Remote and flexible working

This toolkit is designed as a practical guide for employers introducing any form of flexible working.
Remote and flexible working toolkit

Rolling out flexible working for your business

A four-stage process can be followed by organisations to introduce flexible working practices, including remote and hybrid working. An adapted process can be used to evaluate ongoing flexible work practices.

- Stage 1 - Plan
- Stage 2 - Test
- Stage 3 - Implement
- Stage 4 - Evaluate

Further supporting information can be found in the Employer hub on www.ibec.ie.

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## Contents

Remote and flexible working toolkit  
Contents  

### Introduction

What is flexible working?  
Remote working  
   - Benefits of remote working  
   - Challenges of remote working  
Hybrid working  
Compressed hours  
Job sharing  
Part time working  
   - The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001  
   - Prohibition on penalisation  
Flexitime  
Term time working and sabbaticals  
Four day working week  
Rolling out flexible working for your business

### Stage 1: Plan

Stage 1: Plan  
   - Operational impact  
   - Costs and budget  
   - Legal and commercial obligations  
   - Workforce factors  
   - Cultural fit  
   - Project management

### Stage 2: Test

Stage 2: Test  
Pilot study

### Stage 3: Implement

Stage 3: Implement  
Workplace communications  
   - Organisational culture  
   - Communicating effectively  
   - The communication channel  
Meetings  
Remote and hybrid working  
Team communications  
Onboarding new starters  
Cultural and context  
Technical content
Social connection
Evaluation
Managing performance
  Focusing on outputs as a performance measure
  Goal setting
  One to one meeting
  Performance Feedback
  Role of recognition
Employee relations
  Managing underperformance
  Conducting investigations
  Promoting positive employee relations
HR policies and procedures
  Compliance with working time legislation
  Policy on Employment Equality
  Diversity and inclusion
  Policy on workplace bullying
  Expenses policy
  Policy on data protection and cyber security
Health and Safety
  Obligations under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations and ergonomic assessments
  Lone working and managing emergency procedures.
Designing the flexible working policy
  Contracts and agreements
Stage 4: Evaluate
  Stage 4: Evaluate
  Employee Wellbeing
Appendix I Remote Working
  Key factors to consider for remote working applications
  The role
  The person
  Working environment
  Other considerations?
Appendix II Sample forms
  Sample Flexible Working Request Form
Appendix III Sample policies
  Sample Right to Disconnect Policy
  Sample Flexible and Remote Working Policy
  Sample Workplace Communications Charter
Introduction

Flexibility has long been valued by employers and employees for its role in supporting service delivery and work life balance. Flexible work practices are a key part of the evolving and dynamic workplace of the future, where flexibility features heavily in both how and where work is performed. Remote working has taken centre stage after the events of 2020. While initially mandated by public health guidance, it is clear that remote working has now gained a foothold as a key flexible work practice. A move to hybrid working (a blend of working from home and other locations such as the office or remote work hub) will likely become the dominant form in many organisations, when public health guidance allows.

The ability to offer flexible working will vary from organisation to organisation depending on the nature of the industry and the jobs roles. This toolkit outlines the main flexible work practices and a process for introducing and evaluating these work practices over time. As the organisation’s needs and employee expectations change from time to time, this toolkit can be used to revisit and tailor the suite of flexible work practices available. Ibec research on the incidence of flexible work practices by company size, industry, region, ownership and turnover can be found in the research section of the Ibec website.
What is flexible working?

Flexible working is a collective term used to cover a variety of working arrangements that depart from the traditional 9 to 5, Monday to Friday working week at a static work location. In 2019, the Work-life Balance Directive (EU) 2019/1158 came into force. The aim of the Directive is to improve access to family leave and improve flexible work arrangements for workers who are parents or carers. In 2020, COVID-19 had a profound effect on the ways in which organisations work, further accelerating the development of flexible working as part of our future workplaces.

The most common types of flexible working arrangements which will be addressed in this guide are as follows:

- Remote working and hybrid working
- Compressed hours
- Flexitime
- Job-sharing
- Part-time working
- Term-time working
- Four-day working week

Remote working

Remote working is a term that applies when, on a regular basis, an employee is working from home, working in a co-working space or working in some other location that is away from the employee’s primary place of work. Remote Working is used interchangeably with terms such as e-working, teleworking and home working.

The 2019 research paper, Remote Work in Ireland, was published by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation as part of the government’s commitments under Future Jobs Ireland 2019. This research paper noted the lack of data on the prevalence of remote work in Ireland at the time. Results of a pilot study undertaken by the CSO in 2018 were cited. The results of this pilot found that 18% of respondents worked from home, mostly one or two days per week. This aligned with earlier findings in the 2015 EU-OSHA Survey of 49,000 Workplaces, which found that 13% of EU employees worked from home on a regular basis.

With the onset of COVID-19, remote working increased exponentially across the globe when employers requested employees to work from home where possible. Research published by the Central Statistics office in May 2020 found that of those who reported that their employment situation had been affected by COVID-19, 34% had started working from home.

The experience of home working since March 2020, has greatly increased the expectation that remote working will become a prominent work practice in Ireland. The publication of the National Remote Work Strategy in January 2021 confirmed government’s commitment to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace. The strategy is built on three pillars with key underpinning conditions to support them.

(i) Creating a conducive environment for the adoption of remote work.
(ii) Develop and leverage the infrastructure for remote work.
(iii) Build a remote work policy and guidance framework for policy makers.

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1 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158
2 Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2), European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), 2015
3 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elec19/employmentandlifeeffectsofcovid-19/
Key employment related developments outlined in the new strategy include the intention to publish a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect. This was subsequently published on 1 April 2021. This new code is addressed later in this guide under compliance with working time legislation.

The Strategy also contains a commitment to introduce legislation by Q3 2021 to give employees the right to request remote working. The existing e-working tax-free payment that employers can make to cover an employee’s expenses when working from home will be reviewed along with tax arrangements for employers where remote working is facilitated. Any changes arising from these reviews will be encompassed in Budget 2022.

Benefits of remote working

In recent years, remote working has been recognised as a means of attracting and retaining key talent and was largely driven by employees seeking a more flexible work/life balance. The many benefits of remote working for employees, employers and society at large are now driving planning for longer term remote working. These include.

• Wider access to talent as location can be removed as a barrier.
• Attracting talent to the organisation where candidates are seeking working arrangements that enable them to balance work and personal commitments better.
• Increased retention rates amongst existing employees as remote working can help reduce staff turnover. This can be particularly valuable where specialised workers may be difficult to recruit or retain.
• Improved productivity arising from reduced distractions and interruptions where the employee undertakes focused work. Reduced commuting times can contribute to higher productivity levels.
• Enhanced flexibility for the business and/or to meet customer needs. Remote working can also enhance business continuity enabling a business to continue to function where inclement weather or other external events occur.
• Cost effectiveness may arise in the longer term from a reduction in costs due to reduced overheads, however, the initial setup costs will need to be factored in.
• Improves equality and inclusion as remote working can be an ideal platform for reasonable accommodation where applicable and can be attractive to certain groups where labour market participation is low (e.g. persons with children or caring responsibilities, persons with disabilities).
• Provides greater work autonomy for employees as remote workers tend to have greater job control and autonomy, leading to better job satisfaction.
• Improves sustainability due to the reduction in commuting and reduce the pressure for office space and accommodation in towns and cities. Remote working can help increase regional employment and lower carbon emissions.

Challenges of remote working

Whilst individual performance is often improved, supervision and management of remote workers may be more complex. The joint ILO-Eurofound report on Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work found that those working remotely generally

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work longer hours than the average employee who works on-site only. In addition, the report added that the remote working arrangement can be informal, and the additional hours worked are sometimes unpaid. This can present risks under the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 for employers and/or may impact the employee’s physical or mental wellbeing.

Other challenges that may arise in relation to remote working include:

- Adoptions to the existing performance management system may be needed for employees who work remotely, including how performance is measured. Where underperformance occurs, supervision may need to be adjusted. Managers may need training to develop the skills needed to support collaboration and a positive team dynamic when team members are working remotely.

- Virtual communication is very different to in-person communication. In order to ensure that effective communications continue for a remote workforce, new technology and new channels of communication may be needed, along with training and policies to support their usage.

- Innovation, collaboration and team dynamic may suffer where team members are not meeting face-to-face. Impromptu and unplanned conversations can help drive idea generation and foster closer working relationships with immediate team members and those outside of the immediate team/department. Connecting with a wider group of colleagues can help promote a sense of belonging for employees.

- Remote working is dependent on broadband coverage and connectivity.

- Employees need strong IT skills to work remotely. Employers need to invest in the right technology, communication platforms and training for this to occur.

- Work allocation may need to be amended for a remote workforce to ensure that employees are clear on their deliverables and priorities. Where there is a lack of clarity on duties or an inefficient system of working, this may lead to disproportionate time being spent on low value tasks.

- Remote working can be isolating for employees, particularly where they are working long periods alone.

- The risk of data breaches, cyber security risks and challenges in maintaining control of personal and confidential data is higher with remote working.

- The scope of the workplace under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act extends to remote working and employers need to take steps to assess and manage work activities and workspaces for remote workers.

- Employers have a legal responsibility to ensure that employees’ hours of work are compliant with the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, including employees’ entitlement to rest breaks and rest periods. Employers also have a responsibility to keep record of employees’ hours worked. These responsibilities can be more challenging to adhere to when the employee is no working on-site.

- Remote working can present challenges to an organisational culture, whereby staff who work remotely need longer or have difficulties in understanding the subtleties of the ways of working and the behavioural norms that exist in the business. Organisations will need to take proactive steps to ensure that the culture is disseminated to remote colleagues and protected from any dilution that may occur when a workforce is dispersed.

- It is important to assess the full cost of equipping and maintaining a home office at the outset and that this is built into the organisation’s remote working plans.

- Employees may also have a number of concerns in relation to remote working including:
Career development and opportunities; a fear that “out of sight, out of mind” may result in reduction in learning and promotional opportunities.

Professional and social isolation: not everyone enjoys working from home and social isolation may lead to demotivation. Employees will need suitable workspaces within their home where they can work uninterrupted.

Home and work conflicts: the benefit of fewer office-based distractions may be counterbalanced by a potential increase in family interruptions and a blurring of the boundaries between work and family life may lead to increased stress levels.

In addition to or as a replacement for full time remote working, other types of flexible working arrangements may present better options for some organisations.

**Hybrid working**

Hybrid working, also known as blended working, refers to a working arrangement whereby an employee works partially from home and partially on-site, or from a remote work hub or other location. The employee’s working time will be spread across these locations on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, as agreed with their employer.

While hybrid working is an opportunity to address some of the challenges outlined above that apply to full time remote working, hybrid working also presents new challenges for organisations to consider as follows.

- The allocation of an employee’s time between working from home and working on-site will need to be managed. Certain work activities will be more suited to home working, such as administration tasks, report writing and data analysis. Other activities which require team collaboration, rigorous discussion or group input may be better conducted in person. Governing principles that apply to a team or department can be developed to assist managers and staff in this area.

- Ensuring equitable visibility and participation for staff members, regardless of whether they are working from home, on-site or from another location will have to be managed on an ongoing basis. Proactive steps will be needed to ensure that any bias in favour of those whose are present on-site is addressed. Managing hybrid team meetings and the sharing of knowledge and opportunities will have to be tailored to ensure a level playing field for staff regardless of work location.

**Compressed hours**

A compressed working week is where a full-time employee works longer days for part of the week or for a number of weeks, with a day(s) off each week, or a day(s) off in each fortnight.

For example, if the normal hours worked per week are 35 hours, then the employee may work 8.75 hours over four days and have the fifth day off, instead of working 7 hours over five days. Alternatively, the arrangement may be spread over two weeks, so that in the first week employees work five days of 8.75 hours and in the second week, three days of 8.75 with two days off. There are many variations to the arrangements that can be made. It is important to note that an employer must abide by the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Under this legislation, over the normal reference period of four months, an employee must not work more than 48 hours per week. Employees who work on compressed hours must also receive their rest breaks in line with this legislation. For further information on this legislation, see the section in this guide on HR policies relating to working time obligations.

**Job sharing**

Job-sharing is an arrangement that involves dividing one full-time position into two or more positions while all the rights and privileges attached to the full-time position are retained on a pro-rata basis determined by the number of hours that each employee works. [Ibec research](https://www.ibec.ie/) from 2020 found that job sharing was more prevalent in larger companies,
occurring in 32% of companies employing between 250 and 499 employees and 42% of companies employing over 500 employees. The most common ways in which jobs are divided are by alternating weeks, by morning and afternoon or by two equal periods of two and a half days per week each. In offering part-time working, employers should be familiar with the legislation governing part-time work (The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001). This legislation covers all part-time workers and is addressed in the next section on part-time working.

Jobsharers need to have the ability to build close and effective working relationships as well as being able to maintain a high level of communication, with clear systems for communicating regularly so that no aspect of the shared work is overlooked. This may require an agreement between the employees for a period of overlapping working time to ensure that both parties are fully briefed in relation to the work in progress. Other scenarios that need to be anticipated in advance and an agreed protocol put in place include, short term absenteeism of one party, long term absence of one party (e.g. maternity leave) and resignation or internal job move by one party.

Part time working

Part-time working is one of the most common types of flexible working arrangements. Ibec research from 2020 found that it was present in 48% of respondent organisations. Part-time working can take many forms and therefore can be adjusted to suit most employees and organisations.

Some part-time working arrangements allow employees to work shorter hours every day; other arrangements allow employees to work less than the normal number of work days each week.

The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001

In offering part-time working, employers should be familiar with the legislation governing part-time work (The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001). This legislation covers all part-time workers; however, an exemption from the application of the legislation does exist in respect of casual part-time employees. The Act defines a part-time worker as an employee whose normal hours of work are less than those of a comparable full-time employee and sets out particular rights and entitlements for part-time workers. The Act provides that a part-time employee cannot, in respect of their remuneration and conditions of employment, be treated in a less favourable manner than a comparable fulltime employee.

Prohibition on penalisation

Employers should also be aware of the prohibition on penalisation of part time workers that is provided for under the Act. An employee will be considered to have been penalised if they have been dismissed, suffered any changes in their conditions of employment or any unfair treatment (including selection for redundancy) or have been the subject of any other action prejudicial to his or her employment for any of the reasons listed in the legislation. This list includes penalisation for refusing to accede to a request to transfer from full-time work to part-time work, or vice-versa. Further guidance on the provisions of this legislation can be found in Ibec Guidance on part time work, available here.

Employers should also consider the Code of Practice on access to part time working which is available on the website of the Workplace Relations Commissioner here. There is no statutory entitlement to part-time work under the Code of Practice, the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 or elsewhere in Irish employment law. However, under the Code an employer must consider an application to transfer from full time to part-time work. The Code outlines the process regarding how applications for part-time working are to be handled. The Code recommends as best practice that organisations introduce, in consultation with their employees, new policies or review existing policies, to facilitate effective access to and performance of part-time work and specify how part-time working arrangements will operate in the organisation.
An employee may also request a change to the working hours and/or patterns of work for a set period following his or her return to work from parental leave. This entitlement is provided for under the Parental Leave Acts 1998 – 2019 and further guidance is available [here](#).

**Flexitime**

Flexitime systems operate on the basis that employees work, on average, a standard number of hours per week, but may vary their time worked on any particular day or week, as long as a core number of hours are completed. As a result, hours may be varied to suit the needs of the employee as well as the workload. As part of the flexitime arrangement, a “core” time is specified when all employees are required to be at work. Usually, this core time spans from 10am to 4pm. Around this core time, employees choose the hours they wish to work and can therefore determine their own starting and finishing times. The total working day, including core time and flexible time, may for example extend from 7am to 7pm. Individuals may work a number of hours above or below their normal working hours during this period. Any hours worked above or below the normal weekly working hours are credited or debited and may be carried over to the next accounting period. There is usually a limit set on the number of debit or credit hours that may be carried over to the following period.

Some schemes also have a flexible lunch period within a window of two hours. Employees are free to choose how long they stay at lunch within the stipulated minimum (usually 30 minutes) and maximum (usually 90 minutes).

Most organisations allow individuals who build up enough credit hours to take them as a full day’s holiday. This can be limited to one ‘flexi day’ per month. Flexitime systems must comply with the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 in terms of working hours and breaks. Further information on the Working Time legislation is available later in this guide and on the Ibec website.

**Term time working and sabbaticals**

Term-time working is a form of working that allows employees to take unpaid leave for certain portions of the year. Traditionally, this type of leave took its name from periods of unpaid leave granted to working parents during their children’s school holidays. However, in order to be compliant with employment equality legislation, an employer must open this type of leave arrangement to all categories of employees. Employees who wish to take a period of unpaid leave for reasons such as traveling, study or family time should also be afforded the opportunity to apply for a period of unpaid leave. The option to take a career break/sabbatical may be an appropriate option for these employees.

This form of leave enables an employer to retain the skills of employees, while providing them with annual periods of unpaid leave, which allow them to pursue personal or domestic objectives. The period of leave is generally continuous, usually varying from a minimum of four weeks to a maximum of 13 weeks. An employer may also choose to provide this type of leave arrangement at different times of the year, rather than simply limiting it to the summer months.

The period of term-time leave or sabbatical is given in addition to normal annual leave. There are also two options for payment. A reduced salary can be paid over the twelve-month period e.g. nine month’s pay is spread over the twelve months, or an employee can be paid over nine months and receive no payment during the three months additional leave.

**Four day working week**

More recently, a four-day working week has been part of the public discourse on flexible working options. A four-day working week entails full-time employees clocking approximately 30 hours per week instead of 39, with no loss of pay. There are many reasons why this option may be appealing in current times.
A shorter working week could allow parents to manage childcare responsibilities, allow workplaces to stagger attendance and, theoretically, it can open additional opportunities for increasing labour market participation. Advocates of the proposal also refer to the benefits of reduced carbon emissions through a reduction in commuting.

The idea behind this practice is that whilst working hours reduce, productivity increases or remains the same, at a minimum. As a relatively new concept, the emerging evidence is mixed and for some organisations the complexity of managing a workforce across a five-day week has been prohibitive. In addition, there is some debate around whether this approach actually reduces the working week or compresses the working week into four days which is more akin to a compressed hours arrangement.
Rolling out flexible working for your business

This toolkit sets out four stages to introduce flexible working in your business:

Plan
Test
Implement
Evaluate

Whilst many businesses had some form of flexible working in place for employees, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many businesses to operate remotely and flexibly with little or no planning. What was envisaged in the initial stages as a temporary response to a crisis has continued. As workplaces adapt, requests from employees for permanent adjustments to how they work are likely.

Transitioning to permanent arrangements will require careful planning. This four-stage process should be used by businesses who are introducing or, in some cases, continuing flexible working.
Stage 1:
Plan
Stage 1: Plan

Planning involves firstly identifying what types of flexible working your business can offer and to whom. Organisations must then identify the steps to be taken to progress on the option(s) selected. Factors which will impact on the decision to offer any type of flexible working will include.

Operational impact

It is critical to consider the impact on service provision, client interactions and business continuity. Every organisation has different operational requirements and flexible working should only be considered where it is supportive of these. Organisations should consider the impact of the new work practice on customers (both internal/external). Consideration should be given to any upcoming business plans which could be affected by a new flexible working arrangement (e.g. renegotiation of contracts with key customers, restructuring or redeployment of staff).

The size and scale of the organisation will also be a factor. Flexible work arrangements may be more easily facilitated in larger work forces where staff cover is more easily available. Organisations should refer to existing data on staff absences (including absences for statutory and non-statutory leaves) to estimate the average ongoing headcount levels. This data will help inform the extent and type of flexibility on work hours that can be made available.

Costs and budget

Costs, both direct and indirect must also be considered. Flexible working can lead to additional costs in administration, new technology, supervision and investment in equipment (e.g. new time and attendance systems, home office set-up). Many flexible working arrangements will involve a higher utilisation of technology and therefore familiarity with the existing systems and the compatible additions available on the market is important. Therefore, the associated implications of training staff on the use of new systems must be considered. Employers should be clear on the economic costs and benefits of introducing a new work practice in advance.

Legal and commercial obligations

All relevant legal and regulatory considerations which apply to the organisation or sector must be taken into consideration in the implementation of new work practices. This may also include any quality standards, commercial agreements, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and other operational factors.


Workforce factors

The nature of the job roles across the organisation will determine the types of flexible work practices that are suitable. For example, office-based roles, where the work can be done independently will be more suited to remote working than other roles. When examining the possibilities for flexible working, employers should consider what proportion of roles are suitable to the proposed flexible working arrangement(s). Where, the arrangement is only feasible for a limited number of roles, the employer may wish to invest in a different type of flexible working which can accessed by a wider proportion of staff. The demographics of the workforce are another important consideration. Certain types of flexible working are more attractive to persons at different life stages.
Robust and up-to-date information will influence decisions on flexible working. The following information will assist in the planning process.

- Headcount by department/division.
- Absence levels (including statutory leave, company leave and other forms of absence such as sickness absence).
- Job descriptions for the different job roles/teams and an understanding of the tasks/deliverables for each.
- Staff location (including different company sites, employees who travel for work).
- Types of employment contracts including fixed term and part time.
- Feedback on existing informal or formal flexible working arrangements. Employee feedback may include staff surveys, return-to-work meetings and exit interviews. Focus groups can be arranged to gain further insight in to staff preferences in relation to flexible working.
- Manager observations and experience of flexible working practices in the business will also be important. Any existing workflow issues need to be considered (e.g. where a team/department has experienced resource issues or missed deadlines). What are the possible implications for teamworking, general flexibility and quality of service?
- Costing to include investment in training, equipment, new software and indirect costs such as impact on service delivery.

Cultural fit

The design of flexible work arrangements should align with the organisation’s mission and culture. Each workplace has a unique culture, and every organisation focuses on different areas of the employee experience. There may, for example, be diversity & inclusion initiatives, mental health and well-being initiatives or a focus on talent development.

Industry trends may also be considered where the employer is anticipating that flexible work options will be useful in the attraction or retention of employees. To access a broader pool of talent, options such as remote working or part time working can be considered.

Project management

Introducing and managing flexible working requires ongoing management and resources. As there are many aspects to consider and manage, it is important that there is ongoing oversight and that a clear strategic direction is maintained. Overall responsibility should be clearly assigned, with the involvement of key stakeholders and functional experts as needed.

Stakeholders consulted for the project should have expertise in HR, IT, Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and operations. The financial impact(s) of flexible working and the ongoing costs is a key consideration, especially for small and medium enterprises.
Stage 2: Test
Stage 2: Test

It is important to test a flexible working practice before launching. This will enable your organisation to identify unforeseen impacts and challenges. Whilst the need for testing some forms of flexible working options may be reduced because such work practices were temporarily introduced during the pandemic, employers can use this time to understand what worked well, what needs refining and what did not work. For businesses in the future, it is good practice to test flexible working options on a cross section of roles in a business prior to their introduction.

The business case for introducing the flexible working practice(s) should be documented at the outset. Having clarity on why the new work practice is being considered will assist in subsequent discussions and decisions. It is important to understand the anticipated impact of introducing the arrangement on business operations and to identify the economic costs and benefits. Consideration of the operational, strategic, people and other impacts should be undertaken. If there are no measurable gains, organisations should reconsider the value of introducing the new work practice. In undertaking this exercise, the areas set out under the planning process at Stage 1 should be considered.

Pilot study

As with any new initiative, a new flexible working practice needs the commitment of management and the support of staff to succeed. The success of the initiative will especially depend on the support and commitment of line managers.

A pilot study is a trial run of the flexible work practice on a smaller scale. It will enable the organisation to identify issues that were not previously apparent and to fine tune the proposal before launching to the wider staff group. It will help ensure that the detail and processes underpinning the new work practice are comprehensive and address most scenarios. It is useful where the new work practice is a significant departure from the current arrangements and/or where the success of the new work practice hinges on new untested technology or service providers etc.

For the pilot study to derive value and learnings for all concerned, it will need to run for a period of time that allows for different scenarios to arise. This period may be for up to six months depending on the situation.

A pilot study will entail the same steps involved in creating the formal flexible work policy and will include:

- Identify a range of job roles and agree participants for the pilot.
- Identify the parameters to be used for measuring the success of the project (e.g. financial, quality, response time, job satisfaction, productivity).
- Ensure a realistic timeframe to understand and resolve any issues.
- Feedback process – gather feedback on a regular formal basis from all involved.

The outcome of the pilot can help determine what adjustments are needed before proceeding.
Stage 3: Implement
Stage 3: Implement

Reimagining a new way of working presents many possibilities and opportunities. The knock-on effects of flexible work practice are considerable. To ensure that a new work practice delivers the most benefit, it is important to consider all of the supporting policies and processes that are needed.

The HR, employment law and employee relations impacts of flexible working are addressed in the following sections. Emphasis will be placed on remote and hybrid working as two of the most popular work practices to be introduced and devolved in the coming months and years. The following sections will examine

- Workplace communications.
- Onboarding new employees.
- Managing performance.
- Employee relations.
- HR policies and procedures.
  - Recording keeping and management of attendance.
  - Employment Equality.
  - Workplace Bullying.
  - Expenses.
- Data Protection and cyber security.
- Health and Safety.

Workplace communications

Effective workplace communications are essential for managing a flexible workforce, especially where there a number of flexible working arrangements in place. Changes in work location and/or working patterns will impact the effectiveness of existing communication channels and therefore, adjustments will be needed.

Where employees’ work hours are reduced or vary due to flexible work practices, communications will have to be agile to enable all staff to access information through different channels, at different times and from different locations. It is important that all employees know which communication channel is used for what specific purpose and that there is a central place to source company information, updates, and so forth.

Effective workplace communications are important to ensure operational efficiency. On a day-to-day basis, an organisation functions through the ongoing exchange of information, where commitments are made and delivered on.

The design and ongoing management of workplace communications should be linked to organisational strategy, with prioritisation and investment in areas that will contribute to the organisation’s mission.

Organisational culture

Organisational culture can be described as ‘how things get done around here’. It will be different in every organisation, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact traits that apply in each instance. Culture is reinforced through communication and behavioural norms, which can be informal and undocumented.

Much of an organisations’ culture is conveyed and upheld through the patterns and style of workplace communications. The introduction of flexible work practices can unbalance the
existing communications and messaging that are key to transmitting the culture. It is important for organisations to proactively address this so that employees who work flexibly, especially new joiners, have a clear understanding of the organisational culture. While transmission of an organisation’s culture may have happened organically when colleagues were working side by side, planning may be needed to support this to happen across different work locations and work patterns.

People managers play a key role in modelling the right behaviours and setting the right tone and frequency of communication. A culture of trust is key to enable flexible working to succeed and managers can actively demonstrate high levels of trust in their interactions with staff to support this.

**Communicating effectively**

Workplace communications happen across multiple levels and channels, both formal and informal. Effective communication occurs when messaging is consistent across all of these. Inconsistent, poor or incomplete messaging can lead to misunderstanding, confusion and even distrust. This will damage employee engagement and potentially affect employee relations in a business.

The best communication is frequent, transparent and reliable. Effective communication is timely, relevant and delivered in a language, format and channel that assists users to understand the key message. The language used should be appropriate to the context with scope for acronyms and short hands to be used in routine internal communications.

The quality and frequency of communication throughout the working day is important for every employee and manager to consider. All must be aware that when communication is occurring without the usual cues of body language and tone of voice, that it is critical that the wording is unambiguous. Where there is a heavy reliance on written communication between colleagues, it is helpful to over-communicate to ensure that the message is received and understood. While lengthy written messages should be avoided where possible, it is important that written messages include context to aid understanding. This can be achieved through providing supporting materials and background information that staff can access.

Organisations function best where there is clarity of expectation. Having a sense of purpose at work is a key contributor to employee motivation. A clear vision for the organisation which is brought to life in daily conversations will support this. Effective communication is two-way, with employees having clear channels to access and ongoing opportunity to share views and to be heard.

Effective workplace communication is designed with the audience in mind. Each organisation will have multiple audiences with multiple needs. To understand the effectiveness of current communications and to identify areas for improvement, it is useful to understand the user experience. There are number of options to seek employee feedback on workplace communications including surveys, focus groups and inviting feedback through existing meetings and one-to-ones.

Over time, communication with managers and colleagues can become very task focused when teams cease to work side by side. In the absence of the normal cues, these types of communications could run the risk of being demotivating and impersonal. Work relationships can be impacted. Over time, an employee’s network of contacts within the business can shrink. This loss of casual contacts and unplanned conversations can negatively impact on innovation and idea generation. It can also lead to feelings of social isolation.

It is important therefore, that managers and employees develop the skills to enable a mix of communication types from task-focused to relationship building. Effort should be made to ensure that person-to-person interactions are happening whether through on-site meetings, video calls or phone calls. The routine informal exchanges that occur between staff are important to foster a sense of belonging and this is a critical means by which employees get
to understand the culture of an organisation. To support informal communications across the business, an organisation can invest in separate communication platforms where employees can post informal messages.

To develop and nurture effective workplace communications, training may be needed. This can be different for employee and people managers, with the latter group potentially needing training on topics such as having effective one-to-one meetings and managing dispersed teams.

Employers will need to invest in the right communication tools to enable effective communication and collaboration to occur. The full value of these tools will only be recognised where employees understand and use the full capabilities of the technology in question. Critically, all users need to use the communication tool in the same manner for the same types of communication for full efficiency to be achieved. Managers and employees should be aware of the human instinct to default to using the communication tool that is most familiar.

As remote and flexible working becomes more embedded in work cultures, the need for strong, clear writing skills will be essential. Where teams no longer work side by side, an increasing amount of communication will be in written form through various communications channels. Research shows that over 70% of communication is non-verbal. Therefore, there is significant scope for a message to be misinterpreted and/or for a negative slant to be applied to a hastily worded email. Standardised message templates and sample communications can be useful to demonstrate the recommended length, style and tone of common message types.

Employees should have clear points of contact when at work and access to the necessary stakeholders for consultations and decisions. In order to bed down a clear understanding of communication practices within the business, regular tips and short training sessions can help develop good routines.

Clarity around communications is also helpful to ensure that staff can adhere to their agreed work hours and removes the necessity to log in after hours. Where teams work across different time zones, it is helpful to have clear understandings across the team on when colleagues can be contacted. It is also important that there is uninterrupted time built into the workday so that employees can focus on their work. Employees may have different experiences and expectations in relation to communications with work colleagues and therefore managers should ensure that there is a consistent approach and that bad habits do not develop.

**The communication channel**

Increasingly organisations have multiple communication channels in place, including email, phone, text, meetings (both virtual and face to face) and communication platforms that allow for chat and messaging on multiple channels.

Email is one of the most common types of office communication. However, where it is relied upon exclusively for all types of communications from business updates to daily chat, the tone and input of a message can be lost. Key messages can also be missed where inboxes are overflowing with messages. On the other hand, having multiple communication platforms can result in duplication of messages and employees may be using different platforms in different ways.

It is recommended that guidance is provided to employees to ensure that they know the most appropriate form of communication for each platform. For example, email works best for longer, detailed communications and is suitable for customer/client communication. It is best that email is used for non-urgent messages and that other protocols are in place for communicating time sensitive information. Face to face communication is the richest form of communication as it allows tone of voice and body language to be read. It is appropriate for complex or contentious discussions, where major change is being communicated. Face
to face communication is best for supporting real time enquiry and debate. It is also useful for relationship building.

Different styles of communication will also be appropriate for different platforms. These tips can be addressed in team meetings, one to ones and through providing samples in a communications charter/guide.

Meetings

Meetings are very common communication tool in organisations and habits can accumulate over time that reduce their efficiency. Inefficiencies can arise where frequent meetings are happening with large numbers of attendees. The following can support more effective meeting practices.

- Remove or repurpose any unnecessary meetings. Can a meeting be replaced with a written update from team members or a newsletter? Ensure that meetings are as short as possible, and that scheduling allows adequate time for attendees to move between meeting rooms (both real and virtual).
- Have a clear purpose for each meeting. Routinely restate the purpose so that attendees are clear and that the purpose can be adjusted over time.
- Invite only essential attendees to a meeting and allow attendees to decline to attend where the meeting topic is outside of their remit.
- Have a clear agenda for each meeting so that attendees are clear on what will be discussed. Start each meeting on time, stick to the agenda and finish on time. This will promote the best use of time during the allotted time slot and hinder inefficient practices such as late starts and straying off topic.
- Taking notes during the meeting and documenting clear action points will support efficiency over time. Various online tools can assist in contemporary note taking and sharing of action points.
- Training to ensure that meeting organisers are equipped to design agendas and moderate discussions.

Remote and hybrid working

Where employees work remotely on a full or part-time basis, particular effort needs to be taken to support communications. The lack of face-to-face contact can make collaboration more challenging. Specific virtual collaboration tools may be needed.

Communications in hybrid working require particular care. It is important that those who are working from locations outside of the office are supported with the same level of visibility as those who are on-site. Meeting protocols can be put in place to ensure those who are not in the room have an equal contribution. This will be important for hybrid teams.

Where teams work in a remote or hybrid manner, it is useful to document the processes and tools and have a centralised location for information. A document management system that gives staff access to relevant, up-to-date information across different locations and times will support staff to access information quickly. A document management system should be easily navigable with a good search function with information tagged in a manner that allows users to find the required information easily. This helps reduce the need to ask constant questions throughout the day enabling remote workers to work more efficiently.

Asynchronous communication is communication without the need for an immediate response. It is especially useful where teams work remotely or across different time zones. Asynchronous communication can take many forms including shared documents for ongoing work, sharing ongoing updates on progress so team members are aware of
progress. The ability to access FAQ documents, recordings of company briefings and pre-recording training videos are other forms of asynchronous communication.

**Team communications**

Ensuring effective teamwork can be a challenge when team members are working flexibly. Specific steps should be taken to support team communications to ensure that collaboration, information sharing, and updates happen smoothly and consistently. The nature of the work, the frequency of deadlines, the organisational culture and the tools available will all affect the quality of the communications that occur.

Shared calendars are useful to enable team members to see each other’s availability. Where teams work remotely, it is useful for team members to include availability during working hours in their calendars, so that colleagues know the best times to get in touch. Alongside this, it is important that everyone in the team is using the same out-of-office protocols and updates their email and voicemail regularly.

Managers should take steps to foster good team relationships. Team meetings and team activities can include a focus on getting to know one another and informal exchanges can be enabled so that this happens. Team members should be encouraged to prioritise relationship building with their colleagues. Where these underlying relationships are in place, it helps greatly with ensuring that a message is understood. To build relationships, face-to-face meetings, video calls and/or conversation are important to build rapport.

In order to examine this area in more depth, the following can be considered

- What is the existing default mode(s) of communication in the company/team/department? (e.g. Email, Phone..)
- What types of communication happen currently and at what frequency?
- What is the purpose of these communications and are they working effectively?
- Are there unnecessary communications, inconsistent communications or communication gaps?
- Are existing communication tools being used in the best manner and to the full extent of their capability. Will new communication tools/channels be needed?
- Which channel/tool should be used for which kind of communication?
- What are the expected style and content of communications for each communication channel as well as the expected response times?
- Is everyone receiving the communications or are there gaps with some communication channels?

The next step is a communications policy or charter where the organisation can address the following:

- How will managers communicate to remote and on-site teams?
- What channels will be used for what communication method?
- How will employees communicate with each other?
- How is information stored and centralised?
• The style(s) of communication that will be required. What response times are expected? What level of detail is required in different forms of communication?

• Standardised messages for common events

• The challenges of miscommunication can be addressed through providing examples, tips and advice.

It may be necessary to undertake an audit of current communications practices to understand where improvements can be made and how existing tools are being used prior to creating a communication charter. A sample workplace communications charter is available in the appendices.

Checklist for communications

☐ Have we ensured that the correct communication tools exist to enable robust communications?

☐ Have we ensured that managers and staff have a common understanding of how to use the communication tools available?

☐ Have we ensured that all the different types of communications that happen in the organisation can continue to happen when employees work flexibly?

☐ Are we satisfied that there are no communication gaps or practices of inconsistent or over communicating?

☐ Have we set clear expectations on expected response times for the different types of communication channels?

Onboarding new starters

Attracting the right candidates to your business can be complex and is impacted by many factors. These factors include the benefits offered with the role and the recruitment experience itself. Flexible work options will be attractive to potential candidates and can operate as a talent retention tool.

The onboarding process is an important step to introduce a new employee to the organisation. It is a key opportunity to show new employees how things are done and to support the development of good working relationships. Where a new employee will not be working alongside their manager and/or colleagues for some or for all of their working week, the onboarding process is critical to enable a successful start in the role.

For employees who will be onboarding remotely and working remotely, the onboarding process will have to be designed to address the absence of in-person communication. Much of the social onboarding of a new joiner was previously enabled through naturally occurring social connection and face-to-face conversations (e.g. shared lunch tables, chats in the corridor). Remote working removes much of the opportunity to decipher body language and hinders the ability to connect to others through informal conversation. It also reduces the employee’s ability to learn the ways of working and to assimilate the organisational culture.

The following are critical areas to cover in the onboarding process.

Cultural and context

Regardless of their background and skillset, when an individual has not worked in an organisation previously, it is important to share the organisational culture with them. This includes conversations about the organisation’s history and brand, how performance is measured, and how career/development opportunities arise.
Organisational culture is a tenuous component to explain, however when employees have
worked in an organisation for some time, they will instinctively understand how things get
done, who to talk to and what the organisational priorities are in practice. Specific and
ongoing conversations with a new starter are needed to share these nuances. Where the
new colleague is working remotely, this detail and context will help the individual to better
understand the how and why behind various pieces of work and interactions. Practical
elements and background context will assist with this understanding and help build a level
of trust which is important for effective remote working.

The onboarding process should include information on the organisation’s mission and
purpose and explain how the individual’s role links to this. Cultivating a sense of purpose in
work helps motivation levels, and this sense of purpose is more critical in a remote context.
Another important aspect to cover is the typical language or lingo in the organisation. Over
time, certain short hands and acronyms come into use and new employees can struggle to
grasp these unless they are explicitly identified and explained.

Technical content

A critical step in the onboarding process is the timely provision of requisite information,
support and equipment. The onboarding process should provide information in a user
friendly and digestible manner. Overloading of information or conflicting messages should
be avoided. Multiple mediums (written, spoken, video, graphics) can be used to support
understanding and make the onboarding a more engaging process.

This sharing of information will commence prior to the first day of employment. Aside from
the employment contract and other key employment policy documents, the organisation
should ensure that a new starter is clear on what their first day will look like before
commencement (e.g. who to contact, who they will meet and what training or meetings are
planned.)

A welcome pack can be provided with key information. This may include information on
company and values, information on facilities such as IT, sports & social activities, login
and passwords, security information, training schedule and topics and a list of key
contacts (including their contact information).

It is important that a remote employee has the right technology and equipment to start
engaging with colleagues from day one. This will include dedicated training and assistance
to assist with using the company IT systems.

A thorough onboarding process will cover the following

• Organisation’s mission and strategy.
• Company policies.
• Key ongoing activities in the organisation and within the new starter’s
department/team.
• Introductions to key personnel/services (HR, IT, facilities).
• Introductions to teammates and other colleagues with whom the new employee will
work. Video calls are more effective for introductions. An organisational chart or a
contacts list can help the new starter to retain this information.
• Performance expectations – specific goals (short term and longer term) and how
performance will be measured.
• How and when meetings with team, manager and wider organisational meetings will
occur.
• Communication tools and guidance on how best to use these.
• Information on work hours and flexible work options.

• Information on employment benefits and supports such as EAP. Information on current sports and social planned activities that the employee can join (e.g. book club, online exercise class).

• Communications charter/policy – tips and guidance for communication and reporting.

• Hours of work – core hours, expected availability to colleagues during the day and how to ensure others have sight of availability and non-availability.

• Specific training relating to working from home (including health & safety, GDPR, data security, IT skills, dress code and etiquette for video calls if applicable).

• Advice/training on managing their working day. Self-management skills are important for remote workers who will need to take a more active role in managing their working day, conduct remote meetings, take proper breaks and stay motivated. Skills in time management and tips on wellbeing can be of value here.

Clarity on performance expectations is critical for any new starter. It is even more critical for a remote worker, because the individual may undertake their work with less supervision or ongoing input from colleagues. Managers should set out clearly what good performance looks like. Detailed job descriptions and a carefully managed probation processes can assist with this. Both longer term goals and short-term goals should be set. Tasks that can be accomplished in a short timeframe are useful to give a new starter a sense of achievement which contributes to an environment of ongoing development.

Performance expectations should be carefully considered in advance and care taken that they are not set too high or too low as either may be demotivating for the new employee. The tasks for the first few days or weeks should be planned in detail so the new employee is not left guessing or disengaged. Deadlines should be explicit, with available resources and supports flagged. New employees should be encouraged to ask questions early and without limitation so that they can get started with their work.

It is also important that the manager schedules regular one-to-one meetings to discuss ongoing work, upcoming projects and to address any questions/queries. Where possible, a face-to-face meeting(s) in the early stages of employment is helpful to building relationships and understanding. It is safer to over-communicate and over-explain in the early stages and to reduce the number of meetings as the new employee settles in.

**Social connection**

Workplaces are locations of social activity. A sense of belonging and loyalty to an organisation is generated not only from compatibility with the company mission and the type of role undertaken, but from a sense of connection to one’s colleagues. When an employee joins an organisation, it is important that they are introduced to and develop relationships with the stakeholders (internally and externally) who they should know to be successful in their role.

To assist with integrating a new employee, the organisation can consider assigning a colleague as a mentor/buddy. This informal relationship is beneficial as it allows the new employee to raise questions that they may not wish to bring to their manager’s attention. It is also a good opportunity for them to get a sense of the day-to-day workings of the business and the organisational culture. Meetings can be arranged on a weekly or fortnightly basis. For colleagues who do not work alongside one another, a virtual coffee or video call can be arranged.

The selection of mentors/buddies should be carefully considered. It is important that the mentor/buddy voluntarily takes on the task and that they are at an equivalent level in the organisation to the new hire. They may be someone with long service and in-depth knowledge of the business, or someone with relatively low service who can recall the typical
questions that arise on joining. These conversations will be confidential and informal with a view to building a trusting relationship over time.

Establishing relationships with the wider team is also important for a new starter and this should be enabled by the manager. This can be addressed through arranging team away-days where colleagues can get to know one another or through scheduling on-site days for remote workers. When these options are not possible, managers can encourage virtual coffees or video calls between teammates who do not work side-by-side. Encouraging team members to share personal interests and hobbies and virtual social activities can also assist staff to get to know one another.

**Evaluation**

Most organisations have some onboarding activities in place. Building on these is important to ensure that new starters, especially those who work remotely are given critical information and support from the outset. Seeking feedback from recent hires can be useful to ascertain where investment is needed in the onboarding process.

The remote onboarding process may be more time consuming as more dedicated conversations will be needed to impart information. The onboarding process may continue informally for months, as the new recruit expands their knowledge and understanding of the business. The line manager plays a critical role from the outset in imparting valuable information and know-how and enabling key connections to be built.

**Checklist for onboarding new starters**

- Does the current onboarding programme cover the necessary cultural, technical and social aspects?
- Is the duration of the onboarding sufficient?
- Is the design of the current onboarding programme efficient? Does it impact information in a timely digestible manner?
- Do we routinely seek feedback from new joiners on the effectiveness of the onboarding process?
- Have any issues arisen with recent joiners where the sharing of information in a more timely, understandable, or clear manner would have helped? (e.g. performance expectations)
- Have we sought manager feedback on the effectiveness of the onboarding programme?
- Does the onboarding programme operate successfully across all roles and working patterns, including remote/hybrid working (where this is available)?
- Are we satisfied that the onboarding process is comprehensive and addresses the options and training needs of persons who will be working flexibly?

**Managing performance**

Where employees are enabled to work flexibly, the organisation’s process for managing performance may need to be adjusted to take account of the following:

- Reduced/variable hours.
- Remote working/working from other locations.
- New or amended performance measures.
The need for consistency of performance management across all staff.

Effective performance management is the process of creating a work environment in which people are enabled to perform to the best of their abilities. This will involve formal performance appraisal, but it also involves more routine performance activities, such as feedback and goal setting which have a significant role to play in enabling high performance.

Organisations must also be sensitive to the informal learning opportunities that arise through daily staff interactions during breaks and a shared office location. It is important to ensure remote workers or those on atypical working patterns do not miss out on these valuable learnings. Alternative strategies can be introduced to share this corporate knowledge.

Remote working works best for certain job roles and job activities (for example where the role has high levels of autonomy and work is apportioned into discrete tasks). Individual personality and working styles also make certain individuals more suited to remote working. (Employees with high levels of intrinsic motivation can adapt better to remote working). A further factor which effects performance in remote working is the level of support, training and enabling tools and systems provided to the employee.

How the organisation manages performance sends a strong message to staff. Where, how and if performance is recognised will inform an employee on their own contribution and value. It is a key demonstrator of organisational culture.

Focusing on outputs as a performance measure

Flexible working may involve new ways of working, new technologies and new work patterns, which can present the opportunity to review the current performance management (PM) system. Where employees are working remotely for the majority of their working week, performance measures that focus more on outputs and deliverables may be more suitable. Traditionally, there is an association between hours spent in the office and perceived performance. However, remote working requires a shift in thinking. If established performance metrics continue to be applied, they may be misleading or even unworkable in some instances.

Performance management of dispersed workforces requires a new approach from people managers. In general, managers of newly remote teams should be wary of perceived underperformance. Considering the pattern of past performance will assist managers to form a balanced view of variations in performance when employees have moved from on-site to remote.

Managers may fear difficulties arising in relation to motivation, discipline and productivity where there is a lack of face-to-face interaction. Over-monitoring of staff may leave employees feeling that they are not trusted. Conversely, lack of any managerial direction may lead to problems with quality or output where an employee feels disconnected and demotivated. These problems can be addressed at the outset through training and ensuring that managers and staff are fully aware of the performance expectations and measurements that will apply in flexible working arrangements. Addressing concerns early on, lays the foundations for building trust, openness, and goodwill.

Goal setting

Formal performance management cycles will involve goal setting. This may happen at the start of the performance review cycle and the individual/team objectives should cascade down from the company strategy and goals. In recent years, there are noted examples of organisations that have moved to updating employee objectives on a regular basis throughout the year to keep pace with the changing demands of the business.

Goal setting should not be simply the preserve of the formal performance management system. Setting short term goals on an ongoing basis, can be an important motivator for
employees. This provides role clarity which enables the employee to reprioritise their work on a daily/weekly basis. This is especially important in a remote working scenario where the employee is generally entrusted with more flexibility to manage their workday. Specific achievable goals contribute to an ongoing sense of accomplishment at work which drives productivity and can cultivate the right atmosphere for development discussions.

One to one meeting

Regular one-on-one meetings play a key role in setting performance expectations. In a remote working scenario, the one-to-one meeting has even greater value as it presents a focused opportunity for the manager and employee to give feedback and to seek feedback. It is normal to become less disciplined about these meetings over time. However, the one-to-one meeting is a key opportunity to have an in-depth discussion, to understand what is happening, to identify areas for development and to grow relationships. The one-to-one meeting is often the most appropriate time for an employee to raise any concerns or challenges that may be concealed when working from home.

For the one-to-one meeting to be effective, the manager needs to set aside the time to be present and tuned in to employees' needs and priorities. One-to-one meetings can be short (15 – 20 minutes) and having a set agenda will ensure preparation on both sides in advance of each meeting. To ensure that productivity do not falter, these meetings are a key tool for managers to set clear expectations and ensure coherence across different work streams. The one-to-one meeting is a well-established format for the manager and team member to discuss goals, ongoing projects and future development.

An effective one-to-one meeting can be highly beneficial for both parties. However, to achieve this, careful planning and commitment is needed from both sides. An effective one-to-one meeting should result in both parties having a clear view of ongoing progress and future objectives. The one-to-one meeting is also a key opportunity to give feedback and to develop relationships.

One-to-one meetings are also time consuming. They take up valuable calendar time and generate additional tasks. In order to derive the maximum value from a one-to-one meeting, preparation is essential, and all actions agreed must be taken. It can take time to build up trust and a number of meetings and adjustments may be needed before the one-to-one meeting is working effectively for both parties. One-to-one meetings can also be emotionally draining on the manager where employees are experiencing challenges in work or personally.

Preparation for one-to-one meeting

Thorough preparation for each one-to-one meeting is essential. Where the manager demonstrates that they have given careful thought to the employee’s progress and commit to ensuring a valuable exchange at the meeting, this will prompt the team member to undertake their own preparation in return. It is important that managers appreciate the value of the one-to-one meeting and invest in its success, rather than simply going through the motions. Productive one-to-one meetings are more likely where both sides can appreciate the positive intentions of the other and where each person feels listened to.

The manager can set the scene for the meeting by creating an agenda in advance. Agendas should ideally have employee input on the topics for discussion. A standard format can be used and where this is a shared document, both sides can insert topics for discussion in advance. This approach allows each person to prepare as needed. Where employees are not used to adding agenda items, they can be encouraged to add content with open questions such as “What do you want to discuss in our next one-on-one meeting?” or “What challenges are you facing?”.

Lengthy agendas are counterproductive and will reduce the effectiveness of the meeting. It is important to remember that the one-to-one meeting is for discussing items that would not normally be discussed in a group setting or in passing conversation. Project and status
updates are generally shared in other forums and therefore may not need in-depth discussion at the one-to-one. Instead, the focus can be on discussing queries, learnings, new opportunities and clarifications relating to the employee’s ongoing work and future work plans.

**Opening the one-to-one meeting**

The one-to-one meeting should begin with a check-in. The manager can put an open question to the employee to ask how they are doing. This light type of exchange, which may include topics such as sport, family and hobbies, can be helpful for building the relationship and getting to know the real person. Managers can build a level of trust by sharing how they are feeling first and thus create the right atmosphere for further discussion.

One-to-one meetings should be focused on the employee, their progress, their challenges and their career interests. The manager should strive to be completely present during the meeting and demonstrate this by ensuring that the time is set aside in their calendar, that all notifications and interruptions are paused and that they give the employee their full attention. Managers should strive to always be on time for the meeting and only cancel as a last resort. Where it is necessary to cancel the meeting, the manager should communicate the reasons for this to the employee along with a rescheduled meeting time.

The effectiveness of one-to-one meetings hinges in their regularity and predictability. Where the employee comes to understand that the meeting will always happen as scheduled, they will be more likely to use the meeting to discuss tricky areas or challenges that they may be experiencing.

Effective listening is critical in the one-to-one meeting. The manager can practice effective listening by acknowledging what the employee is saying (through nodding or verbal signs), by asking clarifying questions and by summarising the employee’s points. Summarising is a very effective technique, and it is useful where the employee has communicated a complex or sensitive message and the manager wants to ensure that they have understood the subtleties of what has been shared. By listening effectively, the manager can pick up on less obvious issues, demonstrate their attentiveness and gain better insight. Where trust has built up, the manager can then ask more directed questions to gain a better understanding where delicate subjects have been raised. The one-to-one meeting is a key opportunity to identify any frustrations and to provide clarification. It can therefore be used to resolve issues as early as possible.

**Individualise the one-to-one meeting.**

When preparing for and conducting the one-to-one meeting, managers must take care not to have a one-size-fits-all approach. While template agendas may be used, it is important that one-to-one meetings are personalised to allow for different personalities, different challenges and different career journeys. Managers should be cognisant of where the employee is on their career path and the impact on the employee of personal or work challenges at any given time.

One-to-one meetings can be stilted to begin with. They will improve where a level of rapport is built up over time and trust develops. The manager should get to know the employee’s personal style. Some will appreciate some light exchanges to open the meeting. Others will prefer to get straight to the point.

While agendas and areas for discussion may be formulated in advance, it is important that the manager is prepared to be flexible. The one-to-one meeting is a key opportunity for the employee to bring up matters that do not fit in anywhere else. Managers should allow for new topics and suggestions to be raised during the meeting. Open questions should be asked to allow for other matters to be raised. Open questions are questions that do not invite a Yes/No answer. For example, “What is working well for you right now and what isn’t?” or “What other areas are on your mind at present?”
It is the manager’s responsibility to link the discussion back to the bigger picture and to ensure that discussion of projects and progress connects to the company mission. Motivation is enhanced where the employee understands the value of their contribution and has a sense of purpose in their work. Managers should also reinforce what excellence looks like during any discussions on performance and deliverables.

**Notes and action items for the one-to-one meeting**

The manager should take notes during the one-to-one meeting and review these before meeting the employee again. What the team member says during the meetings is important, but it can be forgotten if notes are not taken. Managers should explore the best method for retaining these notes. Shared online documents and other technological solutions can be useful for creating brief notes during or immediately after the meeting.

Every one-to-one meeting should result in action items being created. Setting clear expectations and timelines will motivate and create accountability on both sides. It is important that there is clarity before the meeting ends on who is doing what and the associated timelines. Managers should always follow up on action items and ensure that they deliver on what they agreed to do. Failure to do this will send a message to the employee that the manager is not committed to their development. These action points can then be reviewed at the outset of the next meeting. This accountability is helpful to building trust.

The one-to-one meeting should conclude with a final open question from the manager. This is the time when the team member may bring up the topic that they were hesitant about or a topic that didn’t fit neatly into the agenda. Managers need to be open to these new items being shared, even if the meeting is winding up and to demonstrate this through their body language. Employees will sense it when the manager is eager to close the meeting and to move on. Critical information sharing opportunities can be missed.

**Scheduling a one-to-one meeting**

Deciding on the frequency of the one-to-one meeting can be complex. Managers with large teams will have limited time. However, the manager should strive to schedule the one-to-one meeting on a frequent basis. Weekly or fortnightly one-to-ones may be appropriate for newly appointed employees who have higher support needs. Monthly meetings may be appropriate for a longer serving employee. In any event, the manager should seek the employee’s input on the frequency and schedule the meetings on a rolling basis. It is important that the employee can see the commitment to the ongoing meetings in their calendar.

**The remote one-to-one meeting**

One-to-one meetings take on a new significance where a team is working remotely. Remote working reduces the level of contact between colleagues and between manager and team member. The one-to-one meeting can become the key vehicle to provide clarification, feedback and to understand how the employee is doing. Managers need to be particularly adept at identifying challenges and creating opportunities for raising concerns when the one-to-one meeting is being conducted remotely.

Preparation will include a number of practical considerations. A video call is best to ensure that both sides can appreciate body language and communicate more effectively. The manager should ensure that they have an appropriate set up with minimal interruptions during the meeting so they can give the employee their full attention. Deciphering the nuances of the communication can be more demanding over video and thus full attention is needed. Adequate Wi-Fi and technological tools will be important.

Managers should be sensitive to the fact that remote working, especially involuntary remote working will create different challenges for different employees. Disconnecting from work duties, managing boundaries between work and personal life and accessing information or colleagues in a timely manner can be some of the challenges that arise.
Managers need to be prepared to discuss and propose solutions to these types of issues. More sensitive topics such as loneliness, isolation or a sense of disconnection from the workplace may come up and the manager must be available to discuss these areas and provide supports as appropriate. Particular care must be taken when giving negative feedback to employees who are working remotely, as there is a lack of opportunity to see how the message landed and to provide further clarifications. More regular informal check-ins can be useful to maintain contact and provide support to the remote employee on an ongoing basis.

**Performance Feedback**

Feedback in both a formal and informal context is hugely valuable to nurture high performance. Where undertaken in the correct manner, feedback enables employees to improve and to understand their contribution. Informal feedback can diminish naturally in a remote working scenario and employees may feel a sense of disconnection or lack of purpose over time. It is therefore critical that managers become adept at giving regular feedback, in real time where possible.

Traditional approaches to feedback may lead to managers giving feedback in line with established performance management cycles. However, an ongoing practice of recognising performance as close to the event as possible has been shown to be most effective for positive impact on the staff member. Giving feedback as soon as possible also helps the manager overcome recency bias. Where feedback is happening infrequently, there is a natural tendency for a manager to focus on more recent events that come to mind easier and thus key employee achievements may be missed.

Remote working will generally lead to more written communications and managers should take care not to rely on written exchanges exclusively to deliver feedback. The absence of body language and tone along with the inability to see an employee’s response is significant and may result in employees placing an unintended or negative interpretation on the feedback. The communication channel used is therefore critical. Face to face is best for delivering sensitive feedback and where this is not possible, a video call is preferable to ensure that feedback and discussion can be instantaneous. Words and tone of voice do have a significant impact on how the message is received.

Feedback should be primarily positive where possible and care should be taken where negative feedback is needed. The best feedback is actionable, and constructive. Detail is best to show the employee that the feedback is not tokenism. Where possible, highlighting the precise activities that worked well and any identifiable positive outcomes from these, will ensure that the feedback is impactful. There is a tendency to call out high performers frequently, however all employees should receive feedback on their achievements. Recognising progress as well as achievements can enable the manager to identify constructive feedback for all team members.

Before going into the one-on-one meeting, the manager should have several examples of areas to give feedback on. This detail not only shows the manager’s commitment, but also creates an environment for development focused discussions. Where detailed feedback is shared and discussed this can create a space for identifying what learnings can be taken forward and what could be done differently next time.

It may also be necessary to give negative feedback at a one-to-one meeting. Managers need to approach this very carefully. Feedback should be constructive at all times, with action points and learnings that the employee can take away. The manager’s credibility and trustworthiness as built up over time will help to ensure that messages like this can be delivered in a constructive manner and the relationship maintained.

It is important to remember that the most effective feedback is given as close to the event as possible, rather than waiting for the one-to-one meeting to share. However, some feedback items may be better discussed in the secure space of the one-to-one meeting. For example, where there is a need to delve deeper on a topic and to identify
solutions/learnings. Feedback on sensitive topics may also be best suited to the one-to-one meeting.

In deciding how and what to give feedback on, the manager should consider the individual employee’s style and preferences. Depending on the stage of the employee’s career, the feedback may be more direct if the employee has a breadth of experience behind them. Some employees may need a gentler approach where they lack experience or confidence. Others may prefer to take the issue away to reflect upon it before engaging in a more in-depth discussion. The manager will, over time, get to know each team member and how best to give them feedback.

The best feedback practices are two-way. Managers should ask team members for feedback and demonstrate their openness to receiving feedback on themselves and on wider company initiatives. Typical questions would be “Could I do anything different to support you?”, “What feedback and suggestions do you have for me and the organisation?”.

Role of recognition

The benefits of recognising performance and contribution include a more engaged workforce and improved talent retention. Recognising performance, in whatever manner possible, is an opportunity to give employees a sense of meaning and purpose in their work. Where an employee feels that they are valued by the organisation and where they understand the importance their contribution, this can drive personal fulfilment and ensure that the employee feels connected and part of the organisation. The positives of these two factors alone cannot be underestimated.

Informal recognition of performance is as important as formal recognition. Acknowledge staff contributions and achievements on a regular basis demonstrates the value that the organisation places on their contribution. When practiced regularly, this approach can become embedded in the ways of working.

Consistency of approach is important in any performance management system and it becomes arguably more important where staff have different work patterns/locations. Transparency is critical and the employer must be able to justify any decisions to adjust targets, workload and/or work assignments for flexible working. The importance of acting promptly to address any performance issues remains critical and employers must ensure that they are addressing these consistently. This is particularly important where the performance issue relates to a lack of supervision or support for an employee on flexible working arrangement. The continuation of flexible working arrangements can be questioned where serious performance issues arise, and the employer needs to have a policy that addresses this.

Checklist for performance management

- Are workloads and work opportunities fairly balanced across staff, including between remote workers and on-site staff.
- Do targets and objectives for certain categories of workers need to be adjusted? How will performance expectations be set to ensure fairness and transparency where flexible working arrangements exist?
- How will performance be measured for employees who are not on-site and/or for employees who work variable work patterns?
- Does the performance management system need to be updated to take account of new flexible working practices?
- Is there an impact on performance related pay or bonus payments?
Are line managers trained to manage remote workers? Are they aware of the best approach in managing and motivating remote workers? (e.g. increased trust, higher levels of autonomy, focusing on time bound goals not presenteeism.)

Can the employer continue to provide all elements of the existing performance management system including coaching, formal and informal feedback and training to staff who work flexibly?

Employee relations

Multiple working arrangements need active employee relations management. Employers will need to be aware of the provisions of equality legislation and the protections offered to employees who work part-time or on fixed-term/specified purpose contracts. In addition, it is important to ensure visibility and generate inclusive opportunities to keep those working flexible/remotely connected with colleagues and the workplace generally.

- Where working hours are reduced or work location is changed, changes in the terms and conditions of employment (such as basic pay, performance pay, bonus, allowances) and benefits (e.g. private health insurance, company car/car allowance), need to be addressed fairly and equitably. Access to on-site resources must be considered for those working flexibly or remotely. These may include canteen facilities, subsidised lunch, travel allowances, car parking, on-site gym, ergonomic assessment or onsite classes/briefings.

- Equal opportunities for promotion, training, networking and recognition (formal and informal) must be maintained for all employees.

- Selection and authorisation processes must be transparent and fair to ensure employees understand how to apply for flexible opportunities and also to understand why their application may not have been successful.

Appendix 1 sets out factors to consider for remote working applications.

Flexible working which results in reduced work hours is typically only introduced where there is capacity for this work to be undertaken by colleagues or to recruit additional resources. (This is entirely separate from the granting of leave due to medical reasons or in line with employment legislation). Where a change in work location will impact on the allocation of work across the team, this should be factored into the company’s flexible working policy. The company policy should explicitly state that flexible working can only be granted where it is in line with business needs and where there will be no negative impact on productivity.

When changing working hours and/or work location to reflect new arrangements, the employer must ensure that employees are treated fairly. Some benefits may be pro-rated where hours are reduced, or suitable alternatives considered. These decisions should be documented and based on objective reasons.

Recording of work hours is essential and will be addressed later in this toolkit.

Managing underperformance

Where problems in attendance or absence arise in the context of flexible working, the existence of clear written guidance on the arrangement is critical. Misunderstandings can arise regarding the level of flexibility and employee relations issues can arise where one group of employees perceive a different treatment.

Trust is a cornerstone of flexible work arrangements. Fostering open and regular communications is key to the success of flexible and remote working. Setting clear agreed objectives is also critically important as they establish the criteria against which performance can fairly be evaluated.
Addressing underperformance promptly is important to avoid employee relations issues. Within a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan) or disciplinary process, the fairness and reasonableness of the employer’s position can sometimes be challenged where an inconsistency of approach is evident. If work allocation, objectives or performance measures are different for staff who work flexibly this should be clearly explained and objectively justified to avoid misunderstandings or any sense of grievance in a performance discussion.

Conducting investigations

Where formal processes are activated, the employer needs to consider the practical implications for managing employees who are not routinely on-site. In particular, the management of grievances, investigations, disciplinaries, etc for remote or dispersed teams or workforces needs to be anticipated in advance. Conducting meetings of this nature face-to-face is always preferable, however it may not be possible in all cases.

It is recommended that performance and investigation related company procedures are reviewed prior to the introduction of flexible work arrangements, to ensure that the employer can continue to adhere to the written procedure for employees working flexibly. In particular, the following may be considered:

- An option to run investigations and hearings remotely and a procedure for doing so.
- A provision to enable the employer to require an employee to attend on-site for some or all of the investigation process and/or hearings. Provision of adequate notice would be critical in this instance and such meetings should occur during the employee’s standard work hours.
- Where serious misconduct is alleged, it is standard for disciplinary policies to provide for suspension with pay pending an investigation. Where the employee against whom the allegation is made is working flexibly, the employer may wish to consider additional options within the company policy. For example
  - For remote workers, the return of company equipment to facilitate the investigation and prevent interference with evidence.
  - For employees working flexible hours, the option to return the employee to standard working hours (for increased supervision).
  - How will pay for suspension be calculated for staff that work non-standard hours?

Any amendment to a company policy on disciplinary, grievance etc must be undertaken in line with existing practices, which may require agreement of employees/employee representatives.

The best course of action in running a formal internal process for an employee working on a flexible or remote basis will vary from case to case and in particular, will depend on:

- The type of workplace investigation involved,
- The stage of the process,
- The employee’s work location/work hours,
- The IT capabilities of the employer and relevant employees.

Promoting positive employee relations

To support and promote positive employee relations in the workplace where flexible work practices are being introduced, the following is recommended:
• Line manager training on topics such as objective setting, wellbeing, performance management and how to manage difficult conversations or deliver feedback.

• Effective employee feedback mechanisms which may include employee surveys, a designated HR contact person, HR management system or via one-to-one meetings.

• Effective and ongoing communications which may include company-wide meetings, departmental meetings, one-to-one meetings, bulletins or newsletters.

• Responsiveness to employee queries and addressing any issues quickly and at the lowest level possible (without the necessity for initiating formal policies).

• A top-down commitment to the new practices; management who demonstrate their commitment to the new practices through their words and actions.

• Ensuring that employee feedback and suggestions are taken on board and factored into the design as appropriate. Where employee feedback cannot be factored into design, the employer should be able to outline the reasons for this.

• Ensuring a fair and transparent process for selecting employees to whom flexible working is made available.

**Checklist for employee relations**

- Have we made available an informative and unambiguous policy on flexible working that makes it clear how employees will be selected, what changes in terms of employment will result and how the arrangement will be monitored over time?
- Have we ensured that managers are equipped to manage flexible working and to respond to the queries that may arise?
- Have we a transparent method of selecting those who will be facilitated with flexible working?
- Have we taken feedback from and considered the impact on all relevant stakeholders?

**HR policies and procedures**

When employees work flexibly, amendments to existing company policies will be necessary. Practical issues may arise in relation to how policies are communicated to staff who are working in different locations or on different shifts/work patterns and how policies will apply to these groups. The following should be considered.

- That policies are applied fairly across all staff regardless of their working arrangement and that they are easily accessible via a centralised platform.

- That policies address the questions that may arise from employees on flexible working arrangements. An FAQ to address commonly asked questions is useful.

- That all staff have read and understood company policies and a record of this is retained.

- Where policy updates occur, that all staff regardless of working arrangements are made aware and given time to review the updates.

**Key HR policies that require consideration are as follows:**

- Working time obligations.

- Employment equality legislation.
• Expenses policy.
• Data protection and cyber security.
• Health & Safety.

Compliance with working time legislation

The onus is on employers to show that they are fully compliant with all aspects of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. The legislation applies to most employees, with the exception of some groups as identified in the legislation.

When dealing with issues such as rosters and hours of work for flexible working or remote working, employers need to ensure that they are fully compliant with all aspects relating to hours of work and breaks. Outlined below are some of the main obligations that an employer must focus on. Further detail in relation to these is available on the Ibec website.

Hours of work

The legislation limits the maximum average working week to 48 hours. Weekly working time can be averaged out over a four, six or up to twelve-month reference period. Working time is defined as net working time, i.e. exclusive of breaks, on call or standby time.

Daily rest breaks and rest period

An employer must not require an employee to work for more than 4.5 hours without a break of 15 minutes. If the hours of work are greater than six hours, an employee’s total rest break entitlement is 30 minutes which can include the 15-minute break already referred to. Rest breaks must not be given at the end of the day.

Under the Act, an employee is entitled to 11 hours consecutive rest in each 24-hour period. This effectively means that having completed a day’s work, an employee cannot report back to work until 11 consecutive hours have elapsed.

Weekly rest period

An employee is entitled to a period of 24 hours consecutive rest in each seven-day period. This period can be averaged over 14 days. If the weekly rest day is preceded by a working day, then the employee concerned must first receive his or her daily rest entitlement of 11 hours consecutive rest. This effectively means that such an employee is entitled to 35 hours consecutive rest.

Unless otherwise provided in a contract of employment, an employee will be entitled to have Sunday off as his or her weekly rest period. If weekly rest is averaged over 14 days, at least one rest day must be a Sunday. These merely constitute the minimum weekly rest periods legislated for and, of course, there is nothing to prevent employers providing longer weekly breaks.

Working time records

The Working Time legislation imposes a duty on employers to keep records that show compliance with the provisions of the Act for three years. The Organisation of Working Time (Records) (Prescribed Form and Exemption) Regulations 2001 stipulate the manner in which these records should be documented and maintained. Details of the records that must be kept by an employer under working time legislation include:

- the days and total hours worked in each week by each employee.
- the leave taken by the employee by way of annual leave and public holidays, and the payment received in respect of that leave.
• any “additional days’ pay” paid to an employee in respect of a public holiday entitlement.

• a copy of any notice given to an employee under Section 17 of the Act (information about starting and finishing times and notice of additional working hours).

The obligation is on the employer to ensure that breaks are being taken. The legislation provides that the employer will be exempt from recording breaks if it uses electronic record-keeping facilities, or manual record-keeping facilities (using Form OWT1 or a form to substantial like effect) and

• notifies each employee in writing of his or her statutory rest breaks at work, daily rest entitlement, weekly rest entitlement and (where appropriate) any provisions for compensatory rest.

• puts in place procedures, and notifies each employee in writing of procedures, whereby an employee may notify the employer in writing of any statutory rest period or break to which the employee is entitled and was not able to avail of on a particular occasion and the reason for not availing of such rest period or break.

However, the employer must retain a record of:

• having given each employee details of his or her statutory rest entitlements.

• having notified each employee of procedures to be used in the event the employee is unable to avail of a statutory break or rest period.

• any notifications made to the employer by the employee regarding missed breaks.

The Line manager plays a key role in ensuring that breaks are being taken. Training and awareness session on this topic for the line manager will be key.

The Right to Disconnect

The Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect was published in April 2021 and is available on the website of the Workplace Relations Commission here.

The Code of Practice recommends that employers introduce a Right to Disconnect Policy, that takes into account the employees’ existing terms and conditions of employment and the particular needs of the business and its workforce. The Code recommends that employers engage proactively with employees and/or their trade union or other employees’ representatives as appropriate to develop the Right to Disconnect Policy.

The Code recommends that the policy take account of health and safety legislation, the employee’s terms and conditions of employment as they relate to working time and the statutory obligations on both employers and employees.

The Code also recommends training of managers and staff (where appropriate) to reinforce the desired behaviours. Organisational Culture and leadership are identified in the Code as playing a key role to support employees’ Right to Disconnect. The Code states that the new policy should be communicated in a clear and unambiguous manner to all employees, from junior to senior staff members.

The Right to Disconnect policy will necessarily work alongside other employment policies, in particular any existing working time or wellbeing policies. However, it is important that the organisation’s commitment is clearly demonstrated through the manner of publication and awareness raising activities that happen. Therefore, where the policy is to be incorporated into existing policies, steps should be taken to ensure that the existence and terms of the policy are widely communicated. The Ibec sample policy is in the appendices.

Checklist on working time compliance.

☐ Have we implemented a time and attendance system that records time and attendance for those who work remotely and flexibly?
Can we easily produce time and attendance reports for all workers including remote workers if asked to do so?

Do we ensure that all employees take breaks in line with the Organisation of Working Time Act?

Do we have a process in place whereby if an employee is working excessive hours on a regular basis that we actively counsel them to take their proper rest? Do we keep a record of this?

Do we have a Right to Disconnect policy?

### Policy on Employment Equality

The Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015 protects employees from discriminatory treatment under nine grounds namely: gender, age, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or membership of the Traveller community.

The Acts prohibit discrimination on any of the grounds listed above in relation to access to employment, conditions of employment, training for, or in relation to, employment, promotion, or re-grading/re-classification of posts. Conditions of employment are taken to include overtime, shift work, transfers, lay-offs, reduction in working hours, redundancies, dismissals and disciplinary measures.

Discrimination is taken to occur where one person is treated less favourably than another on any of the grounds listed above. Indirect discrimination is defined as occurring where an apparently neutral provision puts a person, who is a member of one of the nine groups, at a particular disadvantage due to being a member of that group, unless the provision can be objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of the aim are appropriate and necessary. Statistics are admissible for determining whether this section applies in relation to a particular worker. Indirect discrimination focuses on the impact of a practice on an individual.

For example, requiring a person to work full-time could be indirect discrimination on grounds of gender and family status if a woman with children could not work full-time because of childcare responsibilities and the requirement to work full-time was not objectively justified.

Employers should be mindful of the fact that certain flexible working arrangements may be more attractive to certain groups of employees (e.g. Term time working may be availed of by more parents with childcare responsibilities or part time work may be more attractive to employees with a disability). If, as a result of availing of the flexible working arrangement, these employees suffer a detriment in conditions of employment or lack of opportunities such as access to training or promotional opportunities, this could amount to indirect discrimination.

Employers must establish clearly defined procedures to protect all employees from harassment and to deal with grievances relating to harassment and sexual harassment expeditiously. This means having an Equal Opportunities or a Dignity at Work policy in place. In line with the legislation, employers must ensure that all employees are aware of the policy and know that clear action will be taken, should an individual raise an issue of this kind.

### Diversity and inclusion

The company’s approach to diversity and inclusion must also be examined. Managing diversity in the workplace is based on an approach which seeks to recognise, value and fully harness the differences that exist between employees rather than trying to deny the existence of, or diminish those differences. A diversity approach is based on a positive attitude to difference. Individuals with different experiences, backgrounds and attitudes bring different perspectives and ideas to the organisation.
This is a benefit for the organisation, as the range of experiences and approaches offered by a diverse workforce can be drawn upon in the company strategy to meet the needs of employees and customers alike. Fostering an inclusive working environment requires steps to ensure that current practices, policies and procedures encourage integration in the workplace.

Where employees will be working from different locations and/or different work patterns, the employer will need to address their approach to diversity and inclusion to ensure that all working arrangements are inclusive and supportive of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. It has been shown, that companies who offer a more flexible working arrangement in their organisations can often enhance the diversity pool and attract a wider pool of employees from diverse backgrounds.

**Checklist on employment equality**

- Have we ensured that in the design and implementation of flexible working policies, there is no possibility of direct or indirect discrimination arising?
- Where staff will be working different work patterns or from different locations, have we ensured that these employees are equally protected by the company in relation to conditions of employment, access to training/promotion and other areas specifically covered under the Equality legislation?
- Where staff will be working different work patterns or from different locations, have we ensured that these employees are equally informed and aware of the company policy?

**Policy on workplace bullying**

The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 requires employers to protect the welfare of employees. Under common law, an employer has a general duty of care towards his/her employees. Every employer has a duty to manage and conduct work activities in such a way as to prevent any improper conduct or behaviour likely to put at risk employee’s safety, health or welfare at work. The prevention of bullying must therefore be part of the management system.

There are two codes of practice on workplace bullying and harassment:

1. **HSA and WRC Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work 2020**

The codes have a quasi-legal status and adherence to the codes is taken into account in assessing liability in a case.

Bullying at work is defined as ‘repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual’s right to dignity at work’. An isolated incident of the behaviour in this definition may be an affront to dignity but as a once-off incident is not considered to be bullying.

Measures to prevent bullying at work as outlined in the above codes of practice include:

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5 This Code of Practice replaces both the 2007 HSA Code of Practice and the WRC 2002 Code of Practice under S.42 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990
• Having in place a policy on bullying, harassment and sexual harassment stating the organisation’s intention to maintain a work environment free of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment.

• The policy should highlight that all employees are expected to comply with the policy and management will take appropriate measures to ensure that bullying/harassment does not occur.

• Employees must be informed that the policy applies to employees both in the workplace and at work associated events such as meetings, conferences and work-related social events, whether on or off-site including where employees work from home or in another located outside of the office.

• The policy should be communicated effectively to all those potentially affected by it, including management, employees, customers, clients and other business contacts. Existing employees should receive updates and regular communication on the policy. Where flexible work practices are introduced, the employer should examine how the policy and any updates are communicated to these groups.

• An important step in the prevention of workplace bullying is the provision of appropriate training and development at all levels but particularly for line manager roles. Employees should also be provided with such information and training as is necessary to ensure their awareness of the provisions of the policy.

• The appointment of an appropriately trained contact person(s) who can listen and advise about complaints of bullying at work and explain the procedures in place to resolve it.

• Ongoing monitoring and recording incidents of bullying at work. Where issues are identified, the employer should take action to address the matter and to achieve continuous improvement in the prevention of workplace bullying.

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**Checklist on workplace bullying**

- Can we ensure that the bullying & harassment policy is circulated to all existing staff, including those who work flexibly and is included in the induction programme for new staff?

- Can we ensure that all employees know who is the designated “contact person” within the organisation and that employees who are not working on-site or working variable work patterns can also access this person?

- Have we given necessary training to managers to understand the importance of a pro-active, consistent approach towards the problem and that they are equipped to manage any issues that arise across different work locations and work patterns?

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**Expenses policy**

Flexible working arrangements can result in staff incurring different or new expenses. Organisations may need to review their existing expenses policy to ensure that it addresses the needs of the staff. Where employees are working from non-office locations or incurring new/additional costs in relation to travel or subsistence, the company needs to address this in their policy. Company expenses policies need to be compliant with Revenue guidance. An employer may reimburse expenses which are incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the employee’s duties and on the basis of vouched receipts.

The Revenue Commissioners have issued guidelines that deal with the tax implications of e-working employees. Payment for expenses involved in heating and light may be incurred...
by employees in the performance of their duties at home and the Revenue Commissioners allow an employer to make payments of up to €3.20 per day to employees without deducting PAYE and PRSI. This is a Revenue Commissioners rule and does not translate into a legal obligation on the employer to pay such an allowance. The National Remote Work Strategy launched in January 2021 states that this allowance will be reviewed in 2021.

There is no entitlement to any payment for remote working unless it is set out as a term/condition of employment either in the contract or in the remote working policy (if available) or dealt with in an employer’s expenses policy. Alternatively, if the employer does not make this payment, the employee may be entitled to make a claim to Revenue in respect of vouched expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of the employment as a remote worker.

Employers may provide computers, phones, office furniture to employees. Where the provision of equipment is primarily for business usage, a benefit-in-kind charge will not arise.

Travel is another area to examine and the determination of the individual’s base may cause an element of difficulty in some flexible work arrangements. Guidelines from the Revenue Commissioner state that “where an employee works part time in the office and part time at home, the base is the office”. The employee’s home is not usually regarded as their normal place of work. The Revenue Commissioners advise that an exception to this is where there is an ‘objective requirement’ that the employee’s duties be carried out at home. The guidance states that the duties have to be carried out at home because they cannot be carried out elsewhere. It is not an objective requirement if the employee merely carries out, or chooses to carry out, their duties at home or the duties carried out are incidental (minor or administrative). This particular issue of establishing the work base will require further clarification where employees are working remotely on a permanent basis.

**Policy on data protection and cyber security**

To comply with the principle of GDPR on integrity and confidentiality, organisations must have full control of the company data and personal data of its clients, employees and suppliers. This is especially important where employees are working remotely.

This is vital for GDPR compliance and business risk management. The risk of cyber security attacks such as phishing, ransomware or social engineering right through to data breaches or internal theft of important company data can increase in the case of remote working. The National Cyber Security Centre issued guidance for organisations to minimise cyber risks for those who work from home which is available [here](#). They include guidance for safety measures for work issued devices and personal devices that are used in the course of work.

In addition, the office of the Data Protection Commission has published a number of guides on their website that can assist companies in ensuring that they comply with the principle of GDPR on integrity and confidentiality in the context of remote working, which are available [here](#).

Organisations should be satisfied that any video conferencing technology they use is secure and safe. The Data Protection Commission website has issued guidance on the use of video conference systems, available [here](#).

Security of personal and company data extends to both electronic and paper files. If flexible working is introduced, organisations should update their IT, data protection, internet and social media policies to include the implications of flexible working. It may be prudent to collaborate with the IT department on this. Consideration should be given to the following:

- How will employees safely dispose of company confidential paperwork whilst either working on-site or remotely?
- How will they ensure that other people cannot view or access their system if they are working from home, a co-working space or some other location in the course of work?
How can they ensure that business conversations are conducted securely?

Are paper based files allowed to be taken out of the office? If yes, is there a means of tracking the location of the file and how does the employee keep it secure in the home or co-working location?

What is the procedure if an employee loses company information?

What is the procedure for passwords?

What are the security and safety protocols for conducting video conference calls both internally and externally?

Are employees reminded to make the necessary updates on their devices and computer including software/antivirus updates?

How is data backed up securely if there is no cloud or network access?

What effective access controls are in place to reduce the risks of a breach if the device is stolen or misplaced?

**Training on data protection and cyber security**

Regular training and updates on the latest cyber risks are a crucial part of ensuring data is kept safe and secure. This would include:

- A general overview of GDPR and cyber security
- Company specific data security protocols
- Procedure in the case of a data breach
- Training and regular updates on cyber threats and how they occur.

**Checklist for data protection and cyber security**

- Have we conducted a risk assessment of our cyber security and organisational measures to safeguard confidential and personal data?
- How secure is the personal and sensitive data when it is accessed remotely?
- Have we implemented the appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure that personal and sensitive data is kept confidential and secure for all types of flexible working arrangements?
- Have our employees undertaken cyber security and data protection training to ensure they safeguard personal data whether it is from the office, the home, on the road or in a co-working space? Are they aware of security risks involving phishing, vishing, scam emails, social engineering?
- Do we have full control of the personal data or do employees use their own devices? If employees use their own devices what measures are in place to secure the data from their personal devices in the event of loss, theft or the employee leaving employment?
- Have we updated our data protection and cyber security documentation to factor in the new flexible working arrangements options? (Documentation could include data inventories, privacy notices, data breach response plans, Data protection policies for employees, etc)
Health and Safety

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, employers have a legal obligation to protect the safety and health of its employees whilst in the workplace or in the course of their work and this extends to home working.

As the scope of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act is far reaching for all types of flexible working arrangements, this toolkit will only consider the obligation in relation to remote working as health and safety systems are far more embedded on-site. It should be noted that safety statements should be updated to reflect the new flexible working arrangements including remote working.

The main key areas that employers should consider when it comes to remote working are:

1. Obligations under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations and ergonomic assessments.
2. Lone working and managing emergency procedures.
3. Bullying and harassment for those working in client sites or co-working spaces.
4. Accidents in the context of working from home.

Obligations under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations and ergonomic assessments

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, referred to as the 2007 Regulations, specifies in detail the minimum requirements under each regulation that employers should comply with. For those working from home whose main work is computer work, the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) regulations are applicable in this case. The scope of the DSE regulations includes the workstation and the working environment.

The workstation includes the display screen equipment, keyboard, mouse, peripherals, software, chair and desk. The working environment factors in the lighting levels, temperature, humidity, noise levels and the space for the workstation. The DSE regulations set out the minimum requirements for both the workstation and the working environment. Under the DSE regulations the employer is required to conduct a DSE risk assessment each time an employee has a significant change to their work environment. This also includes an ergonomic workstation assessment.

Furthermore, under the DSE regulations, the employer is required to make eyesight tests available for all VDU users at commencement of employment and on a periodic basis and if relevant provide glasses where needed. The employer is required to provide training to the employee on how to set up and use the workstation and ensure that the employee takes regular micro breaks away from the VDU screen.

The HSA recommend a maximum usage of one hour of continuous VDU work. By providing these measures, it ensures that the risks of eye strain, fatigue and work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDS) and other conditions are minimised in an occupational setting.

One of the main challenges is that the employer cannot see the employee’s home environment and has a lot less control over it, but this can be managed by considering the following:

1. The first step is to ask the employee to conduct a self-assessment. This allows the employer to assess if the home environment is suitable for remote working. A Home working checklist is available on the Health and Safety Authority website here.
2. The second step is to arrange for an ergonomic assessment. This can be carried out remotely or in person by a qualified ergonomic assessor. It is essential that both the
checklist and the ergonomic assessment are conducted as part of the full DSE risk assessment.

3. The outcomes of both assessments will help the employer determine;
   a. if the employee’s home environment is suitable for working from home and
   b. what, if any control measures would be required to provide a safe working environment?

4. It is only when the employer has all the relevant information from the risk assessments that they should consider investing or sending over the office workstation to the employee’s home.

5. Other factors to consider are the frequency of home or remote working? Is it 10%, 50% or 100% remote working when it is not mandated for public health interests such as COVID-19?

6. One final element to consider is issuing staff with regular updates on assuming the correct seated position, posters or videos of the correct posture as well as reminders to take micro breaks from working at the computer screen. The Health and Safety Authority have videos and posters that companies can use available here.

Risk assessments should also be carried out for employees working in a co-working space. It is worth noting that when it comes to renting out a co-working space for employees, under Section 15 of the 2005 Act, it stipulates that building owners who lease out spaces for work are obliged to provide safe access and exits and ensure that any equipment or substances they provide are safe in line with the 2005 Act. Employers will need to liaise with the co-working space to assess the suitability of the space to ensure that it complies with the DSE regulations and all other associated risks in line with the 2005 Act.

**Lone working and managing emergency procedures.**

Under Part 1, S.2 (3) of the 2007 regulations, it classifies lone workers as a sensitive risk group which includes those working at home. This means that employers must conduct a risk assessment in relation to the potential hazards for employees working alone or in remote locations either onsite or at home. Whilst the risks of lone working for employees carrying out office work are much lower than other roles such as security or retail, employers still need to consider what the potential hazards could be in relation to remote working.

For instance, elements to consider in the risk assessment is whether the employee has adequate first aid provisions whilst working remotely? Who should they contact in the workplace if there is a work-related accident or emergency that could impact their health? For employees working in a co-working space or on a client site, what emergency procedures are in place in the case of a fire, a violent incident or some other emergency?

Lone working can potentially impact an employee’s wellbeing as they may feel isolated. This will be explored in more detail under the wellbeing section of this toolkit, but it is relevant to the lone working risk assessment as it may be a potential hazard to the employee’s health and wellbeing, often referred to as a psycho-social hazard. Communication is a critical link between the employer and the remote worker not just from a HR or employee relations context, but also from a health and safety perspective. It is important that employers check in regularly with employees not just on their work but also to assess their wellbeing.

It may be prudent to check with the employee whether they have a smoke detector in the home as well as any other equipment that they have in place in the event of a fire or a first aid kit in the event of a minor injury.

Equally, it is important to ensure that those working remotely are also aware of their responsibilities in relation to lone working and maintaining their health and wellbeing whilst
in work. Employers should regularly remind remote workers of their own safety responsibilities in line with Section 13 of the 2005 Act which in summary are:

- Be responsible and look after their own safety and health in the workplace wherever that is located.
- Safeguard the safety and health of other people who could be affected by their work, for instance working on client sites and following their safety and health procedures.
- Use the work equipment properly and in line with the training they received. Not misuse any equipment they have been provided for their safety and health.
- Report all accidents, injuries, near-misses or other dangerous occurrences that arise whilst in the course of work.
- Report any work-related stress issues.

**Bullying and harassment for those working in client sites or co-working spaces**

Bullying can have a significant impact on an employee’s health and wellbeing which is covered in the earlier section of this toolkit and it is worth noting that it is listed as a psycho-social hazard under the HSA guideline on Work Related Stress.

Bullying and harassment may also take the form of cyber-bullying for the employee working from home and for employee’s working in a co-working space they could potentially experience bullying or harassment from other users in the co-working space or on a client site. As stated earlier, policies on bullying and harassment should be updated to include the scope of remote working both from a HR and Health and Safety perspective and it may be prudent to check with a co-working space what processes they have in place to deal with any issues of bullying or harassment as part of your risk assessment.

**Accidents in the context of working from home.**

The Health and Safety Authority are explicit on their website that not only does the employer have the same responsibility for the safety and health of their employees who work from home but that the “employer should accept liability for accident or injury of a homeworker as for any other employee”.

To mitigate against risks of a personal injury claim from a remote worker who is working at home or another remote location, the employer should consider the following:

1. Conduct the relevant risk assessments and document this e.g.: lone working, DSE, ergonomics etc.
2. Record all training that the employee has undertaken in relation to remote working.
3. Ensure that the employee understands their responsibilities for remote working and have a record that they understand and maintain their responsibilities and a firm commitment from the employee that they are aware of their full responsibility to work safely.
4. Have a proper time management system to record hours of work that not only complies with the Organisation of Working Time Act, but as a means of verifying if the employee working from home had the accident in the course of their work or whilst they were on a break or carrying out a non-work related activity.
5. Have a robust procedure in place to report accidents, near misses, injuries, work related stress or other dangerous occurrences. An existing accident and report form could be updated to include working from home or other remote working locations. These incidents or potential accidents should relate to the specific work related activity.
6. Ensure that if an accident, near miss, injury or other is reported that a further risk assessment is conducted to assess what lead to the incident and what other control measures, if any, could be implemented. This may include bringing the employee back into the workplace if necessary.

7. If an employee is out sick as a result of a work-related injury or accident for more than three consecutive days (including the weekend), the employer is obliged to report it to the HSA via this [channel](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Hazards/Lone_Workers/).

8. It may be prudent to notify the company’s insurance company to advise of changes in working arrangements.

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**Checklist for health and safety:**

- Have we conducted a full risk assessment of the remote working environment? *(The scope of the assessment may include the home or a co-working space)*
- Have we identified any safety or health risks? If yes, what control measures have we put in place to remove or reduce those risks? *(We recommend you collaborate with your employees to remove / reduce the risks)*
- Have we sought advice from our insurers in terms of employee liability for remote working options?
- Have we ensured that the IT equipment and office furniture is ergonomically designed and tested for employees working from home or in a co-working space?
- Are our employees aware of their health and safety obligations whilst working remotely? *(We recommend you document that they understand their health and safety obligations)*
- Are our employees trained in managing safety issues whilst working remotely? *(We recommend you document the safety related training)*
- Is the employee medically fit enough to work remotely if we are aware there is a medical issue? *(It is essential that the business receives a medical report to verify that the employee is fit to work remotely as they are classified as lone workers)*
- For employees working in a co-working space, have they been informed of the fire and emergency response / fire drill procedure of that co-working space? Is this regularly tested by the owner of the co-working space?
- For employees working remotely or lone workers, what are the arrangements in the event of an accident or incident? *(See HSA website on lone working at [https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Hazards/Lone_Workers/](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Hazards/Lone_Workers/))*
- Have we updated our safety statement and policies to factor in flexible and remote working options?
- Is there sufficient segregation from disruptions e.g. children, pets, other family members?
- Are there arrangements for keeping in contact with the remote worker?
Designing the flexible working policy

Certain jobs will be more suitable for flexible working than others. There may be roles where flexible working options are limited or not possible due to operational requirements.

The company policy on flexible working must be clear and unambiguous and should allow for regular review and adaption where practical or business issues arise. The policy should include:

- The roles that have been deemed suitable to flexible working.
- How employees will be selected for the new working arrangements.
- A statement outlining the business criteria that will impact on the employer’s decision on how, where and to whom flexible working can be offered. Headcount restrictions, operational priorities and other factors may be cited.
- The practicalities of how the arrangement will operate, including the responsibilities of employees and line managers involved. (A sample policy is available in this toolkit.)
- The option to review and amend the policy as needed including the possibility for withdrawal.
- A provision to revert the employee(s) back to their original work pattern/location where business exigencies require it. The notice periods and types of scenarios in which the flexible working may be revoked need to be outlined.

Sample selection criteria that may be considered when granting flexible working include:

- A minimum service requirement (e.g. 6/12 months) and/or a requirement to have passed probation. This is helpful to ensure that the employer has the opportunity to train and assess a new hire before they move to flexible working where supervision may be more limited.
- A requirement that employee has a clear disciplinary record or a performance rating above a certain level (e.g. performance levels which meet or exceed expectations).
- The overall suitability of the role and this will involve identifying any impact (positive or negative) on an employee’s ability to meet deliverables of their role.

For remote or hybrid working, the following may be considered; (see appendices on key factors for a remote/hybrid working application):

- A requirement for a minimum broadband service (upload/download speeds) in the home office location.
- A suitable working environment as verified by an e-working self-assessment.
- Activities performed on an individual basis or with clearly defined areas of individual responsibilities will be more suited to home working.
- Work which does not require frequent input from others or centrally provided facilities will be more suited to home working.
- Roles that require frequent travelling may be more suited for remote working, including roles that regularly require meetings at customers, suppliers, or external meetings. Roles that require the employee to be on call and/or to have responsiveness requirements outside of normal business hours may be suited to remote working.
- Creative roles or roles that require a lot of collaboration may not flourish in remote working, similar to any roles that require a lot of face-to-face and team interactions.

Individuals with competencies may be more suited to remote working. These include
• Proven time management and organisational skills.
• A high level of job knowledge and skills and little requirement for supervision.
• The ability to cope with minimum personal contact.
• Clear and concise writing skills.
• Self-motivated and disciplined.

In many cases, requests for remote working arise because of personal reasons, long commutes and a desire to balance work and family responsibilities more effectively. Flexible work arrangements should enhance overall business performance. The nature of the role, the resources in a particular function, the current levels of absence within a team may limit the employer’s ability to grant the desired flexible working.

Contracts and agreements

Where a formal flexible working policy is implemented in an organisation, it is important to understand the legal and contractual implications. Many such arrangements may be in place on an informal or ad-hoc basis. However, any long term or permanent changes to terms and conditions of employment.

While the flexible working policy (and other company policies) may stipulate many of the conditions that apply to the new work practice, a separate written agreement with the employee may be required to address certain conditions and/or in certain instances. The following should be considered when making this decision.

• The Terms of Employment Information Act 1994 to 2012 requires that the employer provide certain particulars in writing to the employee within 2 months of commencement. These include the place of work (or, where there is no fixed or main place of work, a statement specifying that the employee is required or permitted to work at various places) and any terms or conditions relating to hours of work (including overtime). Under section 5 of the Act, the employer is obliged to notify the employee in writing whenever a change is made or occurs in any of the particulars of the statement furnished by an employer under the Act. This notification should be in writing and occur no later than one month after the change takes effect. Where this does not occur, the employee may take a claim to the Adjudication service of the WRC and compensation of up to 4 weeks’ pay may be awarded.

• Implications for any future redeployment, restructuring or redundancies. Where the place of work or the hours of work are amended, this may impact on how future selection processes are undertaken. While these future eventualities cannot be predicted in advance, the employer should ensure that there is ongoing clarity on the organisational structure.

• Where remote/hybrid working is being facilitated, the employer can stipulate that the office is the place of work, to ensure that on-site attendance continues.

• The duration of the new working arrangement, including the terms of the cessation of the arrangement by either party are best agreed in writing. This will also include the option to revert to previous working arrangements. The need for reasonable notice and proper justification should be written into the agreement.

• Whether changes in normal reporting/line management are needed.

• Written terms relating to working hours which ensure the employer can comply with the requirements of the working time legislation and how overtime, if applicable, is to be requested and recorded.
• Process for reporting in sick and processes for availing of leave, including annual leave.

• A provision that states that flexible working agreements will be subject to review following changes in job roles and as a consequence of organisational change / restructuring.

• A statement that it is not considered appropriate to combine flexible/remote working with the care of dependents as these working arrangements are not to be viewed as an alternative to paid dependent care.
Stage 4: Evaluate
Stage 4: Evaluate

It is helpful for organisations to measure and monitor the effectiveness of their flexible working arrangements to identify areas for improvement or adjustment. This data can be gathered in a number of ways such as:

- Data analytics from the various systems that measure productivity and other key business performance metrics.
- Outcomes from employee surveys and/or engagement scores.
- Outcomes from one-to-one meetings.
- Conducting a risk analysis from a health and safety perspective for both physical and psychological impacts. An example of this might be comparing data from the HSA’s work positive tool in year 1 with year 2.
- Examining any employment law issues that arose (e.g. complaints relating to employment equality) and the impact on employee relations (e.g. increased levels of grievances, negative impact on performance).
- Conducting risk analysis of cyber risks and data breaches.
- Comparing employee engagement year on year, has it increased or decreased?
- Analysing absenteeism rates, have they increased or decreased?
- Examining the costs of operating the flexible working arrangement over time (including any unexpected costs that arose, any reduction in productivity that occurred, and any further investment needed to continue to operate the arrangement effectively)

Evaluating the flexible working arrangement on a formal and a regular basis is crucial to ensure that the arrangement continues to work effectively for all concerned. It is to be expected that the arrangements will need to be refined over time with the introduction of new technology, new business priorities, the number of employees availing of the arrangement and continuous learnings from the process.

Employee Wellbeing

Workplace wellbeing is an important factor in today’s workplace, which encompasses the physical, social and mental wellbeing of employees. Whilst most flexible working arrangements are mainly on-site, the issue of remote working poses a unique challenge as isolation, possible blurred boundaries between work and home life as well as working in excess of normal working hours could arise.

In light of this, organisations can develop and tailor wellbeing strategies to ensure that both on-site and remote workers are not at risk of any of these issues that could impact their well-being.

It is recommended that the suite of wellbeing initiatives should include offerings that appeal to all employees, across all roles and demographics and including remote workers. Ibec’s accredited programme, the Keepwell Mark, can help companies embrace wellness in their workplaces. For further information, please here.

Line managers should check-in with staff who have moved to a flexible working arrangement in the early weeks and follow up regularly to see if any issues are arising. This will also help ensure that the flexible worker feels supported and that they can confidently raise any issues or concerns in relation to their role or aspects of remote working where applicable.

Poorly defined roles or unclear objectives can be significant stressors for employees, which can lead to demotivation and possible underperformance. Remote working lacks the face-to-face human interaction or ease of calling into the office to discuss a work objective so the need for clarity is even more critical. Where organisations do not clearly define the role
required in the context of remote working including the objectives and timelines, the remote worker may experience increased anxiety or frustration which may result in a mental or health condition if it continues.

An unclear or poorly defined work structure is an increasing concern and whilst it has implications in terms of the Organisation of Working Time Act, it could result in the remote worker working excessively on a continuous basis. The Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect recommends that employers introduce a Right to Disconnect Policy, that takes account of the employees’ existing terms and conditions of employment. An employer may decide to refer to the existence of a Right to Disconnect Policy in the employment contracts and/or in any existing working time/wellbeing policies. A sample policy on Right to Disconnect is available in the appendices.

Another area that could impact employee wellbeing is the series of back-to-back video calls with little to no breaks in between meetings. It can be useful to schedule in gaps between each meeting, review the need for the meeting, for example status updates could be written up on a specific channel or have a no meeting zone for specific day or half day so employees can have set focus times.

Organisations should, therefore, ensure that staff are actively encouraged to manage their working hours, take their full rest breaks and disconnect from work at the end of the day. Asynchronous communication was addresses earlier in the toolkit. Where employees work irregular hours, a communications approach that encourages asynchronous communication will allow employees to send email/messages without the need for an immediate response back.

Isolation can affect some remote workers and remote working does not suit all personalities. Where remote/hybrid working is being introduced, it is advisable to allow the employee to try it out during a trial phrase, with the option to return to the office. Even for the more self-sufficient employees, feelings of isolation may arise. Some companies may offer hybrid working but for employees who work remotely on a full-time basis, active steps should be taken to avoid feelings of isolation arising. These can range from:

- One-to-one meetings where the first few minutes of the conversation could be based around non-work-related topics
- If the company/internal team is celebrating an event, ensure the remote worker is given adequate notice to attend if that is possible or depending on the event, consider including the remote workers via live-stream. Or alternate between face-to-face events and virtual events.
- For on-site activities such a meditation, nutrition classes, yoga etc, can it be live streamed so that the remote worker can take part?
- Ensure that remote workers are equally recognised for the work that they contribute – this could be shared through a HR portal, intranet, etc
- Seek their input on an ongoing basis for decision making and work assignments.

An good method of assessing how on-site and remote employees are coping from a wellness and mental health perspective is to either carry out an anonymous survey or avail of the free Health and Safety tool on assessing psychological hazards in the workplace. This tool helps companies identify ways to improve employee wellbeing and is available at www.workpositive.ie

Checklist for wellbeing:
- Have we conducted a risk assessment of the psycho-social hazards for on-site and remote workers (e.g.: work positive tool)?
- Are we satisfied that the remote worker is able to set a boundary between their professional and private life?
☐ Does the remote worker have enough interaction with on-site colleagues?
☐ What course of action can we consider for remote workers who may experience isolation?
☐ Is the remote worker satisfied with the level of direct feedback on their work from their line manager?
☐ Does the remote worker feel that their colleagues accept their remote working arrangements?
☐ Are we satisfied that the role and working hours are clearly defined for the remote worker and that they encouraged to disconnect from work?
☐ Are we satisfied that our wellbeing initiatives include all types of flexible working arrangements?
Key factors to consider for remote working applications

Proposed legislation on the Right to Request Remote Work may be introduced in the latter half of 2021 in line with the Government’s National Remote Work Strategy. It will offer employees the opportunity to request a remote working arrangement, but it is not clear yet what this entail yet.

As an interim measure, employers should consider what objective criteria can be used to assess a request for remote working that will be fair and consistent.

To assess this objectively, organisations may wish to consider the following:

1. The role
2. The person
3. The working environment
4. Other considerations

The role

1. Is the role suitable for remote working? If no, the application for remote working cannot be considered.
2. If yes, is the role suitable for remote working on a full-time or hybrid basis?

In the case where the role can be carried out remotely, the next stage is to consider the person.

There can be many reasons why a role is not entirely suitable for remote working, especially full-time remote working. These reasons may include the duties of the role, the degree of interaction with colleagues/clients needed throughout the day/week, the level of collaboration in the role, the types of equipment and resources that enable the role, the risks to the business arising through data protection requirements/data security/systems security and the impact on productivity or customer service. The unavailability of technology to enable high productivity in remote working may be another factor where the existing company systems have not been designed for this scenario. The team/unit size may also affect the organisation’s ability to facilitate remote working longer term.

The person

Research shows that whilst employees may wish to work remotely, this form of working is not suitable for all personalities. As it relies heavily on technology and communicating remotely, strong IT and writing skills as well as being a self-starter are key skills for remote working. Other considerations could be:

1. Is the employee eligible to apply for remote working in line with the remote working policy? For example, has the employee completed 6/12 months continuous service and/or successfully passed probation?
2. Has the employee demonstrated a high level of performance in their role?
3. Has the employee demonstrated a high level of attendance and punctuality?
4. Is the employee a self-starter and can they demonstrate a high degree of initiative?
5. Does the employee have strong time management skills and can they manage their workloads effectively?
6. Does the employee have strong written communication skills so that clients and colleagues can clearly understand their message? Companies may wish to provide a writing test to assess their written communication skills.

7. Does the employee have strong IT skills?

8. Insert other criteria as required.

If the employee has the required skills and qualities to work remotely and the required eligibility, the next stage is to assess their working environment.

**Working environment**

1. Does the employee have the minimum broadband requirements? An example could be download speeds of 5mb per second and upload speeds of 1mb per second.

2. Does the employee have a suitable home environment for remote working? Companies should request employees to complete a self-assessment. A Home working checklist is available on the Health and Safety Authority website [here](#).

3. Has the employee verified with their insurance company that there are no implications with them working remotely?

4. Does the company have the necessary communication tools and information technology to enable effective remote working? (These will differ from those required in an office environment where less communication platforms and technology may not be so necessary)

If the working environment is suitable and they meet the minimum broadband requirements, the company can either consider any other elements or progress with the remote working application.

**Other considerations?**

1. Have other employees requested and been approved for remote working? If so, how many and would the business be affected by granting this remote working request?

2. Is this to assist as part of reasonable accommodation and is the employee fit to work remotely?

3. Any other considerations?
Appendix II
Sample forms
Sample Flexible Working Request Form

Some organisations with formal flexible working initiatives require applicants and/or their line managers to submit detailed proposals on how the new working arrangements might impact the individual’s job, as well as organisational requirements. A sample application form such as the following can be used.

Please detail the type of flexible working arrangement you would like to avail of.

Describe how changing your job to X flexible working arrangement will meet current business needs?

Describe how changing your job to X flexible working arrangement will meet customer needs (e.g., co-workers, external customers, manager)?

What deliverables and measurements would you propose for you/your manager to assess how your performance is meeting or exceeding expectations? Be as quantitative as possible.

What review process with your manager do you propose for constructive monitoring and improvement of your chosen flexible working arrangement? Are there measurable outcomes to use in the review process?

How will your chosen flexible working arrangement affect other jobs that remain in the office?

Are there any other barriers that may exist in making this change? How do you propose addressing them?

Describe any equipment or additional expenses that your arrangement might require - give details of costs.

Detail any short or long term cost/savings that might result from your new schedule?

When would you propose to commence the flexible working arrangement? (Please note that the company cannot guarantee that any requested arrangement will be facilitated and/or facilitated from the chosen date. Each flexible working request will be assessed against business requirements and impact on productivity)

What duration are you proposing for the flexible working arrangement?
Appendix III
Sample policies
Sample Right to Disconnect Policy

This is a generic policy and should be tailored to meet the individual needs of each organisation, in consultation with its employees and/or their representatives.

Introduction

The health, safety and wellbeing of our employees is of the utmost importance to us and we encourage and support you to prioritise your own wellbeing. Disconnecting from work and work devices is vital for your wellbeing, and to help you achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance.

To encourage and support our employees in balancing their working and personal lives, whether they work standard hours in the workplace, work remotely or flexibly, [or a shift pattern] we have developed a 'Right to Disconnect' policy, which includes best practice guidance around working hours, the use of technology and more.

The company recognises that every employee is entitled to switch off outside of normal working hours and enjoy their free time away from work without being disturbed. There may be occasions where contact occurs, including for example where business and operational reasons require contact outside of normal working hours and depending on the nature of an employee's role.

Role of the company, our managers and employees

All employees have an active role to play in communication management and the reduction of unnecessary business communications outside normal working hours. The company encourages the ongoing cultivation of a culture where our employees feel they can disconnect from work and work-related devices and this necessitates a joint approach by the company, our managers, and employees. Some of the respective obligations include:

The role of the company:
- To provide information to employees on their working time, in accordance with the relevant legislation.
- To ensure a safe workplace, in line with the health and safety legislation.
- To not penalise an employee for acting in compliance with any relevant provision of the health and safety legislation.

The role of the employee:
- To ensure that they manage their own working time and take care to protect their safety, health and welfare and the health and safety of co-workers, in line with the health and safety legislation and seek support in doing so if necessary.
- To cooperate fully with any appropriate mechanism utilised by the company to record working time, including when working remotely.
- To respect the working time of colleagues and other contacts (including periods of leave)

The role of the manager:
- Managers in particular play a central role in the successful implementation of this policy and may be given additional training and support as needed. Managers also have a duty to respect their team members’ right to disconnect and should provide a good example for their team.
Working Hours

- [Where appropriate, insert high level details of the company’s ‘normal working hours’, recognising that these may differ across roles, level, work patterns, time zones etc]
- [Include examples (non-exhaustive list) of legitimate business circumstances where out of hours contact may occur]

Electronic & Phone Communications

We respect your personal time and expect you to disconnect from work e-mails and work communications outside of normal working hours.

[We understand and appreciate that within our organisation/company people may work non-standard/widely differing patterns of work, so what is the “norm” for one may be different for another.] AND/OR [Due to differing/non-standard patterns of work in the organisation, some employees may send communications at times which are inopportune for other employees, e.g. late nights/weekends.]

Outside your normal working hours or standard office hours, (such as late nights/weekends), may be an opportune time for you to send an email, without any intent to disturb the recipient or in expectation of a speedy answer. In that event, bear in mind the following:

- Try to only check and send e-mails during normal working hours where possible, but we are also mindful of the requirements of those who wish to work in a more flexible manner.
- The sender should give due consideration to the timing of their communication and potential for disturbance. The recipient should understand that they will not be expected to respond until their working time recommences. If you are sending emails outside the normal hours of the working day, please also consider other people’s working hours:
  - Send the e-mail with a signature disclaimer at the end, e.g. “I have sent this email at a time that is convenient for me. I do not expect you to respond to it outside of your usual working hours.”
  - Consider drafting the email and sending it during normal working hours or using the ‘delay send’ option and set it to a specified time on the next working day
  - Always consider the tone/contents/context of texts and emails and other electronic communications (e.g. instant messaging apps).
- Please ensure that your out-of-office notifications are properly activated when you are out of the office and that your out-of-office message correctly directs the recipient to the appropriate colleague. Please respect out-of-office notifications when you receive them from others.
- In the case of an urgent or time-sensitive situation after normal working hours, please consider sending a text or making a phone call rather than an email.
- [Insert details of where social media channels or platforms are used for work purposes and any associated parameters]
- [Work communications through social media channels or platforms are not encouraged and employees should not feel that they must respond to social communications from colleagues outside of their working hours]
Meetings

- While meetings can be crucial to strengthen connections between individuals and teams, individual teams and managers are encouraged to review the frequency and timing of meetings they hold to ensure optimum use of time and allow colleagues time to work outside of meetings.
- Avoid scheduling meetings outside of our core hours [insert what those are] or during lunch hours, unless absolutely necessary. Ensure to block out time in your diary to hold time for your breaks and
- Respect people's time by only inviting them to meetings where their presence is necessary. Share and adopt meeting best practices for example ensure there is a clear agenda with relevant material shared in advance, and actions are recorded and shared post the meeting.

[Wellbeing – optional section – may already be included in other policies, such as Remote Work policy]

Employees, including those engaging in flexible working arrangements or remote working, are reminded to switch off from work and work devices outside their normal working hours and while on leave. Employees are encouraged to familiarise themselves with their break entitlements as set out in (Insert document e.g. their contract of employment or working time policy) and to ensure that they are availing of these. If an employee is unable to avail of their rest break, they should inform their manager.

Employees working remotely are encouraged to take steps to create boundaries between work and personal time.

Reporting concerns

[Employees will not be reprimanded for failing to answer phone calls, emails, or messages outside of their normal working hours].

If you encounter problems in availing of your right to disconnect, please speak to the person(s) in question in the first instance if you feel comfortable to do so. If you feel that you cannot approach the person directly, then you should approach your manager or another line manager, [or a member of HR] with the objective of resolving the issue quickly and informally. If an informal process has not been successful in resolving the concern, then the formal company grievance procedure may be utilised.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with our [insert relevant policies – e.g. dignity at work, our e-communications, our data protection and our confidentiality policies].

We reserve the right to amend and update this policy over time in line with best practice, learnings and any changes in legislation.
Sample Flexible and Remote Working Policy

This is a generic policy and should be tailored to meet the individual needs of each organisation.

Introduction

This flexible and remote working policy recognises that an improved work-life balance can enhance employee motivation, performance and productivity. The Company seeks to support its employees achieve a better balance between work and personal commitments and will make every reasonable effort where possible to accommodate flexible working requests, taking into account the needs of the business as well as individual needs.

This flexible and remote working policy outlines the procedure for an employee to submit a request for consideration by the company to avail of a flexible working arrangement as well as the procedure for agreed remote working arrangements.

Any request for a flexible working arrangement shall be considered by the Company in a fair and transparent manner in line with this policy. If the request is granted, the Company will agree a formal written flexible working arrangement with the employee that will outline the conditions governing their flexible working arrangement, the responsibilities of the Company and the employee as well as any governance controls or measures required for this working arrangement.

The employee’s existing obligations under their contract of employment remain unaltered and in particular where an employee’s request for remote working is facilitated, their attention is drawn to the contractual terms around exclusivity of employment with the Company and the contractual hours of work.

Neither this policy nor any agreed flexible working arrangement confers or is intended to confer any legal or contractual entitlement on an employee to work flexibly. The Company reserves the right to refuse, modify or terminate any flexible working arrangement.

All the Company’s policies and procedures apply equally to any employee on a flexible working arrangement.

The Company may facilitate the following flexible working arrangements when considering a request for flexible working from an employee:

[Select all that apply]

- Compressed hours – this is where an employee works their full-time hours in fewer days by extending their working day in longer blocks of time. An example of this is a five-day week that is compressed into four days.

- Flexitime – this is where an employee can vary their start and finish times outside of the business core hours and that they complete the required hours of work each week as specified in their contract of employment.

- Job-sharing – this is where a full-time post is divided into two part time roles. Both employees share the overall duties and responsibilities for that role. Pay and benefits are shared in proportion to the hours each employee works.

- Part-time – this is where an employee works fewer hours than full-time employees.

- Remote working – this is where an employee regularly carries out all or some of their duties from a remote location. This can be from the home, a co-working space or a hybrid model where work is carried out partly in the office and partly remote working.

- Term-time working – this is where an employee can take unpaid leave for a certain period of the year, most typically summertime. Alternatively, the employee can be paid in 12 equal monthly instalments if they are on a non-variable monthly salary.
• Other – specify what this

Scope

This policy applies to all employees who meet the eligibility criteria set out further in this document. Requests for flexible working will be agreed on a case-by-case basis. Agreeing to one request will not set a precedent or create the right for another employee to be granted a similar change to their working pattern. Employees and management are required to be realistic and recognise that not all flexible working arrangements will be appropriate for all roles.

When considering requests for flexible working, the Company will consider a number of factors including, but not limited to the following:

• The suitability of the role for the flexible working arrangement selected.
• Eligibility requirements.
• Costs associated with the proposed arrangement.
• The skillset and ability of the individual.
• The impact and effect of the proposed arrangement on other staff.
• The need for, and effect on, supervision.
• Existing flexible working arrangements.
• Availability of staff resources.
• Whether it is a request for a reasonable adjustment related to a disability/illness.
• Health and safety issues.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

‘Company Offices’ – [Insert company name/s and address/s here]

‘Flexible working arrangements’ – A work arrangement that is flexible in its nature and temporarily departs from any of the standard working hours and days or main work location in the Company.

‘Remote Work’ – Work performed by an employee at a location outside of the defined office locations either in the home or at another location which involves the electronic access to, processing and/or storage of the Company’s software, systems and information/data.

‘Flexible work request’ – A written request by an employee to perform work via a flexible work arrangement.

‘Remote working arrangement’ – A formal, written agreement between the Company and the employee that governs the remote work performed by an employee at a designated workspace within his/her home or other office that is not the Company offices. Such agreement will outline the conditions applicable to the remote working arrangement, the responsibilities of the Company and the employee, and the risks associated with remote work and the controls and measures required.

‘Requester’ – An employee who applies for a flexible working arrangement and has submitted a flexible working arrangement application form to their line manager and the Human Resources (HR) Department.
Eligibility

An employee is eligible to submit a flexible working arrangement for consideration if they satisfy the criteria outlined below:

- A minimum service requirement (e.g. 6 or 12 months).
- Has successfully passed probation.
- Has a clear disciplinary record.
- Has a performance rating above a certain level (e.g. performance levels which meet or exceed expectations).
- Suitability of role for the particular flexible working arrangement (e.g. some roles are not suited to remote working but may be suited to other flexible working arrangements).

Application process for a flexible working request

Employees should complete the flexible working request form and send it to their line manager ensuring they provide all relevant details and complete all relevant sections. Failure to provide adequate details in the flexible working request form may result in their application being rejected. The form must be supported and signed off by their line manager before issuing it to HR.

Once the completed flexible working request form is received, the HR manager will arrange a meeting to explore the viability of the proposed flexible working arrangement, factoring in the needs of the employee and the Company. It is proposed that the meeting will be arranged within [insert timeline, e.g.: 28 days] of the Company receiving the request. This time limit may be extended by agreement of both parties.

As part of the consideration for any remote working applications, HR may request additional information to be provided and may require such assessments and reports to be conducted as considered necessary. These may include, but are not limited to:

- A risk assessment of the designated workspace in the home or other office.
- IT assessment of the designated workspace in the home or other office.

If an employee suffers from any medical issue that may influence remote working and/or impacts his/her fitness to work alone, then the employee may be requested to provide medical evidence that he/she is fit to work alone and provide details of any special accommodations required to facilitate same. The Company reserves the right to require the requester to attend an Occupational Health Specialist. The outcome of the report may form part of the considerations of a request for remote working.

If the employee fails to attend a meeting and fails to attend a rearranged meeting without good reason, their application for flexible working will be deemed to be withdrawn.

Where a request can, without further discussion, be approved as stated in the employee's written application, a meeting to discuss the request may not be necessary. The employee will be informed of this and the Company’s agreement to the request for flexible working within [insert timeline, e.g.: 28 days] of the Company receiving the request.

Responding to a flexible working request

Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis factoring in the criteria set out earlier in this policy. The employee will be informed in writing of the Company's decision as soon as is reasonable, but no later than [insert timeline, e.g.: 21 days] after the meeting except where agreed between the parties.

The request may be granted in full, in part or refused. The company may propose any of the following:
• A modified version of the request.
• It may be granted on a temporary basis.

If the request is agreed, the employee will be sent a confirmation letter which will include details of the agreed flexible or remote working arrangements, the matters to be attended to by the employee and an envisaged start date. A trial period may be applied to assess the suitability of the flexible working arrangement.

**Right to appeal decision**

The employee may appeal the decision if their request for flexible working is refused. This must be made in writing within [insert timeline e.g.: 7 days] and they must clearly state the grounds on which they are appealing the decision. The appeal will be heard within [insert timeline e.g.: 14 days]. The employee will then be informed of the outcome to their appeal within [insert timeline e.g.: 14 days] of the appeal meeting. The decision made on the appeal will be final.

**Trial the new flexible working arrangement**

In the case where a request has been granted on a fixed term basis subject to a trial period, it will operate for [insert period of time e.g.: 3 months]. The trial period will allow sufficient time for the employee and the Company to implement and see how the new working practice operates. A review meeting will take place once the trial period has ended.

This meeting will explore either the need to extend the original trial period, the necessity to cease the arrangement or explore the long-term viability of the new arrangement. Once an agreement has been made, the employee will be required to sign the agreement.

The Company reserves the right, at the end of the agreed trial period to require the employee to revert to their previous working arrangement.

**Procedure for agreed remote working arrangements.**

Once an application has been agreed for remote working, a risk assessment will be conducted on the designated workspace in the home or other office prior to the start of the remote working arrangement. The home or other office for the remote working arrangement must be based in Ireland and cannot be located overseas.

The employee’s existing obligations under their contract of employment remain unaltered and the company’s employment policies and procedures equally apply to an approved remote working arrangement. An employee’s failure to adhere to applicable practices, policies and procedures may result in a remote working arrangement being terminated.

Any special conditions applicable to, or measures required to facilitate remote work will be detailed in the remote working arrangement. Adherence with such essential conditions and the successful implementation of required measures are fundamental, therefore any failures in this regard may result in a remote work arrangement being terminated.

The formal arrangement for remote working will cover the following:

**Frequency & Duration of Remote Work**

The agreement will set out the commencement date and detail whether the remote working arrangement is part-time or full-time. In the case of partial remote working, the frequency and agreed days for remote working will be specified. The employee will be required to attend the Company’s office on the remaining days or other location as specified by the Company.
Additional clauses for a remote working arrangement [select those that apply]:

Save in exceptional circumstances, the maximum number of days per week which an employee may work remotely from home or another office is [insert number of days] days.

For exceptional circumstances, the Company may authorise an employee to work on a remote basis from home or another office for 4 or 5 days per week for a temporary period. This exceptional arrangement will be temporary and will occur only where circumstances arise that prevent the employee from attending the company offices.

All remote work arrangements will be subject to a formal annual review and it may coincide with the employee's annual performance review where appropriate.

Consent to call to the employee's home

The employee agrees to give the company right of access to their home upon reasonable notice of at least x days or where agreed in a remote working arrangement for the following purposes:

- To inspect the working environment to assess its suitability for health and safety purposes.
- To inspect, install and/or make periodic checks to ensure the proper security arrangements for electronic and physical data.
- To collect files, company equipment or re-allocate work to colleagues in the event of long-term sick leave or some other extended absence.

Availability and communication requirements

The employee is reminded of the increased importance of communication around availability and accessibility and should follow these in line with company practices in particular to their availability on their calendar.

The employee will liaise with his/her manager to agree regular, 'in-office days' when the employee will be based in the Company offices and be available for team and other meetings. The employee and his/her manager must establish clear expectations for response times for all parties and agreed appropriate communication methods via the Company channels [state channels e.g.: email/phone/video conference]

Absence Management

All absences should be notified in line with absence policy. During an absence, the employee should make arrangements to have his/her calls diverted to [insert where to divert calls] and set up his/her out of office message or arrange for the out of office to be set up by the IT department.

Jurisdictional and remote work location

The home or other location must be based in the Republic of Ireland and employees are not permitted to work remotely overseas.

In the case where an employee plans to move location, this should be discussed in advance with the line manager. This is to facilitate a new risk assessment and other considerations in advance of the move.
Time & Attendance

An employee must record his/her working hours and leave on the HR Management System in the same manner they would in the company’s office/as per the designated procedure set down for remote workers.

Availability of Suitable and Safe Remote Workspace

For a remote work arrangement to operate effectively, a single, specific workspace must be available and designated in the home or other office. To ensure this the following considerations will apply:

Operational

The home or other office must have sufficient space to allow the employee to give his/her full effort and attention to the performance of his/her duties during working hours in an environment that is free of noise and distraction.

The home or other office must be suitably equipped and configured to enable the employee to perform his/her role and duties effectively and will typically need to be equipped with the following:

- desk
- chair
- shelving/filing (if applicable)
- secure storage
- suitable lighting and heat
- computer
- telephone
- adequate and reliable internet access

Where a remote working arrangement is agreed the equipment to be provided will be discussed with each employee prior to the commencement of the remote working arrangement on a case by case basis.

The employee will take reasonable care of any Company property within his/her possession and arrange for its secure storage. As per the employee’s contractual terms, he/she agrees to return and/or facilitate the return of the Company’s equipment, furnishings and materials when requested, upon the termination of the remote working arrangement and/or the employee’s employment. The Company may request the return of its property to facilitate the inspection, maintenance and repair as required or upon the termination of the remote working arrangement and/or the employee’s employment. The employee must return and/or facilitate the return of the Company’s equipment, furnishings and materials within 5 days of receiving a request from the Company.

The employee will be required to ensure that an adequate and consistent internet connection is available in the home office that is sufficient for the employee to perform his/her role and duties. The Company’s IT Department may need to assess and verify the internet/network connection in a home office to determine its suitability.

Health and Safety

A remote working arrangement will only be facilitated on the basis that the designated workspace is a suitable work environment which allows the Company and employee to fulfil their corresponding obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 which includes particular cognisance of the Display Screen Regulations and the minimum
requirements detailed in **Schedule 4, Regulation 72** that govern an employee working in a home or other office.

While the Company is cognisant of and implements measures to meet their obligations as far as is reasonably practicable to provide a safe place and safe system of work,

an employee performing remote work is also responsible for their part in the provision of a safe place of work and to be responsible for their own health and safety and that of others.

The employee will use equipment properly and as instructed, cooperate with the Company on all health and safety matters, attend any training sessions, and report any suspected health and safety defects or issues including any work-related stress issues.

**Accident & Incident Reporting**

Employees are, as with all Company policies, reminded of the continued importance of reporting any incident or near misses that occur that is related to their remote working arrangement and should follow the procedure outlined in the Accident and Incident Reporting Policy.

**Security & Data Protection**

Employees are, as with all Company policies, reminded of the continued and heightened importance of data protection and privacy rights while working remotely and are referred to the Company policies in this regard in particular those outlined in the Company’s data protection, IT, E-mail and social media policies that relate to IT usage and documentation storage.

The IT Department may need to assess the employee’s access, storage and back-up requirements and make recommendations for the necessary measures and safeguards required to ensure that such measures implemented are appropriate for a remote working arrangement. These measures may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Commitment to adhere to IT/data protection protocols, policies and procedures when working remotely.
- Undertake additional IT training on data protection and IT security.
- Keep passwords secure and never share user accounts, passwords or credentials with anyone else.
- Take reasonable care to prevent the loss or theft of mobile devices, laptops and associated IT equipment etc and prevent any unauthorised access to data or systems including paper-based documents.
- Report any loss or theft of mobile devices, laptops and associated IT Equipment etc. to the IT Department.
- Maintain strict confidentiality of all data and correspondence, both electronic and manual.
- Insert other measures as applicable.

**Performance management**

The Company must monitor and manage the performance of all of its employees effectively including those who are working remotely from a home or other office. In the case of an employee performing remote work, the Company’s line of sight will differ and may be more limited than for office-based staff.

Prior to the commencement of any remote working arrangement, an employee and his/her manager must agree and implement a suitable process for managing and monitoring the
employee’s performance and productivity as well as measuring the effectiveness of the remote working arrangement. The employee and manager must agree specific effectiveness criteria and/or measurements and feedback mechanisms. These must be clearly specified in the agreement for remote working.

Meetings

Employees on a remote working arrangement must not use their own home to meet with clients or stakeholders nor should they give out their home address or personal telephone number.

Dress code

Employees in a remote working arrangement are expected to dress in a professional manner when conducted video conferencing calls with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders.

Insurance

The employee will ensure that Company equipment is adequately insured and that their home insurer is notified where applicable prior to commencement of the remote working arrangement that the employee is working from home.

Travel and other expenses

Employees on a remote working arrangement may be required to carry out duties at other locations from time to time and are asked to refer to the Company’s travel/expenses policy when claiming expenses.

Note to employers: Existing travel/expenses policies may need to be updated to include the latest Revenue guidance on tax exemptions for remote working arrangements.

Regular review

All remote working arrangements will be subject to review on an ongoing basis as required to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the arrangement and may be subject to a formal review on an annual basis, with an annual report submitted to the HR Department.

Termination or modification of a remote working arrangement

Where the Company decides to modify or terminate a remote working arrangement, the employee will be notified in writing within X weeks’ notice. In the case that the remote working arrangement will be modified, the employee will be provided with the details of the modification(s) and the measures required. The employee will be advised of any actions they need to carry out if applicable and within a certain timeframe. Failure to implement the modifications may result in the termination of the remote working arrangement. Where the Company decides to modify or terminate a remote working arrangement, it will endeavour to provide reasonable notice of its decision prior to such modification or termination taking effect. However, the provision of notice prior to the modification or termination of a remote working arrangement may not be possible in all circumstances.

Review of this policy

The Company reserves the right to alter or amend this policy from time to time and employees will be notified of amendments by way of written notice and/or electronic notice (which may be by e-mail or by notice on the staff intranet).
Sample Workplace Communications Charter

A workplace communications charter is unique to each organisation. This sample charter is a generic document that must be tailored to your organisation’s communication needs. It should be drafted to reflect the organisational culture and style of language/lingo in the business. It will need to factor in staff locations (on-site, off-site, remote, shift patterns) to ensure that everyone in the organisation has full access to the company communications.

A workplace communications policy must also take account of:
- Business needs and priorities (including workflows and reporting)
- Available technology and communication tools / channels
- Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements as well as existing SOP’s and commercial contracts.

A workplace communications policy should be created with the involvement of staff to ensure that it meets the needs of all and that it is workable. Training and awareness sessions may be needed to develop and embed new practices.

A workplace communications policy is a live document that should be updated over time as learnings are gathered.

Sample workplace communications charter

Introduction

This policy outlines [insert company name] approach to workplace communications and provides guidance to all staff on how best to utilise the organisation’s communication channels.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees within the organisation and provides guidance on effective workplace communications and using company communication tools effectively. This policy will be supported by training as needed.

Effective workplace communications are important for

- Ensuring that necessary information is available to all employees throughout the course of their work. Ensuring the smooth flow of information around the business which will support productivity and performance.
- Productive working relationships amongst colleagues and with others that we deal with in the course of our work.
- Increased efficiency in our work as we reduce the possibility of miscommunication and unnecessary/inconsistent communications.
- To enable better sharing of ideas and to support a learning environment.
- To support collaboration between colleagues.

Principles for effective workplace communications

- Use the available communication channels in the most efficient manner, with a consistent approach by all users of each channel.
- Consideration of the audience each time a message is sent to ensure that the message is easily understood.
• Match the message to the communication channel. Different channels are more appropriate for different types of messages.
• Transparency in our sharing of information.
• A commitment to accuracy and the timely provision of requisite information.
• Concise clear language in all our written communications.
• Developing good working relationships with our colleagues so we can communicate more efficiently with them over time.

**Communication etiquette**

*(select any that apply or add in your own company etiquette)*

- **Assume good intent** – Assume that the sender has sent a communication with good intent. Language or cultural differences can sometimes be misunderstood and could be interpreted in a manner different to what was intended.
- **Seek clarity** – Ask questions to ensure that you fully understand the communication.
- **Do not disturb colleagues if busy** – Unless it is critical, avoid contacting colleagues when they are busy or at meetings. [Refer to the right to disconnect policy for our guidance on working times.]
- **Meetings** – be on time and stick to agenda as much as possible.
- **Company style** – Detail the company language style, font size, technical terms, spacing, acronyms etc here.

When communicating with colleagues and others in the course of their work, employees should consider the following four areas.

1) **Message**

- **Message content** – what is the key message to be communicated and what supporting information or explanation is needed?
- **Language and tone** – What style of language and tone should be used? Will the audience understand the background and/or the terms used? Business updates may require formal language whereas informal language can be used when arranging team social activities. Company lingo and emojis would generally only be suited to internal messaging
- **Urgency** – Is the message urgent or routine?
- **Length of message** – What is the appropriate length for this message? Will supporting information and detail required? If there is a lot of information to be shared, is there a way to subdivide the information to make the message more understandable.
- **Commercial sensitivity and confidentiality** - Is the message sensitive or potentially contentious? Is there an intention to form a legal contract or to make a binding commitment?
- **Existing information** – What information is available to this audience already? Is that information accurate? Should reference be made to that information in this message?

2) **Audience**
• **Necessity and impact.** Why is this information being shared? What will be the impact of this message when it is received? Is there a need for a response or feedback to the message?

• **Internal or external audience.** More informal language may be appropriate when communicating with colleagues especially on routine matters.

• **Audience size.** Who needs this information? Does everyone in the audience need the same level of detail or can a shortened version be copied to some.

• **Audience experience and expectations.** What existing level of understanding and background do the audience have on this subject? What are the audience expecting in this message?

3) **Communication Channel**

Different communication channels will be more suited for different messages. It may be necessary to send a message through multiple channels to ensure that all employees can access it and to increase the probability of the message being understood.

When selecting a communication channel(s), the following can be considered

• **Urgent or time sensitive messages** may be better communicated via phone as they could be missed if sent via email or another communication platform.

• **If a record is needed of the communication,** how will this be undertaken? Minutes of meetings can be taken, or an online meeting can be recorded for access by the audience later.

• **Sensitive or difficult messages** should ideally be delivered in person or via video call. They can be supported by written communications where necessary.

• **To build relationships,** a face to face, phone call or video call is best to get know the person.

4) **Timing**

• **Respect the working time of others.** Consider the time of day and day of the week when sending a message (e.g. an email late on a Friday may not be read until the Monday where the receiver does not work on weekends). For communications across time zones, consider the working time of the receiver.

• **Frequency of communication.** If this message is routinely sent, how often is appropriate?

**Communications channels**

*Include all relevant channels that apply to your company*

The following communications channels are available in our organisation and are recommended for use in the following situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Recommended use</th>
<th>Examples of use</th>
<th>Response times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to face meeting</td>
<td>Relationship building Complex discussion Collaboration and idea generation</td>
<td>For meeting new clients and colleagues</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Tool</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phone call</strong></td>
<td>For sharing complex or sensitive information which is difficult to put in writing For more urgent messages To build relationships</td>
<td>To seek clarification or understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Video call</strong></td>
<td>For discussion and relationship building For demonstration or training</td>
<td>Training sessions New clients or employee on boarding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email</strong></td>
<td>Routine messages which are not time sensitive Where a written record is needed Detailed information with web links</td>
<td>External emails with customers and suppliers Specify in text of email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chat platform</strong></td>
<td>Routine communications over the course of the working day</td>
<td>Quick questions or check-ins with colleagues Same day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pings</strong></td>
<td>To issue a direct message to a specific person or specific group</td>
<td>Should be used sparingly for urgent matters Same day / within X hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company internal website</strong></td>
<td>To share companywide updates, company policies and information pertinent to large groups of staff</td>
<td>Company announcements, HR policies Queries can be submitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Centralised document system / files</strong></td>
<td>To update or access documents within company centralised system</td>
<td>Hr policies SOP’s As required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Video or webinar</strong></td>
<td>To share information Where a recording is needed post the event</td>
<td>Training Queries can be submitted at the time or after</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standardised messages are available in the appendices to this policy [insert examples of company common emails, announcements, updates etc …].

The organisation will continue to update and adapt this policy over time. This policy should be read in conjunction with our policies on [Insert as appropriate. May include policies on Right to Disconnect, IT and email, confidentiality, Data Protection, diversity and inclusion].
See the other relevant titles in this toolkit

01 | Employer’s Guide to Redundancy
Employer relations at Ibec

Ibec provides a wide range of professional services to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law. Our Employer Relations team provides strategic and operational advice in employment law, HR solutions and compliance. With 6 regional offices and local teams, our experience of advising and representing business and employers across all sectors ensures unparalleled insights and services. Our employer relations services include:

Advocacy and Representation: supporting Ibec members navigate all stages of the employment lifecycle, workplace disputes and representation at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and Labour Court.

Knowledge Centre: providing expert advice and support on employment legislation and practice, workplace disputes and investigations.

Legal: advising on employment law, the team of legal professionals provide specialist advice and knowledge while also monitoring trends and influencing the development of legislation impacting employers nationally and internationally.

Ibec.ie/employer-hub
knowledgecentre@ibec.ie

About Ibec

Ibec is Ireland’s largest lobby group and business representative. We campaign for real changes to the policies that matter most to business. Policy is shaped by our diverse membership, who are home grown, multinational, big and small and employ 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland. With 36 trade associations covering a range of industry sectors, 6 offices around Ireland as well as an office in Brussels. With over 240 employees, Ibec communicates the Irish business voice to key stakeholders at home and abroad. Ibec also provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

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