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**PROTOCOL**



**Making  
Home-work  
work for all**



## PROTOCOL

# Making Home-work work for all



## Introduction

Covid 19 has transformed the world of work in a rapid timeframe. Home-working has now become the norm for many people. While home-working options and flexible work have been popular, the trend towards non office-based work has not been without its challenges. Research carried out by the University of Limerick for the FSU has revealed that up to 1 in 4 workers in the banking and finance sector are expected to answer calls and emails outside of working hours. (UL, 2019). Research has shown that the challenge to maintain a fixed working schedule is exacerbated when staff are working from home. Recent research carried out by the FSU has shown that 44% of staff working from home at this time feel pressure to answer work calls and emails and engage in work related communication outside of paid working hours. (FSU, 2020)

The right to disconnect is not the only challenge, however. Policies which were designed for the office may not work for the home. The question of costs arises, as does security: are staff adequately protected if security issues arises? How resilient are security policies? Do they cover the new reality of home-work?

All these questions and many others arise as we seek to organise a smooth and just transition for workers into the new reality of home-working. Many of these questions needed to be addressed prior to Covid-19, but the new reality has meant that there is now an added urgency.

This protocol does not seek to be a final word-we invite comment from members, the community at large, employers and stakeholders in the sector. But we are asking for a real debate. While many workers have shown that they are up for the challenge of home-working, we cannot assume that rules made for pre Covid-19 world are sufficient now.

We have to grasp this once in a generation transformation of the world of work and ensure the benefits are shared. We must ensure that we do not swap one set of poor working environments for another.

John O'Connell  
FSU General Secretary

## 1. Work intensity

The demands of work have intensified with the advancement of technology. Responses are sought instantly. Communications channels are becoming more fractured all the time, but all requiring a response. This has led to increased demands on workers that are unsustainable unless we do things differently.

- In recognition of work intensity, a four day working week on the same remuneration should be examined.
- IT systems should be designed to force log offs for legally required breaks.
- Additional hours should be recorded and “banked”, so they are either paid for or available for staff to use.

## 2. Employee-led flexibility

Flexible work is not a one-way street. We need to create a flexible home-work environment that puts the employee front and centre.

- Choice, voluntarism, and optionality, within the confines of restrictions and challenges we all face now, ought to be hallmarks of good home-working policies.
- Home-working can provide great benefits to employees, but it must also be recognised that it is not suitable for everyone or every role.
- The removal/change of home-working arrangements once they are established should be minimal and should only be done with 6 months notice recognising that many colleagues will have built their personal schedules and family arrangements, including caring responsibilities, around home-working.
- Home-working does not have to be full time. Employees should be able to choose to combine home-working with office-based work in a pattern that works best for them.
- On days working from home, staff may need to vary their start and finish times and split their shifts if needed. This will be agreed with their line manager in a way that works for the full team and the role they perform.
- It is important for those staff working from home that regular and normal engagement with their line manager and team colleagues is maintained. This needs to be facilitated by employers.
- Employees need a “right to set” their working hours.

## 3. Health and Safety in the home

We cannot assume that policies and procedures which were designed for offices are suitable for the home environment. When the home becomes a workplace, suitable health and safety standards must be put in place.

- Employers must fully acknowledge their responsibilities under health and safety and working time legislation and how this applies to colleagues who are working from home.
- An online assessment of health and safety must be carried out within the first 3 months of someone working from home, and a physical ergonomic assessment within 6 months.
- Employers must ensure that staff have the necessary equipment (phone, computer, stands, chair, desk etc) for home-working to be carried out safely and professionally.
- Health and safety obligations also extends to mental health and well-being. Employers must provide, and promote regularly, their wellbeing supports and programmes and provide “on the job” time for these to be utilised.
- There needs to be a clear acknowledgement of the right to disconnect outside of paid hours and breaks.
- Overtime agreements should be applied to additional time worked beyond contracted hours and the normal working week.
- Employers should put in place appropriate mechanisms to fulfil their responsibilities under working time legislation.
- Trade Union nominated Health and Safety Reps can play an important role by being available for home space inspections for colleagues.

## 4. Technology

Technology is key to successful and professional working from home. Employers need to ensure that they bear all the costs associated with the right technology for the job.

- Employers should commit to provide everyone with an all-in-one equipment pack in the first week of working from home with the initial necessary equipment for colleagues.
- The clear preference is for staff not to use personal equipment but to be provided by the employer with what is necessary.

- Employers must ensure that all necessary software is in place to ensure security resilience and that upgrades are regularly carried out.
- There are potential security issues in using family broadband or 'smart' listening devices in the home.
- Employers need to provide IT solutions to ensure security resilience, including if necessary, providing specific secure broadband for work purposes.

## 5. Allowances

Employers can accrue significant cost savings from home-working. It is important that staff are not expected to absorb the costs of work.

- Working from home can lead to an increase in utility bills for staff. Employers should commit to significant working from home allowances.
- The revenue tax breaks for home-working were designed for another era. They need to be urgently reviewed and recognise appropriately the costs of home-working.
- For those days staff work from home, it needs to be recognised, for the purposes of travel expenses, that home is their work location.
- As some employers are significantly reducing their property footprint through home-working, some of these savings must be passed on to staff.

## 6. A healthy working from home culture

Employers need to recognise that working from home cannot mean working alone. This means putting in place mechanisms which will promote a healthy working from home culture and eliminate isolation.

- Employers need to create a positive supportive environment for home-working. Staff are entitled to the same, and not excessive, line manager engagement and support.
- Employers need to guard against introducing excessive monitoring or surveillance for those working from home.
- Social engagement should be encouraged through online meet ups.

## 7. Caring responsibilities

One of the key issues for many workers is balancing caring responsibilities with work. Employers should ensure they take these responsibilities into consideration. This should include providing for:

- The availability of a more task orientated approach to work for staff who must adopt flexible arrangements to ensure they manage their caring responsibilities.
- Support for staff with children in childcare by providing flexible start and finish times.
- No penalisation of staff who must provide care to children, elderly relatives or others.

## 8. Culture

Key to a successful homeworking environment is the building of a high trust culture between employers and employees. Building blocks to a strong culture of supporting home-working and being more flexible with staff need to be identified and implemented.

- Strong leadership on the shared benefits of home-working
- Identification of case studies of success
- Celebration of the new way of working