Northern Ireland Civil Service

People and Organisational Development

3.15 Hybrid Working policy

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Date: November 2024

Hybrid Working Policy

The policy sets out the policy in relation to Hybrid Working in the NICS.

This policy is supported by the **Hybrid Working Procedure** [insert hyperlink] which clarifies the process for requesting, considering, implementing, and reviewing requests for Hybrid Working. This policy should be read in conjunction with it and the range of supporting resources:

- Hybrid Working Procedure [link to be inserted]
- Hybrid Working Workstyle Agreement
- Hybrid Working FAQs **[link to be inserted]**
- Hybrid Working Process Summary Flow Chart **[link to be inserted]**
- Line Manager Top Tips **[link to be inserted]**

Commented [Author1]: Hyperlinks to be added

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- 6.01 Standards of Conduct
- 3.10 Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns policy
- 6.05 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy
- 6.09 Dignity at Work
- 6.12 Uniform Appeals Policy
- 6.11 Use of electronic communications policy
- 8.13 Travelling Time policy
- 9.01 General Guidance for Travel and Subsistence policy
- NICS Mobile Device Security policy
- NICS Information Assurance policy

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Version No.	Date	Comments	CM Ref	Author	Branch Directorate
1.0	December 2021			Agile Working Project	New Ways of Working Implementation
1.1	December 2021	Links added		Agile Working Project	New Ways of Working Implementation
1.2	May 2022			Agile Working Project	New Ways of Working Implementation
1.3	October 2022			Agile Working Project	New Ways of Working Implementation
1.4	??/??/2024			HR Policy	People & Organisational Development
Review Period		A review of the current version of this document will be commissioned by end of April 2027			

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Commented [Author2]: Index to be reviewed and updated to reflect final running order of policy sections.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The NICS is committed to creating a modern and inclusive workplace which provides flexibility on how and where you work to support productive, efficient, sustainable and cost-effective business delivery. The NICS recognises the changing world of work and the importance of continued flexibility in its working arrangements by blending the benefits of workplace attendance with hybrid working to drive performance, embed a learning culture, improve health and wellbeing and support work life balance.

1.2 The NICS also recognises the importance of face-to-face engagement to support staff wellbeing and maximise learning and development opportunities and team cohesion. Therefore, the NICS is adopting a hybrid working policy approach to embed both the wellbeing benefits of spending time working together in person (i.e. less isolation and loneliness), and the business benefits, through more effective team working, and enhanced learning opportunities through day-to-day interaction with colleagues and customers.

2. Scope of Policy

2.1 The Hybrid Working policy applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees, agency workers and those seconded to the NICS. Hybrid working is one of several flexible working arrangements in the NICS.

2.2 The policy sets out the principles to be applied in relation to hybrid working in the NICS. The **Hybrid Working Procedure** [insert hyperlink] sets out the process for requesting, considering, implementing, and reviewing requests for Hybrid Working.

2.3 This policy applies to working in 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 abroad, requests for overseas working should not be considered under this policy.

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2.4 Arrangements under this policy do not create any entitlement to work from home on a contractual basis nor does it automatically apply that a previously agreed hybrid working arrangement can continue to be facilitated if you take up a new post or if the duties of your role change significantly. Hybrid working is subject to business need and the nature of the job role. As and when business need changes the agreed working arrangements will also need reviewed.

3. Hybrid Working

3.1 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 as agreed by line management.

Commented [Author3]: Reflects Neil's feedback

3.2 It is recognised that not all business areas or job roles will be suitable for hybrid working.

3.3 Senior management will be responsible for: (i) fairly and consistently considering business need; (ii) determining the potential for job role /activities to be delivered through a hybrid working model (subject to the requirements of paragraphs 4.4-4.6 below); and (iii) communicating the business area workplace attendance requirements to line managers in their business area. For the purposes of this policy senior manager is defined as Grade 7 and above. Further guidance on the factors to be considered when determining if the job role/work activities can accommodate hybrid working is set out in the Hybrid Working Procedure [insert hyperlink].

Commented [EO4]: This caused issues before in the HURLG RD. Leadership should be able to inform/change an agreement if the LM decision is not going to achieve corporate business need or if business need changes

Commented [AC5]: This does not clarify the role of grade 6s and above in defining business need and will not address the issues raised in the Registered Disagreement in Housing in February 2023 and the ongoing Hybrid Registered Disagreement from August 2024. Undermining the authority of a chain of command should not be within the ethos of the policy. Grade 7s **and above** should be able to inform/change an agreement if the Line Manager agreement is not going to achieve corporate business need or when business need changes.

3.4 Line managers will be responsible for: (i) confirming the business area workplace attendance requirements determined by senior management to their direct

reports/staff; and (ii) meeting with them to discuss and agree the implementation of hybrid working arrangements.

3.5 If you wish to avail of hybrid working you should complete a workstyle agreement [insert hyperlink] for consideration by your line manager. If you consider that your request for hybrid working has not been considered fairly and consistently you may appeal using the Uniform Appeals Procedure.

3.6 If an agency worker wishes to avail of hybrid working, they should complete a workstyle agreement for consideration by their line manager. If hybrid working is not accommodated and an agency worker considers the request has not been considered fairly and consistently, they should raise this with their Agency under the respective complaints process. The Agency will consider the complaint and liaise with the relevant business area as necessary.

3.8 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.

4. Key Principles

4.1 Hybrid working is underpinned by the following key principles:

Business needs

4.2 Hybrid working is subject to business needs. The primary focus must always be on meeting the needs of the Civil Service by supporting our Ministers and the Executive

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by maintaining high quality public services, productivity and performance standards. Business needs should not be compromised in order to facilitate hybrid working. **Under this policy business need is determined to encompass Departmental, Group, Directorate and local branch needs.**

Commented [AC6]: Whilst this definition is stronger our learning shows it could be enhanced by making the distinction that business need is both corporate and local to avoid any perception that business need only refers to branch need, thereby missing the wider benefits of people being together more.

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Workplace

4.3 Working remotely or from home, will not change your designated office or workplace. Claims for travel expenses or travelling time should be made in accordance with the General Guidance for Travel and Subsistence policy (9.01 of the HR Handbook) or Travelling Time Policy (8.13 of the HR Handbook).

Workplace Attendance Requirement

4.4 Hybrid working is subject to a requirement that you will attend the workplace **at least 40% of your contractual working hours per week**. If you work an alternative working pattern, 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, the calculation may be based on a two-week basis.

Commented [AC7]: This is consistent with DfC's approach to date is most helpful.

4.5 If you are on an apprenticeship scheme; graduate management programme; in your probationary period; or have moved to a new post, you are encouraged to attend your workplace for more than the 40% workplace attendance requirement to maximise the benefits of face-to-face interaction; build team cohesion; support your learning and development opportunities and wellbeing; and help expand your professional network.

Commented [EO8]: Like this - just wonder if it falls a bit short as it still sounds optional. Perhaps needs a bit on being flexible/available to meet management requirements for attendance

4.6 To ensure teams feel supported and the benefits of face-to-face interaction in the workplace are optimised; and a learning culture is embedded, Senior Civil Servants are encouraged to attend the workplace for more than the 40% workplace attendance requirement per week.

Commented [AC9]: In this instance encouraged does not feel strong enough and should be changed to 'expected'.

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4.7 If you are in a role which requires attendance at the workplace full time and is not suitable for hybrid working, you should continue to attend your designated workplace as normal. Further information on office attendance is available in the Hybrid Working Procedure [insert hyperlink]

Senior Management

4.8 Senior management will as far as possible, subject to business need, encourage and facilitate hybrid working to improve business delivery, maximise efficiency and support work life balance. Senior management will be responsible for communicating to staff the business need and workplace attendance requirements of their business area.

4.9 Senior management will also encourage and promote the benefits of workplace attendance and face to face interaction to support team cohesion, embed a collective learning culture, and support health and well-being. Further guidance on work activities optimised through workplace attendance and hybrid working can be found at [insert hyperlink] Hybrid Working Procedures.

Line Management

4.10 Line management will have an essential leadership role in ensuring that the workplace attendance requirement is adhered to by their team, taking account of any agreed alternate working patterns, or reasonable adjustments.

Mutual Trust

4.11 Hybrid working is built on a culture of trust where you are trusted and empowered to deliver set outcomes on time and to have a choice in relation to how and where you work. The flexibility given to you from hybrid working emphasises the importance of your wellbeing, by providing opportunities for you to work in different ways and to help improve work/life balance. If you are found to be abusing this trust or fail to comply with the requirements of your workstyle agreement, the option of hybrid working may be curtailed or removed altogether.

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Availability

4.12 When operating hybrid working arrangements you are required to be available and contactable during your contracted working hours. There should be a clear understanding between you and your line manager of when and where you will be working and how you may be contacted during working hours. You must be available to your line managers as agreed and keep your line manager informed if any problems arise in this regard. If flexi time arrangements are being operated alongside hybrid working, you must adhere to core hours requirements as provided for at section 3.3. of the Alternative Working Patterns Policy.

Flexibility

4.13 Flexibility is required from senior management, line management and staff for hybrid working to be successful. There is benefit from teams collectively attending their designated workplaces together as this helps build collaboration and workplace connectedness. Team engagement sessions / days are also of value and you should be flexible to ensure you can attend the workplace when these sessions are arranged by managers. Managers shall ensure, where possible, adequate notice is provided.

Health and Safety

4.14 Your health and safety 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 hybrid working arrangements. To support this, departments have developed electronic General Risk and DSE Homeworking checklists.

Care arrangements

4.15 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, 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 for support for carers please see the NICS Supporting Carers Guide.

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Policies and procedures

4.16 When operating a hybrid working arrangement you must continue to comply with your obligations as a civil servant under the Code of Ethics and remain bound by all organisational policies and procedures, including the Standards of Conduct policy, Use of Electronic Communications policy and Information Management and Data Protection policies and procedures.

Equality

4.17 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. You are reminded of your responsibility to be aware of, and apply, the NICS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

Commented [AC10]: It is welcomed that the draft Hybrid Working Policy also restates the NICS's position on caring arrangements, health and safety, flexibility, availability, increased office attendance for new starts and failure to maintain required workplace attendance. What is not clear is that if hybrid working issues are not able to be resolved (eg health and safety, work style agreement, risk assessment) that Hybrid Working can be suspended, and the employee should work in the office 5 days a week until matters are resolved.

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