**Homeworking Operational Control Procedure (OCP)**

INTRODUCTION

Homeworkers are defined as those people who are employed to work at, or from, home. Health and safety legislation applies to homeworkers in addition to employees working at an employer's workplace.

The work conducted by our business has the potential to expose employees to risks associated with home working. Employers and employees are able to manage effectively the risks created by home working and its interaction with health and safety.

The intent of this procedure is to demonstrate how we will prevent or control this risk.

We will show how we meet the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and other statutory provisions not listed here.

We will:

* ensure that an assessment of the risks to homeworkers is carried out and additional control measures are implemented if necessary;
* consult with homeworkers regarding health and safety; and
* provide appropriate training for homeworkers where required.
1. PURPOSE

The intent of this procedure is to prevent accidents/incidents and injury/ ill health arising from any interaction between working practices and home working.

1. SCOPE

This procedure outlines the management of home working and work activities to assist in the prevention of accident/incident and/or injury/ ill health. This procedure covers all areas of our activities throughout the business.

1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There may be more than one person responsible for implementing this procedure. They will carry out or delegate such functions as necessary to ensure the effective day-to-day operation of our safety arrangements.

Where the responsibility to carry out risk assessments is delegated, the individuals will have the necessary expertise to carry out the task and be a competent person.

Managers are responsible for:

* implementing this procedure in their area of responsibility;
* ensuring an assessment of the risks to homeworkers is carried out and additional control measures implemented as required;
* consulting with homeworkers; and
* providing appropriate training for homeworkers.

Employees are responsible for:

* ensuring they do not endanger their own health/safety or the health/safety of any other person; and
* consulting with managers in relation to developing appropriate measures to control risks associated with home working.
1. PROCEDURE

The management of homeworking employees/activities and the interaction with health and safety will be carried out in accordance with this procedure, relevant legislation and HSE Guidance.

We will ensure:

* We identify homeworking activities where there is a risk of accident/incident or injury/ill health;
* An evaluation of working arrangements against the risk of accident/incident or injury/ ill health is carried out- risk assessment;
* The risk assessments will be done with the homeworker;
* Safe working arrangements are implemented and procedures are in place for monitoring and communication;
* Homeworkers are provided with sufficient training to undertake relevant tasks safely; and
* We review this procedure at least annually or more frequently if significant changes occur.
1. DEFINITIONS

Homeworker:

An employee who is contracted to work predominantly at home. This does not preclude the need for visits to meeting held at other places where our business carries out activities.

**Policy**

Employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and this includes homeworkers. Homeworkers are those employees who regularly work at home because of formally agreed arrangements with their employers.

Most of the work our employees undertake at home is performed on a computer supported by the records of our clients (some of which may be paper-based) hence usually such work is not considered to be high risk (our checklist of hazards provides an explanation). Regardless, as your employer, we must ensure risks are continued to be assessed. This includes considering any equipment provided by our business and ensuring there is a suitable and safe place for the employee to work. Any home-based site requires a designated area (when the employee is at work) deemed to be an acceptable workspace and the employee must have a clear delineation of when they are working or not working. Where space is at a premium, this may include using items of equipment which can be stored away when work ends.

**Procedural Steps**

Carry out a risk assessment for homeworking.

**Step 1 Identify the hazards**

We need to work out how people could be harmed so we use a checklist to identify levels of risk based on our experience of how we work and consider the following:

* Look at the tasks homeworkers are required to undertake including assessing the equipment needed to perform these tasks for example, the need to use electrical equipment. Before we provide you with a laptop or computer, we will ensure it is PAT compliant.
* We will ask our employees what they think in case they are aware of things not immediately obvious to us as the employer;
* We shall ask you to check manufacturers' instructions or data sheets for equipment and notify us of any identified hazards if such equipment is delivered direct to the employee ; and
* We ask you to remember to think about physical and mental health hazards, for example, poor posture or working too many hours without a proper break. Working from home should present you with the opportunity to be flexible and take advantage of the time available during the day and use this constructively for both work and home life.

**Step 2 Deciding who might be harmed and how**

For each hazard we need to be clear about who might be harmed - it helps us to identify the best way of managing that risk. We do this by identifying specific risk for you as individuals because we are a small business and able to do this, however it does involve your engagement in that process. We start by completing the hazards risk checklist.

In each case, we identify how you may be harmed, that is, what type of injury or ill health might occur as a result of working from home. This does not mean things like scalding yourself from an accident with the kettle because the risk of this remains similar to when you are at home during your own time and so where risks are normal hazards you must remember to take care as you do so normally including taking the necessary precautions about what you will do in the event of such accidents occurring. It means such risks as are increased because of the change to your working environment. For example, computer users may suffer musculoskeletal problems without suitable equipment, others may trip in an inappropriate working environment or you may feel overwhelmed by feelings of isolation and misuse alcohol.

We may visit you at home or ask for a photograph of your designated working space to identify risks which you may not have considered but in the first instance we require you to assess your risks using our checklist.

Some employees have special requirements and may be at particular risk:

* New and young employees;
* New or expectant mothers; and
* People with disabilities/existing health issues.

You as the employee will need to inform us of such things (unless they are obvious) as extra thought may be needed for some hazards. As the employee, you need to engage with us to think about how homeworking affects family members and visitors, as well as how their activities affect you as a homeworker.

**Step 3 Evaluating the risks and agreeing on precautions**

Having identified the hazards, we need to decide what, if anything we can do about them. The law requires us to do everything reasonably practicable to protect people from harm. We do this by comparing our actions and solutions with good practice.

We take into account the controls we all have in place and how our workplace risks are managed.

To achieve this we should:

* Organise work to reduce exposure to any hazard, for example, by establishing a designated working area and ensuring family members are aware of homeworking times. Whilst dependents are also at home this is particularly important to reduce for example, stress levels to balance priorities;
* Provide training on the safe use of display screen equipment; and
* Provide equipment as we would if you were in our offices such as an adjustable chair or a fold-away or standing desk. Failure to take simple precautions can prove problematic and cause longer term issues.

**Step 4 Record your findings and implement them**

We trust our team to implement the results of your risk assessment tackling the most urgent first. Together we will make a positive difference when looking after both our people and our business.

We record the results of our risk assessments and share them with you.

We need to demonstrate as a team, we have:

* Identified potential hazards relating to homeworking;
* Considered who might be involved in homeworking situations and harm they may encounter;
* Introduced control measures to manage significant hazards; and
* Taken reasonable precautions, and the remaining risk is as low as possible.

**Step 5 Reviewing our risk assessment and update if necessary**

When involved in our day to day activities it is easy to forget about reviewing our risk assessment until something goes wrong and it is too late, hence why we set regular review dates for assessing risk and request your involvement.

Risk assessments should be reviewed at least annually and more often if there are changes to homeworking arrangements, tasks, people, procedures or equipment or following any reported incidents at home involving working practices.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

1. **What is homeworking?**

Homeworking is a type of flexible working arrangement agreed between the employee and employer, and usually involves the employee performing some or all work duties from home.

1. **Why do we need a homeworking policy?**

Employers who operate homeworking should have a clear policy in place – this will help manage rules on employee communication, work obligations and ensure health and safety obligations are met.

Our policy is available from our staff handbook online, or on request from the practice manager.

1. **Can my employer force me to work from home?**

Homeworking arrangements must be agreed between both the employee and employer. An employer cannot force an employee to work from home if they do not have the contractual right to do so – they would need to seek agreement to do so. Our contracts do allow for us to stipulate from where you will work provided this is a reasonable request. As your home is a reasonable alternative to an office then we believe any request to work from home either temporarily or permanently is reasonable subject to our policy. Should you have any concerns, these may be raised together with the practice manager and a solution will be sought, with a right of appeal to a director.

1. **Can I work from other places?**

Under a home-working arrangement we would expect you to be at your home during time designated as working hours. This is to ensure there is proper delineation between work and home life to ensure neither is tainted by distractions from the other. Should there be circumstances under which you need to change this location you should discuss arrangements with your line manager and obtain written authorisation for any changes agreed.

1. **What are the legal implications of homeworking?**

Employers have a legal duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of homeworkers – this includes carrying out a risk assessment of the tasks carried out by an employee whilst at home. We have compiled a risk assessment checklist which we require you to complete to identify common areas of risk within our work environment. There may be others however, of which you become aware and there is space on the checklist to highlight these.

This means identifying potential hazards and taking sufficient steps to prevent harm to them or people who may be affected by their work. This should include making sure equipment is safe and that the employee's work space is suitable and does not cause discomfort.

Employees who use display screen equipment and computers regularly - including homeworkers - are entitled to an eye test paid for by their employer, which as you are aware we reimburse upon production of a receipt as part of our normal expense reimbursement procedures. We do not require you to have eyesight tests as we understand you are adults and should be able to assess your own physical needs.

You should inform your mortgage company, landlord and home insurer that you intend to work from home on an on-going basis. Should this involve extra cost please contact the practice manager to discuss.

1. **What equipment do I need to provide for homeworking?**

Homeworkers will need a desk and chair, reliable, fast broadband connection and a laptop or desktop computer and screen(s) with the necessary software installed. They may also need a smartphone or other mobile device. Whilst you as an employee may be content to use your own equipment in an emergency (such as a pandemic or failure of a computer for example), we as your employer will provide as quickly as possible, the equipment you need to work from home. This will be assessed with you and a list of items agreed with the practice manager and signed off by the director.

All property which is provided to you for the purposes of home-working must be returned immediately to the business upon request and, in any event, immediately following the termination of your employment. Failure to return such items within seven days will result in the cost of the items being deducted from any pay due to you.

You are responsible for any damage to equipment or property the business provides for work purposes which exceeds ordinary wear and tear. Any damage to your home resulting from the installation or removal of equipment will be reasonably reimbursed after quotes have been agreed and on production of a receipt.

Where any damage to business equipment is as a result of your negligence or lack of care due to your private use of the Company property (whether approved use or not), the business reserves the right to deduct the cost of repair from your salary for the cost of that damage as stipulated in your employment contract.

Our biggest risk as a business is data security and you must follow the same rules at home as you would in our offices. Access to our data should be password protected and you should use your work email and mobile (if provided) to communicate with clients. For internal communication Microsoft Teams or Zoom should be used as appropriate.

If you have any reason to believe business information has been compromised by any unauthorised person, you must report this to your manager without delay. Use of business equipment for personal reasons should be limited and insignificant. Storing any personal data on the equipment remains your responsibility and we shall not be responsible for any breach of data protections of such personal information in any circumstances.

Should you need to upgrade your internet connectivity please speak to the practice manager.

1. **What do I need to do in the event of an emergency or incident?**

As a business we are committed to establishing and maintaining procedures to control emergency situations that could adversely affect workers, including workers who are working at home. In the event of any emergency, workers must act in accordance with the relevant emergency procedures notified either by the practice manager, director or any government agencies to ensure their own safety at all times.

When working at home and affected by a specific or personal emergency, an incident reportshould be completed and your line manager notified as soon as reasonably practicable.

Workers who are working from home, should ensure they have access to first aid and have an appropriately stocked first aid kit (for details please see the risk assessment checklist). Details of any workplace injury or illness are to be recorded on a register of injuriesand your manager is to be notified as soon as reasonably practicable.

1. **What happens if I am working from home when the schools are closed (under abnormal circumstances) and I have to care for children?**

If you are working from home and feel able to carry out your work duties despite having childcare responsibilities, it is up to us together as a team, to decide if working from home under these arrangements remains suitable. Under exceptional circumstances, it is best practice for us all to be understanding and tolerant and to come up with a solution appropriate to both home-working and business needs.

This may be considering alternative working arrangements, such as changing work patterns to enable an employee to look after dependants and complete work duties at an alternative time in the day. This is not always possible.

If an employee is unable to work because of caring responsibilities, the government confirmed on 4th April 2020 that such an employee can be placed on furlough leave although this is likely to result in a reduction to salary. If support for furlough leave is no longer available we shall reassess working arrangements. If no solution can be found this working arrangement may no longer be suitable for either the business or the employee. If you feel this to be the case please discuss with a director.

1. **How will I be monitored whilst working at home?**

It is important to consider how you will work from home and segregate home and work. You will need to be self-motivated and able to meet deadlines. Monitoring will be direct by your line managers and the practice manager using our time-sheet system for recording work on client jobs, and through Microsoft software such as planner and one note and our usual channels for discussion, training and assessment of work. You will be measured against output and in line with the norm for your grouping.

Should you require flexibility of hours you will need to discuss this with the practice manager unless you are part of the technical team when you will be required to work flexibly and respond to client needs in return for which we also offer flexibility.

1. W**ill I be required to travel for meetings?**

As part of our technical team you may be required to travel to a meeting with clients either at their place of business or in their home. This will be subject to our lone-working policy and our health and safety policies.

All members of staff will be required to travel to meet each other for our physical team meetings which will be held ad hoc but notice of at least a week will be given, unless there is an emergency situation which requires face to face contact.

1. **Will you as the employer visit me at home?**

We shall keep any visits to you in your home to a minimum. We may require access to assess your working situation for health and safety purposes or if you invite us for a meeting. We will be required to give you notice of 48 hours and agree a mutually convenient time or an alternative location or method of assessment if possible.