

Top Tips for Working from Home for managers

Preparation

Take time to understand the impact working from home is going to have on your team. What do your team members need to be able to fulfil their role and meet their goals? The more time you spend getting to understand these things the easier the transition will be. The University has a number of tools you can use to help with working remotely:

- [Box](#) – file sharing online so that team members can access files remotely. Ensure that your team moves all files over to Box ASAP and gets used to using this tool.
- [Webmail](#) - Use Webmail for quick and easy access to your email using a web browser. You don't need to set anything up, just sign in with your University email address and password. It also works great on a mobile phone or tablet.
- [Zoom](#) - Zoom is the University's supported tool for video conferencing and online meetings. You can use Zoom from your desktop computer or mobile device.
- [VPN](#) - Our Virtual Private Network (VPN) service allows you to securely connect to the University's network when you're not on campus. (Please only request this if it is vital you have access to our networks).
- [Trello](#) – If you haven't tried Trello yet we encourage you to. It's a great way to manage projects and teamwork. This could really help with staying on track whilst working remotely. You can have individual boards, team boards and project boards.
- [LinkedIn Learning](#) – Encourage your team members to use LinkedIn Learning to learn new skills whilst working remotely. It could be as simple as learning to use Excel in a new way or even the 'Managing Virtual Teams' course we have suggested at the end of this guidance.

Create clear expectations

As your team members are unable to ask questions, as quickly and often as usual, it is important that you ensure they understand their objectives and what is expected of them whilst the team is working remotely. Set clear and specific objectives for team members. Give them deadlines so that they can have a thorough understanding of which objectives need to be completed first. This will help them to prioritise their day. Be careful not to tell them exactly how to achieve the goal, they will still need flexibility to work in a way that is most effective for them. Provided that they understand the required result along with the deadline and any other important factors, you can empower them to be effective and maintain morale.

Maintain regular 1:1s and team meetings

It's important that your team members still feel connected and a sense of team community. Continue with your usual 1:1s and team meetings so that team members have some consistency and feel valued. These meetings can all be carried out via Zoom to maintain connection. Be sure to celebrate successes in these meetings so that it doesn't just feel like task discussions each time. Maintaining these regular meetings will help your team members to manage their time and week.

Talk about development

Have open and honest coaching conversations with your team members. Ask them to reflect and think about this new way of working. Is there anything that they would like further support with? Do they need to try a new approach or adjust their way of working in any way? Encourage creative thinking and ideas whilst they establish their new working methods. Remember to talk about them and how they feel. They are going through a period of change and will need to be supported in this.

Change Management

Changing a team's way of working will require change management. In the initial stages you will need to be fully transparent with your team, providing them with updates and what they can expect next. You must respect that people all deal with change in different ways. You may find that some team members are excited about the change whilst others are apprehensive. The support you provide will depend on the individual and where they currently are within the change curve. Let your team members know about the 'Mindfulness for Uncertain Times' Zoom sessions now being run by Caroline Barratt. Also ensure that they familiarise themselves with the remote working guidance for individuals.

Introduce drop-ins and casual catch ups

Your team members may feel that it is harder to get your advice or input on work. This can cause things to be delayed and for morale to drop. Arrange weekly scheduled Zoom time drop-ins. These are times when any of your team members can drop in to ask quick questions which they may not be able to save until your regular catch ups. It also means that they can drop in for a quick 10 minutes for your support and then leave the drop in so that they can begin taking action.

Remember the importance of team morale and connection

If your team were in the office they would likely also be talking about their personal life as well as work. This helps with team connection and morale. They may also be joining each other for coffee or lunch. It is very easy for people to quickly feel isolated when working from home for long periods of time. Encourage your team to have regular quick catch ups themselves to keep these conversations going. You could create a 'virtual coffee catch up' via Zoom, where team members are encouraged to make their own tea/coffee and connect with others.

Open calendars

Ensure that your team can see each other's calendars so that they know in advance when they may not be able to reach someone. When we work in an office together we can usually see if our manager is at their desk or on lunch. If you can encourage your team members to schedule in their lunch times and breaks then it is easier for the team to plan their time around each other.

Be fair to yourself and ensure your team members are fair to themselves

It can be tempting to keep working past our hours when we are at home. This is because the line between work and home becomes easily blurred. Respect the time you have set to end your day. Do not encourage sending emails late into the evening. This will act as poor role modelling to your team and will leave them feeling they need to continue working later hours, now that they are not commuting. It's important to respect the work and home boundaries to keep your team healthy and resilient.

Monitor goals not hours

People are often much more productive when working from home. There are fewer distractions and more opportunities to get stuck into a piece of work. Equally, you need to respect that things that have been done quickly in the past may now take longer as a result of working remotely. It is important to stay focused on goals when your team are working remotely. Spend less time on worrying about what your team are doing moment to moment and focus more on what goals are being accomplished. If you are concerned that goals are not being achieved then you can reassess and decide upon new ways of approaching the goal. The important thing here is making progress and accomplishments rather than appearing 'busy'.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Establish a communication strategy for your team to help them feel connected and to keep them up to date. Consider sending a regular team good morning email. You could include a quote of the day, an update on yesterday's tasks and your ideal outcomes for the day. The main purpose of this email is to ensure that everyone feels included and are receiving timely team updates.

Letting go

Remember that just like you are going through an adjustment period, so are your team members. Don't panic if things don't go to plan in the first week. It will take time for your team members to get into a new pattern and rhythm of work. Some managers find it difficult to let go of having oversight of everything. Trust your team members. Productivity is not a constant thing; it comes in peaks and troughs. As long as you are clear with your expectations, goals and deadlines then you need to give your team members the opportunity to perform and work in the way that works best for them.

New Starters

Starting a new role can be both exciting and worrying for new staff members. During uncertain times, whilst working remotely, new starters may find it harder to ask questions that they could ask easily if they were in the office. Consider setting up a buddying system for your new members of the team. Pair them with a more experience team member and encourage regular communication. You could suggest that they hold regular and short virtual coffee catch ups via Zoom to discuss any questions or concerns.

Health and safety for homeworkers

The University has a duty of care for all employees, and the requirements of the health and safety legislation applies to homeworkers. Please ensure that your team members complete the [Home-working Risk Assessment form](#) and [DSE self-assessment form](#) and return it to you for review. You should also encourage them to revisit the [Computer Safety Essential Training](#) module to ensure that they are working safely.

For colleagues that have complex DSE needs; please contact the Health and Safety Advisory Service (safety@essex.ac.uk) for support and advice on home working with DSE. The Health and Safety team will be able to support colleagues on a case by case basis.

Guidance for individuals

Please encourage your team members to review the [guidance we have created for individuals](#) working remotely. This will ensure that all of your team members are on the same page and will help to lay the foundations for moving to remote working.

Taking it Further

If you would like to learn more about managing remote teams LinkedIn Learning has a number of courses such as [this short LinkedIn Learning course on Managing Virtual Teams](#). The course is less than one hour and covers issues such as:

- The Benefits of Remote Working
- Building Trust at a Distance
- Removing Roadblocks
- Nurturing Team Connections
- Managing Workloads and Deliverables

Support

If you have any questions about this guidance, would like further support or have feedback please email develop@essex.ac.uk