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**Research Report**

## Gender balance at work: A study of an Irish Civil Service department

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# GENDER BALANCE AT WORK

## A STUDY OF AN IRISH CIVIL SERVICE DEPARTMENT

SHANNEN ENRIGHT AND HELEN RUSSELL



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



# **GENDER BALANCE AT WORK: A STUDY OF AN IRISH CIVIL SERVICE DEPARTMENT**

Shannen Enright

Helen Russell

**December 2020**

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The report was reviewed by one external expert and two ESRI reviewers, and we would like to thank them for their very helpful comments, which have helped to improve the final report.

*This report has been accepted for publication by the Institute, which does not itself take institutional policy positions. All ESRI Research Series reports are peer reviewed prior to publication. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.*



## FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I welcome this report from the ESRI on Gender Balance.

As Secretary General, I find the case for a gender balanced work force compelling. I am more convinced than ever that the Department needs to make every effort to draw from the full pool of talent within its complement. Added to this is the fact that as a Government Department we have given a commitment to ‘being a modern diverse and inclusive organisation that reflects and is capable of serving 21st century Irish society’. We can only be inclusive and serve the population and citizenry if our workforce is representative of them.

This report arises from a survey of our own staff in 2018 and gives us an opportunity to reflect on our progress, review our programme of actions and amend and improve them as necessary. This work builds on existing work done in this Department since 2012 with the Brosnan report, which demonstrated a lamentable deficit of women in senior posts. Since then we set up a Gender Balance Steering Committee and in 2015 we conducted our first Gender and Culture review, which was actioned via a DAFM Statement on Vision, Objectives and Actions to address Gender Balance. The benefits of those objectives are being realised with an increased representation of female leadership across the organisation.

I wish to give particular thanks to the ESRI who undertook the analysis of findings and have set out a clear report with signposting for our next steps in this challenging endeavour.

Our next steps will look at those signposts, renew our efforts and continue to ensure that there are fair opportunities for all personnel in this Department.



Brendan Gleeson  
Secretary General





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## ABBREVIATIONS

AO	Administrative Officer
AP	Assistant Principal
AS	Assistant Secretary
CO	Clerical Officer
CSEES	Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey
DS	Deputy Secretary
EO	Executive Officer
HEO	Higher Executive Officer
PO	Principal Officer
SEC	Secretary General
SO	Staff Officer
SSC	Second Secretary
SVO	Service Officer

Note: Hierarchy of grades from top to bottom: Secretary General, Second Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Principal Officer, Assistant Principal, Administrative Officer or Higher Executive Officer, Executive Officer, Staff Officer, and Clerical Officer.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Civil Service Renewal Plan launched in 2014 contains a commitment to improving gender balance. While gender balance within the civil service has improved in recent decades there are still occupational differences between men and women across and within Departments and women are significantly under-represented at higher grades. Previous research has examined gender balance issues across the civil service, while the present study focuses on one Department using survey responses from 904 civil servants in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). This survey provided new information on respondents' working arrangements, experiences, and views of gender balance within the organisation as well as greater information on occupational differences within. These rich data give insights into gender differences in experiences, behaviour and attitudes in the Department. The survey also provides new insights into the operation of flexible working arrangements, and the extent to which they alleviate or accentuate gender differences.

### **GENDER BIAS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT**

Although women were significantly more likely to say they had experienced gender bias in the Department, men were significantly more likely to believe that there was gender bias in promotional competitions in favour of women. Some respondents signalled that this bias was due to the gender balance initiative and suggested that women were promoted over men who were more qualified for the job. This could be the result of stereotypes regarding women's suitability for senior roles or to a lack of understanding on the nature of the gender balance initiative. Our analysis of the results of a number of recent competitions in the Department show that there is no significant difference in the success rate of male and female candidates.

### **TAKE-UP AND PERCEPTIONS OF FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS**

Overall take-up of flexible working was quite high in the Department with over a third of respondents (36 per cent) currently participating and just under half (47 per cent) stating they had previously participated. Take-up varied significantly according to respondent's gender and caring responsibilities, with women and those with childcare responsibilities having significantly higher odds of current and previous participation. Women with childcare responsibilities were found to be the most likely to have previously used flexible working arrangements.

Flexibility also varied according to respondent's occupational stream with use of such options lower for those in the technical, inspectorate, veterinary and laboratory streams. This may be due to a lack of availability, with respondents

stating that flexible options are not available for many workers in the laboratory and technical streams and for higher grades within the Department. The survey also highlighted an unmet demand for flexible options among respondents which was greatest for women in the inspectorate (72 per cent) and men in the laboratory streams (60 per cent).

Participation in flexible work was also found to have a positive effect on perceptions of work-life balance with perceived Departmental support for work-life balance significantly higher for those currently using these options. Despite this, over a third of respondents believed that participating in flexible working negatively affects their chances of promotion. Those currently participating in flexible work were less likely to believe it hindered promotion than other employees, however those who had previously taken care leave had more negative views.

### **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES, BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES**

Overall a large proportion of respondents (72 per cent) had participated in training, but this was highly gendered with the odds of participation significantly lower for women. This gender difference persists when we compare men and women in the same occupational stream, with the same length of service, and family characteristics. The current data does not allow us to assess whether this is due to differing opportunities or because women are less inclined to avail of training; however, in order to improve promotional chances, gender differences in training should be addressed.

As promotions can often involve relocation, this report examined respondents' willingness to move. In total almost a third (31 per cent) of respondents state they would be willing to move for promotional reasons and no significant gender differences were found. This suggests that moving does not disproportionately discourage women for applying for promotions.

Regarding promotions, over half of survey respondents agreed that they felt encouraged to apply for positions and this was not found to differ by gender. Although levels of encouragement did not differ, applications for a competition in the two years prior to the survey was significantly lower for female respondents. This suggests that these gender differences in applications cannot be accounted for by encouragement and may be due to other barriers as found in previous research (Russell et al., 2017). Analysis of outcomes for a number of recent competitions show no difference in the success rates for male and female applicants. However, improving gender balance depends on reducing inequalities in applications too.



## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Transparency in recruitment and promotional competitions is important both for increasing diversity and ensuring that initiatives to increase gender balance are not perceived negatively. It is therefore imperative to track progress towards increased gender balance through the regular collection and analysis of information from Departments.

Despite the relatively high take-up of flexible work options, there is still a large unmet demand for flexible work, particularly for working from home and compressed working week. This unmet demand coupled with the benefits of flexible working with regard to helping workers balance childcare responsibilities, improving organisational commitment and potentially improving gender equality, provides a strong argument for extending availability and encouraging take-up of such options for men. An unintended consequence of the COVID-19 crisis is the widespread facilitation of home-working for civil servants, this presents an opportunity to revisit these and other flexible practices in the longer term.

The presence of gender and occupational differences in networking opportunities suggests that there is scope to implement policies which can increase human capital and consequently promotional chances. In order to address differential access to networks by men and women in different streams, the mentoring programme within the department could be expanded, and peer-to-peer networking targeted at groups where this is lacking could be implemented.



## CHAPTER 1

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### Gender balance in the civil service

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Whilst the gender balance within the Irish civil service is improving, there are still significant disparities in the positions that men and women occupy. Men are twice as likely as women to occupy senior grades, even compared to women with the same level of qualifications and length of service (Russell et al., 2017). Similar differences are found across both public and private sector employment. According to figures from the Gender Balance in Business Survey 2019 (CSO, 2019), women made up only 28 per cent of senior executives in the private sector and only 7 per cent of chairpersons. Figures for the public sector show that women accounted for 73 per cent of employees but occupied only 60 per cent of managerial positions (Russell et al., 2017). Tackling gender inequality within the civil service is important not only for the individuals affected, who would otherwise lose out in terms of income and opportunities for advancement, but also has a broader influence. The OECD (2014) emphasises that the policies and practices enacted by the public sector can act as a model for employers within a country. The absence of gender bias within the civil service is also important for the legitimacy of State institutions and their decision-making processes. More generally, gender inequalities in employment opportunities are economically inefficient, as it means the potential of employees is under-utilised.

According to the OECD (2014), expansive measures need to be taken to tackle the causes of gender inequality in order to address gender differences in public employment. Such measures can include:

*tackling persisting gender stereotypes, involving men in sharing unpaid work responsibilities and making greater use of flexible working arrangements and supporting women in developing the necessary skills and capacities to access executive leadership. (OECD, 2014)*

In a previous study of gender balance in access to Irish senior civil servant positions, we found that one of the main barriers to promotion for women is the ‘availability, and acceptability, of flexible working arrangements’ Russell et al. (2017). This report sets out to examine the relationship between gender, take-up of flexible work practices and gender equality in the Irish civil service. Flexibility is sometimes equated with numerical flexibility, which allows an employer to adjust the quantity of labour to meet demands. This type of flexibility is often associated with precarious employment for employees, for example temporary or agency contracts. These practices are uncommon in the civil service. We are concerned instead with flexibility in work which allows employees to balance work and other

demands. The study draws on detailed survey information collected for a single Government Department, which can provide insights into the experiences of different occupational groups within that Department.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are flexible work options used in the Department and how is the take-up of these options gendered?
2. How do the experiences of men and women differ in key areas of promotion, training and networking? How are these outcomes related to occupational stream and take-up of flexible work options?
3. Is there a perception of gender bias in the Department and what are the factors associated with these attitudes?

## **1.2 GENDER IN THE IRISH CIVIL SERVICE**

Women make up the majority of workers in the Irish civil service. However, the female share falls sharply the further up the occupational ladder we look. In 2016, 63 per cent of civil service employees were female, but this ranged from 75 per cent of those in the entry level grade of Clerical Officer to 21 per cent at top rung of the ladder at Secretary General level (Russell et al., 2017). The gender balance of civil servants also differs across Departments and agencies. The Department of Agriculture<sup>1</sup> was among those with the smallest female share (47 per cent) alongside the Department of the Environment<sup>2</sup> and the Finance group.<sup>3</sup> The highest female share, 71 per cent, was observed in the Department of Education and the Department of Social Protection. The proportion of women occupying senior positions, of Principal Officer and above, also varies considerably across Departments, ranging from 20 per cent in the Department of Finance and Office of Public Works to 63 per cent in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Only four Departments/agencies had more women than men in these senior positions. The Department of Agriculture falls toward the bottom of this scale. In 2016, only 24 per cent of PO (or equivalent) level staff in the Department were female compared to 40 per cent across the civil service as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report we use Department of Agriculture as a shorthand for Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

<sup>2</sup> Department names are those used in the Civil Service HR Management database in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> This consists of offices/agencies that are attached to the Department of Finance (excluding the Revenue Commissioners).

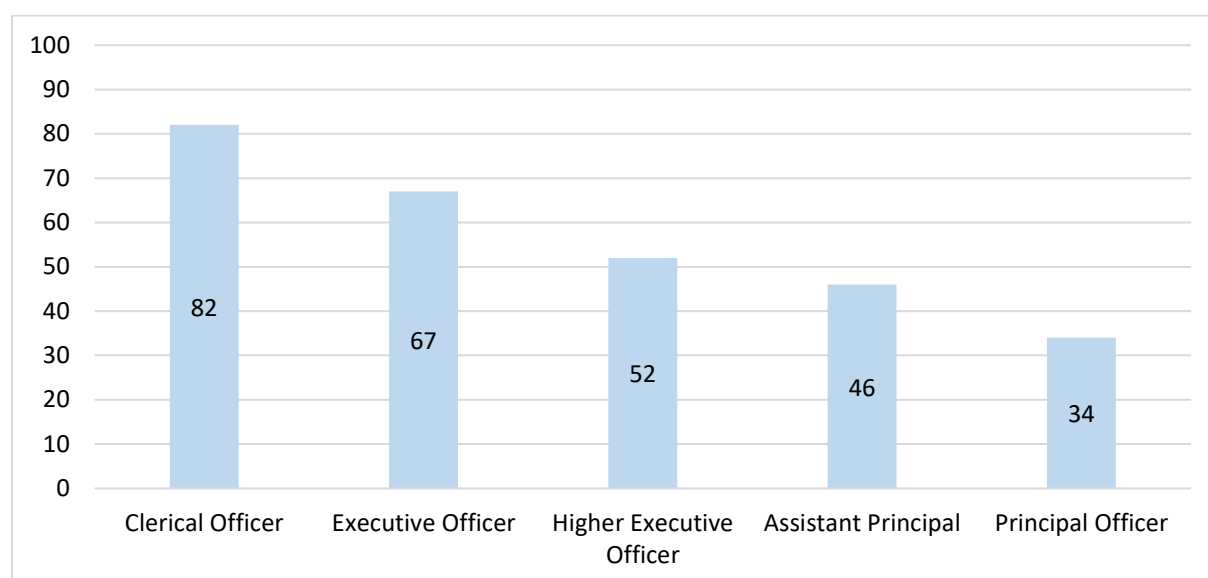
**TABLE 1.1 FEMALE SHARE BY GRADE AND DEPARTMENT, 2016**

Government department/agency	Less than AP	AP	PO	AS and above	ALL
Agriculture, Food & Marine	50.6	33.3	26.1	25.0	46.9
Arts	58.0	39.6	28.6	0.0	53.0
Children	67.5	55.6	66.7	33.3	64.5
Communications	56.3	40.3	30.6	33.3	49.4
Defence	73.2	35.0	36.8	0.0	66.2
Education	73.9	71.0	60.8	18.2	71.2
Environment	52.3	41.0	20.8	55.6	46.6
Finance	55.6	40.6	23.1	14.3	48.0
Foreign Affairs	66.7	48.8	31.4	14.8	59.5
Health	64.5	57.7	62.2	30.0	61.7
Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation	61.2	47.9	32.0	37.5	57.2
Justice	64.3	44.4	28.8	29.4	59.6
Public Expenditure	55.9	44.6	48.8	0.0	51.1
Social Protection	72.8	41.2	44.7	53.8	71.1
Taoiseach	70.9	63.4	63.2	10.0	65.2
Transport	55.9	36.0	38.2	28.6	50.6
Office Public Works	53.4	28.9	23.1	0.0	46.5
Revenue	65.7	44.8	35.9	11.1	63.5
CSO	64.7	46.0	24.0	33.3	62.2
Education Group	75.0	48.6	42.9	50.0	69.0
Finance Group	50.0	40.0	41.7	60.0	47.1
Jobs Group	68.0	32.0	45.5	40.0	63.3
Justice Group	75.5	58.7	42.4	37.5	73.1
Public Expend Group	60.5	55.3	53.1	75.0	59.7
Taoiseach Group	58.7	64.0	45.5	53.1	58.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.6</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>63.1</b>

Source: Russell et al., 2017, from Civil Service Human Resource Management System figures.

Note: AS and above includes AS, Deputy Secretary (DS), SSC and SEC. Departments and offices/agencies have been distinguished in parent departments, groups belonging to the parent departments, and main offices (Central Statistics Office (CSO), Office of the Revenue Commissioners, and Office of Public Works).

More recent figures on the gender breakdown of Department of Agriculture staff are available for 2018 but only for those in administrative grades. These show that while 82 per cent of Clerical Officers were female, this dropped to 34 per cent of those at Principal Officer level (see Figure 1.1).

**FIGURE 1.1 FEMALE SHARE OF GRADES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 2018**

Source: Department of Agriculture administrative figures. Authors' calculations.

There are approximately 3,178 staff employed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine across the country as of 1 October 2020. The staff within the Department work in a variety of streams including Administrative, Inspectorate, Technical, Laboratory, Industrial and Veterinary. A large proportion of roles are office based, however other roles within the inspectorate, technical and veterinary streams involve work at other locations such as meat processing plants and farms.

**TABLE 1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STREAMS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

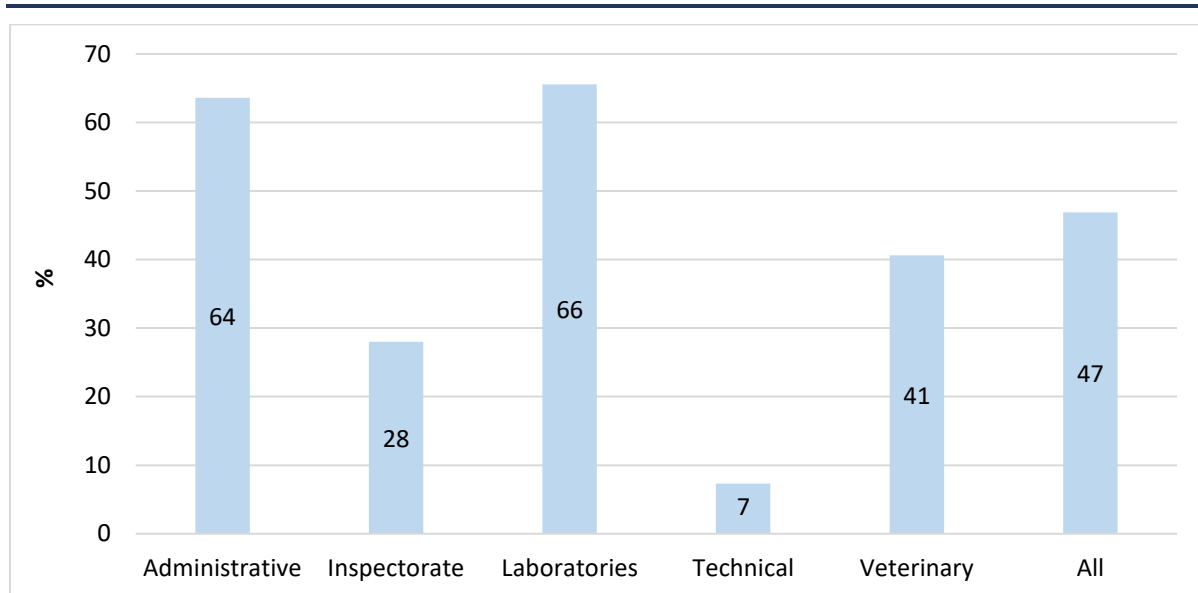
Stream	Staff Numbers October 2020	Roles and Location
<b>Administrative</b>	1,890	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to policy development and implementation</li> <li>Support and develop State bodies and agencies</li> <li>Support payments and entitlements to farmers and fishermen</li> <li>Facilitating trade and international relations</li> <li>Work in Dublin and in regional offices around the country</li> </ul>
<b>Inspectorate</b>	350	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operate the laboratory service for milk and plant health sectors</li> <li>Prevent the entry and spread of non-indigenous pests</li> <li>Evaluate which crops are most suitable for growing in Ireland</li> <li>Implement feed and food safety inspections</li> <li>Inspect forests, nurseries, sawmills</li> </ul>
<b>Technical</b>	665	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out inspections related to disease control, animal identification, livestock mart, herd registration, transport of live animals, feedstuffs fertilisers and grain marketing.</li> <li>Pesticide registration and controls</li> <li>Work all over the country in regional offices and meat factories</li> </ul>
<b>Laboratory</b>	231	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perform regulatory, diagnostic and research testing across veterinary, agriculture and food and plant science</li> <li>Laboratories are based in Backweston Co. Kildare but there are also smaller labs in Cork, Limerick, Kilkenny, Athlone and Sligo</li> </ul>
<b>Industrial</b>	69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service the infrastructure of the Department farms, harbours and buildings</li> <li>Serve the needs of the fishing fleet</li> <li>Responsibilities for animal husbandry, maintenance and repairs</li> <li>Industrial Foreman, General Operative and Craftsmen based in Backweston Campus; Farms, Fishery Harbours, Engineering Division in Killybegs and Portlaoise.</li> </ul>
<b>Veterinary</b>	318	<p>Can be divided into three divisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Animal Health and Welfare Division who provide expert advice regarding national and international legislation and policies and work directly with those involved in food production</li> <li>Veterinary Public Health Inspection Service who assess whether food producers and processors are implementing laws and make recommendations surrounding best practice</li> <li>Veterinary Laboratory Services who carry out testing</li> </ul>

Sources: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/>  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/careersindafmlaboratories/>  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/careersinpolicyandkeysupportservices/>  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/careersintheinspectorate/>  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/technicalcareers/>  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/customerservice/careers/careersinveterinary/>  
 Staff numbers were obtained from Administrative Figures Provided by the department.

There are also differences in the types of work women do within Departments. Figures from the Department of Agriculture in 2019 show that there are large gender differences across streams (see Figure 1.2). Women make up the majority of workers in both the administrative and laboratory streams, however there is a larger proportion of men in the other four streams within the Department.

The largest differences can be seen in both the industrial and technical streams where men make up 99 per cent and 93 per cent of the workforce respectively.

**FIGURE 1.2 FEMALE SHARE OF OCCUPATIONAL STREAMS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 2019**



*Source:* Department of Agriculture administrative figures. Authors' calculations.

*Note:* Industrial stream is excluded due to small cell sizes.

The Civil Service Renewal Plan, launched in 2014, includes a commitment to improve gender balance. The most recent progress report released in May 2019 notes that 'a wide range of initiatives to improve gender balance across the civil service have been developed and are being implemented within Departments and offices'. In January 2017, the Government set a target of 50/50 balance of men and women in senior positions. To achieve this, preference is given to female candidates in cases where male and female candidates have 'equal merit... and women are under-represented on the management board of the Department in question' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.14). The civil service also provides a range of family-friendly work arrangements, which are outlined in Chapter 2.

A broad literature review across the disciplines of economics, sociology, psychology and management has provided a range of accounts for persisting gender inequalities within occupations. We summarise the main explanations in the following sections before returning to the specifics of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the final section



### **1.3 ROLE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES**

The differentiation of individuals by their gender affects all aspects of life including the labour market. Although there are biological differences between men and women, gender stereotypes are rooted in cultural beliefs (Bobbit-Zeher, 2011), rather than biological capabilities. Gender stereotypes are over-characterisations or preconceptions about the characteristics and attributes of men and women and the differences between them. Stereotypical male characteristics include assertiveness, leadership and independence, whereas stereotypes of female traits include care, sociability and emotional sensitivity. These stereotypes are often resistant to change, and research shows that gender stereotypes are evident in men and women's own self-characterisations (Hentschel et al., 2019). Gender roles regarding how men and women should behave are ingrained from early childhood. As they grow, they are expected to act in ways which conform to these traditional gender differences (Bussey and Bandura, 1999), reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes surrounding which jobs are 'suitable' for men and women mean that men and women frequently occupy different kinds of work, in a process described as horizontal segregation (Alksnis et al., 2008).

Gender stereotypes impact women's perceived suitability for senior positions within businesses as there is a perceived 'lack of fit' between the demands of such jobs and the attributes of women (Heilman, 2012). Laboratory research has also shown that mothers are perceived as less competent to carry out their duties in employment (Correll et al., 2007), and less likely to be promoted (Fuegen et al., 2004) than fathers. As gender bias influences workplace evaluations, women may not move up the organisational ladder in the same way as a man of equal competency (Heilman, 2001) as they are often viewed as less ambitious and competent than men. However, women who display these attributes may be negatively evaluated due to gender stereotypes about appropriate female traits (Rudman and Phelan, 2008). These stereotypes have also been highlighted in research involving Irish civil servants which found that ambition was perceived negatively for women but positively for their male counterparts (Valiulis et al., 2008).

### **1.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PROMOTION**

Previous research into the Irish Civil Service has found that women are less likely to occupy senior roles compared to men (Russell et al., 2017). The study found that for the most recent period, women were less likely to apply for senior roles such as Assistant Secretary or Secretary General but women who did apply were more likely to be successful. The decision to apply for promotion was found to be related to workers feelings or readiness, that is, feeling that they had the necessary skills and capabilities (ibid). One potential explanation for why women may not apply

for senior positions may be a lack of confidence in their promotability. Research by Babcock et al. (2017) found that women are more likely to volunteer or be requested to volunteer for tasks with low promotability which places them at a promotional disadvantage to men. In the civil service senior women were more likely to be involved in services provision roles, which offered less visibility and status than policy roles (Russell et al., 2017). Women are also more likely to evaluate their own performance more negatively than their male counterparts, even when they have been informed of their objective overall performance (Exley and Kussler, 2019). The OECD (2014) highlights that the lack of women in senior roles can be partially attributed to their lower self-confidence. In addition to lower self-confidence, Russell et al. (2017) found that a lack of flexible working options in senior positions is a significant barrier to promotion. In contrast, the presence of role models of women in senior positions was associated with a more positive perception of promotion opportunities (ibid.)

### **1.5 FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Women are more likely to participate in part-time work than their male counterparts (Russell and McGinnity, 2011). From 2002-2018, part-time employment made up roughly 29 per cent of all employment for women (Callaghan et al., 2018). The Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2018) found that a larger percentage of Irish women than men would continue to work if they had flexible working options available in their employment.

The OECD (2019) highlights how flexibility surrounding working hours can help accommodate childcare responsibilities such as collecting and dropping children to school or childcare, and helps employees in obtaining a work-life balance. Research involving Irish mothers found that flexible working options had positive results for working mothers in balancing childcare and work demands (Grady and McCarthy, 2008). Having flexibility regarding lunch breaks and start and finish times increases employees' perceptions that their work schedule accommodates their home and social obligations (OECD, 2016). However, Russell et al., (2009) highlight that not all flexible working options improve work-life balance. Whilst part-time and flexi-time work are related to lower levels of work-life conflict, working from home has the opposite effect.

Although flexible working options have the potential to improve work-life balance, previous research has found that many employees might be hesitant to avail of these options as they are afraid of being viewed negatively by employers. Research conducted by Chung (2018) in the UK using the Work-Life Balance Survey found that 32 per cent of respondents believed participating in such options negatively impacts likelihood of promotion. Mothers were also more likely to report that flexible working had negative consequences on their careers. Laboratory research

has shown that when an employee's use of flexible working arrangements is attributed to personal reasons such as childcare responsibilities, they are perceived as less committed to their work (Leslie et al., 2012). McIntosh et al. (2012) found that a shift to part-time working is also related to decreased career progression regardless of gender. In Ireland, part-time working is also found to incur a pay penalty (Bergin et al., 2012).

## **1.6 CARING AND UNPAID WORK RESPONSIBILITIES**

There is a large body of research which shows how women's caring responsibilities negatively impact on their career path. The OECD (2014) highlights how employment outcomes are innately associated with societal gender roles. Traditional gender roles associate women with caring work which constitutes one of the predominant forms of unpaid work (OECD, 2012). In an Irish context, women spend roughly twice the amount of time on care every week compared to men (Russell et al., 2019). According to Census figures from 2016, women make up roughly 60 per cent of unpaid carers (CSO, 2016).

Literature on the wage gap and discrimination has also started to focus on motherhood as a significant factor of inequality (Correll et al., 2007). A survey of new mothers in Ireland found that 30 per cent of respondents reported unfair treatment during pregnancy including 10 per cent who reported loss of salary or bonus or a denial of promotion. A further 24 per cent of women who returned to work after birth perceived that their promotional opportunities had decreased (Russell et al., 2011). One potential explanation for the motherhood wage penalty is the accumulation of breaks from work (Staff and Mortimer, 2011). Research has shown that taking long periods of time off from work negatively impacts the career chances of working mothers (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). To address the inequality faced by working mothers, cultural and policy changes need to be implemented, as the motherhood penalty is found to be lower for countries that have more policy support for working mothers (Gash, 2009), and where societal attitudes supporting working mothers are stronger (Budig et al., 2012).

## **1.7 EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE**

Human capital theory postulates that gendered occupations and career courses are explained by different investments in human capital. The term 'human capital' generally refers to investments in the form of training, education, work experience and any breaks which occur such as paternity or maternity leave (Becker, 1985). According to human capital theory, gendered differences in workforce hierarchies should disappear once human capital is considered. In cases where women's and men's capital are the same, we should not observe any differences in their employment. The ways in which capital is acquired is multi-layered and complex and human capital is often not directly observable (Polachek and Xiang, 2009).

For example, as care responsibilities are time-consuming and often performed by women, women may work part-time or adopt other flexible working practices to help with their work-life balance. This results in less hours spent working and therefore less work experience.

## 1.8 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Gender differences in employment outcomes may be due not only to an organisation's structure but also the culture within the workplace. Organisational culture can be defined as 'the taken for granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, collective memories and definitions present in any organisation' (O'Riordan, 2015). In a study of the Irish public health service, O'Connor (1996) identified several practices that prevented women from obtaining promotion, including lack of communication about opportunities, stereotypical attitudes about women's abilities and career aspirations, and exclusion from male networks. Valiulis et al. (2008) highlight the 'male dominated' (p.61) culture of the Irish Civil Service. They note how many of the women in the study perceived a promotional bias towards those who had more network connections within the organisation which put women, especially those with children, at a disadvantage as they did not have as much time to socialise.

To combat organisational structures and cultures which sustain gender inequality in the workplace, many organisations have implemented diversity initiatives. Research by Dobbin and Kalev (2016) investigated why diversity initiatives often fail to increase diversity within companies. The research found that compulsory measures such as diversity training can lead to a backlash among employees and managers and lead to decreased diversity among workers. However, engaging managers in initiatives such as college recruitment programmes targeting female employees or employing mentoring strategies leads to an increase in female management.

## 1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used for this research come from a survey of civil servants in the Department of Agriculture in 2018. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's Gender Balance Steering Group completed a survey of all staff (circa 3,300) over a three-week period in the fourth quarter of 2018 using Survey Monkey. The survey received 933 responses, with a response rate of roughly 28 per cent of all staff. The survey contained 40 questions which looked at respondents' demographic variables, caring responsibilities, flexible working arrangements and beliefs surrounding gender bias within the Department. This research aims to examine the relationship between gender, take-up of flexible work practices, perceptions of organisational support for flexibility, work-life balance and gender equality, and personal experiences, behaviours and attitudes. The analysis of

questions surrounding caring responsibilities will also add to our understanding of how caring responsibilities influence employment experiences.

The use of a single department as a case study means that the findings are not necessarily generalisable to the civil service as a whole, nor indeed to the wider population of employees. Departments differ in occupational composition, for example the DAFM has a number of occupational streams that are not shared with other departments including veterinary and inspectorate staff. However, while work roles differ, other departments also have technical and specialist staff. Moreover, the administrative stream, which accounts for just under half of the DAFM, is present in all departments. Many important features of the case study department are common to all civil service departments, for example hierarchical structure, pay and formal personnel policies.

There are however differences in practices and organisational culture across departments despite the common over-arching organisation (see Russell et al., 2017). We explore some of these departmental differences in the take-up of flexible work options in Chapter 2.

This survey allows us to take an in-depth analysis into flexible working within the civil service including its usage among employees and its perceived effects on promotional opportunities. In addition, we are able to examine gender differences related to human capital such as applications for promotions, building professional networks and participation in training. We are also able to evaluate perceived gender bias within the Department as well as personal experiences of gender bias.

There are limitations to the survey data. Most notably, respondents' grades could not be analysed as this was not measured in the survey. For this reason, we cannot analyse the vertical segregation between men and women within the Department, such as the proportion occupying senior roles.

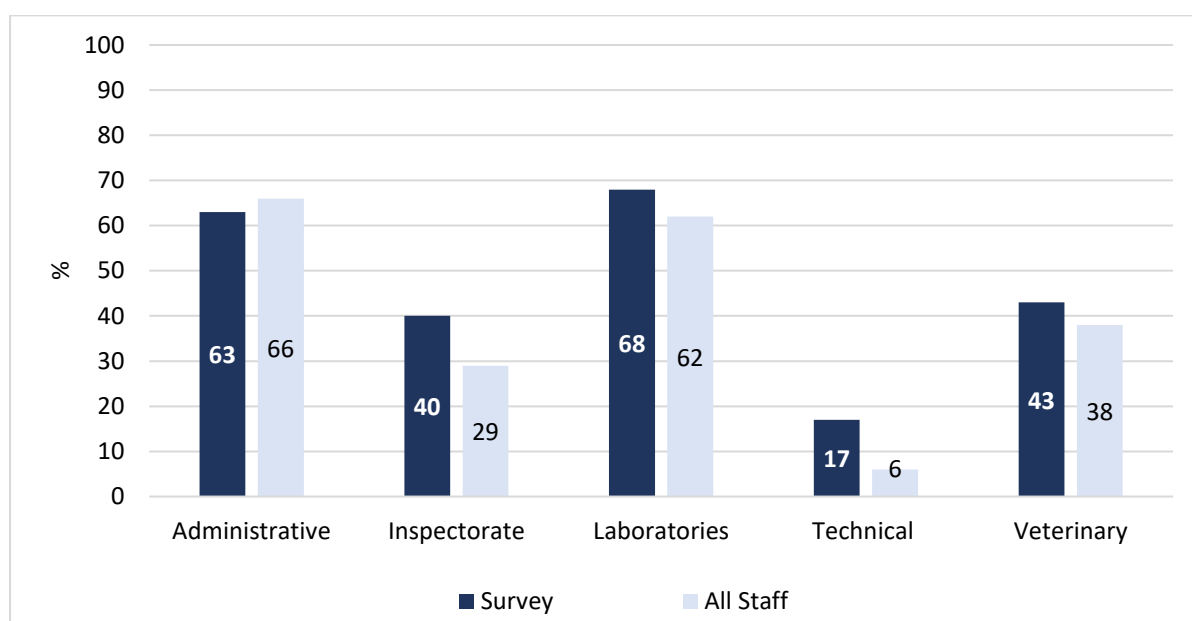
A further limitation is that although respondents' past participation in part-time work and current use of flexible working was measured, detail on their usual working hours was not collected. Qualitative research suggests that senior civil servants often worked very long hours (Russell et al., 2017). In addition, the survey allowed us to evaluate respondents' use of training within the last two years; however the type and quality of training respondents received was not measured. Whilst this allows us to analyse the overall uptake of training within the department and whether it varies by gender, we cannot determine whether the training received by employees enhanced their human capital by upskilling or whether this included mandatory training such as GDPR sessions.

This research uses logistic regression to analyse which factors predict uptake and beliefs of flexible working options. We will also use logistic regression to evaluate differences in experiences, behaviours and attitudes in the Department. We tested interactions between gender and care responsibilities in all models and we tested the interactions between gender and occupational stream where the main effects were significant. We only report cases where the interactions were significant. Given that interactions are difficult to interpret in logistic models we graph significant results as predicted marginal effects. We also ran post hoc contrast tests to confirm significance.

### **1.9.1 Characteristics of survey respondents**

Respondents for the survey consisted of 420 men (46 per cent) and 484 women (54 per cent) from five different streams within the Department. A total of 26 individuals answered 'prefer not to say' when asked about their gender. These respondents were coded as missing, as numbers were too small to statistically analyse.

In order to examine whether the sample was representative of the gender differences across the Department of Agriculture as a whole, we examined the proportion of women across streams in the survey compared to the entire Department in the year the survey was conducted (see Figure 1.3). We find that the proportion of women in the sample is similar to the Department as a whole across streams, however there was a higher response rate among women in the inspectorate and technical streams leading to an over-representation. Sample representativeness was also explored in terms of respondents age and Department in various streams (see Appendix Figure A1.1 and A1.2). There is some over-representation of the oldest age group and those in the administrative stream; however as all the models in the report control for age and stream, we do not re-weight the data.

**FIGURE 1.3 PROPORTION OF WOMEN ACROSS STREAMS: SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO ADMINISTRATIVE FIGURES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 2018**

Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey and administrative data from DAFM. Authors' calculations.

The location of workers varied with respondents working in 17 counties taking part in the survey. Age varied from 18 to over 55 among respondents. Length of time with the Department also differed between respondents ranging from less than five years to over 25 years (see Table 1.3). Over a third of respondents had been with the Department for less than five years. Just over one-fifth of respondents had been with the Department over 25 years at the time the survey was conducted. There was no significant gender difference in length of service.

**TABLE 1.3 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LENGTH OF SERVICE WITH THE DEPARTMENT**

Length of Service	Male		Female		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
<5 Year	33.8	(142)	33.3	(161)	33.5	(303)
6-15 Years	19.1	(80)	19.4	(94)	19.3	(174)
16-25 Years	26.0	(109)	26.9	(130)	26.4	(239)
Over 25 Years	21.2	(89)	20.5	(99)	20.8	(188)
<b>Total</b>	100.0	(420)	100.0	(484)	100.0	(904)

Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

## 1.10 REPORT STRUCTURE

In Chapter 2 we use statistical models to examine the take-up and perceptions of flexible work options, by examining the relationship between past and present take-up of flexible work options and respondents' gender, stream, location, age, length of service and caring responsibilities. This chapter will also examine past use

of leave options before finally looking at perceptions of the effect of using flexible working options on chances of promotion within the Department.

Chapter 3 examines gender differences in experiences, behaviour and attitudes within the Department using logistic regression. The outcomes selected for analysis reflect areas that are highlighted in the literature as important mechanisms for advancement: participation in training, promotional competitions and networking. We also examine the factors associated with perception of gender balance and gender bias within the Department.

Chapter 4 draws together the findings on gender differences within the Department, take-up and perceptions of flexible work, and outcomes to outline the policy implications for the Department in terms of good practice and avenues for future development. This discussion also highlights the broader literature on effective organisational interventions.



## CHAPTER 2

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### Take-up and perceptions of flexible working hours

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Flexible working arrangements are one of the most widely used organisational policies for addressing work-life balance issues and tackling gender equality issues (OECD, 2014). However, as outlined in Chapter 1, the take-up of these options is strongly gendered which may have unintended consequences. The current chapter examines uptake and perceptions of flexible work options among respondents within the Department of Agriculture. To do this we estimate a series of logistic regression models with current and past use of flexible working options, preferences to participate in flexible work, take-up of leave schemes, Departmental support for work-life balance, and impact of flexible working on promotional opportunities as our outcomes of interest (dependent variables). We use respondents' gender, stream, location, age, length of service and caring responsibilities to investigate which factors affect uptake and perceptions of flexible work options.

##### 2.1.1 Flexible working in the broader civil service

The civil service offers several flexible working options to their employees such as flexible working hours, work-sharing, shorter working year, career breaks and e-working.<sup>4</sup> However, the availability of such options varies according to employees' grades and Departments. Moreover, while reduced and flexible working hours are available to a large number of civil service employees, options such as e-working are not as widely available.

Flexitime, which permits flexibility in starting and finishing times and which allows for flexi-leave to be accumulated, is available for those working at grades up to HEO level. However even in grades up to HEO, flexitime is not guaranteed as it is 'only possible as long as it supports and enhances the efficient operation of Departments/Offices'.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, shorter working weeks and term-time working are not routinely available to those in more senior grades, and there is variation across Departments in the extent to which such options are considered for more senior staff (see Russell et al., 2017). Administrative data for 2016 showed that only 5 per cent of Principal Officers were working less than full-time compared to 22 per cent of Clerical Officers. Even fewer POs had shorter working year arrangements (3 per cent)

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<sup>4</sup> <https://hr.per.gov.ie/family-friendly-policies>.

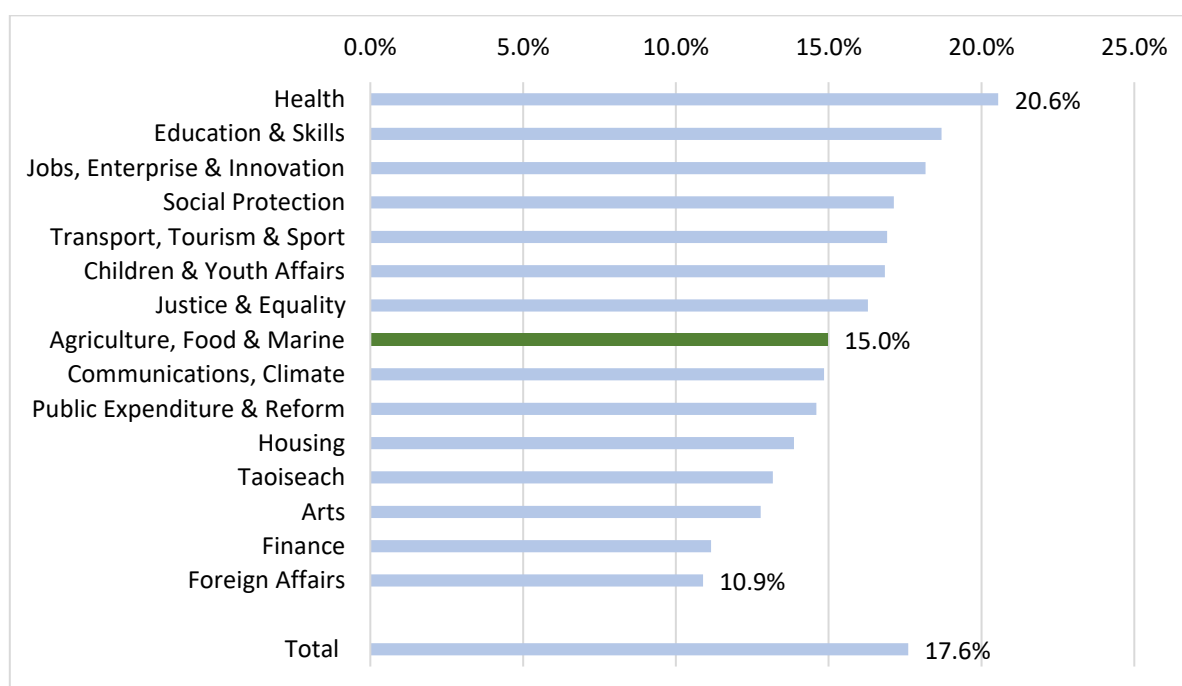
<sup>5</sup> <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/per/2013/11.pdf>.

compared to 21 per cent of COs (ibid. p43-44). Therefore, even if such options are formally available, few of those in positions above HEO level avail of them.

Figure 2.1 compares the proportion of employees working part-time across different Departments within the civil service. This figure is based on administrative data which only distinguish those working full-time and less than full-time. This is a broader than usual definition of part-time work. Overall, 15 per cent of the Department of Agriculture worked part-time compared to 17.6 per cent of the entire civil service. From Figure 2.1 we can see that the Department of Agriculture falls somewhere in the middle of Departmental take-up of part-time work, between those in the Department of Health with the highest proportion of part-time workers (20.6 per cent) and the Department of Foreign Affairs, which has the lowest part-time rate (10.9 per cent).

Of those working part-time within the DAFM, 10 per cent were men and 90 per cent were women. This was similar to the gender breakdown of part-time workers across the entire civil service (9 per cent men and 91 per cent women).

**FIGURE 2.1 PART-TIME WORKING IN THE CIVIL SERVICE BY DEPARTMENT, 2016**



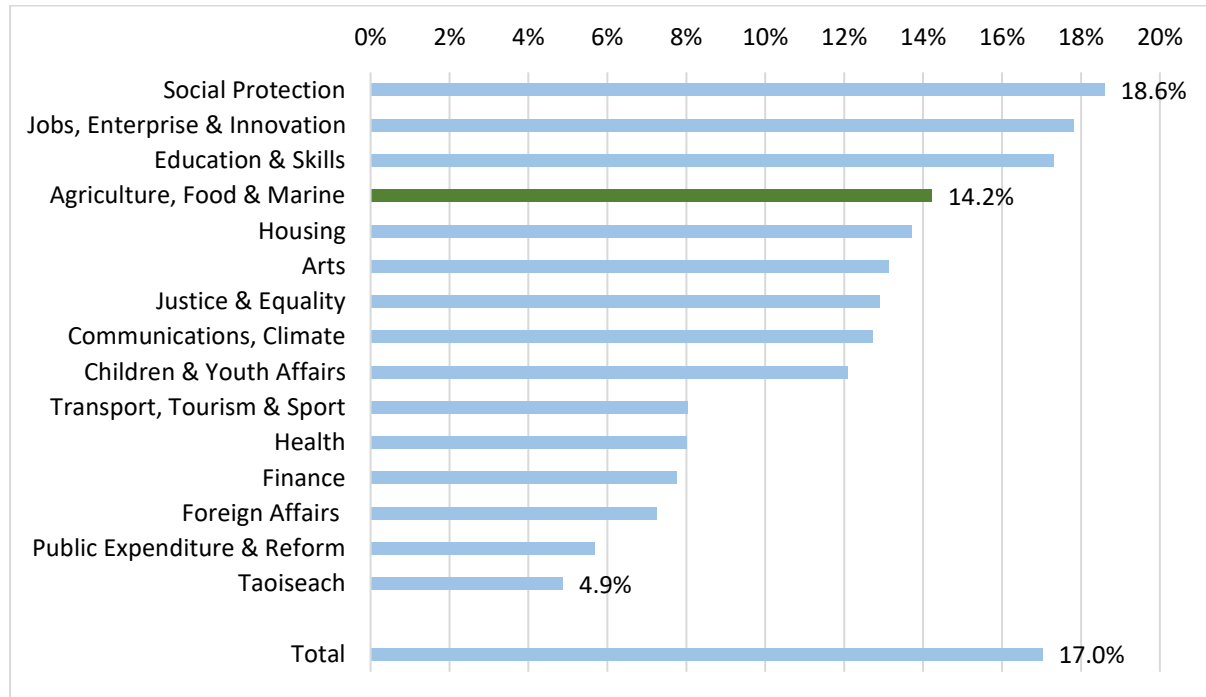
*Source:* Civil Service Human Resource Management System. See Russell et al., 2017

*Note:* Head Count Figures 'Part-time' includes all those recorded as those working less than full-time hours (<1FTE). Departmental figures do not include agencies in the Department group. The total figure includes all agencies and satellites to the departments.

Figure 2.2 examines the proportion of workers who take part in a shorter working year or term-time working by Department. Across the civil service as a whole, 17 per cent of workers take part in a shorter working year or term-time working,

however this varied greatly depending on the Department. For example, 18.6 per cent of workers in the Department of Social Protection availed of this flexible working option compared to just 5.7 per cent of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department of Agriculture was found to have the fourth largest number of employees working a shorter year in 2016 (14.2 per cent).

**FIGURE 2.2 SHORT WORKING YEAR/TERM-TIME WORKING IN THE CIVIL SERVICE, 2016**



*Source:* Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

*Notes:* Head Count Figures. Departmental figures do not include agencies in the Department group. The total figure includes all agencies and satellites to the Departments. This includes the Revenue Commissioners which has the highest rate of short-year working (29 per cent) and also has a large number of employees (N= 6,416).

Economy wide figures suggest that the levels of part-time work are marginally higher in the public sector (22 per cent) than the private sector (20 per cent) (Labour Force Survey, 2019).<sup>6</sup> However there was wide variation across the private sector, from 7 per cent among industry and construction sectors, to 41 per cent of those working in accommodation and food service activities. We lack up to date national figures on e-working, but a non-representative online survey by DBEI (2019) suggests that levels of remote working are much lower in the public sector than the private sector.

Table 2.1 shows the entitlements to various leave and flexible work practices within the civil service. Although employees are legally entitled to some forms of

<sup>6</sup> Data extracted from CSO Statbank QES06. Using NACE categories, public sector employees included those in public administration and defence, education, and health and social work activities. All other NACE categories were defined as private sector.

leave such as maternity, paternity and parental leave, other forms of leave such as career breaks are at the department's discretion. The table shows that all forms of flexible work are at the department's discretion and may have additional restrictions such as grades. For example, flexible working hours are only available for those in entry level grades up to Higher Executive Officers.

**TABLE 2.1 ENTITLEMENTS TO LEAVE AND VARIOUS FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES**

	Entitlement	Details
<b>Flexible Working Hours</b>	At department's discretion	Available for workers at entry level grades up to Higher Executive Officers
<b>Remote Working</b>	At department's discretion	
<b>Shorter Working Week</b>	At department's discretion	
<b>Shorter Working Year</b>	At department's discretion	All civil servants can apply however those on probation at the time it is proposed to take special leave are not entitled to participate
<b>Career Break</b>	At department's discretion	Applicants must have completed two years continuous service including probationary period. Career breaks can be granted for family reasons, other domestic reasons, travel or educational purposes.
<b>Carer's Leave</b>	Statutory entitlement	Must have one-year continuous service to employer
<b>Extended Maternity Leave</b>	Statutory entitlement	
<b>Parental Leave</b>	Statutory entitlement	Must have been working for employer for one year to get full amount of leave
<b>Paternity Leave</b>	Statutory entitlement	

Source: <https://hr.per.gov.ie/supports/flexible-work-arrangements/?lang=ga#:~:text=Most%20Government%20Departments%2FOffices%20operate,departure%20times%2C%20and%20lunch%20breaks.>

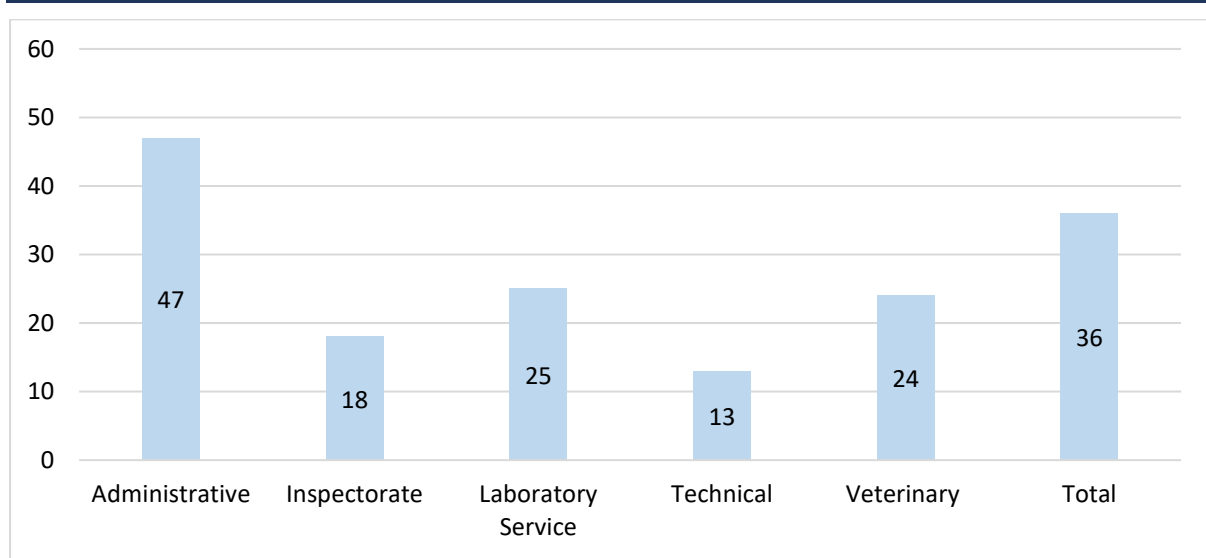
### 2.1.2 Flexible working in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

The survey carried out by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) contains more detailed information on civil servants' use of flexible work practices and leave arrangements past and present, than is available in the CSEES or in the central administrative data.

For current use of flexible working options, we draw on a question from the staff survey which asks respondents if they 'participate in flexible working' in their current role. Overall, we see that over a third of respondents are currently engaged in 'flexible working'; 45 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men. Respondents were not provided guidance as to what is included in this definition. Flexitime users are likely to dominate the group especially for men, as the administrative figures for 2016 show that only a small minority of men in the Department were working part-time or shorter working years.

Differences in current use of flexible working options across streams is captured in Figure 2.3. Overall, 36 per cent of respondents stated they are currently participating in flexible working; however this varies among streams, with almost half (47 per cent) of administrative workers using flexible options compared to just 13 per cent of those in the technical stream of the Department.

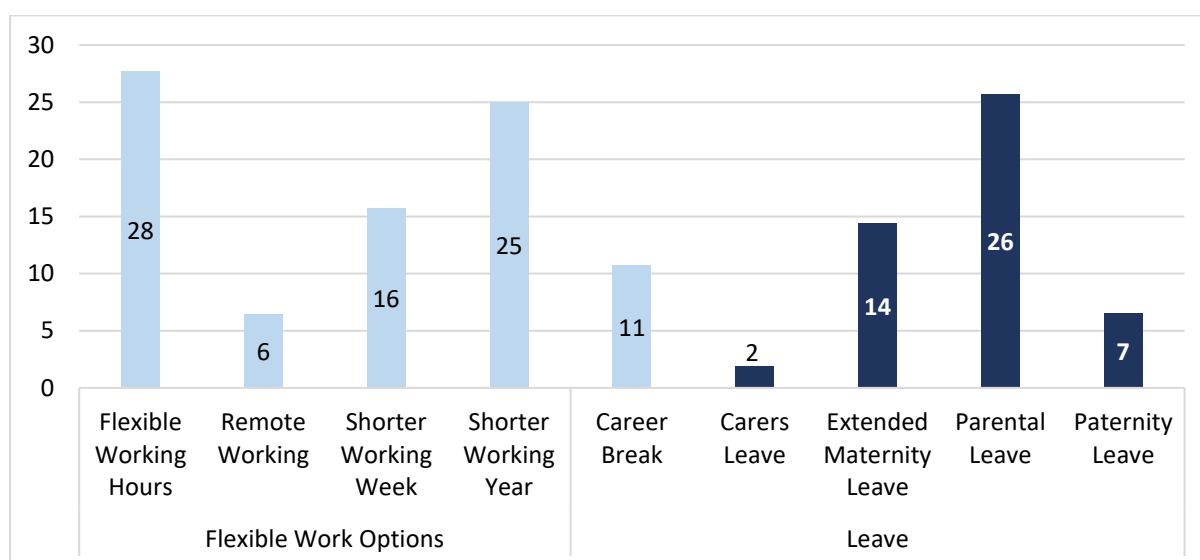
**FIGURE 2.3 PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS CURRENTLY USING FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS BY STREAM (%)**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

Respondents were also asked about their past participation in family-friendly work arrangements and were presented with a list of nine possible options (see Figure 2.4). We divide these options into two categories, one that refers to flexible working arrangements and the other that refers to leave. For past use of flexible working options, we include all respondents who stated they previously participated in at least one of the following: flexible working hours, remote working, shorter working week and shorter working year. The past use of leave category includes those who have taken one or more of the following leave options: career break, carer's leave, extended maternity leave, parental leave, or paternity leave.

Almost half of civil servants in the Department have previously availed of flexible working, which is likely to reflect prior access to flexitime in the entry level grades and up to Higher Executive Officer. Past participation is also strongly gendered: 61 per cent of women have participated compared to 30 per cent of men. The most common form of flexibility reported was flexitime, which was used by 27 per cent of workers. In contrast, just 6 per cent of workers had previously worked remotely (see Figure 2.4).

**FIGURE 2.4 PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY USED FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

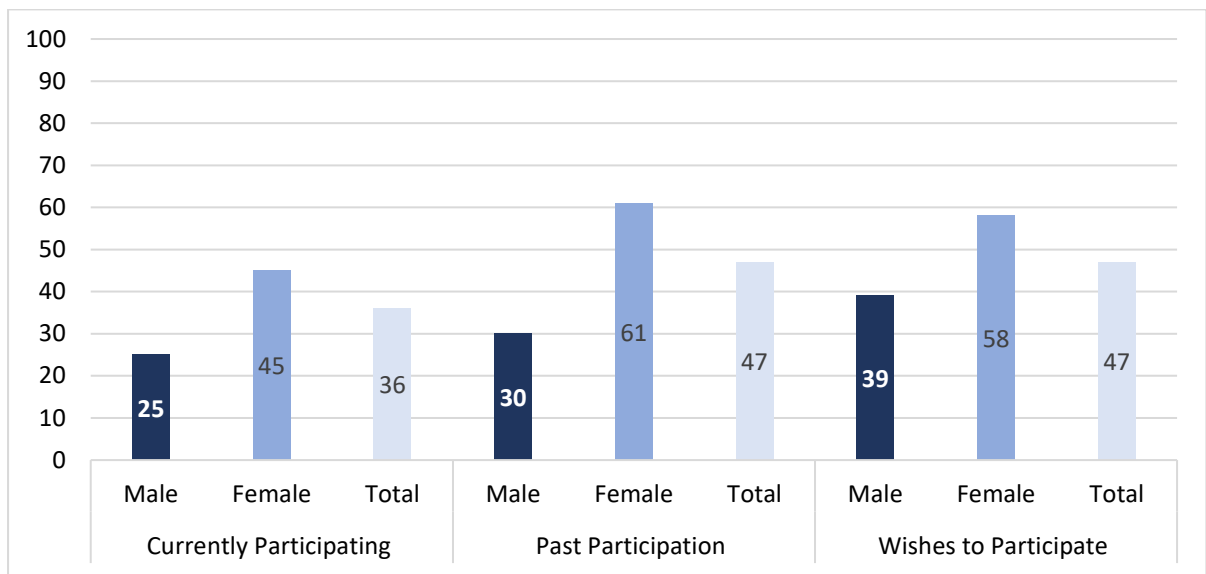
Past take-up of career breaks and leave schemes ranges from 2 per cent for carer's leave to 25 per cent for parental leave. The length of leave taken is not recorded but the maximum allowances differ for different schemes. For example, the entitlement for parental leave is up to 22 weeks for each child,<sup>7</sup> and can be taken in blocks or as a day a week. In contrast, paternity leave is for a maximum of two weeks.

Past take-up of leave is also gendered: 25 per cent of male respondents and 50 per cent of female respondents indicated that they had previously availed of at least one form of leave. Note that extended maternity leave is only available to mothers and paternity leave is only available to fathers.

Finally, we see that there is strong demand for flexible working. Respondents were asked if they would like to participate in flexible working. This was asked to all employees, but we restrict our analysis to those who are not currently working flexibly. As Figure 2.5 shows, a large percentage of men (39 per cent) and women (58 per cent) who are not currently using flexible work options wish to participate.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the entitlements to parental leave have been extended over the last decade, and that respondents may have had different entitlements depending on the year the leave was taken. For example in September 2019 the entitlement was increased from 18 weeks to 22 weeks.

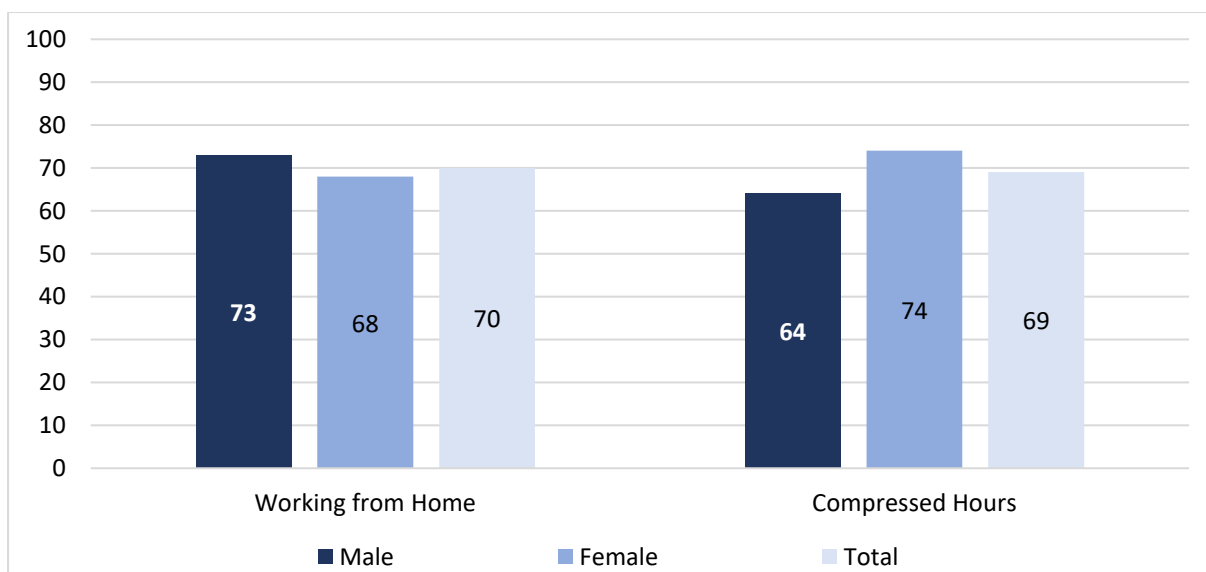
**FIGURE 2.5 PARTICIPATION AND PREFERENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS BY GENDER**



*Source:* DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors’ calculations.  
*Notes:* Past participation is defined as involvement in at least one of the following: flexible working hours, remote working, shorter working week and shorter working year. Respondents who are currently participating in flexible work were excluded from the ‘wishes to participate’ analysis.

Respondents were also asked if they would like to participate in certain flexible working options that are not currently available to them such as working from home and compressed hours. Roughly 70 per cent of respondents stated they would like to work from home or have compressed hours (see Figure 2.6). Preference for these options did not differ significantly between men and women.

**FIGURE 2.6 PREFERENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN WORKING FROM HOME AND COMPRESSED HOURS BY GENDER**



*Source:* DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors’ calculations.

## 2.2 MODELS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

In order to answer the question of who takes up flexible work options and leave and how this differs by occupational category and demographic characteristics we run separate regression analyses examining past and present use of flexible work options and leave. We also investigate preference to participate in flexible work and respondents' perception of Departmental support for work-life balance. Finally, we examine what factors affect respondents' perceptions that availing of flexible work options negatively impacts their career.

We present the results of the models as odds ratios. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower likelihood of the outcome e.g. currently participating in flexible working, than the reference category. An odds ratio greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher likelihood of the outcome than the reference category.

### 2.2.1 Take-up of flexible working and leave

In total 36 per cent of respondents currently participate in flexible work options. However, there were significantly more respondents who wished to use flexible working options, with almost half of respondents stating that they would like to participate who are not currently availing of such options (see Figure 2.5).

In Table 2.2 we examine logistic regressions on outcomes of past and current participation in flexible working and past use of leave options. Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care and length of service. Model 2 contains the same predictors with the addition of an interaction term which examines whether the effect differs between gender and childcare.

The models show that women have higher levels of participation in leave and flexible working. Being a woman increases the odds of currently participating in flexible work by 1.8 times, three times for previously participating in flexible work (Model 1) and 2.1 times for use of leave.<sup>8</sup>

There were no significant age differences in the odds of currently participating in flexible working when length of service is controlled. We include both age and length of service because although correlated they may produce different effects.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As paternity leave only applies to men and extended maternity leave only applies to women, we excluded these leave options and re-ran all models as a robustness check. Results were not found to differ significantly with these options excluded. Models are available from authors.

<sup>9</sup> To test for multicollinearity between variables, the authors examined the independent variables' variance inflation factors and tolerance. The VIF values for all independent variables were found to be less than 2 and tolerance values greater than 0.1. We also re-ran models with either age or length of service. Models are available from authors.



Although there was no significant effect of age on current participation there was a significant effect for past participation in flexible working. The oldest respondents were significantly more likely to have previously participated in flexible working compared to the youngest respondents. The odds of previous participation are more than double for 55- to 70-year-olds compared to those aged 18-34, controlling for length of time respondent has worked in the Department.

Considering previous use of leave, the youngest respondents were the least likely to have taken some form of leave after controlling for length of service with the department. Respondents aged 35-44 were more than twice as likely to have used some form of leave compared to those aged 18-34. Respondents over 45 were also more likely to have used leave, however these effects were insignificant.

Length of service was also found to significantly predict the odds of both currently and previously participating in flexible working options. The odds of currently participating in flexible working are 1.7 times higher for those who have worked in the Department for six to 15 years compared to those whose length of service is less than five years. In the case of past participation in flexible working and leave, those who have been with the Department for six to 15 years have the highest odds of participation followed by those in the Department for 16 to 25 years and over 25 years. In the case of past participation, the length of service effects are partly an artefact as the period of exposure is longer.

Respondents with childcare responsibilities are also more likely to participate in flexible working with the odds of currently participating in flexible working being over 60 per cent higher for those with childcare responsibilities, and the odds of previously participating 2.4 times higher than those without such obligations. Respondents with childcare responsibilities are also significantly more likely to have taken leave than those without; however, this is unsurprising given that three of the four leave options included in the question are for the care of young children.

**TABLE 2.2 MODEL ESTIMATES PREDICTING ODDS OF PARTICIPATING IN LEAVE AND WORKING (CURRENT AND PAST)**

	Current Flexi	Past Flexi Model 1	Past Flexi Model 2	Leave
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>				
Female	1.82***	3.04***	2.28***	2.09**
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>				
Inspectorate	0.25***	0.15***	0.16***	0.52*
Laboratory Service	0.35***	0.41**	0.43**	0.79
Technical	0.22***	0.29***	0.30***	0.73
Veterinary	0.34***	0.22***	0.22***	0.87
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>				
35-44	0.82	1.35	1.30	2.33*
45-54	0.94	1.78	1.79	2.10
55-70	1.12	2.27*	2.29*	1.71
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>				
Dublin	0.85	1.00	1.00	1.10
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>				
6-15 years	1.73*	4.39***	4.39***	3.90***
16-25 years	1.29	3.03***	3.03***	3.42***
Over 25 years	1.39	2.04*	1.99*	3.48***
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>				
Childcare Responsibilities	1.64**	2.43***	1.36	3.72***
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>				
Adult care	1.19	1.34	1.64*	0.78
Female # childcare			2.09*	2.12*
Pseudo R-squared	0.104	0.220	0.224	0.234
Observations	888	894	894	894

Source: DAFM Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

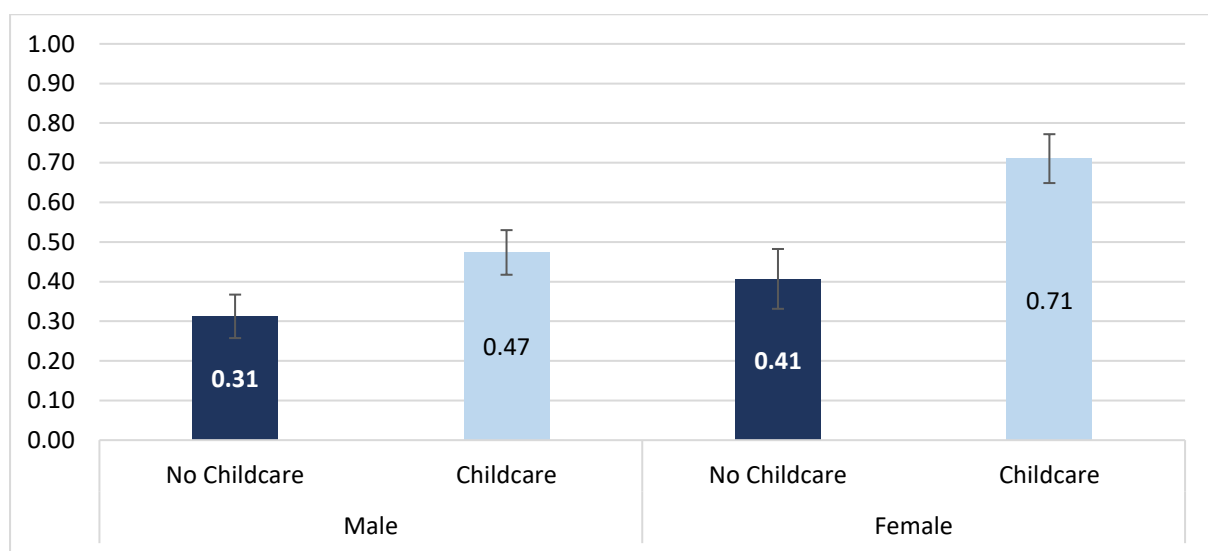
Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of participating in flexible working options than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of participating in flexible working than the reference category.

In all of the models we also tested whether the effect of childcare responsibilities differed for men and women. As shown in Figure 2.7, the probability of previously using flexible working options is significantly higher for women with childcare responsibilities compared to men with the same obligations. Although the probability for both genders increases if they have need to care for children, the increase for women is much higher. This is unsurprising as in an Irish context

women spend roughly twice the amount of time on care compared to men (Russell et al., 2019). Thus, it is more likely for women with children to use flexible working options to accommodate childcare responsibilities. Similarly, while having childcare responsibilities increases past use of leave for both men and women, the effect is stronger for women.

Adult care responsibilities are associated with higher odds of flexible work participation in the past, but do not significantly affect current flexible work participation or previous use of leave.

**FIGURE 2.7 MARGINAL EFFECTS SHOWING PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS BY GENDER AND CHILDCARE RESPONSIBILITIES**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

The stream in which an employee works also significantly predicts uptake of flexible working, with those in administrative positions having higher odds of participation than other streams. In order to determine whether the effect of stream differed for men and women, additional regression analyses were run on past and present use of flexible working options for men and women separately (see Appendix Table A1.1). In line with the findings presented above, employees in the administrative stream were significantly more likely to have availed of flexible working options. The effect of stream could be due to the availability of flexible working options such as working from home or flexitime which may be unavailable to those working in occupations which require employees to be on site during set hours such as those working in laboratory or veterinary grades. Respondents noted in comments that flexible working was not available for some of those working in laboratory or technical settings. Availability of flexible working options can also vary across grades as flexitime is only available for workers up to the Higher Executive Officer grade.

Stream was also found to have a significant effect for use of leave but only in the case of the inspectorate stream. The odds of previously taking some form of leave was significantly lower for inspectorate workers compared to administrative workers, controlling for age and gender composition.

The geographical location of respondents was not found to have any significant effects on the odds of participation in flexible working or use of leave, once stream is considered.

### **2.2.2 Preference for participation in flexible work**

Overall, 47 per cent of respondents not currently participating in flexible work options stated that they would like to participate in flexible work options. Table 2.3 examines logistic regression models which look at respondents who wish to participate in flexible work. Specifically, these models focus on respondents who wish to participate in flexible work *but who are not currently participating*. Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care, leave and length of service. Model 2 contains the same predictors with the addition of an interaction term which examines whether the effect of adult care responsibilities differs between men and women. Model 3 considers whether there is an interaction effect between respondents' gender and stream.

The odds that participants wish to participate in flexible working was significantly higher for women compared to men with the odds of women wishing to participate over 1.8 times higher.

A significant effect was found for age with the youngest respondents significantly less likely to want to participate in flexible working compared to those aged 35 to 44. Odds were also higher for respondents over 45 however these effects were not found to be significant.

The odds of wishing to participate in flexible working appeared to decrease as length of service increased. The odds of wishing to participate in flexible working was significantly lower for workers in the Department for 16 to 25 years and for over 25 years compared to those in the Department for less than five years.

Those who had taken leave in the past were more likely to want to participate in flexible working compared to those who had not. It is important to note that the

leave options included leave for childcare.<sup>10</sup> There were no significant effects found for adult care or location in any of the three models.

**TABLE 2.3 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN FLEXIBLE WORK (AMONG THOSE WHO ARE NOT CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING) (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>			
Female	1.82**	2.04***	2.00**
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>			
Inspectorate	1.35	1.31	1.17
Laboratory Service	0.87	0.85	2.25
Technical	0.67	0.67	0.73
Veterinary	0.67	0.67	0.67
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>			
35-44	2.06*	2.11*	2.12*
45-54	1.51	1.55	1.47
55-70	1.11	1.14	1.14
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>			
6-15 years	0.66	0.65	0.66
16-25 years	0.58*	0.57*	0.58*
Over 25 years	0.39**	0.40**	0.38**
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>			
Dublin	1.07	1.07	1.08
<b>Leave (Ref. No Leave)</b>			
Leave	1.78**	1.79**	1.73*
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>			
Childcare Responsibilities	1.29	1.28	1.30
<b>Adultcare (Ref. No Adultcare)</b>			
Adultcare Responsibilities	1.37	1.80	1.37
Female#AdultCare Responsibilities		0.57	
Female # Administrative			1
Female # Inspectorate			1.72
Female # Laboratory			0.25*
Female # Technical			0.79
Female # Veterinary			1.04
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.10	0.10	0.10
<b>Observations</b>	567	567	567

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of wanting to participate in flexible work than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of wishing to participate in flexible work.

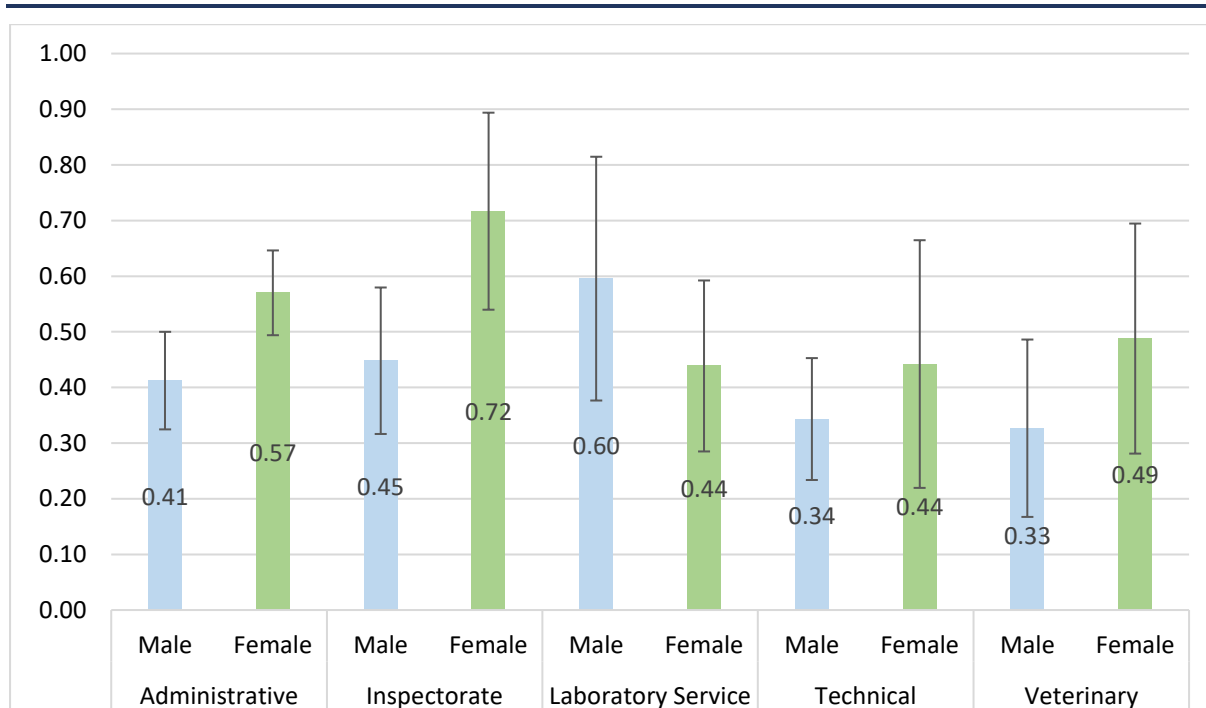
The overall effect of stream is insignificant, but this hides a divergent effect for men and women. In Figure 2.8 we examine the marginal effects of gender and

<sup>10</sup> Although childcare has no significant effect in any of these models, it has a significant effect if the leave variable is excluded.

stream on preference to participate in flexible work. From Figure 2.8 we can see that women in the administrative and inspectorate stream are more likely to wish to participate in flexible work options compared to the men in their respective streams. Additional post-hoc contrast analysis<sup>11</sup> showed that the differences between women and men in the administrative and technical streams were statistically significant.

It is important to note although women (58 per cent) are more likely to wish to participate in flexible working options across most streams, a large proportion of men (39 per cent) would also like to avail of this option (see Figure 2.5). The preference shown for these options among both men and women highlights how work-life balance and the need for flexible working options is not simply a ‘women’s issue’.

**FIGURE 2.8 MARGINAL EFFECTS SHOWING PREFERENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN FLEXIBLE WORKING BY GENDER AND STREAM**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors’ calculations.

### 2.2.3 Departmental support for work-life balance

In Table 2.4 we examine respondents’ perception of Departmental support for work-life balance. This regression looks specifically at respondents who agree or strongly agree that work-life balance is supported in their Department. Model 1 contains gender, stream, age, length of service, location, current participation in

<sup>11</sup> The post-hoc contrast analysis compares predicted probabilities between groups (e.g. men and women in administrative stream etc.) and tests whether the differences between these groups are statistically significant.

flexible working, past participation in flexible working, childcare responsibilities and adult care responsibilities. Model 2 contains an interaction effect between gender and stream. The final model also includes an interaction effect between gender and current participation in flexible working options.

In contrast to the regressions on participation in flexible working, there were no significant differences in the odds of agreeing that work-life balance is supported in the Department between men and women. There were also no significant effects of childcare or adult care responsibilities.

The odds of respondents agreeing that the Department supports work-life balance is over 60 per cent higher for respondents who are currently participating in flexible working. This is consistent with the OECD (2016) finding that having flexibility surrounding working hours increased employees' perceptions that their work schedule accommodated their home and social responsibilities. There was no additional effect for past participation.

The location of respondents was significant in all three models. Perceived Departmental support for work-life balance was lower in Dublin than in other locations across models. Future research should investigate whether there are variations in work practices between Dublin and other counties which could account for this difference or whether it is due to a grade effect.

In Model 2 an interaction effect between gender and stream is added. Post-hoc contrast analysis revealed that there were no significant differences between men and women in any stream.

There was no significant effect found for use of leave options across any of the three models.

**TABLE 2.4 MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH AGREEING THAT DEPARTMENT SUPPORTS WORK-LIFE BALANCE (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>			
Female	1.02	0.81	1.03
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>			
Inspectorate	0.59*	0.56	0.59*
Laboratory Service	1.46	0.65	1.46
Technical	0.70	0.56*	0.70
Veterinary	0.75	0.59	0.75
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>			
35-44	1.04	1.01	1.04
45-54	0.84	0.84	0.84
55-70	0.85	0.85	0.86
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>			
6-15 years	0.84	0.84	0.84
16-25 years	0.71	0.72	0.72
Over 25 years	0.76	0.78	0.76
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>			
Dublin	0.67*	0.66*	0.67*
<b>Currently Participating in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>			
Yes	1.64**	1.67**	1.68
<b>Previously Participated in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>			
Yes	1.35	1.36	1.35
<b>Leave (Ref. No Leave)</b>			
Leave	1.11	1.13	1.11
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>			
Childcare	0.97	0.98	0.97
<b>Adultcare (Ref. No Adultcare)</b>			
Adultcare	1.05	1.06	1.05
<b>Female # Administrative</b>		1	
<b>Female # Inspectorate</b>		0.98	
<b>Female # Laboratory</b>		3.78*	
<b>Female # Technical</b>		2.30	
<b>Female # Veterinary</b>		1.66	
<b>Female # Yes Flex</b>			0.96
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.04	0.05	0.04
<b>Observations</b>	879	879	879

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of agreeing that the Department supports work-life balance than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of agreeing that the Department supports work-life balance.

#### 2.2.4 Flexible working and perceptions of promotional chances

In the final set of models, we examine respondents' perceptions of the relationship between uptake of flexible work options and promotions within the Department. This regression examines the factors associated with a negative perception i.e. agreeing or strongly agreeing that availing of flexible working options limits their



chances of promotion. The model contains gender, stream, age, length of service, location, current participation in flexible working, past participation in flexible working, childcare responsibilities and adult care responsibilities.

In total 36 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that uptake of flexible work negatively impacts promotional opportunities. Overall men's and women's views did not differ on this topic.

Caring responsibilities were also found to have a significant effect. The odds of believing that availing of flexible options limits chances of promotion are roughly 1.7 times higher for those who have adult care responsibilities than those who do not. There was no significant effect for childcare responsibilities however this is likely due to the inclusion of past leave. Respondents who had participated in leave are 1.8 times more likely to believe that flexible working negatively impacts promotional chances. This is in line with previous laboratory research by Leslie et al. (2012) which showed that when an employee's use of flexible working options is attributed to childcare responsibilities, they are perceived as less committed to their work.

There were no significant differences found in the odds between those who had previously participated in flexible working options and those who had not. However, the effect of current participation was significant. Respondents who are currently participating in flexible working are less negative about the effects of availing of such options though this may be due to positive selection, because respondents currently participating are doing so because they believe it will not negatively impact their chances of promotion. The relationship between current or past flexible working and attitudes did not differ by gender (interactions were tested but are not shown).

The stream in which a respondent works was not significantly associated with the perception of the effect of flexible working on promotion. Nor did we find that the influence of gender varied across occupational streams (results not shown).

There were significant differences in the odds by age groups controlling for respondent's length of service in the Department. The youngest respondents (18-34) were significantly more likely than those over 35 to agree that participating in flexible work limits chances of promotion.

**TABLE 2.5 MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH AGREEING THAT FLEXIBLE WORKING LIMITS CHANCES OF PROMOTION WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Model 1
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>	
Female	1.37
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>	
Inspectorate	0.82
Laboratory Service	1.05
Technical	1.25
Veterinary	1.62
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>	
35-44	0.58*
45-54	0.41**
55-70	0.52*
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>	
6-15 years	1.79*
16-25 years	1.45
Over 25 years	1.70
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>	
Dublin	0.92
<b>Currently Participating in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>	
Yes	0.61**
<b>Previously Participated in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>	
Yes	1.10
<b>Leave (Ref. No Leave)</b>	
Leave	1.81***
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>	
Childcare Responsibilities	1.32
<b>Adultcare (Ref. No Adultcare)</b>	
Adultcare Responsibilities	1.71**
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.05
<b>Observations</b>	883

*Source:* Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

*Notes:* \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of agreeing that availing of flexible work options limits chances of promotion within the Department than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of agreeing that availing of flexible work options limits chances of promotion within the Department.

There were significant differences in odds dependent on respondent's length of time in the Department. All those who had been in the Department for six to 15 years were significantly more likely to believe that participation in flexible working options limited chances of promotion compared to those in the Department for less than five years. Respondents in the Department for over 16 years also had higher levels of agreement than newer respondents, however these differences were insignificant.

Whether a respondent worked in Dublin or in other locations was not a significant predictor in any of the models.

## 2.3 CONCLUSION

Roughly a third of respondents currently participate in flexible working options within the Department, however almost half of participants who are not currently participating stated that they would like to. This gap could be due to a lack of availability of flexible work options across grades, information which is not available in the data, or beliefs surrounding how flexible working may impact an employee's career. Survey respondents highlighted how flexible working is not available to certain streams, which explains why uptake of flexible working was 47 per cent for those in the administrative stream but only 13 per cent for those working in technical roles. As previous research in an Irish context (Grady and McCarthy, 2008) has found that flexible working options is beneficial for employees in balancing work and care responsibilities, the potential implementation of suitable flexible working practices across streams should be evaluated.

Respondents with childcare responsibilities were also significantly more likely to currently participate in flexible work and also have previously participated than those without such responsibilities. These findings are consistent with our expectations given how the OECD (2019) noted that flexibility surrounding working hours can help accommodate childcare.

Similar to previous research conducted in a UK context (Chung, 2018), 36 per cent of respondents believed that participating in flexible working options negatively impacts their chances of promotion. The regression analysis showed that those who had caring responsibilities such as caring for adults were 69 per cent to 71 per cent more likely to believe that flexible working would negatively impact their career than those without such responsibilities. No significant effects were found for childcare responsibilities, however this may be related to the inclusion of leave in the model. Respondents who had taken leave were significantly more likely to believe that flexible working negatively impacted their chances of promotion and as mentioned previously many of the leave options used by respondents related to childcare responsibilities such as extended maternity leave, parental leave, or paternity leave. Further analysis which excluded the leave variable found that those with childcare responsibilities were significantly more likely to believe that flexible working would negatively affect their chances of promotion (see Appendix Table A1.2). This differs from Chung's (2018) research which found that mothers were more likely to state that participating in flexible work options negatively impacted their careers. Research conducted by Russell et al. (2017) found that part-time work in the civil service is associated with perceived over-skilling i.e. workers feel that they possess more skills than required in their current position. If employees believe that availing of flexible work will have negative consequences, they are less likely to avail of such options.

Despite negative perceptions surrounding the impact of flexible working on promotions, the majority of respondents (70 per cent) believe that work-life balance is supported in their Department. However, less than half of respondents who want to participate in flexible working are currently doing so. Although respondents are not asked what the main barrier is to their participation, loss of current income may be one issue in the case of reduced hours or term-time working. Further analyses which split previous use of flexible work options into those which are associated with reduced income such as reduced working hours and those that are not such as remote working found that women are significantly more likely to participate in flexible work associated with reduced income compared to men. However, no significant gender differences were found in participation in flexible work options not associated with reduced income (see Appendix Table A1.3).

In order for the civil service to achieve its commitment to improving gender balance across Departments, flexible working options should be made available to employees wherever possible, in addition to continuously promoting gender equality in the workplace as advised by the Council of the European Union (2014).

## CHAPTER 3

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### Gender differences in experiences, behaviour and attitudes

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

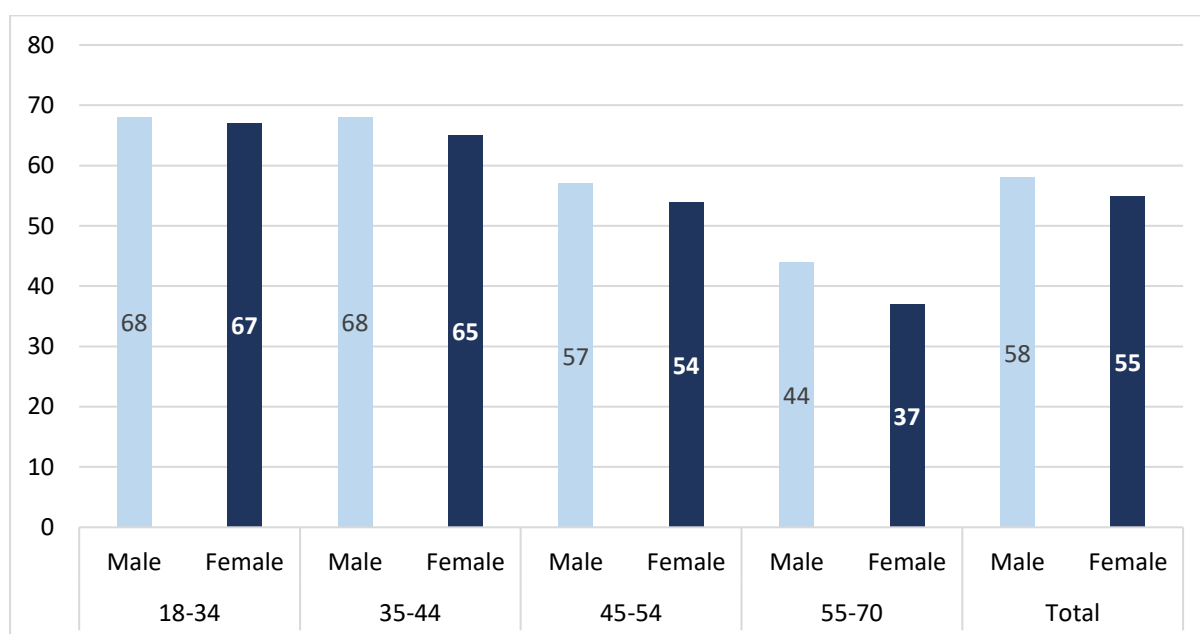
In the previous chapter we examined the role of flexible working in promoting gender equality in the workplace. Previous research has highlighted a range of other organisational level factors that can contribute to gender inequalities in the workplace. Among the processes that may lead to a glass ceiling whereby women are less likely to climb the ladder to the more senior positions in the organisation are: differences in formal and informal supports for advancement including access to training (Evertsson, 2004); career ladders that require geographical mobility (Pilar de Luis Carnicer et al., 2003); unequal access to professional networks (O'Connor, 1996); and discrimination/bias in promotions procedures (Valiulis et al., 2008). The Department of Agriculture survey allows us to examine processes within a single Department within the broader civil service setting. We adopt the same techniques used in the previous chapter, applying statistical models to assess the factors at play. Additionally, we examine responses to open questions, which provide some detail on respondents' perceptions.

#### 3.2 MODELS OF EXPERIENCES, BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

##### 3.2.1 Encouragement to apply for positions

Previous qualitative research in administrative streams of the civil service found that for some the direct encouragement of a line manager was critical in applying for promotions, though this was not present in many cases (Russell et al., 2017). The DAFM survey asks respondents whether they agree that they feel encouraged to apply for positions (in the Department).

Overall, 56 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were encouraged to apply for positions in the Department, with male (58 per cent) and female (55 per cent) respondents reporting similar levels of agreement. This is consistent with the findings of the Civil Service Engagement Survey, which found there was no difference in managerial support or perceived promotion opportunities by gender (Russell et al., 2017). From Figure 3.1 we can see that the percentage of respondents who feel encouraged to apply for positions decreases with age. Amongst the oldest age group men are more likely to report encouragement than women.

**FIGURE 3.1** PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO FEEL ENCOURAGED TO APPLY FOR POSITIONS BY AGE GROUP AND GENDER

Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

In Table 3.1 we examine a logistic regression model for encouragement to apply for promotions. Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, geographical location, childcare, adult care, length of service, use of flexible work options and leave.

There were no significant effects for gender, stream, length of service, childcare, use of flexible working options or leave arrangements. We further tested whether the effect of caring responsibilities differed by gender, but no such patterns were found.

Significant differences in odds were found between the oldest and youngest respondents. Respondents aged 55 and over were significantly less likely to feel that they were encouraged to apply for positions compared to those aged 18 to 34.

Apart from age, geographical location was found to be a significant predictor of encouragement to apply for promotions, with workers from Dublin more likely to feel like they are encouraged than other locations. This could potentially be due to fewer promotional opportunities outside of Dublin or differences in managerial support in other locations.

**TABLE 3.1 LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ENCOURAGEMENT TO APPLY FOR POSITIONS, AND WILLINGNESS TO MOVE FOR PROMOTION (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Apply Model 1	Move Model 1	Move Model 2
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>			
Female	0.88	0.72	0.60*
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>			
Inspectorate	0.75	0.51*	0.53*
Laboratory Service	0.87	0.38**	0.40**
Technical	1.23	1.13	1.12
Veterinary	1.41	0.81	0.82
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>			
35-44	0.97	0.69	0.69
45-54	0.67	0.50*	0.50*
55 and over	0.39**	0.32***	0.33***
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>			
Dublin	1.50*	0.67*	0.66*
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>			
6-15 years	1.21	1.00	1.00
16-25 years	1.12	1.48	1.49
Over 25 years	0.68	1.34	1.32
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>			
Childcare Responsibilities	0.80	0.66*	0.58*
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>			
Adult care	0.78	0.95	0.72
Currently using Flexible Options	0.85	0.86	0.85
Previously Used Flexible Options	0.96	0.78	0.78
Previously Taken Leave	1.24	1.60*	1.57*
Female # adult care			1.59
Female # childcare			1.32
Pseudo R-squared	0.05	0.05	0.05
Observations	884	883	883

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance than the reference category.

Respondents were also given the option to provide comments for this question. Only 5 per cent of respondents (43) gave comments regarding their answers. Many of the respondents who left comments stated that they had not been there long

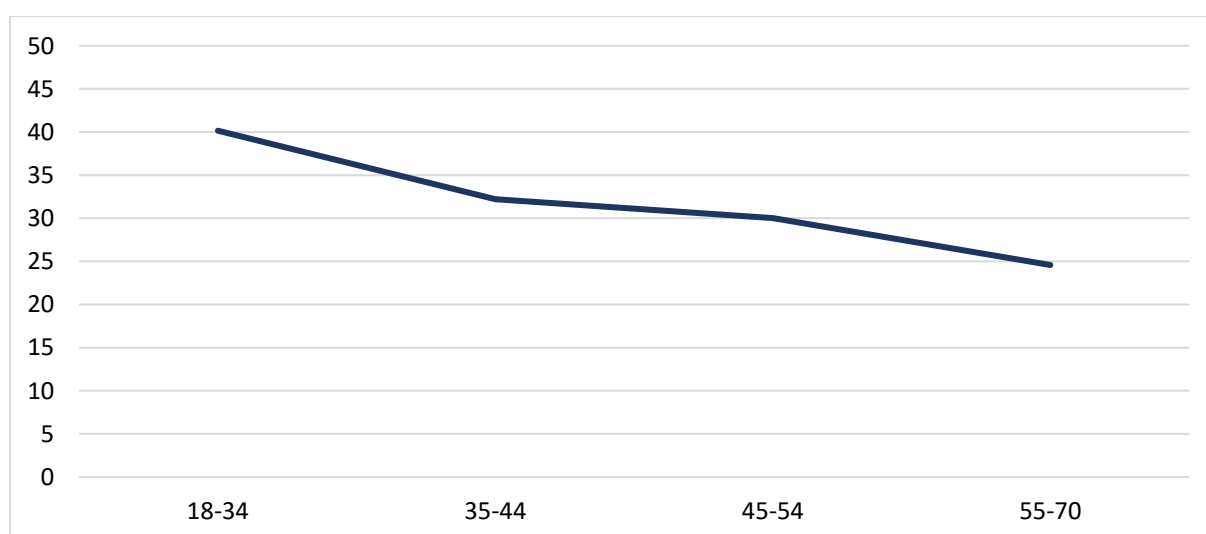
enough to comment, they never experienced any encouragement, or that experiences of encouragement were largely dependent on what manager they had. A very small number of respondents specifically mentioned that they believed there was a gender or age bias regarding encouragement with applying for positions.

### 3.2.2 Willingness to relocate

The gendered ‘ideal worker’ norm, which may be particularly strong in white collar, professional and managerial occupations assumes an employee is unencumbered by other responsibilities, can work full time, and is willing to travel or relocate on request. Within the civil service promotion is often conditional on relocation, which will disadvantage those with family or caring responsibilities. In examining relocation, we draw on a question from the survey which asks respondents if they are prepared to move to another location for their career. Respondents had the option to answer no, not sure, yes- on promotion; yes- for family and commuting reasons; and yes- for the purposes of a change in career direction.

In total, 38 per cent of respondents stated they would not relocate for their career or were unsure. More respondents stated they would be willing to move for promotional reasons (31 per cent) than for family reasons (24 per cent) or for a change in career direction (9 per cent). Overall, we find that men are somewhat more likely to be willing to move for promotion than women (34 per cent vs. 27 per cent) but women were more willing to move for a change in career direction (10 per cent) than men (7 per cent). Differences by age are more pronounced: 40 per cent of those aged under 35 are willing to move for promotion compared to only 25 per cent of those aged 55 or over.

**FIGURE 3.2** PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE WILLING TO MOVE BY AGE GROUP





For the statistical models, we compare respondents who stated they would relocate for promotional reasons to all others (Table 3.1). Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care, length of service, use of flexible work options and leave. Model 1 confirms there is no gender difference in willingness to move for promotion when age, stream and other factors are held constant.

Civil servants working in the administrative stream were significantly more willing to move for promotional reasons than those from the inspectorate stream or laboratory services; this may reflect differences in the career ladders across streams. Technical workers and those in the veterinary service did not differ from those in the administrative stream.

Our model confirms that willingness to relocate for promotional reasons decreases with age. Those aged 45-54 and 55 and over were significantly less willing move than the youngest respondents (18-34). This could be due to the increased social ties to an area among older respondents compared to the youngest respondents. These results are in line with previous research surrounding geographical mobility across the life course which finds that mobility declines swiftly in early adulthood and continues declining with age (Geist and McManus, 2008).

The odds of respondents being willing to move for promotion was also significantly lower for those employed in Dublin compared to other locations. This effect may reflect characteristics of the location or the perception that promotion opportunities were better in Dublin than outside the city. Qualitative research among civil servants found that those located outside the head office were more negative about securing promotion without relocating (Russell et al., 2017).

Childcare responsibilities also significantly reduced the odds that participants were willing to move. Respondents who reported having childcare obligations were significantly less likely to be willing to move for promotional reasons than those without such responsibilities. Additional post-hoc analysis revealed no significant difference between men and women with childcare responsibilities suggesting that childcare affects mobility equally between men and women.

Respondents who have taken leave were significantly more likely to be willing to move for promotion than those who have not. This result is interesting as the types of leave which respondents had taken were related to caring responsibilities such as carer's leave, paternity leave, parental leave and extended maternity leave.

Length of service, use of flexible working options and adult care responsibilities were not found to be significant in any of the models.

### 3.2.3 Participation in training in the last two years

Overall, a high percentage of respondents (72 per cent) reported that they had participated in training in the last two years. In Table 3.2 we examine two logistic regression models with participation in training as our outcome of interest. The model includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care, length of service, use of flexible work options and leave.

The model shows that the odds of participation in training was significantly lower for female respondents than for male respondents. EIGE (2019) found that 40 per cent of women in the EU cannot participate in learning due to family responsibilities compared to 24 per cent of men. However, this model controls for caring responsibilities and additional analysis revealed no significant interaction between gender and caring responsibilities,<sup>12</sup> therefore other factors must be at play.

Location of work also significantly affected the odds of participation in training. The odds of participating in training were 1.5 times higher for those working in Dublin compared to other locations, controlling for stream and other factors. This could potentially be due to greater availability of training programmes in Department headquarters. Previous research of the Civil Service Engagement Survey found that those located in Departmental headquarters were more positive about their access to training (Russell et al., 2017).

The stream in which a respondent worked was a significant predictor of the odds of participation in training within the previous two years. All streams were more likely to have completed training compared to administrative workers, however the effect for the technical stream was insignificant. Compared to those in the administrative stream, the odds of participating in training were 2.5 times higher for those working in laboratory service, over 3.6 times higher for those in the inspectorate stream, and 7.4 times higher for those in the veterinary stream. These large differences may reflect differing requirements within each stream. For example, veterinary workers may be required to undertake more regular upskilling than administrative workers.

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<sup>12</sup> Model available from authors.

**TABLE 3.2 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING AND EASE OF BUILDING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS IN THE DEPARTMENT (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Training Model	Network Model 1	Network Model 2
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>			
Female	0.69*	0.77	0.59**
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>			
Inspectorate	3.61***	2.63***	2.20*
Laboratory Service	2.46**	1.21	0.51
Technical	1.49	2.12**	1.78*
Veterinary	7.41***	3.40***	1.92
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>			
35-44	0.62	1.45	1.39
45-54	0.57	1.44	1.39
55-70	0.57	1.11	1.09
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>			
Dublin	1.53*	2.27***	2.20***
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>			
6-15 years	2.03**	0.76	0.75
16-25 years	1.09	0.71	0.75
Over 25 years	1.22	0.41**	0.44**
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>			
Childcare	1.26	1.05	1.07
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>			
Adult care	1.06	1.00	1.02
<b>Currently using Flexi Options (Ref. No)</b>			
Yes	0.78	0.93	0.93
<b>Previously Used Flexi Options</b>			
Yes	1.19	0.91	0.92
<b>Previously Taken Leave (Ref.no)</b>			
Leave	1.01	1.00	1.02
<b>Female# Administrative</b>			1
<b>Female# Inspectorate</b>			1.35
<b>Female# Laboratory Service</b>			3.50*
<b>Female# Technical</b>			1.27
<b>Female# Veterinary</b>			3.60*
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.07	0.07	0.08
<b>Observations</b>	880	883	883

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance than the reference category. An odds ratio greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance than the reference category.

Considering length of service, respondents who have been with the Department for six to 15 years were twice as likely to have participated in training in the last two years compared to those in the Department for less than five years. There were no significant differences in the odds between those in the Department over 15 years and those whose length of service was less than five years.

There were no significant effects of age, flexible working, care responsibilities and leave on participation in training.

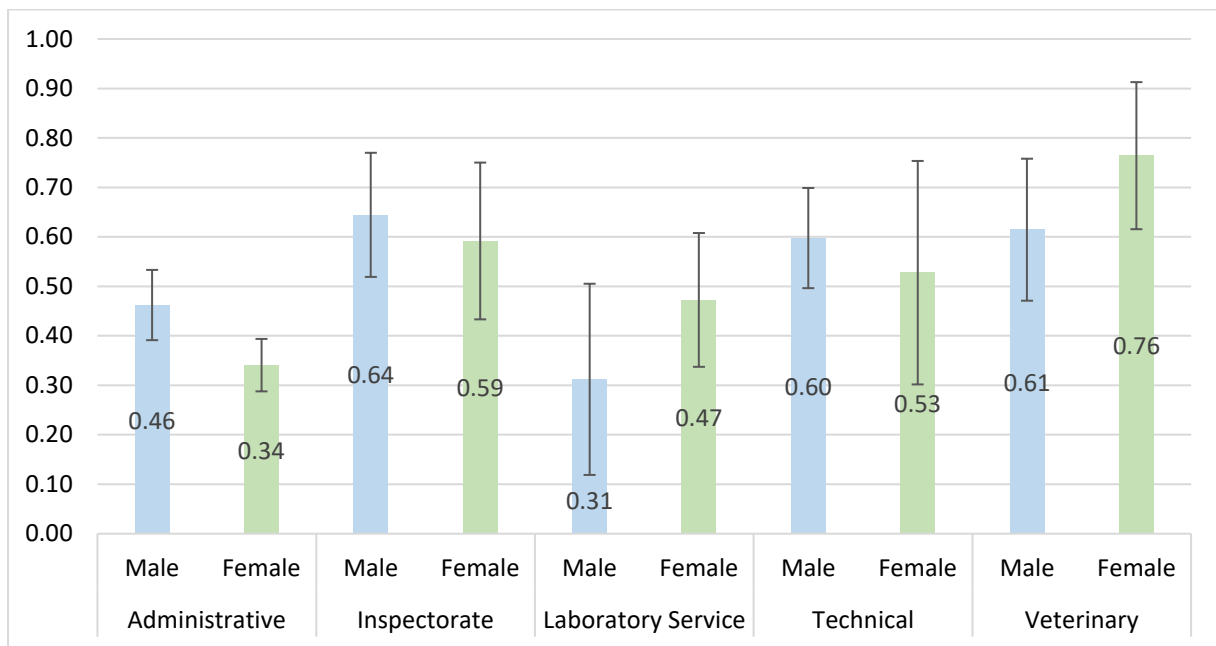
### **3.2.4 Building professional networks**

Just under half of respondents (46 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they found it easy to build professional networks within the Department. In Table 3.2 we examine two logistic regression models with building professional networks as our outcome variable. We contrast respondents who find it easy to build networks with all other respondents. Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care, length of service, use of flexible work options and leave. An interaction between gender and respondent's stream is added in Model 2.

Looking at Model 1, we see a significant effect of stream on the odds of finding it easy to build professional networks. Those who work in the administrative stream have the lowest odds of agreeing that building professional networks is easy within the Department. Workers in the technical stream (odds 2.12 higher), inspectorate stream (odds 2.63 higher) and veterinary stream (odds 3.4 higher) had significantly higher odds compared to admin workers.

In Model 2, an interaction was added between gender and stream. In Figure 3.3 we examine the marginal effects of finding it easy to build professional networks by gender and stream. Additional post-hoc contrast analysis revealed a significant difference in the predicted probabilities between men and women in the administrative stream with men significantly more likely to find it easy to build professional networks.

**FIGURE 3.3 MARGINAL EFFECTS SHOWING PROPORTION WHO FIND IT EASY TO BUILD PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS BY GENDER AND DEPARTMENTAL STREAM**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors’ calculations.

Location also significantly impacted respondents reported ease of building professional network with respondents from Dublin more than twice as likely to agree that it was easy to build networks within the Department.

Considering length of service, respondents who have been in the Department the longest (greater than 25 years) were significantly less likely to agree that they find it easy to build professional networks compared to workers in the Department for less than five years. As networks are usually built over time it is concerning that those in the Department for long periods of time are less likely to find ease in building such networks.

There were no significant effects found for age, caring responsibilities or use of flexible work options and leave.

### 3.2.5 Application for a competition within the last two years

Over half of respondents (58 per cent) stated that they had applied for a competition within the last two years. In Table 3.3 we examine four logistic regression models with application for a competition as our outcome variable. We contrast respondents who have applied for a competition in the last two years with those who have not applied. The logistic regression models allow us to examine whether application for competitions differs based on respondent’s gender,

stream, location, childcare, adult care, length of service,<sup>13</sup> use of flexible work options, and leave. They also allow us to determine whether perceived encouragement to apply for positions and respondent's willingness to move for promotional reasons significantly affects the odds of applying.

Holding all other variables constant, the odds of applying for a competition were significantly lower for women within the Department.

A significant effect was also found for respondents' stream with those working in the inspectorate, laboratory, technical and veterinary streams all significantly less likely to have applied for a competition in the last two years. This effect is likely due to the size of the administrative stream which has almost five times the number of workers in other streams, and therefore would have more positions available.

The odds of applying for promotion decreased with respondent's length of service within the Department, with those in the Department over 16 years significantly less likely to have applied for a competition in the last two years compared to those in the Department for less than five years. This pattern may reflect fewer job openings at senior level; however, we cannot examine how this is related to current grade in the current data. Previous research across the civil service also found that those with less than five years' service were most positive about promotion opportunities, but so also were those in higher grades (Russell et al., 2017).

Whether a respondent had childcare responsibilities was a significant predictor of applications for competitions. Compared to those without such obligations, the odds of having applied for a competition in the last two years are 1.4 times higher for those with childcare responsibilities.

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<sup>13</sup> Analysis revealed that age effects follow the same pattern as length of service in all models (not shown).

**TABLE 3.3 LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH APPLICATION FOR PROMOTION IN LAST TWO YEARS (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>				
Female	0.65**	0.66*	0.66*	0.70*
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>				
Inspectorate	0.40***	0.35***	0.35***	0.34***
Laboratory Service	0.48**	0.44**	0.44**	0.43**
Technical	0.40***	0.37***	0.36***	0.33***
Veterinary	0.49**	0.45**	0.43**	0.37***
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>				
6-15 years	0.86	0.91	0.89	0.81
16-25 years	0.56**	0.57**	0.56**	0.53**
Over 25 years	0.19***	0.20***	0.21***	0.19***
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>				
Dublin	1.33	1.29	1.27	1.36
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>				
Childcare	1.38*	1.37	1.39	1.45*
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>				
Adult care	1.15	1.20	1.24	1.27
<b>Currently Participating in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes		0.90	0.94	1.00
<b>Previously Participated in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes		0.81	0.81	0.82
<b>Leave (Ref. No Leave)</b>				
Leave		1.10	1.07	1.01
<b>Encouraged to Apply for Positions (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes			1.37*	1.25
<b>Participated in Training (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes				1.91***
<b>Finds it Easy to Build Professional Networks (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes				0.84
<b>Willing to Move for Promotional Reasons (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes				2.41***
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.14
<b>Observations</b>	898	893	888	873

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance than the reference category. An odds ratio greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance than the reference category.

Perceived encouragement to apply for positions significantly increased the odds of having applied for a competition. Compared to those who did not agree that they were encouraged to apply for positions, the odds of having applied for a competition are 1.4 times higher for those who felt encouraged. However, when participation in training and willingness to move were added to the model, this effect became insignificant.

Participation in training was also found to significantly affect applications for competitions with the odds of applying 1.9 times higher for those who had participated in training in the two years preceding the survey.

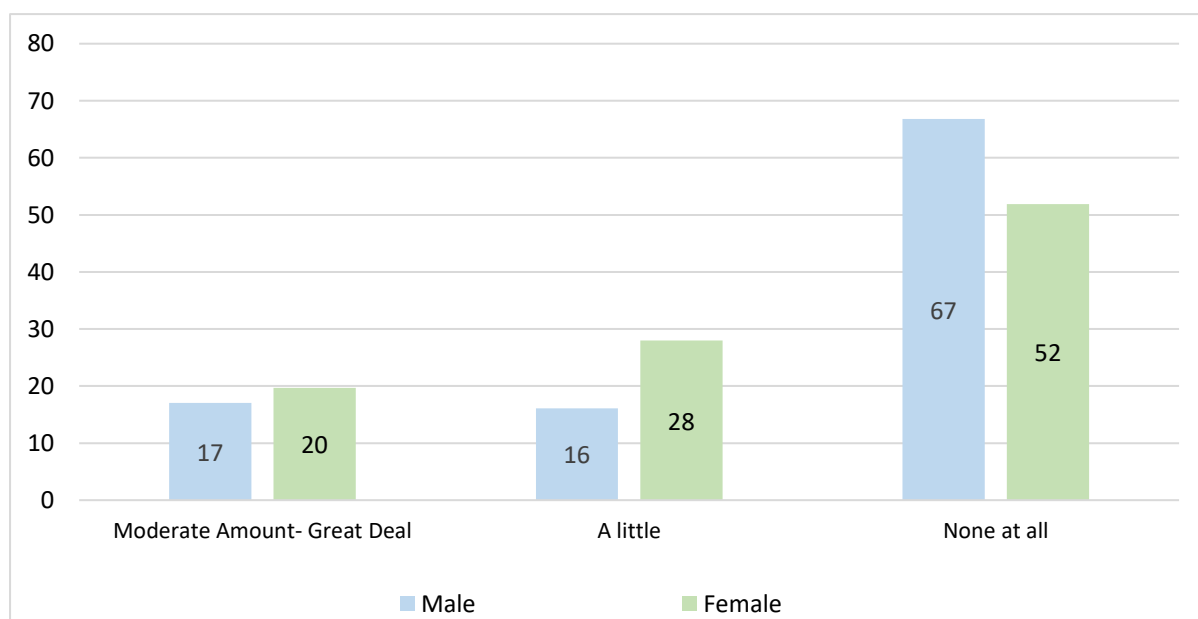
Finally, respondent's willingness to move was found to have a large significant effect on applications for promotion. Compared to those who are not willing to move for promotional reasons, the odds of applying for a competition are 2.4 times higher for respondents who are willing to move for these reasons.

There were no significant effects found for respondent's geographical location, adult care responsibilities, participation in flexible working options or perceptions of professional network building.

### 3.2.6 Experiences of gender bias

In total 41 per cent of respondents stated that they had experienced some form of gender bias in the Department. Responses were provided on a five-point scale ranging from none at all to a great deal. Experience of gender bias was significantly higher among women than men (see Figure 3.4), nevertheless a third of men reported experiencing gender bias.

**FIGURE 3.4 PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED GENDER BIAS IN THE DEPARTMENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: Moderate amount contains respondents who stated they had experienced a moderate amount, a lot, or a great deal of gender bias.



The logistic regression models allow us to examine whether the perception of gender bias differs across streams or by age, length of service, or geographical location. They also allow us to determine whether experiences of gender bias are more common amongst those who have availed of flexible working option and/or those who have adult or childcare responsibilities. In the models we contrast those who have experienced some gender bias (a little, a moderate amount, a lot and a great deal) to those who have experienced none at all.

Holding other characteristics constant the odds of experiencing gender bias are almost twice as high for women than men (1.9 times higher).

Length of service also significantly affected the odds of experiencing gender bias, with those in the Department the least amount of time (less than five years) having significantly lower odds than those in the Department for longer (more than five years). The question wording does not impose a reference time for such experience 'Have you ever experienced any form of gender bias in the Department?' Therefore, this effect could be due to newer employees simply being in the Department for a shorter period of time.

**TABLE 3.4 MODELS OF EXPERIENCE OF GENDER BIAS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT AND BELIEFS OF GENDER BIAS IN PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Bias Model 1	Bias Model 2	PromoBias Model 1	PromoBias Model 2
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>				
Female	1.90***	1.47	0.21***	0.17***
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>				
Inspectorate	1.00	0.67	0.85	0.75
Laboratory Service	1.12	1.22	0.94	0.73
Technical	1.12	0.76	0.47*	0.37**
Veterinary	1.24	0.94	0.72	0.65
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>				
35-44	0.72	0.72	1.11	1.10
45-54	0.64	0.63	1.51	1.51
55-70	0.67	0.68	1.26	1.26
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>				
Dublin	1.41	1.37	1.04	1.01
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>				
6-15 years	3.21***	3.24***	1.96*	1.90*
16-25 years	2.72***	2.81***	1.34	1.36
Over 25 years	2.68***	2.80***	1.43	1.47
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>				
Childcare	0.97	0.98	0.79	0.80
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>				
Adult care	1.95***	1.99***	1.27	1.30
<b>Currently using Flexi Options (Ref. No)</b>				
Yes	0.87	0.89	0.84	0.86
<b>Previously Used Flexi Options</b>				
Yes	1.15	1.16	1.04	1.04
<b>Previously Taken Leave (Ref. No)</b>				
Leave	1.10	1.09	1.27	1.27
<b>Female# Administrative</b>		1		1
<b>Female# Inspectorate</b>		2.34		1.52
<b>Female# Laboratory Service</b>		0.89		1.75
<b>Female# Technical</b>		4.02*		4.81*
<b>Female# Veterinary</b>		1.64		1.30
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.07	0.08	0.010	0.10
<b>Observations</b>	883	883	886	886

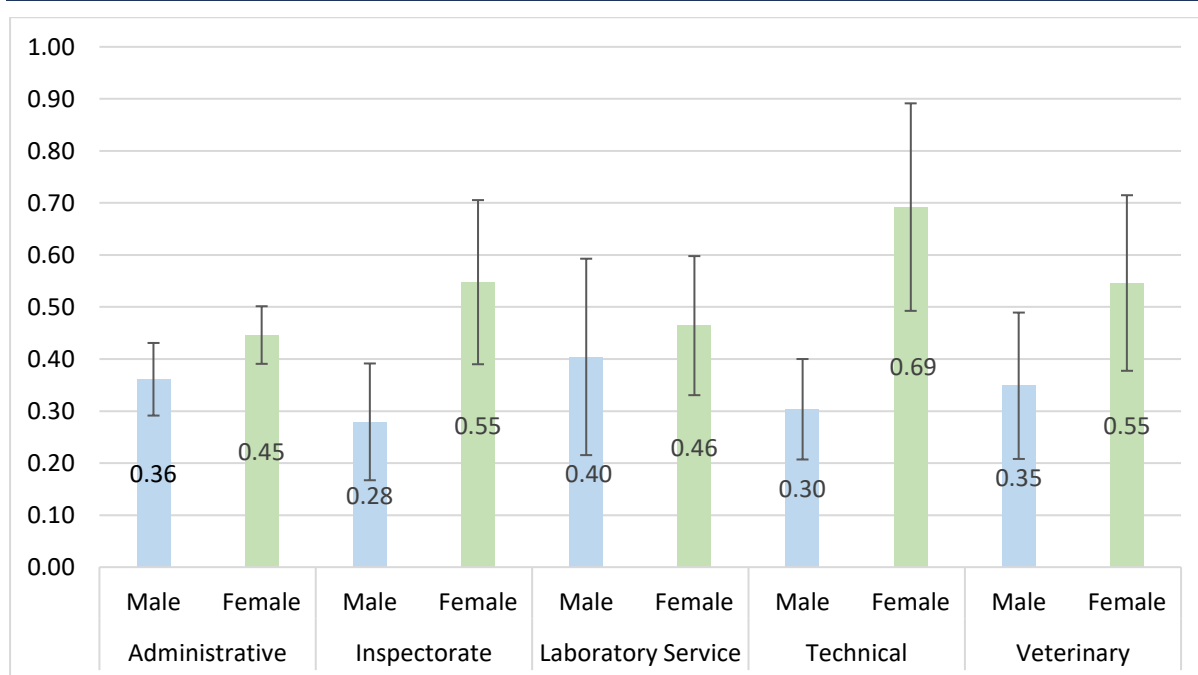
Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance than the references category. An odds ratio greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance than the reference category.

There was no significant effect of having childcare responsibilities on the odds of experiencing gender bias, however those with adult care responsibilities are almost twice as likely to have experienced bias compared to those without such responsibilities.

Model 1 shows that there was no difference in the experience of gender bias across the different Department streams. In Model 2, we test whether the experiences of men and women differ within these streams. We find a significant interaction added between gender and stream which shows a divergence in the experience of men and women within the technical stream. Additional post-hoc contrast analysis revealed significant differences in the probability of experiencing gender bias between men and women in the technical and inspectorate streams at  $p < 0.01$ . This is illustrated in Figure 3.5, which shows the marginal effects of gender and stream on experiencing gender bias. This highlights that women in the technical and inspectorate streams have a particularly high probability of having experienced gender bias, while the men in these streams have a much lower probability.

**FIGURE 3.5 MARGINAL EFFECTS SHOWING PROBABILITY OF EXPERIENCING GENDER BIAS BY GENDER AND STREAM**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: Marginal effects are calculated from the model outlined in Table 3.4.

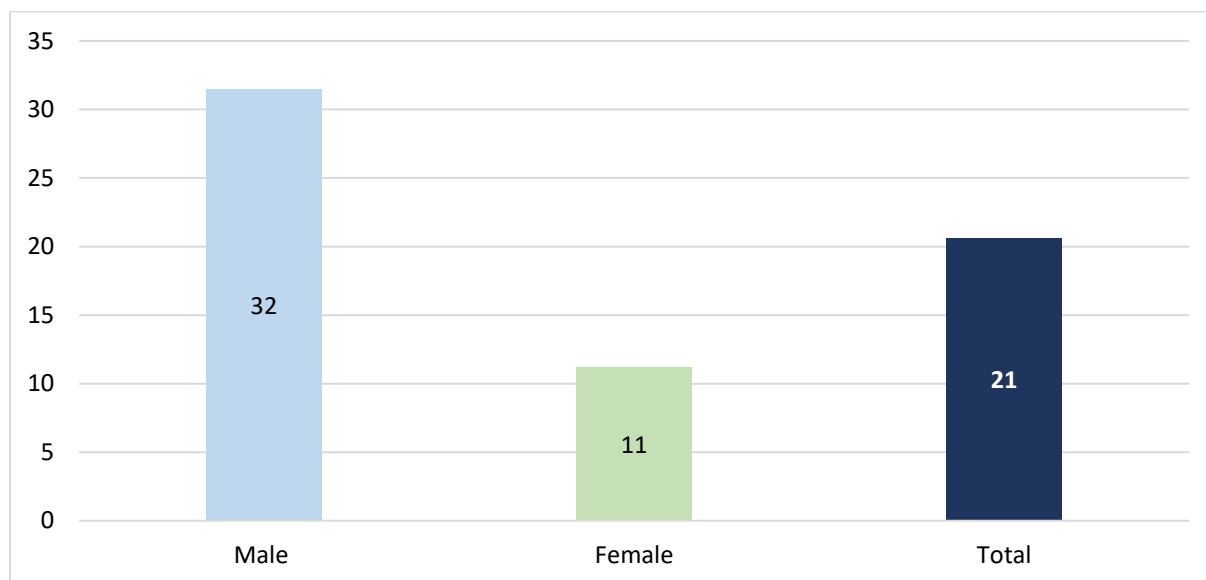
### 3.2.7 Perceived gender bias in promotional competitions

Overall, 21 per cent of respondents (see Figure 3.6) believed that there was gender bias within promotional competitions. In contrast to the finding on the experience of bias, men in the Department (32 per cent) were more likely to perceive gender bias in promotions than women (11 per cent).

Table 3.4 examines two logistic regression models with experiences of gender bias as our outcome variable. We focus specifically on respondents who stated they

have experienced such bias. Model 1 includes gender, stream, age, location, childcare, adult care, length of service, use of flexible work options and leave. An interaction between gender and respondent's stream is added in Model 2.

**FIGURE 3.6 PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHO BELIEVE THAT THERE IS GENDER BIAS IN PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

Contrary to the results on experiences of gender bias, the odds of women believing that gender bias exists in promotional competitions was significantly lower compared to men.

Considering length of service, respondents in the Department six to 15 years were almost twice as likely to believe that there is gender bias in promotion compared to those in the Department for less than five years.

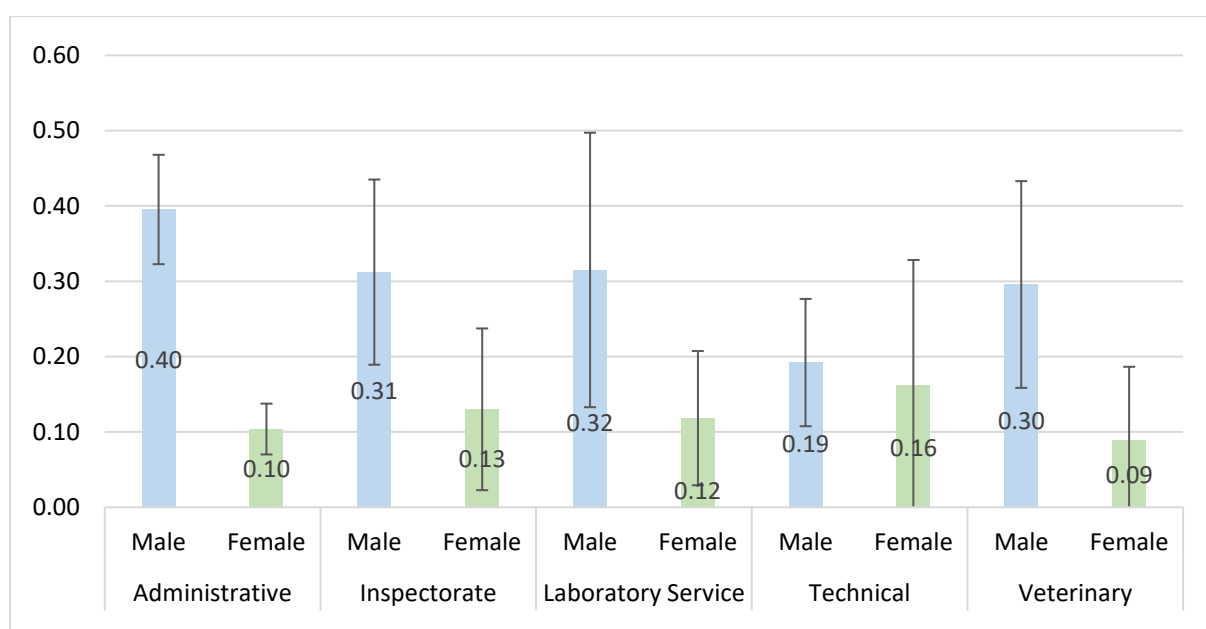
There were no significant effects found for age, location, caring responsibilities and use of flexible working hours and leave.

Taking into account respondent's stream, those in the administrative stream were more likely to believe that gender bias exists in promotional competitions than other streams. Respondents working in the technical stream were significantly less likely to believe that there was gender bias in promotion.

Figure 3.7 shows the marginal effects of gender and stream on beliefs that gender bias exists in promotional competitions. Additional post-hoc contrast analysis

revealed significant differences in the predicted probability of believing there was gender bias in promotional competitions between men and women in the administrative stream. As the figure shows, men from the administrative stream are significantly more likely to believe that gender bias exists in promotion compared to women within this stream. This refutes the idea of the 'glass escalator' where men in female-dominated professions are promoted relatively quickly despite their intentions (Williams, 1992). This may be due to the Department's commitment to gender balance. As Williams (1992) notes, the glass escalator does not operate in all positions, in particular for jobs where an employer is committed to affirmative action.

**FIGURE 3.7 MARGINAL EFFECTS SHOWING PROBABILITY OF BELIEVING THERE IS GENDER BIAS IN PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS BY GENDER AND STREAM**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey. Authors' calculations.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments for this question. A total of 101 respondents left comments with almost 70 per cent of these referring to a belief surrounding a bias towards female candidates in promotion. Respondents in the comments discussed how they believed that the gender balance initiative has resulted in gender bias.

*'Competitions biased in favour of females now rather than ability'  
(Gender not Listed)*

*'There is an ideological balance towards gender which can ignore merit'  
(Male)*

*'I think there is a positive discrimination towards female candidates to address gender imbalance. I disagree with this and believe each post should be filled by the best candidate' (Male)*

*'I think people should only be promoted on their skills not the(ir) sex'  
(Female)*

The relationship between gender balance and merit discussed by respondents is of particular interest. The comments suggest that some employees have the perception that female candidates are promoted above men who are more suitable or qualified for the job.

There are some administrative data against which to test this perception. Due to the relatively small number of cases involved, we group data for two competitions for PO appointments to preserve anonymity and to increase the statistical power. The analysis of Principal Officer competitions shows that 11 per cent of male applicants and 18.5 per cent of female applicants were selected for the panel (Table 3.5). The chi-square test checks if this distribution is statistically different from that which we would expect if the outcome did not differ by sex (i.e. If 14 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men were selected for the panel). The test shows that a difference of the size observed is likely to be due to chance ( $p=0.197$ ). Significance was also tested using the Exact Binomial Test, which confirmed that there was no significant difference in the success rates of male and female applicants ( $P=0.664$ ).

**TABLE 3.5 PRINCIPAL OFFICER COMPETITIONS 2017 AND 2019**

	Male		Female		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Selected</b>	9	11.0	12	18.5	21	14
<b>Not Selected</b>	73	89.0	53	81.5	126	86
<b>All Applicants</b>	82	100.0	65	100.0	147	100

Source: Department of Agriculture Administrative Statistics.

Similarly, in the case of the 2018 EO competition 11 per cent of female applicants were selected for the final panel ( $N=17$ ) compared to 17 per cent of the male applicants ( $N=8$ ). If there had been a perfectly even selection by gender, we would have expected 19 women and six men to have been successful. Both the chi-square test and the Exact Binomial Test shows that the difference between men and women is not significant and likely to be due to chance ( $p=0.277$  and  $p=0.108$  respectively).

**TABLE 3.6 EXECUTIVE OFFICER COMPETITION 2018**

	Male		Female		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Selected for panel</b>	8	17.0	17	11.0	25	12.4
<b>Not selected</b>	39	83.0	137	89.0	176	87.6
<b>Total Applicants</b>	47	100.0	154	100.0	201	100.0

Source: Department of Agriculture Admin statistics.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

Over half of the respondents from the Department felt encouraged to apply for promotions within the Department. Similar levels of encouragement were reported by both men and women, however the odds of feeling this encouragement differed between age groups. The oldest respondents were significantly less likely to feel that they were encouraged to apply for positions than the youngest respondents within the Department. Older workers may feel less encouraged to apply for positions due to a perceived age bias against them or because more respondents have reached the top of the career scale. As the survey did not collect information on respondent's grade level, it is difficult to determine if this is the case.

Just under a third of respondents (31 per cent) stated they would be willing to move for promotional reasons although this varied based on caring responsibilities. Respondents who reported having childcare obligations were significantly less likely to be willing to move for promotion. This effect is likely due to the difficulty of moving locations with children as both parent and child have social ties to their current area. This would also involve finding a new school for the child if they are of school-going age. Interestingly the effect of childcare responsibilities applies equally to men and women, constraining mobility for both groups. The findings undermine the assumption that women are less mobile than men, at least within this organisational context.

In contrast to this, respondents who had taken leave including paternity, paternal and extended maternity were significantly more likely to express willingness to move for promotion once childcare responsibilities were taken into account. Previous research has found that accessible family-friendly flexible work practices have a positive effect on organisational commitment (Eaton, 2003). One potential explanation for this is that the availability of these leave options promotes organisational commitment.

While there was no gender difference in encouragement to apply for promotions in the Department, women were significantly less likely than men to have applied for promotion in the last two years holding job tenure, stream and location constant. Participation in family-friendly work practices, past or present, was not associated with a lower level of promotion applications. Current childcare responsibilities were associated with increased application, which may reflect greater breadwinning responsibility and financial needs for parents. The interactions suggest that this positive association is mainly for men, though the interaction term was statistically insignificant. For both men and women encouragement to apply for promotion was associated with increased applications. The Department currently offers a mentoring programme which commenced in 2012 and is open to all grades from Clerical Officer to Principal Officer. The programme had 92 pairs of mentors and mentees in 2019 and 2020. Continued managerial support and an expansion of the current mentoring programme is a potentially effective way of increasing advancement among under-represented groups. An evaluation of this programme comparing the outcomes of participants with a control group with similar characteristics would provide valuable information on the effectiveness of this intervention.

Participation in training was found to be high for workers within the Department with the majority of respondents (72 per cent) stating that they had participated in training in the last two years. There are no directly comparable statistics for workers in the private sector over a two-year period, however research by the CSO (2017) found that 50 per cent of employees working for enterprises in the private sector completed training in 2015. Respondents who worked in Dublin were 50 per cent more likely to have participated in training compared to respondents from other locations in Ireland. This could be due to a lack of availability of training programmes in smaller locations. As training and upskilling can affect chances of promotion, the Department should ensure training opportunities are available to all workers wherever possible.

Examining network building within the Department, we found significant effects for stream and length of service. Regarding length of service we found that respondents who had been with the Department the longest (greater than 25 years) were significantly less likely to find it easy to build professional networks than those in the Department the shortest (less than five years). One potential explanation for this difference is that older workers have less available time to socialise in the Department due to more social and family responsibilities.

Almost half of the women in the Department and a third of men reported experiencing gender bias. This is a salutary finding and underlines the ongoing importance of commitment in the civil service to improving gender equality.



Experiences of bias also varied by stream with women in male dominated streams having the highest odds of experiencing such bias.

There is a striking mismatch in the experience of bias, the gendered distribution of positions in the Department and the perception of bias in promotion. Men in the Department were more likely to believe that the promotional competitions were biased than women, despite men occupying the majority of senior positions in the Department (see Chapter 1). This negative perception was particularly pronounced among men in the administrative stream, and least common among men (and women) in the technical stream. Comments provided by participants suggested that respondents believed there was a gender bias against men due to the implementation of gender balance initiatives within the Department. Analysis of a number of recent competitions show that the differences in the success rates of male and female candidates are well within the bounds of chance variation and do not support the claim of bias towards either sex. The civil service must ensure that the processes through which they hope to achieve gender balance are made transparent to employees to avoid any misconceptions surrounding promotion and merit. This issue is returned to in the concluding chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

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### Conclusions and policy lessons

#### 4.1 GENDER BALANCE IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

This study investigates issues of gender balance within the civil service, focusing on the Department of Agriculture which has traditionally been more male dominated than the civil service as a whole (see Chapter 1). It set out to examine the link between gender, flexible working and gendered outcomes, in order to identify the factors associated with different outcomes and, more importantly, to inform efforts to reduce gender biases.

The study draws on a survey of 904 civil servants across all sections of the Department who provided information on their working arrangements, experiences, and views of gender balance in the organisation.

Significant progress towards greater gender balance has been made across the civil service over recent decades. For example, the proportion of women at PO level, grew from less than five per cent in 1987 to 40 per cent in 2016. Initiatives to address remaining inequalities have also been set in train. The survey provides a snapshot of civil servants' current views of gender equality and allows us to assess if there are differences in men's and women's access to experiences and supports that enhance opportunities for advancement.

Access to flexible working practices has been highlighted as one element of the toolkit to promote greater gender equality. It is also noted that such access needs to be available at higher organisational levels and to be availed of by both men and women so that it does not have the unintended effect of increasing vertical gender segregation and widening the gender pay gap. The survey data allow us to explore the factors associated with take-up of these options and to investigate the relationship between use of flexible arrangements (past and present) and access to training, support, networking and applications for promotion.

#### 4.2 PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF GENDER BIAS

Of particular interest in this research is the gender differences found in both experiences of gender bias, and perceptions of gender bias in promotional competitions. Whilst the odds of experiencing gender bias were significantly higher among women, the odds of believing that there was gender bias in promotional competitions were significantly higher among men. In an open response section provided within the promotional competition question, some respondents

suggested that promotions were biased towards women due to the gender balance initiative and pointed to recent competitions in which women were more successful. Our analysis of recent competitions for PO and EO positions in the Department show that there are no significant differences in the success rate of male and female applicants.

Although the civil service has highlighted that the 50/50 initiative in senior appointments<sup>14</sup> only gives preference to female candidates where candidates 'have equal merit...and women are underrepresented on the management board of the Department in question' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.14), some workers have the perception that women are promoted over men who are more qualified for the position. This perception could be influenced by gender stereotypes surrounding women's suitability for senior positions. Such stereotypes generally involve a perceived 'lack of fit' between the demands of senior positions and the attributes of women (Heilman, 2012). However, this perception that women are promoted over more qualified men could be due to a lack of understanding surrounding the equal merit facet of the gender balance initiative.

Even though the measures introduced involve a target rather than a quota, and only a very weak form of preferential treatment (Russell et al., 2017), there is nevertheless a push back from some male civil servants. The response is common to situations where an in-group lose some of their privileged status, and therefore perceive progress toward equality as a loss (Eibach and Keegan, 2006).

Fine et al. (2019) note that affirmative action measures such as prioritising hiring female employees can be perceived as reverse discrimination. The researchers highlight that it is important in implementing affirmative action measures to ensure that the processes are 'transparent, well designed, based on evidence, and carefully monitored and reviewed'. The researchers also state that it is important to consider how affirmative action initiatives are framed. When diversity initiatives are justified based on 'numerical under-representation' they are associated with more negative attitudes, whereas when such initiatives are justified on the grounds of fixing past discrimination or improving diversity they are associated with more positive attitudes.

Research by Dobbin and Kalev (2016) into why diversity initiatives fail found that compulsory policies such as compulsory diversity training, the imposition of job tests for candidates, and the introduction of additional grievance procedures did

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<sup>14</sup> The initiative is only in place for the Top-Level Appointments Committee.

not have the expected effect of increasing diversity in businesses. They argue that this is because managers react negatively to the limits on their discretion.

The researchers note (*ibid.*) that it is more effective to involve managers in resolving diversity issues by increasing their contact at work with women and minority employees and encouraging social accountability. Involving managers and employees in addressing diversity issues led to better results with the research showing that voluntary measures such as ‘targeted college recruitment, mentoring programs, self-managed teams and task forces’ increased diversity in businesses. In particular, companies that had voluntary diversity task forces to examine which departments had problems in relation to diversity and produce solutions had a 9 per cent to 30 per cent increase in the representation of women and minority groups over the following five years. College recruitment targeted at women was also found to lead to an increase of 10 per cent in female and female minority managers.

Other features of successful approaches include manager buy-in to the goal of equal opportunity, ongoing monitoring and transparency (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016; Hirsch and Cha, 2017).

Setting targets, such as the 50/50 balance in senior appointments, exerts a normative pressure for compliance with equal opportunity goals and signals a commitment to equality objectives and a tracking of progress. These are important elements of effective organisational responses (Gabaldon et al., 2016; OECD, 2014).

In order to address the negative perceptions surrounding gender balance initiatives in the Department, the civil service must be transparent with employees around how these are implemented and ensure to frame the initiatives in terms of improving diversity. Departments should also consider implementing voluntary diversity task forces. Analysis and dissemination of competition results in anonymised form can also be used to test if promotion processes are unbiased.

### **4.3 PERCEPTIONS AND TAKE-UP OF FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS**

Take-up of flexible working options was relatively high in the Department with over a third (36 per cent) of respondents stating that they currently participate in flexible working options and almost half (47 per cent) stating they had previously participated. These figures varied significantly according to respondent’s gender and caring responsibilities. The odds of currently participating in flexible work was 1.82 times higher for women and the odds of previous participation was three

times higher compared to men. Respondents with childcare responsibilities also had significantly higher odds of previous and current participation.

Women with children were the group most likely to have previously used flexible working arrangements. This reflects findings in an Irish context which found positive results in balancing childcare and work demands for Irish mothers participating in flexible working (Grady and McCarthy, 2008).

However, flexibility is not equally common across Departmental streams, even controlling for composition in terms of gender, age and care responsibilities. Current or past use of flexible options is much lower for those in technical, inspectorate, veterinary and laboratory occupations. Respondents noted that flexible working is not available for many workers in the laboratory and technical settings, and also at higher grades within the Department. The survey also showed a clear unmet demand for further flexibility among those not currently participating, this was highest for men in the laboratory service (60 per cent) and women in the inspectorate service (72 per cent).<sup>15</sup> Unmet demand for flexibility peaked among those aged 35 to 44 years.

Across the Department as a whole there was a substantial demand for the opportunity to work from home (70 per cent) and for compressed hours (69 per cent), with men more likely to favour the former and women the latter. While the civil service is a leader in terms of flexitime it appears to lag behind in remote working. While we lack up-to-date nationally representative figures, a non-representative online survey by the DBEI (2019) suggests that 63 per cent of employees in the private sector and 28 per cent of those in the public sector worked from home. This suggests that there is considerable scope to roll out such practices, especially in the case of administrative roles.

As flexible working options have been associated with balancing home and social responsibilities (Grady and McCarthy 2008; Eurofound, 2018), greater organisational commitment (Eaton, 2003; Russell and McGinnity, 2011) and higher job satisfaction (Russell and McGinnity, 2011), the potential implementation of suitable flexible work options across streams and grades should be evaluated. In a US context, Miles (2013) found that women are five times more likely to leave their job after ten years compared to men, which can largely be attributed to difficulties in balancing work and home responsibilities. Therefore, the extension of greater flexibility to other streams is likely to promote retention of female workers in these areas. Due to COVID-19 a large number of civil servants began working from home where previously this option was not available. This presents an opportunity to

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<sup>15</sup> Predicted probabilities see Figure 2.8.

revisit working from home and other flexible practices in the longer term. This would alleviate the large unmet demand for flexible working options in the Department.

Respondents who were currently participating in flexible work also were significantly more likely to believe that the Department supported work-life balance. This is in line with research from the OECD (2016) which found that having flexibility around working hours and break times increases perceptions that an employee's work schedule accommodates their home and social obligations.

Despite the positive effect of flexible working on perceptions of work-life balance, over a third of respondents believed that participating in such options negatively impacts their chances of promotion. This echoes research conducted by Chung (2018) in the UK using the Work-Life Balance Survey. Although respondents currently participating in flexible work were significantly less likely to believe this, the odds were 1.8 times higher for those who had previously taken leave for caring. This suggests use of flexible working arrangements that involve care leave are perceived to have more negative consequences. Given that length of service is held constant this is not simply due to lower accumulated experience. These results are in line with previous laboratory research findings which showed that when an employee's use of flexible working arrangements is attributed to personal reasons such as caring responsibilities, they are perceived as less committed to their work (Leslie et al., 2012).

There are many positive effects of flexible working for both organisations and its employees. Previous research has shown that workers using flexible work options have higher levels of job satisfaction and are more committed to their organisation than those who are not using such options (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009). However, it is important to remember that not all flexible working options have equally positive effects. Kelliher and Anderson (2009) highlight that those on reduced hours and working remotely often experience work intensification. Russell et al., (2009) also show that whilst part-time and flexi-time work are related to lower levels of work-life conflict, working from home had the opposite effect.

Given the benefits of flexible working options to both employees and workplaces in terms of balancing care responsibilities, improving organisational commitment, and promoting gender equality, and the unmet demand to participate, there is a strong argument for extending flexible work options to more employees where possible. The normalisation of working flexibly for male as well as female workers could have the effect of reducing the perception that take-up of these options signals reduced work commitment. The extension of options to predominantly

male occupational streams could also help to undermine the perception that gender equality is a zero-sum game that only benefits women.

#### **4.4 DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT**

As occupational success is influenced by the amount of human capital one possesses, it is crucial for employees to have equal access to opportunities for human capital accumulation such as training. Overall, a large proportion of respondents (72 per cent) had participated in training in the last two years, a much higher proportion than the average across the labour force. This high take-up may not accurately reflect the proportion of upskilling training received, as the type and level of training was not measured in the survey. For example, most employees may be required to attend mandatory training such as GDPR which may artificially enhance the training profile of the Department but not increase workers' human capital. Future research should evaluate the type and level of training received and whether this differs by gender.

Despite the high uptake of training, participation varied significantly based on respondent's gender with the odds of participating significantly lower for women. It is not possible to tell from the current data if this gender difference arises from different opportunities or because women are less likely to avail of training. In order to enhance the capital of women within the Department and therefore improve their promotional chances, it is imperative to ensure that women are encouraged to participate in training.

As individuals can often be required to relocate for promotional reasons in the civil service, it is important to consider respondents' willingness to move. In total 31 per cent of respondents stated they would be willing to move for promotional reasons and no significant gender differences were found. The results suggest that relocation does not disproportionately deter women from applying for promotions and women should therefore be encouraged to apply for such positions.

It is also necessary to examine networking within the Department, as research by O'Connor (1996) highlighted how exclusion from male networks prevents women from obtaining promotions. Roughly half of respondents (46 per cent) agreed that they found it easy to build professional networks in the Department, however levels of ease differed significantly between men and women in different streams. Women in the administrative stream were significantly less likely to find it easy to build professional networks compared to men in this stream. This suggests that there is scope to further develop mentoring as well as peer-to-peer networking opportunities and such efforts could be targeted at areas where this is most lacking.



#### 4.5 PROMOTIONS/CAREER PROGRESSION

Considering promotions, over half of respondents agreed that they felt they were encouraged to apply for positions and no gender differences were evident. However, there were clear differences in the proportion of men and women who had actually applied for a competition in the preceding two years. Previous analysis across the broader civil services highlighted a range of barriers to greater gender equality in senior appointments, these included difference in access to certain types of experience (e.g. policy roles, interaction with stakeholders), a long hours culture which was incompatible with care commitments, lack of supports for transitions into new roles, and gender difference in self-confidence. Strategies identified to improve gender equality in applications included a more structured approach to career development which allows staff to develop skills and competencies across a range of functions; the provision of induction/handover supports; mentoring and coaching supports to enhance confidence; and enhanced data collection and monitoring (Russell et al., 2017). The supports for career development and transitions are likely to benefit both women and men in the civil service, while smoother induction processes are likely to enhance organisational efficiency by ensuring the transfer of skills, knowledge and contacts.

#### 4.6 DATA AND MONITORING

Internal and external transparency in recruitment and promotion procedures is important for increasing diversity. Therefore, it is necessary to track progress towards the gender balance targets set by the civil service. This involves the regular collection and analysis of information from Departments. The Department of Agriculture survey offers an example of good practice, which provides new insights into the current position within different occupational groups in the civil service. The implementation of regular surveys can assist in identifying barriers to gender equality in the civil service. The extension of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey to include some of the questions asked in the DAFM survey, including details on caring responsibilities, flexible working past and present, and occupational stream, would add considerably to its potential to track progress and to identify the processes underlying gender differences in outcomes. Additional administrative information on the gender composition of applicants to positions and competition outcomes have proved useful for identifying the relative success rates of men and women. The results from the analysis of a number of recent competitions in the Department show no evidence of gender bias. Such data can reassure employees that processes are fair and can identify problems if they do appear. Effective policies and progress within the civil service can also serve as a model for employers and managers in the broader public and private sectors.



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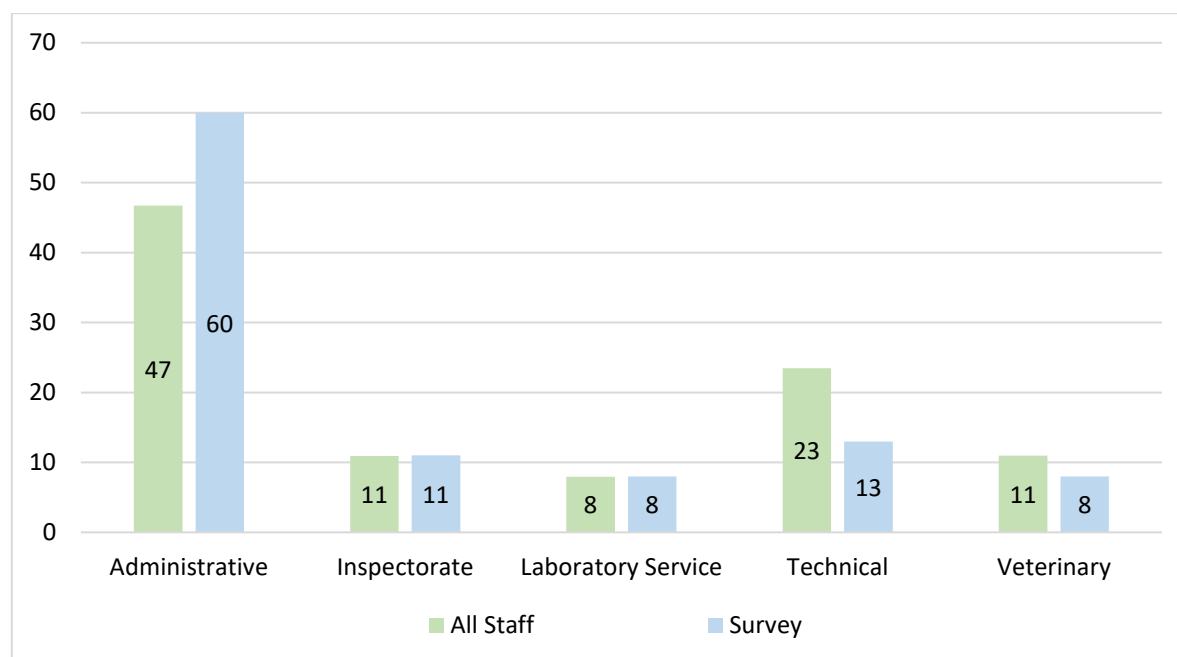
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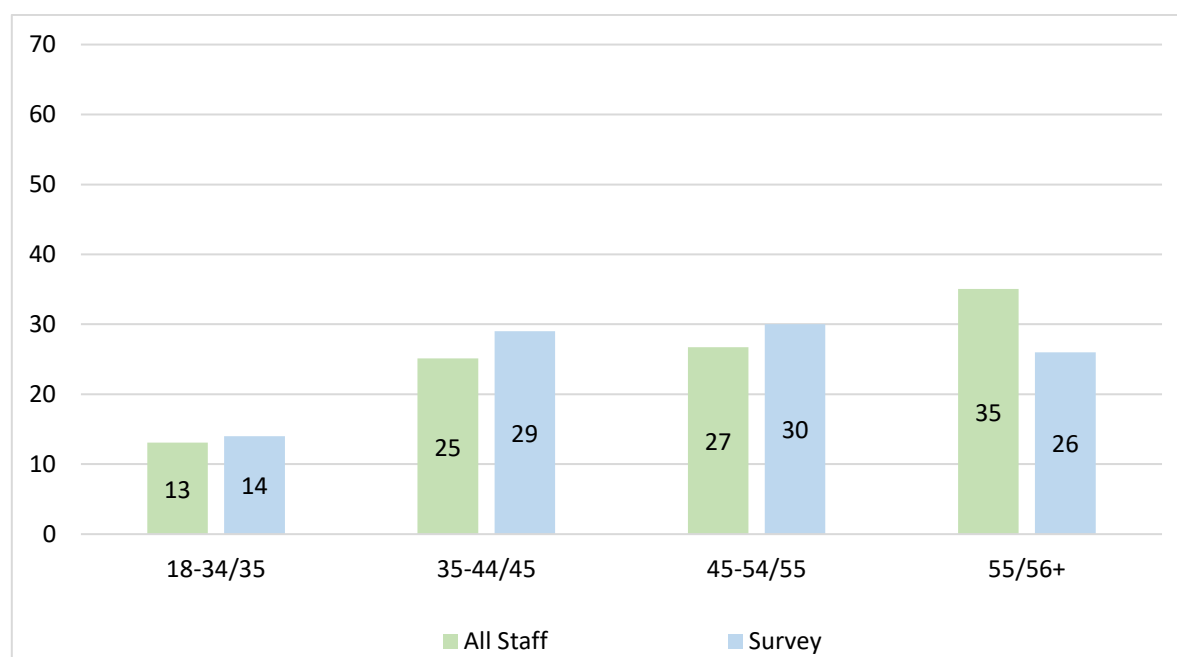
## APPENDIX

**FIGURE A1.1 PROPORTION OF WORKERS ACROSS STREAMS: SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO ADMINISTRATIVE FIGURES: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 2018**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey and Administrative Figures. Authors' calculations.

**FIGURE A1.2 PROPORTION OF WORKERS ACROSS AGE GROUPS: SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO ADMINISTRATIVE FIGURES: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, 2018**



Source: DAFM Gender Balance Survey and Administrative Figures. Authors' calculations.

**TABLE A1.1 MODEL ESTIMATES PREDICTING ODDS OF CURRENT AND PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS BY GENDER**

	Current Flexi Female	Current Flexi Male	Past Flexi Female	Past Flexi Male
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>				
Inspectorate	0.33**	0.23**	0.14***	0.22***
Laboratory Service	0.29***	0.61	0.26**	1.04
Technical	0.05**	0.34**	0.17**	0.51*
Veterinary	0.41*	0.34*	0.18***	0.40*
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>				
35-44	1.61	0.44*	2.25	0.94
45-54	1.81	0.57	3.62**	1.23
55-70	2.19	0.69	8.57***	1.01
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>				
Dublin	0.74	1.09	0.55*	1.66
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>				
6-15 years	2.20**	1.13	4.07***	3.48***
16-25 years	1.55	0.98	4.98***	1.51
Over 25 years	2.21*	0.63	3.39**	0.74
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>				
Childcare Responsibilities	1.79**	1.39	4.18***	1.47
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>				
Adult care	1.12	1.14	1.05	1.43
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.118	0.07	0.297	0.11
<b>Observations</b>	475	413	479	415

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of participating in flexible working options than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of participating in flexible working than the reference category.



**TABLE A1.2 MODEL OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH AGREEING THAT FLEXIBLE WORKING LIMITS CHANCES OF PROMOTION WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT (ODDS RATIOS)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>			
Female	1.50*	1.83**	1.38
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>			
Inspectorate	0.80	0.80	0.80
Laboratory Service	1.04	2.10	1.06
Technical	1.25	1.46	1.25
Veterinary	1.64	2.37*	1.64
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>			
35-44	0.62	0.64	0.61
45-54	0.44**	0.44**	0.43**
55-70	0.52*	0.53	0.52*
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>			
6-15 years	2.00**	2.00**	1.98**
16-25 years	1.61*	1.56	1.59*
Over 25 years	1.92*	1.84*	1.88*
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>			
Dublin	0.93	0.96	0.94
<b>Currently Participating in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>			
Yes	0.62**	0.61**	0.52*
<b>Previously Participated in Flexi (Ref. No)</b>			
Yes	1.21	1.12	1.22
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>			
Childcare Responsibilities	1.59**	1.58**	1.58**
<b>Adultcare (Ref. No Adultcare)</b>			
Adultcare Responsibilities	1.64**	1.63**	1.63**
Female # Administrative		1	
Female # Inspectorate		1.13	
Female # Laboratory		0.35	
Female # Technical		0.72	
Female # Veterinary		0.48	
Female # Currently Participate in Flexi			1.32
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>	0.04	0.05	0.04
<b>Observations</b>	883	883	883

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of participating in flexible working options than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of participating in flexible working than the reference category. Reduced income includes those who previously availed of a shorter working week or shorter working year. Not reduced income includes those who previously participated in flexible working hours and remote working.

**TABLE A1.3 MODEL ESTIMATES PREDICTING ODDS OF PREVIOUS PARTICIPATION IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS (REDUCED INCOME AND NOT REDUCED INCOME)**

	Past Flexi Reduced Income	Past Flexi Not Reduced Income
<b>Gender (Ref. Male)</b>		
Female	4.14***	1.29
<b>Stream (Ref. Administrative)</b>		
Inspectorate	0.19***	0.21***
Laboratory Service	0.57	0.22***
Technical	0.29***	0.27***
Veterinary	0.26***	0.27***
<b>Age (Ref. 18-34)</b>		
35-44	3.61**	0.66
45-54	4.11**	0.94
55-70	5.95***	1.00
<b>Location (Ref. Other)</b>		
Dublin	0.67	1.13
<b>Length of Service (Ref. &lt;5years)</b>		
6-15 years	3.11***	2.44***
16-25 years	2.77***	2.03**
Over 25 years	2.04*	1.41
<b>Childcare (Ref. No Childcare)</b>		
Childcare Responsibilities	1.61*	2.86***
<b>Adult care (Ref. No Adult care)</b>		
Adult care	1.11	1.32
<b>Leave (Ref. No Leave)</b>		
Leave	2.59***	2.26***
<b>Pseudo R-squared</b>		
	0.285	0.164
<b>Observations</b>		
	894	894

Source: Civil Service Gender Survey. Authors' calculations.

Notes: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. An odds ratio of less than one means that the variable is associated with a lower chance of participating in flexible working options than the reference category. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the variable is associated with a higher chance of participating in flexible working than the reference category. Reduced income includes those who previously availed of a shorter working week or shorter working year. Not reduced income includes those who previously participated in flexible working hours and remote working.

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