



A GUIDE TO WORKING FROM HOME

For managers and employees.

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With thanks to our expert contributors



WORKING FROM HOME

INTRODUCTION



Amanda McCulloch
Managing Director

Over the last five years the number of people working from home has steadily increased and just before the outbreak of COVID-19 over 5% of the total UK workforce (estimated 1.7 million people) worked mainly from home.

The extent to which people can work from home varies by sector and job role. But the COVID-19 lockdown caused an enormous number of people to experience home working for the first time.

Remote and flexible working, where possible to do so, is reinforced across every phase of the lockdown exit strategy and is set to be a longer-term scenario for many businesses and employees. Having time to appreciate the benefits of this type of working, it's logical to assume that remote workforces will become much more commonplace in the future and in some industries, employees may wonder why they ever went to an office in the first place!

In this document you'll find guidance on the key considerations for successful remote working during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

WORKING FROM HOME

FLEXIBLE WORKING



Fiona Herrell
Partner, Brodies LLP

Unprecedented numbers of employees are working from home at the moment and for many the traditional working day has been replaced by something far more fluid.

These changes were implemented quickly, informally and in the hope that they would be relatively short-term measures. As the weeks go by, however, most are settling into this new way of working and some are even thinking about continuing their current flexible working arrangements post-crisis.

Flexible working is a wide-ranging term which describes any working pattern or arrangement which deviates from the 'norm'. It includes changes to working hours or times as well as working from a different location e.g. remote or home working.

As the law currently stands, there is no absolute right to work flexibly. However, an employee who has been employed by their employer for at least 26 weeks has a statutory right to ask to work flexibly.

An employee can request flexible working for any reason (the right used to be limited to those with parental or caring responsibilities but this is no longer the case). Where a request is granted, a statement confirming the change being made should be issued to the employee within one month of the change taking effect. There are prescribed business reasons that must apply if a request is to be refused.

It will be interesting to watch how the law in this area develops post-crisis. Will the UK follow Finland and Germany and give employees a legal right to work from home? That remains to be seen. It seems likely, however, that there will be a spike in formal and informal requests for flexible working post-crisis and probably also a willingness by employers to approve them, especially if flexible working has worked well during lockdown.



WORKING TIME

It is important for employers to continue to bear in mind the legal protections afforded to workers (including those working from home) under the Working Time Regulations 1998.

Workers shouldn't work more than an average of 48 hours per week (unless an opt-out agreement has been signed) and most workers will be entitled to at least a 20-minute rest break after having worked for 6 hours. There are also set daily and weekly rest periods workers are legally entitled to and special rules apply to certain workers e.g. night workers and young workers.



Home workers can often find it more difficult to separate their work and private life with lines becoming blurred and boundaries being ignored. This is a particular risk at the moment when many are having to juggle work and caring responsibilities. Some employees may also feel the need to be constantly available, even outside of their normal working hours.

Managers have an important role to play here. They should monitor workloads and ensure that targets are realistic. They should keep in touch with their teams on a regular basis and make clear that they can be contacted outside of these catch-ups if there are any issues or concerns. They should also encourage their team to take regular breaks and to make time for exercise.

Ensuring that employees are able to take annual leave and that they switch off from work whilst on holiday is going to be more important than ever. There has been legislative change in relation to the carry-over of holidays which enables workers to carry forward up to 4 weeks of their statutory holiday entitlement into the next two holiday years immediately following the holiday year in which it was due, if it was 'not reasonably practicable' for them to take the holiday as a result of the effects of coronavirus (including on the worker, the employer or the wider economy or society). However, employers should do everything reasonably practicable in order to ensure that workers can take as much of their holiday as possible in the leave year to which it relates.

WORKING FROM HOME POLICY

Due to the breakneck speed with which employers had to introduce full-time home working, many did not have the opportunity to fully consider the implications in advance so now is a good time to do that.

Employers are required to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, including home workers, so far as is reasonably practicable. They should carry out risk assessments of all work activities being undertaken by a home worker to identify hazards and assess the degree of risk. They should also ensure that any work equipment they provide to the home worker is suitable for its purpose and maintained in a safe condition which does not pose a risk to the health and safety of the employee.

Employers who had a home working policy in place already should review and update it as necessary.

Having an up-to-date home working policy will also be important, particularly if employers are planning to continue home working within their business longer-term. Even if home working is still only a short-term solution, employers should consider implementing a temporary home working policy.

A home working policy will typically cover key matters such as insurance, provision of equipment, expenses and data security. Having such a policy in place provides employees with clarity on the arrangements that apply in respect of them working from home. It also enables HR teams to ensure a consistent approach is being taken across the business when it comes to managing home working.

Employers who had a home working policy in place already should review and update it as necessary.

It is unlikely that a home working policy would be contractual in nature and therefore implementing a new policy or updating an existing policy in light of COVID-19 will not usually require the agreement of employees. However, if employers are looking to make a permanent change to an employee's place of work to reflect the fact that employees will be based at home and will only attend an office if required, this will amount to a change to terms and conditions of employment such that an appropriate variation process will need to be followed first.

WORKING FROM HOME

HEALTH & SAFETY



Chris Carr

Senior Workplace Consultant, Space Solutions

When the lockdown was announced, there was a rush to get laptops and PCs home and to set up home offices. Some were fortunate to have ready-made spaces that were to all intents and purposes a recreation of their office environment.

This was not the case for everyone, with dining tables being re-purposed and as became apparent, trips back to the office to collect monitors and task chairs were a sign that an ergonomic working environment was essential for wellbeing and productivity.

Assessments of home working environments are part of an organisation's health and safety obligations and these are best conducted through dialogue between line managers and their team during regular catch up calls. Where remedial action is needed, e.g. taking office equipment home, this needs to be carried out safely; remember that most offices have been empty for 2 months with cleaning reduced if not stopped altogether. Safety measures might not be in place yet within the workplace (hand sanitiser, signage etc.) so ad hoc trips to the office should be discouraged.

Safely accessing the office to collect office equipment or print-outs and returning home also introduces potential risk from using different transport systems.

Of a less practical nature, but equally as important, are the legal and HR issues that arise from a workforce that is predominantly working from home. All the insurances that organisations are obliged to have in place – how are these affected by staff working from home? Home insurance may also be affected and HR will be able to offer advice to staff. Contracts that stipulate a work location will have to be looked at in the short-term to ensure that any adjustments reflect the current situation. In the longer-term as more staff are likely to work from home on a more regular basis, HR will need to ensure that different working patterns are officially agreed and recorded.

WORKING FROM HOME

CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA SECURITY



Duncan Cameron
Technical Director, Tycom

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, more than a third of CIOs said the biggest security threat to their business was employees not taking the proper security measures.

Most organisations will not have supported so many employees working remotely, with the added stresses of family life and staying healthy only making it harder to maintain the best digital security practices.

There's a lot to consider from the privacy of telephone conversations, eliminating documentation printed at home to more technical issues such as encryption and anti-phishing protection.



There's more security advice on our blog [here](#).

As a starting point

For Employees

- **Pay attention to passwords** Review and strengthen passwords that you use for logging onto remote resources, such as email or work applications. Avoid using work passwords on personal devices.
- **Be phishing-aware** Be wary of clicking on links which look in any way suspicious, and only download content from reliable sources that can be verified.
- **Choose your device carefully** Many employees use their company computer or laptop for personal use, which can create a security risk. The risk is even greater if you use a personal computer for work purposes. Talk to your IT team about how to strengthen security by adding a strong anti-virus and security package.
- **Who's listening?** Make sure your home wi-fi network has a strong password to protect against anyone within range being able to access and connect to the network.

For Employers

- **Policies** Ensure security guidelines for remote work and remote access to a company's information systems is up to date and understood by employees.
- **Plan** Think ahead about how to handle the threats posed by data leakage or attacks propagating from a device into your network.
- **Stress-test your infrastructure** Incorporate secure remote access tools into your workflows, it's critical to have a robust VPN or an SDP.
- **Define your data** Identify, specify and label sensitive data, in order to prepare for policies that will make sure that only the appropriate people can access it.
- **Review** Include continuity reviews and re-establish consistent standards across your system to enable a more digitally sophisticated workforce in the long-term.

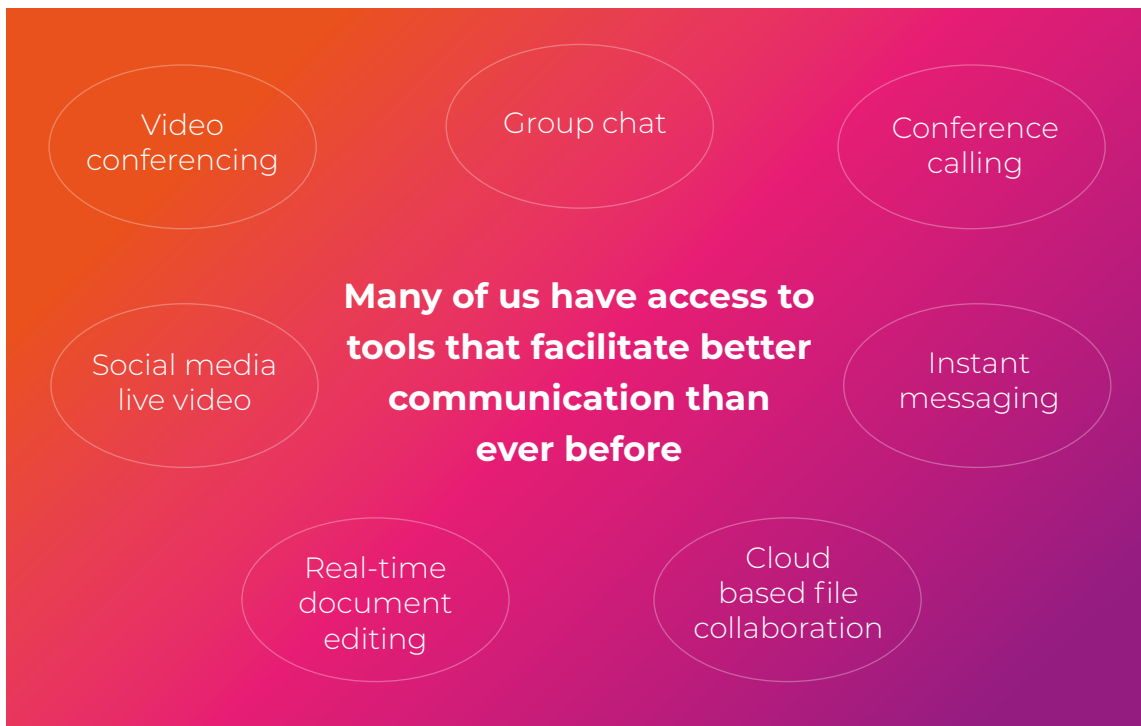
COMMUNICATION

The **Perspectives on Home Working** report by **Space Solutions** highlighted the dichotomy of remote working.

Respondents appreciated the time to perform focused work without office-based distractions but they also missed collaboration with colleagues and felt disconnected from the wider organisation.

Remote workers don't need to feel "distant" workers. With a combination of training and trust, many of us have access to tools that facilitate better communication than ever before.

The tools selected by a business will depend upon cost and ease of integration with existing systems. Suppliers responded very quickly with free versions or enhanced functionality with Whatsapp chat, Microsoft Teams collaboration, Zoom conferencing and Trello project management surging in popularity.





Training Collaborative tools such as SharePoint, Microsoft Teams and Zoom are great, but they'll only be used if employees know how to use them and understand the purpose of each one. Video is effective for 1:1 and group training but pairing up with a super-user buddy who is easy to contact and responsive is a great way to learn too.

Optimise Review current business processes, are they fit for purpose for remote workers or is the lack of continuity counter-productive?

Action This is also an opportunity for business meetings to become more effective, forcing shorter, more action driven discussions compared to the death by discussion meetings so often held in an office.

Culture As well as making our remote working lives more productive and connected, collaboration tools play an important role in keeping employees engaged with your company culture.

For example, Zoom is used to great effect for shared experiences from quiz nights to pilates classes. We're even using the Strava app to log our runs, cycles and walks in a TMM Recruitment Club – motivating each other as we go.

Broadband speed, adequate software licences and access to shared resources can all be taken for granted when working in an office, but they can significantly impact productivity levels from remote locations if not properly specified.

Training on new tools and reinforcing good working practice is essential to minimise data protection and confidentiality risks.

PRODUCTIVITY & MOTIVATION

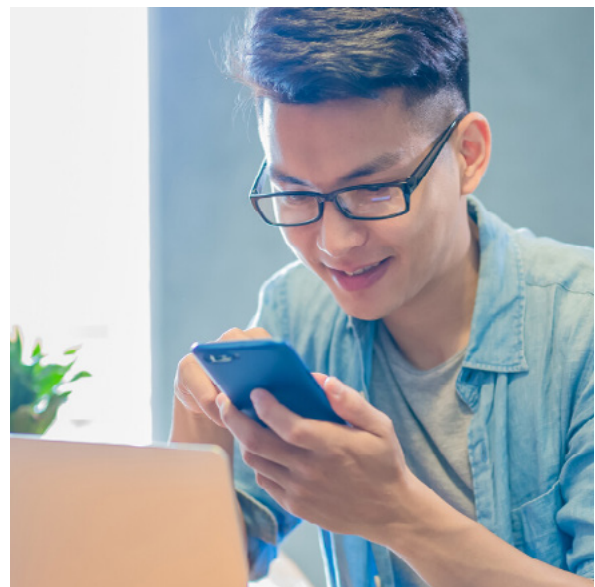
Working from home arrangements are normally agreed after a period of consultation. Employee and employer spend time planning the transition, with clear objectives set and communication arrangements in place.

But that's not how you probably came to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Worklytics shows:

- An increased number of interruptions from tools like email, Slack, Teams etc led to a sharp decline in focus time.
- Working longer hours by around 10-20% on average.
- More after hours email as the lines between work and personal life blur.
- A lot more collaboration but an increasing number of isolated individuals.
- Significantly more interaction from managers as they need to check in more often to stay up to date.

We can learn from this insight and how we've adapted so far to put in place a structure that supports productivity and good mental health going forward.

Much of our advice is common sense but can often be hard to maintain in real-life situations – that's where self-discipline and self-awareness play their part!



Separate Work & Personal

It can be very difficult to set aside space for work at home. But separating work life from personal life is very important. To make home working as successful as it can be, we encourage a designated space, preferably behind a door which can be firmly closed at the end of the working day. Not only is this important from an IT and data security point of view but it is also really important for mental wellbeing, facilitating the ability to “switch off”.

Create a routine that puts you in “work mode”. That might include what time you get up and how you dress. And if possible, dedicate space for your work that can be completely separated from daily family life.

Schedule & Breaks

Keep a schedule and be as intentional as you can about your routine and taking breaks. Try to recreate your normal working day schedule, particularly if you need the input of others. Initially, this will allow you to determine how much more (or less!) you get done at home, but it is also important for the rest of the team to know when you are available.

Communication & Productivity

Talk with your manager about your circumstances, so that they understand the support you need. Are you juggling home schooling? Do you have little space to create a dedicated work area? Perhaps you live with a key worker who is on night shift?

Design your day in a way that makes you most productive – just detail everything in a shared calendar including scheduling non-work time; regular tasks and events; meetings and “do not disturb I’m really concentrating” time.

Limit Social Media

In an effort to stay connected we can actually overdo it. Phone, email, instant messaging, online groups, video chat. Where did I see that message, was it in WhatsApp or Messenger? You can understand that it is really easy to miss important pieces of information. Argggghhh!

Too many options are overwhelming, and really distracting too. Switch off social media notifications to minimise disruptions during work time.

Anxiety And Stress Busting

It just might be possible that more of us will become healthier during this crisis. When we asked our network what they were doing to stay motivated and in a good mindset the resounding response was exercise (mind you there was also a fair amount of wine drinking!)

Not just good for our hearts and minds, exercise can help us concentrate and sleep better too. For others it was hobbies, cooking, keeping in touch with family and even housework that was working for them – introducing variety to the daily routine.

Be Social

With so many communication tools available you can take responsibility for keeping in touch with others. Take time to call a colleague to talk about something other than work, simply to ask how they are – it’s a really effective way to stay connected to colleagues and they will appreciate that you thought of them.

Video calls are a great way to stay connected, but if groups become larger than 4 or 5 not every voice on the call can be heard, with people, and their contributions, being overlooked. Set aside time for 1:1 video calls, and as nice as it is to see people’s faces, phone calls are making a comeback too.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Working from home is an adjustment that takes time to get used to. Managers have a crucial role to play in the effectiveness of home working, taking the mental leap that performance is not to be measured by how much time someone spends at their desk but how much work they get done.

TRUST - SUPPORT - APPRECIATE

1. The right tools and support in an environment with fewer distractions will increase productivity.
2. Don't micro-manage but do provide very clear outcomes and timeframes as a benchmark for success. People want to do the best job that they can, if there is no trust you probably hired the wrong person.
3. If you are managing a new team member, **upgrade your onboarding programme** to reflect the working from home circumstances.
4. Everyone likes to be managed differently, and when working remotely, it helps a business to know how best to communicate and motivate individuals.

Based on Marston's DISC theory, Personal Profile Analysis (PPA) reveals an individual's preference for communicating with others and the type of support they need to stay motivated and engaged but also to avoid burnout and work-related stress (see diagram below).





There's
information
on our PPA
service here.

With this knowledge a manager can:

- Determine the frequency and method of communication with individual members of a team.
 - Manage effective communication within the team, ensuring all voices are heard.
 - Stay alert to behaviours that indicate someone is becoming negatively affected by full-time remote working.
5. Lead by example and be a role model. Take a moment to reflect on how meaningful your face-to-face interactions are with people in the office. Room for improvement? Probably! There's an opportunity to use the experience of working from home to have quality conversations through dedicated keep in touch time for work and non-work related chat. This will encourage the same behaviour throughout your team.
 6. Transparency is required too. Use team calls to share what everyone is working on, have dedicated messenger channels for specific topics, utilise shared calendars and don't be afraid to talk about challenges.
 7. Don't forget to celebrate individual and team success too.

Maintaining employee engagement is the biggest challenge. Be more intentional about keeping in touch and think carefully about what you can do to nurture your company culture, to ensure it isn't negatively impacted by the remote working experience.

WORKING FROM HOME

THE FUTURE OF WORK



Chris Carr

Senior Workplace Consultant, Space Solutions

We are creatures of habit. For the overwhelming majority of us pre-COVID-19, we went to the office Mon-Fri from 9-5. Now that we've experienced working from home (not through choice) many of us have found that it has its benefits.

A plethora of surveys have been carried out recently, some looking at individual responses, some looking at how organisations have adapted. The percentages may fluctuate, but the underlying message is still the same "we're not returning to the old ways of working".

There will be some, who through job function, home environment or personal preference will continue as before, working in the office. That's fine – no one size fits all.

For the rest, it will be about choice and variety. The future workplace will be an ecosystem of locations. Two days / week at home, 3 days in the office seems to be finding favour in surveys. The home working environment will have to be supported technologically and ergonomically, the increase in back pain in late March was testimony to the importance of a good set-up.



But what of the office?

A more mobile workforce will require to plan for when they want to work in the office. Empty desks take up valuable space so managed desk-sharing will be required. The future office will need to be vibrant to encourage remote teams to meet physically for collaboration. It is not going to be a social club, however, it will need to support focus as well as interaction in order to be productive.

The future office will need to be vibrant to encourage remote teams to meet physically.

We are likely to see the continuation of virtual interaction and this will have an impact on the types of spaces required – taking calls to small ‘Zoom Rooms’ will help minimise disturbance and designed properly, these can double as quiet focus booths.

The future workplace might in fact be more cellular, but with spaces catering for 1-3 people rather than large meeting rooms or managerial offices (that lie empty 50% of the week).

Does this mean less space? Potentially it does mean less space, though this will ultimately depend on the uptake of working from home. As leases come to an end, organisations may look to rationalise space and with an increase in working from home we could see overall office density decrease as issues such as health and wellbeing increase in importance.

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