

What to consider when starting up in a shared workspace

Shared workspaces are usually office based environments housing a number of different small businesses. These environments can provide desk, office or studio space and often include facilities such as lighting, heating and broadband in the rent. Generally, shared workspaces are short-term lets, giving a new business flexibility to expand or move on to other premises. A business can also potentially benefit from being close to other businesses through the sharing of experience, skills, information and possibly even customers and suppliers.

If you're thinking of moving into a shared workspace there are a number of things to consider.

Work through the actions below. Tick them off as you do each one (or cross out the ones that don't apply).

- ☐ Identify your major reason for wanting to make the move. This will enable you to recognise the best option for you. For example you might want to save money or need more space or better facilities.
- ☐ Decide whether you need full-time use of business premises or not.
- ☐ Contact commercial estate agents, surveyors and other organisations that can help you find a suitable business property, such as trade associations or your local council.
- ☐ Check whether you could rent a meeting room in a local business or conference centre if you only need business premises every now and again.
- ☐ Consider whether a virtual office arrangement might be an option. This gives you a range of services like a business address and telephone number, a professional telephone answering service and mail forwarding.
- ☐ Find out whether your business is eligible for use of any specialist business growth facilities available in your area. These include business incubation environments, science and technology parks, and business technology centres.
- ☐ Produce a cashflow forecast to work out what you can afford.
- ☐ Contact commercial estate agents, surveyors and other organisations that can help you find a suitable business property, such as trade associations or your local council.
- ☐ Identify suitable premises and make sure their size, location, facilities and cost is appropriate.
- ☐ Check that the location meets your requirements. You'll need to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each location. For example, an inner city site may be desirable, but more expensive. An out-of-town business park may be cheaper but less accessible. Consider locations near similar businesses, or with easy access to transport links.

- ☐ Conduct market research to check out footfall - will the space be big enough for the expected amount of customers?
- ☐ Check that the premises are equipped with all the facilities and utilities you need - for example, three-phase electricity or fast broadband internet access.
- ☐ If you're renting serviced office accommodation, check the range of services included in the package - do you need them all? If not, you might be able to negotiate a lower fee.
- ☐ Find out what type of business you'll be sharing the premises with. Think about whether there would be any scope for teaming up and sharing costs with any of them.
- ☐ Consider the security issues for the business, such as shared access, locks, shutters, CCTV, alarms and crime reports.
- ☐ Get professional help with the contract and other legal matters. Make sure you're clear about the terms and conditions of your agreement.
- ☐ Confirm the responsibilities of each of the businesses occupying the premises, for example fire drills, entry keypad and other security procedures, waste disposal and cleaning.
- ☐ Estimate what your ongoing premises costs will be, for example rent and service charges, business rates, utilities and telecoms bills, repairs and maintenance.