Homeworking Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance supplements the University’s Homeworking Policy to assist managers in considering homeworking arrangements in support of business needs.

2. Determining whether a vacancy is suitable for homeworking

Units should consider whether a role is suitable for homeworking at the job design/vacancy release stage. The following checklist should be used to ensure consideration is given to the relevant issues as part of the decision making process:

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<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Is this a standard full time role? If not, what will be the working hours/pattern of work?</td>
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<td>Is the role suitable for remote supervision? If yes, how will the work be monitored?</td>
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<td>Does the role manage direct reports/a team? If yes, what roles/grades are they and how will the individual manage their staff effectively from home?</td>
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<td>Will the role require contact/liaison with external parties? If yes, how will this be achieved?</td>
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<td>Will the role require attendance at OU premises, attendance at meetings or other travel? If yes, give details.</td>
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<td>Will the role require delivery/return of paper-based documentation? If so, how will this be achieved in a timely manner?</td>
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<td>Are there any other considerations in relation to this role? If yes, give details.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any additional costs in relation to basing this role from home, e.g. set allowances, equipment, travel, other? If yes, give details.</td>
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For a role to be designated as home based, the line manager and Head of Unit must be satisfied that the required service can be maintained effectively and professionally.

3. Recruiting to a home based role

Where it is agreed that a vacancy should be designated as home based, the Unit must ensure the advert and Job Related Information make it clear that the location will be the individual’s home. The location of the role should be advertised as ‘home based’. The
Person Specification must clearly state that the role is home based and the job requirements should reflect any specific requirements such as the need to attend OU premises for meetings or other business purposes. Suggested wording has been included in the Job Related Information Template to assist Units.

When interviewing for the role, recruiting managers must discuss the homeworking requirements with all candidates to ensure each individual has suitable facilities and is fully aware of the practicalities, for example that it is their responsibility to supply their own office furniture. All candidates should be asked whether there is anything about their home environment that may impact on their ability to work from home. A note of the discussion and any issues raised should be recorded in the interview notes. Individuals working from home must be able to work without direct supervision, manage their time effectively, and work to clearly defined and measurable objectives agreed with their line manager – this needs to be discussed at interview.

The offer of employment will be subject to satisfactory completion of the Homeworking Self-Assessment Form and Homeworking Checklist Form. These forms are required to check that the individual has access to a workspace at home that allows their work duties to be carried out effectively and safely. All sections of the forms apart from those relating to IT equipment must be completed and the findings discussed (where necessary) before a start date is agreed. The section on IT equipment must be completed as soon as the individual starts homeworking. It is the responsibility of the People Hub to ensure the forms are returned for completion of the IT-related sections as soon as the individual starts homeworking, and that any issues are resolved promptly.

The individual is required to complete Display Screen Equipment (DSE) training and an online DSE assessment ideally within one week of starting their job role.

Line managers can obtain advice on specific actions that may need to be taken as a result of the risk assessments from the People Hub and the Health & Safety Team.

If health and safety conditions are unsatisfactory or the environment does not support the professional fulfilment of the role, the offer will be withdrawn.

Sufficient time must be allowed before the proposed start date to enable IT to assess the requirements and arrange/set up equipment (at least 15 working days from submission of the IT Service Request to the proposed start date). It is the Unit’s responsibility to request the appropriate IT equipment once all checks are in place and the start date is confirmed.

4. Existing roles re-designated as home based

Where a Head of Unit determines that a change to work location is required for an existing role, the University will consult with affected colleagues in accordance with relevant procedures.

Where an individual believes it is feasible and appropriate for the University to designate their role as home based and they wish to request this, they should discuss this with their manager and, if appropriate, a request should be made under the Agile Working Policy and Guidance.

Any arrangement to work from home for part of the working week would not fall under these procedures – it must be feasible for the entire role to be undertaken from home (except for occasional meetings at OU premises) for it to be designated as home based.

The line manager should ensure the individual is fully aware of the implications of becoming a designated home based worker. For example, if approved, their contractual work location would become their home address and whilst they would have access to a
 Heads of Units must consider such requests under the University’s Agile Working arrangements. Consideration must be given to whether it is feasible to designate the role as home based and whether the individual has a suitable and sufficient working environment and office furniture in their home, therefore the Unit should use the following in conjunction with the Agile Working documentation as part of the decision making process:

- Checklist in section 2 of this guidance
- Homeworking Checklist Form
- Homeworking Self-Assessment Form

Any agreement by the University for an individual to move to a homeworking contract is subject to successful completion of the relevant checklists.

5. **Homeworking arrangements for designated office based staff**

If an office based worker wishes to work from home on a regular basis (e.g. on certain days each week), they should submit an Agile Working Request Form to their line manager for consideration.

Before approving such a request, the line manager and Unit need to consider whether the person’s role (or aspects of it) is suitable to be carried out at home, and whether the home environment is appropriate for homeworking. A Homeworking Self-Assessment Form should be completed by the individual and discussed with their line manager before an agile working request is approved.

It is the individual’s responsibility to ensure that they provide:
- Appropriate furniture for DSE such as a suitable sized office desk, office chair with 5 castors, filing cabinet, foot rest, fan, etc.
- Additional equipment that is not provided by the Unit, i.e. any item other than a monitor, mouse and keyboard.

It is the responsibility of the Unit to purchase an additional monitor, mouse and keyboard to enable homeworking on a regular basis. If a person has a desktop computer in the office, the line manager should liaise with IT to swap the desktop PC for a laptop. This additional cost would be charged to the Unit.

If an individual has existing reasonable adjustments at their office workstation, a homeworking assessment would be required to identify appropriate reasonable adjustments for their home workstation. Any reasonable adjustments required by an individual to work from home would also need to be funded by the Unit.

6. **Ongoing obligations and support for designated home based workers**

**Occasional working from an office based location**

There will be times when homeworkers need to attend an office based location for meetings and collaborative working. Homeworkers wishing to book either a meeting room or hot-desk should liaise with the appropriate contact in their Unit. The following information would be required:
• Required date
• Start and end time of the meeting
• Number of people attending
• Names of any external visitors
• Equipment requirements
• If required, catering details and budget code

Health, safety and security

It is the responsibility of the homeworker to keep their work place safe and take reasonable care of their health and safety whilst working from home. The individual should notify their line manager if any precautions taken turn out to be inadequate.

The individual is required to ensure that the use of computer equipment and the workstation set-up meets the requirements of the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Regulations. Further guidance is available on the Health and Safety Intranet.

A DSE assessment must be completed via the Cardinus Software System as soon as possible when an individual starts working in the home. This will need to be repeated as standard every two years or sooner if there are any changes in circumstances. The guidance on the Health and Safety Intranet site under ‘Homeworking’ must be adhered to.

If, during the course of employment conditions become unsatisfactory, the Head of Unit must ensure that remedial action is taken as a matter of urgency, which may include recourse to the relevant disciplinary procedures.

Under no circumstances should arrangements be made for students, clients or representatives to meet with the individual at their home. All such meetings should be carried out on OU approved premises in order to maintain the necessary level of professionalism and safety. Meetings with colleagues may take place by prior arrangement where appropriate. Meetings should normally be conducted online or held at OU premises, wherever possible.

The review log in the Homeworking Self-Assessment Form should be completed annually or whenever there are any significant changes in circumstances, e.g. moving house, impairment, or using new equipment.

Where individuals have a medical condition and/or disability that affects their ability to work from home and which may require reasonable adjustments, they should speak to their line manager in the first instance. A Reasonable Adjustment Support Plan should be used for existing individuals or new starters where appropriate (see ‘Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People’ for further information). Further advice can be obtained from the Health and Safety Department.

Network requirements to support homeworking

Individuals who use any form of homeworking to carry out their duties will be responsible for ensuring that broadband services and home networking are reliable to enable them to fulfil their role.

The requirements for broadband and home networking services will change from time to time as the University develops its services, so individuals may need to upgrade their services. The individual will be responsible for contacting their service provider in the event of any technical issues.
The University reserves the right to require individuals to travel to an alternative work location if they are unable to fulfil their contractual duties due to technical or environmental issues.

**IT equipment**

The IT Unit will determine the standard IT equipment to be provided at commencement of employment and the ongoing IT support that will be provided to individuals working from home under the Homeworking Policy.

It is the line manager’s responsibility to request the appropriate IT equipment for new starters once all checks are in place and the start date is confirmed. An IT Procurement Request (ITPR) will need to be completed and returned to IT, who will need at least 15 working days to order and set up the equipment.

The standard equipment issued by IT to designated homeworkers is a laptop. The additional equipment, to include a docking station, screen, keyboard, mouse, USB headset, separate webcam, Kensington security cable and printer, is to be funded by the individual’s Unit. All required IT equipment should be listed on the ITPR, including details of the appropriate Unit budget code to be used for these additional items.

If a printer has been requested, IT’s third party supplier (currently Banner) will do it. IT will contact them to set up an account for the individual so that replacement toners and paper can be ordered directly from them, and delivered to the individual’s home.

Any equipment provided by the University will remain the property of the University and will be returnable at the University's request or on termination of employment.

In the event that IT need to swap an individual’s laptop due to a fault or upgrade, IT would expect the existing laptop to be returned at the time of replacement. Any cost incurred for late returns or unreturned equipment would be charged to the individual’s Unit.

The OU public liability insurance extends to all home based staff as it relates to the use of equipment provided by the OU. Members of staff are advised to inform their household contents insurer to check that the presence of the equipment does not invalidate their own cover in any way.

Where the individual uses their own equipment, it is their responsibility to check with their home insurance provider that their own policy covers such use. The maintenance of this equipment continues to be the responsibility of the individual.

University equipment must only be used by OU individuals. Access to OU equipment must not be allowed to any third parties, for example family members or friends.

All individuals are required to read and adhere to the Computing Codes of Conduct and the Information Security Policy that are available on the OU intranet site. Where individuals have any questions or queries regarding their responsibilities these should be raised with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

**Office furniture**

The University does not provide individuals working from home under the Homeworking Policy with office furniture. It is the individual’s responsibility to ensure that they have appropriate furniture such as a suitable sized office desk, office chair with 5 castors, filing cabinet, foot rest, fan, etc.
Unresolved issues with furniture highlighted by the homeworking assessment or Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessment should be discussed by an individual with their line manager in liaison with the Health and Safety Department via Homeworking@open.ac.uk and the People Hub. If these issues are linked to a disability or medical condition, a Reasonable Adjustment Support Plan may need to be used. It may be appropriate for the individual and/or line manager to discuss requirements with the Health and Safety Department, in which case an email should be sent to Homeworking@open.ac.uk. Where required, further advice may be sought from appropriate external parties and an assessment of requirements may need to be carried out in the home.

Where the need is identified for an individual home workplace appraisal, the Government’s Access to Work scheme can provide an assessment and potentially a grant to fund all or part fund any reasonable adjustments necessary. Details of this scheme can be found in the Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People available on the People Services Intranet, or at www.gov.uk/access-to-work.

Household expenses

The University will not contribute to any household wear-and-tear costs or accidental damage incurred as a result of homeworking, household running costs such as heat, light and power, or other costs such as council tax, broadband and line rental. It is noted that colleagues working from home will not have the financial outgoings associated with travelling to an office each day.

Other expenses

Where the contractual place of work is the individual’s home as set out in the Homeworking Policy, the individual will be entitled to claim expenses for approved travel to OU offices or other locations required by their role in line with the University’s Travel and Subsistence Policy.

Basic stationery and office supplies may be provided by the University within agreed University frameworks. Any exceptional additional requirements should be agreed in advance with the line manager for reimbursement of the cost to be made, where appropriate.

Business telephone calls should only be made using Skype. Any exceptional telephone calls made through other means should be agreed in advance with the line manager for reimbursement of the cost.

Taxation

Where the contractual place of work is the individual’s home as set out in the Homeworking Policy, the individual may be entitled to claim tax relief for extra household expenses incurred (i.e. gas, electricity). Further information can be obtained from the HMRC website http://www hmrc.gov.uk/incometax/relief-household.htm. It is the responsibility of the individual to understand and make appropriate claims for tax relief.

Insurance

Individuals are responsible for taking out the appropriate level of home insurance for any personal property used at home whilst undertaking work duties.

In the normal course of their OU work, individuals will be covered by the University’s Public Liability insurance policy. However, this does not cover private work or consultancy, for which the individual would need to take out separate personal indemnity insurance.
Mortgage/rental agreement

All individuals working from home under the Homeworking Policy who are living in a mortgaged or rented property must take responsibility for checking that they are not in breach of any of the terms and conditions of their mortgage or rental contract.

Work duties and practices: expectations on individuals and managers

Newly recruited individuals should be inducted into the organisation’s culture and working practices through a period of office-based work, wherever possible.

Duties and objectives for the work to be undertaken from home should be set out in writing and specified procedures put in place to monitor work on a regular basis. All other University employment policies available on the People Services Intranet apply.

Provision should be made to allow effective communication with colleagues, students and clients during the working day. Contact arrangements must be agreed with the line manager.

Moving home

It is the individual’s responsibility to advise their line manager in advance of any permanent or temporary change of address. Homeworking arrangements will need to be reassessed in the case of any proposed move and University approval will be required in order for the role to continue from the new home location.

Before homeworking arrangements can be approved to continue in the new home, the relevant checklists must be completed in relation to the new home. If the move results in excessively increased costs relating to travelling expenses or travel time (i.e. as a guide, in excess of 25 miles from the original address), the University reserves the right to limit such costs to those which were generated from the original address. Management discretion may be applied, in consultation with the People Hub.

The OU will not pay for the removal and setting up of equipment or furniture to a new home location unless the change of location is as a result of a formal job offer made by the University and the University’s Office Moves, Secondment or Relocation policies apply.

The University only supports homeworking from the UK or Republic of Ireland (ROI).

Data Protection, IT Standards and confidentiality

All University data protection policies and procedures, and IT policies, procedures, codes and standards apply to homeworkers. A homeworker is responsible for ensuring that they fulfil the confidentiality clause within their contract of employment, together with all other confidentiality obligations, whilst working at home.

7. Reasonable adjustments for designated homeworkers

Some individuals may need support to carry out their work effectively in the home environment. Scenarios that could trigger the reasonable adjustments process for people who work from home include:
• New starter requiring reasonable adjustments.
• Issues identified by an individual on completion of a Homeworking Self-Assessment Form and/or the Cardinus online module, which link to ongoing medical symptoms or disability.
• Occupational Health (OH) referral.
• An office based individual who already has reasonable adjustments in place becoming a designated homeworker.

Before any recommendations for homeworking arising from an OH referral are approved, the line manager and Unit need to make sure that the individual's homeworking environment and workstation meet their specific needs.

**Reasonable adjustments relating to workstation set-up and DSE**

When reasonable adjustments for designated homeworkers relate to workstation set-up and DSE, individuals should complete the Homeworking Self-Assessment Form and the Cardinus online module for their home workstations. Once completed, line managers are required to discuss the home workstation set-up with individuals to ensure that it reflects the Health and Safety Department's DSE guidance (e.g. suitable sized office desk, office chair with 5 castors, separate monitor, mouse and keyboard).

Line managers should explain to the individual that they will be seeking advice from the Health and Safety Department, so some sensitive information will be shared. When reasonable adjustments are being considered for an individual, line managers should email the individual's Homeworking Self-Assessment Form to Homeworking@open.ac.uk. The Health and Safety (H&S) Manager will review the Homeworking Self-Assessment Form and Cardinus Risk Assessment to determine whether a home workstation assessment is required.

If an assessment is necessary, an appointment will be arranged for an assessor from a third party supplier to carry out an assessment at the individual's home. The line manager should advise the individual that their personal contact details (i.e. their name, address, telephone number and usual work hours) will be shared with the H&S Manager and forwarded to the supplier, who will contact the individual directly to arrange a convenient date and time for an assessment. Once an assessment is completed, the supplier will send the H&S Manager a report outlining their recommendations for reasonable adjustments that need to be made. The H&S Manager will email the individual the report, requesting that they discuss the outcomes with their line manager.

The line manager should discuss the required adjustment(s) with their Unit to arrange the order and installation of the necessary equipment from the third party supplier. Once equipment has been ordered, the line manager should send a final list of the equipment that has been purchased with associated costs to Homeworking@open.ac.uk. If the individual experiences any issues with equipment delivery or functionality (i.e. it is unsuitable or faulty), they should speak with the appropriate Unit contact, who will liaise with the third party supplier to resolve these issues.

Where possible, all packaging needs to be kept by the individual because the specialist equipment and/or furniture may be reclaimed when the individual leaves the University.

**Access to Work**
Access to Work (AtW) is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition that has a negative effect on their ability to do their job. In these instances it can be beneficial for individuals to receive support from AtW because they will be reassessed on a regular basis to ensure that any reasonable adjustments made continue to provide the necessary support over time.

If AtW is considered an appropriate option, an individual would need to apply directly to AtW. Information about the scheme can be found on the AtW website: www.gov.uk/access-to-work. This should be discussed with their line manager. Support is also available from the People Hub and the H&S Manager. Once an application has been submitted to AtW, an assessment is arranged with the individual, who will receive a report comprising recommendations for appropriate adjustments to the work place or work duties. Any equipment necessary would be provided by AtW, although the individual’s Unit would need to contribute the first £1,000 towards it. It is worth noting that where an application is made to AtW during the first 6 weeks of a new appointment, AtW fund the full cost of any equipment recommended as a result of their assessment.

Alternative providers

In addition to Access to Work, there are a number of other providers that provide support for people with a long term physical or mental health condition, including RNIB and Centre for Accessible Environments.

Reasonable adjustments relating to Occupational Health Referrals and non-workstation/DSE requirements

Reasonable adjustments recommended as part of the Occupational Health (OH) Referral process that do not relate to workstation and DSE requirements (such as mental health) should be referred to the People Hub. The People Hub will assist the line manager and individual to identify appropriate reasonable adjustments that could be put in place to support the individual (e.g. changes to work patterns, workload, nature of work, etc.).

8. Termination of designated homeworking arrangements and leavers

Where the University determines that its business needs are no longer being met by a homeworking arrangement and/or an OH recommendation for homeworking is no longer valid, an individual may be asked to work from one of the University’s offices. In these instances, consultation will take place with the individual and a reasonable period of notice will be given.

Returning IT equipment

As soon as line managers are aware that a designated homeworker is leaving the University, or a designated homeworking arrangement comes to an end with the person moving to an office based location, they should notify the People Hub. The People Hub will ask IT to liaise with the leaver to arrange a suitable date for collection of the IT equipment from the person’s home. Any cost for unreturned equipment would be charged to the individual’s Unit.

Reclaiming specialist furniture and equipment for reasonable adjustments

If an individual has specialist furniture or equipment at home with regard to reasonable adjustments and is leaving the University, line managers should notify their Unit and the Health and Safety Department via Homeworking@open.ac.uk.
Where an individual has been provided with equipment to work from home either by the Open University and/or by AtW, the line manager in liaison with the H&S Manager will agree whether equipment must be returned to the University or can be retained by the individual.

Where furniture or equipment is made especially for an individual and cannot be re-used, the individual will be allowed to keep it. If it could be re-used by someone else, it is reclaimed by the University. This decision is agreed jointly by the line manager/Unit and H&S Manager.

It is the responsibility of the line manager, in conjunction with the Unit, to liaise with the individual to arrange for the equipment to be collected at a convenient time. The line manager also needs to liaise with the Health and Safety Department via Homeworking@open.ac.uk to establish where any reclaimed items should be returned to Walton Hall for storage.

9. Useful References

Agile Working Policy and Guidance
Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People
Health and Safety Intranet Site – Home Working
Homeworking Checklist Form
Homeworking Policy
Homeworking Self-Assessment Form (Health and Safety Intranet site)
Job Related Information Template
Reasonable Adjustment Support Plan