
Notat

Til: Fakultetene, Vitenskapsmuseet og Fellesadministrasjonen

Kopi til:

Fra: Rektor

Signatur:

Guidelines and guidance for a permanent home office agreement at NTNU

Introduction and delimitation

These guidelines applies to the regulation on the use of home office **in a normal situation** and must therefore be separated from the use of home office in special situations such as during the coronavirus, temporarily relocation of place of work through individual agreements, for example remote work, and transferring location of work in connection with the research term or other assignments.

The main rule for all employees is to have a fixed workspace at campus. The guidelines for a permanent home office agreement at NTNU will therefore apply to situations where it is in the **establishments interest** and is considered **appropriate for the employee** to have some days at the office and some days at home during a work week over a longer period of time managed by a written agreement with the nearest leader. The employee cannot require permanent home office, however, the employer cannot **impose** it. A scheme as such must be of **one's own free will**, and the employer cannot lay out the office space and support rooms based on the workers that got home office at any given time.

This scheme may have an environmental impact for employees that got a long journey driving their own car to work, as well as contributing to less strain on the public transport network. Furthermore, this scheme will possibly reduce stress and time scarcity for employees that for example got care obligations.

The manager must make their own assessment of whether permanent home office should be granted and must evaluate the request with the possible consequences this will have on the working environment. The value of meeting physically must be fundamental and governing. Nevertheless, all employees have a duty to contribute with the work environment even if they work from home.

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For employees that do **not** have an arrangement regarding permanent home office, it may nevertheless be appropriate to work from home in shorter periods of time – for example, when performing tasks that require concentration. This is a short-term transfer of workplace and must be agreed **from time to time** between the employee and the nearest manager.

1. The main rule

- 1.1. The main rule is that every employee has their permanent workplace in the premises of NTNU or on campus in general. In some cases, it may be agreed that employees switch between home office and attendance at the workplace for a period of time.
- 1.2. Home office should not be used as a permanent arrangement for any employees at NTNU.

2. Framework

2.1. *Decision on the use of home office*

The decision about making a home office agreement is made by the employer.

2.2. *Workinghours*

The working hours when at home office are the same as when working in the office. The core time also applies when using a home office.

2.3. *Work follow-up*

When using a home office, the nearest manager must follow up the employee in the usual way, both relational and in terms of task execution.

2.4. *Permanent home office agreement*

Agreements on the use of home offices can be entered for a maximum of six months at a time. Default appointment should be used. It can be agreed that up to 40 per cent of the working hours are spent at the home office with the basis of these regulations, and the distribution between the home office and attendance at the workplace shall be such that the employee regularly meets at the place of work.

2.5. *Equipment coverage*

NTNU will at a minimum cover basic equipment such as keyboards, mouse, and monitors. It will be possible for each faculty/institute/department to provide equipment beyond this, based on budget and individual needs. The purchases of home office equipment are owned by NTNU.

2.6. *Physical working environment*

The same requirements are set for the physical working environment at home offices as in ordinary offices. Workplace, work equipment and indoor environment shall not result in

unfortunate physical loads. The immediate manager and the employee should be in dialogue about this on an ongoing basis. If the employer considers that these requirements cannot be met, no agreement for a permanent home office shall be entered.

3. Criteria and prerequisites for the use of home office

- 3.1. A prerequisite for granting a home office agreement is that the employee has tasks that can be solved from the home office. Home office should not result in lower productivity.
- 3.2. The task execution in a home office cannot impose such severe requirements on equipment that it becomes a disproportionate cost for the employer to make it available. It will be a reason to oppose the request of home office if it requires highly specialized or expensive equipment.
- 3.3. Home office should not be used as a solution to a working environment challenge.
- 3.4. A home office agreement requires a good and adapted work situation for each individual employee as well as for interaction in their unit.
- 3.5. If the tasks impose particularly strict requirements for the prevention of consequences regarding health or safety, or for information security, the home office can normally not be agreed upon.
- 3.6. The employer has the right to request the employee into physical attendance, e.g. at meetings or other unforeseen events, even if this falls on days when home office was originally agreed upon.

4. Insurances

4.1. *Insurances – the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund*

The insurances and group-life-schemes that state employees have through a collective agreement/The Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund (SPK) also apply during home office.

4.2. *Occupational injury*

Occupational injury insurance applies at home office. For the occupational injury insurance to apply, the damage must be caused “whilst working, at work and during working hours”, and it must fall under the Occupational Injury Insurance Act’s definition of occupational accidents or occupational illness.

It can be difficult to define the difference of professional practice and leisure time when using a home office. Occupational injury cases will be dealt with individually. Private tasks

such as mail collection, dog walks, follow-up of children and the like will not be defined as occupational injury, even if it occurs within what is defined as working hours.

Links

[Forskrift om arbeid som utføres i arbeidstakers hjem \(Lovdata\)](#)
[Arbeidstilsynet om hjemmekontor](#)

Appendix

The memo's two appendices address important aspects of management in a home office situation, where Appendix 1 reviews research in this area, whilst Appendix 2 includes some practical advice for managers:

- Benefits and challenges of using a home office
- Advice to managers: Management of employees in home and campus/office

Appendix 1 – Research, benefits and challenges of using a home office

Benefits with home office

Recent research (2020) from SINTEF and the Labour Research Institute (AFI)/OsloMet shows the following benefits of using a home office:

- *Productivity*
Research on virtual autonomous teams shows that we can be just as productive or more productive by having a home office, as long as we have good virtual interaction practices and have good tools for collaboration. The increased productivity is because a home office gives better room for concentration and focus, without any surrounding disturbances, given that you have a good work situation at home with few interruptions. Additionally, having a home office means that you do not have to travel to and from the place of work, and there is no travel time associated with meeting activities. This saves time that can be used to perform the tasks.
- *Flexibility and autonomy*
Home office can give a more flexible work situation. The employee can pretty much set up the workday as they please, except when there are meetings with others. To make home office work, autonomy and independent tasks are an important prerequisite. The manager must have and show confidence that the job is being done.
- *Less stress*
Recent research from AFI (2020) points to perceived health benefits by having a home office. Many employees have been given a different kind of control over their working day and have experienced less stress by being able to work from home. In the home office there is no need to

stress about getting a bus/train, there is an opportunity to go for a walk in the middle of the day, and there has been more available time to spend with family.

Home office challenges

Researchers from AFI/OsloMet (2020) highlight the working environment and negative health consequences of home office. They specify that it is important to return to work to prevent physical, psychological and social consequences of having a home office.

- *Safeguarding a good working environment*
Social support from colleagues and contact with the nearest manager becomes challenging when being at home office. In a workplace where there is a good and health-promoting environment, support from colleagues and managers is a good buffer to have for mastering the job. Social support becomes less accessible when one does not see each other daily, and when contact primarily takes place via digital platforms.
- *Loneliness*
During long periods of home office and lack of physical presence in the workplace, many people may feel lonely, especially for individuals who live by themselves. Lack of face-to-face meetings with colleagues over a long period of time can be perceived as stressful and unsanitary. Digital meetings mean that we keep in touch with colleagues, but some employees have had less to do, and thus have fewer meetings and less contact with colleagues compared to before.
- *Reduced job affiliation*
When you work a lot on your own and rarely meet your colleagues and nearest manager face to face, your job affiliation and workplace identity can be weakened. This in turn can go beyond the motivation to perform your own tasks and the performance. This may also reduce the interest in participating in the workplace.
- *Absence of informal meeting places*
The spontaneous conversations between colleagues before and after meetings, or at the coffee machine are lost when we only meet digitally. When the informal meeting places disappear, it can be negative for social, psychosocial, and professional development in a professional environment/team. Being able to meet face-to-face and take unplanned and informal conversations is of great value both for the working environment and for professional exchange and innovation.
- *Work-life balance is challenged*
Working from home entails a greater probability for a blurred and erased distinction between

work and leisure. It can be more challenging to set limits on what is work and leisure when doing work from your own home. You have a more flexible work situation and may find that you are “at work 24/7”. If one fails to structure the working day and consider that there is a distinction between work and leisure, it can become a demanding and stressful work situation over time.

Appendix 2 – Advice to managers: Management of employees at home and on campus/office

A particular challenge for managers will be to maintain a good working environment and follow up their employees. This is especially true in case of periodic agreements on home office. We refer to previous advice on how to manage and look after employees in home offices¹.

In a kind of hybrid work situation with a mixture of employees working from home and on campus, it is important to take care of all employees equally and facilitate good meeting places both physically and digitally. As a manager, it is important to ensure a good working environment and while the employees contribute to the community. Working from home for a period of time can work well for some employees because they have tasks suitable for home office, while others do not. As a manager, one must consider whether and to what extent there is a need for a home office for their employees.

The following are some practical advice for managers with personnel responsibilities:

- Wishes and needs for the use of home offices are assessed and clarified with each employee. The immediate manager decides whether to give home office.
- If there is some extensive use of home office for some time, it would be beneficial to make a plan for which days the employees will work from home and in the campus/office. If necessary, set up a rotation plan, and involve the employees so that one can participate in the planning of one's own work situation².
- Consider the kinds of tasks that are suitable for home office in cooperation with the employee. The tasks and the nature of the work is important to know which work situation is best suited and to get the experience of an effective home office. Writing and concentration work, for example, is well suited for home office, especially for those who sit in office landscapes where noise is experienced.
- Focus on the working environment and collaboration
 - Put the working environment on the agenda at the meetings in your unit. Maintaining a good working environment and collaboration between colleagues can be demanding when not all employees in a team/unit are at work at the same time. Make sure that no one "opts out" of the community.
 - Meeting in informal meeting places face-to-face in the workplace is of great value both in relation to the social community and for spontaneous professional discussions.

¹ <https://innsida.ntnu.no/lederstotte>

² This is most appropriate in extraordinary periods, for example where infection control considerations imply more extensive use of home offices than elsewhere.

These informal meetings between colleagues can also contribute to becoming more efficient as well as it positively affects results/value creation. Research shows that the spontaneous encounters between people can lead to idea exchange, innovation, and new/projects/project collaborations

- Create a good work-life balance
Assist to structure the work and set limits for employees in home offices, this is to avoid anyone getting overworked and drained by the lack of separation between work and leisure.
- Facilitation for both physical and digital meetings
 - *Physical meetings*
Summon your employees to regular, weekly meetings in your unit. Facilitate the participation and physical presence of all employees at regular meetings. This will help promote collaboration and team feeling.
 - *Digital meetings*
A greater number of employees master digital meeting tools today compared to before the corona situation. Consider what kind of meetings the unit can conduct digitally, based on experiences and lessons learned when everyone had a home office. The advantages of digital meetings are their effectiveness, mainly because they have a clear start and end, and you save time on transport to and from meetings. The challenges are that it can be tougher to keep your attention, it is harder to read body language, and it can be perceived as more demanding to take and get the word in digital meetings.
Digital meetings are best suited for short meetings (1 – 1 ½ hours), with a clear agenda and few topics/issues on the agenda.

The combination of physical meetings and digital meetings can be used to develop a good meeting culture, where one evaluates, explores and improves meeting practices in their unit.

Physical and digital meetings work best when all participants are physically gathered or that everyone participated digitally. If there is a mixture of someone being present physically and others digitally (so-called hybrid meetings), these meetings can be more challenging to conduct and lead. There may be technical challenges with sound and image, or it becomes more difficult with equal involvement of the participants.