

## **Hybrid Working- Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q1. What is Hybrid Working?**

Hybrid Working is a non-contractual, locally agreed, flexible working arrangement which, subject to business needs, blends working from: (i) your designated workplace, (ii) other work or remote locations; or (iii) home. Hybrid working by its blended nature requires you to attend your workplace for part of each working week. The term 'workplace' is used throughout to indicate your designated office, or other work, or remote location (other than your home) as specifically agreed by line management.

### **Q2. What are the business needs which should be considered?**

When considering business needs in respect of Hybrid Working arrangements, senior management at Grade 7 (or analogous), in addition to local and branch matters, should also consider the wider business needs at divisional, directorate or departmental level.

### **Q3. Is Hybrid Working optional or mandatory?**

Hybrid working is optional. Under the Hybrid Working policy, no one will be required to work remotely, and staff will be able to attend their designated workplace each day if they prefer.

### **Q4. Who is eligible to request Hybrid Working?**

All permanent, fixed-term employees, agency workers and those seconded to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) are eligible to apply for hybrid working.

### **Q5. Do I have to attend my workplace every week?**

Hybrid working is subject to a workplace minimum attendance requirement this means that you are required to attend the workplace at least 40% of your contractual working hours per week. If you work an alternative working pattern, your workplace attendance requirement will be calculated on a pro-rata basis. Where attendance is calculated on a pro-rata basis and is less than 3hrs 45mins per week, the calculation may be based on a two-week basis.

### **Q6. Can I attend the workplace for less than 40% of my contractual working hours each week?**

Everyone is required to attend the workplace for a minimum of 40% of their contracted hours each week.

The workplace attendance requirement strikes the appropriate balance between the benefits realised from workplace attendance to the business, such as more effective team working, communication, increased informal learning, development collaboration, and the benefits that come from working from home or remote location to staff, such as reduced commuting time, travel costs and an improved work-life balance.

### **Q7. How will my hybrid working arrangement be determined?**

Your hybrid working arrangement will be determined by completing a Workstyle Agreement which will be agreed with your line manager. You will be required to attend the workplace at least 40% of your contracted working hours. However, to maintain service delivery within your business area, the workplace attendance requirement may be higher.

The workplace attendance required will be determined by senior management responsible for your business area. This will be communicated to your line manager before your hybrid working meeting. Line managers and staff should make every effort to reach agreement and have a Workstyle Agreement completed.

While your line manager will as far as possible, try to accommodate your work preferences, requests must be considered in a fair and consistent manner. If you have an existing reasonable adjustment which impacts on your workplace attendance, this will continue to be reflected in your Workstyle Agreement.

#### **Q8. How do I make a Hybrid Working request?**

You should make your request to your line manager via HRConnect Self-Service and the APEX FACES option. Where HRConnect Self-Service is not available, you should complete a downloadable Workstyle Agreement form which is available on the Employee Service Portal (ESP).

In addition, you must also complete a Homeworking DSE Checklist and a Homeworking General H&S Checklist. To support this, departments have developed general risk and DSE homeworking checklists which are available to download from departmental intranet sites.

#### **Q9. I have a Workstyle Agreement under the previous policy. Do I need a new Workstyle Agreement?**

All staff who work a hybrid working pattern will now be required to complete and agree a new Workstyle Agreement.

The hybrid working request process has been streamlined. All staff with access to HRConnect should agree their new Workstyle Agreement with their line manager via the APEX FACES option.

The Abridged Workstyle Agreement option has been removed to simplify the request process, with one Workstyle Agreement form to be used by all staff. Those staff who do not work a hybrid pattern due to their job role, business need or personal preference, will no longer have to complete a Workstyle Agreement.

## **Q10. What guidance is available on hybrid working?**

The Hybrid Working Policy, Procedures and FAQs provide further information and are available on the [Employee Services Portal](#). The Policy includes key principles underpinning the operation of hybrid working in the NICS. It will ensure a more consistent approach requiring a minimum workplace attendance requirement for all staff, aligned with a broad framework, which individual Departments and workplaces can adapt to business need and local demand.

The Procedures and FAQs provide staff and managers will more detail on hybrid working. It has been developed to accompany the policy and to help all staff with its operational application. It will help you, your line manager and senior management to consider the suitability of your role for hybrid working and agree working arrangements that best suit the business and, as far as possible, your own work preferences.

A Hybrid Working Learning bundle is available including a short explainer video, which you can access via [LInKS Toolkits](#). Should you have any queries or require further information, please contact HRConnect in the first instance.

## **Q11. How long will a hybrid working request take to process?**

Line managers should acknowledge receipt of the Workstyle Agreement request within five working days and should arrange to discuss the request and how the workplace attendance requirement will be implemented with the requesting member of staff within 10 working days of receipt of the request. The line manager must confirm the outcome decision in writing, within five working days of your discussion.

When your request has been agreed, your Workstyle Agreement will set out the commencement date, the days for workplace and home attendance and will confirm your designated workplace.

## **Q12. What happens if I do not agree with the decision on my Workstyle Agreement?**

If you feel that your request has not been considered fairly and consistently, you may appeal the decision. The appeals procedure for NICS staff is set out in [HR policy 6.12 Uniform Appeals](#).

If an agency worker does not agree with the workplace arrangements, they should use their Agency's complaints process to raise their concern(s). The Agency will consider and liaise with the business area as required.

### **Q13. How often should a Workstyle Agreement be reviewed?**

Hybrid working arrangements and workstyle agreements should be reviewed at least annually or where:

- a relevant change occurs, such as a change in business needs;
- a request for a reasonable adjustment is made;
- the requirements of the job role changes;
- the member of staff requests a change to the operation of hybrid working;
- there is a change in management structure; and
- the member of staff moves to a new NICS post.
- a performance management requirement is identified.

### **Q14. If I move to a new post, can I retain my existing Workstyle Agreement?**

No, your existing Workstyle Agreement may not be suitable for your new job role. You will have to agree a new Workstyle Agreement with your line manager.

### **Q15. I am now working from home three days per week, has my designated office changed?**

No, your designated office will not change as a result of time spent working from home or remotely.

### **Q15. Can I work from other remote locations other than my home?**

Yes, you may work from other work or remote locations if specifically agreed with your line manager. There are a number of Connect2 hubs across the region which may be utilised for team meetings or to provide an ad hoc remote location. Connect2 hubs are not designed for long-term lone working; do not replace your

designated office or workplace and should only be used on an exceptional basis subject to business need and your line manager's agreement.

#### **Q16. Where should Workstyle Agreements be stored?**

The HR Connect APEX-FACES option enables most staff to enter their workstyle Agreements directly onto the system therefore there will be no requirement to store a hard copy.

NICS industrial staff and agency workers without access to HRConnect should complete a downloadable Workstyle Agreement form to enable their line manager to process their request.

Line managers must store Workstyle Agreements in a secure manner. whilst they consider the request, in accordance with their departmental Records Management policy.

Workstyle Agreements for agency workers should be sent to their relevant Agency using the below e-mail addresses:

- The Recruitment Co - [nicshybridworking@therecruitmentco.uk](mailto:nicshybridworking@therecruitmentco.uk)
- CPL - [nics-registrations@cpl-ni.com](mailto:nics-registrations@cpl-ni.com)
- Staffline - [nics@staffline.co.uk](mailto:nics@staffline.co.uk)
- Hays - [NICSjobs@hays.com](mailto:NICSjobs@hays.com).

All Workstyle Agreements held, in either electronic form (on outlook) or in hardcopy, must be disposed of securely, once the request has been processed, by deleting electronic copies and shredding or placing any hardcopies in a confidential secure waste bin.

Further information on handling personal data can be found within the Hybrid Working Procedures on the Employee Services Portal.

#### **Q17. What counts as workplace attendance?**

All time spent either working in offices or travelling on official business (not from home to workplace), counts towards workplace attendance.

This includes;

- your designated workplace
- other work or remote locations
- your home

The term 'workplace' is used throughout to indicate your designated office, or where it is necessary to conduct official business, another work or remote location (other than your home) as agreed by line management

#### **Q18. As an Agency worker, will the workplace attendance requirement apply to me?**

Yes, agency workers are expected to attend the workplace in line with the requirements of NICS employees.

#### **Q19. Can I work hybrid working as a reasonable adjustment to help manage my disability?**

The existing process to request reasonable adjustments remains unchanged. Reasonable adjustments will continue to be carefully considered and managed on a case-by-case basis.

[Your line managers is fully aware of the legal requirement regarding consideration of reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.](#)

For information on how to request a reasonable adjustment, please see the [Referrals & Interventions User guide](#), the [Reasonable Adjustment intranet page](#), and the [Reasonable Adjustment Application Form and Agreement](#) available on the Employee Services Portal.

**Q20. How does the workplace attendance requirement apply to carers and childcare?**

Hybrid working is not a substitute for suitable care or formal caring or childcare arrangements. If you have dependents that need to be looked after during your contracted working hours (whether you are working at home or in the office), then appropriate care arrangements should be put in place to cover the time when you are working.

For further information see the [Alternative and Flexible working policy](#) and the [NICS Supporting Carers Guide](#).

**Q21. Will I need to record my attendance at the workplace?**

There is no requirement to record your attendance at the workplace. Managers may ask their staff to keep a record of their attendance, if there are concerns whether staff are meeting the workplace attendance expectation for their business area. Managers should consider if there are any existing reasonable adjustments in place, which impact on the staff member's workplace attendance.

**Q22. Will my workplace attendance be monitored?**

Your line manager has a duty of care for their staff and it is reasonable for them to know where you are working on any given day, so they may ask you to provide information on where you are working and when.

**Q23. I am worried that I will be unable to afford the increased travel costs, due the workplace attendance requirement. What can I do?**

It is a reasonable requirement for you to attend the workplace in line with the terms of employment. If you are concerned about the cost of living and you experience financial hardship, you should talk to your line manager about the support available.

There are various sources of support including [season ticket advance](#), [cycle to work scheme](#) on the Employee Services Portal.

The [Employee Assistance Programme](#) offers a wide range of support to staff including confidential advice on personal, social or work-related problems. The [Charity for Civil Servants](#) also offers financial support services. Your line manager can provide you with further information and support.

#### **Q24. How do I manage a member of staff who is failing to maintain their workplace attendance requirement.**

As a manager, asking your staff to attend their contractual workplace is a reasonable management request. You must advise them that if they fail to attend the workplace in accordance with their workplace attendance requirement (unless they have an agreed reasonable adjustment or caring arrangement in place), disciplinary procedures may be instigated.

Line managers are encouraged to address any non-attendance through informal action in the first instance. This means discussing the refusal to maintain the workplace attendance requirement with the staff member, advising them of why it is not appropriate and supporting them to improve their attendance. That support could be informal mentoring, coaching or a simple discussion about standards.

Whilst all efforts should be made to resolve the issue informally, line managers can, take formal action at any time in response to repeated misconduct. NICS HR will provide support on managing disciplinary action. Further detail, including a step-by-step process, is included in the [\[Hybrid Working Procedure\]](#) on the Employee Services Portal.

#### **Q25. Will I be able to work from an overseas location?**

The Hybrid Working Policy applies to working within the UK and Ireland only and does not cover arrangements to work overseas. Due to potential security, tax, visa and other

complexities surrounding remote working from abroad, Departments are not able to consider requests for overseas working under the Hybrid Working policy.

### **Q26. Can I work from home/remotely if I remain in UK or Ireland?**

The Hybrid Work policy allows home/remote working within UK and Ireland. However business needs will always come first. You are required to be available to attend at the workplace in line with business needs and as set out in your Workstyle Agreement. It is also important to note that all workstyle agreements are subject to regular review and will be updated where business requirements or the job roles change.

### **Q27. Do I need specific insurance when working from Home?**

When working from home you must ensure you have Class 1 (clerical use) business insurance in place, this is normally provided by insurance companies at no extra charge. However, staff will not be reimbursed, if an additional cost should be incurred.

Most home insurance companies expect customers to declare if they work from their home (clerical use cover suffices) and while it usually makes no difference to the policy premium, failure to declare could present problems in any future claim.

It is your responsibility to check your insurance policy documents and, if appropriate, their insurance company, mortgage providers and landlords to ensure that they meet any contractual requirements. You must not conduct face-to-face business meetings at your home as this would incur public liability that may not be covered.

### **Q28. I work an alternative working pattern how will my workplace attendance requirement be calculated?**

#### **Alternative Working Pattern**

**Example One:** Working 3 days per week

<b>Day</b>	<b>Worked</b>
Monday	N

Tuesday	Y
Wednesday	Y
Thursday	Y
Friday	N

3 days x 40% = 1.2 days per week

(Option 1) The employee in the workplace 1 day per week

OR

(Option 2) Equal to 6 days worked in the office over a 5-week period.

Proposed Hybrid working

Week 1 The employee is in the workplace on 2 days

Weeks 2-5 The employee is in the workplace 1 day

**Example Two:** Working 3 days one week, 2 days one week

Day	Week One	Week Two
Monday	N	Y
Tuesday	N	Y
Wednesday	Y	N
Thursday	Y	N
Friday	Y	N

3 days x 40% = 1.2 days per week

2 days x 40% = 0.8 days per week

The employee is in the workplace 1 day per week

**Q29. How will annual leave or sickness absence impact on workplace attendance?**

Periods of annual leave, sickness absence do not count towards available working days. Staff unavailable due to leave or sickness to attend the workplace on their agreed workplace attendance days should discuss with their line manager their workplace attendance requirements.

**Q30. Can I request to work from home on one of my set team day(s)?**

If you need to be away from work due to a pressing and unexpected reason, annual leave, sickness absence or special leave should be considered depending on the

particular circumstances. You should on all occasions discuss your circumstances with your line manager. Approval is at the discretion of your line manager who may ask you to swap agreed home working days with workplace days.

**Q31. Has the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 been considered?**

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 has been considered in developing the hybrid working policy. A Rural Needs Impact assessment was completed and the NICS Estate Strategy considered.

Hybrid working supports the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 by reducing the need for travel, thereby lowering carbon emissions. Sustainability issues, including the impact of climate change, should be fully considered when deciding whether and how to travel.