Energy Networks Overview and Summary COVID-19

Report

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Related documents

References	Website links Government Services and Information – *Coronavirus* (2023) https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus Supporting Occupational Health and Wellbeing Professionals (SOM) *'Developing a COVID-19 secure mental health and wellbeing strategy'* – (2021) https://www.som.org.uk/Developing_a_COVID-19_secure_mental_health_and_wellbeing_strategy.pdf & https://www.som.org.uk/Returning_to_the_workplace_COVID-19_toolkit_FINAL.pdf COVID-19 topic hub | CIPD (2023) https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/work/trends/goodwork/covid-impact What Works Wellbeing '*How cost effective is a workplace wellbeing activity'* (2020) https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/how-cost-effective-is-a-workplace-wellbeing-activity/ CIPD (2023) https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/anxious-returning-workplace Health and Safety Executive (HSE) – Coronavirus (2023) Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Advice for workplaces (hse.gov.uk) & https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 4
About ENA 4
Our members and associates 4
ENA members 4
..... 4
ENA associates 4

COVID-19 2019 5
UK Impact 5

Energy Industry Response 7

Post Pandemic Learning 9

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Introduction

About ENA

Energy Networks Association represents the companies which operate the electricity wires, gas pipes and energy system in the UK and Ireland.

We help our members meet the challenge of delivering electricity and gas to communities across the UK and Ireland safely, sustainably, and reliably.

- Create smart grids, ensuring our networks are prepared for more renewable generation than ever before, decentralised sources of energy, more electric vehicles, and heat pumps. *Learn more about our Open Networks programme.*
- Create the world's first zero-carbon gas grid, by speeding up the switch from natural gas to hydrogen. *Learn more about our Gas Goes Green programme.*
- Innovate. We are supporting over £450m of innovation investment to support customers, connections and more.
- Be safe. We bring our industry together to improve safety and reduce workforce and public injury.
- Manage our networks. We support our members to manage, create and maintain a vast array of electricity codes, standards and regulations which supports the day-to-day operation of our energy networks.

Together, the energy networks are keeping your energy flowing, supporting our economy through jobs and investment and preparing for a net zero future.

Our members and associates

Our members include every major electricity and gas network operator in the UK and Ireland, independent operators, National Grid ESO which operates the electricity system in Great Britain, and National Grid which operates the gas system in Great Britain. Our affiliate membership also includes companies with an interest in energy, including Heathrow Airport and Network Rail.

ENA members

BUUK Infrastructure
Cadent Your Gas Network
electricity north west Bringing energy to your door
ESB NETWORKS
national gas transmission
nationalgrid
nationalgridESO
Northern Gas Networks
Northern Ireland Electricity Networks
NORTHERN POWERGRID
Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
SGN Your gas. Our network.
SP ENERGY NETWORKS
UK Power Networks Delivering your electricity
WALES&WEST UTILITIES

ENA associates

- Chubu
- EEA
- Guernsey Electricity Ltd
- Heathrow Airport
- Jersey Electricity
- Manx Electricity Authority
- Network Rail
- TEPCO

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COVID-19 2019

Emergence

COVID-19 was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. COVID-19 is caused by the virus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), a new virus in humans causing respiratory illness which can be spread from person-to-person. Early in the outbreak, many patients were reported to have a link to a large seafood and live animal market; however, later cases with no link to the market confirmed person-to-person transmission of the disease. Additionally, travel-related exportation of cases occurred.

UK Impact

The UK began to experience challenges from the virus in early 2020, as the disease worked its way across the world, and the first UK transmission of the virus was recorded in February 2020. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom, the UK Government introduced various public health and economic measures to mitigate its impact. Devolution meant that the four nations' administrative responses to the pandemic differed; the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive produced different policies to those that apply in England. Numerous laws were enacted or introduced throughout the crisis.

The UK government had developed a pandemic response plan in previous years. In response to the first confirmed COVID-19 cases in January 2020, the UK introduced advice for travellers coming from affected countries in late January and February 2020, and began contact tracing, although this was later abandoned.

The government incrementally introduced further societal restrictions on the public as the virus spread across the country in the following weeks, initially resisting more stringent measures introduced elsewhere in Europe and Asia. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the first national lockdown in the UK on 23 March 2020 and Parliament introduced the Coronavirus Act 2020, which granted the devolved governments emergency powers and empowered the police to enforce public health measures.

Transmission

There are three main ways that COVID-19 can spread:

1. By breathing in air carrying droplets or aerosol particles that contain the SARS-CoV-2 virus when close to an infected person or in poorly ventilated spaces with infected persons.
2. By having droplets and particles that contain the SARS-CoV-2 virus land on the eyes, nose, or mouth, especially through splashes and sprays like a cough or sneeze.
3. By touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the SARS-CoV-2 virus particles on them.

There are certain circumstances that can increase the risk of infection for COVID-19 such as poorly ventilated space. In indoor spaces with poor ventilation, the concentration of virus particles is often higher than outdoors. Other factors that are associated with increased COVID-19 risk include prolonged exposure to those infected with COVID-19, close contact with infected persons, and any other activity that leads to exposure to a greater number of respiratory droplets and particles.

Symptoms

A wide range of symptoms for COVID-19 have been reported since the pandemic including:

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- New or persistent cough
- Loss of smell or taste
- Headache
- High temperature
- Tiredness/Fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever or chills
- Muscle or body aches
- Anorexia
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion or runny nose
- Diarrhoea
- Nausea

However, there are lots of symptoms people have reported to develop even after a COVID-19 infection, including:

- Problems with your memory and concentration ("brain fog")
- Chest pain or tightness
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- Heart palpitations
- Dizziness
- Pins and needles
- Joint pain
- Depression and anxiety
- Tinnitus, earaches
- Feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- A high temperature, cough, headaches, sore throat, changes to sense of smell or taste
- Rashes

The estimated incubation period is between 2 and 14 days with a median of 5 days.

People at Higher Risk for Severe Illness

COVID-19 is a relatively new disease; therefore, additional risk factors for severe COVID-19 continue to be identified. In some cases, people who get COVID-19 can develop severe complications including difficulty in breathing, causing a need for hospitalisation and intensive care. These severe complications can even lead to death. The risk of severe disease increases steadily as people age and for those of all ages with underlying medical conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease which are conditions that can exacerbate symptoms and increase a person's risk of developing severe COVID-19 compared to those without these conditions.

Most people with COVID-19 feel better within a few days or weeks of their first symptoms and make a full recovery within 12 weeks. For some people symptoms can last longer; this is called long COVID or post COVID-19 syndrome. Long COVID is a new condition which is still being studied.

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Energy Industry Response

The Energy industry needed to respond as many others did to ensure workers were kept safe from COVID-19 which meant ensuring it took embedded principles and learning from reputable bodies including the World Health Organisation, HSE, UK Health Security Agency, and other professional health organisations in real time on every changing management of COVID-19 risk. This included regular interaction with the industry regulators and Government departments such as the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and other devolved administrations.

The focus throughout the pandemic was on ensuring the implementation of necessary control measures to minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the transmission of the disease in occupational settings, the provision of suitable information, instruction, and training for all staff, and ensuring the safe return of staff to the workplaces following and during the national lockdowns that were introduced.

During the height of the pandemic, there was an enduring need to continually interpret evolving Government guidance to determine the optimum adjustments to working practices and for workplace settings, including how best to assist employees in a variety of roles and subject to varying levels of exposure and vulnerability. Successful management of COVID-19 issues has required a combination of controlling the physical environment, sensible and pragmatic guidance, efficient testing regimes, effective management of individual employee needs, and the responsibility of staff themselves to practice self-care strategies and behaviours.

In March 2020, following the first national lockdown, through the Electricity Industry National Health and Safety Committee (HESAC), an industry COVID-19 forum was formed. This forum met initially on a weekly basis providing a platform for all Powering Improvement (PI) stakeholders across the energy sector to engage and share best practice on the management of COVID-19. Since its inception it has been widely referenced by companies that the forum was imperative to delivering safe outcomes during the pandemic and helped companies to remain informed, consistent, and on top of their requirements to manage this new risk.

This forum continued to meet on a frequent basis into 2023. Through the work of this forum, over 140 individual questions had been raised by trade union representatives on behalf of their members with employers on the management of COVID-19; these have all been suitably addressed and provided challenge where it was felt enhanced improvements could be made. As a result of the forum and collaboration between the industry stakeholders, employers and trade unions were able to collectively address these challenges providing reassurance across the sector that robust precautions and control measures were being meticulously thought out and implemented by all member companies so far as was reasonably practicable to protect workers from the risk of transmission at all costs in occupational settings. This included the introduction of an enhanced Risk Assessment for COVID-19 which companies were required to make available on their company websites. As well as introducing COVID-19 risk assessments across all businesses relevant to each specific location, additional measures

were introduced including, increased hygiene controls, social distancing, lower office occupancies and hybrid working measures, isolated and lone working protocols, testing for staff including lateral flow and importantly, health and mental health support services.

It was noted that the HESAC forum also provided a platform for companies to share best practice and learn from one another to implement those controls which would have the most impact. It was also helpful to improve internal engagement and external communication at all levels within each individual member organisation, and in addition the forum enabled all PI stakeholders across the electricity sector to work collaboratively.

Through the collaborative working, several key outputs have been delivered via the COVD-19 forum; this included several joint statements developed by businesses, trade unions, and the regulators providing reassurance to employees working across the sector of the importance of their commitment and dedication as they continually adapted to the changes and challenges faced by the sector. By putting in place effective controls and measures to mitigate the risk, they also provided points of reference for employers and helpful reminders to members of the public on the importance of key critical workers across the electricity sector, who continued working during periods of national lockdown to ensure the flow of energy for the country. The engagement generated by the joint statements also provided an opportunity for staff at all levels and members of the public to communicate and obtain support and advice from the industry. Examples of the joint statements published can be found below:

- **How the UK's energy networks are preparing for COVID-19**
- **Keeping you safe and your energy flowing through COVID-19**
- **Continuing to work safely together during COVID-19**
- **Measures to support vulnerable people through COVID-19**
- **Continuing to work safely during COVID-19**
- **'Watch Out, Cables About!' – a reminder to third parties and Members of Public (MOPs) as lockdown measures were easing across the UK.**
- **Energy networks launch COVID-19 public information campaign – Energy Networks Association (ENA)**

Other examples of outputs that were delivered specifically through the dedicated National HESAC COVID-19 forum included specific briefing packs, which were developed to provide high level overarching guidance for companies to adopt, consider, and communicate when incorporated into their own internal policies and procedures to provide support in the engagement of staff around COVID-19 risk.

These included:

- Principles for Work Delivery during the COVID-19 Pandemic for Energy Networks Association (ENA) Member Companies.
- Guidance on Physical Distancing.
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice and Entry to Customer Premises.
- 'We are all in this together'– A briefing document to support companies in their approach to tackling complacency particularly as advice for social settings were beginning to ease; it was important that employers in occupational settings took a much more cautious approach to removing or reducing control measures put in place throughout COVID-19.

All companies adopted a common and consistent approach to managing the risks of COVID-19 throughout the pandemic and, as the nation gradually reduced its control measures to more of a new 'business as usual' (BAU) model, the companies have continued to cautiously support Government guidance in this regard as the industry continues safeguarding principles

to ensure it continues to work safely. The sector has even looked at principles introduced during the pandemic to promote safer working and have incorporated some practices into BAU wherever possible. This is particularly true for such things as hybrid style working and increased hygiene provisions.

Energy Network Companies and the industry trade unions continue to act vigilantly and are mindful of the impact a rise in cases or another pandemic can have and are prepared to remain agile and able to respond if required.

Post Pandemic Learning

As an industry, having experienced such an event as COVID-19, it's important to undertake a review of how the situation was managed and ensure any significant learning is captured as good practice. This will ensure businesses and the industry are able to respond more succinctly and effectively should another pandemic event take place and the industry is required to respond accordingly.

Principles

There were three key areas required to be in place whether at industry or company level, these were:

1. Governance and Strategic Direction
2. Communication
3. Clear objectives

Ensuring line of sight was maintained with Government guidelines was also noted as being key to uphold during the process of managing occupational risks during the pandemic.

Some key principles can be taken as best practice for all companies to adopt and review on a regular basis. Below is a list of items that following review have been highlighted as key learning points for companies to consider when reviewing and pre-planning for similar future events.

1. *The development of a pandemic 'concept of operations' will assist in managing a cross-industry and multi-agency response, i.e., how Government works with responders agreeing the communicative means to remain abreast of Government advice and to engage sufficiently with the workforce.*

Feedback from many member businesses was the effectiveness of having a suitable, preplanned command service in place that could be deployed for operation and which remained under regular review. This enabled businesses to act quickly and respond effectively when faced with a dynamic challenge and rapidly changing advice.

A **gold–silver–bronze command structure** was a hierarchal structure referred to by businesses which is commonly used for major operations in particular by the emergency services in the United Kingdom. The term strategic–tactical–operational command structure is also used, but the different categories are equivalent. In some cases, the national Government (via the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms) will assume ultimate control and act as a "platinum" level.

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The three roles are not restricted to any rank, though invariably the chain of command will be the same as the order of rank. Whilst the gold–silver–bronze command structure was designed for responding to sudden major incidents, it can also be used for planned operations.

In addition to this, coordinating and sharing best practice and verifying actions prior to implementation with like-minded organisations helps to provide business assurance. Within the Energy Sector, utilising the services of the relevant Trade Bodies is a good starting point however mobilising existing forums to act as industry leads was also seen to be highly effective. For example, the quick mobilisation of the National HESAC COVID-19 forum with leadership endorsement was noted as being highly advantageous for businesses. This includes ensuring representation from Trade Unions and Regulators to maintain transparency and promote collective accountability.

2. *Maintaining consistent, regular, and clear communication channels with all affected persons ensures people are appropriately informed and ensures that responsibility and accountability is clear.*

During COVID-19 the National HESAC industry forum was established and continued to meet on a frequent basis, allowing Trade Unions to raise queries directly with companies to understand what companies were doing in response to guidance updates be that from Government or reputable organisations. It also provided an avenue to liaise with similar organisations to ensure that staff were continually and consistently kept abreast of relevant guidance that was being deployed across the sector.

Some businesses developed a series of channels as a way of ensuring staff at all levels were regularly updated on decisions or policy changes. A good example of this is through a dedicated intranet site that some businesses developed and managed centrally to give regular automated communications to all staff. Coordinated through a central team, this was incorporated with smart telecom systems which allowed businesses to keep in regular contact with teams using electronic devices, so they received regular updates via texts, emails and online briefings wherever they were. This coined with regular team briefings and weekly updates were proven to be the most effective forms of communication during the crisis.

Ensuring there are clear communication channels in place with employees, trade unions, and representatives of employees whilst undertaking a review and implementing changes to address challenges are seen as important by the energy sector; this is also crucial in maintaining contact during a crisis such as a global pandemic.

3. *The introduction of collective policies and frameworks across the industry to assist with the implementation of control measures that are deployed during a pandemic to address existing and emerging risks.*

Look to mobilise cross-industry forums (such as that formed through National HESAC during COVID-19) and indeed local, company level forums to ensure controls can be coordinated and rolled out as effectively as possible. In the early stages it promotes governance and allows for suitable and sensible collaboration between all affected parties to be promoted. This enables tangible deliverables and outcomes to be planned and executed which provides the required influence and benefits everyone. It

also enables tangible actions to be delegated and delivered by responsible individuals or teams, thus ensuring that the controls are put in motion and can be suitably monitored.

4. *An effective response requires capability and capacity to surge services to meet demand. It has been recognised that in response to such events as a pandemic, it is crucial that each business has an action plan in place to ensure critical resources and roles are protected as far as is reasonably practicable.*

Predominantly, businesses operating within the energy sector are fundamental in managing critical national infrastructure to ensure primary commodities are delivered to communities and businesses; this includes national electricity and gas services. In many scenarios these commodities are vital to ensure services are able to be upheld safely to maintain life. For this reason, the energy sector, particularly Generation, Networks and Metering businesses who operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, were consistently offered exemptions for certain roles to ensure minimal disruption.

To ensure the management of resource was maintained during the pandemic, it was critical to ensure that key workers (critical workers) were identified and protected which often meant additional measures were put in place to keep allow them to continue to work.

This is where ensuring that maintaining contact and liaison with central Government is vital to ensure that the roles of key workers are clearly made known and that business gauge Government support to ensure the security of such resources. Otherwise, exemptions from specific regulations that are imposed on the general public and industry to allow them to work would be required.

During COVID-19, National ‘Lockdowns’ prevented people from attending places of work, shops, public spaces, and even visiting homes of friends and relatives. Critical Worker categories were identified and protected by legal pardons to provide essential services to the public during these periods. Workers in the energy sector were provided the same exemptions for certain roles. These included:

- The oil, gas, electricity, and water sectors (including sewerage)
- Information technology and data infrastructure sector, with primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response.
- Key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services)

In addition to this some businesses implemented additional controls for certain individuals in specific roles, which would provide them with additional protection from risks of transmitting the disease in occupational settings, for example isolating control room engineers to specific teams or working ‘bubbles’.

Suitable resourcing is challenging during regular operations, however during the COVID-19 pandemic the risk of resource depletion was an increasingly more likely phenomena particularly where control could only be managed in occupational settings.

Best practice from the businesses included implementing measures through the segregation of individuals and teams as well as social distancing measures not just for critical roles. This coincided with putting specific measures in place to limit person-to-person contact within teams. This includes but is not limited to:

- Departmental segregation into teams with an equivalent number of personnel and skill mix
- Social distancing guidelines for all tasks and activities
- Separate control rooms and operating teams to be working in isolation
- Separating personnel caring for suspected or diagnosed COVID-19 patients from those providing routine care
- Shift or rotation system

It is also important to recognise that, although it is difficult to manage the behaviour of workers in social settings, promoting similar controls to staff that are required in occupational settings via regular campaigns and briefings also proved to support risk management of COVID-19 transmission.

Roles and responsibilities of individuals may be required to change and adapt as required to ensure actions are implemented effectively. This may mean that preplanning should consider contractual changes for certain employees to accommodate any dynamic changes in their roles required for support during significant events.

Examples included increased individual interactions with teams, changes in shift patterns to accommodate new shifts to maintain supplies and accepting additional responsibilities.

It is also imperative that early communication of any required changes or potential changes are flagged in advance and that employees are sufficiently consulted.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the above controls proved to be very affective and supported worker safety in occupational settings. It is however very important to recognise that the controls, particularly surrounding social segregation, whilst reducing one risk can introduce other risks particularly around debilitating the mental health of individuals. Another area of good practice identified is to maintain levels of social interaction through other means, whether virtual or through regular phone contacts.

5. *Provisions for Mental Health during the pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many changes to how people live, work, and how they carry out their daily routines. In addition to this, it created a number of other concerns for the general population including financial pressures and social isolation.

This had a significant impact on people's mental health and wellbeing with cases of stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and loneliness increased across society.

Surveys show a major increase in the number of UK adults who reported symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia during the pandemic, compared with surveys before the pandemic. Some people have increased their use of alcohol or drugs, thinking that can help them cope with their fears about the pandemic. In reality, using these substances can worsen levels of anxiety and depression.

Organisations are facing many challenges in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their staff during and now after the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst also being mindful of and new or emerging crises. These include helping people manage changing working patterns and practices, ensuring that key transitions (such as returning to on-site working) are handled safely and sensitively, supporting people with caring responsibilities, and how best to monitor and support the wellbeing of the workforce during such challenging times. To respond to a pandemic style crisis and indeed post-COVID conditions, organisations are encouraged to review their existing health and wellbeing strategies and incorporate new initiatives.

Consider these five simple steps to reviewing your wellbeing strategy.

1. Obtain information on the demographics of your company and the provision and utilisation of current employee benefits. Consider whether your current policies and procedures are fit for purpose in supporting health and wellbeing during a pandemic and beyond.

2. Ask your employees.

3. Design your strategy.

4. Launch your programme.

5. Evaluate and refine your programme.

The HSE supports organisations to take a strategic approach to employee wellbeing, by providing a toolkit to prevent, assess, and manage work-related stress. The key causes of work-related stress are defined within the Management Standards:

Demands e.g., workload, patterns of work and the working environment.

Control e.g., how much say employees have in the way they do their work.

Support e.g., the encouragement and resources provided by managers and colleagues.

Role e.g., whether people understand their role within the organisation.

Relationships e.g., avoiding conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour such as bullying.

Change e.g., how organisations manage change and how well this is communicated.

It is also important as individuals to build resilience, and this can be supported by developing ‘self-care strategies’ to help take charge of your mental and physical health. Firstly, be mindful about your physical health:

- Get enough sleep.
- Participate in regular physical activity.
- Eat healthily.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.
- Limit screen time.
- Relax and recharge. Set aside time for yourself.

Consider your mental health and reduce stress triggers:

- Keep to your regular routine.
- Limit exposure to news media.
- Stay busy. Healthy distractions can get you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression.
- Focus on positive thoughts.
- Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.
- Set priorities.

Build support and strengthen relationships:

- Make connections.
- Do something for others.
- Support a family member or friend.

6. *Proactive Implementation of Preventative Actions*

As the world was getting to grips with how to safely manage the pandemic and limit transmission, including understanding national Government requirements and World Health Organization standards, there were simple basic measures that companies could and should have adopted in the first instance.

Vaccination

Getting vaccinated is a preventative measure that people can take to avoid illness and are the most effective way to prevent infectious diseases including COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccinations were only made available well into the pandemic when the disease had already affected much of the global population. Vaccines can be heavily promoted and encouraged, however during the pandemic it was also noted that, however effective, not all people wished to be inoculated for a variety of reasons, and as such deploying a sense of understanding is important. The promotion to take vaccines can be proactive and encouraging, however they should not be forced upon individuals.

While safe and effective vaccines are a great tool for prevention, it is important to note that not all known diseases and illnesses can be inoculated against and as such it is important to continue to employ other preventative actions. For airborne diseases such as COVID-19 measures such as wearing masks, performing hand hygiene, physically distancing from

others, and avoiding crowded spaces and spaces with poor ventilation have proved to be effective controls.

Other preventative actions

Ventilation – ensuring it is suitable, adequate, maintained etc.

Hygiene - Promoting good hygiene practices all year round. This should include a regular review of welfare arrangements and available facilities for all staff.

Engagement and communication - The importance of communication and reinforcement through signage, posters, guidance docs, bulletins, H&S alerts etc.

Personal Protective Equipment provisions – Supply provisions and the removal and management of hazardous waste etc.,

7. *Adapting to new ways of working*

AS a result of COVID-19, many ways of working and practices that were adopted to mitigate and manage transmission risk have since been adopted as business as usual in occupational settings. It's important to capture the practices that add value and improve business productivity whilst managing them and considering any new risks that these new practices may introduce. A control that has very much became common practice in many industries post COVID-19 is the practice of 'working from home'.

It is commonly reported that now around a third of workers in the UK alone are currently homeworking or have the ability to do so due to COVID-19. Homeworking is set to continue, as many employers and staff are recognising the benefits. Many organisations are considering and have now introduced a 'hybrid' pattern, where on-site working is combined with homeworking. Organisations have a duty of care to provide a safe place of work, so risk assessments are crucial for homeworkers whether these are temporary or permanent arrangements. As well as recognising the benefits of new ways of working, it's important that employers manage the risks accordingly, for example consider:

- How to keep in touch with them
- What work activities will they be doing (and for how long)?
- Can these work activities be done safely?
- Do you need to put control measures in place to protect them?

The HSE highlights the risks of work-related stress, social isolation, and physical complaints such as upper limb disorders for homeworkers and provides guidance on how employers should protect them. Other guidelines on health and safety for remote workers and useful checklists are available on the HSE website.

8. *Continual monitoring and reviewing of systems are critical for ensuring consistency and compliance, but importantly ensuring measures are effective.*

A common pillar that many businesses fail to fully consider as part of any Plan, Do, Check, Act approach to managing risk is the requirement to Act; namely to take action based on what you learned in the study step. In addition to the work undertaken at an industry level through National HESAC during COVID-19, it was important to undertake a review of how we responded as an industry.

The HESAC Forum was an effective way of regularly reviewing measures implemented during the pandemic. Continuous monitoring is the process used to detect compliance and risk issues associated with an organisation's financial and operational environment. Throughout the pandemic, as measures were introduced, there was a significant increase in the number of assurance and compliance audits being undertaken by companies. It was imperative that the audits were recorded, and any non-compliance was acted upon to ensure the effectiveness of any controls. Compliance by staff across the sector was generally exemplary, however the continuous monitoring also enabled companies to adjust their measures to make them more practical in practice. The financial and operational environment consists of people, processes, and systems working together to support efficient and effective operations; this can only be achieved through effective engagement and as such maintaining channels to review information is an effective way to secure improvement.

Case Studies

An example of some of the initiatives developed during COVID-19 to support staff is from **UK Power Networks (UKPN)** who developed a suite of toolkits available to all staff via a dedicated COVID-19 intranet site. This included such items as an 'Operational Toolkit' providing all field employees access to helpful resources which could be accessed to support operatives to conduct their daily tasks safely and gave access to the most relevant and up to date information in real-time. In addition to this UKPN also developed an 'employee toolkit', 'manager toolkit', 'working well toolkit', a 'working from home toolkit' and 'blended working policy'. The latter was developed to aid employees who were having to work from home or other temporary locations away from their regular base, providing easy to understand support and advice and access to a formal assessment which needed to be carried out to ensure staff were working in a suitable working environment. This also supported staff as restrictions were easing and a gradual introduction to occupational environments were taking place across the business. In addition to these, a helpline and information section was made available covering a frequently asked questions page (FAQs), a position on caring responsibilities, equality impact, escalation processes and COVID-19 response plans.

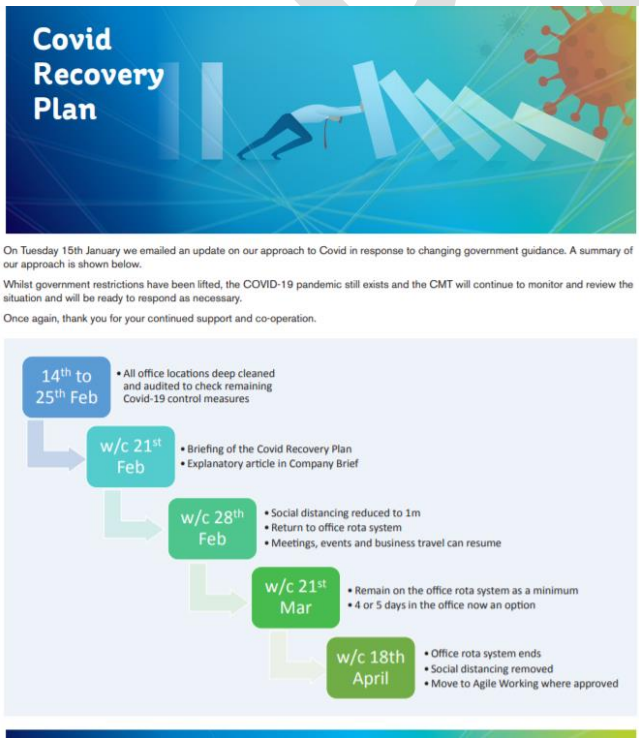
Most of this work involved frequent and consistent engagement with employees at all levels to provide support and advice wherever necessary. The engagement was for all levels of staff including regular updates from the Chief Executive Officer, Basil Scarcella, who conducted

‘weekly video updates’ involving individual discussions with staff across the business through the ‘Basil Chats’ initiative.

During the pandemic, colleagues needing to work from home on a semi-permanent basis often involved looking after children who were also away from their school environments. **UKPN** supported staff in these scenarios with the flexibility to conduct their work to suit their personal needs and created channels to communicate and share best practice with other colleagues within the business such as setting up a ‘Home Schooling Support Group’ via Yammer.

Like many companies during the pandemic, crisis management response groups were set up and coordinated to facilitate the management of change throughout the pandemic as guidance across the UK changed frequently and rapidly. In order to support these changes, companies were developing road maps and response or recovery plans that were provided staff with a sense of direction of what to expect for the coming weeks or months across the business. **Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN)** were no different as their internal Crisis Management Team (CMT) met on a frequent basis. Based on best available guidance and advice throughout the sector and the nation, including feedback from internal audits, risk assessments and reviewing community inaction rates, COVID Recovery Plans were introduced and communicated to staff on a frequent basis. These plans set out a guide for controls, mitigations, restrictions, and phases that were being implemented or removed across the business in a simple, timebound, step by step style, which enabled all staff to monitor and maintain a level of consistency.
To complement this, a summary of the approach was also developed for each step to provide further detail and guidance including regular briefing packs and updates available online, communicated over email and briefed out to staff.

Examples of these are provided below.



Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN)

operating area covered all UK and ROI during the pandemic, this presented an additional challenge as the Government guidance was different in every jurisdiction and changed frequently. To ensure the business stayed within the law, a team of people were committed to monitoring and interpreting the guidance. Regular **SSE** Group Gold & Business Silver Command meetings were set up and an introduction of specific HR process for reporting actual and suspected cases of COVID-19 developed to monitor any hotspots. Introduction of a 'Ways of Working group' was also successful (with representatives from HR, trade unions, key business operational stakeholders, and the SHE Team) to look at effective ways of working whilst maintaining the company's ability to meets its regularity obligations.

Throughout the pandemic, most companies were beginning to learn a lot about remote working around how staff can communicate and operate, and also the positive impacts on people from a 'work/life balance perspective' including how much can be achieved with less travel barriers. It was also realised however that there is significant value in maintaining good levels of 'face to face' interactions. **SSE**s 'Ways of Working' group has worked hard to capture and embed these lessons into its new ways of working post pandemic. **SSEN**s SHE Team also reviewed its Safety Management System to embed pandemic learnings into the appropriate sections, and a group wide Safety Health and Environment (SHE) COVID-19 guidance booklet was developed and regularly reviewed and updated by a nominated small team. This helped reduce the need for separate business unit guidance, which was consulted on and worked upon jointly with trade union colleagues.

During the whole pandemic to date there have been very few occasions that any critical company operation was close to being adversely impacted by positive/close contact self-isolation. At times when the industry was approaching critical levels, it was able to plan in advance and able to implement early contingencies.

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