Guidance for Health and Safety When Working at Home During the Covid-19 Closure Period

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Introduction

1. The Covid-19 outbreak means that all members of the Maynooth University community must change their individual and collective behaviours. As part of changing our collective behaviours, Maynooth University has changed the way in which it does business and delivers its services and employees who can work effectively from home must do so.

2. These guidelines have been developed to assist employees working from home during this period. In particular, it aims to assist those who have not worked from home in the past and who may have been unprepared for this temporary change in their working arrangements.

3. These guidelines represent the ideal scenario for working at home. It is acknowledged that it may not be possible for employees to implement all of these guidelines. However, employees must ensure that they carry out their duties in a safe manner at all times, and where possible, follow these guidelines.

4. This document addresses two key areas while working from home during this period:
   - Keeping physically safe; and
   - Keeping mentally well.

5. If you require any further information or have any queries in relation to this document, please email humanresources@mu.ie for support and guidance.

Keeping Physically Safe

6. The majority of duties which will be carried out at home during this period will be desk-based work. This work is generally deemed to be low risk. Nonetheless, employees are required to ensure they perform their duties in a manner which does not pose a risk to them or others.

7. Whilst it may not be possible for all employees to put in place the 'perfect' working setup for this period, the following provides general guidance which all employees should aim to achieve:
   - Set aside a designated area so that you have a clear delineation of where you are working and not working.
   - Ideally, the area should not be close to sources of glare such as windows, overhead lights, and reflective surfaces.
   - Chose an environment which provides a reasonable degree of comfort, e.g. away from draughts with a comfortable working temperature.
   - Keep the immediate area clear of obstructions and in a tidy condition.

- Do not allow cables to extend across the floor.
- Try and allow sufficient space to move about comfortably.
- Where possible use a desktop rather than a laptop.
- If using a laptop, position it on a table that you can sit at, keeping the laptop at a comfortable height (lower to mid-chest) and at arm's length (further details of the ideal Workstation Set up is available at Appendix 1)
- Try to avoid leaning over the laptop as this may lead to discomfort.
- Take frequent breaks away from the screen.
- Avoid using the laptop on a couch or on your lap as far where possible.
- Use a chair that provides a supported seating position and allows you to keep your back in an upright position.
- Avoid any working position that requires you to twist, stoop or overreach.
- Avoid the need to move heavy loads, especially boxes of files and similar, break up such loads into smaller parts.
- When moving work equipment in the home, take care to ensure that the way is clear and that there are no obstacles in place.
- If carrying a display screen, be sure to hold the screen to your body, i.e. the heaviest side closest to you.
- Do not carry any equipment by the electrical flex.
- If possible, ensure that your working area/home is fitted with a smoke detector.
- In the case of any electrical fault turn of your equipment and disconnect from the power supply if safe to do so.
- Do not use damaged cables, sockets or plugs.
- The mains power supply must be disconnected before attempting to move electrical equipment.
- All electrical cables should be set up so as not to present a trip hazard.
- Ensure that you are working within the parameters of your hourly/weekly working arrangement and complying with the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act.
- If you suffer an accident when working from home contract healthandsafety@mu.ie.
- If you are pregnant, contact healthandsafety@mu.ie who will provide you with additional support.

Keeping Mentally Well

8. As well as considering physical safety when working from home, all of us must also consider our mental wellbeing in the context of these significant and sudden changes in our working practices and environment.

9. The HSE provides excellent guidelines on looking after your mental health and employees are encouraged to review same - https://www2.hse.ie/looking-after-your-mental-health/ .

10. During the current Covid-19 working from home period, the following measures may also help in managing an employee's mental health:

    - Set aside a designated space for working so that you have a clear delineation of when you are working and not working.
    - Have a clear work plan for each day in so far as is possible; structure is important.
    - Keep in regular contact with your Head of Department and your colleagues. Use Microsoft Teams to arrange meetings and informal get-togethers; social contact (even at a distance) is important.
    - If you are unsure of what is expected of you during this period, speak with your Head of Department and do not allow uncertainty and ambiguity to develop in so far as possible.
    - Take frequent breaks away from the screen.
    - Explore flexible working options with your Head of Department.

11. If an employee is experiencing any difficulties, they are encouraged to avail of the Employee Assistance Programme available to them. Details of this service are available on https://www.inspiresupporthub.org/index. Alternatively, employees may call Inspire Workplaces directly on 1800 201 346.

Appendix 1

Workstation Set Up Diagram

Screen height and angle adjusted to allow comfortable head position

Screen height dependent on typing style, tasks performed, software used and glasses worn

Shoulders relaxed

Arms bent at elbows at approximately 90 degrees

Forearms approximately horizontal

Wrists not bent (up, down or sideways)

Seat back adjustable

Good lumbar support

Seat height adjustable

Space in front of keyboard to rest hands and arms when not typing

No excess pressure on underside of thighs and backs of knees

Space for postural change, no obstacles

Foot support if needed