

Bargaining Support Group



Working from home and hybrid working



Working from home and hybrid working

A bargaining guide and model policy

Introduction

Importantly, it must be remembered that for many of our members, because of the nature of the work they do, working from home was, is and will never be an option for them. Nonetheless, they still deserve careful consideration in the provision of flexible working options wherever possible.

The CIPD (the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) reported in [‘Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023’](#) “while our research showed an increase in requests for flexible and hybrid working, and that three-fifths of employers already offer this, we also found that there’s unmet demand for varying types of flexible working.

Considering that 6% of employees changed jobs last year due to a lack of options – and 12% left their profession/sector altogether – it is essential for employers to increase both formal and informal flexible working arrangements to improve staff retention and attract the best talent.”

Eurofound reports in [‘The rise in telework: Impact on working conditions and regulations’](#), remote or homeworking sometimes called ‘telework’ “may have further exacerbated the wage and employment gap between high- and low-skilled workers as it took place mostly in better-paid, higher-level occupations, creating inequalities between workers who have access to telework and those who do not. As employees

with access to telework can enjoy greater job security, better wages, and potentially more autonomy and better work–life balance, policymakers have an important role to play in ensuring a level playing field between those who can telework and those who cannot.”

In general the number of people working from home has more than doubled when compared to pre-pandemic levels, according to July 2022 data from the [Office for National Statistics](#). And the majority of employers are continuing with hybrid working (sometimes called agile working, smart working, blended working, remote working or teleworking), whereby workers combine working from home with some days in the employer’s workplace.

There have been a plethora of surveys and studies looking at the issues of whether homeworking is effective, desirable and sustainable and these are considered within this guidance as evidence to back up negotiations.

However, research has also found that employees’ own views on homeworking benefits and difficulties, were often not being fed into employer’s decision-making process.

For example, the April 2021 [UNISON Scotland survey of local government workers](#) asked those who had not enjoyed working from home why that was. A third of respondents said it was due to **isolation** (31%), a quarter (26%) said the **impact on their work/life balance**, 18% said it was due to **challenges with technology** and 11% indicated **lack of support**.

The [report](#) highlights “the importance of ensuring our members are properly consulted and engaged about future working arrangements post-Covid.”

It’s crucial that UNISON reps and branches actively engage in the workplace decisions made about homeworking and hybrid working, so as to improve experiences for all workers.

UNISON wants our members to have a real choice in the matter, rather than having to accept new ways of working without consultation.

If negotiators have any comments on this guidance or any experience of negotiations that could be usefully incorporated in the guidance, please contact Bargaining Support at bsg@unison.co.uk

Further guidance is available from bargaining support for branches and workplace reps www.unison.org.uk/bargaining

Contact your regional education teams and / or LAOS to find out what training and resources are available to assist you with negotiating with your employer or promoting the issues in this guide with your members <https://learning.unison.org.uk>

Contents

Short of time? → Jump straight to the ‘Key points’ and ‘Quick checklists’

Homeworking as a flexible working choice.....	5
Current flexible working rights	5
UNISON case study – NHS staff	7
Examples of different homeworking practice	8
How are job roles selected as suitable for homeworking?	10
What about staff who are unable to work at home?.....	12
→ Key points for negotiations	13
UNISON case study – community sector employer	17
UNISON case study – University of Aberdeen	17
Model survey for your workplace	19
Sharing the evidence and making a case.....	28
Improved health, wellbeing and work/life balance – but only for some	28
Health and safety considerations	30
→ Quick checklist	32
Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for some disabled workers	36
→ Quick checklist	40
Increased productivity and focus for some – but maybe at a price	41
A negative experience for others unable to ‘switch off’ from work	42
The right to ‘disconnect’	43
→ Quick checklist	44
Domestic abuse and homeworkers.....	45
→ Quick checklist	47
A greener way of working, but only maybe	50
→ Quick checklist	51
The visibility of homeworkers – out of sight, out of mind?.....	52
→ Quick checklist	55

Ensuring confidentiality and data protection at home	57
➔ Quick checklist for negotiations	58
Homeworking expenses and allowances	59
Tax relief when working from home	59
Flat-rate tax-free payments under ‘homeworking arrangements’	59
Reclaiming expenses under homeworking arrangements.....	60
Homeworking allowances	61
Employers directly providing equipment etc.....	63
Travel expenses.....	63
Other issues – insurance, mortgage providers, landlords	67
Locational allowances	67
➔ Quick checklist	69
The employment contract - to vary or not to vary	70
➔ Quick checklist	74
➔ Key points for making the case for homeworking options.....	75
➔ Key points for making the case to keep some office working options.....	77
More information	78
➔ Quick checklist for developing a homeworking policy.....	80
Model agreement.....	84

Homeworking as a flexible working choice

Employers are increasingly seeing the reputational benefits of being 'seen' as a flexible employer, which will inevitably attract better staff.

CIPD (the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) research '[Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023](#)' showed that 6% of employees changed jobs in 2022 specifically due to a lack of flexible working options, and 12% left their profession or sector altogether because there was a lack of flexibility.

Employees highlighted flexible working (53%) and remote working (53%) as key when considering a new job, only overtaken in importance by pay and benefits (77%).

The UK government's 2021 consultation paper into flexible working, (covering England, Wales and Scotland only, as employment law is devolved to Northern Ireland) recognises the benefits to employers. "By removing the invisible restrictions to jobs, flexible working fosters a more diverse workforce – and the evidence shows that this leads to improved financial returns for businesses. Furthermore, workers who have more flexibility are more motivated at work and more likely to stay with their employer."

'[Working from home around the world](#)', published in September 2022 in the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) working paper series, found that:

- Employees view the option to work from home two-to-three days a week as equal in value to 5% of pay, on average with higher valuations for women, people with children and those with longer commutes.
- One quarter of employees who currently work from home one or more days per week said they would quit or seek another job, if their employer announced that all employees must return to the worksite for five or more days a week.

But for flexible working to be a positive experience for both employers and staff, it must be truly flexible and truly a choice, and not just limited to homeworking or hybrid working.

More details on flexible working can be found in '[Bargaining on working hours](#)' www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/10/Working-hours-bargaining-guide.pdf

Further information from the UK government at www.gov.uk/flexible-working

Current flexible working rights

All qualifying employees who have worked continuously for their present employer for 26 weeks can apply to work flexibly, such as by changing their hours, the times

they work or requesting they work from home. The employer must seriously consider the written request and provide good reasons for rejecting it.

Employers will have to give a prescribed statutory reason for turning down any such request. By law, a request can only be turned down if:

- it will cost the business too much
- the employer cannot reorganise the work among other staff
- the employer cannot recruit more staff
- there will be a negative effect on quality
- there will be a negative effect on the business' ability to meet customer demand
- there will be a negative effect on performance
- there's not enough work for the employee to do when they've requested to work
- there are planned changes to the business, for example, the employer intends to reorganise or change the business and thinks the request will not fit with these plans.

Acas has produced a [Code of Practice](http://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-flexible-working-requests) on the topic www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-flexible-working-requests. (In Northern Ireland, the Labour Relations Agency has the responsibility of promoting the improvement of employment relations. It has produced an [advisory guide for employers and employees](#) about how the right to request flexible working operates and the duty on employers to consider requests seriously.)

An employee can complain about procedural failings by the employer, where a tribunal may award up to 8 weeks' wages. There may also be inter-related discrimination claims to consider too.

In addition, **the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023** received royal assent in July 2023 and is likely to come into effect in spring 2024. (However, it will not apply in Northern Ireland because the implementation of employment laws is devolved.)

This will mean that

- employees will be able to make two flexible working requests in any 12-month period (compared to just one under current law)
- employers must respond within two months (compared to three months currently)
- employees will no longer be required to explain the impact that granting their request would have on the organisation and how any such effect might be dealt with.

Managers will not be able to refuse a request until they have consulted with the staff member (although the 'consultation' is not defined). But the scope for refusing a flexible working request remains the same and employers still do not have to offer a right of appeal against their decision, although this is recommended in the Acas Code of Practice on Flexible Working.

More information from the TUC 'The law on flexible work is changing - here's what your employer needs to do' www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/law-flexible-work-changing-heres-what-your-employer-needs-to-do

The [UK government's response to the consultation](#) on reforms to the Flexible Working Regulations also included the plan to extend the right to request for employees from day one of their employment. However, this will need to be introduced under separate legislation, which they have not yet tabled.

Acas is currently updating its statutory code of practice on handling flexible working requests and are currently reviewing responses to [their consultation that closed in September 2023](#). They also plan to update their non-statutory guidance which sits alongside the code. The updated code aims to encourage a more positive approach to flexible working, with an emphasis on fostering an environment in which requests are not rejected by default without open-minded consideration and meaningful dialogue.

Flexible working requests make a permanent change to a worker's terms and conditions of employment, although there can be a trial period if mutually agreed (as suggested in the model homeworking policy included in this document).

UNISON case study – NHS staff

In 2021, health unions including UNISON and NHS employers agreed [new flexible working rights](#) aimed at giving NHS staff a better work/life balance. New contractual terms allows staff to:

- Request flexible working from the start of their employment (removing the requirement to have six months' service)
- Make an unlimited number of applications for flexible working, instead of just one a year
- Submit applications without having to justify requests or provide specific reasons
- Access a process where managers must refer on requests that cannot be accommodated initially to ensure all possible solutions are explored.

It is expected to help the NHS recruit and retain health workers. Poor work/life balance is often given as a key reason for employees wanting to leave the health service. The extra demands of the pandemic have left staff exhausted with many re-evaluating their priorities and considering leaving the NHS.

To tackle this, health unions and NHS employers agreed these new flexible measures to encourage staff to continue their careers in health. The provisions apply in England, Scotland and Wales, with similar measures expected in Northern Ireland.

Employers will be expected to promote flexibility options for all jobs at the recruitment stage and discuss them regularly with all staff in one-to-one meetings, team discussions and appraisals.

Health employers are also working with unions to develop, agree and offer a broader range of flexible working arrangements. In addition, they will monitor and examine what happens to requests made across their organisations. More information at www.nhsemployers.org/staff-experience/flexible-working

The NHS Staff Council, on behalf of NHS trade unions and employers in England, jointly agreed to implement **a framework agreement for homeworking and agile/hybrid working**, that came into effect in October 2023.

Principles agreed include that employees who work all or some of their time at home should all be treated fairly and equitably, and supported to work safely and effectively in their teams. Employees in posts which are deemed not suitable for agile/hybrid or homeworking should also be treated fairly and equitably and should be encouraged to discuss and consider other forms of flexible working that may meet their needs.

Locally agreed policies should encompass provisions for a range of agile/hybrid and homeworking situations, including:

- Occasional or temporary ad hoc homeworking – agreed informally as and when with the line manager.
- Agile/Hybrid working where part of the contractual hours are undertaken at home.
- Contractual homeworking where the work base is home.

Policies should be communicated to all employees and reference to the option of agile/hybrid and/or homeworking should be included in recruitment and selection material where relevant.

Local agile/hybrid and homeworking policies should set out clear, consistent and objective criteria for considering whether and how a role could be successfully carried out at home and in what proportion for agile/hybrid working.

Employers and local unions should work together to agree procedures for assessing existing and new posts against the criteria to ensure consistency and fairness in decision-making.

Examples of different homeworking practice

Too often the views of all workers are not fully considered when decisions on

working from home and other forms of flexible working are made by employers.

Some employers do recognise that there needs to be various options defined within any homeworking policy, that will provide the best way of working for individual workers, for the job roles and for service delivery.

For example, hybrid working that may vary from week to week could particularly benefit employees where the job involves frequent off-site visits; permanent homeworking could be a reasonable adjustment for some disabled workers.

However, increasingly employers are looking to define hybrid working as a stipulated number of hours or days to be worked in the office. Often it can be largely determined by managers according to 'business need' and at their discretion and not as fits in best with the needs of the employee, nor of how they can be most productive in their work.

Hybrid working or a mix

[Xpert HR's May 2022 survey](#) found that the majority of organisations surveyed had at least some employees working on a hybrid basis. 32.2% of the organisations surveyed offer it to their entire workforce.. Employees are typically spending two or three days in the office. Some employers specify a number of days in the office, whereas other a percentage of working time (usually 40-60%) and they may apply this equally to full and part-time workers.

[CIPD's research into flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023](#), found that over half of the organisations they surveyed (52%) require hybrid working employees to be in the workplace for a minimum number of days in the working week/month, while 46% do not. Employees are most likely to be required in the workplace for two (35%) or three (33%) days a week.

A fifth (20%) of organisations are seeking to put in place additional measures or investment to enable more hybrid or homeworking in the next six to 12 months. Organisations are looking to implement a range of measures of support – most notably making their offices more collaborative spaces (44%), a greater investment in the quality (40%) and quantity (40%) of technology, and more line manager training (38%).

Remote working

In Wales, the government has [a remote working strategy for the country](#). They define remote working as “working outside of a traditional workplace or central place of work for all or for part of an individual’s working hours. It includes working at home and close to home in your local community.”

Their aim is to:

- see 30% of the workforce working remotely on a regular basis
- work in partnership with employers, workers, trade unions and others to support a

shift to more people working remotely, helping them to build on progress made during the pandemic and better understand the benefits of remote working

- take action against climate change by reducing the need to travel thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with transport
- improve air quality by reducing congestion and softening rush hour peaks
- create inclusive workplaces in our local communities that have equality at the heart of decision making
- promote a hybrid workplace model of office, home and local hubs to enable people to live and work in their local communities
- increase opportunities for more fair work and promote well-being and work-life balance in the Welsh workforce.

More information at <https://gov.wales/remote-working-policy>

Dynamic working

Loughborough University is operating a [Dynamic Working policy](#). They recognise that flexible working is a fixed change to an employee's working patterns for which there is a formal application procedure. By comparison Dynamic Working is an informal arrangement between the employee and their manager which is intended to give more flexibility in when and where they deliver their role. If the employee wants to agree a fixed pattern of work that doesn't vary from week to week, they will need to make a flexible working request.

To determine the specific Dynamic Working arrangements for individual employees, their manager will determine the proportion of their role that needs to be performed from campus, considering both the operational needs of the role and the need to maintain effective interactions between team members and development of a positive team culture.

Once they have determined the appropriate proportion, they will discuss with the employee their wishes about Dynamic Working to work out the optimal arrangements.

How are job roles selected as suitable for homeworking?

The criteria used to select which job roles are suitable for homeworking whether wholly or in part, is also crucial. Again it's important there is some trade union involvement in decision making.

The criteria should consider the

- demands of the role,
- its tasks
- whether it is dependent on a particular location

- the logistical factors around supporting and managing that role
- how the team or department as a whole can best work in supporting each other and be most productive.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) ‘Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023’ shows that “workers in the highest income band of £50,000 or more annual earnings, those who were educated to degree level or above, and those in professional occupations were most likely to report home only or hybrid working... **workers in the lowest income band** of up to £10,000 annual earnings where only 14% of workers reported home or hybrid working...

Younger workers continue to be least likely to only work from home (6%)... The group aged 16 to 24 years also had the highest rate of workers who did not have the ability to work from home, with just under two in three (65%) reporting this.

The TUC has pointed out that **women and Black workers** are often the ones who are less likely to be able to work from home. They occupy front line, emergency and health and social care jobs in disproportionate numbers, as shown during the COVID crisis where it also resulted in higher rates of contracting the virus.

As well as the needs of the job role, the employer should consider the individual worker's needs.

The same arrangements might not work for everyone who does the same role. For example, everybody’s home circumstances will vary considerably. Some people may lack space and privacy, or have a poor internet or mobile phone signal, there may be an increased risk of domestic abuse, etc.

Enforcing homeworking for all could potentially disadvantage some workers who struggle with the arrangement. On the other hand, for some disabled workers it could provide a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010¹.

Whilst criteria for homeworking might also include consideration of whether the worker has a suitable homeworking environment, this should not necessarily exclude those workers who just need some practical support (such as provision of technology, equipment, furniture, reasonable adjustments) from the employer.

But it’s key that any arrangements are not imposed on staff, unless it is shown to be

¹ In Northern Ireland, this requirement is enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

an absolutely necessary condition of the job role.

What about staff who are unable to work at home?

There may, of course, be valid reasons for an employer to be reluctant in some circumstances to allow homeworking as an option for all staff. But it remains imperative that the employer provides clarity about expectations in terms of physical presence in the workplace, potentially implementing a rota system to ensure fairness in treatment of staff.

With some careful consideration of a job role, perhaps re-organising some tasks or re-designing the work, an element of hybrid working may be possible, for example working at home for associated administrative tasks, although the main duties need to be carried out in-person.

Trade union reps may also need to be mindful of any knock-on effect of increasing the homeworking option for desk-based workers on other members of the workforce. For example, there could be an impact on the cleaners or caterers, security staff or receptionists working for the same employer, whose services may be reduced as a result.

And with all the interest given to hybrid working in the post-pandemic world, it's important that trade unions do not neglect the flexible working needs of our many members who cannot work from home due to the nature of their job.

For example the [CIPD's research into flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023](#), found that 65% of organisations provide some kind of flexibility to their front-line workers.

The most popular type of flexibility is in start and finish times (46%), with a third providing flexibility in scheduling of shifts/rotas. Almost a third (31%) provide the ability to swap shifts with colleagues.

More details on flexible working can be found in '[Bargaining on working hours'](#) www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/10/Working-hours-bargaining-guide.pdf

Further information from the UK government at www.gov.uk/flexible-working

→ Key points for negotiations

Make sure there is consultation with staff and that the trade union is involved

Key to a successful workplace post-pandemic, is meaningful consultation with workers to reassure them that lessons have been learnt for any future change in working practice.

Employers may need to be reminded that homeworking during the restrictions did not impact on productivity and the ability to deliver services, and may in fact have permitted efficiencies in delivery.

However, for some workers this may have come at a price, perhaps with an adverse impact on their mental and physical health and wellbeing. That's why the trade union must be involved in discussions to raise these issues with the employer.

Is the employer engaging with the trade union workplace reps and safety reps on any new working arrangements and consulting with staff?

Are employers addressing any concerns and properly preparing for new working practices?

Are employers focusing solely on working from home and neglecting other flexible working options that can enhance recruitment and retention of all staff?

Share the experiences of staff homeworking during the COVID-19 restrictions or during any hybrid working trial periods

Are you collecting details from members, perhaps with a workplace survey covering all staff – what were the particular benefits and challenges of homeworking? Can you provide specific examples?

How do staff see themselves working in the future? Is homeworking an important part of it?

[Use the UNISON model survey and adapt it for your workplace.](#)

Armed with this type of evidence, you may be able to highlight the particular value not only to recruitment and retention of staff but their future productivity. It may emphasise the benefit of providing real choice to staff, of having a balanced approach to homeworking as one of the many options available within flexible working.

Has the employer considered their duty to provide reasonable adjustments to disabled workers? As well as making adjustments for disabled workers who work from home, and for disabled workers who work in the office, has the employer also considered homeworking in itself as a potential reasonable adjustment?

You may also be able to point out the particular problems and challenges of homeworking for some workers, that in the long run can impact on their productivity

as well as their mental and physical health.

Enforcing homeworking for all may de-motivate some workers, and could result in limiting the career progression of specific groups of workers, such as women and disabled people.

Make clear to the employer the particular benefits and challenges that have been experienced by our members, and that real choice and appropriate support is the best way of ensuring recruitment, retention and productivity.

Share the wider evidence about the benefits and challenges

See sections below, to help in your negotiations where the employer is reluctant to either continue any form of homeworking, or plans to impose it on all staff:

[Improved health, wellbeing and work-life balance – but only for some](#)

[Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for some disabled workers](#)

[A negative experience for others unable to ‘switch off’ from work](#)

[Domestic abuse and homeworkers](#)

[A greener way of working – but only maybe](#)

[The visibility of homeworkers – out of sight, out of mind?](#)

[Ensuring confidentiality and data protection at home](#)

Remember those who cannot work from home

Don't forget those within the workplace who do not have the option to work from home because of their job role and duties.

Can certain duties be done in different ways to enable some homeworking? Are these workers offered other forms of flexible working to help ensure a work/life balance?

If much of what these workers do is servicing colleagues who now work from home, such as the administrators, cleaners, caterers etc, is any homeworking policy creating a two-tier workforce? Are some jobs actually at threat if workers are not coming into the employer's workplace as before?

How is work being distributed between those in the workplace and those working from home? Does the more interesting, fulfilling work with greater opportunities for career development go to those that are more visible in the workplace? Or those who are able to work particularly productively from home because of their more comfortable, spacious and better equipped surroundings?

Mix and match with care

Is the trade union involved in deciding on which job roles are suitable for homeworking whether wholly or in part?

What criteria is the employer using to make selections? Are clear reasons given? Do they take into account the individual needs of a worker?

Are the employer's decisions fair and consistent across the organisation and will they be reviewed in the future? Do they consider a variety of options – office working, occasional homeworking, hybrid working as well as permanent homeworking? Is it a choice for the employee?

Be wary of employers focusing solely on saving overhead costs

It's important that employers do not shirk from their duties under health and safety whilst their staff are working from home. They will need to consult with the trade union including safety representatives (where recognised) on matters affecting members' health and safety including when working from home. Even in a non-recognised workplace there is still a duty to consult either directly with employees or through an elected representative of employee safety.

This is crucial because homeworking is shown to have a direct impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of workers.

It's important too that employers are reminded of their duties under the Equality Act 2010² for making reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. Whilst working from home may be a reasonable adjustment in itself for some disabled employees, is the employer imposing it as an excuse to avoid making reasonable adjustments in the workplace?

Employers may also see homeworking as an opportunity to make savings on office space and overheads. They may need to be reminded of a need to compensate workers for additional costs and concerns whilst working from home, and that homeworking is simply too stressful and difficult for some workers. Alternatives must still need to be considered if they want to avoid losing valuable staff and impact on staff morale.

If hybrid working is planned by the employer, and office space to be reduced, how will those who come into the office be allocated workstations? Is there to be a hotdesking policy on a first-come, first-served basis? Is there to be a booking system? Will it take account of the needs of disabled workers and any reasonable adjustments they may have, as well as other specific needs of workers (e.g. menopausal women wanting to be by a window that opens.)

² In Northern Ireland, this requirement is enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

More information in 'Bargaining on hotdesking policies'

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/01/Hot-Desking.pdf

Case law

In the employment tribunal case of *Miss A Baker v House of Commons Commission*, part of Ms Baker's complaint was upheld. It was found that the Commission's hotdesking practice put her – as a disabled worker – at a substantial disadvantage, because her workstation and equipment had been adapted for her needs and she risked injuring herself if alterations were made.

The tribunal held that the employer had breached its duty to make reasonable adjustments when it failed to prevent the use of a disabled employee's modified workstation as a hot desk during an absence of only one day.

As shown in this case, any hotdesking arrangements that an employer puts in place should not put disabled employees at a substantial disadvantage, or if it does, they must consider further reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.

Review the flexible working policy

Make sure the employer is not just discussing homeworking. Remind them of all the many other options of flexible working that they could be offering to their staff.

Has the workplace got a flexible working policy in place? Should this be reviewed alongside any proposals for homeworking or a full return to the office?

What criteria does the organisation use for workers who can request flexible working? Is it allowed as a day one right or only after the statutory period of service? Highlight the recruitment benefits of offering flexible working to all staff, including new staff.

UNISON case study – community sector employer

A community sector employer proposed a shift to a complete homeworking model, with all offices closed, replaced by a smaller number of flexible working hubs with no-one working regularly or routinely within them.

Hub locations had been chosen on the basis of cost, rather than where would best enable the existing workforce to access the facilities, proximity to adequate public transport, or other such factors. And the proposal was for a very limited number of desks at the hubs.

However, in the process of the consultation with the trade union, the following was achieved:

- An increase in the number of desks in each hub, so that there would be enough desks to support a generally blended model of working; everyone having the ability to work in an office once a week, and those with special requirements, more often.
- Reopening of some offices on a short-term basis while hubs were developed.
- Provision of desk spaces at some of the work sites (depots) used away from the office. Over the last few years, these were anyway becoming more like offices as IT had been installed and training rooms developed. This would then enable more people to have a desk accessible within a reasonable distance from their home.

UNISON case study – University of Aberdeen

UNISON reps were consulted over the introduction of the University's homeworking policy. A range of documents have been developed to support the arrangements at ['Managing and working in a hybrid team'](#).

UNISON rep, Owen Cox explained: "It's been a really positive experience for us. One of the things we considered right off the bat was a suitable working environment for anyone working from home. We made sure there was a workstation assessment in place and pretty much everybody was well kitted out.

There was also a full consideration of caring responsibilities – it's not just about being a parent, you can be caring for a friend, and the employer took all types of carers into consideration right from the off.

Welfare and wellbeing were other key issues, remembering that everyone's circumstances are different with some people welcoming homeworking, others who did not want to work from home, particularly with some facing loneliness and isolation.

One of the things the employer asked to include in the policy was the right to visit at home. At first we were concerned, but it was all about the welfare of staff so we actually got it added in.

The request process for home or hybrid working includes an appeals process, and the employer agreed to having a trade union rep to sit on the panel so that there was a bit of transparency. Decisions also give due consideration of all protected characteristics and vulnerabilities.

And when the university first started home working, the employer agreed to give every single staff member an individual phone call, and that was really helpful to ensure wellbeing.”

Model survey for your workplace

To collect evidence for any development of homeworking and hybrid working arrangements or as part of a general review of flexible working, workplace reps and branches can inform their negotiations with employers by providing them with the views and experiences of staff, collected through an anonymous workplace survey.

You may want to adapt the survey at some points so that, for example, it refers to a trial period of hybrid working if undertaken in your workplace.

In order to assist UNISON **[branch name]**'s work in defending and seeking improvements in the **[name of employer]**'s flexible working policy, we would greatly appreciate it if you could complete this survey. It should only take a few minutes to complete.

All responses to this survey are anonymous and will be treated as confidential. It will not be possible to identify any individual from information used for negotiations.

We are collecting equality monitoring information so that we can help make sure that any workplace practices do not disadvantage any particular groups.

1. How do you describe your gender?

- Female
- Male
- In another way

2. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

- Asian UK
- Black African
- Chinese
- Asian Other
- Black Caribbean
- Irish
- Bangladeshi
- Black UK
- White UK
- Indian
- Black Other
- White Other
- Pakistani
- Black mixed heritage
- Other mixed heritage

3. Would you describe yourself as a disabled person?

- Yes

4. Would you describe yourself as

- lesbian?
- gay?

bisexual+?

5. Would you describe yourself as transgender?

Yes

6. Do you work

full-time?

part-time?

7. How much do you earn?

Less than £10,000 per year

£10,000 to £20,000 per year

£21,000 to £35,000 per year

£36,000 to £50,000 per year

More than £50,000 per year

8. Do you currently work from home some or all of the time?

Yes, all of the time

Yes, some of the time

No

9. If no, do you think it would be possible for your job to be done from home if you had the right support?

Yes

No

If your answer is no, please now go straight to question 41.

10. What assistance has your employer provided to help you work from home?

Laptop/computer

Separate computer screen

Laptop riser

Adjustable office chair

Workstation/desk

Keyboard, monitor or mouse

Mobile phone

- Landline phone and phone line rental
- Broadband connection
- Made changes to your duties to help you work from home
- Other assistance, please detail

.....

- None of the above

11. Do you have a dedicated, private workspace at home?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you have a desk at home?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you have an adjustable office chair at home?

- Yes
- No

14. Do you have access to IT equipment such as a computer, keyboard and mouse at home?

- Yes
- No

15. Do you have access to a dedicated work mobile phone at home?

- Yes
- No

16. Do you have a strong mobile signal in your home?

- Yes
- No

17. Do you have reliable and fast internet with sufficient capacity at home?

- Yes
- No

18. Has your employer conducted a homeworking environment risk assessment?

- Yes
- No

19. Has your employer provided you with any health and safety guidance about working from home?
- Yes
 - No
20. Has your employer made you aware about the requirements of data protection law and the workplace data protection policy?
- Yes
 - No
21. What provisions has your employer made with you for dealing with storage, use and security of confidential data held at home?
- Provided a homeworking policy for dealing with storage, use and security of confidential data held at home
 - Provided a lockable filing cabinet
 - Provided provision for the secure disposal of confidential waste
 - Other provisions, please detail
.....
 - None of the above
22. Does your employer use technology to monitor your work activity or breaks away from the computer whilst working from home?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
23. Whilst working from home have you got as much work done as when you were working in the workplace?
- More work
 - Same amount of work
 - Less work
24. Have you continued to work your contracted hours whilst working from home?
- More hours
 - Same amount of hours
 - Fewer hours

25. Whilst working from home, has contact with your line manager been

- More frequent?
- The same?
- Less frequent?

26. Whilst working from home, have communications with your line manager been

- More positive?
- The same?
- Less positive?

In what way? Please give examples

.....

27. Have you received any training whilst working from home?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give details.

.....

28. Have communications with work colleagues or your team/department

- Improved?
- Remained about the same?
- Reduced?

In what way? Please give examples

.....

29. Have communications with service users or clients or customers

- Improved?
- Remained about the same?
- Reduced?

In what way? Please give examples

.....

30. Have communications with your workplace trade union rep

- Improved?
- Remained about the same?

Reduced?

In what way? Please give examples

.....

31. Have your working hours been more flexible whilst working from home?

- Yes, in part – although still expected to be available at certain times
- Yes, totally – able to organise my working day as I wish as long as I fulfil my responsibilities
- No

32. Has working from home affected your general physical health?

- Improved
- Stayed the same
- Deteriorated

34. How has working from home impacted on your physical health?

- I have started experiencing musculoskeletal pain such as back ache or hip pain
- I feel more fatigued
- I have developed a poor sleep pattern
- I have experienced eye strain
- I am more inactive and/or have gained weight
- Other, please detail

.....

I have experienced no physical health problems

35. Has working from home impacted on your mental health and wellbeing?

- Improved
- Stayed the same
- Deteriorated

In what way? Please give examples

.....

36. Has working from home affected your work/life balance?

- Improved

- Stayed the same
- Deteriorated

In what way? Please give examples

.....

37. Has working from home impacted on your personal finances?

- Significantly better off
- Slightly better off
- About the same
- Slightly worse off
- Significantly worse off

38. If you are financially worse off from working from home, what have been the additional costs?

- Increased heating and electricity costs
- Increased water meter costs
- Workstation costs (such as desk, chair)
- Equipment costs (such as laptop, keyboard, mouse)
- Reasonable adjustments at home if you are disabled
- Increased telephone or broadband costs
- Home insurance costs

39. Has your employer offered to reimburse any extra cost you have incurred whilst working from home?

- Yes
- No

40. If you are disabled, has your employer offered you any reasonable adjustments whilst working from home?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

41. If you are disabled, have you received any assistance from Access to Work whilst working from home?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If yes, please give details.

.....

42. Would working from home help you to balance your caring responsibilities for children or disabled people or older people better with your work?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

43. If you are a disabled person, would working from home be beneficial to you as a reasonable adjustment?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

44. How would you like to work in the long term?

- Permanently working from home
- Hybrid working (mixture of office and homeworking)
- Fully office based

45. What are the barriers that would make long-term working from home undesirable for you?

- Health and safety considerations
- Physical health issues
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Costs are too high
- My family circumstances do not suit homeworking
- I am unable to adhere fully to data protection requirements in my home
- Lack of reasonable adjustments as I am disabled
- Other barriers, please detail

.....

- No barriers

46. When attending the [workplace or office], have you experienced any problems with:

- hotdesking
- technical problems
- managing my childcare arrangements
- managing other caring responsibilities
- barriers to participation (if you are a disabled worker)
- with travel/commuting
- collaborating with colleagues (e.g. as so few have been attending at the same time as me or all meetings are continuing virtually).

47. If you have any further comments with regards to the positive or negative benefits of homeworking and workplace/office working, please let us know here.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Sharing the evidence and making a case

Improved health, wellbeing and work/life balance – but only for some

The [Hybrid Work Commission reported in August 2023](#) that “a growing body of research shows that the right hybrid and remote work environment in the UK could contribute to raised productivity, increased prosperity and a happier and healthier workforce...”

70% of *business* owners reported that their business was happier since introducing a hybrid work model.

Over half of Brits (54%) believe working hybrid supports a better work/life balance. 62% of hybrid workers said it promoted better wellbeing. 60% of those who had a hybrid work pattern told us that they were able to better avoid work stress when working from home.”

The [Hybrid Work Commission also reported](#) that “75% of hybrid workers told us that hybrid working has had a positive impact on their work-life balance... Our survey showed that work-life balance comes second only to a competitive salary for Brits, when asked to consider what factors would be important when looking for a new job.”

One of the biggest benefits of working from home cited by workers and employers alike, is the improvement for many in their work/life balance, being able to deal with domestic and work demands more flexibly within the day, and often with much greater freedom to organise their day. In addition, workers benefit from not having to waste time on travelling to and from work.

However, the [Hybrid Work Commission's](#) report shows that increases in loneliness and isolation topped the list of concerns business owners had about a hybrid model of work. In their focus groups, a number of participants talked about how mental health and wellbeing had become more of a focus since moving to hybrid working.

Many of the members surveyed by [UNISON Cymru/Wales](#) back in 2021, reported a considerable impact on their mental health when working from home, particularly reporting anxiety and depression. Over a third (33.8%) said that their mental health had deteriorated.

Examples of comments of UNISON respondents:

“I have felt isolated and this has increased my stress and anxiety at a time when I am already struggling with this and trying to return from sickness.”

“I have a chronic fatigue syndrome so some days are so much better working from home - especially when I have bad days. Then other days it has made me more

mentally fatigued being on virtual meetings all day.”

“Poor mental health and lack of support from employer.”

Detailed responses to the 2021 CMI and Work Foundation report ‘[Making hybrid inclusive – key priorities for policymakers](#)’ indicated that parents and carers work longer hours to make up for interrupted time, causing blurred boundaries between their work and home lives, and negatively affecting their wellbeing.

[Croner-i](#) HR information reports that “One study suggests that the average 1.5 hours saved from commuting has led to an 8.2% increase in the working day, being ‘zoomed-out’ and the feeling that homeworkers are now just eating and sleeping at work.”

At a basic practical level, [UNISON's 2020 equalities survey](#) found that 49% of respondents had a lack of suitable equipment to be able to fulfil their work duties from home, as well as highlighting the flaws and failures in IT systems.

As one UNISON member described: “At home I could not access my work emails. Managers assumed we could, as they have work laptops and already work from home. Higher-paid staff were much better informed and were having Microsoft Teams meetings.”

The Institute for Employment Studies report ‘[Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and Tensions – January 2021](#)’ found that many workers asked missed the workplace as a source of social interaction and support networks. Informal interactions were hard to replicate using digital tools.

These findings are backed up by the ILO/WHO (International Labour Organization/World Health Organization) publication ‘[Healthy and safe telework technical brief](#)’.

In order to encourage social interaction and promote mental health for homeworkers, the [ILO/WHO](#) suggest:

- Employers should encourage workers to set boundaries on workhours and keep to a regular schedule, to ensure they do not to work an excessive number of hours.
- Employers should avoid contacting workers outside of scheduled workhours, and should encourage co-workers and managers to communicate only during scheduled workhours.
- Workers should be encouraged to connect with co-workers for virtual gatherings and informal chats.
- Employers should provide teleworkers with ICT tools and software that will help them to connect efficiently with co-workers and managers. However, it is

important for employers and managers to be aware of the number of online meetings employees are involved in, especially the number of back-to-back meetings.

- Workers should be encouraged to engage in enjoyable social and recreational activities during work breaks. This could include short physical activity breaks.
- Workers should be informed about the potential psychosocial risks related to telework, the early symptoms of mental ill health, and how and where they can access psychosocial and mental health supports.
- Teleworkers should be trained on appropriate work behaviour and digital etiquette while interacting with colleagues, and on how to identify and respond to abuse or bullying.

Physical health too can be negatively impacted by homeworking.

For example, the 2021 [UNISON Cymru/Wales survey](#) of members found that 35% reported that their physical health had deteriorated whilst working from home, with common issues being musculoskeletal pain such as back ache or hip pain, fatigue, eye strain, and a poor sleep pattern.

Many others complained of lack of exercise and weight gain whilst working from home.

A deterioration in physical health can clearly be caused by inadequate equipment. For example, the Institute for Employment Studies report '[Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and Tensions – January 2021](#)' found that workers often had to share workspaces, lacking suitable desks, chairs and computers, struggling with poor WiFi and internet connections.

Workers “had little privacy, or had to be peripatetic, negotiating their use of space around household members’ relative need for quiet. Workspace could be more of an issue for young people living in shared accommodation and bedsits, often working in their bedrooms or in communal rooms. Managers observed that this could then link to deteriorations in well-being.”

Health and safety considerations

As the control that can be exercised over a member of staff working from home is limited, the main responsibility for health and safety considerations will be with the home worker under Section 3 (2) of the Act. This places the obligations on homeworkers themselves to ensure that they and other persons, including members of their household (as well as the public if relevant) are not endangered by work activities undertaken at home.

Workplace reps and branches should highlight the importance of staff to raise any health and safety concerns whilst working from home with their line managers

promptly. They should make sure any risk assessment checklists are thorough and cover all potential areas of risk including the workstation and equipment.

More information from UNISON:

Homeworking and hybrid working safely

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/12/Homeworking-and-hybrid-working-safely.pdf

From the Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

Home working – the basics for employers

www.hse.gov.uk/home-working/index.htm

→ Quick checklist

- Is the employer preparing to take any additional measures or increase investment in homeworking arrangements? Are they purely approaching homeworking as a cost-saving exercise?
- Are they considering all areas needed for planning and investment, not just the provision of equipment and IT but a development of a homeworking or hybrid working policy, strengthening of the flexible working policy, training for line managers including related equality issues, consideration of how performance management systems will need to be adapted?
- Is the trade union involved in these preparations?
- Has the employer considered the benefits of homeworking and all forms of flexible working choices for the work/life balance of their workers, particularly those with caring responsibilities (who continue to be predominantly women)?
- Where homeworking is popular with staff members, has the employer considered it as part of their gender pay gap action plan?
- Where homeworking has shown to be unpopular with some staff members because of the negative impact on work/life balance, will the employer agree to other forms of flexible working options?
- Does the employer provide adequate paid parental leave and carers' leave? Do they stress that homeworkers have as much right to these types of leave as those who are in the workplace?
- Check that the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) guidance](#) for employers on health and safety for homeworkers is being followed.
- Does the worker have a suitable workspace at home? Has the employer made sure staff have the correct equipment to do their job?
- As well as considering adaptations for the worker's physical environment and for the management of homeworkers, has the employer taken account of [HSE's guidance](#) on stress and mental health of home workers?
- Remind employers of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations and the need for regular rest breaks for users of DSE (such as PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones) – and this should include taking account of the amount of time spent on focusing on virtual meetings. The common experience often referred to as 'Zoom fatigue' is being more widely recognised as often causing stress and exhaustion.
- Does the organisation have a mental health policy developed alongside the trade union, and does it take account of the specific needs of those staff members who are working from home? Are all workers aware of this policy and how it

operates?

- Do managers receive training in mental health issues in the workplace, and do they act as role models in taking proper breaks, leave and switching off at the end of the working day?
- Has the employer updated the health and safety policy to cover working from home including setting out:
 - how working from home risks are to be assessed
 - providing a checklist and guidance and training to help workers assess and identify problems within their homeworking environment
 - steps taken to protect groups who may be at particular risk — e.g. pregnant or disabled workers
 - how risks may impact family members and housemates?
- Is the health and safety policy made widely available to staff so that they are aware of the details and confident that appropriate risk assessments are undertaken?
- Are workers aware of their responsibility to comply with the health and safety policy including reporting of concerns whilst working from home? Have they been sufficiently trained to undertake their own risk assessments at home?
- Do they know they have a responsibility to make sure they highlight any issues they know when the risk assessment takes place (for example, faulty electric plug points). Under Section 3 (2) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, obligations are placed on homeworkers themselves to ensure that they and other persons, including members of the household (as well as the public) are not endangered by work activities undertaken at home. Workplace reps and branches should highlight the importance of staff to raise any health and safety concerns whilst working from home with their line managers promptly.
- If for whatever reason it is not safe for a worker to work from home (perhaps due to overcrowding, noise, light, musculoskeletal injuries, stress/mental health problems), is the employer clear about the measures they will take to eliminate that risk, which could include allowing some workers to work in the office?
- Are UNISON safety reps consulted on any risk assessment checklists, guidance and training provided by the employer to ensure they are thorough and cover all potential areas of risk including the workstation and equipment?
- Are risk assessments regularly reviewed to ensure employees' homeworking environments remain safe and healthy?
- Are individual risk assessments undertaken for disabled workers and pregnant workers when working from home?

- Where workers are home-based but go out to visit clients, is there a system set up to register their whereabouts so that their safety can be checked on (lone working issues)?
- If it's felt necessary for the health and safety officer to visit a worker's home because of a certain problem or additional support needed, has this been agreed with the individual and suitable notice given for the visit? Can a UNISON member request that a UNISON safety rep accompany the health and safety office in order to help make recommendations on any equipment etc that is needed? Are alternative approaches offered such as providing photographs?
- Does the employer recognise that a different way of working may also open up the potential for bullying and harassment, particularly as such behaviour need not be carried out face-to-face but can occur in writing, by telephone, text messaging, email or use of social media?
- Does the employer have a budget specifically for action to help ensure the health and wellbeing of staff?
- Do workers know where to go for mental health support such as the employee assistance programme or external organisations such as Mind?
- How does the employer plan to support homeworkers who feel isolated, lonely and disconnected from work colleagues? Will they provide additional investment to help ensure homeworkers are supported?

Acas suggests that “where possible, employers should provide different ways for people to stay in touch to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation. For example, instant messenger tools, video meetings, as well as emails.”

They suggest that regular “one-to-one meetings are good opportunities to talk about how work is going, as well as how people are feeling.”

UNISON reps and branches should remember that contact with their union can be an important way of preventing homeworkers succumbing to feelings of social isolation. How do branch officers plan to support members who work from home?

- How does the employer plan to communicate with staff who are working from home? How do branch officers? Do they recognise that sometimes, the fatigue and anxiety experienced by homeworkers comes from the need to be always digitally available, with an overload of chat, email, mobile phone and video meetings.

Acas warns that “using too many different methods to communicate can also be confusing and stressful. Employers should talk to their employees and any representatives about which communication methods work best and when... too

many [online] meetings can reduce productivity and cause stress, anxiety and fatigue.”

- How does the employer plan to support homeworkers who need assistance such as with IT problems. Do staff know who to contact?
- Are staff being kept properly informed when they work from home so that they do not feel professionally isolated? Does the employer recognise that homeworkers can feel frustrated because of a lack of communication and not being kept up to date about changes within the organisation, or because they can't be kept up to date due to faulty equipment or poor IT?

Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for some disabled workers

The [Hybrid Work Commission reported in August 2023](#) that “44% of those who self-reported having a long-term health condition wished they had more flexibility over their work schedule, compared to 35% of the general population. This group also reported marginally better overall wellbeing when working from home (47% vs 44%).

The Commission also found that “hybrid work has allowed disabled employees increased autonomy and flexibility in their roles and hours worked, allowing them the ability to work in more accommodating environments.”

In addition it “allows disabled employees greater ease with managing their conditions: administering medication, changing medical dressings and equipment and attending medical appointments over the phone.”

This backs up a key finding from UNISON’s 2020 survey highlighted in the report ‘[Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?](#)’ in that a number of disabled workers reported taking less sickness absence as they were able to manage their condition better when working from home.

[ONS statistics from 2011 to 2020](#) also showed that those who do any work from home (whether disabled or non-disabled) have a lower sickness absence rate than office-based workers.

Some examples of comments from disabled workers responding to the survey included in the UNISON report ‘[Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?](#)’:

“I can hear better as I have hearing loss in both ears. The quiet of the home enables me to hear and think clearer.”

“I live with bipolar. Working from home gives me a controlled quiet space with no distractions. When needed, I am able to interact with colleagues via email or phone.”

“I’m autistic and the office is a relentless sensory assault. So much of my energy goes on trying to function while blocking out the sound, light and feel of an open plan office. I do not have to deal with the social anxiety I have whilst in the workplace with other colleagues.”

“I don’t need to start my day at 5am just to make sure I have all morning treatment and medication in order to be able drive to work. Getting up at 7 am makes massive difference. Less travel/ driving time means less impact on my disability.”

“Able to work around my pain levels. On good days can do longer and can take regular breaks when I need to.”

“Able to [...] fit work around life easier with no worries on how often I go to loo [due to

Crohns disease].”

“I have managed to stay well at home and have not gone off work sick at all this year. If I were in an open plan office at work as I usually would, by now I would have picked up a cold or cough and as I have lung problems, it would affect me more than most.”

Generally, working from home was found to give disabled workers more control over the pattern of their working day. From later start and finish times to the ability to timetable in more breaks, disabled workers could better manage their impairments without the rigidity of the work environment.

Disabled workers also welcomed the positive impact on their pain and fatigue of not having to commute. Many reported of a daily battle to get to work and the huge impact this had on their ability to work once there. Homeworking had completely removed this barrier for many.

July 2022 research from the Work Foundation [‘The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working’](#) found that 70% of disabled workers who took part in the project, said that if their employer did not allow them to work remotely, it would negatively impact their physical or mental health.

Survey respondents and interviewees highlighted clear benefits to working from home, including having more autonomy and control over when and how they work, which in turn allowed them to better manage their health and wellbeing.

This brought wider benefits for their organisations too; 85% of disabled workers surveyed felt more productive working from home.

[Remote4All’s research project](#) exploring the experiences of disabled and neurodivergent workers similarly found that remote work opportunities presented a positive intervention for many. In particular, remote work allows some disabled and neurodivergent workers to be in employment when this may otherwise be difficult. For instance, working regularly from home may help individuals on the autistic spectrum by limiting difficult in-person social interactions and providing greater control of their environment.

However they also found that when specific needs are not considered, remote working can trigger serious difficulties. For example, work life balance could suffer for individuals with ADHD, and for those with sensory impairments.

Overall, they found that the employees stressed the importance of employers understanding and listening to their individual needs, to make remote working accessible and optimal for all.

But some disabled workers disadvantaged

But home working is not necessarily suitable for all disabled workers, and may in fact

create additional barriers. Responding to the individual needs of disabled workers means not assuming that working from home is always a positive option. [UNISON's survey](#) found that, for those disabled workers who were less productive, reasons included lack of reasonable adjustments (53% had not been given any reasonable adjustments to support them to work from home), poor IT equipment and the mental health impact of homeworking.

It should be remembered that reasonable adjustments are specific to an individual person's needs. There are a variety of adjustments that could be made including altering work hours, installing software programmes on the worker's computer, delivering specialist pre-assembled equipment like a work chair, providing speech-to-text support or a BSL interpreter to join video meetings, or installing a specialist phone.

More information from UNISON:

Reasonable adjustments: bargaining guide, model policy and accessibility passport
www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/10/25875_reasonableadjustments.pdf

Proving disability and reasonable adjustments

<https://shop.unison.site/product/proving-disability-and-reasonable-adjustments/>

It is crucial that employers be reminded of their duty to provide adjustments both in the workbase and at home for disabled people. Yet some disabled workers are clearly facing disadvantages when working from home.

In the UNISON survey of disabled members covered in the report '[Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?](#)', many respondents had felt the need to buy their own equipment as they could not access reasonable adjustments.

Deaf workers were often particularly excluded from work colleagues due to a lack of reasonable adjustments in the form of communications used. This led to a sense of isolation amongst some.

Some neurodivergent respondents said that they needed clear boundaries between work and home, and found it difficult to work from home without clear structures.

Some examples of the comments received from disabled UNISON members from the UNISON report:

“At work I have my desk set up to meet my needs having had a work station assessment carried out by OH which unfortunately I can't replicate at home.”

“I need to use the phone a lot for my job, however the mobile supplied is an old style cheap Nokia, the sound quality is awful. I'm hearing impaired.”

“My environment is not set up for working from home. I have a visual impairment and cannot use the equipment set up to support my vision.”

“Unable to call or take part in group calls. My department doesn't use any form of video conferencing that would allow a sign language interpreter to be included.”

“My mental health has suffered partly due to my reasonable adjustments not being met. Worried it is going to be the new norm.”

In addition, of the disabled members who responded to UNISON's survey:

- Only 5% had help from Access to Work, the government's flagship agency that funds adjustments for disabled workers
- 41% did not know about Access to Work and 23% did not think Access to Work could help with working from home.

Reps and branches should make sure that employers are providing sufficient advice and support on working from home and reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. The [Access to Work programme](#) is administered through Jobcentre Plus and may provide grants towards the cost of various adjustments including adapting or purchasing equipment.

Many employers are unaware of the existence of Access to Work. Workers are eligible if they have a disability or health condition. The employer or worker then purchases the equipment, etc and reclaims the grant from Access to Work. The employer may have to make a contribution to the cost.

For latest details on levels and eligibility for grants, it is important for disabled workers to check directly with an Access to Work Adviser. Contact details are at www.gov.uk/access-to-work (www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work for workers in Northern Ireland).

The UNISON survey also highlighted how reps and branches must protect disabled workers who are being forced to work from home in order to save the employer money or to help the employer avoid ensuring accessible workplaces. Homeworking should be a choice for disabled workers, not a requirement, otherwise disabled workers could be forced out of the visible workforce.

Worryingly, July 2022 research from the Work Foundation '[The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working](#)' found that close to 1 in 5 (19.1%) of survey respondents had their request for additional support or new adjustments while working remotely refused, with no alternative arrangements put in place.

UNISON is clear that disabled workers should always have the option to work from home if they want to as it may reduce barriers significantly, as long as there is a prompt provision of reasonable adjustments necessary for the home situation.

→ Quick checklist

- Has the employer invested in equality training for all line managers including best practice around dealing with reasonable adjustment and flexible working requests? Do they also receive training on managing hybrid teams so they are productive and inclusive, regardless of where and when their teams are working?
- Does the employer consider the needs of each disabled worker individually on a case-by-case basis? Every disabled member is different and there is no exhaustive set of workplace adjustments.
- Has the employer a reasonable adjustment policy in place? If not, what is the timescale for implementation?
- Can workplace reps work with employers to review reasonable adjustments policies and practices specifically to see their effectiveness when it comes to implementing requests for flexible working?
- Will employers consider permanent or hybrid homeworking in itself as a potential reasonable adjustment for disabled workers? This should include the equipment needed to eliminate any workplace barriers a disabled worker might encounter when working from home.
- Are employers putting pressure on disabled people to work from home just to get out of providing reasonable adjustments in the workplace?
- Will employers provide the same reasonable adjustments for disabled workers when they work from home such as equipment, BSL interpreters for online meetings, software, specialist phone? If necessary, will they provide additional adjustments?
- Do disabled workers know about Access to Work?

Increased productivity and focus for some – but maybe at a price

One important observation from much of the research so far is how home or hybrid working can have a positive impact on work productivity.

[CIPD's research into flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023](#), found that almost two-fifths (38%) of organisations say that more home/hybrid working has increased their organisation's productivity/efficiency. Just 13% say it has decreased their organisation's productivity/efficiency.

Employee productivity also remains positive, with almost half (46%) thinking that employees in their organisation are generally more productive when they are working from home/in a hybrid way. This has increased from 43% in a similar CIPD survey in 2021.

An earlier report from the Institute for Employment Studies on their major research project '[Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and Tensions – January 2021](#)' similarly highlighted productivity positives with nine in ten (88.4%) employees asked, feeling they had got at least as much, if not more, work done at home as in the office.

The research project also reported that "Employees had more autonomy over their time to craft their own jobs and to spend more quality time with families. Organisations too benefited, as more employee time was invested in jobs, even if this was on a more flexible schedule. These gains translate across to the productivity scores reported."

[UNISON's 2020 equalities survey](#) found that many members felt more productive working from home, including one person who summarised the productivity benefits: "I get more done without all the distractions of being in a noisy, open-plan office."

UNISON's report '[Covid 19 and disabled workers – time for a homeworking revolution?](#)' found that almost three quarters of disabled workers said they were more productive or just as productive. Reasons for increased productivity included reduced impact on pain and fatigue due to less commuting and an ability to work more flexibly with additional breaks or later start times. Some disabled workers also commented that their homes were better set up to manage their impairments, including in terms of access to toilet facilities.

Additionally, disabled workers cited fewer distractions as helping to increase their productivity. For many disabled workers, the distractions they refer to were not simply colleagues asking questions but included the distractions of noise and lighting in busy open plan offices that do not make adjustments for disabled workers.

Neurodivergent workers and those with hearing impairments or mental health problems particularly reported that homeworking had allowed them to address these issues.

A negative experience for others unable to ‘switch off’ from work

Whilst productivity has been shown to improve or stay the same for most when working from home, it can cause difficulties for others, not least because most people’s homes are simply not designed for their job.

Additionally, productivity may decrease simply because working relationships may suffer, and people are no longer able to pick up information from informal office conversations.

Worryingly too, the [2021 CIPD/Simplyhealth Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report](#) found that more than 77% of employers had observed ‘presenteeism’ – people working when unwell – in employees who were working from home. Additionally, 30% of remote workers reported working more unpaid hours than before the pandemic.

70% of employers found ‘leaveism’ – working outside of contracted hours or using annual leave to work – was also an issue.

No wonder then that 5% of remote workers said their work-related mental health had got worse during the pandemic, with 42% saying this was at least partly a result of inability to switch off from work.

The CIPD states that “the findings suggest that many organisations haven’t been taking effective action to combat the risks of an ‘always on’ culture. Boundaries between work and home life have become increasingly blurred for many people working from home for example, making it difficult for people to switch off.”

[A report \(August 2021\) from Autonomy on the right to disconnect](#), looked at existing research on the prevalence and impact of always being ‘on’ for work. They found that, across a number of studies, “findings show that if workers have a chance to mentally ‘switch off’ from their work, they are generally more productive, engaged on the job and convivial with colleagues. On the other hand, if workers do not have the ability to ‘switch off’ mentally from their work, they are more likely to experience symptoms of exhaustion...”

And because “the vast majority of those who work from home are women... [as they are] far more likely to shoulder the additional burdens of childcare, housework and care for elderly family members... women are at greater risk of negative health impacts.”

UNISON’s national young members’ forum, has also highlighted the negative impact of working from home on younger workers’ wellbeing and work/life balance, citing [South West Young Members Forum July 2021 survey](#).

They found that the majority of respondents found it hard to switch off (57%), worked over their contracted hours (66%) and continued to work despite not feeling well (83%). They call for employers to produce clear guidelines and policies on the right

to disconnect.

The right to 'disconnect'

The TUC has called for a statutory right for employees and workers to disconnect from work, to create 'communication-free' time in their lives.

French workers have benefited from a right to disconnect since 2017 when a law was passed to ensure that workers had a right to stop taking work calls or respond to emails outside of their normal working hours. The law was introduced to address the 'always on' culture, whereby the line between work and home life had become increasingly blurred.

Since then Italy, Spain, Ireland, Slovakia and Portugal have introduced the right at least in some form. And EU members are currently negotiating a binding directive that will include the right to disconnect from work-related communications outside working hours.

The aim of the Republic of Ireland's right is to help employees strike a better work/life balance while working from home. The Irish government has introduced a Code of Practice for organisations which includes:

- the right of an employee to not have to routinely perform work outside their normal working hours
- the right not to be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours
- the duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (e.g. by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours).

Six in 10 UK workers would support a 'right to disconnect' law, according to research from [Ipsos](#).

Case study

The Council of Scottish Government Unions agreed terms with [the Scottish Government to implement the right to 'disconnect'](#). The Scottish Government guidance for the new policy states that staff "should not be required to routinely perform work outside their own agreed normal working hours" and "should not be penalised or pressured to routinely work outside their normal working hours".

It also states that all staff "have a duty to respect each other's down time, for example by not phoning or expecting responses to emails or other communications outside of an individual's normal agreed working hours".

There are exceptions, such as where contact was expressly agreed with an official in advance, someone is on call, or the situation is extraordinary, such as letting a staff member know an office is shut that day.

→ Quick checklist

- If hybrid working is proposed, are employees properly considering the best use of time spent in the office (more collaborative work and activities that benefit from face-to-face meetings and informal sharing) and time spent working at home (work requiring focus and less distraction)? A fixed pattern of working at home and in the office may not be the most productive use of hybrid working.
- The most productive workers have some choice and input into how they can best work. Will the employer take account of the individual needs of workers, particularly where homeworking or office working has a negative impact on their productivity?
- Is the employer providing sufficient investment into providing reasonable adjustments for disabled homeworkers, IT equipment and ergonomic furniture for all homeworkers?
- Are they ensuring that homeworkers' improved productivity will not be as a result of increased working hours and never 'switching off' whilst working from home, to the detriment of the mental health of workers?
- Have employers made sure the workload of their staff is at a safe level and that they are not put under unreasonable stress?
- Will the employer agree to rules about when staff can and cannot be contacted for work purposes outside of normal working hours? Do staff have a right to switch off and disconnect work from home life?
- Does the employer recognise that the lines between personal life and work can become blurred for homeworkers, not least through the use of virtual meetings that intrude into the home space?
- At the very least, will the employer ensure that employees working from home are encouraged and able to take adequate rest breaks and not work excessive hours? In addition to the 48-hour limit on the working week, the Working Time Regulations 1998 require workers to take the following breaks: a 20-minute rest break, if working more than six hours per day, 11 hours of uninterrupted rest in a 24-hour period, 24 hours of uninterrupted rest per week (or 48 hours per fortnight).
- Are all staff expected to properly use their annual leave for rest and relaxation and not to work whilst on leave or use it for sickness absence?
- Are all staff expected not to work whilst off sick?
- Are all staff expected to get the right breaks and to not work beyond contracted hours?

Domestic abuse and homeworkers

Over a quarter of respondents (27%) to [UNISON's 2020 equalities survey](#) felt working from home brought risks to their health, safety and wellbeing, and this could include the additional problems of domestic abuse.

One member living with an abusive partner said: “Before lockdown, I was just about coping as long as I was going into the office. But being kept at home and my children spending even more time with their abuser has almost broken me.”

Nearly 4% of respondents said that they, or someone they know had been experiencing domestic abuse during lockdown.

The Office for National Statistics or [ONS](#) has reported that the number of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by police rose in 2020 by 7% compared with 2019.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in their forward to the CIPD's resource on '[Domestic abuse: Guidance for people professionals on managing and supporting employees](#)' pointed out that “The pandemic-led increase in homeworking has further blurred the lines between domestic and working lives and shown that employers can no longer ignore the issue of domestic abuse. During lockdown, as more people work from home, abuse has sadly increased because abusers have more opportunities to exert power and control. This has also made it more difficult for people to seek help.”

The UK government also stress the need for people who are at risk of abuse to remember that there is help and support available to them, and these should be highlighted by employers, union reps and branches.

More information from UNISON:

Domestic violence and abuse, a trade union issue

<https://shop.unison.site/product/domestic-violence-and-abuse-a-trade-union-issue/>

More information from CIPD:

Domestic abuse: Guidance for people professionals on managing and supporting employees

www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse/

More information from Acas:

Wellbeing when working from home: domestic violence and abuse

<https://www.acas.org.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing-when-working-from-home/domestic-violence-and-abuse>

More information from Labour Relations Agency:

Safe at home, safe at work: Guidance on domestic violence and abuse
<https://www.lra.org.uk/resources/advisory-guide/safe-home-safe-work-guidance-domestic-violence-and-abuse-0>

→ Quick checklist

- Is there a domestic abuse policy agreed at work? Are all employees aware of this policy? Are managers trained to operate this policy?

[Northern Ireland's Labour Relations Agency](#) points out in 'Safe at home, safe at work' that "Employers' obligations in relation to health and safety apply, irrespective of whether the employee works from the workplace or from another remote location for example, home or designated hub. Where there is a known risk of domestic violence and abuse, the starting point would be a risk assessment, taking account of risks when working remotely and identifying measures to minimise those risks."

- Does the policy take account of the particular circumstances of employees who are working from home, including providing job flexibility at this time, and ideally special paid leave in order for a victim/survivor of domestic abuse to find a new home, get a place at a refuge, receive legal advice, open a new bank account, seek medical help etc?

[Acas](#) outlines the sort of support employers should make clearly available should an employee be experiencing domestic abuse, such as:

- finding a way to communicate safely, for example by text message if calls are not possible, or a different email address if their email is being monitored by the perpetrator
- agreeing on a code word or hand signal for someone to use to alert others that they're experiencing domestic abuse
- arranging another place they can do their work instead of at home
- being flexible around working hours
- time off, for example to attend support appointments
- helping the person get other appropriate support.

- Does the policy also recognise that working at home or remotely as an alternative to working in the usual workplace may provide a safer environment for the victim/survivor?

[The Labour Relations Agency](#) highlights in 'Safe at home, safe at work' how "Staff members who work from home, whether for all or some of their working hours, may lack a safe space away from the perpetrator of the domestic violence and abuse."

[CIPD](#) highlights how "Women's Aid suggest that survivors may need to leave their area of usual work in order to escape the perpetrator, and/or to receive additional support. In these cases, managers should work with the employee and

senior staff to find ways for the survivor to keep their role, or move to a comparable one. This may involve working in a different office, from home, and so on.”

[Labour Relations Agency](#) include the following suggested clauses in their model policy:

“In circumstances, where an individual normally works from a remote location, such as home or designated hub for all or part of the working week, and we have genuine concerns that they may be experiencing domestic violence and abuse, we will seek to ensure that the individual is part of at least one telephone or video call with a colleague on each working day. If contact is lost, we will consider what steps may be appropriate in the circumstances.

We will always seek to agree with the staff member experiencing domestic violence and abuse what will be communicated to colleagues, if any changes are obvious and may require explanation.”

- Does the policy include An assurance to prioritise health and safety at work

[CIPD](#) highlights how “the dangers of domestic abuse should not be underestimated. Employers should make an assessment of risks relating to domestic abuse. Existing risk management frameworks, traditionally used in the workplace health and safety context, could be used for this process.

Assessments should identify the risks and the control measures identified to minimise the risks. Risks may include, for example, employees working from home, or the workplace being open to the public...

If domestic abuse is disclosed, undertaking a risk assessment can ensure that the potential risk to employees and colleagues is lessened. It is important to note each person’s needs are different and that any measures should only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.

- Does the policy and risk assessment take account of practical issues affecting a victim/survivor?

[CIPD](#) warns “Be careful raising things when are people working from home, as the abuser might be monitoring the employee’s email or other methods of communication. Even asking open questions in an email, or in a call when it’s not known who else is listening, might ring alarm bells with the abuser and cause more abuse.

With the consent of the employee, you could agree code words, or hand signals in video calls, so if they don’t come into the office, or if they are in a threatening situation while working at home, there are set phrases both parties can say to enable them to flag if they are in danger. Also agree what action a signal requires, for example if to call the police, or if to provide information about

available support.”

- UNISON recognises that controlling and abusive behaviour can occur in mixed and same sex relationships, within extended families, and can affect men as well as women. However, the vast majority of the victims/survivors of domestic abuse are women and children, and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence, and sexual abuse.

It is important that reps and branches raise awareness of the issues and highlight any [domestic abuse policy](#) that may be agreed at work, as well as external support services available, such as the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) or [Galop](#) for LGBT+ people.

A greener way of working, but only maybe

UNISON's [2020 equalities survey](#) found that some UNISON members believed working from home to be healthier in general, both for the environment and individuals.

As one UNISON member reported: "It's much less stressful and a better working environment from home. I get so much more done. I don't have to use my car and deal with traffic congestion, so it's helping the environment. I also don't have to work in an open-plan office with no opening windows, no temperature control (we sit with coats on in winter), and use dirty desks, kitchens and toilets."

The [Hybrid Work Commission reported in August 2023](#) reported that 36% of hybrid workers said that their commute had changed since hybrid working was introduced, with 44% saying that they drove to work less, travelled off-peak more (26%) and no longer paid for a season ticket (22%).

The [Hybrid Work Commission](#) estimate that the average hybrid worker saves 178 hours a year from reduced commuting as a result of hybrid working. In total, this equates to 661 million hours saved across all hybrid workers in the UK. However, the carbon emissions savings related to reduced commuting are partly offset by the increased energy use of workers in their homes.

"[Research from WSP UK](#), a London-based consulting firm specialising in engineering, shows that **remote work in the UK may only be more environmentally friendly in the summer**. Examining the carbon output of 200 UK-based workers across different locations, researchers found that the environmental impact of remote work was higher in the winter due to the need to heat individual workers' buildings versus one office building.

"Energy management in buildings is generally more sophisticated than at individual homes," says David Symons, Future Ready Lead and Director of Sustainability at WSP UK. Because each individual remote worker keeps the heating on and tends to heat the entire house, working in a single office building ends up having a lower impact – even with the commute added in."

From BBC website article ['Why working from home might be less sustainable'](#)

The evidence is not yet conclusive. And many employers may be keen to show that they are continuing to help the environment by cutting the amount of pollution caused by their workforce in a daily commute when advocating homeworking. The use of virtual meetings also means fewer business journeys.

In addition, many organisations contributing to The Institute for Employment Studies report '[Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and Tensions – January 2021](#)' reported how workers and managers had to adapt to less printing with

many unable to print out documents whilst working from home. This resulted in finding new paperless ways of working.

→ Quick checklist

- Is the employer promoting homeworking as the greener choice? It should not be used as a quick way to get to tick the box on reducing the employer's carbon footprint whilst also cutting their costs and expenses. It may not be a greener choice, simply shifting the burden onto the worker.
- Has the employer considered other ways of ensuring a greener, more sustainable workplace?
- Do your negotiations include other ways of working that make the workplace greener?
- Does your workplace have an environmental rep able to lead on negotiations?

More information:

Green UNISON

www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/green-unison/

Greener workplaces for a just transition – a Wales TUC toolkit for trade unionists

www.tuc.org.uk/greener-workplaces-just-transition-wales-tuc-toolkit-trade-unionists

The visibility of homeworkers – out of sight, out of mind?

Increasingly the workplace culture where workers are totally office-based is being seen as old-fashioned, unnecessary and unhelpful to both the employer and the worker.

Offering homeworking jobs can open up opportunities to a wider, more diverse pool of applicants from a wider geographical area. In some cases, it could also help retain staff.

A September 2021 [YouGov survey for the BBC](#) found that just over half (56%) of women thought working from home would help them progress at work, since “childcare and caring duties become less of a hindrance to working full-time”.

The [Hybrid Work Commission reported in August 2023](#) that “in plain monetary terms, we estimate that hybrid working is worth £13.5bn to UK hybrid employees annually. This is equivalent to £1,634 a year to an individual hybrid worker or 5.3% of a median salary...

In particular, our economic analysis has found that hybrid working has encouraged large numbers of professionally educated women to move to full time work – particularly mothers.”

However, some workers are contending with an entrenched workplace cultures where workers are expected to be seen working, even if it can now seem outdated to many modern workers and employers.

Research from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research on [‘Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown’](#), discovered that “a common fear among employers is that without physical oversight, employees will shirk and productivity will fall” even if this has not been borne out during the COVID restrictions.

But manager’s attitudes may slowly be changing.

The [Hybrid Work Commission reports](#) that “a key impact of hybrid work has been the shifting relationships between managers and employees. A 2021 study found that hybrid employees reported higher levels of autonomy than those fully office-based.

Managers are required to have higher levels of trust in employees working from home as they are unable to monitor them as they would when sharing an office. Managers reported going to greater lengths to build trust, focusing on opportunities to develop social relationships, not just their work... The assumption that being office-based is linked to career progression appears to be regressing.”

Some employers insisted on a full-time return to the workplace after the COVID

restrictions were lifted in order to physically monitor their employees' productivity based on hours worked and not quality of work done, rather than trusting their employees to continue to be productive whilst working at home.

As the [Hybrid Work Commission's](#) analysis of research shows, whilst some employees may benefit from the practicalities of hybrid work, not being available and visible in the workplace "may result in a "double stigma", as they may not be considered for promotions as immediately as those who are able or prefer to spend more time in the office.

These findings are supported by data collected prior to the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrating that the reason why flexible working is used, i.e. due to caring responsibilities, can negatively impact career outcomes more than gender factors."

There is a risk of 'out of sight, out of mind', with the better opportunities and more interesting work being allocated to those working in the office.

[The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee](#) also highlighted that working from home could particularly create challenges for career progression for women, with a risk that permanent homeworkers become 'invisible' and left off the career ladder. A number of witnesses also pointed out to the Committee that working from home does not cause care responsibilities suddenly to vanish.

"While the hybrid way of working presents opportunities—including, if done right, enabling many to maintain the flexibility that remote working can afford—it also creates a risk of exclusion for those not physically present. Almost 60% of women who work in hybrid environments feel they have been excluded from important meetings, and almost half say they do not have enough exposure to leaders, a critical enabler of sponsorship and career progression.

Additionally, only around one-quarter of women say their employer has set clear expectations of how and where they should work, which causes challenges for those seeking predictability (often as a result of caring responsibilities)."

From Deloitte's report '[Women @ work 2022: a global outlook](#)'

[ONS analysis](#) suggests that the rewards for homeworking were typically less for those who exclusively worked from home. On average they are paid less, less likely to get a bonus, less likely to get promoted, and less likely to receive training.

Employers will need to be mindful of the attraction of this type of flexible working option to particular groups of workers, not only women as suggested above, but disabled workers who use homeworking as a reasonable adjustment, or younger workers.

July 2022 research from the Work Foundation '[The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working](#)' found that survey respondents and interviewees

highlighted concerns that they might lose access to opportunities at work if they need to be based at home, and these concerns were greatest among disabled individuals with multiple impairments or conditions.

The CMI and Work Foundation report '[Making hybrid inclusive – key priorities for policymakers](#)' found that managers have particular concerns that hybrid working could mean younger staff (under 24 years old) may be at risk of missing out on workplace opportunities, such as accessing networking opportunities, stretch projects, or representing the organisation at external events, with 36% of managers highlighting this as a concern.

Worryingly, [the IDR July 2022 report](#) 'Hybrid and homeworking and implications for pay' found that, whilst most organisations were making efforts to promote teamworking between office-based staff and home or hybrid workers, few respondents had put specific initiatives in place to ensure homeworkers continue to receive opportunities for career development, progression or promotion.

→ Quick checklist

- Is any new homeworking or hybrid working policy equality impact assessed? Is the trade union involved in this assessment? Does it include taking account of issues affecting carers, new starters, disabled workers?
- Will the employer monitor the take-up of the policy in practice, to ensure that certain groups are not disadvantaged because they work from home?
- How does the employer plan to protect homeworkers from becoming invisible in the workforce?
- How does the employer plan to ensure that homeworkers receive the same opportunities for development and training and career progression?
- How does the employer plan to ensure that homeworkers continue to receive opportunities for collaborative work with colleagues?
- Will all managers receive training on managing staff who are working from home? Working in a very different way clearly requires a different level of trust between managers and workers, and it is important that employers remind managers of this and provide training on the appropriate management of remote workers.
- Are performance management systems being adapted so that they can work effectively for homeworkers?
- Do managers regularly check that they have up-to-date contact details for staff and let workers know who they should contact if they have any concerns, such as health and safety issues, IT problems or data protection worries when they are working away from the office?
- Are managers clear about team communications, their frequency and timing, and also when workers can be reached by phone, video link, text or email? And how members of their team can reach them?
- How are communications between team members encouraged to ensure necessary information and experiences are shared?
- Are staff clear about behaviours expected in relation to work policies whilst working from home, and potential consequences for breaching these? Is the policy or are individual agreements on homeworking as a flexible working option clear about the expectations of those working from home such as their working hours, reporting sickness absence and annual leave, as well as a continued need to comply with other workplace policies?
- Are working hours flexible, for example around caring responsibilities at home, as long as full number of hours are fulfilled within the week? Can the individual have some autonomy as to how they use their hours or are they expected to work core hours as if they were in the office?

- ❑ Do all staff members continue to benefit from some face-to-face meetings and training? How are opportunities for learning from colleagues facilitated? Is it made clear that there will be a need for permanent homeworkers to attend updates, meetings, workshops and courses at the workplace?
- ❑ For many occupations (such as social workers) an important aspect is informal learning from the experiences of colleagues. Similarly, this need to informally learn from the experiences of colleagues around them, should be considered for new workers, students and those on work experience. How is this addressed in any homeworking policy so that remote workers do not lose out?
- ❑ Do managers ensure that homeworkers experience the same career development opportunities as their colleagues based in the workplace?
- ❑ Is the employer ensuring that any future opportunities for homeworking are made available to all staff at all levels or grades?
- ❑ What will determine when an employee is expected to come into the office – on a rota basis? On a set pattern for each individual? In response to the needs of the work, particular duties, activities, projects, meetings? Are employers planning for how those who come into the office will be allocated workstations whether through a booking system or hotdesking policy, and how appropriate and useful such systems are for office workers?

Whilst hybrid working will provide some opportunities for office-based training, informal learning and workplace visibility, employers will need to plan ahead to ensure a smooth transition from working at home to working in the office within each working week, taking into account technological needs, reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, availability of workplace workstations and equipment required for both locations.

- ❑ Employers may see hybrid working as an opportunity to make savings on office space and overheads. Is there an expectation from the employer that the work practice in the office may also need to be adapted (perhaps because of a reduction of space)? Is the trade union being consulted and are the needs of individual workers taken into account when changes are being considered so that no-one is disadvantaged?

Ensuring confidentiality and data protection at home

Safe, secure collection and storage of work-related information within the home setting, whether digital or paper-based must be considered and planned for by the employer.

In addition, data may be being collected about individual workers whilst homeworking. For example, employers might seek to monitor their employees' use of electronic systems whilst working and to check email content and traffic, e.g. looking for danger words, blocking internet sites, looking at telephone usage to ensure performance and quality control.

Certainly, during the pandemic, there was seen an increase in the use of monitoring and surveillance of staff whilst working from home, using the latest technology.

Research highlighted by the TUC in their report '[Technology managing people](#)' found that the increase in homeworking during the Covid-19 pandemic almost certainly increased the use of artificial intelligence (AI) powered technologies to manage people.

The TUC reported that “the use of AI in people management can also impact on the employment rights of workers. For example, the deployed technology might result in discriminatory and unfair outcomes for workers, their human right to privacy might be infringed, and their data might not be handled in accordance with data protection law.

In addition, there are significant implications in terms of workers' physical and mental wellbeing, for example when workers experience the extreme stress and pressure of constant, AI-driven 'real-time' performance assessment and monitoring.”

This type of monitoring and surveillance can certainly have negative implications for trust and productivity. There are not only privacy issues involved in such usage of monitoring technology.

[CIPD \(Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development\) research](#) unsurprisingly found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of employees' felt that introducing workplace monitoring would damage trust between employers and staff, something that could be a real threat to future harmonious workplace relations.

[Acas](#) warns “if monitoring is too much or does not respect the employee's privacy, it can damage employees' trust in the employer, cause stress and reduce productivity. Employers should also remember that employees are entitled to some privacy at work, including when they are working from home...”

Any monitoring arrangements must follow data protection law.”

→ Quick checklist for negotiations

- What provisions has the employer made for the dealing with storage, use and security of confidential data whilst working at home, both paper-based and digital information?

A starting point for any branch or rep is to look at the employer's data protection policy and to ask for the data protection impact assessment in relation to homeworking. Can the employer demonstrate that they are being followed and in doing so are they being compliant with UK data protection law?

- What about mail – where should it be sent to both protect the personal details of the worker but also to ensure there is no delay in sending out or receiving correspondence. Might there be a need for mail boxes?
- Has the employer taken account of data protection issues and confidentiality with the use of virtual meetings whilst homeworking? It can be very easy to record online meetings without anyone realising. Is there an agreed protocol? Are workers invited to turn off cameras or use virtual backgrounds? Are meeting participants always asked first before there is any recording? Is it clear that any underhand recording is a serious disciplinary offence? There should also be clear instructions for clients and service users etc. and what action the employer will take if protocol is broken.
- Is the employer using technology to monitor workers' activity etc whilst working from home? If so, has the employer carried out a data impact assessment? How is data used, stored and destroyed? Are individual workers aware of this collection of data and have they consented to it?
- Have employers consulted with workers before introducing any new monitoring arrangements for homeworkers? Reps and branches need to demand clear details of any performance monitoring programmes used by employers.
- Have they given clear reasons for the monitoring? And are these reasons legitimate and in proportion to the need. Employees need to be clear about what information is likely to be collected about them, why it is being collected and how the employer wishes to use that information. The rights of a data subject are enforceable through the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#).
- Does the employer have a privacy policy that all employees know about?
- Does the employer have a data retention policy? Are staff told what information is recorded and how long it is kept and for what purpose?
- Are all staff who handle data appropriately trained to ensure they follow data protection procedures?

Homeworking expenses and allowances

Whether homeworking expenses and allowances are taxable or not can be an extremely complicated issue. And employers tend to only offer non-taxable expenses to homeworkers, if at all.

They may regard potentially taxable benefits as additional income rather than a genuine expense, so it's important to understand the distinction between taxable and non-taxable benefits. It may be necessary for individuals to be able to produce clear evidence of the additional expenditure whilst working from home to strengthen their argument.

Tax relief when working from home

To HMRC, a genuine home worker is one who cannot perform their substantive duties anywhere other than their home.

For example, this included those who had to work from home during the pandemic because of government COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore they were allowed a non-taxable allowance to cover additional household expenses, such as a proportion of gas or electricity charges.

But, since the restrictions have been lifted, a hybrid worker who works part of the time in the employer's workplace is unlikely to be regarded as a permanent home worker in order to benefit from tax relief.

Similarly if the employee *chooses* to work from home full-time as a flexible working option, whilst there remains an option to work at the employer's workplace, is unlikely to be regarded as a permanent home worker for tax relief. [HMRC explains](#) that this includes those whose employment contract lets them work from home some or all of the time. They are not seen as permanent home workers able to benefit from tax relief.

Employees can check if they can make a claim by completing details requested via www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home.

However, it may be possible for employers to reimburse employees for **reasonable additional costs** they incur while working at home under [homeworking arrangements](#).

Flat-rate tax-free payments under 'homeworking arrangements'

HMRC states that the employer can still pay employees working regularly at home a [basic flat-rate tax-free payment of £6 per week \(or £26 per month for monthly paid employees\)](#) without the employer or employee having to justify the amount paid by providing evidence. The home or hybrid working must be under a '[homeworking arrangement](#)'. It should be noted that the exemption only applies to payments made

by the employer, not claims for tax relief (as mentioned above and previously allowed during COVID restrictions).

HMRC explains “It does not entitle an employee to deduct unreimbursed household expenses. To deduct unreimbursed household expenses an employee must satisfy much more restrictive tests in section 336 ITEPA2003, see [EIM32760](#).”

HMRC give the example as follows:

An employer introduces a homeworking policy under which employees who wish to work from home may do so. The employer makes a payment of £6 per week towards the additional household expenses of those employees who decide to work from home. The £6 per week is exempt from tax under section 316A ITEPA 2003 (see [EIM01472](#) onwards). However, employees who can show that working from home costs them more than £6 per week are not able to obtain a deduction for the excess under section 336 because they are working at home by choice. The conditions for relief under section 336 are more restrictive than the conditions for exempt payments under section 316A.

This tax-free payment would not apply where an employee works at home informally and not by arrangement with the employer. For example, it would not apply where an employee simply takes work home in the evenings. In such an ad-hoc situation, the employer will need to treat any reimbursement as a taxable benefit.

Reclaiming expenses under homeworking arrangements

Claiming actual additional household expenses incurred whilst working from home can only be paid tax-free if employees, working under a ‘homeworking arrangement’, can provide clear evidence of these extra costs.

Providing this evidence can be extremely difficult for the employee and could also produce increased time-consuming admin for the employer in processing claims.

The additional household costs must be reasonable and must be incurred in carrying out the duties, such as heating and lighting the work area or the metered cost of increased water use. There might also be increased charges for Internet access, home contents insurance or business telephone calls. Where working at home leads to a liability for business rates the additional cost incurred can also be included.

However, costs that would be the same whether or not the employee works at home are excluded, for example mortgage interest, rent or council tax. It also excludes expenses that put the employee into a position to work at home, for example building alterations or the cost of furniture or office equipment.

HMRC give the following example where it would be regarded as tax-free additional expenses.

The North of England representative of a company whose only offices are in

London is entitled to a deduction under section 336 ITEPA 2003 for the expenses of working at home. He produces evidence that his additional household expenses, allowable under section 336, amount to £6 per week. However, his employer makes a contribution of £5 per week towards those expenses. That contribution is exempt from tax under section 316A. The amount the employee is able to deduct under section 336 is therefore £1 per week, being the difference between his allowable, additional expenditure of £6 per week and his employer's reimbursement of £5 per week.

The main issue here is for each individual worker having to provide the sort of evidence that is both acceptable to the employer and HMRC as proof of the additional expenses to be reclaimed.

Homeworking allowances

A lump-sum homeworking allowance paid to all home workers, that is greater than the exempt payment of £6 per week, is likely to be regarded by HMRC as taxable earnings unless there is some evidence of actual expenditure from individual employees.

In line with the potential tax status of such an allowance, UNISON reps and officers are reporting that employers are showing a reluctance to provide higher payments. In the context of difficult pay negotiations, it may be especially hard to get an employer to agree to provide a higher homeworking allowance for some members of their staff.

However, this does not mean that negotiators should rule it out. Whilst homeworkers may benefit from a reduction in travel costs to and from the workplace, they have to cover a considerable amount of additional expenditure, that is usually covered by the employer – from the teas and coffee available in the office, to the electricity, gas and metered water used throughout the working day.

Some individuals who work from home may also be penalised because their broadband contract is not unlimited and data is charged at a premium over certain usage. Extra use for work may mean considerable additional cost. Additionally, the broadband speed may only be basic, adequate for personal use but slow and inconsistent for work use.

As well as additional internet costs, it may also be necessary to highlight to the employer problems with maintaining phone communication with homeworkers, even if a mobile phone is provided by the employer. Very often there are problems getting mobile phone signals inside people's home and calls may just go straight to voicemail. Employers may need to take this practical issue into account when providing equipment and covering expenses.

However it seems that, so far, additional allowances paid to homeworkers are unfortunately rare.

The [IDR July 2022 report](#) 'Hybrid and homeworking and implications for pay' found that:

- It is comparatively rare for employers to offer any additional compensation for the expenses incurred in working from home, with just 18% of respondents paying a homeworking allowance. Where they do, this is typically in line with the £6 a week statutory tax relief limit and in some cases such provision is reserved for exclusive homeworkers rather than hybrid workers.
- While homeworkers are usually provided with computer equipment, provision of office furniture such as suitable chairs or desks is less common. Meanwhile very few employers fund or supply resources such as printers or separate phone lines

Similarly [Xpert HR's May 2022 survey](#) found that most organisations surveyed were happy to cover the provision or cost of equipment, although few (8.7%) offer a payment to cover other costs of working from home such as energy bills.

However, some employers are reported to be considering whether homeworkers should actually face a pay cut.

In the [HR software provider CIPHR survey](#) (August 2021) 68% of businesses contacted were debating whether or not to introduce pay cuts for staff who choose to work from home. This is despite over half of the employers surveyed (53%) agreeing that they saved money with an uptake of remote working.

However, in another [poll for the Employee Benefits website](#), most employers asked rejected the idea of cutting pay for staff who continue to work from home since the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. In fact, more than a quarter of these employers (27%) believed that these homeworkers should be paid more.

Even where homeworking allowances are provided by employers, negotiators may need to be wary in case the employer is offering them as an alternative to increasing pay overall, which offers more long-standing benefits to all staff.

A workplace survey of members may be worthwhile to clarify whether a more substantial pay rise that will benefit all staff regardless of whether they are working from home or not is preferred to bargaining over a homeworking allowance.

Staff may also prefer negotiations to focus on improved equipment and technology for homeworkers – such as ergonomic chairs, desks, mobile phones, printers, and better broadband connections.

Examples of homeworking allowances:

The Care Inspectorate in Scotland distinguishes between those who are contractually homeworkers and those who occasionally work from home on an ad hoc basis. Contractual homeworkers receive an annual homeworking allowance

towards heating and electricity costs, as well as £16 monthly contribution (taxable allowance) towards the cost of the individual's personal broadband.

Some councils too provide their homeworking employees with a homeworking allowance such as **Kirklees** (currently £13 per 4 weeks but not reviewed for many years) and **Wirral Borough Council** (currently £27 per month).

The MS Society pays an allowance of £15 a month towards Broadband costs for permanent homeworking staff.

The Home Office recently increased their homeworking allowance from £113pa to £312pa (£26pm) for staff who are contractually permanently based at home

Santander UK/Santander Technology/Santander Operations provide a homeworking allowance that includes a one-time gross cash lump sum of £500 (subject to deductions) in order to allow staff to arrange a suitable home working environment (with IT equipment and chair already provided) and which is not pro-rated for part timers. Then, £500-a-year allowance paid from the anniversary of the £500 lump sum payment on an ongoing monthly basis. This is pro-rated for part timers and subject to deductions.

Both home-based workers and hybrid-workers at **Sport England** continue to receive the HM Treasury 2019 rate of home-based workers allowance (£18pcm) direct from the employer.

Employers directly providing equipment etc.

If employers directly provide 'equipment, services and supplies' to an employee who has a homeworking arrangement, they do not have to report or pay tax if either:

- they're only used for business purposes
- any non-work use ('private use') is insignificant.

This includes office furniture and equipment such as desks, filing cabinets, stationery and normal office or workshop materials and supplies, laptops, tablets and computers as well as mobile phones and SIM cards (restricted to one per employee). In effect, the items are loaned to the employee by the employer and there is no transfer of ownership.

More details from HMRC on providing supplies or services for employees who work from home or remotely away from the workplace www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim21611

Travel expenses

The issue of the work-base can similarly affect the taxable nature of some travel expenses.

As mentioned already, HMRC considers that a genuine home worker is someone

who cannot perform their substantive duties anywhere other than their home, regardless of what may be stated in the contract of employment.

So the worker's **permanent workplace would remain the employer's workplace** where the worker is able to work from the employer's workplace on some days of the week under hybrid or blended working arrangements. This is also likely to be the case for those workers who choose to work from home full-time as part of a flexible working option.

Therefore, any commuting from home to the employer's workplace would not be counted as business travel. It will not be eligible for tax relief nor be treated as a non-taxable expense if reimbursed by the employer.

As far as [HMRC is concerned](#), travel between an employee's home and permanent workplace is considered a taxable benefit.

As with other allowances mentioned above, employers tend to reflect the distinction in taxable and non-taxable benefits in the expenses that they are willing to offer, by only reimbursing expenses when it is clearly non-taxable.

Examples of travel expenses offered to home workers in the public sector

"For occasional and regular home workers, car mileage expenses will only be paid for those miles travelled which are over and above the number of miles which the home worker would previously have incurred by having to travel into the office and return home on a daily basis, i.e. their normal commuting journey.

For permanent home workers, car mileage expenses would be payable for work-related journeys beginning and ending at the home base."

Eden District Council

For a permanent Homeworker, community or non community based, any mileage will be claimed from home as the base and the base **MUST** be made clear on the claim form. This is based on the assumption that permanent Homeworkers do not attend agile work places unless for pre planned meetings which should not be a regular feature.

For a community based occasional Homeworker any mileage to and from home to an agile base will be classed as normal travel to work arrangements and cannot be claimed. Any mileage outside of normal travel to work arrangements will be claimed in line with the mileage policy and a review may be undertaken of any excessive mileage claims.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

All employees who are fixed homeworkers will have a nominal work base. Fixed homeworkers cannot claim mileage between their home to their nominated work base. Fixed homeworkers can claim mileage if they are travelling to a base other than their nominated base in line with current agreements. For the purposes of travel

claims, the first journey of the day employee will claim mileage to their destination from either their home address or their notional base, depending on which is the shortest in terms of mileage. On the last journey of the day, employees can claim mileage either to their home address or their notional base, whichever is the shortest.

Derbyshire County Council

However, for negotiations, it should be noted that journeys to other work appointments such as to clients or customers, from either the worker's home or from the employer's workplace can be regarded as business journeys and not part of the regular commute, and so should be eligible for tax relief. But HMRC would expect these journeys to meet the rules for **travel to a temporary workplace**.

“A workplace is a temporary workplace if an employee goes there only to perform a task of limited duration or for a temporary purpose... The test is whether the employee has spent, or is likely to spend, 40% or more of his or her working time at that particular workplace over a period that lasts, or is likely to last, more than 24 months.”

More details at [EIM32075 - Employment Income Manual - HMRC internal manual - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Ultimately, the employer would have to contact the HMRC for full clarity on the particular circumstances of their situation.

Case law

In the case of *Kirkwood v Evans [2003]* Mr Evans was a civil servant who lived in King's Lynn and worked in Leeds. His employer introduced a voluntary homeworking scheme under which Mr Evans was allowed to work at home and to travel to Leeds one day each week. Under the scheme Mr Evans lost his office space in Leeds but was provided with equipment to support an office at home. Either Mr Evans or his employer could terminate the homeworking agreement.

Mr Evans argued that travel between his home and Leeds was travel in the performance of the duties of the employment and so non-taxable when reimbursed. The High Court rejected that argument and commented: “his choice to live in King's Lynn rather than Leeds was historical and is unconnected with any term of his employment. The necessity of travelling to Leeds is dictated by his choice of the place where he lives and not by the nature and terms of the job itself.”

Mr Evans also argued that he was entitled to relief for the additional household costs he incurred while working at home. This was rejected because: “the homeworking scheme was optional. Mr Evans was permitted to work from home but he was not required to do so. He took up the option because for perfectly understandable reasons it was more convenient for him to remain at home for most of the week

rather than to travel to Leeds. Working at home was not therefore a necessary incident of his employment.”

More information from HMRC on travel expenses and tax www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim32350 including travel from home when home is the place of work www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim32370

One other matter to bear in mind in negotiations over travel expenses for homeworkers, is that if the full travel cost of all business travel is reimbursed to homeworkers, those who have to work in the employer’s workplace may feel disadvantaged in having had to pay for their commute.

The framework agreement for homeworking and agile/hybrid working for NHS staff in England, that came into effect in October 2023 states that “all employees, regardless of work pattern or number of work locations, should have one designated contractual work base either home, or an office/site.

The designated contractual work base may have different implications for travel costs, high cost area supplements (HCAS), subsistence and on tax arrangements that will need to be clear.

Employees designated as ‘contractual homeworkers’ will require the fact that their home is their work base to be clearly reflected in their contract. For existing employees this will require a process of contractual change whether that comes about as a result of an individual request or because an employer moves to designating certain posts as contractual homeworking.

Employees designated as ‘agile/hybrid workers’ will in most instances retain an employer site as the designated work base with terms and conditions reflecting this. Formal contractual variation may not therefore be required except in instances where both parties agree that the hours to be worked at home should be captured as a contractual term...

As the terms and conditions sets out that mileage will be reimbursed for miles “in excess of the home to agreed work base return journey”, for employees who are designated as ‘contractual homeworkers’ this means any required business mileage from home to another location will be reimbursed as the home and the work base are one and the same.

For agile/hybrid workers, this means reimbursement for miles in excess of home to their designated contractual work base. Employers should ensure that contractual homeworkers are informed about whether or not reimbursement payments qualify for tax relief under HMRC provisions.”

Other issues – insurance, mortgage providers, landlords

Homeworkers may also need to check with their home insurers, mortgage providers or landlords if there are any issues with them working from home.

In most cases, there should be minimal changes if any to insurance if the work at home is largely confined to clerical work – generally defined as working on a computer and making phone calls – as long as there are no work visitors to the home nor stock stored there.

Nonetheless, homeworkers should advise anyone with an interest in their property (such as a mortgage lender or landlord) of their homeworking arrangement to ensure that they are not subject to terms and conditions or covenants which prevent them from working from home.

If they are a home-owner, they should also check their title deeds to ensure that it does not prohibit homeworking.

It is extremely unlikely that there would be any liability for business rates for the home worker, unless they are lucky enough to be able to have an area of their home dedicated exclusively for their work (such as those with a purpose-built 'garden office') and not used for domestic purposes at all.

Locational allowances

The IDR July 2022 report 'Hybrid and homeworking and implications for pay' found that the increase in hybrid/homeworking appears to have had little bearing on the payment of location allowances (such as London weighting) as yet, with all but two respondents determining eligibility on the basis of the business address rather than where the worker lives.

One of these two exceptions, a not-for-profit organisation, now only pays London premia to staff who live in London boroughs. However, a further (private sector) respondent reported that it is considering reviewing London allowances at the end of the year in light of increased home or hybrid working.

Meanwhile just one respondent based eligibility for location premiums on the proportion of time a hybrid or homeworker spends working in the office.

Xpert HR's May 2022 survey reported that just 2.2% of respondents had so far made changes to location payments.

An earlier XpertHR survey in January 2022 highlighted that the majority of employers sees the provision of locational allowances as a valuable recruitment and retention tool, and to compensate staff for the higher cost of living in higher-cost areas.

But there is concern from some workers, that the introduction of homeworking or hybrid working arrangements could lead employers to consider cutting locational allowances such as London weighting.

Reps and branches are advised to prepare arguments to retain location payments, bearing in mind the additional costs to homeworkers of energy etc, and the value of the payment as a recruitment and retention tool.

UNISON case study

When a community sector employer proposed to shift to a complete homeworking model, with all offices closed, it was agreed early on with the union to establish a 'no one will lose' principle.

However, the closure of the London offices led the employer to initially suggest that inner and outer London weighting payments should be removed. But this was clearly going against the 'no losers' principle. In the end, the employer agreed to continue to pay London weighting to those who currently received it, even if they would no longer use an office in London.

The union reps pushed hard in negotiations for an allowance to be paid to reflect the extra costs to be incurred by workers whilst working from home such as for utility costs. Unfortunately, the employer would not agree to any homeworking allowance although the matter may be pursued in the annual pay round.

However, they did secure a £250 one-off 'transition' payment to everyone who had previously had an office base but would now have a contractual home base.

More information:

Bargaining on locational and occupational pay supplements

www.unison.org.uk/locational-and-occupational-pay-supplements/

Whilst locational supplements are not a substitute for proper basic pay rises, an employer who proposes to cut such an allowance will, in practice, be cutting salaries for workers. Such a proposal is bound to be met with opposition from workers, particularly as there is a clear increase in personal costs when working from home.

Savings on commuting costs might be limited for hybrid workers where, even with some flexibility in public transport costs, the biggest savings in travel costs are for those who are able to buy season tickets.

Where locational allowances are under great threat in the future, it may be worth focusing on the difference between hybrid workers and permanent homeworkers as a compromise. Locational allowances could then be based on the permanent workplace as shown on the individual's contract.

A hybrid worker is likely to have the employer's premises as their permanent workplace. Those whose homeworking is a permanent arrangement may have clearly stated in their contract that their home is their permanent workplace, and therefore in their case, may or may not benefit from the locational allowance depending on where they live. However, the argument may go, that they should instead receive homeworking allowance to cover their additional utility costs.

→ Quick checklist

- Will the employer agree a principle of no-one losing out financially if shifting to a working from home policy?
- Are employers aware that considering an unfair pay cut to homeworkers could amount to discrimination if factors such as disabled employees for whom homeworking is a reasonable adjustment, and employees working from home due to childcare or caring for disabled dependents are also taken into account?
- Will the employer agree to pay the flat-rate exempt allowance for those homeworkers or hybrid workers working under a homeworking arrangement?
- Will the employer agree to pay higher homeworking allowances where evidence of legitimate additional expenditure is shown, even if HMRC regards it as a taxable benefit? This is particularly important should the employer argue that other living allowances (such as travel and mileage costs or location allowances) should be reduced to those who predominantly work from home. But the problem is that it can be very hard for workers to find ways of proving these additional costs.
- If a regular allowance is not agreed by the employer, will they agree to a transition lump sum payment?
- Is all workstation and IT equipment and stationery provided by the employer for homeworkers or directly reimbursed to the employee?
- Check the contract of employment. Are any existing allowances and expenses contractual? Are relevant existing policies related to expenses incorporated into the contract of employment or part of collective agreements? If so, is the employer proposing a variation in the contract? There must be consultation and agreement with individual employees or through a collective agreement to make the change.
- Will the employer agree to pay all work-related travel costs including to the office, for those workers who permanently work from home throughout their working week?
- If there are any additional costs involved for home insurance (such as higher insurance premiums) try to negotiate with the employer to cover them.
- Has the employer ensured staff that their own insurance covers employees and the organisation's equipment whilst working from home or travelling and working remotely?

The employment contract - to vary or not to vary

What is the normal working base? And does it need to change?

The starting point for considering any working arrangement is what an employee's contract says – and this includes what it says about their normal working base.

Ideally, the employer will aim for a meaningful consultation to reach agreement on any changes to the contract of employment including when changing the work-base to the home, or to include it as an option to be allowed as required by the employer.

As many workers may have come to recognise some benefits from working from home, negotiations over permanent homeworking may be fairly straightforward if this is something the employer wants to continue in the future.

However, any such negotiations should still take account of the needs of those many individuals who found working from home a real struggle, as documented in the sections above.

A good employer will go some way to address these concerns and provide options in working practice for those that could be disadvantaged by such a change.

Exceptional circumstances such as during the pandemic

It should be noted that, if government guidance is telling people to work from home as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, custom and practice will not play a part in the contracted work-base. It depends on the industry and the circumstances.

No change of contract can be fairly made without individual or collective agreement. As the circumstances for homeworking can vary so widely amongst staff members, whether they find it beneficial or a struggle, any policy to permanently change the work-base should ideally also be explicitly agreed with each individual.

As a survey of all [UNISON members working in local government in Scotland](#) highlighted, any collective consultation and majority decision will not please all the people all the time.

“Unsurprisingly views were mixed [about homeworking]... This underlines the importance of ensuring our members are properly consulted and engaged about future working arrangements post-Covid. We know that many local authorities are looking at reducing office space going forward but this clearly demonstrates that one size does not fit all - managers need to be flexible in their approach and cognisant of the need to ensure all employees are engaged and supported, particularly if they are managing remote teams in the future.”

If agreement is reached following consultation, then the employer must confirm the change in writing within a month. A letter to each worker is sufficient. A new contract does not have to be provided.

Enforcing homeworking – risk of ‘fire and re-hire’?

If agreement cannot be reached, employers may bring about the change by dismissing and re-engaging staff, also described as ‘fire and re-hire’ in the media.

If the employer intends to unilaterally impose contractual changes (e.g. to introduce permanent homeworking), they must give contractual notice. Normally a period of 3 months might be used before introducing new contracts.

Additionally, if an employer is planning to dismiss and re-engage up to 20 or more employees from the same workplace establishment, then collective information and consultation under s.188 Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 must be followed.

This means the employer must consult with any recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, then an employer must facilitate the election of employee representatives and then inform and consult with those persons. Where employee representatives have been elected specifically for the consultation, an employer may need to provide training for the role. Consultation has to commence when an employer proposes to dismiss staff.

If the changes cannot be made under the terms of the existing contract and the employee is not prepared to accept the new contract, then the reason for dismissal may be redundancy under s.139 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

The issue then for the employer is whether they are able to demonstrate – to a Tribunal if necessary – that the homeworking role offered, was a suitable alternative employment and, even if it was, whether the employee's refusal of the alternative role offered under the dismissal and re-engagement process was unreasonable.

It would be difficult to determine how hard it would be for the employee to win on the grounds of unsuitability at a Tribunal, without taking into account the specific details of an individual's circumstances, so legal advice is essential.

If reps and branches have concerns about proposed changes to terms and conditions that the employer is enforcing, they should contact their regional organiser (www.unison.org.uk/regions) and seek legal advice if appropriate.

What if it is a mutually agreed change to the working practice or a request from the employee?

Even if the change is agreed or requested by the employee, there still needs to be clarity in the contract of employment and homeworking policies as to where the official work-base is.

Is it the employer's workplace or the individual's home? Or is it wherever the individual is working at the time whether that may be the workplace, a work hub, off-site, at home or 'on the road'?

This can have significant impact on mileage and travel policies for some employees, and may also impact on their tax liability.

It could be advisable for workers who have regular or permanent homeworking arrangements to change the work-base on their contract of employment. It may offer the worker more protection in terms of the allowances they are able to claim or for work-related travel expenses to and from their home if this is their stated work-base, as well as accounting for working time when on work-related travel.

Therefore, it's important for members to recognise that any agreement or implementation of homeworking or hybrid working may result in a change to the terms and conditions of the worker's employment contract. This needs to be agreed, clear and confirmed in writing.

Some employers are presenting occasional and hybrid working options without changing the work-base for employees. As shown, this could impact on the worker's expenses and working time. It could also mean that opportunities for homeworking could be more easily refused by the employer as there isn't a contractual right. The control over choice continues to be with the employer.

However, the employer would not be able to enforce homeworking without this change in the contract or an existing 'mobility', 'relocation' or 'flexibility' clause. A mobility clause may allow the employer to change the place of work for their employee (on either a permanent or a temporary basis), including changes that would require the employee to relocate, although the employer would have to use the clause reasonably.

UNISON case study

A community sector employer closed their offices for the period of the pandemic. Approximately half of the workers were office-based, the others working on site predominantly outdoors.

Homeworking was an uncommon working practice prior to the pandemic and the culture of going to the office was strong. Like many organisations, the charity found that it was able to continue to work very effectively during COVID with office-based staff working from home. Seeing this, they proposed the shift to a complete homeworking model, with all offices closed, replaced by a smaller number of flexible working hubs with no-one working regularly or routinely within them, saving the employer considerable costs as well as generating income with the leasing or selling of buildings.

But to do this, they needed to secure individual or collective agreement to a contractual change as most office-based workers had a specified location. There already existed well-functioning arrangements for consultation and negotiation and a generally positive relationship with the employer. The employer hoped for a swift collective agreement in this case.

However, as shown within this guide, whilst homeworking suits many, it can create serious difficulties for others. Whilst many workers had tolerated the difficult circumstances of temporary homeworking during the pandemic, the prospect of a permanent change was far from welcome.

Eventually management and unions agreed on a process of individual interview where individual needs could be identified. As appropriate to the individual, some workers would then be able to have priority to book desk space for at least a portion of the working week. This would be decided by HR rather than individual managers, on the basis of the challenges related to financial, social, accommodation or other significant reasons.

During the process of the one-to-one meetings that were held, nearly all the workers agreed to switch to homeworking (for most, clearly, the benefits outweighed the drawbacks).

Reps did not believe there was any realistic prospect in these particular circumstances of support for further action against the new policy, and as the proposal had changed from compulsory homeworking to a more blended model through negotiation, as well as achieving significant movement on expenses and location payments, the group of reps overseeing the negotiation agreed to the collective contract change.

→ Quick checklist

- Check the contract of employment. Does the contract expressly define the place of work?
- Is there any flexibility or mobility or relocation clause within the contract of employment? And how clear is it?
- Were contracts amended during the pandemic restrictions to specify the place of work being at home?
- Was there an expectation that any changes, such as working from home, were to be temporary or permanent?
- Is there any other written correspondence that shows what was intended and agreed at the time these changes were made? Sometimes changes can be difficult to define where agreement on a particular issue has not been confirmed in writing.
- Are the employers now seeking to vary contracts to make any changes permanent? Negotiating changes to contractual terms is something the employer should approach the union about (where recognised) as well as the affected workers. Any policy to permanently change the work-base should ideally also be explicitly agreed with every individual.
- Do negotiations take account of workers who find homeworking difficult? Or who do not want to return to work in the office full-time for a variety of legitimate reasons as discussed above?
- If agreement is reached following consultation, has the employer confirmed the change in writing within a month?

If the employer plans to enforce a change to the contract without agreement, reps and branches should contact their regional organiser (www.unison.org.uk/regions) and seek legal advice if appropriate.

→ Key points for making the case for homeworking options

Recruitment and retention

Employers are more likely to be seen as attractive employers if they offer this type of working arrangement as one of a number of flexible working options. It could help increase the number and diversity of talented candidates to the organisation who need or want to work flexibly.

Current employees, who benefited from homeworking during the pandemic restrictions with improved physical and mental health and wellbeing and better work/life balance, will want to continue working for the organisation if it continues to offer flexible-working options. Therefore it could increase their engagement and commitment.

A high employee turnover produces disruption to any organisation. Problems associated with replacing key employees include loss of knowledge, expertise and experience from the team; reduction in team output if work has to be reallocated to cover; a negative impact on team morale of employee's departure; and the considerable time, effort and cost of recruiting and training a replacement member of staff.

[CIPD's research into flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023](#), found that When looking at the wider impact of hybrid working, employers are most likely to say it has brought a positive impact for:

- attraction and retention of talent (+61)
- ability to recruit from a wider geography in the UK (+62)
- ability to recruit a more diverse workforce (+53)
- employee financial wellbeing (+53).

[Xpert HR's May 2022 survey](#) of nearly 300 employers in all sectors, found that the biggest challenge for employers in the move to hybrid working post-lockdown was the reluctance of some workers to return to the workplace, even on a hybrid basis, with 70% of respondents reporting that this covers "some" employees and 10.5% describing this as covering a "significant proportion" of their workforce. For some organisations, the reluctance to return to the workplace has led to attrition and increased labour turnover.

Possibilities for career development and progression for some

With the increased flexibility that working from home provides for those with caring responsibilities (who continue to be mostly women), providing this option may offer greater opportunity for women to remain in and progress within their work.

Similarly, working from home is shown to be a practical and easily achieved reasonable adjustment for many disabled workers. Providing this option as an adjustment may offer greater opportunity for disabled people to remain in and progress within their work.

Potential cost-savings

Clearly, where many of their workers are opting to work from home, there may be opportunities to reduce the size of costly office space and overheads for employers. And for employers keen to show they are reducing their carbon footprint, encouraging their staff to work from home, to 'meet' clients and customers and service users virtually, will help to reduce car use significantly.

Additionally, homeworking has been shown to result in reduced absence levels as employees may be more able to balance work and domestic life conflicts. As a result they may need less time off, reducing both their stress levels and sickness absences.

Increased productivity

Employers benefitted with many efficiencies created by homeworking during the pandemic restrictions. Homeworking arrangements have proven that work productivity need not suffer; in some cases it may even have improved. Survey after survey show that many workers particularly welcome the opportunity to focus without the distractions of the office.

→ Key points for making the case to keep some office working options

Impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of staff

Whilst some workers benefit from working from home options, many others struggle with their home working environment, limited equipment and IT, inadequate workstations, the blurred home/work boundaries, fatigue, stress and burnout resulting in poor physical health and deteriorating mental health.

There may be an expectation for staff to work excessively long hours when working from home. For many, it may feel that there is no separation between their work and personal lives. Inevitably that may result in a lack of engagement and commitment to the organisation and their employer.

Reduced productivity for some

Poor physical and mental health and wellbeing will inevitably impact on productivity, as will an inadequate working environment. Sickness absence may increase in the long-term for those affected. Some disabled workers may struggle with a homeworking environment, and find it produces greater barriers to their work. Most people's homes are simply not designed to become a workplace.

Loss of staff and reduced morale

Ultimately valuable staff may feel they are losing out by having to work from home. They may end up having to leave to find truly flexible workplaces that take account of their individual circumstances and provide a variety of options. Those that remain may have diminished morale, and loyalty and trust in their employer.

Negative impact on the organisation's work as a whole

Managers may find it extremely difficult to create and maintain a team spirit when staff are working in relative isolation from one another. They may also struggle to create a collaborative work environment when employees have different patterns of work or work in different locations. Career development and important aspects of informal learning from colleagues may be restricted under a homeworking arrangement, forcing ambitious, talented staff members to leave in order to find career progression elsewhere.

More information

From UNISON:

Homeworking and hybrid working safely

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/12/Homeworking-and-hybrid-working-safely.pdf

Bargaining on working hours

www.unison.org.uk/working-hours-bargaining-guide/

Bargaining on workload

www.unison.org.uk/negotiating-workload-agreement-employer/

Bargaining on hotdesking policies

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/01/Hot-Desking.pdf

Reasonable adjustments: bargaining guide, model policy and accessibility passport

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/10/25875_reasonableadjustments.pdf

Bargaining on mental health policies: a practical guide for UNISON branches

<https://shop.unison.site/product/bargaining-on-mental-health-policies-a-practical-guide-for-unison-branches/>

Health and safety

www.unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/health-and-safety/

Risk assessments

www.unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/health-and-safety/risk-assessment/

Domestic Violence and abuse: a trade union issue

<https://shop.unison.site/product/domestic-violence-and-abuse-a-trade-union-issue/>

Bargaining on locational and occupational pay supplements

www.unison.org.uk/locational-and-occupational-pay-supplements/

New technology in the workplace

www.unison.org.uk/new-technology-in-the-workplace/

From the TUC

Risk assessments for homeworkers

<https://learning.elucidat.com/course/5ea8201298996-5eac468ab5b70>

From Acas:

Working from home and hybrid working

www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home-and-hybrid-working

Home and hybrid working requests

www.acas.org.uk/requests-for-home-and-hybrid-working

Changing an employment contract

www.acas.org.uk/changing-an-employment-contract

Home and hybrid working policies

www.acas.org.uk/policies-for-home-and-hybrid-working

Managing staff who work from home

www.acas.org.uk/managing-staff-who-work-from-home

Health, safety and wellbeing when working from home

www.acas.org.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing-when-working-from-home

From Working Families:

Hybrid working: practical guidance

<https://workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/hybrid-working-practical-guidance/>

From CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development):

Flexible and hybrid working resources

www.cipd.org.uk/topics/flexible-hybrid-working/

From the Health and Safety Executive:

Homeworking

www.hse.gov.uk/home-working/index.htm

Display screen equipment (DSE) workstation checklist

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf

Working with display screen equipment at home

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/home-working.htm>

Stress and mental health at work

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

From HMRC:

Expenses and benefits: homeworking

www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-homeworking

From Labour Research Department (LRD):

Negotiating the new homeworking landscape - a guide for union reps

www.lrdpublications.org.uk/publications.php?pub=BK&iss=2068

From the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

Data protection and working from home

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/working-from-home/>

→ Quick checklist for developing a homeworking policy

- What is the employer's rationale for introducing a homeworking or hybrid working policy? Can they justify it? Will it contribute to retention, recruitment and staff morale? Has the policy been equality impact assessed?
- Will the employer approach homeworking or hybrid working as part of the options available from their voluntary flexible working practice? Or are they planning on imposing a way of working on staff? Have any experiences and difficulties been drawn to the attention of employers? Does the employer acknowledge the difficulties as well as the benefits for some?
- Will any introduction of a homeworking or hybrid working policy address the difficulties and challenges experienced by some workers if forced to work from home? Are options to work from an office remaining for those who need or choose to?
- Are all staff covered by the policy regardless of length of service? How are new members of staff to be notified about the policy? Will job applicants be aware of homeworking opportunities for specific roles? If a job can be done remotely, is this option offered as standard, should people want to take it up?
- How are the flexible working needs to be accommodated for staff whose job roles or personal circumstances mean they cannot work from home?
- Does the employer provide clear definitions of homeworking or hybrid working within the policy? Often employers like to call such working practices by a different name, but everyone needs to be clear about what is covered and whether there is a set time or set tasks when working from home, or if this is a free choice.
- Does a particular homeworking option require a change in an individual's employment contract? Or does the employment contract include a valid mobility, relocation or flexibility clause that allows some homeworking already?
- If the employer is wanting to negotiate a collective agreement covering the place of work in the employment contract, will the change properly reflect the wishes and needs of all staff? Ideally individual agreement as well as collective agreement should be reached after proper consultation should some changes to the employment contract be necessary.
- If the employer wants to retain the right to call the worker into the office at any point, ensure that this will be for a valid business reason, and that they will provide reasonable notice. It will be important for there to remain opportunities for all workers to physically come together to help ensure collaborative working,

supportive teams and opportunities for informal learning from colleagues, as long as there is reasonable notice.

- If approached as a flexible working option, is there a clear procedure to apply for homeworking or hybrid working? Is there a right of appeal against decisions made? Does the employer have reasonable business-related reasons for any refusals?
- Is the trade union involved in deciding on criteria used for assessing whether a job role is suitable for homeworking or not? Are criteria clear, transparent and non-discriminatory?
- Is there an opportunity for a trial period for any new working arrangement, and if so, how is it reviewed?
- How can a working from home agreement be ended by either the employer or the worker – what are the circumstances and what notice is necessary?
- Is the policy clear about the expectations of those working from home such as their working hours, reporting sickness absence and annual leave, as well as a continued need to comply with other workplace policies? Does it confirm that the worker has a right to ‘switch off’ outside these working hours?
- The working arrangement should also be clear about any monitoring of the worker whilst working from home, why the monitoring needs to take place and how it operates consistently when someone is in the workplace or working from home. The workplace reps or branch officers should be consulted about any monitoring that is to take place.
- Will the new working arrangement with individuals be regularly reviewed?
- Are there systems to deal with communications with line managers, colleagues, customers/clients/service users whilst the worker is working from home? Do managers ensure homeworkers do not miss out on opportunities for training, development, and decision-making within the organisation?

The National Joint Council for local government services in guidance sent out in March 2023, highlighted the impact on performance and productivity of staff, suggesting that policies should consider the following:

- It is important to ensure visibility for remote / home and hybrid employees, especially if they are a small cohort of people working this way
- Ensure all staff communications are able to reach everyone, regardless of their place of work on any given day
- Monitor career progression to check remote / home and hybrid workers are not being disadvantaged
- Remote / home and hybrid working can lead to increased productivity for

some, but different people work in different ways, and different jobs have different needs, so it is important not to take a one-size-fits-all approach to making decisions and when assessing the impact on productivity

- Does the policy refer to the health and safety policy and highlight the duty of care that the employer has for homeworkers? Does it include the consideration of work-related stress and include a right 'to disconnect'? Will electrical equipment loaned to the home worker be regularly checked? Are workers specifically told that they should not hold meetings with clients/customers/service users at home and that meetings with colleagues at home should take place for specific limited purposes?
- Does it outline how homeworking risk assessments will take place and the responsibilities of the worker and of the line manager in relation to health and safety? Does it confirm that individual risk assessments will be undertaken for pregnant homeworkers and for disabled homeworkers?

The NJC also suggest the following to help ensure the health and safety of remote workers:

- Conducting regular staff surveys in order to better understand employees' experiences of remote / home and hybrid working
- Look out for signs of loneliness etc for remote / home and hybrid workers who are lone workers (eg, live alone)
- In extreme cases, there has been some evidence of increased remote / hybrid and home working leading to an increase in domestic abuse

- Will workers get appropriate training so that they can properly use any risk assessment checklists?
- It's important to clarify with employers how they will support staff to help ensure their home is a safe, secure place of work, taking into account ergonomics and reasonable adjustments necessary for disabled workers. Additionally, the employer has to ensure the workload remains at safe levels and that workers are not put under unreasonable stress.
- You may want to agree with the employer the basic equipment and furniture that will be available and provided to homeworkers. Dependent on workers and the extent of homeworking they will be doing, and the type of work they will be undertaking, it may be necessary to try and negotiate the provision of internet access and a dedicated work phone line. The key thing is that workers should not be out of pocket nor have to use personal equipment if they are regularly working from home.
- Does the employer make it clear within their policy that they will provide

reasonable adjustments for disabled workers? That homeworking in itself may be a reasonable adjustment for some disabled workers? However, employers must continue to provide appropriate reasonable adjustments for all disabled staff still working in the workplace.

- Does the homeworking policy offer a homeworking allowance to cover the additional utility costs for homeworkers? If the employer will not agree to an allowance, will they clarify what expenses they will reimburse so that homeworkers are not financially disadvantaged? In particular, there may need to be careful negotiations over travel expenses allowed for homeworkers whether hybrid or full-time.
- It is useful to highlight some of the key responsibilities of both the line manager and the worker under a homeworking arrangement. It is important for line managers to take account of communications with homeworkers, to ensure that teams can continue to function well and collaboratively, and that new starters are appropriately supported.
- Sickness absence policies should not be different for homeworkers.
- Data protection and security issues will need careful attention from the employer. Have they undertaken a data protection impact assessment? Are workers and their line managers aware of what they need to do to fully comply with any existing data protection policy whilst working from home? Will the employer commit not to introduce any monitoring, or surveillance technology into workers homes via work devices?
- Is the homeworking or hybrid working policy regularly reviewed?

Model agreement

This model policy/agreement is not meant to replace any national public sector agreements on homeworking; it aims to build on national agreements to reflect local circumstances and needs.

UNISON's position remains that homeworking should be a flexible working option of choice for individual workers, particularly as it presents many difficulties and challenges for some workers, whilst recognising there are considerable benefits for many others.

This policy can be used in the workplace to help support workers who choose to work from home as part of a flexible working option. It could be adapted to be used where a workforce-wide approach to homeworking has been introduced, or aspects used to help update an existing homeworking policy or flexible working policy.

Please note that the text in square brackets [...] indicates where branches and workplace reps need to complete information specific to their workplace, or else are notes for them to consider in relation to their negotiations.

Policy statement

[It may be reassuring to start with an agreed statement that reflects the need for flexibility, trust and co-operation from both the employer and employee under homeworking arrangements.]

It also puts homeworking in the context of one option for flexible working, and recognises the benefits and challenges.]

[Name of employer] is determined to provide flexible working arrangements for all staff who request it, wherever possible and where implementation will be reasonable and feasible for both the employer and worker.

This homeworking policy will operate in line with **[name of employer]'s** Flexible Working policy found at **[include a link to the policy]**. Homeworkers are also able to apply for other forms of flexible working as defined in the Flexible Working policy.

Not all jobs or all duties within jobs may be suitable for homeworking, such as those that provide a direct service to the public at a fixed location.

Not all staff may find homeworking suitable for them and staff who prefer to work from the office full-time, for whatever reason, may continue to do so.

[This is clearly a key aspect of negotiations, to consider what happens to those staff members that cannot or are unable to work from home, or if it would create too many problems for them. There need to be alternative

options. But, whilst exploring these options, employers should not be able to evade their responsibilities, for example their duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, whether that is at home or at work.]

However, all staff are encouraged to consider the variety of flexible working options available to them within the Flexible Working policy.

[If the employer is imposing homeworking or hybrid working on their workers, these paragraphs should be removed. However, for the policy to be successful, the employer should at least highlight their rationale for introducing this working arrangement across the workforce so that workers can understand the need for it.

It will also be even more essential that the challenges are recognised and addressed by the employer in such a situation, for the policy to work successfully and fairly for all roles and all workers.]

[Name of employer] recognises the need for mutual trust between staff and employer, and a flexible, practical and sensitive approach to homeworking arrangements.

[Name of employer] recognises that all staff are entitled to switch off outside of their normal working hours and disconnect from work in order to enjoy their time away from work without being disturbed, unless there is an emergency or prior agreement to do so, for example while on 'standby'.

[Name of employer] recognises the benefits of a homeworking option within flexible working arrangements for some workers and will highlight them to staff. These benefits may include:

- improved work/life balance
- improved productivity and focus
- reduced travel problems and environmental impact
- as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers.

[Name of employer] recognises the challenges of homeworking arrangements for some workers and will act to address them. Challenges may include:

- poor work/life balance and impact on mental health
- reduced social connections and isolation
- reduced productivity
- risks to health, safety and wellbeing.

Scope and definitions

This policy applies to all staff who are employed at **[name of employer]** including

part-time and temporary workers, regardless of hours worked or length of service, as long as their role has at least some activities that lend themselves to being carried out from home.

[Are there any eligibility criteria for workers to benefit from the policy or is it open to all workers? Ideally, it should be open to all.]

All new members of staff will be made aware of this policy and how it operates as part of their induction. If a particular post is considered as suitable for a regular or permanent homeworking post, job applicants should be made aware of this option through any recruitment material.

[Name of employer] will ensure that homeworking arrangements do not have an adverse effect on any particular group of employees nor that a refusal to agree homeworking arrangements disadvantage any particular group.

Homeworking is when staff are working based at home rather than at the normal place of work.

[Whilst much of the media attention has been on hybrid working, a variety of options could be considered within negotiations, such as:]

Occasional (ad-hoc) working from home

This means taking work home on an ad-hoc basis. This might be:

- because the worker has a specific task they need to concentrate on without the normal interruptions of an office environment
- because it is ill advised or difficult for an employee to get into work because of circumstances beyond their control (such as adverse weather conditions)
- following maternity leave or following sickness absence where homeworking is recommended as part of a phased return
- as a temporary arrangement due to family commitments or domestic circumstances
- as a temporary reasonable adjustment for disabled workers whilst permanent adjustments (which may include permanent / regular homeworking) are being put in place.

This list is not exhaustive.

However, there is an expectation that staff have appropriate care arrangements in place for dependants, and homeworking on a regular or permanent basis cannot be used as a substitute for appropriate care arrangements for dependants on an ongoing and full-time basis.

In most situations, workers should refer to **[name of employer]'s** policy on Time Off for Dependants, or the Carer's Leave Policy or the Parental Leave Policy as

appropriate and these are available at **[include links to where the policies can be viewed.]**

It is accepted, however, that home working may be suitable to provide flexibility for staff to work around care arrangements. For example, a member of staff may work from home after a nursery or school pick up period or during school holidays as long as they are still able to undertake their work appropriately.

Consideration of the appropriateness for home working in such circumstances will be based on the specific detail on an individual case basis with a focus on flexibility and accommodation of requests as far as reasonable but bearing in mind the need to maintain the level of productivity, service delivery, efficiency and/or effectiveness.

[Whilst any employer who agrees to flexibly accommodate workers who are working at home whilst also caring for others is welcomed, other workers who may have to continue to work in their normal workplace should similarly be treated sensitively and flexibly in relation to caring responsibilities or other domestic emergencies.]

Regular homeworking

This is when a worker spends 50% or more of their contracted hours working from home.

[A key issue with regular homeworking is whether the official workplace will remain the office, or whether this will require a change in the individual's employment contract to state that it includes the home. Where the employer requires employees to work remotely under a new regular homeworking or hybrid working policy (rather than making it optional), it is likely that an amendment to the contract will be needed, unless the contract already includes sufficient flexibility, for example under a mobility or relocation clause.

Also, the employer may want to clarify if they are to stipulate a certain number of days or hours for working in the office each week, or if it is to be flexibly agreed between the worker and their manager.

Whatever is carried out in practice must reflect what is covered in the contract of employment. For example, it would not be appropriate for a worker to be called a regular home worker but never come into the office in practice.

Some regular homeworkers may have more protections if they have a contract varied to state that their home is their work base or a combination of both the office and their home as their bases. Without this, the employer retains the option to change the working arrangements at a later date without the employee's agreement.

If the employer does want to retain the right to ask employees to come into the office on particular days or on a continuous basis where this is necessary to

meet the needs of the business or role, make sure they agree to provide the worker with reasonable notice.

If a change to the contract terms and conditions are required, it is important that there are individual meetings with staff to discuss the proposed changes, and that individuals agree to the change. Any agreed change should be confirmed in writing. Employers will also need to consider how they plan to respond fairly to those staff members who do not want to work from home perhaps due to many different valid reasons.]

Permanent homeworking

This is when an employee will spend all of their contracted hours either working at home or visiting sites from their home base.

[The home should be shown as the worker's contracted work base, and it is key that reps ensure this is confirmed in writing as a variation to the employee's contract of employment if not reflected in the existing contract.]

Permanent / regular homeworking is an agreement between [name of employer] and the worker to work the working week from home, or a combination of homeworking and attendance at [name of employer]'s workplace, on a regular and on-going basis.

[It's important that the policy is clear as to what is meant by homeworking. Some employers may want to call it hybrid working, remote working, agile working, smart working, mobile working, teleworking etc, terms that may mean different things to different people, so it's important to be clear.

For example, the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) describes agile working in the following way: "Agile working is a term used to describe employees conducting their usual job role from varied locations which can include but are not limited to the usual place of work."

If the employer is considering allowing remote working or agile working, it should be suitably clarified, such as: Homeworking may include any remote working away from the [name of employer]'s workplace and so may take place at another address other than the worker's home address, such as at a local co-working space or at a regional site or whilst travelling. However, employers may want to specify that remote working whilst abroad is not included, as there may be knock-on issues of tax, data protection etc.]

All forms of homeworking mean that workers are subject to the same rules, procedures and expected standard of conduct and performance as when they are working in their normal workplace. Contractual obligations, duties and responsibilities remain in place, as do [name of employer]'s workplace policies.

[An important benefit of homeworking during the COVID-19 pandemic was

shown to be the flexibility in being able to organise the working day, which allowed it to be balanced with other demands such as caring responsibilities. For homeworking to be truly flexible, it may be important to recognise that staff should be able to access flexibility both in working time as well as their working location — and not simply to work their usual office hours from an alternative location. Ideally, a flexi-hours arrangement will be part and parcel of a homeworking arrangement.]

All staff, irrespective of their homeworking category, may be required to attend [name of employer]'s workplace for specific activities as defined by their line manager with reasonable notice. These may include, for example, team meetings, committee meetings, training events, performance management discussions, collaborative or creative working, induction meetings, and other specific work-related events [amend as appropriate].

[In order to help ensure a collaborative workplace, with supportive team-working and opportunities for informal learning from colleagues, it is inevitable that there will need to be some opportunities for workers to physically come together. It will be very important for homeworkers to be given sufficient notice of such events.]

The right to disconnect is a worker's right to be able to disengage from work and refrain from in-work related electronic communications, such as emails, telephone calls or messages, or attending meetings whether virtually or in-person, outside of normal working hours.

Whilst it is recognised that unplanned and emergency situations may arise where it is not possible to deal with matters during normal working hours, these should be the rare exception rather than the rule.

All staff have the right to disconnect in the context of their own normal working pattern. Staff, including those engaging in flexible working arrangements or working from home, are encouraged to create some separation from the end of their workday and the beginning of their personal time.

This policy is supported by and developed with the trade unions representing the employees.

Procedure for requesting homeworking

The procedure for requesting homeworking is in line with [name of employer]'s Flexible Working policy found at [include a link to the policy].

[Remove this if not applicable, although ideally this will be why homeworking arrangements are being introduced.]

Workers who wish to apply for homeworking, either permanently, regularly or on an occasional/ad hoc basis, should make their request to their line manager.

Requests will be reviewed on their own merit taking into account the individual's circumstances and the needs of the business, and all posts will be subject to homeworking criteria to make sure the post suits homeworking.

Approval must be sought from the line manager before an employee works from home on an **occasional or ad hoc basis**. Occasional or ad-hoc homeworking will be treated as a temporary variation from existing terms and will not make a permanent contractual change to the worker's contract terms and conditions.

For those workers wishing to **permanently and/or regularly work from home** either for a full or part working week, they should first discuss their application with their line manager, considering:

- when it is hoped the arrangements will start
- the proposed number of days to work from home - the whole working week, or only certain days
- proposed hours of work **[and opportunity for flexi-hours if available]**
- the proposed organisation of the homeworking environment – workstation, equipment required, security arrangements, materials/documentation, reasonable adjustments required if a disabled worker
- extent of availability to attend the workplace, for meetings, cover colleague absences etc
- how the worker proposes that contact will be maintained with their line manager
- how they will adapt to the different working practices involved.

The worker should then submit a written application to their line manager using the flexible working request form **[or amend as appropriate]** found in the Flexible Working policy **[include a link to the policy]**, setting out all these details for the homeworking arrangements.

The line manager should aim to respond to formal applications for homeworking within **[insert time period, ideally 48 hours if feasible, but it certainly should be no longer than 28 days]** of the application being received.

Line managers may need to meet with the employee again to discuss the issues arising from the application **[and you could add: within this time period. It is particularly important to include this if the initial response period is quite long. Otherwise the procedure may be delayed unnecessarily].**

If the line manager accepts the worker's permanent / regular homeworking application, written confirmation will be provided.

A trial period should be agreed. The aim of the trial period is for both the worker and **[name of employer]** to evaluate whether the new homeworking arrangements

operate as expected.

[A period of 3 months may be adequate for the trial but may depend on individual circumstances.]

At the end of the trial period, an evaluation meeting will take place between the worker and the line manager, to consider if the arrangement has been successful or not, if there is a need to extend the trial period, and if adjustments or amendments to the arrangement are needed. The line manager will then confirm if the arrangement may continue.

Workers who wish to apply for regular or permanent homeworking should be aware that any arrangement agreed will constitute a contractual change to their terms and conditions.

If the line manager is unable to accept the worker's application or to confirm the homeworking arrangement after a trial period, a clear business reason for the rejection will be provided to the worker in writing and sent to the employee within 5 working days. Any such reason must also comply with the Equality Act 2010³.

Workers have a right to appeal any decision not to allow them to work from home or to continue to work from home after the trial period. This appeal should be made in writing within **[insert time period e.g. 10 working days]**. The appeal will be heard by another manager (independent from the case). The worker has the right to be accompanied by their trade union representative or full time official to the appeal meeting.

[Branches and workplace reps should aim to work with the employer to assess what posts are suitable for homeworking and what posts are absolutely not possible, based on transparent criteria.]

Cost implications should not be the top priority for the employer when refusing homeworking. However, it may be important for workers to show in the applications that it is cost-effective and will not mean any significant

³ In Northern Ireland the relevant legislation includes: the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and subsequent amendments and supplementary laws, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006 and subsequent amendments, Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970, Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 and subsequent amendments, Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations (NI) 1999, Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 and subsequent amendment, Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998 and subsequent supplementary laws, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003, Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 and subsequent amendments, and under Section 75, 76 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

increase in workload on colleagues.

The reasons used for refusing homeworking should be in line with the organisation's flexible working policy and be sound business reasons.

The procedure should include an appeals procedure for workers to use if they feel their post has been judged incorrectly, in line with flexible working requests.]

On successful completion of a trial period, a homeworking agreement will be issued for the employee to sign and return.

The homeworking agreement will clearly state the details of the homeworking arrangement including:

- whether the worker is expected to be available and contactable during any core hours
- how the worker should communicate when they are not available and contactable to colleagues and customers/clients/service users (e.g. voicemail message, out-of-office automated email)
- whether there are any other flexible working arrangements
- whether the worker is expected to attend meetings and other office-based events
- when regular reviews of the homeworking arrangement will take place to ensure the arrangement is still working or whether it needs to be changed
- in what circumstances the homeworking agreement can be ended by the employer and the worker, and any amount of notice to be given
- confirmation that the home worker has a right to disconnect outside of working hours, and to separate their working and home lives
- confirmation that the home worker is required to comply with other workplace policies.

It is essential that good communication is maintained at all times between the home worker and their line manager. The line manager and worker should plan and agree how they will communicate effectively with each other. These arrangements should be agreed and regularly reviewed.

[The issue of communication is also very important for UNISON branches. They will need to look at how to best stay in touch with members who work at home whilst still involving them with any branch campaigns etc]

Homeworking does not mean that you can change your other contractual obligations, including your core working hours or working days within the week unless it has been agreed with your line manager. **[This is an area that individuals may want**

to negotiate as part of their flexible working request, that their hours can be flexible too. If homeworking, hybrid working or remote working is more widespread within an organisation, changes to core working hours may need to be collectively negotiated as part of a wider work/life balance strategy.]

However **[name of employer]** does recognise that there may be particular exceptional circumstances that may necessitate a temporary change to contractual obligations, including changes to your core working hours and line managers are expected to deal flexibly and sensitively to any such requests and respond promptly.

Agreed homeworking arrangements can be withdrawn if it is demonstrated that it has not been possible for an individual worker to provide a safe, secure place of work in spite of support and guidance.

Homeworking arrangements can also be withdrawn if it is demonstrated that the performance of a worker suffers significantly as a result of homeworking. This will be dealt with under the **[name of employer]'s** Capability Procedure available at **[include a link to where the policy can be viewed.]**.

The worker has the right to be accompanied by their trade union representative or full time official to any meetings to discuss any changes to homeworking arrangements or performance management.

Health and safety

[The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974⁴ states that an employer shall ensure, so far as it is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees – this also extends to homeworkers.

As the control that can be exercised over a member of staff working from home is limited, the main responsibility will be with the home worker under Section 3 (2) of the Act, which places the obligations on homeworkers themselves to ensure that they and other persons, including members of the household (as well as the public) are not endangered by work activities undertaken at home.]

[Name of employer] will set up and maintain safe and appropriate systems for homeworking. The Health and Safety Policy includes those who are homeworking and is available at **[include a link to where the policy can be viewed.]**

⁴ Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

Workers are expected to take personal responsibility for their health, safety and wellbeing whilst working from home. This includes:

- Completing a health and safety risk assessment checklist for the homeworking environment **[or proposed working environments if the arrangement is for agile working – amend as appropriate]** with the support and guidance of the Health and Safety Officer **[amend as appropriate]** to assess any potential risks and how best to reduce or remove the risks.
- If the home worker is using a computer for a significant part of their duties whilst working at home, a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment must be undertaken by the worker and passed onto the line manager. The assessment will also include consideration of work-related stress.

[The Health and Safety Executive have a Display screen equipment (DSE) workstation checklist www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf that could be used.]

- Raising any health, safety and/or wellbeing issues with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
- Looking after their wellbeing whilst working remotely e.g. keeping hydrated, taking regular breaks from the computer screen, taking a break during the day and switching off at the end of the working day.
- Reporting any accidents or incidents in line with **[name of employer]’s** Health and Safety policy found at **[include a link to the policy]**.

The risk assessment will be recorded and reviewed on a regular basis, usually annually or after any significant change of situation, depending on the resultant risk. Further details can be found in the Health and Safety policy **[include a link to the policy]**.

If there are any health and safety concerns that cannot be addressed or extra support is needed the **[name of employer]’s** Health and Safety Officer **[or amend as appropriate]** may need to visit the worker’s home to carry out a further risk assessment. A minimum of 4 weeks’ **[or amend as appropriate]** notice will be given in writing before a home visit takes place.

A worker can request that a UNISON Health and Safety representative accompany the Health and Safety officer if they are conducting a risk assessment of the home-based workstation.

[Name of employer] has a legal requirement to consult with trade union safety representatives on risk assessments and mechanisms in place to protect the health and safety of homeworkers.

A specific risk assessment will be undertaken for homeworkers who are pregnant, so they should notify their line manager of their pregnancy as soon as possible. Further details can be found in the maternity policy **[include a link to the policy]**.

A specific risk assessment will be undertaken for disabled homeworkers to identify and implement any reasonable adjustments necessary that will assist them in carrying out their role.

All electrical equipment loaned to the home worker will be regularly checked for safety. Homeworkers will be responsible for the safety of electrical sockets and wiring in their home and for any other electrical equipment used by them in their work activities.

Meetings with service users and employees of other agencies must not be held at home for reasons of personal security nor should workers release personal data or information, such as home address or personal telephone number.

Meetings at home with work colleagues should be avoided unless absolutely essential, such as for the pre-arranged repair or maintenance of equipment loaned by **[name of employer]** or for a health and safety risk assessment carried out by the health and safety officer. They must be approved in advance by the relevant line manager.

If any worker has a health and safety concern, or if an accident or incident takes place whilst homeworking, they must immediately report this to **[contact's name]** in line with the Health and Safety policy found at **[include a link to the policy]**.

Additional guidance on how to work safely at home will be provided by **[contact's name]**.

[Name of employer]'s existing insurance policies (both public and employer's liability) will continue to operate and cover homeworkers.

IT and equipment

Equipment required to enable the worker to work effectively at home will be provided by **[name of employer]** and may include (but not be limited to):

- laptop or computer
- headset
- printer
- mobile phone
- lockable filing cupboard
- adjustable chair
- desk
- items of stationery.

[Amend and add to as appropriate. Whilst some employers, particularly those offering only hybrid or ad hoc homeworking may refuse to provide suitable

furniture for the home workstation, homeworking during COVID restrictions may have already highlighted the health and safety risks this may lead to, with an increase in musculoskeletal problems for workers forced to improvise.]

Line managers must formally authorise and accurately record equipment to be used by workers and ensure they are provided with adequate technical support and are compliant with legal and regulatory requirements (e.g. health and safety laws and data privacy regulations).

This equipment will remain the property of **[name of employer]** and will be installed, updated, maintained, repaired and replaced at **[name of employer]**'s cost. This may involve attendance at the worker's home by **[name of employer]**'s IT officer or other appropriate officer **[amend as appropriate]**. **[Name of employer]** will give the worker reasonable notice of the need for this visit.

[Name of employer] is not responsible for the maintenance, replacement, or repair of any personal equipment that is used. When using a home telephone for official work purposes a detailed record of official calls should be kept for expense reimbursement purposes.

Only equipment that a worker's line manager has authorised may be used for homeworking.

[For regular and permanent homeworkers, it may be appropriate to try to negotiate the installation of a business telephone line at their home. You could add the following paragraph: "Following a trial period, if it has been agreed that you can work more than 50% of your time at home, [name of employer] will install a dedicated work phone line connection at [name of employer]'s expense. This will be for work use only. This may be less relevant if the worker is provided with a work mobile phone. However, it should be remembered that sometimes mobile phone signals within home settings can be poor, making a landline essential.]

If you already have broadband in your home, **[name of employer]** expects you to use this where necessary, the cost of which is covered by the homeworking allowance **[if such an allowance is agreed]**. If you do not have broadband, this will be provided and paid for by the employer.

In addition, **[name of employer]** will provide homeworkers with a mobile phone and where appropriate, other mobile IT devices necessary for you to carry out your tasks.

[The details of what is provided by the employer will need to be negotiated and may vary as appropriate. The key thing is that workers should not be out of pocket nor have to use personal equipment if they are regularly working from home. For tax and national insurance purposes, it is easier for both the employer and the employee if the employer provides and pays for equipment on loan to the worker.]

All IT equipment, internet facilities, mobile phone [and dedicated work telephone line **if appropriate**] provided by the employer must be used in line with the IT, Email and Telephone Acceptable Use Policy [**or equivalent**] found at [**include a link to the policy**].

Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers

[**Name of employer**] recognises that disabled people face discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace and society. The skills and experience of disabled workers are highly valued.

[**Name of employer**] is committed to the social model of disability and to supporting disabled employees by removing access barriers, tackling discrimination that they face, and implementing best employment practice including when they are working from home.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010⁵ [**name of employer**] will not discriminate against disabled workers but will consider and accommodate all reasonable adjustment needs within a reasonable timeframe, whether these are required for a home work-base or at the office.

[**Name of employer**] believes that accessibility passports offer a way of ensuring staff can maintain their adjustments when their manager changes or when they move roles within the organisation or change their work-base, reducing time spent on re-negotiating already agreed adjustments.

Line managers are responsible for the prompt implementation of reasonable adjustments for disabled workers whether working from home or within the office.

Line managers (with the support of HR and Health and Safety where requested) should discuss support options available for disabled workers who request practical assistance in setting up homeworking arrangements.

The Reasonable Adjustments Policy provides further information about accessibility passports and reasonable adjustments, and is available at [**include a link to where the policy can be viewed.**]

Other support for when homeworking

[**Name of employer**] recognises that homeworking may lead to some workers

⁵ The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and subsequent amendments and supplementary laws in Northern Ireland.

feeling isolated or have a negative impact on their mental health. If any worker at any point feels anxious, isolated, left out, lacking guidance or support due to homeworking, they should discuss this with their line manager and/or a member of HR **[amend as appropriate]**.

This paragraph is particularly important where homeworking or hybrid working has been imposed on staff by the employer.

The policy could also list other services that can be offered to workers to help support them such as access to free counselling services or a confidential helpline that staff can call to get advice.]

The Mental Health Policy includes those who are homeworking and is available at **[include a link to where the policy can be viewed.]**

Confidential support is available for individual employees from the **employee assistance programme** and this may include counselling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice. **[Include a link or signpost to further information.]**

[Name of employer] recognises that some workers will be experiencing domestic abuse and that any work base, including the home if used for work, should be a place of safety. Through the Domestic Abuse Policy and through working to reduce the risks related to domestic abuse, **[name of employer]** aims to create a safer workplace including for homeworkers, and to send out a strong message that domestic abuse is unacceptable.

Workers who disclose that they are experiencing abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not be shared with other members of staff without their permission. Line managers should address the issue positively and sympathetically ensuring that the worker is aware that support and assistance can be provided. Further details can be found in the Domestic Abuse Policy, available at **[include a link to where the policy can be viewed.]**

Homeworkers are reminded that if they are concerned for their own or someone else's immediate safety, they should ring the police on 999. If they or a friend needs help, they can call 0808 2000 247 the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Homeworking allowance [or expenses]

[Name of employer] will pay a homeworking allowance of **[state amount, pro rata for part-time workers]** each period **[state period e.g. four-week]** as a contribution to additional costs incurred whilst working from home to anyone who is solely and permanently a home worker, provided the expenses incurred are solely work-related. Those who are on a trial basis and those who are regular homeworkers **[i.e. hybrid workers]** will be paid the allowance on a pro rata basis. No allowance is

paid to anyone who works occasionally at home on an ad hoc basis.

[Whilst a lump sum homeworking allowance greater than the exempt payment – see the section on [Homeworking expenses and allowances](#) above – is likely to be a taxable benefit for homeworkers, it is clear there are additional costs to homeworkers.]

Homeworking allowances may particularly need careful negotiation, although more employers do now recognise the need to compensate homeworkers for additional expense. Apportioning utility and broadband costs can be very difficult to work out fairly for individuals, so a set homeworking allowance is an easier way of providing compensation, although it is likely to be regarded as a taxable benefit by HMRC.

Ideally the amount allocated as a homeworking allowance towards utility costs should be regularly reviewed to take account of inflation and other increases.]

[Name of employer] will reimburse workers for any other agreed additional expenditure incurred due to homeworking, including for any reasonable **[complete as appropriate e.g. postage, photocopying, printing, stationery]** costs. Proof of purchase (such as a receipt, email confirmation, scanned or photographed copy) should be kept and included with any expenses claim.

[You may want to include further details of how to claim these expenses, what form to use, where to send them, how frequently etc.]

Travel expenses for regular and occasional homeworkers will be paid as for staff based in **[name of employer]**'s workplace. Workers will be able to claim travel expenses to work-related appointments from wherever they are working on that day. For further details, please refer to the Staff Travel Policy **[or equivalent]** found at **[include a link to the policy]**.

[Whilst it is clearly fair to reimburse the cost of travel to work appointments that are not part of a normal commute, if employers are reluctant to reimburse business travel from home for hybrid or ad hoc homeworkers, a compromise may be to exclude the first journey of the day as in: “except if the journey from home to the work appointment is the first journey of the day and is closer to the individual’s home than **[name of employer]’s workplace, when no expenses will be due or if the journey from home to the work appointment is the first journey of the day and is further away from the individual’s home than **[name of employer]**’s workplace, when the difference in costs/mileage expenses will be due.”]**

All business travel for permanent full-time homeworkers will be reimbursed including journeys to and from **[name of employer]**'s workplace.

[Travel expenses and allowances may also be an area that needs considerable careful negotiation so that homeworkers are not disadvantaged. The above is one suggested scenario.]

It is likely that hybrid workers regardless of how frequently they work from home, will be expected to meet the cost of travelling from their home to their employer's workplace – see section on [Homeworking expenses and allowances above.](#)]

Responsibilities of managers

Line managers should ensure that all workers are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities.

Line managers will consider all requests for support for homeworking practically, flexibly and sensitively. All workers must be treated fairly and consistently. However, when considering whether regular or permanent homeworking can be agreed, line managers will also take into account the overall team requirements.

Line managers are instructed to allow homeworking wherever possible and should encourage staff to access the support offered.

Additional guidance for line managers on how to respond to requests for homeworking can be obtained from the HR team **[or amend as appropriate. Ideally the trade union will be involved in agreeing this guidance.]**

As preparation for any homeworking agreement, the line manager must ensure that the home worker has received training or guidance on:

- health and safety awareness including Display Screen Equipment assessments
- first aid, fire safety and accident reporting
- employer support on work-related stress
- appropriate IT skills and support available
- communications and time management skills
- data protection security issues
- lone working.

In addition to the details listed in the homeworking agreement, line managers should confirm in writing the following details with homeworkers:

- how they will keep in touch
- how the team will keep in touch to discuss work issues and provide mutual support including the use of using video conferencing and other tools
- how the workplace is to be used e.g. for team meetings etc
- if the home worker is a new starter, any additional support they will receive during their initial weeks such as **[outline any new starter support available**

such as mentoring or buddying schemes] in line with the Induction policy **[amend as appropriate to your workplace]** found at **[include a link to the policy]**

- measures in place to support their mental health, how work-life balance will be managed, for example taking regular breaks and switching off from work at the end of the day
- rules around storing information and data protection
- how performance will be managed and assessed in line with the Performance Management policy **[amend as appropriate to your workplace]** found at **[include a link to the policy]**
- how the homeworkers will have access to learning and development and career development opportunities, and team events
- how to use the health and safety checklist to help homeworkers assess their own home working environment and identify problems
- who the homeworkers should contact if they have any problems or their circumstances change.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that all workers have participated in appropriate health and safety training and have completed the risk assessment checklists.

Line managers must respond promptly to any issues arising from the assessment in order to reduce or remove risk including from work-related stress, and proactively manage any wellbeing issues that arise including from workload, communications, support with IT difficulties etc.

Line managers must ensure that they cultivate an environment and practice where their team is able to disconnect from work outside of normal working hours, and will be mindful of staff's right to disconnect.

If the home worker reports any work-related health and safety hazards whilst working from home, including ergonomic issues with their home workstation, concerns about workload, the homeworking environment etc., work-related stress, or any work-related accidents that have occurred in their home, the line manager must promptly inform ... **[complete as appropriate, such as the Health and Safety or HR officer]** to look into what action can be taken.

Line managers will treat the personal contact information provided by homeworkers confidentially and in line with the Data Protection Policy found at **[include a link to the policy or include here a statement on the storage, use and security of confidential data held at home]**.

The role of the line manager is that of facilitator and motivator providing members of

their team support through regular contact. Line managers should recognise that homeworkers cannot be micro-managed and need to feel trusted and supported to carry out their role.

All managers have a responsibility to create a work environment in which bullying or harassing behaviour is unacceptable and are reminded that the Dignity at Work policy **[or refer to the particular anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy at your workplace]** applies to all workers on and off the premises, including those working at home. Line managers have a particular responsibility to ensure that within their area of control, everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

[Name of employer] will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

Responsibilities of workers

[There may be a number of general requirements of homeworkers in relation to communications, attendance at key meetings in the workplace, compliance with health and safety or wellbeing issues that could be outlined here, and/or detailed in the individual's homeworking agreement.]

Homeworkers should ensure that they are taking steps to look after their wellbeing including

- maintaining regular contact with their line manager and colleagues
- ensuring that the line manager is aware of their whereabouts and availability during the working week and how to contact them
- raising issues of concern with their line manager including concerning workload and work-related stress
- taking regular rest breaks
- endeavouring to arrange a suitable environment where they can focus on work
- avoiding being 'always on' by ensuring that they identify non-working time
- making use of tools such as shared calendars and out-of-office messaging to help colleagues be aware of their availability
- not working when unwell
- contacting the employee assistance programme if they need support, for example, in relation to heightened feelings of anxiety
- being aware of the things that can cause them poor wellbeing and the activities and resources that can help to address this

- being mindful of their own and others right to disconnect.

[There is particularly a danger of working longer hours and not taking adequate breaks when people work from home, so this should be stressed to homeworkers and monitored by their line manager.]

Homeworkers have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety, that they work in a safe manner and ensure a safe working environment that complies with the Health and Safety policy **[include a link to the policy]**.

Homeworkers must notify their line manager if they believe that there are any work-related health and safety hazards whilst working from home, including ergonomic issues with their home workstation, concerns about workload, the homeworking environment etc. They must also report any work-related accidents that occur in their home. The line manager will promptly inform ... **[complete as appropriate, such as the Health and Safety or HR officer]** to look into what action can be taken.

Homeworkers should check there are no issues with their home insurer, mortgage provider or landlord. The worker must check that there are no restrictions on them from homeworking – for example, in their mortgage agreement, lease or insurance. Any issues should be promptly reported to their line manager for advice.

Homeworkers are advised to take out a household contents insurance policy if they do not currently have one. If the home worker already has insurance, it is a condition of any homeworking agreement that they inform their household insurers of the arrangements and provide a copy of the policy wording and schedule to their line manager if their homeworking request is granted.

[It is important that employers are also reminded to check the details of their insurance to make sure that business equipment used by a worker at their home is covered.]

The employer's insurance also needs to cover them against a claim by a third party.]

Homeworkers should take reasonable care of equipment and materials provided by **[name of employer]** and return any item to **[name of employer]** when requested. Equipment should only be used for work-related purposes and in accordance with any existing **[name of employer]** policies.

[Name of employer] will cover the cost of periodic repairs and maintenance of any personal equipment if it has been agreed by the line manager it can be used for work purposes.

[The employer's legal requirement is that business equipment must be suitable for its purpose, maintained in good working order and inspected regularly. Therefore, they should cover costs of repair and maintenance to help ensure this.]

Use of personal equipment is not ideal but if it is the case, particularly if homeworking is on an ad hoc basis or perhaps during a trial period, employers should compensate staff for any additional costs such as computer anti-viral protection, computer software, additional data for a mobile phone etc.]

It is the responsibility of individual workers to ensure that their line manager has up-to-date contact details whilst they are homeworking. The information will be treated confidentially in line with the Data Protection policy found at **[include a link to the policy]**.

Homeworkers must keep information and materials safe and secure at all times and take reasonable precautions to maintain confidentiality in line with the Data Protection policy found at **[include a link to the policy.]**

All workers have a clear role to play in helping to create a work environment in which bullying or harassing behaviour is unacceptable and are reminded that the Dignity at Work policy **[or refer to the particular anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy at your workplace]** applies to all workers on and off the premises, including those working away from their normal place of work. Workers should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced.

Sickness absence

Homeworkers must comply with **[name of employer]'s** Sickness Absence policy found at **[include a link to the policy]** and ensure they report their sickness to their line manager when they are sick and unable to work.

Data protection, confidentiality and security

[Name of employer] will conduct a data protection impact assessment, monitor and record how the 'processing' (i.e. 'obtaining, storing, viewing, holding, recording, transmitting or destroying information or data or carrying out any operation or set of operations on the information or data') takes place when staff are working outside of **[name of employer]'s** workplace including at home or travelling. This will also consider any additional safeguards necessary for special categories of data, in order to continue to comply with **[name of employer]'s** Data Protection policy found at **[include a link to the policy]**.

Line managers must ensure that workers are made aware of the Data Protection Policy so that they understand their own areas of responsibility in order to comply with it.

Line managers must ensure that there is adequate provision of secure storage and facilities to ensure the secure destruction of confidential printed information (e.g. access to lockable fireproof storage areas and cross-cut shredders or other secure disposal methods).

Homeworkers are reminded to protect confidential information belonging to **[name of employer]** and to **[complete as appropriate to your organisation such as other work colleagues, clients, customers, service users, suppliers, contractors etc.]** and must follow any operating instructions to be used for homeworking including how to securely connect to various types of networks.

Homeworkers must report any actual or potential breach of security, confidentiality or data protection to their line manager immediately.

Homeworkers who are unsure about any aspect of security, confidentiality or data protection, should seek advice from their line manager.

[The Data Protection Policy should also clarify what sort of monitoring the employer may carry out on homeworkers and ensure it complies with privacy and data protection legal requirements.]

Trade union involvement

Consultation will take place with the recognised trade union on the implementation, development, monitoring and review of this policy.

This will include consultation with health and safety reps in good time through the joint health and safety committee over any proposal that can be expected to have a significant effect on physical and mental health.

A regular review of the homeworking policy will be held through the joint health and safety committee with a view to agreeing improvements.

Union reps will be given training equal to that of managers and supervisors and sufficient time to carry out their duties.

Review of this policy

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy. The policy will be widely promoted, and copies will be freely available and displayed in **[name of employer]'s** offices and through the staff intranet **[amend as appropriate to your workplace]**.

This policy will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

Signatories

This agreement is made between **[name of the employer]** and UNISON, a registered trade union.

This agreement comes into force on:

Date:.....

This agreement will be reviewed on:

Date:.....

SIGNED for **[name of the employer]**

DATE

SIGNED for UNISON

DATE