

COVID-19: Managing People - Quick Reference Guides (UK)

Guide 4 - Successful Home Working

Introduction

Due to the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus, remote working has become a requirement and a new reality for many businesses. Few though, will have been prepared for such large-scale remote working so we have outlined a few important factors for consideration.

COVID-19 contingency plans should specify key functions, roles and activities required to keep your business running as a minimum and where feasible for the work to be done remotely, it might involve carrying out tasks differently. Many companies have had to react quickly, but with limited time to adapt policies and frameworks. It has been identified that some of the most significant challenges lie with IT infrastructure and the process of adapting to new ways of working.

It's likely that some of your employees may have already been working remotely, but for others, they will need some formal guidance and support to navigate the logistical and operational challenges involved. It's also important to build trust and clarify to your employees what is expected to avoid any misunderstandings during what is already a difficult time. For example: when employees are available to work and how they should keep in contact; rules around confidentiality, storing of information and reminder of GDPR implications; the priorities to focus on as some employees may find it hard to

motivate and organise themselves when working from home. Employers and employees should be flexible and sensitive during this exceptional period of remote working and encourage problem solving and collaboration between teams, clarifying decision making authority.

The COVID-19 situation is dynamic, so monitor the situation regularly from government updates and if there are any changes in severity that impact your remote working plan, be prepared to make other changes as appropriate.

Key Considerations

Employees' needs: Managers should keep in touch with their employees and make any reasonable adjustments which may include for those with a disability or long-term health condition, as well as anyone with childcare responsibilities.

Employees' wellbeing: Managers need to support remote employees and be accessible to answer questions, concerns or sharing of information. Where it is not possible for employees to work off site and you need to keep a skeleton staff on site, your business should be implementing safety measures, coming up with creative and agile ways of working and providing support to reduce anxiety levels.

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Health and safety risks: Legally, employers are responsible for the health and safety of their employees, including those working from home. However, during the coronavirus pandemic it's unlikely that employers will be able to carry out the usual health and safety risk assessments. The employer should still check that the employee feels the work can be done at home safely and should be encouraged to operate from a clean and clear workspace.

Communication: A system for regular communication is essential for making a remote working arrangement successful. Advise those working remotely to establish an effective way of contacting their teams; this may be via the phone, or scheduling video conferences.

Work schedules: Working from home arrangements may offer a greater level of flexibility for employees, but the Working Time Regulations 1998 should still be adhered to, considering how a work-life balance will be managed, for example taking regular breaks and switching off from work at the end of the day.

Salary and expenses: If your employees are working from home and doing their usual hours, they should receive the same basic pay and the usual terms and conditions will apply (except remote working on a temporary basis). If remote workers are incurring expenses over and above what they would normally incur when working from their normal place of work, this should be discussed with the employer.

Absence from work: With self-isolating and social distancing, more and more employees will be forced to take time off, so it's important to have robust absence policies in place to support and guide the correct processes and recording in all types of absence. Leaders may need to take time off themselves to take care of their own health

and family members. Ensure you have coverage, even if it's temporary, for people to cover key roles.

Data protection and storing information: Remote working means inevitably moving data into public spaces and increasing the risk of data being misplaced. In order to prevent data protection obligations from being breached, employers should remind employees about handling confidential data, passwords, shredding and other home security measures.

Performance management: It is important to consider how performance will be managed and measured in a remote work setting, employers should take into account people's circumstances where necessary.

Employee engagement: Employee engagement will be critical for productivity and profitability. Ethical issues relating to how you support your employees and society during a crisis will have implications on your business reputation and employer brand in the long-term.

IT systems: Employers should assess how their IT systems and temporary arrangements are working, including if the IT systems and support teams can handle the number of staff working remotely. Also if additional or replacement equipment is needed, how this could be delivered. Employers should guide employees on effectively leveraging email, instant messaging and internal social media platforms to drive efficient usage.