Maynooth University
Working from Home During Covid-19 Policy

Date: 17th August 2020
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Purpose</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Definitions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Scope</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Working hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working Safely</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Normal Schedule and Routine and Rest Breaks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wellbeing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Information &amp; Data Security</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Guidance on expenses and tax relief</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Useful Contacts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Relevant Information and Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maynooth University Working from Home Wellbeing Guides</td>
<td><a href="https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/human-resources/employee-wellbeing">https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/human-resources/employee-wellbeing</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing Supports.</td>
<td>Inspire Workplace Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.inspiresuporthub.org/index">https://www.inspiresuporthub.org/index</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HSE Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses and tax Relief Information</td>
<td>Maynooth e-Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/e-Working%20%26%20Tax%20%28March%202020%20%29.pdf">https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/e-Working%20%26%20Tax%20%28March%202020%20%29.pdf</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revenue Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maynooth University's Information &amp; Data Security Policies</td>
<td><a href="https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/information-security/policies">https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/information-security/policies</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Services – Working from Home</td>
<td><a href="https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/it-services/working-home">https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/it-services/working-home</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **Purpose**

The Covid-19 outbreak means that all members of the Maynooth University community have had to temporarily change their individual and collective working arrangements to ensure the University continues to deliver the teaching, research and administrative services to students and employees whilst working remotely from the campus.

It is acknowledged that during this COVID-19 period, staff are not ‘working from home’, they are at home during a crisis, trying to work. Staff may also have at-home caring responsibilities, an increased/decreased workload due to Covid-19, and/or health considerations that make this a particularly stressful time.

This policy has been developed in consultation with the recognised Trade Unions in Maynooth University to assist employees in adapting to the Covid-19 imposed restrictions and provides guidance on how best to deliver their role and responsibilities when working remotely during this time.

It is acknowledged that it may not be possible for the University or its employees to adhere to all of the measures in this policy during the Covid-19 restrictions. However, there is an onus on us all to ensure that we carry out our duties in a safe manner at all times, and insofar as possible, adhere to this policy.

2. **Definitions**

For the purpose of this policy, the phrase ‘Working From Home’ shall be understood to mean the carrying out of an employee’s role, or other tasks assigned to them by their Head of Department, or nominee, away from the University Campus and generally in their place of residence.

3. **Scope**

This policy applies to Maynooth University employees who are required to work from home as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also applies to employees who are advised to self-isolate and temporarily work from home during this period.

This is an interim and transient policy which aims to outline good practice and minimum standards required for working from home during this period, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff while Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

Following government and public health advice on workplace restrictions, the University will continue to review this policy until such time as the requirement for this interim policy ceases.

4. **Working hours**

During this period, employees will continue to work their contracted hours. However, it is acknowledged that the challenges employees may face under the current conditions are likely to impact on their capacity to work, especially in regard to concurrent caring responsibilities. If required, and where possible, flexible or staggered working hours may be discussed and agreed with the relevant Head of Department, or nominee. Each Head of Department, or nominee, will be as flexible as possible in response to any such requests.

If an employee cannot work effectively from home, they should contact their Head of Department to discuss further.

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1 This document will be updated in line with public health advice as required.
Staff who find they have a substantially increased/decreased workload due to Covid-19, should discuss this with their Head of Department, or nominee and identify options for managing this as appropriate.

5. Working Safely
The duties which will be carried out at home during this period will be mostly desk-based, and employees are required to ensure that they perform their duties in a manner that does not pose a risk to themselves or others in the household following the guidance of the HSA.

Whilst it may not be possible for all employees to put in place "an ideal" working setup for this period, the following advice provides general guidance that all employees should aim to achieve.

Ideally, employees should:
- Set aside a designated area so that there is a clear delineation of where the employee is working and not working.
- Ensure that this area, where possible, is not close to sources of glare such as windows, overhead lights, and reflective surfaces.
- Chose an environment that 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.
- Ensure that cables do not extend across the floor.
- Try to allow sufficient space to move about comfortably.
- Where possible, use a desktop or a docking station configuration.
- If using a laptop, position it on a table that is comfortable to 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 (more information on the safe use of screens can be found on the HSA's website.)
- Avoid sitting or standing in the same position for long periods and make sure to change posture as often as practicable.
- Avoid using the laptop on their lap where possible.
- Use a chair that provides a supported seating position and allows the employee to keep their back in an upright position.
- Avoid any working position that requires the employee to twist, stoop or overreach.
- Avoid the need to move heavy loads, especially boxes of files and similar. Employees should 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.
- Ensure that the working area/home is not overloaded with electrical equipment and is fitted with a smoke detector.
- Turn off all electrical equipment at the end of each working day.
- Ensure electrical sockets, plugs and cords in good condition, e.g. no charring, exposed wiring or frayed cables.
- In the case of any electrical fault, turn off equipment and disconnect from the power supply if safe to do so.
- Contact healthandsafety@mu.ie if they suffer an accident when working from home. If an employee is pregnant, they should contact healthandsafety@mu.ie who will provide them with additional support.

Employees should complete and submit the Home Workstation Questionnaire to gauge the suitability of their home working environment during this period.

6. Normal Schedule and Routine and Rest Breaks
It is accepted that working at home may be new for many employees. Nonetheless, employees are encouraged to put structures and routines in place so that they can stay motivated and productive during the Covid-19 period. Employees are encouraged to agree with their Head of
Department or nominee to a daily/weekly work plan setting out the tasks that they need to focus on and ensure they maintain contact with their Head and colleagues.

While working from home, employees are required to ensure that they are working within the parameters of their hourly/weekly working arrangement and complying with the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act.

When working remotely, employees may start to feel as though they are not doing enough or worry that others will think they are not pulling their weight. Employees should stick to their normal daily routine where possible and not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours.

Employees should also not use any ‘extra time’ saved on their normal commute to do more work while at home. For example, if an employee saves time on their daily commute, this time could be used to read, catch up with music or podcasts, which they would have done whilst on their commute, these activities should not stop. The journeys to and from work help to create a transition between the two. By not commuting, the lines between home and work may begin to blur, and that may have a negative effect on health and wellbeing.

7. Wellbeing
As well as considering physical safety when working from home, all employees should consider their mental wellbeing in the context of the significant and sudden changes in the working practices and environment.

If an employee is experiencing any difficulties or requires additional support, they are encouraged to avail of the Employee Assistance Programme. Alternatively, employees may call Inspire Workplaces directly on 1800 201 346.

In addition, Maynooth University has developed a Wellbeing Guide to Working From Home that provides guidance and useful tips on working from home during the Covid-19 period. The guide aims to provide practical advice to help support overall wellbeing whilst working from home. During the current Covid-19 working from home period, the following general measures may also help in managing an employee's wellbeing. Employees should:
- Set aside a designated space for working so that the employee can have a clear delineation of when they are working and not working.
- Have a clear work plan for each day in so far as is possible; structure is important.
- Keep in contact with their Head of Department and colleagues to arrange regular meetings. Use Microsoft Teams to arrange meetings and informal get-togethers; social contact (even at a distance) is important.
- If an employee is unsure of what is expected of them during this period, they should speak with their Head of Department to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity from developing in so far as possible.
- Take frequent breaks away from the screen.
- Explore flexible working options with their Head of Department.
- Be kind to themselves and not judge how they are coping based on how they see others coping. Equally, employees should be kind to others and not judge others by how they themselves are coping.

8. IT and Information Security
Maynooth University's Information & Data Security Policy and associated policies apply while working remotely.

IT Equipment
Where possible, the University will provide the necessary equipment (devices and peripherals) to employees to ensure that they can work from home. Any equipment that the University
provides is considered the property of the University. Therefore, employees must keep this equipment safe and avoid any misuse.

**Network Access & Support**
Support for your home network connection is available from your Internet Service Provider (ISP). Advice on working with poor connectivity is available from IT Services.
In the event that you require IT support for your device that cannot be addressed remotely, employees are required to return and collect equipment from campus. Contact IT Services or your Department IT support to make arrangements.

**Information Security**
While working from home, employees are required to:
- Ensure that their device is used in a safe and secure location, particularly if working with sensitive or personal data.
- Apply the latest security patches, and enable automatic updates on all University-owned devices, consult with IT Services if assistance is needed. (https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/it-services/servicedesk)
- Avoid downloading any confidential, sensitive or personal data to any mobile device or home computer unless the device is secure.
- Delete all personal, confidential and sensitive data from the mobile device or home computer as soon as practical.
- Use effective security controls (such as multi-factor authentication and strong passwords) and, where available, encryption to restrict access to the device.
- Lock your device if it will be left unattended for any reason.
- Maynooth University confidential information, personal or sensitive information or any work sensitive conversations must not be discussed near voice-enabled smart assistant devices or sent, shared, accessed or edited using non-University approved applications.
- Complete the online training in GDPR and Data Protection requirements (available at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/dataprotection/online-gdpr-training-staff)
- If a device is lost or stolen or there is a data security incident, employees should immediately contact the Data Protection Officer or the Information Security Manager by email: dataprotection@mu.ie

**Emails**
While working from home, employees are required to:
- Use their work email account (@mu.ie) rather than personal accounts for University-related emails.
- Ensure that they are sending the email to the correct recipient, particularly for emails involving personal data.
- Not send personal data by email unless the network is secure between the sender and the receiver.
- Be aware of phishing emails especially related to the topic Covid-19; do not click on any links or open attachments from an unknown sender.

**Access and use of IT services**
While working from home, employees are required to:
- Only use approved core services (Microsoft Office 365) provided by the University for University business. Details of these services can be found on the University’s website.
- For access to backoffice business systems, use the approved access methods e.g. through the VPN.
- Store and back up data to the University-approved OneDrive solution.
- Consult with IT Services if assistance is needed (https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/it-services/servicedesk).

**Paper Records**
While working from home, employees are required to:
• Remember that data protection and data security apply to not only electronically stored or processed data but also University data in a manual form (such as paper records).
  o Minimise/avoid the keeping of paper records as much as possible and only create paper records where absolutely necessary.
• Take steps to ensure the security and confidentiality of records by:
  o keeping them locked in a filing cabinet, or drawer, where possible, when not in use;
  o disposing of them securely (e.g. shredding) where secure storage is not available. If an employee does not have access to a shredder, paper records should be retained securely until they can be returned to the campus, where they can be shredded; and
  o ensuring that they are not left where they could be misplaced or stolen.
• Deal with records that contain special categories of personal data (e.g. health data) with extra care to ensure their security and confidentiality, and only remove such records from a secure location when it is strictly necessary.
• Keep a written record of which records and files have been taken home, in order to maintain good data access and governance practices.

Data Protection, GDPR, Information Security and Freedom of Information queries should be emailed to dataprotection@mu.ie

9. Guidance on, Consumables, Expenses and Tax Relief

Consumables
Where an employee requires stationary or other consumables while working from home, they should contact their Head of Department to organise temporary access to campus so that they can collect same from their Department.

Expenses and Tax Relief
Revenue has issued updated guidance (March 2020) on the tax treatment of expenses incurred whilst working remotely.

In line with Revenue guidelines, MU employees working from home to support a national public health objective, such as Covid-19, may be entitled to make a claim on their personal tax return for expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of the employment. Such expenses will need to be supported by receipts.

Employees can make a claim at the end of the year when filing tax returns. Revenue will allow a claim based on actual utility expenses incurred (e.g. light and heat) and the number of days spent e-working. Revenue will allow 10% of this figure as a tax deduction to represent the proportion spent to maintain a home. Any such claim is a matter between the employee and Revenue and is subject to the Revenue rules on the operation of the e-working scheme.

10. Useful Contacts
• IT Services - servicedesk@mu.ie
• Human Resources – humanresources@mu.ie
• Payroll – payroll@mu.ie
• Health & Safety – healthandsafety@mu.ie
• Library Services – Library.Information@mu.ie
• Moodle Support helpdesk - moodlesupport@mu.ie
• Learning & Development – learning.development@mu.ie
• Employee Self Service – essqueries@mu.ie
• Equality Officer – equality@mu.ie
• Return to Campus Office - return.to.campus@mu.ie
11. Roles and Responsibilities

Head of Department or nominee
- Take a lead on strong, supportive communication and active listening with their staff.
- Regularly check in with staff to see how they are managing their workload under these unprecedented conditions and take steps to support them where possible.
- Keep up to date with relevant information on the University’s website.
- Ask their team how they are managing with new working arrangements, and assure them that while essential work continues, their wellbeing is the paramount concern.
- Provide support when requested or required by an employee.
- Keep employees informed of updates at the Departmental level and ensure they are aware and reading University-wide communications.
- Be accommodating, where possible, for staggered or flexible working arrangements.
- Avail of the guidance on Managing & Supporting People Temporarily Working from Home.

All Employee Responsibilities
- Keep in regular contact with their Head of Department, or nominee, and colleagues.
- Keep up to date with relevant information on https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/coronavirus.
- Be flexible in their approach to working, which may require taking on tasks which may not form part of their normal day to day duties but do fall within their skill set or level of expertise in line with their contract of employment.
- Be transparent about workloads and seek support if required or if you have extra capacity to support colleagues, let your Head of Department know.
- Cooperate fully with the University, policy, guidelines.
- Adhere to the HSA guidelines on Working from home to protect themselves and others during their work.

Human Resources Responsibilities
- Keep up to date with relevant information.
- Continue to provide policy and general advice and guidance on University policies.
- Ensure that circulars from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to Covid-19 are publicised and implemented.
- Make referrals to Occupational Health Providers where necessary.
- Respond to any requests for additional supports.

Health and Safety Office Responsibilities
- Continue to provide policy and general advice and guidance on this policy.
- Ensure that Public Health Guidelines are implemented in a timely manner.
- Respond to employee queries in a timely manner.
- Promote safe working conditions for employees.
Appendix 1 – Workstation Set Up

Workstation Set Up Diagram

- Shoulders relaxed
- Arms bent at elbows at approximately 90 degrees
- Forearms approximately horizontal

- Seat back adjustable
- Good lumbar support
- Seat height adjustable

- Screen height and angle adjusted to allow comfortable head position
- Screen height dependent on typing style, tasks performed, software used and glasses worn

- Wrists not bent (up, down or sideways)
- Space in front of keyboard to rest hands and arms when not typing
- Space for postural change, no obstacles

- No excess pressure on underside of thighs and backs of knees
- Foot support if needed