Top tips for maintaining **good communications** for homeworking teams

Practicalities

- **Chat software:** Use a chat platform and video meeting software, where possible. If you do use it, make use of the 'busy' mode to focus and lessen distraction. Pop up chats are a great way for remote workers to connect informally with colleagues but can be distracting when concentration is required.

- **Ask workers to signpost their breaks or non-working periods with an out of office.** Agree specific times when staff can be contacted or are available for meetings. This not only helps colleagues know when they can connect, but it also helps remote workers take reasonable breaks away from their work without feeling guilty or fearful that they will be accused of 'shirking'. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, people's work patterns may vary day to day due to external forces.

- **Encourage the use of video, even if it feels uncomfortable at first.** To avoid feeling isolated, use video technology as much as possible to connect with people internally and externally. Face-to-face interaction, even if virtual, can make all the difference in productivity, mental and emotional well-being.

- **Create a system for sharing documents.** If you don't already, now would be a good time to consider how you will share files.

- **Flexible mindset:** Recognise that people may have to suddenly leave a call/meeting at a moment's notice if e.g. a child needs attending to, or that someone's working hours might change day to day.

- **Peer to peer support:** Support those new to remote working by setting up a buddy scheme, linking staff up with more experienced remote workers.

Maintain relationships

- **Take time for that 'water cooler' chat.** Some staff might live alone and feel very isolated, or may feel overwhelmed by juggling childcare and work. If your company is using an instant messaging system, consider creating a brand new 'water cooler' channel, specifically for this.

working families

- **Resolve issues quickly with a phone call or a virtual face-to-face conversation.** Email, text and other written methods of communication are prone to misunderstandings. When you sense this is happening, be quick to pick up the phone to resolve issues.

- **Regular whole-team virtual (video) meetings** are important to maintain good communication, so find times that are suitable for all group members. Consider alternating days, if it's impossible to find a time that everyone can make.

Communicating with your team

- **Tell your team how and when they can reach you.** If you manage people, be clear with them about any new or different communication and productivity expectations you have, now that your team is working remotely. The more guidance and boundaries you provide, the fewer misunderstandings will occur and the more smoothly work can stay on track.

- **Continue with your 121s**, doing them with video if possible. And ensure you get, and give, feedback on how remote working is going.

- **Make sure to clarify expectations for your team.** Connect with key colleagues around communication, work priorities, and KPIs. Will everyone be expected to work the same hours? Will all the same projects and plans be moving forward? Don't let people make assumptions about anything that's unclear.

- **Burn-out:** Ensure your team know that they are not expected to be working 24/7 and ensure everyone has realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Check in regularly with each team member to ensure they are not feeling swamped.

- **Note any project progress.** Be proactive and alert all colleagues to progress on longer-term goals. Celebrate and share widely all the positive news that you can!