Northern Ireland Civil Service

People and Organisational Development

HR policy

3.15 Hybrid Working policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 Hybrid Working is an informal, non-contractual, locally agreed, flexible working arrangement which blends working in the workplace, remotely or at home. The NICS is committed to promoting flexibility and choice at work with the aim of meeting both the needs of the service and its staff. The benefits of hybrid working are wide ranging and include better work-life balance for employees, increased productivity, and environmental benefits.

1.2 It is recognised that hybrid working provides additional work style choices that are important for both individuals and business areas. The purpose of this policy is to outline the NICS approach to hybrid working and to provide a framework to ensure consistent practice. This policy will be subject to regular review.

1.3 Requests for a reasonable adjustment to working arrangements are dealt with under Referrals & Interventions – Guidance for Identifying and Implementing Reasonable Adjustments **(7.01 of the HR Handbook)** and not through the application process in this policy.

2. Scope of Policy

2.1 The policy applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees, including agency staff, across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This policy recognises that one size does not fit all, and that hybrid working will need to operate differently in different parts of the business.

2.2 Hybrid working is not an automatic entitlement, regardless of any previous working arrangement, for example where staff are required to be in the workplace at all times due to the nature of their role.

2.3 This policy applies to working within the UK and Ireland only and does not cover arrangements to work overseas. Exceptional circumstances may exist where staff could work outside of UK and Ireland, this would be at the instigation of the business area and would not be for a continuous or long-term basis, for example, an urgent meeting where an individual has expertise or knowledge of a specific topic, which requires travel to another location for a timebound period.

2.4 A staff member's personal preference to work outside of UK and Ireland, would not be regarded as exceptional circumstances.

3. Key Principles

3.1 The approach to considering hybrid working requests is underpinned by the following key principles:

Business needs

3.2 Hybrid working arrangements must align with business needs. The primary focus must always be on maintaining customer service, productivity and performance standards. Business needs should not be compromised in order to facilitate hybrid working.

Workplace Attendance

3.3 A minimum workplace attendance of ?% each week for all staff. For staff working alternative working patterns, workplace attendance 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, calculation may be based on a two-week basis.

Senior Management Support

3.4 Senior management in the NICS will encourage and facilitate hybrid working where practical.

Transparency and Consistency

3.5 Management is committed to transparency and consistency when dealing with hybrid working in the NICS.

Health and Safety

3.6 The health and safety of NICS staff is of paramount importance. Completion of a Health and Safety risk assessment and a Display Screen Equipment assessment must be carried out prior to the commencement of remote/home working arrangements.

Mutual Trust

3.7 NICS staff are trusted and empowered to deliver set outcomes on time and to have a choice in relation to the traditional work boundaries of workspace. The flexibility given to staff from hybrid working emphasises the importance of staff wellbeing, especially in creating an improved work/life balance by providing opportunities for staff to work in different ways. A member of staff found to be abusing this trust may have their hybrid arrangements curtailed or removed altogether.

Staff Availability

3.8 There should be a clear understanding between managers and their staff on when and where the staff member will be working and be contactable. All staff working from

home or remotely should inform their line manager; colleagues and customers of when they will be available and how to contact them during working hours. Staff must be available to their line managers as agreed and keep their managers informed if any problems arise in this regard.

Policies and procedures

3.9 Staff working on a hybrid working arrangement must continue to comply with all their obligations as a civil servant and remain bound by all relevant policies and procedures.

Flexibility

3.10 Flexibility is required from both line management and staff for hybrid working to be successful. There is value in team collaboration, office attendance, workplace connectedness and team engagement days. Staff shall be flexible to ensure they participate when these sessions are arranged by managers. Managers shall ensure, where possible, adequate notice is provided.

Office / IT Equipment

3.11 Staff will be provided with furniture and equipment for use at home to support hybrid working which will remain NICS property. Furniture and equipment should be ordered using the department's usual ordering processes.

Work Location

3.12 Working remotely or from home, will not change a staff members permanent workplace or claims for business mileage in accordance with the NICS Travelling Time Policy (8.13 of the HR Handbook).

3.13 Whilst a member of staff's work location remains the same, they may work from another NICS office location eg a Connect2 hub on an occasional basis. This will only be possible if space is available and agreed with management.

3.14 Working from a Connect2 hub will not count towards a staff member's required minimum workplace attendance.

Equality

3.12 The NICS has a strong and clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Equality is a cornerstone consideration in the development and review of all HR policies that determine how staff are recruited and appointed, their terms and conditions, how they are managed and developed, assessed, recognised and rewarded. All staff are reminded of their responsibility to be aware of, and apply, the NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy (6.05 of the HR Handbook).

5. Hybrid Working procedure

5.1 The general principles underpinning the hybrid working procedure are as follows;

- Staff must make a formal hybrid working request under this policy. Staff should make their request to their line manager via APEX. Where APEX is not available, staff should complete a Workstyle Agreement form.

- A Workstyle Agreement should be completed by all staff working a regular hybrid working pattern. The Agreement should also be used to record the agreement between management and staff, for all roles that have to be carried out in the workplace due to the requirements of the role; the nature of the business or when a member of staff has chosen to work in their workplace at all times. Further information and resources are in the Hybrid Working Staff Toolkit.

Commented [JF1]: Do we need to do this? I'm wondering if it should just be filled out where member of staff wants to work hybrid, and not completed where not the case. We can have a chat

Commented [RM2R1]: Lifted from para 4.5 of draft policy. It would mean all staff would have a W A regardless if they work a hybrid pattern or not.
The extant toolkit states
'It is also recommended that staff required to or opting to work at all times from their
designated workplace should use the Abridged Workstyle Agreement to briefly record what working arrangements you have agreed with your manager'.

- Line management must ensure that effective service delivery is maintained, however managers should facilitate requests were possible, reaching workable solutions.

- Specific days for office attendance to be agreed with the line management.

- Line management may require staff to attend the office on additional days, for meetings, training, or other work-related events as required by business needs.

- Line management should aim to respond to requests for hybrid working and agree the outcome with members of staff within 28 days.

- If a staff member believes their request for hybrid working has not been considered fairly and consistently, they can appeal under the Uniform Appeals policy (6.12 of the HR Handbook).

- Agency workers have no right of appeal. If a request for hybrid working cannot be agreed locally, they may contact their Agency in the normal way. The Agency will consider the dispute and liaise with the relevant business area as necessary.

- Workstyle Agreements should be reviewed regularly (at least annually) or when a relevant change occurs eg business needs change; the requirements of the role changes, or a member of staff moves to a new NICS post. A member of staff can also request a change to their Workstyle Agreement.

- Hybrid working arrangements may be ended by the line management on reasonable notice due to business needs, performance management purposes, team collaboration, health and safety risks.

- Alternatively, a member of staff's circumstances may change, requiring them to return to working in an office-based environment on a more regular basis.

6 Data Protection

6.1 The hybrid working procedure is subject to the UK Data Protection Legislation, Freedom of Information legislation and disclosure for Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunals or other legal proceedings.

6.2 All relevant information will be retained in line with your department's Retention and Disposal Schedule and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. Records of all stages of the hybrid working procedure must also be created, sent and stored in line with the established data handling guidance contained within the Handling Personal Data section of the Hybrid Working User Guide.

6.3 Inappropriate access to, or disclosure of, employee data, either written or verbally, constitutes a data breach and should be reported immediately. Such a breach may constitute a disciplinary offence, under this Discipline policy.