

# Remote Working – Health and Safety

## Guidance for line managers and staff

This guide is intended to provide an overview of the health and safety aspects associated with remote working. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) definition of remote working is:

“Remote working is a way of working “at a distance”, using information technology (IT) to allow employees to undertake work away from the employers’ premises. Remote workers can be based at home, occasionally work from home, or be mobile and connected from anywhere in the world.”

**This guidance does not address the specific requirements of overseas working. Please contact your HR partner for further advice.**

### 1. The Legal Position

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA) places a duty on the College as an employer to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all its employees irrespective of where they may be working. This will include those working from home or elsewhere.

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWA) extend this duty to include assessing the risk to employees posed by remote working.

### 2. Remote working

Changes in the way people have been working since March 2020 have meant that remote and hybrid working (roles which can be performed through a combination of remote working (including home working) and working at a College location) are becoming more common. Typical reasons for remote working may include:

- Where a special project requires completion, and it is possible to undertake this work away from College premises.
- Where there are predicted transport difficulties.
- To better balance work, including caring responsibilities
- Where a temporary difficulty needs to be overcome such as recuperation from an injury or illness or as part of a phased return to work. However, it should not be used as a substitute for normal working practices where medical opinion states that the person is still considered unfit for work.

More information on remote working is available in the College’s [work location framework page](#).

### **3. Requests to work remotely, including from home**

During the College's 'transition and learn' phase, permanent changes to work location will not be made. This means that, during this phase, staff should discuss any matters relating to work location with their line manager.

Once the College has determined a long-term approach to be implemented during the 'ambition' phase and a date from which to begin this implementation, we will provide details on the approach chosen for hybrid working to staff.

### **4. Insurance**

Imperial's insurance policy currently covers College equipment temporarily loaned to College staff and located off-site. However, this is subject to whatever the excess limit on the current policy stands at – and this is typically significantly higher than the value of any computer equipment is likely to be. Therefore, any College equipment damaged or stolen from within the home or other premises is likely to be a write-off with no financial recompense from the College insurers. It may be possible to claim for loss or damages on the homeowner's own contents insurance policy (assuming the homeowner has such a policy) but any such claim would be a matter for the home worker to discuss with their own insurer.

College staff working from home on College business would normally be covered by the College Employers Liability Insurance in relation to any personal injury sustained as a direct result of their work. However, in the event of a claim, the insurers would expect to see evidence that home working had been suitably requested, sanctioned, and assessed in accordance with these guidelines.

### **5. Security**

The College has secure communications systems in place. Home workers are advised not to release their home address and telephone details to anyone outside the College.

Staff working from home should ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the security of College equipment e.g., keep doors and windows locked when equipment may be temporarily unattended; keep high value portable items out of direct view of the public etc. This is particularly important given the situation regarding insurance as described above.

Similarly, remote workers should ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the security of College equipment e.g., do not leave laptops unattended in café or restaurant areas or communal College areas.

For further details please refer to the Imperial essentials [Information security](#) and [Data protection](#) training modules.

### **6. Risk assessment**

As with all work activities, a risk assessment should ordinarily be carried out prior to commencing work. When working remotely or from home, and on the basis that work

activities shall be restricted to clerical work such as reading, writing, or working at a computer, then the risks associated with the work should be very low and primarily limited to ergonomic issues, electrical hazards, or manual handling. With appropriate support from the department's local safety staff, self-assessment should not prove difficult. It is not usually practicable, nor necessary, for the person's home to be visited.

As with any risk assessment, it is important that remote working assessments be documented and kept on file by the relevant College department.

#### **a) Provision of equipment**

The College is only responsible for equipment supplied by the College for the purposes of home or remote working.

#### **b) Ergonomic issues**

Further guidance on computer health and safety is available from the [Occupational Health website](#) along with a workstation self-assessment checklist.

#### **c) Electrical safety**

Where the College provides any electrical equipment for use remotely or in the home it is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure the equipment is safe and appropriate for the task for which it is provided.

College equipment must be subject to regular portable appliance testing (PAT). This should be done at least every 4 years for homeworking equipment. However, this should be increased to every 2 years where the equipment is moved around a lot, as this will cause significantly more wear and tear on the cables. It will be necessary to ensure that the electrical equipment is physically present on College premises for PAT testing to take place at the scheduled time.

In between formal portable appliance testing, workers must periodically check for obvious faults that could cause harm e.g., frayed wiring, damaged casing, damaged plugs etc. These are observational checks and require no specific electrical expertise. Any concerns must be reported to the person's line manager and if necessary, the equipment must be returned to College for further investigation and repair or replacement.

Electrical sockets and other parts of the home workers domestic supply are not the responsibility of the College.

Please note that for people in rented accommodation, their [landlord is obliged to provide an electrical safety certificate at least every 5 years](#).

#### **d) Other work equipment**

Any equipment other than computers or printers that is required to be used for remote or home working will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

#### **e) Manual handling**

Steps should be taken to eliminate the need for hazardous manual handling activities at home wherever possible. If manual handling must be performed at home, then a [manual handling assessment](#) must be undertaken.

#### **f) Radon**

Radon is a naturally occurring odourless and colourless radioactive gas, generated by the radioactive decay of natural uranium present in minerals and rocks. As Radon is a lung carcinogen, inhalation may pose a risk to health. The exposure to radon at work is subject to statutory limitation.

Radon can build up in confined spaces, particularly underground, such as in basements, or in poorly ventilated areas. Radon can also be found in conventional buildings above ground level, as it may pass through gaps or cracks in the building materials or may be derived from materials used in the building's construction.

Radon should be considered when assessing the risks of remote working. To that end remote workers should ascertain whether:

- They are working in a building that is in a radon "Affected Area". In the U.K, this can be determined by using your postcode and consulting the "Radon Atlas" found [here](#); or
- They are working in a basement or below ground level.

If the answer to either of these is "yes", then a more detailed assessment, to include radon measurements, will be required. The College Safety Department should be contacted in such instances. They can assist with the required assessment.

If remote workers are already aware that they are based in a radon Affected Area and remediation has been installed in the property and radon levels measured, then these should be included in the risk assessment.

#### **g) Hazardous substances**

The use of chemicals other than those for use in computer-based work (printer inks, correction fluid etc.) would not be approved by the College unless there were exceptional circumstances.

## **h) Mental health and wellbeing**

Mental health is as important as physical health. The College's Occupational Health Service provides a range of guidance and tools via its web pages to assist with assessing and improving the wellbeing of staff. These can be found [here](#).

Managers should ensure that they keep in touch with remote workers and contact them regularly to check that they are healthy and safe. If contact is poor, workers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned. This may lead to increased stress levels and mental health issues.

[Managing home workers' health and safety - Stress and mental health - HSE](#)

## **7. First Aid**

The low-risk nature of office type work dictates that no special provisions in terms of first aid equipment are likely to be necessary. However, where an individual has a known medical condition which may require additional support specific arrangements need be discussed and agreed between the individual and their line manager.

## **8. Accidents and work-related ill health**

Any accidents directly related to the work tasks are unlikely because of the low-risk nature of the work undertaken, particularly if electrical equipment is maintained in good working order. However, repetitive strain type injuries related to poor workstation ergonomics that develop over time are more likely to occur. If such conditions become apparent, the matter should be raised with the line manager without delay. Any incidents or cases of work-related ill health must be reported to the College system using the online incident reporting facility [Salus](#). It should be possible to access Salus and submit a report from the person's local computer. Alternatively, the individual can report once they have returned to work or a colleague at College could report on their behalf.

## **9. Further guidance**

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) guide to managing remote working can be referenced [here](#).

The HSE's Home Workers Guidance can be found [here](#).

[Work location framework](#)

[Family Leave](#)

[Special Leave](#)