



uniting
church
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Flexible Work Policy

Title: Flexible Work Policy
Creation Date: August 2021
Version: 0.1
Last Revised: March 2022
Approved by: Synod Office SLT

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1. Overview/Background

The Synod of NSW and ACT ('**Synod**') is committed to creating a healthy, inclusive and diverse working environment. We recognise that, whether Government mandated or not, working from home and other types of flexibility are increasingly used as a means to provide more options for employees and facilitate engagement and retention.

Providing for some workplace flexibility can increase productivity, while enabling the Synod to rapidly assess and respond to challenges that may require individuals to work from alternative locations (including home locations).

Whilst we understand and support the desire for flexibility, we also recognise the importance of teamwork, mentoring and leadership in the development of our people and as such, flexible working arrangements require a true commitment from managers and employees. Both parties have an obligation to ensure effective communication, collaboration and the implementation of safe work practices.

The Synod's duty of care applies wherever work is being undertaken and the purpose of this policy is to help ensure that while working from home employees do so safely and continue to fulfil their work obligations.

2. Purpose of Policy

The policy outlines arrangements for working flexibly, including working from home.

3. Applicability (scope)

This policy applies to all employees of the Synod, including permanent full-time, permanent part-time, fixed term employment and casual employment ('**employees**').

Impact of Government-mandated working from home arrangements

Where the relevant Federal, State or Territory Government mandates working from home, the Synod will issue separate communications specific to that situation and, as such some elements of this policy (such as the need to gain People Manager approval) will not apply. The requirements for continuous and ongoing communication, and the need to be present at meetings, and responsibility for WH&S remain in place.

4. Responsibilities

People Managers are responsible for ensuring that employees have a documented Working from Home ('**WFH**') agreement, and that they have completed the WH&S checklist. People Managers are also responsible for the ongoing management of any WFH arrangements, and for promptly reporting any WH&S issues or concerns to the compliance team.

People Managers should be aware that certain categories of employees have a right to request workplace flexibility.

Employees wishing to access WFH arrangements must complete the WH&S checklist, providing an honest assessment of their proposed working from home environment. Employees are also responsible for gaining the agreement of their People Manager to their proposed WFH arrangement. This agreement should reference:

- ▶ How employees should communicate with team members and management (Zoom etc);
- ▶ How the health and safety standards of the work environment will be upheld;
- ▶ Any change to the normal working hours for the employee who is WFH;
- ▶ How work will be allocated between team members and how those responsible for delegating work and coaching or mentoring others will continue to do so effectively while WFH.

COVID

In circumstances where an employee is experiencing COVID-related symptoms, the employee must stay home and not return to the office until they have received clearance to do so from the relevant COVID authorities. If well enough to do so, the employee may work from home; otherwise, the employee will be asked to take personal leave.

5. Policy

5.1 Conditions of this Policy

Subject to the terms set out in this policy, the Synod will endeavour to provide flexibility to allow employees to WFH, except where the nature of the role requires a physical presence in the office (for example, reception, front counter, customer facing roles).

Employees who have access to WFH arrangements will be required to maintain a minimum presence in the office of 3 days per week, as agreed with their manager, and subject to organisational and team needs. This will ensure that team communication and team work can be maintained, and that we build a collaborative and engaged workforce culture.

WFH arrangements are subject to ongoing review, and subject to the employee ensuring that they have adequate working arrangements at home and that they continue to meet their obligations, both to their managers and to their team.

WFH isn't a substitute for child care and, as a general rule, employees working from home should not be supervising children or other dependents. There may be exceptions to this, e.g. in the case of an unexpected need to WFH such as in a pandemic or other unplanned or unforeseen circumstance (which could include a personal circumstance) that requires individuals to work from home. The working arrangements should reflect office conditions, meaning that the employee is available during work hours and fully focused on undertaking their regular duties.

Employees requiring variation to hours of work should discuss this with their manager.

5.2 Work Health and Safety Assessment

Employees working from home will be required to complete a workplace health and safety ('**WH&S**') assessment, and to comply at all times with the safe working guidelines provided in the attached guide. Any costs or equipment required to setup the home office safely are at the employee's expense. In the event the employee cannot or does not provide the required equipment, the WFH arrangement may either be denied or, if already in place, revoked.

It is not just the working area that needs to be safe when an employee works from home. Facilities used by the employee in the course of their working day are also subject to WH&S standards, such as the kitchen and bathroom.

As the office continues to be the preferred work location, even where an employee has an approved WFH agreement, no travel, expenses or allowances can be claimed from home to the office.

5.3 Work Practices and Policies

When attending meetings remotely, employees are required to ensure that they are in business dress, that their surroundings reflect an office environment (or a professional virtual background), and that their camera is switched on for all teleconference meetings. Please see attachments 1, 2 and 3 of this policy for further information.

The Synod's Code of Conduct and other associated workplace behaviour policies (including but not limited to Bullying, Harassment & Discrimination, Social Media, Information Security, Internet and Email Usage, etc) apply to WFH in exactly the same way as they do in the office.

Employees should avoid taking home printouts of data or other confidential information. If this is unavoidable, employees are required to discuss this with their manager, and to also ensure that any physical information is secured at all times.

5.3 Work health and safety risks

The Work Health and Safety (**WH&S**) risks or hazards that are typically present in a workplace can also be present in an employee's home. These risks may be physical or psychological.

Physical risks include:

- ▶ Slipping, tripping or falling
- ▶ Risks associated with improper workstation set up and insufficient standing breaks
- ▶ Risks posed by working with electrical items
- ▶ Risks posed by manual handling
- ▶ Risks posed by incorrect or inadequate equipment

Psychological risks include:

- ▶ Experiencing loneliness and/or isolation; feeling disconnected from one's team
- ▶ Being tasked with an excessive workload or managing unreasonable or conflicting demands
- ▶ Contending with organisational change
- ▶ Experiencing a lack of role clarity
- ▶ Feeling uninvolved in decision-making processes
- ▶ Contending with inadequate communication practices
- ▶ Workplace bullying, harassment or discrimination

A WFH Procedure and WFH Checklist are attached as Attachments 1 and 2 respectively. The checklist should be completed by employees wishing to access WFH arrangements, and reviewed on a regular basis, or if their circumstances change.

Support is available from the People & Culture team in relation to the applicability of this policy, or in relation to concerns about WH&S issues.

6. Implications

Failure to adhere to this policy or to meet ongoing work obligations could lead to a review of a WFH arrangement. As a result of any such review, modifications may be made to the WFH arrangement including (but not limited to):

- ▶ Greater clarity over the Synod's expectations and the employee's obligations while WFH;
- ▶ The WFH arrangement being modified or re-set with the option of a trial period applied; and/or
- ▶ The WFH arrangement being rescinded or revoked.

In the event of concerns over the employee's performance, the Synod may also make a

determination as to whether a performance improvement plan is required (in the same way that would occur if the employee was working in the office).

7. Review

This policy may be amended, suspended or rescinded for periods of time, including but not limited to the following circumstances:

- ▶ Pandemic and/or other significant public health or public order disruptions. In these events the Synod will follow the guidance of the relevant regulatory authority;
- ▶ Where the Synod is implementing a significant project or change program, and attendance in the office is reasonably needed for a specified period of time. In these circumstances, the Synod office will communicate the nature of the required attendance, and the timeframes anticipated to the impacted teams with sufficient notice.

8. Other Policies and Legislation

Policies

Code of Conduct and Ethics
Work Health and Safety Policies
Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment Policy
Social Media Policy
Privacy and Surveillance Policy
Internet and Email Useage Policy

Legislation

Work Health and Safety legislation
Temporary or permanent changes or additions to legislative instruments, e.g. in the case of a pandemic
Fair Work Act (Cth) 2009

9. Terms and conditions

This Policy does not form part of any contract of employment or contract of engagement and may be amended, replaced or revoked at any time by the Synod at its discretion.

Attachment 1 – Working From Home ('WFH') Procedure

Purpose

At Synod of NSW & ACT ('Synod'), we recognise that working flexibly helps support our people with their personal circumstances and work commitments. Additionally, there may be circumstances, such as in a pandemic, where employees are either required to, or are requested to, WFH in line with the government recommendations or requirements. In such circumstances, there may be elements of this policy that don't apply. The Synod will communicate separately with employees.

This procedure applies to all employees of the Synod, including permanent full-time, permanent part-time, fixed term employment and casual employment.

Please read this information to understand the what, how and why about WFH, as well as your responsibilities.

Failure to follow this policy could result in a variety of outcomes including revoking or modifying WFH arrangements or disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. The Synod takes its responsibilities to its people very seriously and, as such, we need to ensure strict adherence to our WFH policy and guidelines. Those engaging work for the Synod who are not employees may face other action for breach of the WFH policy and guidelines, including termination of their engagement with the Synod and potential legal action.

Working from Home

The WH&S risks and hazards that are typically present in a workplace can also be present in an employee's home. A summary of these risks is set out in clause 5.3 of this policy.

A checklist will be required for each employee wishing to have a WFH arrangement, except in circumstances where:

- ▶ WFH is instigated as a result of a government mandated lockdown, in which case modifications (either temporary or permanent) to this policy may apply;
- ▶ Emergency situations exist (e.g. unexpected interruptions to business which cause disruption to the office space or emergencies impacting the employee's ability to attend the office;)
- ▶ WFH is of an ad hoc and very short-term nature (e.g. a day or two).

Roles & Responsibilities

Employees are responsible for:

- ▶ Complying with this procedure and all related policies;
- ▶ Complying with any working from home agreement and continuing to deliver work outcomes;
- ▶ Providing access to the home-based work environment to appropriate Synod representatives, with reasonable notice;
- ▶ Continuing to participate in all team meetings and relevant learning and development activities;
- ▶ Reporting accidents or injuries that occur in the home-based work environment as soon as possible in line with Synod processes;
- ▶ Immediately reporting any technology or other information security breaches, or suspected breaches, to IT.

People Manager are responsible for:

- ▶ Ensuring they make a fair and non-discriminatory decision in relation to all WFH requests and responding to employees within 21 days of any request.
- ▶ Having a WFH agreement in place for any approved regular arrangements.
- ▶ Monitoring and reviewing the WFH arrangement and ensuring that agreed work outcomes are consistently delivered or addressed quickly, and fairly, where there is a perceived shortfall.

Steps to be completed prior to work from home commencing

- ▶ We encourage the employee to have an initial discussion with their People Manager about their proposed WFH arrangement.
- ▶ The employee completes the WFH checklist. If the employee does not feel confident in completing the checklist or has specific questions, they should speak with their People Manager.
- ▶ The employee provides the completed checklist to their People Manager who will identify any concerns or confirm they are comfortable for the arrangement to begin.
- ▶ If a People Manager has any concerns, they should speak with their People and Culture Business Partner and consider any potential adjustments or a trial period for the arrangement.
- ▶ In the event of any home workspace modifications, it is the employee's responsibility to either purchase appropriate equipment or to make relevant adjustments to their existing equipment or set up.
- ▶ To ensure all safety safeguards are in place, ideally the WFH arrangement should not commence until all appropriate changes have been made. However, we accept that, in some circumstances, this may not be possible and some leeway may be needed.
- ▶ If requested by either the employee, their People Manager or Risk & Compliance, a competent third party provider may be engaged by the Synod to assist in the review of the home based workplace, identification of hazards and appropriate the controls to be implemented.
- ▶ The employee will notify their People Manager and Risk & Compliance of any relevant changes to their working environment such as renovations, tradespeople on site or changes in equipment or work area.
- ▶ In the event of changes to a previously approved home-working set up, a decision will be made between the People Manager, Risk & Compliance and the employee on any further action needed. This may require a new checklist to be completed or a temporary change to the WFH agreement.
- ▶ The completed checklist needs to be provided to the People & Culture team.

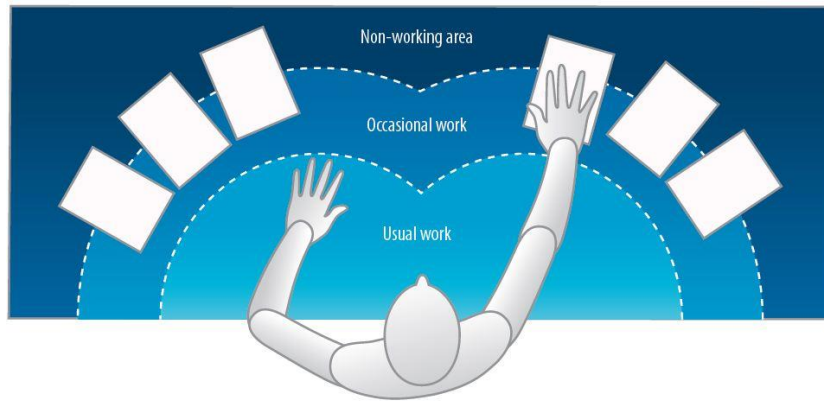
Attachment 2 – WFH Checklist

General Information			
Name of Worker:		Position:	
Position:		People Manager :	
Address of home-based workplace:			
Home workplace phone number:			
Nature of Arrangement:	Fixed Term:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Temp: <input type="checkbox"/>
Commencement Date:			
Days & Hours to be worked from home:			
Date of Review:			

WORKSTATION PHOTOGRAPHS *(must be provided prior to approval of this Working from Home Checklist / Agreement)*

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ISSUE	YES	NO	ACTION REQUIRED
WORKSTATION			
Is the workspace clean and well maintained?			
Does the layout of the workspace allow for easy access to furniture and equipment?			
LAYOUT			
Are all often-used items within easy reach? (They should be within normal arm reach with a minimum trunk movement.)			



Is there sufficient space for large documents, completed work or writing?			
Is there sufficient space for furniture, equipment and hardcopy materials?			
CHAIR			
Is there a quality ergonomic chair? (Adjustable height, lumbar support and removable/ adjustable armrests for key board operation).			
Is the chair easily adjusted from a seated position?			
Is the chair stable with a five-star base?			
Can the user get close to the workstation without impediment? (Check that the desktop is thin, chair arms are not in the way and there is clear legroom.)			
Is the seat height adjusted so that the user's thighs are parallel to the floor with feet resting on the floor or on a footrest?			
Is the backrest height and angle adjusted to fit into the small of the users back and adequately support the spine?			
Work Environment			
Check the level of illumination and location of lighting fixtures are suited to the activity. Lighting level should be sufficient for visual tasks to be completed without eye strain. Greater illumination is generally needed for very fine visual tasks. Natural and artificial light sources should not create glare via reflection on the computer screen or working surface.			

Check there are sufficient levels of ventilation and thermal comfort.			
Check the location, height and other physical characteristics of furniture and computer/s are suited to the task and take into consideration other factors, for example, egress routes, direction of light source.			
Check walkways are clear of clutter and trip hazards such as trailing electrical cords.			
Check there is no damaged flooring (uneven tiles, pulled up carpet).			
Check there is suitable storage for documents and books.			
Check that equipment has been issued by your organisation and has recently been tagged and tested.			
Make an agreement about a reasonable communication system between you and your manager (for example, call-in or email morning and night).			Note: Managers to confirm that the agreed communications strategy with the worker is documented.
Make an agreement about a reasonable communication system between you and your team (for example, call-in or email morning and night).			Note: Managers to confirm that the agreed communications strategy with the worker is documented.
Inform your manager if there is any change that may impact your health and safety or the health and safety of another worker (for example, a new pet, renovations or moving house).			

Please refer to SafeWork NSW for more detailed guidance in relation to ergonomics and safe working [Working-from-home-workplace-checklist.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/working-from-home-workplace-checklist).

If you need additional guidance to assess your work area, please seek assistance from the compliance team.

Attachment 3 - Supporting Strategies when Working From Home

Work practices

- Take appropriate breaks to ensure repetitive actions are not continued for long periods.
- Breaks involve stretching and changing of posture, and possibly alternating activity.
- Check you have a comfortable posture.
- Make sure any lifting, pushing, or carrying type task is well within your physical capacity.
- Take breaks every 30 minutes of keyboarding and stand at least once per hour.
- Keep wrists upright while typing and make sure they are not supported on any surface while typing.
- Ensure sitting posture is upright or slightly reclined, maintaining slight hollow in lower back.
- Use your hand to hold telephone receiver or wear a headset (no cradling).
- Break up long periods of continuous computer use by performing other tasks.

Mental health

- Set up your workstation and establish boundaries around your work hours.
- Schedule regular meetings and catch ups with your People Manager, team and clients to help you maintain ongoing contact and foster positive working relationships.
- Stay connected via phone, email and/or online to keep across latest developments with work, your team and the Synod.
- Use outdoor spaces where possible when you take breaks and try to incorporate some exercise or other activity as part of your working day.
- Identify any potential distractions and put strategies in place to minimise them, for example separating your workstation from the rest of the house.