

A quick guide for Napo members working at home:

Many of you are working at home for the first time; and certainly (even for our members who do so regularly) for the longest period that you have ever been asked to do so. Napo has been contacted by a number of members who are anxious at this prospect. Among the concerns that have reached us are: no peer support, professional supervision and a lack of routine all of which add to people's anxiety.



Tania Bassett - National Official (and who has worked based from home for 3 years) has put together this handy guide and tips for getting through the working week and reducing anxiety.

To start: here is a check list 3 key things from the TUC Coronavirus Working at Home Guide:
You should have the following - can you tick all the boxes?

- Have access to safe working conditions in their own home
- Have access to relevant equipment and IT. (NB: the employers should pay for Wi-Fi for workers who don't have internet access at home)
- Have a clear understanding of what work they are expected to carry out, especially if this differs from their usual duties

With regard to safe working condition: ideally there should be a proper H&S assessment (DSE assessment) for those working at home, most employers have on-line assessments. While this is being sorted please do your best to keep yourself safe – as well as comfortable. (See Napo's Home Working Policy – link at end).

If possible, identify a work space – if not a dedicated 'office' then at least a stable work area so that you can use the same workspace every day. Working on a chair at a table is probably better than working while sitting on the sofa or bed while a lap top is balanced on lap - but even if you are forced to do this due to space restrictions, put a cushion or pillow under the lap top to raise it up a bit.

There is also the issue of people with AT or those with reasonable adjustments in their workplace. Napo's view is that these reasonable adjustments should be reflected in the home working environment and that the employer should assist with this. If they cannot, then changes should be made to the nature of work staff are asked to do. Napo will be looking into this further. We will also be raising the issue of how the costs of homeworking will be covered (e.g. electricity, heating, broadband costs etc.)

Staff are also being told to do interviews, by phone, and from home. This is less than ideal if you have children at home, or live with someone who isn't a probation officer. It's not really as though you can ask the person/people you are locked down with to nip out for a coffee anymore, and not everyone lives in a big enough property to avoid being overheard. If you are in a position where, when interviewing clients via telephone, confidentiality will be compromised due to other people being in the property, please notify your manager and see if that work can be allocated to staff that are able to do this.

Try to keep to your usual working routine. Use the time you would normally spend travelling to set up your workspace for the day. Undertake your normal morning regime as you would, and, do wear clothes, rather than your PJ's (however tempting) so your brain learns the difference between working and down time. Set yourself regular break times to get away from the computer screen e.g. Coffee breaks, putting a load of washing on, anything that gets you away from your desk for 10 minutes or so. Make sure you are also setting a finish time for each day and stick to it save for emergencies.

Make contact. Try to schedule in at least one phone call with a colleague or manager per day – and also do ring colleagues to find out how they are (or your Napo branch rep for a chat and to keep up with what's happening). This especially important if you live alone, as not having a conversation all day can be very hard on your mental health but also your productivity. You can also follow Napo staff on Twitter for national updates.

- Katie Lomas, National Chair @katielomas99
- Ian Lawrence, General Secretary @llawrenceL
- Tania Bassett, National Official Press, Parliament & Campaigns @taniabassett

Set a realistic 'to do' list so you can track what you need to do but also what you have done. Some people may find they work at a quicker pace working at home as distractions and other duties are limited. Don't overdo it! For those that struggle to work at home try putting on some back ground noise.

It is important that work doesn't encroach on your personal life and keeping to one place only for work ensures your brain doesn't allow you to confuse the two. This will help you switch off at the end of the day and have places in your home that are not associated with work. Also set an end time – just as if you had left the office – and try "not to take work home with you" if you possibly can.

Childcare may be an issue for some. Probation and Family Court staff are classed as key workers so you should be able to access school provision for older children. If for whatever reason you can't do this, make sure you inform your manager so your work times can be adjusted and/or expectations of what you can get done are realistic. The current emergency has put everyone into unchartered territory. There are lots of online teaching aids for home schooling appearing on the internet. There is also a lot of advice on what you might want to do to help children at home. For example, 2 hours' school work is deemed enough per day by many experts. Don't try and replicate a full school day as you will be trying to do the work of several teachers and that is just not sustainable.

Ask for help: If you are struggling either with getting work done or your mental health please talk about it. If you don't feel able to speak to your manager contact your Napo branch for advice. You might also want to try online yoga, meditation and other calming activities.

Finally make sure you get some exercise. Your steps per day will significantly reduce when working at home so going out for your daily walk, run or cycle (if you are able) will help you maintain your energy levels and your general health. Again there are a number of free online aids for those of you who are used to regular visits to Gym classes.

USEFUL LINKS

Napo's Home Working Policy

<https://www.napo.org.uk/sites/default/files/HS%2004-2019%20Home%20working%20Policy.pdf>

TUC Advice for People Working at Home during the Coronavirus Outbreak

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-advice-people-working-home-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

