



An Roinn Caiteachais  
Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe  
Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform

# Working from Home during COVID-19

## Guidance for Civil Service Organisations

Issued 15 December 2020

Prepared by Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform  
[www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)

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# 1. Introduction

The very sudden restriction of movement due to the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a large proportion of employees in Civil Service organisations working from home and in new priority and critical areas arising from the crisis. Business continuity planning has been a key factor in ensuring that business can continue to be delivered throughout the pandemic.

The Framework for Restrictive Measures, as set out in the Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19, provides for home working to continue where possible. Home working will continue as and when deemed appropriate by the employer, having regard to the changes that may be required at each level of the Framework and in line with public health requirements.

The purpose of these guidelines is to support the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees; to ensure that good practice is followed by all employees when working from home (full-time or blended basis), and to support the regular and effective delivery of the services of Civil Service organisations.

This guidance document has now been updated following the recent publication of the revised Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees issued by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

## **Important note**

Employers should make employees aware that any remote or home-based working arrangements that have been implemented due to COVID-19 apply so long as necessary to address the health and safety risks of COVID-19; and that any longer-term/future access to remote working will be dealt with by way of a Remote Working Policy.

These guidelines have been drafted for use by HR in the first instance, with the intention that the content be communicated to all employees as appropriate. For this reason, this document has been formatted with easy 'pull-out' appendices outlining the roles and responsibilities of individual employees and people managers (i.e. those responsible for managing employees) respectively; and HR should ensure that all employees are made aware of the relevant remote working provisions.

It should be noted that these guidelines are not exhaustive, and organisations may need to consider their own needs and tailor the guidance as appropriate. This guidance will be subject to review on a regular basis, and will be updated as we move through the current working arrangements.

## 2. Roles and Responsibilities

### 2.1 ROLE OF HR

HR plays an integral part in organisational business continuity by supporting both people managers and employees in a working-from-home environment, having regard to health and safety, employee wellbeing; performance management; training needs; and other necessary supports.

The role of HR is a vital connection for people during this pandemic. HR are there to provide support and assistance, to help employees to navigate their way through these unsettling times, and, crucially, to provide direction to people managers on how to adapt to the new circumstances. HR should:

- implement relevant advice provided by, for example: FAQs, Public Health, Transport Authority, Health and Safety etc.; communicate that advice regularly to employees, providing updates and guidance as required;
- support new employees into this new working-from-home environment, where applicable, through effective and appropriate induction programmes, while also maintaining ongoing contact with them;
- inform employees of the supports available through OneLearning and Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) as well as those developed locally;
- remind employees of the requirement to adhere to policies and procedures that continue to apply while working from home; and
- inform employees that they continue to have a responsibility to engage with HR if and when required.

### 2.2 ROLE OF PEOPLE MANAGERS

In the significantly changed working environment, the role of people managers is more important than ever before. People managers at all levels must continue to lead, engage with and manage the performance and development of their teams. A significant number of people managers are working and managing their teams remotely whether working from home, in an office setting or a combination of both. This distributed leadership environment is very new to many people managers and employees and will require a different approach to the role. People managers are expected to take a proactive approach in adapting to this new working environment, utilising the supports and guidance available to them so that they can continue to effectively carry out their management function. People managers need to enable employees to be as productive as possible at all times, both in the work premises and in a blended and distributed workplace. People managers need to

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*The Role of the  
People Manager is  
available at Appendix  
A.*

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continue to be innovative in terms of new ways of working including maximising and fully exploring distributed and hybrid work models, where applicable. People managers will continue to be supported by HR and should seek support from their own HR as required.

## 2.3 ROLE OF EMPLOYEES

All employees have a responsibility to ensure that they maintain as safe a working environment as practicable while working from home. They are expected to remain engaged and productive in their work. While employers and people managers have a role to play, employee engagement is key to successful home-working arrangements. Employees must cooperate with employers and be proactive in identifying how they can increase value and how their roles can be performed effectively in the new and changing environment. During COVID-19, in order to ensure maximum efficiency, employees may be assigned work outside their usual core duties or given a new role.

*Employee Guide –  
Working from Home  
is available at  
Appendix B.*

### Extract from HSA Guidance

Employees must:

- co-operate with their employer and follow their instructions;
- protect themselves from harm during the course of their work, for example take care of any equipment provided and report any defects immediately to the employer;
- report any injury arising from the work activity to their employer immediately; and
- follow procedures that have been put in place by their employer.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)

## 2.4 COMMUNICATION

Regular communication from people managers can also provide both structure in the role and ability to prioritise work on a regular basis. Employers should be proactive in communicating with employees working from home. This will help to ensure employees feel connected to the organisation.

### Extract from HSA Guidance

#### Communication

Working from home can result in employees feeling isolated, working longer hours and blurring the lines between work and personal life. It is important that employees know they have support at all times during working hours.

To ensure they retain a strong connection with employees, employers should:

- ensure all contact details for employees are on file and agree a means of contact;
- arrange regular updates via phone, web or email;
- schedule time for informal conversation at the beginning and end of video conference meetings;
- provide employees with emergency contact numbers;
- arrange IT support in the event of technical problems where relevant;
- provide employees with information detailing when it is important for them to contact their employer;
- make sure work is organised in such a way that the employees take regular breaks and can;
- separate their work life and home life;
- provide employees with regular feedback on their work; and
- encourage employees to maintain contact with co-workers for example virtual coffee breaks.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)

### 3. Health & Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of all employees is paramount, particularly throughout the pandemic. Any decisions on how the Civil Service does business and how it reimagines the concept of the workplace at this time must be driven by the principles underlying the public health guidance. HR and people managers should be aware of issues that may be impacting employees in the current environment such as the feeling of isolation, maintaining a work-life balance etc. Supports should

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*The Role of the People Manager at Appendix A includes information on how People Managers can support the health and wellbeing of individuals.*

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be provided as required. In circumstances where HR or people managers cannot provide the appropriate supports, the employee should be made aware of other supports available to them.

### 3.1 PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING FROM HOME

Employers should;

- Review and/or develop mental and physical wellbeing strategies in their organisation, being mindful of the need for these programmes to be delivered remotely;
- Utilise supports such as Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) and develop other supports including online Learning & Development (L&D) training for employees, people managers and senior leaders (resilience, etc.). The Health and Wellbeing Framework, currently under development in CSHRD, will be a useful support when rolled out; and
- Remind employees that the CSEAS is available to them. The CSEAS provides helpful advice around self-care, managing working from home, childcare responsibilities, managing your wellbeing, etc. [Video support](#) is available on YouTube for all employees.

## 4. Health, Safety and Welfare at Work

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of their employees. The responsibility for employees' health and safety at work rests with the employer, whether or not that work is being done at the employer's premises or the employee's home.

Employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and other people who may be affected by the work they are doing.

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*Helpful guidelines for employees regarding health and safety at work are included in:*

*Appendix B – Guide for Employees Working from Home*

*Appendix C – Working from Home - Checklist for Employees.*

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#### **Extract from [HSA Guidance](#)**

##### **Key duties of employers under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005**

Responsibility for health and safety at work rests with the employer whether or not that work is being done at the employee's home. Employers need to consult with their employees to assure themselves that:

- the employee is aware of any specific risks regarding working from home;

- the work activity and the workspace are suitable;
- they provide suitable equipment to enable the work to be done; and
- there is a pre-arranged means of contact.

Key duties that apply to the work activity and workspace include:

- managing and conducting all work activities to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees;
- providing safe systems of work that are planned, organised, and maintained;
- assessing risks and implementing appropriate control measures;
- providing safe equipment including personal protective equipment, where necessary;
- providing information, instruction, training and supervision regarding safety and health to employees; and
- having plans in place for emergencies such as, a fire or an accident at work.

### **Employee responsibilities**

If you are an employee working from home, you have a responsibility to take reasonable care of yourself.

Employees must:

- co-operate with their employer and follow their instructions;
- protect themselves from harm during the course of their work, for example take care of any equipment provided and report any defects immediately to the employer;
- report any injury arising from the work activity to their employer immediately; and
- follow procedures that have been put in place by their employer.

The HSA Guidance sets out good practice across a range of health and safety issues and how employers and employees should manage home working – covering issues such as; remote working policies; work related stress; training; communication; health and safety.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)



## 4.1 RISK ASSESSMENT

The HSA Guidance emphasises the employer's responsibility for health and safety at work, irrespective the location in which work is being carried out. A risk assessment is used to identify possible issues that could cause injury and/or ill-health arising from the home working arrangements in place. Informed by the requirements set out in the Guidance and by the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, a two-step process is recommended by the HSA to respond to the needs of employees who are working from home.

### **Extract from [HSA Guidance](#)**

Employers are required to ensure that a competent person carries out a risk assessment of an employee's workstation in the home. The risk assessment will identify possible issues that could cause injury or ill-health. Having suitable controls in place through the provision of appropriate equipment, training and good communication will help reduce future problems.

#### **Homeworking risk assessment/checklist**

The homeworking risk assessment/checklist process is broken into a two-step process;

##### **Step 1 – Equipment/resources required**

The homeworking risk assessment/checklist is sent to all employees who work from home on a full/part time basis. Employers in consultation with employees will identify equipment and resources required to work effectively from home. When all equipment/resources identified have been provided and set up in the homeworking environment then the employer can proceed to Step 2.

##### **Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment checklist (non-exhaustive list)**

When the equipment/resources checklist have been agreed, then the employer must engage the services of a competent person who can carry out the homeworking assessment/checklist in consultation with the employee. The assessment can be done online for example through the use of video calls ideally with a smartphone so that the employee can move freely around the specific work location so as to help the assessor identify and direct the employee to areas that need to be assessed. The assessor must record any specific issues identified at an employee's home workspace and agree on corrective actions with the employee. Once any corrective actions have been actioned then the homeworking assessment/checklist can be signed off by the assessor and employee.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)

A competent person is someone with sufficient training, experience and knowledge who can carry out a risk assessment of an employee's workstation. Given the large number of employees who are currently working from home, employers should use Step 1 to determine a priority order for progressing employees to Step 2, commencing with those who more urgently require a homeworking risk assessment.

## 4.2 DIGNITY AT WORK

The Civil Service is committed to protecting dignity and respect across the organisation, whether this be in the employer's work premises or when working from home and working remotely in any location. The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 place an obligation on employers to prevent harassment in the workplace. Every employee should be aware that all forms of bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment are unacceptable, and every employee has a duty to behave in a courteous and respectful manner. This continues to apply when working from home and working remotely in any location.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, employers have a duty to prevent any improper conduct or behaviour which is likely to put the safety, health and welfare of employees at risk, and are required to deal with complaints appropriately.

Both employer and employee should be aware that there are supports available to them such as the Mediation Service, which is accessible to all Public Service employees.

## 5. Onboarding and Induction

An effective induction process is essential for ensuring new employees successfully adapt to the social and professional expectations of their new role, enabling them to carry out their work comfortably. Consideration should be given to employees who commence a new role within the organisation (for example, promotion or transfer) as this may require the employee to join a new team and take on new tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, it is important for employers and people managers to create and implement an onboarding and induction process that meets the

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*The Role of the People Manager available at Appendix A sets out their roles in relation to onboarding and induction.*

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requirements of employees joining a new role remotely. HR should adapt standard HR induction programmes so that they can be delivered remotely and should maintain contact with new employees to offer any additional supports that may be required.

## 6. Supports

### 6.1 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

OneLearning has been developing an L&D strategy to support the move to remote and home-based working. Priority learning interventions have been identified within the existing OneLearning catalogue, and adjustments are being made to the content of these courses, where appropriate, to ensure they address remote-working requirements.

A range of videos are available to employees and people managers to support successful home working which can be accessed via the OneLearning Learning Management System (LMS). Employees without access to governmental networks can access the following videos on YouTube:

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*Working from Home -  
Sample checklist available  
at Appendix C.*

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- [Organising and Chairing Effective Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Tips for Effective Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Remote Working during COVID-19](#)
- [Remote Working for Managers during COVID-19](#)
- [Wellbeing for Workers Providing Essential Services](#)
- [COVID-19 Return to the Workplace Safely Induction](#)

Online training courses are now available on the [LMS](#) and OneLearning are continuing to move face to face training courses to instructor led online training.

Organisations may contact OneLearning directly regarding any urgent needs for hosting content on the LMS.

SPS Leadership training will take account of the new ways of working to effectively respond to the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19.

#### **Extract from [HSA Guidance](#)**

Employees should be given instruction and information to make them aware of the risks associated when working from home, for example:

- homeworking policy;
- using the equipment provided for use at the workstation;

- instruction on using the workstation appropriately;
- information on the types of musculoskeletal disorders, the symptoms and the systems in place on how to report suspected musculoskeletal disorders to your employer;
- how the risk assessment/checklist process will be conducted;
- information on eye and eyesight tests; and
- how to plan work to allow for regular breaks or changes in work activity to reduce workload at a computer workstation.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)

## 6.2 CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE (CSEAS)

The CSEAS is a free and confidential service providing support to civil servants at times of personal and/or work-related difficulties. As the nature and environment of work rapidly evolves due to COVID-19, the CSEAS is available to assist employees in managing and coping with change and uncertainty. Services remain open and available to employers and employees during this time, and may be accessed by phone, email or through the website (<https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie>).

To meet the additional challenges and demands placed on civil servants due to COVID-19, helpdesk hours have been extended. An Employee Assistance Officer (EAO) is available by phone: 0761 000 030 and email: [cseas@per.gov.ie](mailto:cseas@per.gov.ie), **Monday – Thursday:** 9am – 5.45pm **Friday:** 9am – 5.15pm. Appointments are available evening and weekends if required. . Health and Wellbeing initiatives are also being communicated to civil servants through Departments' HR, Departmental intranet sites and Departmental Newsletters/Magazines.

The CSEAS website has a COVID-19 webpage providing information, articles, tips, videos and links to other supports. This webpage is specifically tailored to meet the various needs of a civil servant whether working in the office or remotely. In addition to the on-duty helpdesk, EAOs may be contacted during office hours. Individual EAOs' contact details can be found on the CSEAS website.

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*A useful list of supports is set out in Appendix E – Glossary of Supports.*

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## 6.3 TECHNOLOGY

Organisations should implement technology solutions which take into consideration their specific business, technical requirements and local related policies with the aim of enabling staff to work

from home effectively. Employers need to consider issues such as acceptable usage of IT, internet content policy, security and data protection policy as well as budget/spend.

Connecting with the organisation's network from home brings risks and challenges. Organisations should ensure the necessary safeguards are in place in order to mitigate these risks. For example:

- Provision of a secure, password protected work device e.g. laptop;
- Provision of headset to facilitate work conversations in confidence;
- Immediate access to technical support via helpdesk, phone number etc.;
- Security/firewall etc.;
- Methods and contingencies for fixing devices used for work; and
- Access to a secure and approved video conferencing platform.

Employees should be reminded of their responsibility to take necessary precautions to safeguard the equipment and ensure that the appropriate policies are followed in relation to security, personal data and work use.

#### 6.4 PROVISION OF EQUIPMENT

Employers need to engage with employees regarding the provision of equipment and resources in so far as is reasonably practicable. This engagement may be carried out as part of, or in addition to, the risk assessment process detailed in Section 4.1 of this guidance. Where possible, employers may facilitate requests from employees to bring office equipment home in order to meet employee health and safety needs while, having regard to business need, sustainable costs and practical matters. Removal of equipment from the office should be documented in the asset register thereby ensuring an appropriate audit trail.

Employers should give particular consideration to the needs of employees who are sensitive to risk and provide reasonable accommodation where appropriate and as far as practicable.

##### **Extract from [HSA Guidance](#)**

##### **Sensitive Risk Groups**

It is essential that work tasks, working conditions and the work environment do not adversely affect the health of sensitive risk groups such as pregnant, post-natal and breastfeeding employees, night and shift workers and young persons at work. In requesting an employee from a sensitive risk group, or an employee with a disability, to work from home, the employer should consider the suitability of the person to the work in the context of their homeworking space. It is essential that work tasks and working conditions do not adversely affect their health and safety. In consultation with the employee the employer should consider:

- safe access to the workspace,

- the equipment necessary to complete the work,
- suitable workspace,
- adequate lighting, heat and ventilation to allow comfortable working,
- adequate breaks,
- regular contact, and
- emergency contacts and procedures.

Ref: HSA: Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports\\_for\\_business/business\\_and\\_education\\_supports/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home/guidance\\_for\\_employers\\_and\\_employees\\_working\\_from\\_home.pdf](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/supports_for_business/business_and_education_supports/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home/guidance_for_employers_and_employees_working_from_home.pdf)

## 6.5 EXPENSES

Employers should not pay a daily allowance (i.e. €3.20) to their employees in respect of working from home. It is open to employees to make claims directly from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in respect of certain costs incurred in working from home at the end of the relevant tax year, in accordance with the relevant tax laws. Any claim made in this regard is solely a matter for the individual concerned. Further details on eWorking and tax are available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-05/05-02-13.pdf>

## 7. Organisational Culture

Employers should strive to maintain their organisation's vision and values, even where a large proportion of their workforce is now working from home. As the opportunities for face-to-face social interactions are now severely limited, efforts should be made to foster a sense of common goals and values amongst all employees.

Employers should:

- adopt a culture of agility that is responsive to the evolving needs of the new work environment;
- use innovative methods to promote and facilitate social interaction between colleagues, for example, Social Clubs, online events and weekly newsletters etc.;
- encourage employees to maintain regular contact with their colleagues whilst working from home. In particular, people managers must communicate frequently with their teams to support employee wellbeing and to manage work effectively;
- provide adequate supports, for example, appropriate equipment and training to allow employees to successfully carry out their work;

- promote access to Disability Liaison Officer and CSEAS to help employees manage personal difficulties that may arise while working from home; and
- provide regular updates to employees in line with public health advice and their own organisation's business continuity plan.

Leadership at all levels should:

- strive to improve and enhance a culture of innovative thinking and distributed leadership;
- endorse a culture of change with clear, frequent communication of the expectations, values and goals of the organisation; and
- drive innovative solutions to facilitate continued delivery of service, support online training for employees and to encourage positive working relationships in the new working environment.

## 8. Terms and Conditions

During this temporary home-working arrangement, the employee's terms and conditions of employment remain the same.

Employees are expected to fulfil their usual standard weekly hours. Employees and managers have a responsibility to ensure they operate within the requirements of the Organisation of Working Time Act (OWTA) taking adequate breaks, not working excessive hours and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, setting boundaries in relation to working hours in order to facilitate disconnection from work outside of these hours. The normal operation of flexi-time or equivalent attendance management rules, including any flexi-time accruals and deficits, continues to be temporarily suspended for employees who are working from home during the period of COVID-19. This does not preclude organisations from using clocking in and out arrangements that apply including those working at home.

All leave entitlements remain the same. People managers should ensure that their team members are availing of annual leave in a way that supports wellbeing, and also ensures that their team is supported to take their statutory minimum entitlement.

Sick leave arrangements including pay thresholds remain the same. Employees who become ill while working from home should report that they are ill through the normal sick leave procedures (i.e. their manager). Guidance regarding COVID-19 related absences are set out in the [\*Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19\*](#).

The working-from-home arrangement is temporary in nature to address the health and safety risks associated with the current pandemic and no employee will have an automatic entitlement to remote working.

## 9. Security, Confidentiality, Secrecy and Standards of Behaviour

Employees working from home are responsible for both the security of any official devices issued to them and the information stored on these devices. The same responsibilities apply to employees enabled to work from home using their own device. The following protocols apply:

- Storing of work related documents – these should be locked away (See Section 10);
- Business calls should be conducted in a confidential setting;
- E-Filing – maintain security by password-protecting sensitive/confidential documents, and devices such as laptops should be shut down when not in use;
- Screens should be locked when the employee is away from the device at any time;
- Use of IT equipment – Organisational IT equipment should be used in line with relevant organisational policies;
- Freedom of Information (FOI) – all records on computers/laptops etc., including instant messaging conversations are encompassed under the FOI Acts;
- Standards of Behaviour – employees working from home are governed by the same standards of behaviour as when in the office environment – respect, dignity, conduct, professionalism etc.; and
- Disclosure of information - employees remain subject to obligations in respect of confidentiality and the requirement under the Official Secrets Act 1963 to avoid improper disclosure of information gained in the course of their official work.

## 10. Data Protection

Employers and employees should be aware that their obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018 are not confined to the employer's work premises. They also apply when working from home and working remotely in any location.

Organisations should be alive to the risks associated with employees processing personal data while carrying out their duties remotely. Organisations should ensure the arrangements for remote working do not conflict with the organisation's data protection policies and take any additional measures necessary to ensure the security of confidential, personal and sensitive data during remote working

Employers and employees must be mindful of the principles of the GDPR:

- Lawfulness, fairness and transparency;
- Purpose limitation;
- Data minimisation;



- Accuracy;
- Storage limitation;
- Integrity and confidentiality; and
- Accountability.

Employers and employees who are processing personal data must have a legal basis to do so - Article 6 and Article 9 (special category data) of the GDPR refers.

Obligations under Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019 and the National Archives Act 1986 continue to apply.

Helpful resources include your organisation's Data Protection Officer and the Data Protection Commission website - in particular their guidance on Protecting Personal Data when Working Remotely. The following documents issued to HR from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in February, 2020;

- [Data Protection for HR in the Civil Service - Guidelines for HR Units in the civil service;](#) and
- [Civil Service Human Resources Personal Data Records Retention Schedule.](#)

## 11. Legal Requirements

Employers should be mindful of the various legislative requirements which place certain obligations on employers, regardless of whether business is conducted at the employer's premises, the employee's home or another location where the employee is engaging in remote working, for example:

- Data Protection obligations;
- Health, safety and welfare at work requirements;
- Employee Equality Acts;
- Obligations under the Organisation of Working Time Act:
  - Rest periods;
  - Annual Leave entitlements; and
  - Excessive hours.

It is also important to remind employees to be mindful that they are bound by the usual policies in place when working from home, in particular:

- Official Secrets legislation/requirements;
- ICT acceptable usage policy;
- Internet content policy;
- Data Protection and Governance Acts;
- Freedom of Information Acts;

- HR Code of Conduct, etc.;
- Data Protection Policies;
- Disciplinary Code, Circular 19/2016;
- Policies regarding Diversity and Equality including but not limited to: Circular 42 of 2001, Gender Equality Policy for Civil Servants and Circular 24 of 2002, Diversity in the Civil Service; and
- Grievance procedure as set out in Circular 11/2001.

This list is not exhaustive, details of relevant policies can be found at <https://hr.per.gov.ie/>.

## 12. Review Mechanism

These guidelines will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to adapt to any changes to public health advice and with a view to informing a Remote Working Policy post COVID-19.

## Appendix A – Role of the People Manager

### **Leading and Managing Teams**

#### **People managers at all levels should:**

- Promote a positive, open and inclusive working environment where individuals and teams feel valued and supported.
- Be open to new ways of working - discuss and agree flexibility around work times with their teams and managers.
- Examine and reimagine the roles of their teams. Consider if new ways of working have emerged during the crisis that have enhanced productivity and could be embedded on a permanent basis.
- Actively foster innovation - encourage their teams to share ideas, use their initiative, take informed risks and develop their confidence to make decisions.
- Empower their team members to take responsibility for their work and give them the authority to do so.
- Help their teams to avoid burnout and overworking by encouraging a healthy routine around the hours they work, for example, take tea breaks and a lunch break each day and set their start time and end time – allowing flexibility around other responsibilities where needed.
- Ensure all team members including themselves are not working excessively long hours and understand their rights under the Organisation of Working Time Act, including their right to uninterrupted rest breaks.
- Act as a role-model and support a healthy work–life balance. Lead by example, for example, by taking leave, rest breaks, and actively participating in remote social events.

### **Maximise individual and team productivity and performance**

#### **People managers at all levels should:**

- Proactively manage, motivate and support individual and team performances. Continued engagement between people managers and their employees is a key element of the management of performance, including employees on probation. Continue to use support tools (for example, ePMDS, eProbation, Leads) recognising that these are in place to support effective people manager/employee engagement – not to replace direct engagement and conversation.

- Set clear work priorities, objectives and expectations. Focus on what employees should be accomplishing by emphasising objectives and outcomes over processes – be flexible. People managers should consider how they can best support employees in achieving their agreed objectives in the short term while at the same time developing their skills and capability in the longer term.
- Trust teams to get on with their work but provide them with ongoing support and supervision.
- Ensure as far as is practicable that team members have access to the relevant tools, systems and equipment to perform their jobs and help them adjust to new ways of working.
- Review their own and their team members' individual learning needs in light of remote working and changing job requirements.
- Encourage team development as far as is practicable including exploring innovative development methods.
- Enhance opportunities for recognition to motivate the individual team member and encourage similar behaviour from their team members.
- Leave space to discuss career development.
- Address performance issues appropriately and without delay, seeking HR advice as required.

### **Engaging employees and communicating effectively**

#### **People managers at all levels should:**

- Maintain close and regular contact with their team members to maximise engagement at an individual and team level.
- Identify where employees are having difficulty adjusting to working from home in order to offer support as and when required.
- Keep teams informed of ongoing developments by regularly communicating relevant organisational and team information.
- Stay in touch with their own manager, teams and colleagues for both work and social engagements.
- Hold regular online team meetings to share updates, discuss the work programme, agree ways of working, and support each other.
- Hold frequent one-to-one conversations to discuss outputs, progress and development options.
- Acknowledge that virtual communications are different — and won't be perfect — but should still be professional and respectful of others. People managers should actively instigate

contact with their team members to promote involvement and engagement and should encourage people managers within their teams to do likewise.

- Make time for social conversations. This increases rapport, reduces feelings of isolation and eases communication between people working from home.
- Look after the health and wellbeing of the individuals on your team – keep a look out for any signs of anxiety or distress caused by the current circumstances.
- Remind team members of existing health and wellbeing supports, for example CSEAS, organisational wellbeing programmes.

### **Onboarding and induction**

#### **People managers at all levels should:**

- Ensure as far as practicable new employees have the equipment and access required to carry out their role effectively.
- Have a one to one discussion with new employees to welcome them to your team, set out business objectives and work expectations and to explore development needs
- Use video conferencing where possible to introduce new employees to their team members and colleagues.
- Arrange for key team members to introduce themselves and welcome the new employee, ideally one-to-one or in a small-group setting.
- Give new employees the opportunity to attend team meetings as quickly as possible so that they can form an understanding of the organisation's culture and the interaction between roles/divisions/units.
- Adopt innovative solutions to facilitate the delivery of information, training, and/ other supports that would traditionally have been provided in person by IT, HR or people managers to assist employees with reaching the expected standard of performance
- Set objectives and carry out the probationary process without delay to ensure performance expectations are clearly communicated to the new employee from the outset. The same principles of performance management apply, even when probationary reviews are taking place remotely. Consult local HR without delay in the event of probationary difficulties.
- Schedule regular video conferencing/phone calls with new employees. Use this time to check how the employee is settling in, encourage and answer any questions they may have and discuss progress with assigned tasks in order to identify any support they may need.
- Encourage team colleagues to pro-actively engage with the new member of the team to ensure that they are actively involved in social and work initiatives.

- Encourage new employees to take part in any upcoming online social events and networking opportunities arranged by the organisation that will give the employee an opportunity to get to know their colleagues.

## Appendix B – Employee Guide - Working from Home

Working from home will be a new experience for many of us, in particular sustaining this for an extended period. All employees play a role in supporting each other in transitioning to this new way of working, and this guidance should help us all in this interim period. We should all be aware of the importance of communicating and staying connected with each other during this time and be proactive in maintaining effective communications. Practical considerations include:

### **Your working day:**

- ✓ Comply with your organisation's arrangements for recording hours.
- ✓ Maintain a healthy daily routine as far as possible. Keep set times for your breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Eat nutritious meals and drink plenty of water. Build time in your schedule to exercise.
- ✓ Ensure you take your normal breaks away from your work area and take a short walk, if possible.
- ✓ Aim to stand and move for at least one minute in every hour.
- ✓ Try to vary work tasks to ensure that you are not working in the same position for long periods of time.
- ✓ Be mindful of your phone usage while working to avoid distractions from social media notifications. This allows you to stay focussed on the task at hand.
- ✓ Avoid eye fatigue by resting your eyes periodically.
- ✓ Set boundaries – be mindful of your working hours.
- ✓ Ensure your manager is aware if you are unable to work on a given day for example, due to scheduled leave, illness etc. Normal procedures regarding notice continue to apply.
- ✓ Protect yourself and others from harm during the course of your work, for example, take care of any equipment provided and report any issues appropriately.
- ✓ Notify HR if you have a disability or are sensitive to risk (for example, pregnant, mobility needs) and have specific workspace or equipment needs/concerns.

### **Staying connected:**

- ✓ You may be working alone for a long period in the day, so having the mechanisms and structures to stay connected with colleagues will be very important not only from a work and delivery perspective, but also an individual and team perspective.
- ✓ Everyone should continue to be available and contactable to their teams and managers during the working day bearing in mind the work patterns of team members.
- ✓ Communications at a team level should continue, maximising the use of the technology available.
- ✓ Meetings should be arranged using available technology with colleagues expected to participate in the same way, albeit remotely.
- ✓ Where access is possible, please ensure you are saving your relevant files in a shared location so the wider team can access as required.

**Planning & prioritising:**

- ✓ While work and tasks will continue to be assigned in the normal way (i.e. through your manager, colleagues, inboxes etc.), working without face-to-face contact will require more self-discipline, organisation and clearer two-way communication.
- ✓ Ensure you are clear on what your priorities are and any deadlines you may be working to.
- ✓ Please speak to your direct manager on an ongoing basis and don't delay in asking for clarification, support or assistance on your work if you need it.



## Appendix C – Working from Home – Sample Checklist

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Working Environment       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Ensure there is sufficient space to work comfortably</li><li>•Ensure you can access the workspace easily and safely</li><li>•Ensure workspace is kept in a safe condition</li><li>•Ensure adequate lighting, heating and ventilation is provided at the workspace</li><li>•Ensure there are no trips and/or hazards (e.g. cables, electrical wires)</li><li>•Ensure electrical sockets, plugs and cords are in good condition (for example, no charring, exposed wiring or frayed cables)</li><li>•Ensure where possible there is sufficient privacy and freedom from disturbances</li><li>•Do not place laptop/monitor in a position that may result in a glare on the screen</li><li>•Report any equipment defects to your employer</li><li>•Report any injury arising from work activity to your manager/ HR/ Facilities Management immediately</li><li>•Keep flammable materials (e.g. paper) and ignition sources (cigarettes) to a minimum</li><li>•Ensure smoke detectors/fire alarms are present and in working order</li></ul> |
| Ergonomics                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•When seated, feet should be flat on the floor, thighs parallel to the floor and lower legs approximately vertical</li><li>•Sit upright whilst using laptop/computer</li><li>•Use an upright chair that fits and supports the small of your back</li><li>•Position screen level with, or slightly lower than, your eyes and therefore avoiding bending the neck for sustained periods of time</li><li>•The screen should be positioned at approximately an arm's length away from your seated position</li><li>•Space should be allowed in front of the keyboard to provide support for the hands and arms</li><li>•Follow up after the assessment to ensure that any corrective actions required have been completed.</li></ul>   |
| Security/ Confidentiality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Laptops/Computers or other work devices should not be left unlocked when employee leaves their workspace</li><li>•Business calls should be made/taken in a private space</li></ul>  |

If you are concerned about or identify any specific risks, these should be flagged and discussed with your manager in the first instance.

More information in relation to the home working environment can be found at Section 11 of the [HSA Guidance](#).

A sample homeworking risk assessment/checklist can be found at Section 12 of the [HSA Guidance](#).

## Appendix D – Tips for the Effective Use of Video Conferencing

Working from home has resulted in most communications now being carried out via video conferencing. The following are general tips and associated risks in the use of video conferencing.

- Appropriate internet connectivity speed for specific tasks will be required e.g. audio/video conferencing, collaboration, etc.
- Be aware of contention on the line within the house
- Turn off smart speakers (especially for phone and video calls)
- Be aware of background and surroundings if on video calls
- If getting an echo on call reset (unplug and plug back in) headset/microphone
- Mute microphones if on video conference calls when not talking
- Turn off internal microphone on laptop or hybrid if using an external speaker as it may lead to echoes
- Use a headset if possible as it reduces speaker and microphone issues
- Ensure all devices are secured at all times including at home and travelling to/from work
- Be mindful when using video conferencing for conversations on matters of a highly confidential nature

## Appendix E – Glossary of Supports

As detailed in the above guidance, a number of supports are available to employers and employees to help navigate their way through the challenges of working from home during COVID-19. For ease of reference, these links are listed again below as a handy ‘pull-out’ guide that can be circulated to all employees and people managers.

### [Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during Covid 19](#)

#### ***Health and Safety Authority Supports***

- [Guidance on Working from Home for Employers and Employees](#)
- [Homeworking risk assessment/checklist](#)
- [Display Screen Equipment Guidance](#)
- [Display Screen Equipment Documents](#)
- [Work Related Stress: A Guide for Employers](#)
- [Work Related Stress: Information Sheet for Employees](#)
- [Further Information on Sensitive Risk Groups](#)
- [Fire Extinguisher Safety Checks Information Sheet](#)
- [Practical Information on Managing Electricity](#)

#### ***OneLearning Online Supports***

- [Organising and Chairing Effective Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Tips for Effective Virtual Meetings](#)
- [Remote Working during COVID-19](#)
- [Remote Working for Managers during COVID-19](#)
- [Wellbeing for Workers Providing Essential Services](#)
- [COVID-19 Return to the Workplace Safely Induction](#)

#### ***Civil Service Employee Assistance Service***

The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service ([CSEAS](#)) provides helpful advice around self-care, managing working from home and childcare responsibilities, managing your wellbeing, etc. Link to CSEAS’ COVID-19 response <https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/coronavirus-covid19-support/>.

#### ***Guidance on work-related stress***

Guidance on managing work-related stress can be found in Section 7 of the [HSA Guidance](#).

#### ***Mediation Service***

The [Mediation Service](#) provides a voluntary confidential process that allows parties resolve their conflict in a mutually agreeable way with the help of a neutral third party, a Mediator. The Mediator does not impose a solution but rather works with all parties to create their own solution.

### ***Disability Liaison Officer***

Departments and Offices are required to appoint a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) to assist and support staff with disabilities and their managers by the provision of necessary information, appropriate contacts, guidance, suggestions and advice. Inform employees of the departmental DLO contact details.

### ***Eyes Tests***

Provision of eyesight tests accessible under Circular 16/1999 Special Corrective Appliances required for work with display screen equipment and visual display units.

### ***Data Protection***

Data Protection Commission – [www.dataprotection.ie](http://www.dataprotection.ie)

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - [Protecting Personal Data when Working Remotely](#).

The Data Protection Officer advises on and monitors compliance with the laws protecting individuals' personal data within an organisation. The designation, position and tasks of a DPO within an organisation are described in Articles 37, 38 and 39 of the GDPR.

The Data Protection Commission's guidance relating to video calls can be accessed [here](#).



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