



EUROPEAN SAFETY WEEK

NATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY FUNCTION (NHSF) • 2023

"SAFE & HEALTHY WORK IN THE DIGITAL AGE" CAMPAIGN 2023 - 2025

BLENDING WORKING IN PRACTICE

Blended working may be a relatively new departure in some areas of the HSE, however the Information and Advisory Team (I&A Team) of the NSHF have been working as a remote team (all being based in various HSE locations nationwide) for over eight years.

The team is made up of eight staff members who work in different HSE locations around the country and have a national role in providing health & safety support and advice to all staff across the HSE.



Mairéad Murray and Erica Irwin
Health and Safety Advisors with the NHSF.

We asked two new members of the Information and Advisory Team to give their thoughts on what it is like to work remotely from their colleagues.

What were the challenges in joining a remote working team?

Well, upon joining the team our main challenge was building a rapport with our new colleagues in terms of getting to know their personalities, personal preferences and ways of working online as well as integrating ourselves to the team.

Using and communicating through WebEx and Microsoft Teams was another challenge. Both platforms work well for remote working but in terms of communication there can be time delays in hearing others speak and it is easy to end up talking over someone! Furthermore when attending an online meeting with a number of people, it can be challenging trying to find the right moment to make your point during the flow of discussion and the inability to see an individual's non-verbal cues adds to this.

Our team also provides information sessions through these platforms with 25 staff members or more from all over the country in attendance. We had both come from organisations where this would have been completed face to face. The difficulty here is encouraging participants to leave their cameras on where they can ask questions and take part in discussions.

Another challenge that became apparent after a few months was the constant use of Display Screen Equipment resulting in lack of task rotation and movement e.g. when working in the same location as your team, you walk to a meeting room versus clicking on a Teams Meeting button. We both had worked in jobs where we were constantly in and out from our desks dealing with health and safety issues on site.



How long did it take to overcome the challenges?

Getting used to using WebEx and Microsoft Teams took a few months, with many moments of "We can't hear you, you are on mute" and "Can you see my shared screen?"!

We got there in the end.

We have been fortunate in joining a very supportive and well-established team that knows and understands the challenges of remote working. Working together one-on-one on projects has allowed us to develop professional relationships with our new colleagues.





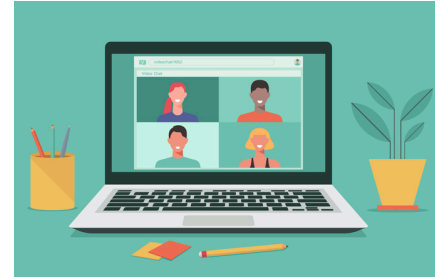
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BLENDING WORKING IN PRACTICE

What has worked well?

The WebEx and Microsoft Teams platforms are used every day, so even though we are working remotely, away from our colleagues we see and talk to each other multiple times a day - it never feels like we are completely on our own.

As the team meets so often, isolation was not a problem, we always felt connected and the culture in the team has a lot to do with this. From the start, it was clear that everyone operated to a high standard of professionalism but at the same time there was always a feeling of comradery and when we needed help and support (which was most days to begin with!) - we just had to pick up the phone. When we do meet in person (even for our first face to face meeting) it's a treat - we feel like we know each other very well and are comfortable working together.



What were the personal benefits?

The remote working aspect of the job has been amazing in terms of work-life balance. It has allowed a move out of Dublin back home to the countryside where it can be difficult to find health and safety jobs in healthcare. Another benefit is the large reduction in hours spent commuting to and from work.

This has allowed for an improved work-life balance e.g. home earlier to have dinner with family, available to bring children to after school activities. There have also been financial savings on tolls, fuel costs and car maintenance.

What advice would you give to potential remote workers?

Remote working is very different to being based in the same building as your team. We would advise to be open to the change and remember that, as with any change it can take time to feel normal.

We would recommend having the correct workstation setup, getting all of the basics right in terms of a having a comfortable office chair, desk and external mouse and keyboard. We found that we naturally moved around more when in the office with our teams than as remote workers so be aware of how sedentary you are throughout the day and then introduce additional movement if needed. Also, make sure to take your breaks and if possible, get some fresh air at lunchtime.

After that get stuck in - connect with the team often, initiate contact through calls and virtual meetings. It's a good idea to work on things with other colleagues in one-on-one meetings outside of full team meetings so that you get to know everyone.

Finally, enjoy! Remote working has brought about a more flexible approach to our jobs and allowed us to work in roles that we love and otherwise would not have been able to do.



CONTACT US



1800 420 420

Monday to Friday

10:30am - 12pm & 2pm - 3.30pm



To log an online request for health and safety information, advice or support please click [here](#).