# NWU ®

**People & Culture**

**REMOTE WORKING PROTOCOL**

## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The NWU has primarily operated and managed its staff members on the principle that they execute the majority of their tasks on the physical premises or demarcated worksites as per their job descriptions and performance agreements. COVID-19 has brought about many challenges to ensure business continuity, but also new perspectives on how work can be executed effectively from remote work locations. The NWU can leverage the lessons learned during the current pandemic to make critical operational changes that can sustain the NWU during other unforeseen crises, including but not limited to labour unrests, student protests, unplanned business disruptions and natural disasters.

In alignment with the NWU's objective to become an agile institution that employs digital business strategies, it is imperative that the NWU consider new ways of work that embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Employees have enjoyed greater job autonomy and flexibility whilst working remotely and the improved engagement is testimonial to the fact that different modalities to the execution of tasks can improve job outcomes. Additionally, the inclusion of a remote working modality can enrich the NWU's value proposition and prove beneficial in the attraction and retention of critical talent.

## 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines that regulate remote working and inform staff members of the expectations and arrangements whilst working remotely. The protocol seeks to ensure fair labour practices and corresponding business continuity with productivity and employee well-being. The Protocol explicitly sets out to:

- Identity the various contexts and conditions under which staff members may be required or allowed to work remotely, and
- Delineate the eligibility criteria for staff members to work remotely.

## 3. SCOPE OF APPLICATION

The NWU acknowledges that some roles cannot be performed remotely and staff members need to render their services on the physical premises or at demarcated worksites as per their job descriptions and performance agreements. These roles include but, are not limited to staff members in Protection Services, Catering and Residence Management, Cleaning and Sanitation, certain modes of teaching and learning, certain modes of research and Facilities Management where maintenance work and ad-hoc standby may be required to ensure business continuity. Hence, staff members involved in tasks that relate to cleaning, maintenance, safety, security, IT, medical and laboratory services, animal care and any other services deemed essential service by the NWU or applicable regulation may be excluded from the scope of this Protocol.

## 4. DELINEATION OF THE TERM REMOTE WORKING

Remote working implies the execution of tasks from a remote location other than the physical premises or demarcated worksites of the NWU. Staff members may have various locations from which they can execute their tasks, however, the characteristics of the remote location has to support and promote the effective delivery of the work tasks.

Thus, the remote location may not only refer to the physical residence(s) of the staff member, but

can also include other spaces that adhere to the safety, health and confidentiality requirements as stipulated in the agreement between the staff member and the NWU.

## 5. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- How do we capacitate line managers to lead remotely?
- What behaviours do we want to encourage?
- How do we want to position ourselves as an employer of choice?
- Instead of counting time, how do we encourage our employees to make their output count?
- How do we ensure that our employees do meaningful and impactful work?
- Does the nature of work allow remote working? For example, 85% of tasks can be done remotely?
- How do we move from focusing on the time spent on the work to focusing on the quality of outcomes?

## 6. CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH EMPLOYEES ARE ALLOWED OR REQUIRED TO WORK REMOTELY

The following conditions permit employees to work remotely:

- Natural disasters and emergencies;
- Business disruptions;
- Individual preferences for more flexibility and work-life balance.
- Employee value proposition of NWU where attraction to certain locations prove challenging, and
- Optimisation of space utilization

## 7. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- General nature of the role and its requirements
- Network access and sound connectivity
- The relationship of trust between employee and line manager
- Provision of relevant resources

## 8. GROUND RULES FOR REMOTE WORKERS

### 8.1 Trust relationship

The Remote Working Protocol is built on the premise of the trust relationship between staff members and their direct line managers. Staff members need to be empowered by their line managers to execute their key performance areas (KPAs) as per their performance agreements and take responsibility for their obligations without their physical supervision over their tasks. Line managers must demonstrate care and clearly communicate the scope and milestones of expected work. Additionally, line managers must provide staff members with the freedom and job autonomy to deliver their tasks yet providing support and assistance where needed.

In some instances, a staggered approach can be followed where the staff member's proven productivity and track record whilst working remotely can serve as basis for granting a one- day-a-week, later two-days-a-week, three-days-a-week etc. flexible working arrangements.

### 8.2 Outcomes over time expenditure

In a remote working arrangement, it can be very challenging to measure staff productivity as a function of working hours. However, the current NWU Performance Management process is based on the measurement of overall staff performance as how satisfactorily the key performance indicators/outcomes were achieved. Remote working requires a shift from counting staff members time (working hours) towards ensuring that they make their time count to achieve key role outcomes as captured in their performance agreements and job descriptions.

Table 1 below provides a template that can guide a weekly/bi-weekly/monthly conversation between the line manager and staff member on which tasks he/she should engage in during the allocated

period. The line manager's focus shifts from counting the staff member's working hours to focus on measuring productivity by reviewing the achievement of the key performance indicators and gauging the efficiency in which the staff member utilised his/her time.

**Table 1: Remote Working Productivity Tracker**

| Before commencement of period determine: | | | | At completion of period evaluate: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Key performance areas and other roles | Specific outcome to be achieved during the period | Key performance indicator (indication of productivity) | Expected time to execute task | Productivity indication based on meeting KPI (1=poor, 5=excellent) | Actual time spent | Time utilisation | Progress on meeting KPA |
| KPA 1 | | | | | | | |
| KPA 2 | | | | | | | |
| KPA 3 | | | | | | | |
| Ad-hoc tasks | | | | | | | |
| Administrative tasks and team meetings | | | | | | | |

## 9. STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING REMOTELY

The following strategies may be utilised to manage productivity
- Avoid unnecessary meetings
- Define productive goals
- Reduce repetitive tasks
- Focus on core functions of the unit to eliminate inefficiencies
- Encourage your team to protect their time
- Be mindful of ZOOM/Teams/Skype fatigue
- Where possible have/use an online deliverable tracking system
- Managers must have clear understanding of the job content of subordinates
- Regular communication with teams to measure outcomes.
- Give clear and concise tasks.
- Good quality performance management by managers.
- Fostering good relationships amongst team members that fosters a climate of respect, synergy and teamwork.

## 10. PLANNING FOR AND THE PROVISION OF TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES

### 10.1 Laptops

- A move from Desktops to Laptops should be considered in line with the replacement plan of the University
- Additional insurance should be obtained and all laptops and locks provided

### 10.2 Data

- Review if staff needs and is eligible for 3G allowance.
- A cost and logistical comparison to be made between providing an allowance or providing bulk data

### 10.3  Printers/scanners

- NWU should endeavour to go paperless where possible
- Where the above is not feasible, central printers should be acquired or arrangements made with certain remote service providers
- Alternatively an Office day, can be utilised for printing
- Optimise the use of technology (phones can act as scanners for example and small scanners can be bought).

### 10.4  VPN

- A faster network should be considered together with access to server based programmes

## 11  OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- According to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 ("OHSA") it is the Employer's duty to ensure a safe and healthy remote working environment.
- Potential risks should be proactively identified and mitigating actions should be implemented
- Guidelines should be provided to ensure that each remote working environment is not only safe but complies with all health and safety related conditions, risk assessments can be conducted in this regard.
- Employees are required to comply and cooperate with all health and safety practices imposed by the employer
- Employees have a duty to inform the employer should there be changes in their remote working conditions
- Regular interaction with colleagues should be encouraged and wellness services marketed for any emotional support.

## 12  COMMUNAL WORKING SPACES IN THE OFFICE

Hot desks can be provided for "office days" which will save on office space

## 13  OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORKING

3.1 Perceptions on favouritism

3.1.1  Line managers are encouraged to be objective and utilise the criteria set out in this protocol as the basis of any decision making to eliminate any potential labour relations issues