

HS04-19

SF/SS

Napo Homeworking Guide

Home working

Napo members working in probation services are working at home for at least part of the week in increasing numbers (something our Family Court members have been doing for some time now).

Napo members are not alone in this increase in home working, TUC analysis shows that 373, 000 staff, that's 27% more employees, are working from home than ten years ago.

This is a huge shift in the labour market as technological change means that many workers no longer need to be at the workplace to carry out their role. Not only can the work at home, they can also work on the move, between workplace sites.

Our feedback is that on the whole Napo members welcome the opportunity to work from home (with the proviso that home working should not be compulsory).

This dramatic increase in home working raises a number of issues, particularly given the nature of the work our members do. In this guidance, we look at the pros and cons of homeworking and the issues that should be considered when home working.

What is home working?

Homeworking is a term covering a variety of arrangements:

Occasional working from home – for example this might be for a specific piece of work that requires full concentration, if there has been transport disruption due to bad weather or if someone is on a phased return to work following sickness and working from home is part of the phased return arrangement.

Regular homeworking - some employees split their time between working at home a few days a week (depending on the agreement with the employer), with the rest of the time in the office or with clients.

Permanent homeworking – some employees work almost entirely at home apart from carrying out regular or occasional duties/meetings at the office or with clients.

Travel-related roles - where the job entails a lot of journeys and the employee's home is used as a base.

Homeworking is a type of flexible working that, depending on the agreement between employer and employee, can be also used in conjunction with other arrangements such as flexible hours, working part-time or the employer's core hours.

However, homeworking and other forms of flexible working do not have to be used together. For example, an employer could stipulate that a homeworker work the same working pattern as office-based staff.¹

Advantages for the employee of homeworking²:

- It gives more freedom for staff to manage their own time
- Makes it easier to combine work with caring responsibilities
- Saves time and money on commuting
- Avoids the daily commute, therefore saves money and means staff are not tired from the journey into work.
- Makes work easier for some disabled people. Just over a million people with a disability work from home.ⁱ
- It is a way to balance work and home commitments. Staff that work from home either for some/or much of the time say they have a better work-life-balance and job satisfaction. ACAS research found a mix of working from the office and home can yield the best results in job satisfaction, work performance and reducing stress.³
- Improved working environment, as the individual can adjust the layout, temperature and lighting
- Improved productivity, as there are not the disturbances that can be encountered in the office.

Disadvantages of homeworking for the employee

Isolation: Our Family Court members (who have been working from home for some while now) tell us that they can feel isolated when working from home.

This sense of isolation can be avoided by the employer and employee agreeing to keep in touch through phone/skype/email.

¹ ACAS Homeworking – a guide for employers and employees.

<https://www.acas.org.uk/media/3905/Homeworking---a-guide-for-employers-and-employees/pdf/Homeworking-a-guide-for-employers-and-employees.pdf>

² Labour Research article, “Exploiting the home advantage?” June 2019

³ ACAS Homeworking – a guide for employers and employees.

The ACAS homeworking guide explains that the need for on-site attendance will vary depending on the job, the employee and the organisation. If a mixture of home and on-site working is best, then allowing the homeworker to focus on their work when at home, while still feeling part of the team and catching up on what is happening in the organisation when on site can help address the problem of isolation.

Working time: There is a tendency for homeworkers to work long hours (this is probably one of the reasons why many employers encourage homeworking!). It can be the ultimate in productive working – straight out of bed onto the laptop. Research by Cardiff University academics Alan Felstead and Golo Henseke⁴ showed that three quarters of workers have revealed that they put in more effort than is required when working from home. Napo have received reports of staff sending emails in the early hours of the morning, in a seemingly desperate attempt to keep on top of workloads.

To address this there should be guidelines in the employers home working policy on how to manage time. The central requirement is that the importance of homeworkers sticking to their contracted hours is maintained and that they take sufficient breaks.

Also, employees need to make it clear to their employer when they are and are not contactable and to notify their colleagues and manager accordingly.

Coping: In a presentation “Agile Working: Implications for staff wellbeing and effective practice” Dr Jake Phillips gave to a recent Napo training event where he explained that a coping mechanism for probation staff was to seek support from colleagues, that there were “communities of coping”/letting off steam and this was often done through humour.

How will this happen when working from home or working remotely? What can employers do to support staff who regularly work away from the office? These issues should be addressed in employers’ homeworking guidance and in risk assessments.

Blurring boundaries/Spill over: Traditionally probation practitioners have tried ‘not to take work home’ as they understand the importance of creating a boundary between work and family life. This has become harder as this boundary is not now so easy to maintain, particularly giving the impact of increasing volume of high-risk

⁴ Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance, Felstead, Alan and Henseke, Golo

https://orca-mwe.cf.ac.uk/104239/8/Felstead%20and%20Henseke_NTWE_2017.pdf

caseloads in probation.⁵ (This problem of boundaries and spill over would apply equally to our family court members).

Some academic research on the impact of issues identified in this guidance of coping mechanisms, workloads and blurring boundaries/spill over would be really useful. The TUC state that in many cases, homeworking is a “win-win-win” issue. But in the case of many Napo members things maybe more nuanced than this due to the nature of their work.

Stress: Working from home may help reduce stress levels, but this depends on individual circumstances, if you are working from home and have caring responsibilities and a busy household – stress levels could increase.

Possible impact on career: Recent research by Cardiff University academics Felstead and Henseke has shown that a downside of home working is that the chances of promotion were reduced.⁶ Out of site out of mind is the problem. Also home workers are less aware than colleagues of what is going on in the organisation.

Keeping in touch with Napo: Our family court section Napo activists have told us about how difficult it is to organise their section as they often visit workplaces with the intention of speaking to staff about the union and there is no one there to speak to! As all are working from home or working remotely.

This is a big challenge for us as a trade union; unfortunately, we cannot rely on emails to keep in contact, as members are overwhelmed with them as it is. The loss of, or reduced contact with colleagues and the union is a definite challenge that home working causes for us. Also, the sense of collective, an injury to one is an injury to all is dissipated though home working. We will need to consider how we keep in contact with members who work at home, making sure to give members plenty of notice of workplace union activities. But the TUC should also give some thought to these issues as this will be a problem also for many other unions.

What are the advantages for the employer of having staff working from home?

Employers overheads are lower, increased productivity as less disturbance as there would be in the office and staff are happier, wider choice when hiring (as workplace location is less of an issue), attracting a more diverse workforce, attracting staff with

⁵ Spill over and work-family conflict in probation practice: Managing the boundary between work and home life, Westaby, Chalen; Phillips, Jake and Fowler, Andrew
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2066220316680370?journalCode=ejpa>

⁶ Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance, Felstead, Alan and Henseke, Golo

disabilities or caring responsibilities, going green due to less commuting and growing reputation as a flexible employer, can help retain staff.⁷

Why are some managers reluctant to let their staff work from home?

Despite the benefits outlined above for employers of having staff homeworking some of our members have been blocked from home working. This usually happens when trust has broken down and the employer wants to be able to see staff working.

The TUC writes that work practices are often stuck in the past. Far too many employers still rely on a factory-style model, managing by attendance, even when it's a poor fit. The TUC estimate that there are about four million people who want to work from home but are not being given this opportunity.

TUC evidence shows that older workers are more likely to work from home, twice as many men work from home (which is the opposite of what you might think given the traditional breakdown of roles); people with BME background are less likely to get homeworking. Much of this comes down to employment status – managers more likely to work at home compared with average employee.

All the employers Napo work with are reporting difficulties in being able to both recruit and retain staff. By doing more to facilitate homeworking employers will assist with addressing the problems they have with recruitment and retention. Research show that remote workers display more positive attitudes to their employer. Seven in ten remote workers agreed or strongly agreed that they would move to another organisation for higher pay compared with six in ten conventionally sited workers.

If being asked to homework you should consider the following:

Do I have sufficient space in my home to accommodate a workstation and necessary storage?

See section on h&s and homeworking.

Homeworking space should be safe and secure. Do you have the equipment you need to work from home? Such as furniture, Phone, IT, Adequate internet connection, Fire extinguisher

Will I have few or no disruptions during my working day, e.g. family?

It is vital that working at home is not used to combine work and caring responsibilities. Homeworking can make it easier to be available for other commitments but it should be kept separate - your employers homeworking policy should address this.

⁷ ACAS Homeworking – a guide for employers and employees.

If you want to homework there must be a quiet, private place to work and you should be careful not to allow work to encroach on home life.

Can I manage my working time to enable me to work effectively?

Can I establish sufficient boundaries between work and private life/responsibilities?

Can I work with the minimum of immediate supervision?

Can I ensure the security and confidentiality of the information I will work with?

Will I miss the frequent face-to-face social contact I am used to when working in the office?

How will I keep in contact with my colleagues and my Napo representative?

Will this interrupt my career?

Does my home insurance cover homeworking and a claim from a third party?

Do I need to tell my mortgage provider/landlord of my plan to work from home? And to check this is allowed for under my mortgage or rent agreement?

Health and safety and homeworking

The employer is responsible for the health and safety of employees who work from home as they covered by all safety legislation when working from a work place. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that every employer has a duty to ensure as far as reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of their employees. This duty applies equally to homeworkers.

Though to an extent the responsibilities of the employer are limited as they are not working alongside you in your home. Given this it must be remembered that under the Health and Safety at Work act employees also have responsibilities for health and safety.

Key areas that should be addressed in homeworking policies are DSE, electrical safety, fire safety, first aid, accident reporting, lone working, storage and manual handling.

The Management of Health and Safety in the Workplace regs, particularly regulation 3 applies. This is the duty on employers to risk assess hazards. The individual member of staff will carry out the risk assessment and the employer will only become involved if there are specific issues – such as matters related to the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments or disability related restrictions. The employers

home working policy should allow for Napo safety reps to attend on any home inspections.

Risk assessments should be gender sensitive to ensure issues around caring responsibilities and how these interplay with paid work commitments are assessed.

Accident and near misses must be reported in the same way as for office-based staff.

Reasonable adjustments and homeworking

All employers have a positive duty to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the disability of disabled workers (Equality Act 2010, section 20).

Napo have received reports that members have been told they cannot have reasonable adjustment equipment at home - but homeworking can be a reasonable adjustment and in these circumstances necessary equipment should be provided.

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ⁱ TUC Guest Blog: Working from home has increased, but why so slow? – By Frances O’Grady –TUC General Secretary, May 2019