-paid option to help achieve a fairer society and workplaces build on equality and diversity in practice. Might the language around part-time work be more positive? What are your suggestions? This session is led by **Laura Dowie**, Director of Timely Careers, whose mission is to remove the obstacles, anxiety and challenges that women who want to return to work often face.

14.25 Comfort Break

14.30

**Option 1:** We need your views, tips, best practice and more. **Managing Employee Expectations of Hybrid Working and WFH.** Research in the Republic of Ireland shows that 44% of employees would change job, even if it means taking a pay cut, if their remote working preferences are not facilitated. Discuss and record with your peers what you have done or will have to consider in future in order to meet the desire of many employees to work from home or maximise remote working opportunities. This session is led by **Ryan Calvert**, Head of Human Resources, Sales & Marketing Recruitment at the MCS Group, recruitment specialists that has seen employers lose out on excellent candidates because they do not market flexible working opportunities.

**Option 2:** We need your views, tips, best practice and more. **Managing Remote Teams: Strategies for Success in a Flexible Work Environment.** Implementing flexible working policies is one thing, managing employees with myriad working patterns and locations is another thing altogether. Discuss and record with your peers what you have done to engage remote and other flexible workers and ensure that are both productive and happy with their flexible working arrangements. This session is led by **Craig Thompson, renowned and award-winning podcaster and Director of Vibrant Talent**, who believes a failure of employers to measure engagement levels of remote workers will inevitably lead to the creation of a generation of mercenaries who will work simply for the highest bidder and change jobs at the drop of a hat.

# Programme

15.10 Comfort Break

## Afternoon Plenary Sessions Main Hall

- 15.15 **Keynote Speech: Productivity, People, Planet: Trends Shaping the Future World of Work.**  
The future world of work was already being redefined by digital technologies before the pandemic hit. Now, as old and new ways of working collide, we have a unique opportunity to rethink things to make work work for people, productivity and the planet, whilst harnessing the best of both real and virtual worlds, explains **Nicola J Millard**, Principal Innovation Partner, Enterprise CTIO at BT.
- 15.55 **What Next?**  
**Don Leeson, Chief Executive, Labour Relations Agency**
- 16.00 Close

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# Speakers & Panellists



**Don Leeson** Don Leeson has been the Labour Relations Agency's Chief Executive since 2020, having previously been its Director of Corporate Services. He earlier worked as a senior manager at the Agency between 2011 and 2013, managing the Agency's arbitration services and facilitating collective conciliations and mediations. Outside of the Agency, Don has had a varied career. He was the Consumer Council's Director of Operations (2013-17); Head of Corporate Services for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2004-11); and the Equality Commission's Head of Disability Policy (2002-04). Prior to moving to Belfast, Don was Investors in People UK's Quality Manager, with responsibility for quality assurance and development of the iIP standard. It was while in this role he developed a passion for organisational development and good employment practice.



**Wendy Austin** has one of Northern Ireland's best known voices. A journalist and broadcaster for 45 years, she presented radio and television programmes for the BBC both in NI and nationwide, from Good Morning Ulster to Woman's Hour and Inside Business. Her career started in local newspapers and the Belfast Telegraph, then Downtown Radio and BBC Radio Ulster, Radio 4 and television.

Since giving up full time work she has presented podcasts for Ulster University Business School NI Social Care Council and Danske among others, and continued hosting conferences and events.



**Mark McAllister** has been with the Labour Relations Agency for 20 years working in all frontline services as well as the corporate services side of the organisation. Mark was appointed Director of Employment Relations Services in May 2019.

Prior to joining the Agency Mark was a legal academic and a regional trade union negotiator in the further and higher education sector from 1995 – 2000. He is an experienced mediator, author and contributor to employment law publications and a regular speaker on the employment law circuit in Northern Ireland.

Mark has worked in a variety of voluntary capacities such as community mediation and is a former Chair of Community Restorative Justice Ireland. In addition, Mark has held the post of Northern Ireland Convenor of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and the Chair of the Governance Institute (NI) Branch.

Mark has a variety of formal academic qualifications including a Master's Degree in Law and Public Administration. He is a member of CiARB and a Fellow of the Governance Institute (ICSA) as well as holding memberships in the Employment Lawyers Group (NI) and the Industrial Law Society. Mark is a member of the GAA and his beloved club Kilclief Ben Dearg (the most visually spectacular club in Ireland on the coast of Strangford Lough) and he is a keen Irish rugby fan. He is steeped in industrial an employment relations and has retained his passion for making work better for all since he started employment many years ago.

# Speakers & Panellists (continued)



**Ian Snowden** has worked in the Northern Ireland Civil Service for 31 years. Prior to joining the Department for the Economy, he had been Chief Executive of Land & Property Services for five years, where he was responsible for Land Registers of Northern Ireland, Ordnance Survey NI, Valuation Services, rating policy and the collection of business and domestic rates. During the pandemic, he led on the delivery of a major package of rate reliefs and grants for businesses affected by the restrictions to control the virus which provided £1.25 billion in support for the local economy. He has also worked on creating a register of all land and property owned by Northern Ireland departments and arms' length bodies and a new approach to asset management.

Before joining LPS, Ian worked the Department for Communities as Head of the Engaged Communities Group, where he was responsible for a wide portfolio that included arts, culture, language policy, sport, museums, libraries, built heritage, community development, community based regeneration and social inclusion policy.

In DfC and the former Department for Social Development, he also worked for almost 18 years in Housing and Urban , working in some of Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged and segregated communities, including West Belfast and Londonderry.

Since 2015 Ian has led the co-ordination of Northern Ireland's response to the immediate and longer-term needs of Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian refugees being resettled in Northern Ireland. To date, 1,900 Syrians, over 100 Afghans and 3,000 Ukrainians have been successfully supported into new lives here



**Dr Tatiana Andreeva**, currently an Associate Professor at Maynooth University School of Business, previously served as Research Director there from 2018 to 2023. Before joining Maynooth, she was an associate professor at St. Petersburg University Graduate School of Management, Russia. She has held international roles, including as External Examiner at University of Auckland Business School, New Zealand, and Visiting Professor at Lappeenranta University Business School, Finland.

Tatiana holds a PhD from St. Petersburg University Graduate School of Management, along with MSc and BSc degrees in related fields. Her research focuses on the intersection of knowledge management, organizational behavior, and human resource management. Her work has been published in various prestigious journals, and she has received awards for her research on intellectual capital and knowledge management practices in Russian companies.

Tatiana has extensive teaching experience across undergraduate, postgraduate, and executive education programs, covering topics such as knowledge management, organizational behavior, research methods, and cross-cultural issues.

## Speakers & Panellists (continued)



**Angela Phillips** graduated in medicine from the University of Nottingham in 1995 and worked in a number of hospital posts in England and Northern Ireland before entering public health in 2001. She has a Masters in Public Health from University College, Dublin and worked in a number of Public Health bodies across Northern Ireland between 2001 and 2011 including the previous Eastern and Northern Health and Social Services Boards, the Health Promotion Agency, the Public Health Agency and the Institute of Public Health. Angela has worked across all areas of public health including health protection, service improvement, research and health improvement/ promotion but her passion has always been around addressing health inequalities and improving those social determinants which we know can severely impact a person's health and life experience. Angela left work in 2011 to focus on raising her two young daughters but returned to work to help with the contact tracing process during the pandemic. Whilst raising her daughters she also put her skills to use applying for funds/grants for a local playgroup and primary school.

Personally, Angela was diagnosed in 2004 with antiphospholipid syndrome (APS), a rare autoimmune blood clotting disorder, first described in 1983. APS has a wide range of symptoms affecting multiple systems. She has experienced first hand the difficulties in getting diagnosis and treatment plans for rarer diseases and in finding information and support. She has also navigated the difficulties in managing a long-term illness along with working and then raising a family. Her experiences have made her a strong advocate for APS and she is keen to see greater awareness of rare diseases and how to diagnose them amongst healthcare professionals and stronger clinical networks across the UK (and indeed wider) for rare diseases.



**Anastasia Desmond** first joined the Economic Policy Centre as a placement student during her undergraduate degree, where she went on to graduate with first class honours from Ulster University in Economics with Finance.

Ana re-joined the centre as an Assistant Economist and has since progressed to Senior Economist, now specialising in areas of research including regional & sub-regional development and labour market analysis.

Since the pandemic Ana has been heavily involved in work streams relating to remote and hybrid working which continues to be of interest in an ever evolving post-pandemic world.

Ana also is involved in the delivery of teaching modules within the Ulster University Business School.

# Speakers & Panellists (continued)



**Conor Curran** is a qualified employment lawyer and HR professional with over 15 years' experience of embedding effective D&I strategies in large complex organisations, having previously worked in the policing, justice and health sectors. In his current role as Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Staff Wellbeing, he has helped Queen's University Belfast develop a reputation as leader in Equality, Diversity & Inclusion best practice, both locally and nationally. A Russell Group University, with a workforce of 4,500 staff and 27,000 students from almost 100 different countries, Queen's is also widely recognised as Northern Ireland's top university and one of the country's most diverse organisations.



**Laura Walker & Chloe Fletcher** After trail blazing in flexible working within their organisations, Chloe and Laura came together as a jobsharing pair in 2021. After repeatedly being asked to share tips and advice, and realising the gap in knowledge of the benefits and practicalities of jobsharing, The Jobshare Revolution was born! We now offer inspiration, advice and consultancy support to help organisations to drive gender equity through jobsharing. alongside this, we continue our Senior Finance role as a jobsharing pair.



After starting her career at Deloitte, **Laura** joined Asda as an entry level management accountant and progressed to Senior Director over a 10 year period including roles in Accounting, Commercial Finance and Head of Internal Audit

As an advocate for social justice, Laura is hugely passionate about her roles as trustee and treasurer of both Citizens Advice Leeds and Older Citizens Advocacy York

She is also believes in sport for mental health and spends most of her free time running and cycling.

**Chloe** trained on the Cadbury Finance Graduate Scheme and progressed rapidly through the ranks, ultimately leading the Supply Chain finance team. She joined Asda to lead Ambient Logistics Finance and had a varied career, including Finance Director for George Clothing.

Chloe led the "Free Range Finance" programme to transform flexible working at Asda - which sparked a passion to do more  
Outside of work, Chloe is a huge advocate of wellbeing and self development - as the Trustee of a mental health charity and a personal development coach.



**Jim Norris** has over 20 years experience in Human Resources and a further 14 years working in manufacturing roles. Jim has been with Allstate since 1999 in a variety of HR roles and currently is Senior HR manager with responsibility for the HR and Talent Acquisition function for Allstate's Technology services with over 2,000 employees across three sites in Northern Ireland.

He is also an active member of Business in the Community (BITCNI) on the Business- Education Partnership board for North Belfast. Jim also represents Allstate Northern Ireland at the CBI Employment affairs committee.



# Speakers & Panellists (continued)



**Lesley Moreland MA, FCIPD** is a Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Personnel and Development and a European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Senior Assessor. She runs her own company (Lesley Consulting) which specialises in providing outsourced HR services. Lesley specialises on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing and business improvement through people projects. Prior to starting her own company Lesley worked in the IT sector for over 20 years and held various senior leadership positions within start-up organisations, responsible for driving change and business improvement through people.



**Frances Denny** uses her extensive knowledge and experience of supporting clinical development programmes to facilitate project delivery and oversee business operations at Exploristics.

With a BSc in Mathematics and a PhD in Statistics from Queen's University Belfast, Frances has over fifteen years' experience in biostatistics and modelling techniques supporting clinical development. Starting as a statistician at Exploristics in 2009, Frances has used her in-depth knowledge of statistics as applied to clinical development to inform and facilitate decision-making across business operations in support of project delivery for a wide range of therapeutic areas and study types.



**Laura Dowie** is Director of Timely Careers, a social enterprise that supports women returning to work after a break in their career, and those seeking flexibility to ensure they are able to remain a vital part of the NI workforce.

Laura has extensive experience working in roles that enable and empower those facing challenging circumstances to re-engage with work and education through personal and professional development. She is a Chartered Manager and MBA qualified. Over almost twenty years, Laura has held a number of roles across operations, marketing and project management in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.



**Ryan Calvert** As a Psychology graduate with a CIPD Level 5 qualification, Ryan brings a strong foundation to his role in the HR and legal recruitment field. Leading the HR Recruitment Division and Legal Recruitment Division, he leverages extensive specialist recruitment experience to match the most talented professionals with exciting opportunities.

Ryan's expertise lies in understanding the HR skillset and its impact on organisations, ensuring a strategic approach to recruitment. His collaborative efforts span across the UK and Ireland, where he partners with a diverse range of organisations.

Known for his highly personable and customer service-driven approach, Ryan is committed to building sustainable working relationships with both candidates and clients. His dedication to excellence is evident in his role, contributing to the success of the recruitment divisions he oversees.

# Speakers & Panellists (continued)



**Craig Thompson** is the Founding Director of employee engagement consultancy Vibrant Talent and creator of the Vibrant Workplace Forum, Vibrant Workplace Podcast and Vibrant Workplace Collective - an exclusive community of employers of choice granted access only after successful completion of the 12-week culture audit - the Vibrant Workplace Challenge.

Following a number of years in which he was responsible for the training and recruitment functions of the audience contact department of a major media organisation, receiving industry recognition in this time from the CCA and CIPD, he set Vibrant up to change the way the world works. He's since worked with clients with between tens and tens of thousands of employees across the Tech, Manufacturing, Hospitality & Catering, Utilities, Recruitment, Media, Advertising, Insurance, Internet and Telecommunications industries amongst others.

Craig's life's mission is to drive a movement toward a better working world for both employers and employees as he fundamentally believes a better experience of work for employees creates a better performing business for employers.



**Kate Hulley** is Owner and Manager of Belmont Packaging Ltd., a manufacturer of printed and plain corrugated packaging solutions. Belmont Packaging is a female-led, forward-thinking company with years of expertise and experience in creating custom branded packaging and imaginative box shapes and functionality.

# Delegates

Scott Alexander	Alexander Meditation	Stephany McConnell	–
Denise Black	Women In Business	Patricia McErlaen	Mount Charles
Jennifer Connolly	Seagate	Nuala McEvoy	Stranmillis University College
Jessica Brown	NI Housing Executive	Michelle McGinley	Employers Federation
Carol Cousins	HealthCare Ireland	Angela McGowan	CBI
Cathryn Blair	Department for the Economy	Briege McGreevy	Fintru
Michael Black	CFR Law	Erin McGuigan	–
Natalie Anderson	Business in the Community NI	Sharon McIlveen	–
Nicola Barber	–	Linda McIlwrath	Hughes Insurance
Carol Cousins	–	Ciaran McIvor	Endeavour IS
Sarah Crowe	Woodside	Frances McKee	Pinnacle
Gareth Dillon	Department for the Economy	Tia McLeod	Orchardville
Erik Ellison	–	Mary Meehan	Manufacturing NI
Abygail Forsythe	Honeycomb Jobs	Lesley Moreland	Exploristics
Evelyn Fraser	Honeycomb Jobs	Ruth Mulholland	Habinteg
Brendan Graham	Invest NI	Shauna Mullan	Endeavour IS
Heather Graham	TBL International	Caroline Murphy	Aiken PR
Aoife Hamilton	Card Group	Philip Murray	Northern Ireland Chamber
Michael Henderson	NI Takeaway Association	Shannon O'Neill	Energia
Barbara Henry	Caterpillar	Sheila Owens	Cubis Systems
Pauline Hillen	Barnett Hall	Anna Perera	Collins Aerospace
Neil Hutcheson	FSB	Lee Prentice	Danske Bank
Janice Irvine	Leaning IN	Kieran Quinn	Belfast City Hall
Colin Jack	Department for the Economy	Noel Rainey	–
Jefferson James	Stranmillis University College	Rachel Reid	Agnews
Scott Jevons	Lidl	Maria Robinson	Belfast City Hall
Sean Kearney	Department for the Economy	Hazel Robinson	MBM Consulting
Jennifer Kelly	NBSNI	Lawrence Rogers	Department for the Economy
Paula Leathem	NIE Networks	Eimear Rushe	Stranmillis University College
Paula Logue	Invest NI	Shannon Scullion	HSC NI
Hannah Marshall	FSB	Gemma Simmons	HSF
Laura McGlade	Tobermore	Peter Stevens	MCS Group
Lorna McAdoo	Version1	Helen Todd	–
Patrick McAuley	Waterways Ireland	Jamie Warnock	Law Society NI
Frances McCausland	Relate NI	Gill Warwick	Pinsent Masons
Davina McCay	Department for the Economy	Laura White	Irwin M&E
Mark McChesney	–	Christine White	Diversity Mark
		Lisa Wilson	Nevin Economic Research Institute