

[irishtimes.com](https://www.irishtimes.com)

From KPMG to Bank Ireland, where do major employers currently stand on working from home?

Joe Brennan

13–17 minutes

[Donald Trump](#) and [Jamie Dimon](#) may not see eye to eye on much – with the JP Morgan chief executive reported to have privately told associates of his dislike for the former reality TV star before the US presidential election in November and support for Kamala Harris.

But the pair have emerged as unlikely allies on one front, as each called time in recent weeks on [working from home](#).

Almost five years after Covid-19 emptied offices across the world virtually overnight, Dimon, the longest-serving Wall Street banking boss, told employees globally – including 1,500 in Ireland – on January 10th that he wants everyone back in the office five days a week in the coming months.

Meanwhile a freshly inaugurated Trump signed an executive order mandating all federal employees to return to the office – though the strategy seems to be to mainly trigger mass resignations across what he sees as a bloated bureaucracy.

They follow [Amazon](#)'s decision to call all its workers back to the office five days a week from the start of the month. The US tech giant employs 6,500 in the Republic.

Might big Irish employers follow suit? A survey carried out by KPMG last summer of chief executives globally suggested they'd like to. It found that 90 per cent of Irish business leaders envisioned a full [return to the office](#) within three years. They were more certain than the global average, at 83 per cent, which itself was up from 64 per cent a year earlier.

Irish work-life balance laws enacted almost two years ago require employers to "objectively" weigh a worker's needs against those of the business within four weeks of receiving a written request for remote or [flexible working](#) arrangements. But it has been [described as toothless](#) in the wake of a series of six cases that came before the [Workplace Relations Commission](#) (WRC) last year.

In three of these, the WRC found that the employers handled the cases properly, The Irish Times reported last week. Two other cases went nowhere when the tribunal ruled the workers involved had failed to make valid requests under the legislation. The sixth was dismissed after nobody showed up for a hearing.

In the public service, the winds of change may be starting to blow with the [Government](#) seeking to have staff in parts of the [Civil Service](#) return more frequently to [the office](#), according to a report in The Irish Times.

The [Department of Social Protection](#) has told staff that from February, personnel will have to spend a minimum of two days per week in the workplace. Staff in senior management grades at principal officer level and above will have to be in the office three days per week at least.

The country's largest public service trade union, [Fórsa](#) has said about 1,000 of its members in the Department of Social Protection would be affected by the proposed changes which it has vowed to fight.

But, for now, Ireland's top banking and insurance companies as well as law and accounting firms are sticking to the hybrid working model, according to an Irish Times survey. They are typically asking staff to be in the office two to three days a week as they publicly tout the benefits of flexibility and work-life balance.

"I think there is a high degree of trust of employees in Ireland," said Síobhra Rush, the head of the Irish practice of UK law firm Lewis Silkin, who specialises in employment law. "You could have somebody in the office and not doing very much. It has to be output quantified."

The number of Irish job postings offering remote or hybrid work arrangements [rose to a record high last year](#), despite growing noises about the death of working from home, recruitment platform Indeed said in a report published this week.

[[Civil servants told to spend more time in office as working from home scaled back](#)Opens in new window]

Irish job postings mentioning remote or hybrid work rose to 17.5 per cent at the end of December, four times the pre-pandemic rate. Indeed economist Jack Kennedy said the Irish figures compare with a rate of about 8 per cent in the US and almost 17 per cent in the UK.

With the Irish jobless rate running at a little over 4 per cent – considered by economists to be full employment – Kennedy says that offering hybrid work helps employers compete for staff.

"We may have seen statements from CEOs about people getting back to the office," Kennedy said, when asked about the KPMG survey. "But in a tight labour market, that's difficult to push through. We're not going to see hybrid working disappear any time soon. It's here to stay."

Rush agrees. However, she believes the average number of days hybrid-eligible Irish spend in the office will gradually move up to "three to four days a week, as opposed to two to three now".

"But I think it will be voluntary. When diktats go out, people are more inclined to vote with their feet," she said.

[[Analysis: Ireland joins global row-back on working-from-home arrangements](#)Opens in new window]

Accountancy firms

In the post-Covid world, **PwC Ireland**, the largest professional services firm in the State by revenues, sought to have staff either working in one of its offices or on a client site three days a week. It saw the need coming out of last summer, however, to set it as an expectation of all groups within the organisation.

KPMG Ireland, the second-largest player in the sector, also typically has staff in at least three days a week, according to a spokeswoman. "We know that people also like the social aspect of work and human and business relationships benefit from being together, so we balance this with the need for flexibility in people's lives," she said.

A spokesman for **Deloitte Ireland** said that the firm retains a "flexible approach" to where staff work and that it "trusts" its people to make the right decisions around where they work "within the context of their client and team responsibilities". On average, employees are spending three days a week physically with clients or in one of the firm's offices, with the remainder working remotely, he said.

EY Ireland does not mandate a set number of days for our people to work in its offices, according to a spokesman. "Our teams have flexibility to find the right combination of working from client site, in our offices and from home depending on the needs of our clients, our people and our business," he said. He was not in a position to say on how many days staff work, on average, from home each week.

Grant Thornton's managing partner in Ireland, Steve Tennant, said his firm does not impose a minimum number of days for people to attend the office – though people are in three days a week on average.

Hybrid working "supports productivity, collaboration, and work-life balance, which are core to our company culture," he said.

Law firms

New York-headquartered corporate law firm Sullivan & Cromwell raised eyes across the legal world earlier this month by bucking the hybrid trend that has become standard across the industry. In updating its office manual, it set an expectation of five-days-a-week office attendance.

While it remains an outlier across the sector internationally, it appears lawyers across the bigger firms in Ireland are already spending more time in the office than other white-collar sectors.

McCann Fitzgerald said its people are typically choosing to be in the office for four days a week, above the general requirement of three days. "We do however see the office environment as being central to our future of work," a spokesman

said. “This is especially important as a firm that is built on collaboration and as a training firm that employs new graduates each year, each of whom benefit from on-site learning in a fast-paced, yet supportive environment, where they can observe, and work with, senior colleagues.”

Arthur Cox currently allows employees to work from home for up to 50 per cent of the time, with exceptions such as trainees, who learn from being in the office, or facilities staff whose jobs can’t be done remotely. “Our experience is that most people generally come into the office three or four days a week,” a spokesman said.

Matheson introduced a degree of flexibility around when staff started and finished work in 2018 – two years before the pandemic sent the world into lockdown. The hybrid-working model introduced in 2022 requires employees to work from the office a minimum of two days a week, with partners and heads of business services required to be in for at least three days.

“Our annual staff surveys demonstrated that a hybrid working model was – and continues to be – preferred by the vast majority of our people,” a spokesman said. “While we did consider increasing the number of mandatory days in the office, we have decided that it is not necessary, as our experience has been that more people are choosing to spend more time in the office anyway. Our employees understand that there are times where it is necessary or better to be in the office.”

Mason Hayes & Curran’s human resources director, Jan Smullen, said the firm is “currently averaging 60 per cent-plus office occupancy”. It doesn’t have a fixed policy for how many days employees should be in the office. But she says there is a bigger need for some groups of staff, such as trainees, to be in the workplace to “maximise their learning and experience”.

A&L Goodbody, the largest law firm in the Republic by number of practicing solicitors, did not respond to efforts to secure comment on its working arrangements.

Banks

JP Morgan’s global return-to-office order, which kicks in from March, will affect the group’s 1,500 staff working in the Republic, including Cork-based fintech Global Shares, an administrator of employee share plans for companies, which it acquired in 2022.

The edict is an exception, even among international financial services firms based in the country. Still, the UK’s [Barclays](#) said on Thursday its staff, including 300 in Dublin, will need to come into the office three days a week instead of two.

Bank of Ireland, the largest bank in the State by assets, rolled out a so-called agile workspaces regime for about a third of its workforce in the two years before the pandemic struck – allowing them to work from alternative offices or home.

This allowed the group to cut the level of leased office space in Dublin by close to 30 per cent.

Under the post-Covid model, most Bank of Ireland staff can work from a combination of home, central office locations, and a network of hybrid working hubs – though a fifth of the group’s 11,000 roles require fixed location, including some branch and IT positions, according to a spokesman. While hybrid-eligible staff aren’t required to work a minimum number of days in the office, the vast majority do so regularly, he said. Many teams have so-called anchor days where they come together in-person.

AIB commenced a hybrid working model in early 2022, where office days depend on the role. “This model has served AIB, our customers and our people well since its introduction and continues to form our approach to flexible working, together with our pioneering right to disconnect [after work hours] policy and our comprehensive suite of family friendly policies,” a spokesman said.

In practice, the approach means that some, such as branch staff, are in 100 per cent of the time, while others work mainly from home. Employees are expected to be in the office for at least two days a week, according to sources.

A spokeswoman for **PTSB** said that of the 70 per cent of staff eligible for hybrid working, most are on site for a minimum of two days a week. “But we leave it to individual teams to set arrangements at local level that best meet the needs of our customers and colleagues,” she said.

Citigroup, which employs about 2,800 in the Republic, has the majority of its local staff on a hybrid schedule of at least three days a week in the office, according to sources.

The amount of time that staff with fellow US financial services giant **State Street**, another major employer in Ireland with about 2,000 staff, staff spend in its offices is “informed by client need and individual employee circumstances”, a spokesman said. It’s a more lenient official approach than what the group adopted in its home market 18 months ago, when it called North American employees back into the office for at least four days a week.

Insurers

French owned **Axa Ireland**, the largest general insurer in the State, told staff last autumn that it expects them to spend the majority of their working week in the office or with customers from this September. Currently, staff are expected to work two days a week out of their homes.

A spokesman for **Allianz Ireland** said the company follows “a flexible approach where different teams map out their office and non-office days depending on the needs of their customers, the wider business, and the team members”. He was not in a position to say how many days a week the average employee spends in the office.

Aviva's businesses in Ireland currently expect employees "to spend around half their time in an office", according to a spokeswoman.

FBD, the country's only indigenous general insurer, has a policy that employees work from the office for a minimum of two days a week, according to sources. While the requirement is higher for staff in its 34 sales offices, it is understood that a rota system allows for workers in these to enjoy some degree of hybrid working.

Irish Life, the largest life and pensions provider in the market, has set a "blended pattern of two to three days in the office for the majority of our people", a spokesman said, adding that this has not changed since the group returned to the office post-Covid.

- *Sign up for the [Business Today](#) newsletter and get the latest business news and commentary in your inbox every weekday morning*
- *Opt in to [Business push alerts](#) and have the best news, analysis and comment delivered directly to your phone*
- *Join [The Irish Times on WhatsApp](#) and stay up to date*
- *Our Inside Business podcast is published weekly – Find the latest episode [here](#)*