

Employee communication

Issued by: Communications

Date: 30 March 2020

Issue No: 10513

Status: **IMPORTANT**

Concerns around the Impacts of COVID-19

Guidance on Working from Home (WFH)

We are in an unprecedented situation which will place new and unexpected demands on all of us. Therefore, we need to look at balancing demands from work and home, whilst looking after our mental wellbeing as the pandemic may run for a number of months.

For some this will be the first time you have been asked to work from home. The novelty of this may soon wear off, or may already have worn off, especially with the additional restrictions in place around leaving your home.

Spending continuous time in a confined space with your family will have its challenges while others will be feeling the opposite, being isolated on your own and unable to see family. Not to mention supporting dependants, home schooling, helping the vulnerable, community, infrastructure etc.

Some of you will have family working in the NHS and be concerned about their safety, maybe worried about bringing the virus home. For those of you who have family working in the food industry, it will be incredibly hard to hear of those members who are being abused for enforcing limits on essential items.

Others will be worried about family members who are self-employed, or perhaps who have been laid off, and concerned for your finances. If that situation is within your extended family, you may be worrying about their finances.

Everyone's situation will be different, with different challenges to face, so we should all be mindful of this when maintaining contact with our teams and colleagues.

Do not be hard on yourself!!

We understand these are difficult times and everyone is in a different situation, and concerned for their loved ones. All we can expect is that everyone is trying their best and working together through this unprecedented phase.

Recognise this in yourself and others and accept that this is OK – these are normal emotions in extraordinary times. Continue to do what you can: this is all we can ask.

Below are some useful tips and advice on working from home which hopefully will help your homeworking situation:

- Working from home needs communication, communication, communication.
- You need to establish with your line manager what your priority work is, and what is routine work.
- Everyone needs to be mindful of the situation of others, even if they do not know them.
- If possible, dedicate a space in your house to be your workplace. Make this as safe as possible, with no trip hazards and aiming to get good body posture.
- Create a daily routine for yourself. Schedule regular breaks and do not book all day on calls. Block time out in your diary to help facilitate this.
- Try not to book calls for longer than 45 minutes.
- Set ground rules for yourself. Make your line manager, team and family aware of them. You will no doubt be juggling working at home with others around.
- Schedule breaks and take them in their entirety. Get fresh air, go for a walk. You are still able to go for a walk once a day as long as you adhere to the 2 metre distance. Fresh air and exercise are good for your health and wellbeing.
- Do not work longer than a normal working day.
- It is not recommended that you work a 9.25 hour day solidly from home. Where possible spread your hours over the full 5-day week rather than 4, working a maximum 7 hours a day (with breaks). Part timers can spread their normal hours accordingly.
- Move about regularly – every 30 to 40 minutes. Get up and walk around.
- Maintain information security whilst at home – when communicating on social media or Skype be aware these are not secure and that you should not share sensitive materials.

- Any disposal of any printed material should be through shredding or burning.
- Look at completing online training packages or continued professional development.
- Socialise virtually with your colleagues. Take a few minutes at the start of calls to do this before business. Set up team meetings and be social. Use Skype to connect.
- If you are feeling unwell then you should not be working. You should be booking this as sickness, as normal.

Holiday Arrangements

As noted at the outset we need to look at our work life balance in these unusual circumstances.

With that in mind we ask that you approach annual leave in the same way as you would normally at work – take regular time off to refresh, don't attempt to be 'always available' and please look after yourselves and families as a priority.

This applies equally to everyone whether working from home, at home but ready to work or looking after children or relatives due to COVID-19.

Further to recent government guidance, all essential workers who have not taken all of their statutory annual leave entitlement due to COVID-19 will now be able to carry it over into the next 2 leave years if you so wish.

Where you have booked annual holidays you can have them credited back if you no longer intend, or will not be permitted by restrictions, to take them.

In terms of more regular breaks, such as occasional days around Easter, May holidays etc, we would encourage you to take some time away and book as regular leave. As an average we would recommend you take on average two days per month - to be clear we are not insisting you do that but recommending for health and wellbeing reasons, and everyone's personal situation is of course different.

As we start to think about return to work in the next few months I am sure we will all be ready for a break – we will have to ensure that any leave is authorised and sequenced so that we can re-start the business first and get everyone back to work. It may be that we can't approve everyone being on leave at the same time or having extended periods to use up an entire years' leave balance, so please consider in your teams how you will do this.

Finally, we will review this as we evolve our approach to this exceptional year as there will be other new and unexpected challenges ahead.

Summary of General Principles

- Encourage staff to book their annual leave as normal - we all need breaks from our work to maintain our wellbeing, even if working from home.

- If individuals have had holidays cancelled, then this will be credited back in the normal way.
- Further to recent government guidance, all essential workers who have not taken all of their statutory annual leave entitlement due to COVID-19 will now be able to carry it over into the next 2 leave years if you so wish.
- We will not pay out TOIL for 2020 since there will be adequate opportunities to take anything accrued.
- We will review buying and selling of annual leave later in the year once we have clarity on the duration of this current pandemic.

	Homeworkers	People unable to work from home (but available if called upon)	Staff required to continue working on sites
Annual leave/TOIL Taken	Continue to book leave from working from home as if you would normally. It is important to maintain regular breaks away from work. Where leave is taken, ensure that cover is arranged if necessary and agreed with your line manager	Continue to book leave on days/hours that you do not want to be called upon to work and agree this up front with your line manager.	Continue to request/book as normal. If you are or have been unable to take your leave due to operational requirements, you will be given priority once we are back to normal operations.
Part time/4 day workers	Flexibility is encouraged and we understand that individuals may not be able to work their exact hours and may need to spread their working hours across the week. However it is important to still book regular breaks/leave away from work.	Continue to book leave on days/hours that you do not want to be called upon and agree this up front with your line manager.	Continue to request/book as normal. If you are or have been unable to take your leave due to operational requirements, you will be given priority once we are back to normal operations.

Leave already booked	This should still be used as normal. Continue to book leave if unable to be called upon for work. i.e for Easter holidays	This should still be used as normal. Continue to book leave if unable to be called upon for work. i.e for Easter holidays	If you are unable to have your leave due to operational requirements, you will be given priority once we are back to normal operations.
Bank Holidays	Continue to book as normal	Continue to book as normal	Continue to book as normal

Overtime/TOIL worked	No additional hours should be claimed whilst working from home	No additional hours should be claimed if called to go into site out of normal working hours	Continue to book as normal
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Any queries regarding annual leave, please speak in the first instance to your HR Business Partner.

John Vickerman
HR Director