Remote working: guidance for managers

27 October 2020

This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Business Continuity: Temporary Remote Working Policy](#) and the FAQs relevant to the specific event which is causing disruption to normal business and working arrangements.

Managing a remote team requires a change in mind-set. Remote working is not just about physical distance, it's also about the distance in relationships between you and your team. This guidance covers the essential topics of leading during times of uncertainty, managing wellbeing, expectations, workload, communication and collaboration. Everyone will have to make changes and for some this will take more adjustment than others. Some will be working from home for the first time, and we realise this will be a very different experience for them (and for you). Even for those accustomed to it, working from home can feel unstructured and isolating.

Leading during times of uncertainty

The situation is unprecedented, and this may lead to unscheduled change. Colleagues may be feeling particularly anxious about the lack of certainty and change to their normal working arrangements. Home working has been one of the key responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, significantly mitigating transmission of the virus amongst the general population. Team members should be acknowledged for the changes they have made to their routines and the challenges they may have faced in doing so.

We ask you to maintain regular and clear communication with your team members over this period, encouraging team-working, ensuring their health and wellbeing, and generally supporting them as best you can. This means making efforts to maintain personal contact with every member of your team and promoting a culture of openness and support. It also means being honest about the expected unpredictability with your team. This will require you to demonstrate empathy to and allocate time for discussing issues and concerns.

Our values will support you in this, which have been tailored to this situation:

- Stewardship - following through on commitments and keeping promises
- Respect - demonstrating respect by valuing team member's time and appreciating their ideas and contribution and looking for opportunities to celebrate success in the work they are doing
- Inclusiveness - being accessible and flexible and being aware of personal circumstances. Your team members may have to take time out of the working day to deal with children or someone they are caring for
- Excellence – monitoring workloads and reviewing plans and priorities and supporting your team members through the change in circumstances

Assessing suitability for homeworking and addressing barriers

You're responsible for ensuring your team members complete a Homeworking Self-Assessment and Request form. Use this information to identify any barriers to safe and effective working from home. You may also find the following questions helpful:

- Can the role be carried out as normal while working from home?

- Are there any limitations, such as responsibility for care of a dependant, that might limit capacity?

- Can work be carried out at times outwith the normal working hours?

- Is any equipment needed (such as a keyboard, mouse)?

If you need assistance with a reasonable adjustment for a member of staff please contact HR.

You should make every effort to support homeworking arrangements, including being flexible by supporting team members to work different hours than they would normally do at Holyrood. Remember to take an inclusive approach to identifying opportunities to bring team members working at home and at Holyrood together to maintain positive team culture and encourage collaboration, where appropriate.

Hints and tips for managing SPS staff

For SPS staff, ensure your team are continuing to record their hours of work on TRS.

Managing wellbeing

When working remotely, you won't be able to tell who is having a good/bad day, who is doing something great, who is struggling or needs support and what relationships are like within the team. As the natural and informal opportunities to interact are likely to be reduced, you'll need to consciously plan time to check-in with your team members.

Hints and Tips

✓ Book check-ins using video calling at the beginning and end of each working day. This approach is effective in agreeing what the team is working on each day.

✓ You won't have access to the usual clues as to how someone is feeling so it's important to ask. The following actions will help:

⇒ Ask them about their wellbeing

⇒ Use coaching skills such as listening and open questions to support them in adapting to change and working through their challenges

⇒ Recognise that moods can change as they get used to remote working and that we all respond differently to change

⇒ Emphasise appreciation and celebrate success.

✓ Have a look on our wellbeing pages for more info. Remind colleagues that they are not alone, and we'll work together to get through this. As well as talking to you they can go to HR for support. They can also contact the Employee Assistance Programme which is open 24/7 (0800 032 9849).

✓ Working safely at home. If possible, your team member should establish a separate space exclusively for work in their home. They should assess this using the Homeworking Self-Assessment and Request form to ensure it is safe for them and family members. Staff members should remember their posture when working on laptops/computers, and also to take regular breaks away from those screens. Encourage team members to read and follow Remote Working: Guidance for Staff.

✓ Everyone working at the Parliament is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity in accordance with our values and behaviours. This is as relevant as ever during a period of uncertainty or disruption. You should ensure that you and your teams are familiar with our policies on Dignity at Work and Sexual Harassment, as well as the Code of Conduct for MSPs. These are equally relevant whether people are working on-site or remotely.

✓ Here are some exercises developed by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy that you should signpost your staff to try during their breaks, to help them stay more active throughout the day. As with any activity, they should make sure they exercise within their own capabilities. If your team member is pregnant, a new mother, suffers from any health conditions or has any concerns about their health conditions or levels of fitness, they should consult their GP.

Managing expectations

Be aware that it may be more difficult to make things happen. Remote working operates best when there is a focus on achieving outcomes. It's important to recognise achievements (both individual and team) and not focus solely on activities. Discuss a set of remote working guidelines with your team. This could include having agreed times to make and receive phone calls and keeping calendars up to date. It's also important to be clear about the outcomes you want them to achieve and agree deadlines and measures to ensure they are consistent with the expected outcomes.

Hints and Tips

✓ There will be comparatively fewer opportunities for you to check if work is being completed and goals are being achieved. Agree a work plan and capture this formally in a daily/weekly progress update call. This will help your team members understand where to focus their efforts.

✓ Encouraging your team member to establish some structure to their working day, including marking out breaks, can be helpful.

Managing communication and collaborations

Collaboration is still possible, using platforms to communicate regularly with your team. You'll not be able to rely on informal and ad-hoc interactions. Be deliberate and structured in your communications. Remember it's better to over-communicate rather than under-communicate, and ensure your messages are clear and that no-one is missed out.

Hints and Tips

✓ Agree frequency of ongoing communications. Encourage two-way communications; meet at regular intervals using MS Teams; and use email and phone call as you would normally. You can do this by:

⇒ Using a mix of structured and informal communication methods - blend structured communication approaches, such as weekly "check-ins" through phone or MS Team, with informal, real-time communication methods, such as instant messaging through teams or e-mail

⇒ Establishing/agreeing guidance around team meetings, including:

- Setting the team up on MS Teams - see [BIT guidance](#) on homeworking, including how to set up MS Teams

- Sending meeting agenda and supplementary information along with the notification

- Sending notification for a meeting at least 24 hours in advance so that team members can decide where necessary.

✓ Establish and model virtual meeting etiquette, by providing your team with the following tactics:

⇒ Adjust tone and pace of speaking to compensate for transmission delays

⇒ Limit background noise to minimise interruptions

⇒ Maintain appropriate distance from Web cameras to avoid blurry or large images

⇒ Set an agenda prior to the meeting

⇒ At end of the meeting send out agreed actions, such as task assignments and due dates; post them in a central location for the full team

Managing annual leave

Time away from work is important for health and wellbeing, even more so in the current circumstances. We have generous leave arrangements and we want staff to continue to utilise time off even if they are working from home.

Temporary changes to the Working Time Regulations mean that those who have been unable to take their 2019-20 leave entitlement will be able to carry untaken leave into the next 2 leave years.

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For further information contact:

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