An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

Aonad Comhionannais na Státseirbhíse,	Civil Service Equality Unit,	Telephone: 353-1-676 7571
15 Sráid Haiste Íocht.,	15 Lower Hatch Street,	Facsimile: 353-1-639 6250
Baile Átha Cliath 2,	Dublin 2,	LoCall: 1890 66 10 10
Eire.	Ireland.	VPN: 109
		http://www.irlgov.ie/finance

E109/157/00

21 January 2003

Circular 4/2003: Pilot schemes to promote e-working in the Civil Service

Introduction

1.   This Circular advises Departments of the Government's policy on e-working or teleworking in the Civil Service and requests them to assess the possible introduction of such working arrangements on a pilot basis.

2.   The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) commits the Government to introduce teleworking options into mainstream public service employment by 2002 [Framework IV - Para. 22].   The PPF also commits the Government to ensure that "all publicly-funded organisations will develop a teleworking policy for implementation by 2002". In April 2000, the Government approved a Code of Practice on teleworking, or e-working. [The Code is entitled 'e-working in Ireland' and is available from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and on its web site at www.entemp.ie/e-work.] The Government also decided that Ministers would consider ways of encouraging these new methods of working within their Departments and agencies. The Code of Practice has been endorsed by the social partners and was launched by the Minister for Science, Technology and Commerce.

3.   Teleworking or e-working uses information and communication technology to allow work to be carried out independently of location. Teleworking arrangements can include working;

- *from home or a remote office, either full-time or part-time,*
- *part-time at home and part-time in the office, or*
- *outside the home or office and communicating with the office by means of computer or telephone technology.*

4.   Teleworking can bring substantial benefits for both management and staff. For management, the efficient introduction of e-working can reduce overheads, increase productivity and improve the retention of staff. For staff, e-working can improve the balance

between work and other aspects of life. It can also give people with a disability better access to employment. Increased e-working could also bring significant economic and social benefits by reducing traffic congestion and the demand for public transportation.

Development of e-working Plans

5.   Some Departments are already operating informal or ad hoc teleworking arrangements to meet the needs of individual members of staff or to accommodate types of work that are particularly suited to teleworking. For example, Departments may, from time to time, request individual part-time staff to telework in order to complete a project; other Departments with staff who work away from the office for significant periods, may encourage teleworking to increase efficiency.

6.   In accordance with Government policy, Departments are now asked to consider developing a policy to promote the wider implementation of e-working in the Civil Service. Departments are therefore requested to carry out an initial assessment of the potential for e-working in their organisations. In view of the importance of the Government policy on e-working, all Departments are asked to carry out this assessment, even in cases where it may seem at first, that the nature of the work involved might not lend itself to e-working. Experience suggests that, with recent developments in information and communication technology, e-working is now possible in a wide range of employments.

7.   **If the preliminary assessments indicate that there are opportunities for the development of e-working which management considers suitable, Departments should then draw up a plan for the introduction of teleworking on a pilot basis.** The plan should, among other things, indicate:

- *the number of e-working posts which will be available,*
- *the annual budget which will be allocated to the initiative,*
- *the areas of the organisation or the types of work which are considered suitable for e-working,*
- *eligibility criteria for e-working staff,*
- *the general working arrangements which will be put in place, including hours of work, management/staff reporting procedures, and security and confidentiality,*
- *the procedures for ending or suspending the e-working arrangement, and*
- *the duration of the pilot e-working scheme; in most cases, such pilot schemes should be for a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 3 years.*

The plan should be discussed with the Civil Service unions, discussed through Partnership and/or at the Departmental Council and agreed at the Departmental Council. Departmental management should then consider requesting applications from staff in accordance with the general guidelines presented in the e-working plan.

8.   It is essential that the plan sets out clear aims and procedures for the introduction of e-working for the guidance of both management and staff. It is particularly important that general procedures for handling unforeseen changes in any aspect of the arrangement are agreed between management and staff.

9.   Departments are advised in particular that the Code of Practice suggests that a formal written agreement be signed by the staff member, which clearly sets out the terms and

conditions of the new working arrangements and the responsibilities which are attached to it. Departments are requested to make such an agreement a requirement for staff who e-work. In drawing up the Departmental policy on e-working, draft agreements should be discussed with the Civil Service unions, discussed through Partnership and/or the Departmental Council and agreed at the Departmental Council. The agreement may need to be adapted from time to time, to take account of changing circumstances and, in particular, if e-working is introduced into different areas of the Department. [Appendix 1 includes an outline e-working agreement drawn from the Code of Practice.]

10.   All initial teleworking schemes will be on a pilot basis, lasting for a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 3 years. Departmental plans and the agreements with individual staff members should set out the procedures for the termination of Departmental or individual e-working arrangements. Procedures for the termination of the e-working arrangements by either management or staff must be specified in the agreements with staff members. In particular, it should be made clear to staff that there can be no guarantee of a continuation of any e-working arrangement beyond the period of the pilot programme.

11.   **It is essential that Departmental management ensure that the introduction of e-working is at the sole discretion of management in the light of the operational needs of the organisation. Management must therefore have the final decision on both the introduction of e-working into particular areas of Departments, and on all applications for participation in e-working. Management must also have the right to terminate e-working arrangements should this be required in the light of the operational needs of the organisation.**

12.   Pilot schemes run by Departments will be reviewed in 2005. In the light of that review consideration will be given to the further development of e-working arrangements in Government Departments.

Management Implications

13.   Departments should familiarise themselves with the Code of Practice, which covers all the main managerial and other issues that need to be taken into account in developing e-working.

14.   It is essential for the successful operation of e-working, that Departments consider the suitability of both the work involved and the staff who will be e-working.

15.   Clearly, work which involves a substantial amount of information processing, has well defined products, and relatively lower requirements for supervision, may be particularly suitable for e-working. However, Departments should not limit their assessment to such types of work. Rather than introduce e-working across a number of areas, some Departments may wish to consider the possibility of concentrating all or most e-working posts in one or more sections and making management arrangements accordingly. Staff who wish to e-work would then be transferred to those sections.

16.   It is also important for Departments to ensure that staff are individually suited to e-working. Depending on the nature of the work, staff who have, for instance, decision-making and problem-solving skills, experience with information technology, and the ability to cope with a reduced level of social contact may be particularly suited to e-working. The reporting

procedures between e-working staff and line management must also be carefully considered and set down in the formal agreement. Management should agree appropriate periods of attendance in the head office for e-working staff. The agreements should also specify what arrangements will be made in respect of attendance by e-working staff at the head office for meetings.

17.   Departments should ensure that the opportunity to e-work is open to as wide a range of staff as possible, taking into account the need to maintain the efficiency of the organisation.

18.   Staff opting for teleworking must have successfully completed their probation or the one year assessment contract following appointment. Departments will need to consider, in consultation with the Civil Service Staff Unions, as appropriate, what other service conditions may be required.

19.   Departments must also take account of the fact that e-working can place particular demands on management and should, therefore, give special consideration to the selection of managers who will be responsible for e-working staff. Line managers must be able to ensure that work is carried out efficiently and to the required standards.

Cost Implications

20.   **In developing their plans, Departments must take full account of the cost implications of the introduction of e-working. Departments must draw up an annual budget for the pilot programme and put in place appropriate procedures to monitor and control expenditure. In view of the constraints on public expenditure, spending on e-working must be managed within existing administrative budgets.**

21.   It is essential that Departments consider proposals for pilot e-work programmes from the point of view of obtaining value for public money. Expenditure should be kept to a minimum. Nonetheless, considerable additional expenditure could arise from purchasing items which will be additional to the existing stock of equipment and furniture already owned by Departments. Departments must consider the benefits gained by e-working in the light of the additional costs being incurred. Every effort must be made to reduce costs where accommodation and equipment is freed by the introduction of e-working arrangements for staff.

22.   Depending on the nature of the work and the number and distribution of e-working staff, Departments must be aware that there are a number of items from which significant expenditure may arise in a pilot programme:

- *purchase or lease of personal computers, printers, fax machines, telephones*
- *rental or leasing of data lines*
- *purchase or lease of office furniture and other equipment such as filing cabinets*
- *security measures*
- *maintenance and technical support*
- *insurance; in certain circumstances it may be necessary for the person e-working to acquire a special home insurance policy.*

4

These and other issues are discussed in more detail in the Code of Practice. The Departmental plan must identify what items are considered necessary and appropriate to allow the pilot programme to proceed. The plan should also set out the total expenditure involved and the level of expenditure to be allocated to individual items. The plan and the agreements with individual staff should set out the full liability of the Department and the e-working staff member. The agreements with staff should also make clear that ownership of all equipment or furniture being provided remains the property of the Department. Suitable arrangements for the reimbursement of private use of equipment must also be considered by Departments as part of the agreement with staff.

23. Before entering into any agreement with individual staff members, Departments must carry out a full assessment of the technical implications of the proposed e-working arrangements. Professional advice may be needed. Departments must also ensure that the arrangements are as flexible as possible, in particular, that any equipment purchased or leased can be used for other purposes if the agreed e-working arrangements do not continue.

24. No allowance will be paid to e-working staff. The accommodation allowance [letter to Personnel Officers, 27 July 1993, E105/5/82 refers] will not be paid to staff as part of the arrangements for e-working. Where it is agreed that certain costs, in relation to security, insurance or any other items, have to be met by a Department in order to permit an e-working arrangement to proceed, these costs must be fully vouched in accordance with normal accounting procedures.

25. No entitlement to travel and subsistence payments will arise for teleworking staff which would not arise if those staff continued to work at headquarters. That is, home for teleworking staff will not be designated as headquarters for the periods during which they are teleworking and any journeys from home to headquarters will not carry an entitlement to travel and subsistence payments.

Other Issues

26. Departments should take account of any tax or PRSI implications arising from the proposed e-working arrangements.

27. It is also important that Departments consider the implications of e-working arrangements in the light of their responsibilities as employers. Departments retain a certain duty of care for e-working staff. It may therefore be necessary for Departments to carry out a health and safety risk assessment on the premises that will be used for e-working. Departments may need to take account of this risk assessment in drawing up agreements with e-working staff. The Code of Practice offers guidance on these issues.

Mise le Meas,

Joe McGovern

Assistant Secretary

Appendix: Outline e-working agreement

This outline agreement is most effective in conjunction with an agreed, detailed Departmental policy on e-working.

- **Name**

- **Address** at which e-working will mostly be performed

- **Hours of work**: This should specify office-based time, home-based time, arrangements for the recording of working time and overtime, etc.

- **Communication/Reporting arrangements**: Core contact times, team meetings, reporting, supervision

- **Home office arrangements**

  - technical requirements
  - provision of equipment and furniture
  - maintenance and technical support
  - personal use of equipment/ prevention of misuse
  - insurance
  - health and safety issues

- **Training**

- **Security and confidentiality arrangements**

- **Procedures for termination or suspension of e-working**: This should specify the circumstances in which the agreement can be terminated. Particular attention should be given to procedures governing e-working in the event of the transfer or promotion of the staff member involved, or a change in the nature of the post involved.

- **Monitoring and review**