

RESEARCH COUNCIL HOMEWORKING GUIDANCE

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RESEARCH COUNCIL HOMEWORKING GUIDANCE

Introduction

The Homeworking guidance provides a framework for employees, managers and HR when considering issues related to homeworking and should be read in conjunction with the Research Council Flexible Working Policy.

Requests for homeworking should be considered as a form of flexible working as indicated in the Flexible Working Policy. Everyone has the right to request this, or any other form of flexible working although the organisation has the right to refuse any request on reasonable, business- related grounds.

The TU Side have been consulted on the contents of the guidance, which complies with statutory legislation and ACAS guidance on homeworking procedures.

The Homeworking guidance applies to all employees. This includes those employed on permanent or temporary contracts, and for the avoidance of doubt, does not include visiting workers, students or those workers provided by a third party agency.

The UK Shared Business Services Ltd (SBS) provides HR Services across the Research Councils. However some employees are deployed at establishments/facilities/ships that do not access services from SBS. In these cases references to the SBS or System (Employee Self Service) will not apply and employees should refer to their Research Council HR team for assistance.

1. Principles

- 1.1. All homeworking arrangements are subject to the approval of the employee's Line Manager and subsequent approval from the relevant delegated authority within their Research Council.
- 1.2. The Council will encourage and support homeworking where it meets business needs.
- 1.3. The Council recognises that some homeworking options may not be operationally practical for certain roles.

2. Benefits of homeworking

- 2.1. The benefits for the Council and the individual of homeworking may include:
 - Improved efficiency and effectiveness.
 - Time and cost savings on commuting and business mileage.
 - Potential benefits from increased goodwill and morale.
 - Greater freedom to manage workloads.
 - Greater job satisfaction and personal responsibility.
 - Enhanced quality of life.
 - Greater flexibility for combining work and domestic commitments.
 - Supports the Research Council's Equalities and Diversity policy, for example homeworking may benefit some employees with disabilities.

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3. Regular and frequent homeworking

3.1. There are two main categories:

a) Those who work at home on a regular and frequent basis for example, one to two days a week, but otherwise work at the establishment.

b) Those who work full-time from home e.g. employees involved in data analysis or statistical work, those working on research projects where attendance at the establishment is not required or those unable to travel to work.

3.2 Requests for these types of regular homeworking should be made using the Flexible Working Application form. Approved homeworking arrangements will, where necessary and appropriate, be subject to an agreed trial period before final agreement. This arrangement is formal and contractual. To apply for a regular and frequent homeworking arrangement, the employee should make an application in writing to their manager in line with the Research Council Flexible Working Policy .

3.3 Prior to commencing any regular and frequent homeworking the manager should agree with the employee a reasonable frequency and method of communication. The manager must be able to contact the person working at home. The manager should also agree with the employee how regularly they may be required to come into the office e.g. for team meetings, Appraisal & Personal Development Reviews and training.

3.4 It is the Research Council's responsibility to carry out a risk assessment / work station assessment at the employee's home.

3.5 It is the Research Council's responsibility to ensure that any specialist equipment which is recommended as part of the DSE assessment will be provided.

3.6 Line Managers will continue to involve employees working from home in team meetings, performance appraisals and staff training.

4. Occasional working from home

4.1. This would be informal and non-contractual. An individual's main place of work remains the establishment but they may have a standing or ad hoc arrangement with their manager to work at home at irregular, unspecified times. This will typically be for short-term instances such as:

- where concentrated focus is needed without the distractions of a noisy office for a period of time, e.g. report writing.
- where the individual is temporarily confined to the home (e.g. injury).
- when covering short-term difficulties e.g. adverse weather conditions and public transport emergencies.

4.2. Employees are required to get local management approval before each planned occasion of occasional working from home, but do not have to use the flexible working application form.

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- 4.3 As with regular and frequent homeworking, the manager must be able to contact the person working at home at any time of the agreed working day by the agreed method.
- 4.4 In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Research Council to attend the employee's home to carry out a risk assessment. However, in many cases it will be suitable and sufficient for the employee to carry out the assessment under the direction of the Research Council. For example, the Research Council should provide the employee with information on the need for an appropriate space in which to work, with a suitable desk or table and how to set the equipment up appropriately to avoid health risks that could arise from prolonged computer use. The employee should inform the Research Council of any risks which are identified.
- 4.5 It is the employee's responsibility to report all faults that may present a hazard to their own health and to take reasonable care of their own health and safety. The domestic electrical system is the employee's responsibility.

5. Short-term homeworking arrangements

- 5.1 Short-term homeworking is an informal arrangement for example where it is part of a staged process for rehabilitation and reintegration into the work place after longterm absence. It is also intended to deal with health issues which may form part of the 'reasonable adjustments' to enable the individual to continue to operate effectively. Employees should refer to the Research Council Sick Absence Management Policy.

6. Related Policies

- 6.1 All home workers will be expected to comply with Research Council policies and procedures in particular with regard to Health and Safety (by undertaking the required assessment), Data Protection, Confidentiality and Security. Employees are responsible for managing and securing any personal, sensitive or otherwise protected data / records whether directly on a computer or documents which have been taken away from the office.
- 6.2 All Research Council usual terms and conditions and practices and procedures will continue to apply. In the event that the employee is sick during a period of homeworking then the normal Research Council sickness absence reporting procedures must still be followed.
- 6.3 In accordance with the Working Time Regulations, employees (including home workers) should not work more than 48 hours per seven day period, calculated over an average period of 17 weeks unless they opt out of this. For more information see the Research Council Working Hours Policy.
- 6.4 If the normal, place of work is home then the home worker may be able to claim home to establishment travel expenses should they be required to come into the office e.g. to attend a meeting. Employees should contact their Research Council HR Team for further guidance.

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7. Insurance, tax and mortgage agreements

- 7.1 A regular home worker must inform their insurers that they are working from home on a regular basis. It is the responsibility of the employee to provide adequate home buildings and contents insurance. The Council will not accept liability for damage caused to the home or its contents. For queries on additional charges incurred, refer to your Research Council HR team for guidance.
- 7.2 The Research Council will not accept any responsibility for an employee who suffers any detriment, loss or legal action as a result of not obtaining the necessary permissions from their insurer, mortgage lender, landlord or local authority.
- 7.3 It is the employee's responsibility to contact the HMRC about whether they qualify for tax relief on expenses incurred while working at home. The Research Council has no liability for any capital gains tax imposed as a result of working at home.
- 7.4 It is the employee's responsibility to inform their household insurer of the homeworking arrangement. A general household insurance policy is unlikely to cover expensive business equipment or the employee's liability if someone is hurt while visiting their home for business reasons. If higher premiums are payable because the employee's home is being used for business purposes the employee should consult with the Research Council HR Team.

8. Equipment / Expenses

- 8.1 Where necessary, the Research Council will provide suitable equipment that is required to undertake those duties agreed to be undertaken at home, Employees should refer to their Research Council HR Team for further information.
- 8.2 Equipment used at home should be maintained in efficient working order and should only be used in accordance with the Research Council's policies, procedures and practices applicable to information technology and communication systems and information security.
- 8.3 The Research Council is responsible for the safety of the equipment that it supplies. Employees are under a duty to take reasonable care of the equipment and to report any faults as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 8.4 Employees who use their own device have a responsibility to ensure that it is in efficient working order and has the appropriate anti virus/security software installed.
- 8.5 Employees who have a formal and contractual homeworking arrangement in place may be reimbursed for reasonable additional household costs associated with the work they are undertaking. Reimbursement of such costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Research Council HR Team and may include a contribution towards, for example, heating and lighting.
- 8.6 Equipment provided remains the property of the Council and must be returned at the end of the homeworking arrangement.

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9. Hours of work

- 9.1 Employees who work from home are not necessarily required to work fixed hours of work. However, there should be core hours during which employees must be available to respond to telephone calls, deal with urgent e-mails or attend meetings (either remotely or, where practicable, in person). These core hours should be discussed and agreed with the Line Manager. Having done this, employees are otherwise free to perform their agreed work tasks at times that suit them.
- 9.2 Employees who work from home must ensure that they take adequate rest breaks as required by the Working Time Regulations 1998. They must:
- take a break during each working day of at least 30 minutes, during which they must stop work;
 - ensure that they have a daily rest break of at least 11 continuous hours, ie the time period between stopping work one day and beginning work the next day must not be less than 11 hours; and
 - have at least one complete day each week when no work is done.

10. Trial period and reviews

- 10.1 Where appropriate, a trial period will be agreed as part of the application process. During the trial period and beyond the manager must ensure that communication with the worker is effective, and that productivity/performance is adequately monitored and managed.
- 10.2 The Council reserves the right to extend trial periods in line with the Flexible Working policy.
- 10.3 Dates for formal reviews should be agreed by the manager and home worker. As a guide reviews will be held three monthly for the first year and annually thereafter.

11. Concluding a homeworking arrangement

- 11.1 If an agreed homeworking arrangement becomes no longer appropriate and the manager has sound business reasons for withdrawing the arrangement, the Council reserves the right to negotiate a change to the arrangement. Employees will have the right of appeal against this in line with the RC Flexible Working Policy. If an employee wishes to cease working at home they must discuss this with their manager in the first instance.
- 11.2 Files, equipment etc. belonging to the Research Council must be returned by the worker before the conclusion date.

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12. Misuse of a homeworking arrangement

12.1 Any misuse of the homeworking agreement will be dealt with under the Research Council Disciplinary Policy e.g. where an employee is continually unavailable and the manager is unable to contact them, where evidence suggests the employee is not carrying out any work in the home environment.

13. Guidance Review

13.1 This guidance will be regularly reviewed to incorporate any legislation changes. The TU may request that guidance is reviewed.

14. Amendment history

Version	Date	Comments/Changes