

Teachers Working from Home

The following is based on advice drawn from the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority

Employers' health and safety responsibilities have not changed for workers who are now being asked to work from home.

Employers' responsibilities

- When a teacher is working from home, employers need to consider:
 - How to keep in touch with you
 - What work activity you will be doing and for how long
 - Whether it can be done safely
 - Whether there is a need to put control measures in place to protect you

Teachers working from home can be considered to be lone workers

- There will always be greater risks for lone workers with no direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong.
- Line managers should keep in touch with teachers while they are working from home, and ensure regular contact to make sure they are healthy and safe.
- If contact is poor, teachers may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned. This can affect stress levels and mental health.

Working with display screen equipment

- For those people who are working at home on a long-term basis, the risks associated with using display screen equipment (DSE) must be controlled. Normally this includes doing home workstation assessments.
- However, the HSE considers that there is no increased risk from DSE work for those working at home temporarily. In the current situation employers do not need to do home workstation assessments, and with current risk reductions restrictions this would not be practicable.
- However, your employer should provide you with advice on completing your own basic assessment at home. This practical workstation checklist may be helpful: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf>
- Many teachers may now be spending far longer using display screen equipment than before. There are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risks from display screen work:
 - break up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) or changes in activity
 - avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
 - get up and move around, try doing stretching exercises
 - avoid eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time
 - try to teach in a way which does not involve constant monitoring of your screen.
 - if you require specialised DSE equipment, you may need to be assigned to different tasks during this period of school closure.

Stress and mental health

Home working can cause work-related stress and affect people's mental health. Being away from managers and colleagues could make it difficult to get proper support.

- Maintain regular contact with your line manager and colleagues
- Take regular breaks
- Avoid being 'always on' by ensuring that you identify non-working time
- Contact your employer's employee assistance programme if you need support, for example, in relation to heightened feelings of anxiety.
- Try to be aware of the things that can impact negatively on your wellbeing
- Try to engage in activities and resources that can help to improve your wellbeing.
- The General Teaching Council for Scotland has put together some helpful advice here: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/News/news/covid-19-look-after-wellbeing.aspx>

Keep in touch

- Although it seems unlikely, if they haven't done so, ask your line manager to put procedures in place so you can keep in direct contact with them.
- If you are a line manager, take care to listen to your team so you can recognise and address any signs of stress as early as possible. This is a time when teachers, even those usually regarded as resilient, may find themselves struggling.
- Your employer should ensure you have been provided with an emergency point of contact, widely shared so you and your colleagues know how to get help if they need it.
- Your employer should make you aware of employee assistance programmes.

Online Communication

Local authorities have their own policies relating to online communication between teachers and learners. Employers should ensure that teachers are reminded of their expectations.

The GTCS also offers professional guidance which teachers are recommended to review:

<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/teacher-regulation/professional-guidance-ecomms-social-media.pdf>

- do not engage in live face to face or audio discussions with learners using online video or webchat
- only use official channels of communication e.g. GLOW and work e-mail addresses and be aware of and comply with employer's policies and guidance
- do not exchange private phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with pupils
- if recording video resources, take care to obscure anything in the background which may compromise your privacy or professionalism
- be aware that anything shared online is not private

Reducing Bureaucracy

- Usual management procedures should apply and no new paperwork for gathering evidence of pupil attainment or teacher professionalism should be developed
- Teachers should not be required to submit daily lesson plans
- Normal quality assurance processes should be in place
- Teachers should aim to follow their normal working pattern as far as possible