**Guidance for Schools: Working from Home during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

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# Introduction & Scope

This guidance document sets out PACT HR’s recommended approach to schools for staff working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. This guidance applies to all school staff regardless of their role who at any point during the pandemic are required to work from home.

It is recognised during these extremely difficult and challenging times that adjustments must be made to continue working effectively and meet the demands placed on schools, to mitigate any detriment faced by the staff and learners as a result of amended ways of working and to ensure effective service delivery is maintained. All school staff should be reassured that their wellbeing is of the utmost importance and it is understood that it may take time for some to find the most suitable way of balancing both work and home life during this time.

# Support & Communication

Staff are encouraged to maintain regular contact with their colleagues, team and line manager, making additional efforts to ensure they keep their line manager up to date with any particular pieces of work where requested and equally, ensuring line managers are contacted if staff members are unsure of something they have been tasked with or require support in completing work.

It is advisable to arrange regular team meetings and/or one-to-one’s. Working from home can be a big adjustment for many staff, for a variety of reasons and is not always an individual’s preferred working arrangement. It is important managers maintain contact with their staff, that effective communication is maintained so far as this is possible and that teams are given opportunities to interact, even if this is done virtually.

All staff should consider all means of communication, including email, telephone, group chats and video calls to ensure relationships are maintained and work continues effectively.

# Working Pattern

Whilst no formal changes to working patterns have been implemented with staff working from home during the pandemic, it is recognised that home working suits some school roles more than others and the scope for flexibility in the working pattern is linked to the nature of the role. Unless otherwise agreed, all staff are expected to be logged on and available for work during their contracted hours. Teaching staff should ensure they are available and appropriately set up to deliver online learning during ‘class’ time.

As staff are responsible for managing their hours, this will require organisational and time-management skills to ensure they are meeting work requirements. Where any staff are struggling with this they should contact their line manager to discuss available support. Line managers should be as clear as possible about their staff members’ hours of work and are advised to utilise shared calendars, for instance to highlight lunch breaks, meetings etc. and out-of-office replies to help colleagues be aware of their availability.

# Wellbeing

All staff should be mindful of the potential for blurred lines between work and home life that can present themselves when working from home, and that they are not overworking due to the constant access to technology and limited opportunity to leave the house during the pandemic. "Switching off” from work at the end of the working day and having some “digital downtime” is essential to maintaining a good level of health and wellbeing and staff are encouraged to find their own ways of doing this effectively, whether it is working in a different room in the house where possible or going for a walk at the end of the day.

It is recognised not all staff will have the opportunity to physically separate their work and home lives, some staff may be working from living rooms or kitchens. Staff may also be juggling the demands of work with family life, looking after children or dependants and in some cases home-schooling their children, whilst also having to work from home. It is appreciated that this is an unprecedented and difficult situation to be in and all that is asked of staff is to do their absolutely best to fulfil their working responsibilities and speak to their line manager if they feel they need some support or to discuss a temporary change to working arrangements.

To help maintain a good level of wellbeing, staff should ensure they take adequate rest breaks and even if things are busy, it is essential they break away for at least 20 minutes each working day that lasts more than six hours. However, given the increase in time spent working online and sat at a computer or laptop, staff are encouraged to take frequent breaks where appropriate and possible to move around and keep refreshed.

It is also recognised working from home can be a lonely and isolating experience for many and mental health can be impacted just as much, if not more than physical health. Schools are encouraged to make use of PACT HR’s Wellbeing Guidance (available [here](https://pact-hr.co.uk/hr-advisory-service/absence-leave/sickness-absence/)) and where appropriate signpost staff to support services; these may be internal such as Occupational Health or external such as the NHS, MIND, Remploy or MyWellbeing College.

# Safeguarding

Safeguarding remains of the utmost importance and an obligation of all school staff regardless of their role. Staff are advised to consider any additional safeguarding considerations that may present themselves whilst working from home, for instance where teaching staff are delivering a lesson online to ensure appropriate access to the materials and no interference from others who may be in the vicinity.

# Health and Safety

Staff should liaise with their line manager to ensure their workstation is appropriate and that they are working in a safe manner. All managers should by now have conducted risk assessments for all school staff working from home and arranged for the implementation of any reasonable adjustments; if not these should be completed as a matter of urgency. Staff must also take responsibility for their own health and safety whilst working from home and that of anyone else in the household who is affected by this arrangement.

Staff are encouraged to be proactive in managing their health and wellbeing whilst working from home, including making themselves aware of steps they can take to ensure a comfortable posture while working from home on a computer or laptop. This video from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on workstation set-up covers this in further detail [www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm).

Some recommended actions for staff who are working with display screen equipment i.e. a computer or laptop include:

* Taking at least a five minute break every hour or changing activity/task
* Regularly changing seated position and avoiding uncomfortable, awkward or static postures
* Standing up and moving around regularly or doing some stretching exercises (the Chartered Society for Physiotherapy recommends ‘desk physio’ – click [here](https://www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/keeping-active-healthy/staying-healthy-work/desk-based-exercises) to find out more)
* Avoiding eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time. Where staff are experiencing increased eye strain or headaches due to using DSE equipment more than they usually would, they should report this to their line manager and aarrange for an eye test.

Staff must notify their line manager if they experience any discomfort due to working from home, such as back, neck or shoulder pain, or if they identify any work-related health and safety hazards, so that the line manager can liaise with Occupational Health and/or HR to consider the appropriate action.

Staff should follow the usual reporting procedures for any work-related accidents that occur in their home.

# Equipment and Materials

The equipment and materials required for staff to work effectively from home have all now been provided. Any staff that are still in need of any necessary equipment or materials should notify their line manager immediately. It is appreciated that the initial requirement to work from home transpired with little notice and as such there may be delays to some equipment being provided; staff are asked to please bear with the school whilst this is arranged where any equipment or materials are still outstanding.

All staff are responsible for taking proper care of school equipment and materials and to notify their line manager and/or IT contact in the event of any faults.

Where staff may be required to undertake or complete tasks that cannot be done from home, such as posting letters or printing materials, in the first instance they should contact the school to arrange for those who may be in attendance at the school site to facilitate this. Staff who are working from home should not be attending school unless absolutely necessary and only where this has been discussed with their line manager first. This is not to deter staff from being able to complete their tasks but is in the interests of protecting all staff and pupils from Covid-19.

Any staff who leave the school’s employment whilst working from home should arrange with their line manager to return all school property in their possession as quickly and as safely as possible, adhering to Covid-19 protection guidelines at all times.

# Sickness

The school’s sickness absence policy and procedure continues to apply whilst staff are working from home and staff are required to comply with the usual absence reporting procedures in contacting their line managers where they are unfit for work.

Any staff who are experiencing symptoms of Covid-19 must follow the appropriate guidance and arrange a test. Please see [here](https://pact-hr.co.uk/coronavirus-updates/government-advice-guidance/) a range of links available on the PACT HR website relating to the Government’s Covid-19 guidance.

# Tax

Staff may be able to claim tax relief for any household expenses incurred as a result of working from home, provided the expenses are solely work related. Please visit [www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home](https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home) for further information.

# Security & GDPR

Staff working from home are responsible for keeping all documents, materials, resources and information associated with the school secure at all times. This includes:

* keep filing cabinets and drawers locked when they are not being used;
* keep all documentation under lock and key at all times except when in use; and
* using a unique password for work computers, laptops and any other digital devices used for work making sure to not share this with anyone else.

Any equipment provided by the school must be used for work-related purposes only and must not be used by any other member of the family, household or third party at any time or for any purpose.

Staff should be mindful of being aware of others in the household potentially overhearing private conversations or being able to see sensitive documents or emails left open on an unlocked laptop. It is appreciated staff may live with other adults who are also working from home and it may not always be feasible to not be overheard for instance; however, wherever possible staff should take steps to ensure this does not happen, including but not limited to locking or shutting down computers or laptops when not in use.

# Review & Further Assistance

This guidance will be kept under review and updated accordingly.

Any schools who require any further advice, guidance or support in respect of staff working from home should contact their PACT HR Business Partner.