



HR Professional



Six steps to  
enabling successful  
home working

IRIS. Look forward



## Introduction



This year, the majority of the population has been asked to work from home. And for most of us, this 'new normal' has brought an array of challenges including juggling home-schooling alongside work; concern about the health of loved ones; worrying about the future; dealing with feelings of isolation; and much more.

Now, as we start to venture out of crisis-mode and look forward towards the next normal, businesses are starting to reimagine what life after lockdown will mean for them. For the majority, the big question is now that we can enable the majority of employees work from home, should we?

Indeed, one of the key learnings from the first half of the year is that the impossible is possible – in terms of what we could be faced with, but also what we can achieve. Inspired by success stories of people coming together, businesses diversifying, and organisations quickly finding new ways of working, we have new ideas about what we want 'normal' to be – and that includes working from home more.

So, with home working top of the HR agenda, we're offering a guide to help you navigate this new territory – including both the practical aspects and also the health implications you'll need to consider.



## The truth about working from home – stats, facts, and benefits



### Benefits of home working include:

- > Reduced need for office space
- > Access to a wider talent pool of employees
- > Increased employee retention
- > Increased employee engagement
- > Decreased business carbon footprint



## 6 steps to working from home success



### 1. Set up

Your workspace is very important to your mental health while working from home, but can be a challenge to get right. In an ideal situation, everyone would have a quiet room away from communal areas of their home, but not everyone has the luxury of this space.

[The NHS has some excellent instructions](#) about how to set up your workspace for a healthy body and mind – share these with employees to help and let them know how they can request any extra equipment they need. Importantly, each employees' chair must be comfortable and supportive, allowing them to sit at the correct height for the surface they are using to avoid back, neck, leg, and arm problems.

You'll also need to conduct a working from home health and safety assessment for your home workers, and this can be done virtually.

### 2. Mental health

Most employers recognise the importance of taking employee wellbeing seriously. But, however well intentioned, one of the biggest problems with wellbeing strategies is that they assume that there's only one way to stay well. So, while a percentage of your people may relish the opportunity to try a few different types of activities to help their mental health, no one thing is for everyone. Offer mental health support, but respect the differences in your workforce and don't make activities mandatory.

A few ways you could encourage good mental health activities include:

**Encouraging routine** - when working from home, it's all too easy for routine to fall by the wayside. So, encourage your home workers to retain a routine by setting a morning alarm, honouring lunchbreaks, stretching their legs every hour or so, and encouraging regular breaks.

**Dressing for success** - sitting at work in your favourite pyjamas might sound like living the dream, but it's not as good an idea as it seems. It's not necessarily imperative that your home workers put on your normal office wear, but looking (and most importantly, feeling) presentable is very important for our frame of mind while working. So, while you don't necessarily need to set a formal 'working from home' dress code, simply remind your people

that feeling ready for work is an important part of staying healthy while working from home.

**Listening** - sometimes as an employer the best way to support your employees is to simply ask them how you can help. So make sure you have channels your employees can use to give their feedback and suggestions. You should also make sure your home workers know about the support schemes available to them - this could be a confidential in-house contact your employees can confide in, signposting employees to expert organisations such as charities who can help, or by making sure the help offered by your employee assistance programme is clear and accessible to anyone working from home.

### 3. Physical health

You're more likely to become sedentary if you're working from home. And this is unhealthy for all kinds of different reasons. Encourage your people to keep moving by launching 'steps' competitions, setting up 'walking meetings', or even putting on virtual lunchtime yoga.

Remember though that while eating healthily and staying physically fit are important parts of overall wellbeing, they're not the only aspects of staying well. And it's absolutely not an employer's responsibility to monitor them. Many people have complicated relationships with food and exercise, so instead of offering blanket advice, why not encourage your home workers to share healthy recipe ideas? Or encourage gentle movement during the working day through (optional) walking meetings? You could also set up a team walking challenge where you and your colleagues track how many steps you each take during your lunch break.

### 4. Balance

Research shows that remote workers work on average 1.4 more days every month, which equals 16.8 extra working days per year. It may prove a point, but it's not to be encouraged.

To promote a good work/life balance (and prevent home working burnout), encourage full lunch breaks, a universal work 'switch off' time if possible, and ask your leaders to lead by example - sending emails out of hours will only encourage workers to keep working.

A few other ways to encourage balance include:

**Flexible working** - wherever possible, offering flexibility will be a great way to show your home workers you trust them. If they're working remotely for a reason, for example childcare, would flexible working hours help? Find out and be as accommodating as you can.

**Maintaining a 'commute'** - arguably, one of the best things about working from home is that we don't have to drive, train, bus, or walk to work. That said, for many of us, our commute is where we do our best thinking - a bit of 'me' time to start the day where we listen to our favourite



podcast series, chat to friends, or drink a cup of coffee. So, it can still be beneficial to separate the waking up in the morning to the beginning of the working day. With that in mind, encourage your employees to keep their 'commute' time – perhaps by taking a walk, having a virtual catch up with friends, pet playtime, or a cleaning blitz around the house... whatever works for them to start the day well.

**Training and development** - don't forget your home workers in your training and development plans. There's a whole world of virtual training available, utilising many different methods. So encourage them to make time for learning and development and remember to include virtual methods in any training you need them to undertake.

### 5. Structure (but not too much)

If you monopolise your home workers' days with meetings, check-ins and catch ups, you'll not only lessen their productivity, you'll also suggest that you don't trust them to manage their own time and stay productive. However, implementing some structure can be helpful – you need to work out how much structure is just the right amount and this is an art not a science.

Ask your homeworkers what they think could be helpful for them and balance that with what would be helpful for you – it could be a virtual huddle each morning, a weekly 'week ahead' call, a mid-week project progress meeting...whatever works for you and your team.

### 6. Collaboration and community

If your employees are used to working geographically closely to their manager and teammates, then communicating with them in ways other than face to face might be a big adjustment. But distance makes it even more important that everyone knows what their goals and task lists are for the day. Encourage managers to set up a daily video catchup with their team for work related matters, and also social chats to keep a sense of community going – virtual coffee breaks, walking and talking sessions, pub quizzes and 'question of the day' style chats could all help.



A few other ideas to try:

**Lunch and learn** - a sure-fire focal point of the day in any office is what everyone's having for lunch. Like your huddles, you can still eat lunch together through video call. But with more amenities at home, who knows what exotic delights your team will be able to create. So why not take this a step further and start a #WhatsCooking chat? Encourage your colleagues to share their at home lunch recipes and photos – you could even hand out a 'lunch of the week' award. Add an educational element by asking each team member to share their expertise during this time too.

**Game time** - there are loads of online team games you can play remotely, including puzzles, word conundrums, and action games. Set up a tournament to keep spirits high, and there are business benefits too – gaming can help encourage good team communication, problem solving and collaboration.

**Recognise and reward** - reward and recognition should be open to all of your employees – an early finish, extended lunch break, and an additional day's annual leave are all great ways to reward your hard-working remote workers. And praise for a job well done can continue on video calls, through email, and publicly on LinkedIn.

## Final word

One of the most essential things to help your teams adjust to home working is to keep company communication going strong.

Share a schedule of when and how you'll be sharing the latest updates – for example a midday 'all employee' email, a dedicated section on your intranet, or regular team video or conference calls.

Depending on the technology you have available, you could set up a feed or email inbox so your employees can ask questions or make suggestions on the information and tools that will help them stay connected when they're working from home.



Book a demo to learn more  
[click here.](#)



## Look forward to the next normal

Our HR and payroll systems can be used to help your business run smoothly regardless of the locations your employees are working from.

From making sure your critical business activity such as payroll continues, to using our communication tools to support your people, benefits of our systems include:

- > **Anytime, any place, any device** – our HR systems are Cloud based which means you and your employees have instant access, no matter where you're all working from.
- > **Business continuity planning** – you can use our tools to record the location of your teams and the assets they need to keep working, such as laptops and mobile phones.
- > **Employee engagement** – we can help you communicate key messages and understand employee feeling by providing a wide range of communication tools, including texts, emails and online forms. You can segment staff into groups, teams and individuals, ensuring the right people receive the right information when it matters most. And to reduce time-consuming admin, messages can also be scheduled in advance and be written on pre-written templates on subjects including legislation changes and HR policies.
- > **Supporting a work/life balance** - to help reduce stress caused by a clash of work and personal life priorities, time sheets for flexible working patterns, as well as time off in lieu, can be managed directly by your employees through our self-service functionality. You can also keep a wellbeing library of documents within our HR system, offering your employees help and advice on a host of wellbeing topics. These could include the stress management training materials discussed earlier, as well as details on the support systems available for your employees.
- > **Monitoring stress levels** - to help you monitor and review stress in your workplace, you can run detailed absence reports on topics such as the cost of absence, the Bradford factor, weekly holiday leave, and headcount status. Absence types and reasons can be customised to make sure they're relevant to your company. You can also build surveys (which can be anonymised) to monitor stress, wellbeing and employee engagement using the 'query builder' function. These can be a useful tool in gathering insight directly from your people, as well as offering employees a clear channel to express any concerns they're having. Especially important to include in your tool kit in case an employee doesn't feel comfortable raising an issue they're finding stressful with their own line manager.
- > **Managing absence** - after a period of short term or extended absence you need to make sure your employees integrate back into the business successfully – no matter where they're working from. Our solutions can help by enabling you to automate return to work processes to make sure your employees are supported. Our payroll integration enables you to easily calculate statutory sick pay and pay for other statutory leave, including maternity pay and adoption. This clear visibility of pay can reduce additional stress caused by financial concerns during absence.

To find out more, speak to our expert team on **0344 815 5554**



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