



working from home guide

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Working from home – guidance for smaller Prokom members

Introduction

For most smaller Prokom members who are continuing to operate, at least partially though the pandemic crisis, a limited number of staff can be encouraged to work from home. Indeed in some countries such as the UK, the government instructs you that during a period of 'lockdown' anyone who can work from home must do so.

However for most staff this may be a fresh experience and is being set up during a very challenging and stressful time with kids at home, no-one going out except for specific needs and so on. These tips have been taken largely from guidance given by the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) in the UK. It comes in three parts; Part A for managers, Part B for staff and Part C for everyone using online meetings. *The last two are available as downloadable PDFs for onward distribution.*

Part A. 13 top tips for managing remote teams

1. **Agree ways of working.** Make sure every team member is clear about how you will work together remotely, how you keep each other updated, and how frequently. You should conduct electronic risk assessments with your staff to ensure the home workplace is suitable. Make sure all staff know about your health and safety policies.
2. **Adapting processes and providing training.** Remember that some processes may 'assume' physical transfers and/or rekeying of files when working in the company, that may not be practical when staff are working from home. You may have to redesign processes 'on the fly' but if you do so, ensure they are thoroughly tested and that all staff impacted are advised and trained. This must include staff up and down the process in other departments as well as those in the immediate team.
3. **Show the big picture but prepare to flex.** Remind your team about the big picture and how their work fits into it. Review short-term goals regularly and adjust as needed. If some members can't carry out all their usual work, consider other skills they can lend to others to meet team goals.
4. **Set expectations and trust your team but provide support as necessary.** Be clear about mutual expectations and trust your team to get on without micromanaging. Focus on results rather than activity. Provide any coaching staff might need to use online systems or work remotely. Keep your calendar visible and maintain a virtual open door.
5. **Providing equipment and IT support.** There is no obligation to provide computer or other equipment necessary for working at home, although you may need to do so to enable home working. If you do supply equipment it must pass relevant safety tests and it is prudent to list the equipment that has been supplied. You must consider if you are going to contribute partially or in full to the broadband costs (and even heating and lighting). You must also confirm any IT support (likely to be remote at this time) and clarify your responsibility for repair or replacement if the employee's equipment is used. You need to check that your insurance covers business equipment in your staff's homes.
6. **Keep the rhythm of regular one-to-ones and team meetings.** This maintains a sense of structure and continuity for all. Have a daily virtual huddle. This is essential for keeping connected as a team, to check in on each other's well-being and keep workflow on track. It needn't be long, but regularity is key.

7. **Share information and encourage your team to do the same.** Without physical 'water-cooler conversations', opportunities to pick up information in passing are more limited. Share *appropriate* updates or learnings from other meetings and projects and invite your team to do the same.
8. **Tailor your feedback and communications.** People can be more sensitive if they're feeling isolated or anxious, so take this into account when talking or writing. Communicate regularly, not just when things go wrong, whether it is information, praise or criticism.
9. **Listen closely and read between the lines.** Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling, particularly in more difficult conversations. Home in on what's not being said and ask questions to clarify your interpretation.
10. **Help foster relationships and well-being.** Make time for social conversations. This increases rapport and eases communication between people who may not meet often. It also reduces feelings of isolation.
11. **Think about health and safety obligations.** You are responsible for an employee's health, safety and welfare, even when working from home. You must remind staff that they should ensure a suitable and safe environment where they can focus on work. Remind staff that they should continue to comply with your sickness absence policy and report their sickness in the normal way when they are sick and unable to work.
12. **Review working time and length of period.** Will staff need to be available for work during strict office hours or work a specified a set number of hours per day? Agree this clearly and confirm in writing but recognise the need to be flexible as work and family matters arise. This is a stressful time, look out for signs of overwork.
13. **Data protection and security.** You should make sure data protection obligations are maintained and employees using their own computer should still process information in compliance with data protection principles. You should remind employees about home security, confidential information, passwords, shredding etc. You must consider the security issues around the use of various software aids to remote communications eg Zoom, Skype etc.

Part B. Guidance for staff working from home

Here are some top tips for you to circulate to staff members who are home working. [A downloadable PDF of this is at the foot of this article.](#)

10 top tips for healthy remote working

1. **Put safety first.** You must ensure your working environment is both safe and as effective as possible. Try at least to create a space, if not a room where you can focus, ideally without too many distractions.
2. **Establish and keep to a schedule.** Be clear about when your working day begins and ends. Tell family and neighbours/friends your daily routine and ask them to respect it and stay clear physically/virtually during 'office hours'. (We know young kids and babies may be more difficult!)
3. **Know when to step away from your desk.** Structure your time in 'work mode' and take breaks to refresh. When work is over, be sure you switch off to avoid burnout. Cultivate healthy habits such as taking exercise and fresh air every day.

4. **Minimise stress.** Agree with your boss clear expectations about the way you should deliver and receive communications throughout the working day. This will help alleviate pressure and anxiety.
5. **Have a daily virtual team huddle.** This is essential for keeping connected and discuss any additional support you need to fulfil your role from home.
6. **Foster relationships.** Make time for non-work chats as you would in the workplace and use video calling if possible to maintain face-to-face contact.
7. **Remember how your efforts fit into the big picture and keep updated on this.** Ask to be kept in the picture on how things are going overall. Review your short-term goals regularly and seek approval to adjust as needed. If you cannot carry out all your usual work, consider other skills you can lend to others to meet team goals.
8. **Set expectations and trust your colleagues.** Be clear about mutual expectations and trust your colleagues to get on. Focus on results rather than activity. Working relationships can deteriorate quickly and well-being suffer without trust.
9. **Be kind.** Remote conversations can easily be misinterpreted, as it's harder to read body language, tone of voice and other visual and audio cues. Stay mindful of this when delivering difficult messages or feedback. Challenging times call for greater sensitivity and kindness.
10. **Be realistic if you are ill.** If you're unwell, tell the company and take sick leave, doing your best to give an update or handover on urgent work.

Part C. Managing effective online meetings

Online meetings are rapidly becoming the routine option in current circumstances. You and your teams need to ensure that best use is made of such meetings, even when the verbal and non-verbal cues that you use to manage face-to-face meetings are not all available. Here is a short list of top tips to aid success. *Again this is available as a downloadable PDF at the end of this article.*

10 top tips for effective online meetings

1. **Embrace video calling.** Being present and seeing each other is an important part of keeping connected. Don't hide away or do other work during the meeting.
2. **Use headsets or earphones.** This will give better sound quality. Speak directly into the mic and remember to mute it when not speaking to limit background noise.
3. **Speak clearly and steadily.** This will help ensure everyone can understand you. And try to modulate your voice, to keep people interested and engaged.
4. **Establish etiquette guidelines.** Agree a system to give everyone a voice. Arrange 'hands up' signals to agree who speaks next and use chat functions to allow everyone to contribute.
5. **Repeat the question.** The chair or presenter should repeat questions they ask or before answering them, to ensure all participants are aware of the original question. Repeating the question in writing within a chat box could provide additional clarity.

6. **Use names and give context.** When responding to chat comments, repeat the relevant remarks and make clear to whom you're responding to. Don't just say 'yes, Jane that's right' because others may not have seen Jane's comment and it won't make sense to them.
7. **Keep slides simple.** Keep to a single thought per slide to help participants understand and focus on what's being discussed. It's better to have more slides with fewer things on them.
8. **Keep slides visual.** Your participants may be joining from a mobile device and wordy slides will be tough to read. Anchor your presentation on relevant, image-based slides.
9. **Engage participants regularly.** It's hard to simply listen online for a long time. Invite participants to give comments or ask questions, and use tools like chat or polls.
10. **Be explicit about actions and summarise.** Spell out clearly any actions that need to be taken and by whom. Summarise meeting takeaways and circulate notes promptly.



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