

CORONAVIRUS - (

WORKING FROM HOME GUIDANCE

2ND EDITION

**WE ALL
MUST DO IT
TO GET
THROUGH T**



**KEEP
DISTANCE**



**WEAR FACE
COVERING**



**WASH
HANDS**

N rthern Ireland

Civil ervice

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Please note, this temporary guidance is as a result of current Executive and Public Health Agency guidance regarding coronavirus and will be kept under review.

Introduction

1. The Executive has published its [plan](#) for a phased, strategic approach to recovery. The situation in relation to localised restrictions changes but [current information](#) is available.
2. The plan encourages us to continue to work from home when and where we can. Therefore colleagues who can work from home, will continue to do so, and this is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future.
3. This guidance outlines for employees and managers the key principles and practical steps for working from home during the ongoing Covid-19 emergency. This guidance will be regularly reviewed so updated versions may replace this in due course.
4. Some employees are likely to be working at different times and in different ways from their normal patterns however, the impact for individuals and service delivery will be kept under review.
5. Arrangements made using this guidance will be temporary and will not create any future entitlement to work from home on a contractual basis.

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General advice and principles

6. Departments have identified essential workers as per the emergency Covid-19 regulations. In line with this and any requests for attendance for business continuity reasons; managers should consider the potential to work from home fairly and consistently, taking account of the Equal Opportunities Policy, NICS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy and PHA guidance. [General advice and principles](#)

These arrangements may be on a continual basis or for part days/weeks on a rota basis. A focus on the various elements of jobs should identify those tasks that can be performed away from the main office. The following issues should be taken into consideration to decide if the work can be undertaken at home:

- What is the service provided and what is the impact upon the individual's work load and the work of the team?
 - What will be the effect on service delivery?
 - Is the home working environment suitable? Taking into account considerations that may affect an employee's ability to work from home such as; those living in shared households or homes or, where the employee shares with the line manager any personal circumstances that puts them at a greater disadvantage by staying at home than returning to the office and they have been asked to be prioritised due to medical, welfare reasons, or other personal circumstances.
 - Does the job require long periods of uninterrupted mental concentration?
 - Does the job require a lot of ad hoc communication between the groups of staff?
 - Can the work be monitored in terms of output, or is it possible to come to an agreement with the employee about the amount of time particular outputs and deliverables will take?
 - How will contact with the manager and team be maintained?
 - What equipment would be required?
 - Are there any reasonable adjustments required and how can these be made?
 - What costs would be incurred?
7. Since the onset of this pandemic many staff have done their best to balance childcare (in the absence of their normal childcare arrangements), home-schooling, other caring responsibilities and work. Disruption to caring arrangements may well continue due to scenarios where individuals have to isolate or outbreaks which require temporary closure of schools, buildings and/or suspension of services. Therefore there is a need for

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continued flexibility in the management of workloads/working hours during the working day where staff have caring responsibilities. Staff should also refer to [Covid-19: FAQs & Guidance for NICS staff](#) for further information on current caring provisions

8. In order to ensure that individuals have all the relevant information, the manager may wish to meet with them using online meeting facilities or through video conferencing to discuss and agree arrangements. Staff must be available as agreed and if any problems arise in this regard, ensure they keep their manager informed. Advice from NICS HR is available to assist managers.
9. The flexible working hours scheme will apply to staff working from home in the same way that it applies to office based staff. Any flexible working pattern should be sympathetically considered as part of the initial discussions and any subsequent requests to change those arrangements should be made according to the existing procedures.
10. The Staff Handbook still applies to you while working at home during this period and all HR policies apply when working from home, including the standards of conduct and dignity at work when conducting business on behalf of the NICS.
 - The hours worked should not exceed your normal/flexi working hours other than where overtime has been approved for business reasons.
 - Even if you are busy, it is essential that you find the time to take a break of at least 20 minutes each working day that lasts more than six hours.
 - You should ensure that the time period between stopping work one day and beginning the next is not less than 11 hours.
 - You should have at least one complete day each week when no work is done.
 - You should ensure that when undertaking your duties through remote and/or virtual means that your working environment is suitable for this purpose as outlined in the [Staff Handbook](#).
11. Staff should consider whether they really need to make any journeys at present or whether journeys can be replaced with online meeting facilities or video conferencing. Any essential mileage expenses can be claimed in accordance with the NICS Travel and Subsistence Policy. Working from home will not change your permanent workplace or how you claim business mileage at present. Your permanent workplace remains the building notified to you when you took up your current post. Mileage is not payable between home and your permanent workplace unless you are coming in to your permanent workplace to do out-of-hours overtime at the request of management, when, consistent with HMRC requirements, such mileage is paid through HR Connect so that it can be taxed in accordance with HMRC rules on 'substantially ordinary commuting'.

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12. In exceptional circumstances, if you cannot be connected to the internet via data SIM, Wi-Fi device or other devices provided by ICT colleagues, the Department will reimburse home working employees for any actual cost incurred in the making of business calls on staff's personal mobile phones/home landline. Additional information on expenses can be found at [NICS FAQs on homeworking expenses](#).

Health and safety requirements

13. Although you may have previous experience of working from home, in these current circumstances things will likely be very different to before. This may be for example; because you are sharing the space with other family members, or because you are now working at home all week rather than just occasionally or on specific days.

14. The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) has advised that Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Risk Assessments do not need to be carried out while you are temporarily working at home however, employers are encouraged to provide guidance which would enable workers to complete their own basic assessment of home working arrangements and take steps to minimise the DSE-related risks to your health when working at home. To support this, departments have developed homeworking DSE checklists which are available to download from departmental intranet sites. Staff should use the checklist relevant to their department. If necessary, advice is also available from Departmental Health & Safety Advisors. The DSE checklists will allow staff to review their work space in their own home environment, identify potential hazards, mitigate risks, raise and progress relevant issues with their line manager, Departmental Risk Assessors and/or Departmental Health & Safety Advisors. A copy of the agreed DSE assessment should be retained in line with departmental procedures.

- The Health & Safety Executive have produced the [following guidance](#) in relation to carrying out assessments.
- DSE assessments must be reviewed on an annual basis or more frequently if there is a change of circumstances, for example; pregnancy, a house move or change of work location within the home.
- The department is responsible for the equipment it supplies and will therefore be responsible for addressing any equipment related issues identified within the DSE checklist. It is the responsibility of the employee to rectify any environmental issues within the home as highlighted by the DSE checklist.
- Those with disabilities or who normally have special adjustments in the work place should discuss any concerns with their manager.
- If an item of furniture or equipment is required based on the outcome of the DSE

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assessment, temporary provision arrangements should be followed as outlined in [NICS FAQs: Homeworking expenses and furniture provision](#).

- Periodic risk assessments of homeworking arrangements, as well as maintenance checks and electrical testing may be carried out. For example electrical equipment/ leads will need to be returned to the office on an annual basis to facilitate Portable Appliance Testing.
15. [Further guidance](#) and some tips and reminders to ensure your health and safety while working from home.
 16. [Advice on setting up your work space](#).

Reporting of accidents and 'near-misses'

17. Any work related incidents affecting staff working from home must be reported to, and recorded by employers. This includes accidents and any 'near-miss' occurrences. The homeworker must forward details of any relevant incidents to their line manager who should then follow the departmental incident reporting process and forward a copy to the Departmental Health & Safety Advisor.

Security

18. Employees who work from home are required to comply with all IT security and confidentiality requirements of the Department and the NICS. This includes acceptance and adherence to the [Use of Electronic Communications Policy](#)
19. Employees have a direct responsibility for all official equipment and information material held at their home and must take all possible measures to ensure that it is not accessible to non-authorised people (e.g. other members of the household). Employees and managers should discuss any concerns and agree how this will be achieved and managed
20. Most home insurance companies expect customers to declare if they work from their home (clerical use cover suffices) and while it usually makes no difference to the policy premium, failure to declare could present problems in any future claim. Therefore it is the responsibility of the employee to consult their insurance policy documents and, if appropriate, their insurance company, mortgage holders and landlords to ensure that they meet any contractual requirements.

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IT equipment and service

21. All staff should refer and comply with the requirements as set out in Covid-19 [IT Assist advice-and-guidance](#). For NICS staff on an IT Assist supported network, IT Assist will provide them with the necessary IT equipment to connect securely to the corporate network via Secure Remote Access (SRA). This will normally be a laptop or tablet and includes a USB headset. If required, staff working from home may also be provided with a monitor with docking capability or separate monitor and docking station, keyboard and mouse. Additional equipment such as monitors and keyboards should be requested using your department's normal IT Service Request procedures and the costs will be charged to the relevant business area.
22. It is acknowledged that there may be some variations in the IT equipment required by staff depending on the IT requirements of their current role. The equipment to be provided should be detailed by the business area in a Service Request to IT Assist. The equipment available from IT Assist is listed in the [DSS Services Catalogue](#). Where specific equipment needs additional approvals (e.g. high specification laptops) this will be detailed in the [DSS Services Catalogue](#).
23. Equipment requirements not covered in the [DSS Services Catalogue](#) should be discussed with the departmental Business Relationship Manager (BRM) and IT Assist. A list of departmental BRMs can be found in the [DSS Services Catalogue](#).
24. IT equipment will be charged to the business area in line with IT Assist charging policies. These charges can be found in the [DSS Services Catalogue](#). All IT equipment no longer required by business areas should be returned to IT Assist.

Information management, assurance and data protection

25. When working from home the same obligations and compliance in good records management and protecting personal information apply. It is the responsibility of both staff and their managers to ensure that they are aware of their Department's Information Management and Data Protection Policies and Procedures.
26. Where working from home impacts on how personal data is going to be processed, a [Data Protection Impact Assessment \(DPIA\)](#) screening, or full DPIA, should be considered. The DPIA should be carried out by the relevant person within the team in agreement with the Information Asset Owner (IAO) for the business area. Advice and assistance is also available from departmental Data Protection Officers (DPOs) if required.
[Further information on the definition of personal data and DPIAs.](#)
27. Any personal data incidents, breaches or loss of information or equipment should be reported to your line manager immediately.

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Key points and responsibilities of staff working from home include:

Communicate securely - Use NICS approved communication devices i.e. laptop, PC, tablet, softphone or work mobile phone and NICS approved software.

Decision making - Any discussion via online chat and instant messaging apps on unofficial channels e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook messenger etc. leading to decision making, must be redirected to the official channels i.e. departmental email and stored in your official records management system.

Printing - Printing at home is not permitted. On such occasions where there is a requirement for staff to print, they must arrange to go to an office location and use a Multi-Functional Device (MFD).

Security - Ensure IT equipment is turned off and securely stored. Documents and equipment should be kept in the car boot during transit between home and the office. See [NICS mobile device security policy](#) for more information.

Digital assistants - Devices such as Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant etc. must be switched off or removed from your home work area to avoid inadvertent disclosure of information.

Saving records - Ensure records that cannot be saved immediately to your Records Management System (e.g. due to limited connectivity) are checked into the Records Management System as soon as possible once connection to the network is re-established.

Confidentiality - Be aware when holding conversations or using a video connection. You may be sharing your home working space with other family members or friends. Try to hold conversations where others are less likely to overhear you and position your screen where it is less likely to be overseen. Ensure you are not disclosing any personal data in the background. Headsets should be worn to further reduce the risk of overheard conversations.

Home security - If working in a room next to or near an accessible window consider closing blinds and or curtains to prevent/deter sight of official material from outside of your property. [Further advice on home security.](#)

Data incidents / breaches - Report any personal data incidents, breaches or loss of information or equipment to your line manager immediately.

Paper documents - Any personal or sensitive documents taken from or printed off in the office and reviewed away from the office location, must be managed and disposed of appropriately i.e. securely stored and strip-shredded. Staff should be aware that their business area may have additional security restrictions on what documents may be taken out of the office, or printed to use at home; and should check with their line manager.

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Wellbeing

28. Managers have a duty to take reasonably practicable steps to protect employees from the effects of work-related stress. Managers should ensure they are looking out for their employees by:

- Maintaining regular contact.
- Ensuring employees are clear about what work they need to deliver and by when.
- Looking out for signs of stress, considering whether the stress could be linked to work pressure and acting accordingly.
- Taking reasonably practicable steps to ensure that the home working environment is suitable.
- Taking account of considerations that may affect an employee's ability to work from home such as those living in shared households or homes with no or limited internet access, or where the employee shares with the line manager any personal circumstances that puts them at a greater disadvantage by staying at home than returning to the office and they have been asked to be prioritised due to medical, welfare reasons, or other personal circumstances.

29. Employees should ensure they are taking steps to look after their wellbeing during their period of working from home. This includes:

- Maintaining regular contact with their manager and colleagues.
- Taking regular breaks.
- Avoiding being 'always on' by ensuring that they identify non-working time. Most of the software which supports text, audio and video chat used across the NICS has a function that allows employees to add their current status - staff may find this useful for informing others when they are not contactable.
- Contacting the Employee Assistance Programme provider, Inspire or Welfare Officers if they need support, for example, in relation to heightened feelings of anxiety.
- Being aware of personal and workplace stressors and the activities and resources that can help to address this.
- Being aware of the contact details for [IT support](#).

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30. Employees can stay mentally and physically active during this time by:

- Looking for ideas of home-based exercises on the [NHS website](#)
- Spending time doing things they enjoy - this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes.
- Trying to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Keeping windows open to let in fresh air, get some natural sunlight if they can, or get outside. Go for a walk outdoors but remember where possible, to stay more than 2 metres from others.

31. Further guidance and information for staff and managers can be sourced at [Health & Wellbeing](#)

Working from home for teams

32. Guidance for managers and employees should include the following good practice:

- Agree objectives, working arrangements and how the team will operate and communicate to maintain service delivery. Plan ahead and promote flexibility to manage work-life commitments, encouraging the use of shared diaries and collaboration tools to show availability and work flexibly.
- Stay connected by using digital communication and collaboration tools such as instant messaging (e.g. Jabber) and video meeting/conferencing (e.g. WebEx) to work together and communicate on projects, and consider phone calls, tele and video conferencing to discuss ideas and catch-up instead of constant email and instant messaging traffic. Additional information on communication and staying connected can be found on the [Digital and Collaboration Tools](#) page where you will find information on all of the video, email and audio tools your department offers to make working from home and keeping in touch that little bit easier.
- Adopt an approach that builds positive relationships.
- Share information and track progress of priority tasks, giving feedback on work and discussing new ideas to avoid isolation and maintain a sense of community.
- Set clear boundaries between home and work and creating a safe and comfortable place to work.
- Have regular health and wellbeing conversations with others and be flexible in responding to business and employee needs.

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- Maintain contact with colleagues and stakeholders to manage relationships and expectations regarding service delivery.

33. Further detail and advice is available at [Health & Wellbeing](#) under 'Looking after your team - Resources for managers'.

34. Managers across the NICS will be thinking about virtual leadership and development and the actions they need to take to support their team's wellbeing and delivery. Information on learning and development can be found on [LInKS Learning Bundles](#)

Performance management / absence

35. Normal guidance governing performance management and reporting of sickness absence will apply for any home working arrangement. It is particularly important that staff who become ill during a period of home working should notify their line manager as soon as possible. PPA/PDPs should be reviewed and amended where necessary to take account of any changes to tasks or roles during the current pandemic and, targets must remain realistic and achievable.

36. All managers and staff should refer to the [Covid-19 Guidance for NICS employees](#) which outlines the steps required to be taken for managing performance and sickness absence related issues.