Northern Ireland Civil Service
People and Organisational Development

Jill Minne
Director, People & Organisational Development
2-4 Bruce Street
Belfast, BT2 7JD
Tel: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

From: Jill Minne
People and Organisational Development

Date: 20 February 2025

To: Finance and HR Advisory Group

PEOPLE & ORGANISATONAL DEVELOPMENT – REVIEW OF HYBRID WORKING POLICY

This paper provides comments on feedback received from FHRAG on the draft Hybrid Working policy, procedures and FAQs.

The Group is asked to consider and provide comments by cop 28 February 2025 prior to seeking Ministerial approval to commence formal consultation with Central Trade Unions.

1. Thank you for providing feedback on the draft NICS Hybrid Working policy and supporting documentation.

2. The collated feedback along with People & OD responses is attached at **Annex A**. There are a few points where decisions are required as views differ across departments, see **Annex B**.

Connect2 hubs/Workplace definition

3. The draft policy defines 'workplace' as a member of staff's designated office, or other work, or remote location as agreed by line management including

Connect2 hubs. Some departments welcomed the clarification on the use of Connect2 hubs and indicated that it would be important to monitor usage as this will likely increase with the proposed change in policy direction.

4. Other departments disagreed with Connect2 hubs being included as part of the 'workplace' stating that Connect2 hubs were never intended as a replacement for being in the workplace or for lone working; and that Connect2 hubs could be used for wider team engagement subject to departmental approval.

5. Following consideration of the feedback received, it is proposed that the definition of 'workplace' contained within the draft policy be amended to remove the reference to Connect2 hubs. The revised definition proposed is:

"*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".*

Notice period to end hybrid working arrangements

6. Several departments have raised concerns on the three months' notice period required to end hybrid working arrangements particularly where there are health and safety concerns or changed business needs.

7. The proposed three months' notice period to end hybrid working arrangements, aligns with other changes to working patterns, for example partial retirement or alternative working patterns, albeit it is recognised that such changes are contractual unlike hybrid working, which is non-contractual. It is proposed that a provision be added to the policy to state that 'in exceptional circumstances e.g. business need, emergencies, including health and safety, the period of notice can be reduced' which may help to address some of the concerns raised.

8. A reduction of the notice period could potentially be contentious for trade unions. Therefore, FHRAG is also asked to consider whether the notice period of three

months should remain or be revised to also allow for a reduced notice period if mutually agreed by the parties i.e. line manager and individual.

Recommendation

9. You are asked to consider responses to the feedback (**Annex A)** and provide response to the issues above and detailed in **Annex B**. Please send response to [redacted] by cop **28 February 2025.**

Jill Minne
People and Organisational Development
Ext [redacted]

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