Feedback on draft Hybrid Working Policy - Perm Secs & FHRAG January 2025

Department	Document & Paragraph	Main comment	Points to note	People & OD response
Health	**General comment**	DoH confirmed that it is content	None	Noted
Economy -	**General Comment**	A consistent approach within teams, groups, departments and across the NICS will need to be taken - and staff will need to have confidence that everyone is being treated fairly. We must therefore be realistic that the introduction of this policy will be a considerable management challenge. It will require visible leadership and compliance from the top of the house. It would be useful to include some awareness training or discussion sessions to accompany the implementation of this policy and it would be helpful to understand when this policy will become effective, e.g. from 1 April?	Challenge to ensure consistency Awareness sessions / Effective date	Noted - This will require line managers to effectively implement at all levels in the organisation. Comms to inform staff of changes and direct staff to policy documents will issue in advance of new policy implementation date.
	All documents	Outline at the beginning of all Hybrid Working policy documents the baseline agreement that 'all NICS employees are assigned a permanent workplace, however employees can avail of Hybrid working. The current approach adopted by existing staff is 'I work from home and management are asking me to attend the office 2 days per week'. We need to switch this narrative	Inclusion of statement on all documents.	Not accepted - Policy has clarified that business need is the priority.
	Hybrid working Procedure Section 3 & Annex ppt	Include clarity around the limited circumstances in which line managers can grant an exemption from the 40% policy.	Clarity on exceptions to the 40% requirement	Not accepted - line managers must have the flexibility to exercise their discretion.

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	Para 8.2	Recommend that hybrid working arrangements to be reviewed as part of the In Year/End Year Reviews.	Hybrid annual review timing	Not accepted - Hybrid working can be reviewed at any time and not restricted to the performance management cycle. Para 3.8 of the draft policy provides: **"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".** This information is also provided at para 8.2 of the Procedures.

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	Para 3.2	Will staff be able to base themselves permanently at Connect 2 Hubs, or meet their 40% requirement by using the Hub on a regular basis? This is addressed in the FAQs, however, it would be beneficial if this was also spelt out in the procedures.	Connect2 Hubs & workplace attendance	Reference to Connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed. Para 3.2 of the procedures has been removed and Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to state: **"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".**
	Para 6.2	Include clarity that senior managers are responsible for enforcing the 40% minimum attendance requirement and supporting line managers in this.	Senior managers responsible for enforcing 40% requirement	Not accepted – All line managers will have responsibility in ensuring the effective & consistent implementation of the policy.
	Para 6.5	Clarify 'alternate working patterns', some staff will have local 'alternate working patterns. Some full-time staff have agreed with their line managers that they don't have to meet the 40% minimum. The policy needs to be clear that full time staff are expected to be in the office 40%.	Define AWP & Clarify that FT staff must attend 40%	Not accepted – the Alternative Working Patterns policy which provide arrangements for the permitted work pattern flexibilities does not include local arrangements. The draft policy is clear para 3.1 reads: "**All staff operating hybrid working will be required to attend the workplace at least**

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				40% of their contractual working hours…" Therefore, from point of implementation of the new policy, all staff would be required to adhere to the policy requirement of 40% minimum attendance of contracted working hours per week.
	Section 9	Performance issues, what are our options around removing the privilege of working from home? Does the performance management policy need to be updated?	Performance issue removal of hybrid working	Para 8.3 of the Procedure reads "**Line management may end hybrid working arrangements due to business needs, performance management purposes".** The Performance Management policy is currently being reviewed
	Para 12.2	If there is an extra charge for home include a line that NICS will not reimburse additional charges for home insurance as an office base is provided.	Insurance charges / Staff claims	Accepted – The draft procedure and FAQ q.28 will be amended to include a line to state '**Staff will not be reimbursed if an additional cost is incurred'.**
	Annex PPT Slide 4	*Employees should be given as much notice as reasonably practicable to attend the workplace on days when they normally work from home*". It would be helpful to add a further caveat to say this may not always be possible.	Clarify that LM may not be unable to provide Notice for additional attendance.	Not accepted – It is considered that 'reasonably practicable' is sufficient.
	Annex Slide 5	Unclear what the potential pitfall "working hours expanding into commuting time." refers to, and inclusion	Delete pitfall 'working hours expanding into commuting time'.	Not accepted – Annex A of Procedures provides potential pros and cons of hybrid working

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		could be perceived as insensitive to staff with long, unpleasant commutes.		for managers and staff to find a blended approach.
	Hybrid Working Policy **Para 4 4**	Include explicit wording that the expectation of a day in the office is a full day in the office – in private sector there is a trend "coffee badging" to come in briefly and work the rest of the day from home.	Clarify that a day in office is a full day	Accepted – Calculation will be included in FAQs to demonstrate the expectation of a full day for full and part-time staff.
	Para 4.13	Explicitly encourage / recommend Team days in the office. Help line managers of staff who don't wish to attend the office on the same day (s) as the majority of their colleagues. Some areas to consider are:	Strengthen wording on use of Team days in the office	Accepted -– Para 4.13 of Policy amended to read **"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 help builds, collaboration and workplace connectiveness.** **It is recommended that line managers hold team engagement sessions / days as these 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 were possible, adequate notice is provided"**.

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	Para 4.5	Those on probation etc encouraged to attend more than 40%. Should there also be something around how managers of staff in these categories are also encouraged to do the same? It would seem hard for someone on probation/apprentice to get learning from being in the office otherwise.	Where staff are required to attend over 40% that LM also be encouraged to attend.	Accepted – A line will be added to Para 4.5 of the policy to read "**Your line manager is also encouraged to attend the workplace along with you to support your learning and development".**
	Para 4.6	This will come as a surprise to some SCS and it would be good to flag this in advance.	Ensure SCS aware of expectation of over 40% Management of set/core office days	There will be formal consultation with CTUS and all staff communications in advance of policy launch; Comms with also issue via NICS Board, HRBPs, intranet articles to ensure all staff are aware.
	FAQs **Q 25**	What if staff refuse to come in on the same days as colleagues?	Set days for workplace attendance /noncompliance	Line managers will implement the workplace attendance requirement. Para 4.10 of the policy reads **"Line management will have an essential leadership role in ensuring that the workplace attendance requirement is adhered to by their team…"**. Para 7.13 of the procedures states "…**the line manager and member of staff should both sign off the Workstyle Agreement. The agreement will**

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				set out the commencement date; the agreed days for workplace and home attendance" Para 9.1 of the procedures states "**Where staff fail to attend the workplace in accordance with their Workstyle Agreement, this may result in disciplinary procedures being initiated".**
	Suggested FAQs	More on flexibility how the 40% is applied. If I'm on leave for 3 days, do I still have to be in 2 days or is it 1 day in and 1 day at home? If my 'normal' days in the office are the days I'm on leave - can I then work from home both days when I'm working?	Detail on management of 40% and annual leave	Accepted - an FAQ will be included to clarify the impact of annual leave on workplace attendance.
	Suggested FAQs	Some work patterns will be very hard to calculate precisely into a number of days in the office even allowing for having different patterns across different weeks. Might be worth indicating there can be some rounding at line manager's discretion, provided there's consistency?	Calculation of no. of office days – Rounding	Accepted - FAQs on calculation for AWPs will be included.
	Suggested FAQs	Where someone has a pressing and unexpected reason to be at home on their usual days is it ok to move your 2 days from one week into the next for instance?	Managing Office Attendance	This would be subject to line management agreement /discretion. An FAQ will be developed to deal with this scenario.
Communities	**General Comment**	I would like to reinforce the importance of learning from the DfC Registered Disagreement, in particular:	Business Need / LM authority	Noted

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		• Business need can be determined at many levels, including corporate and branch; • The importance of specifying a minimum office attendance level; and • The limitations presented if only line managers are able to change a workstyle agreement.		• The term business need is used across a wide range of other existing HR policies without further clarification. The definition of business need will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. Internal communications to support implementation of any policy changes could also capture this. • The policy clearly states at para 4.3 '**Hybrid working is subject to a requirement that you will attend the workplace at least 40% of your contractual working hours per week.** • The current draft is consistent with the NICS direction of travel regarding the rolling out of management responsibility / decision making to line management. While this will not be included in the policy the associated

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				procedures and FAQs will be updated to reflect that senior managers at Grade 7 level may discuss wider business needs with senior management colleagues when determining hybrid working arrangements for their respective area.
	General Comment	For the avoidance of doubt, it would be beneficial if the draft Hybrid Working Policy also clarified the relationship between Hybrid Working and Reasonable Adjustments	Clarify relationship between reasonable Adjustments & Hybrid	Accepted - Para 7.9 of procedures updated as below "**Requests to avail of home working or working from another location as a reasonable adjustment due to a disability are separate to requests for hybrid working under the Hybrid Working policy. Implementation of reasonable adjustments is a legal duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)".** A new para 7.10 will read **"The existing process to request and consider reasonable adjustments remains unchanged and reasonable adjustments will continue to be carefully considered and managed on a case-by-case basis. Further**

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				guidance on reasonable adjustments is available". **Reasonable Adjustments | NICS Intranet'**
	Hybrid Working policy **Para 3.3**	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	Clarify Grade 6 and above authority on workstyle Agreements	Not accepted. This was also raised by Public Prosecution Service due to its specific grade structures i.e. no Grade 7s. The current draft policy is consistent with the Civil Service policy direction of travel regarding the delegation of HR decision making to line management. The suggested change to Grade 7 **and above** is still ambiguous as to who the decision maker should be particularly in the event of an appeal. The policy is aiming to remove ambiguity which is what led to the Registered Disagreement. Such approach would also elevate the level of appeal decisions to Grade 5 and above, which given the size of DfC is not considered optimum. While this will not be included in the policy the associated procedures and FAQs will be

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				updated to reflect that senior managers at Grade 7 level may discuss wider business needs with senior management colleagues when determining hybrid working arrangements for their respective area.
	Para 3.3	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.		Not accepted – See above response.
	Para 4.2	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. Suggested inclusion **'Under this policy business need is determined to encompass Departmental, Group, Directorate and local branch needs'.**	Include corporate aspect re business needs.	Not accepted - The term business need is used across a wide range of other existing HR policies without further clarification. The definition of business need will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. Internal communications to support implementation of any policy changes could also capture this.
	Para 4.4	This is consistent with DfC's approach to date is most helpful.	None	Noted

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	Para 4.5	Falls a bit short as it still sounds optional '*you are encouraged to attend'*. Perhaps needs a bit on being flexible/available to meet management requirements for attendance.	Strengthen wording requirement for increased attendance	'Not all Departments agreed with this comment. '***Encouraged***' is consistent with benchmarking with Cabinet office. A decision will be required from FHRAG.
	Para 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'. In this instance 'encouraged' does not feel strong enough and should be changed to 'expected'.	Strengthen wording SCS are expected	Not accepted. Hybrid working policy applies to all employees, including SCS. It is not prescriptive; it is a matter for the individual and Line Manager to agree.
	Para 4.13 - 17	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 (e.g. 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.	Clarify staff will not commence Hybrid working until workstyle agreement / issues resolved.	Not accepted - This is dealt at para 11.7 of Procedures: *"***The NICS may not permit home/remote working to commence or continue until any issues identified during the assessment process have been resolved".**
	Hybrid Working Procedures Para 3.2	Some departments have ruled out attendance at Hubs as counting towards 40% as this was seen to be contrary to the intent of hybrid. If hubs are to be counted towards 40% need to clarify that hubs are not intended for lone working but could be used for wider team engagement subject to business need and departmental approval.	Hubs to count as office attendance only in context of team engagement.	The specific reference to Connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed.

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				Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to state: **"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".**
	Para 3.3	Suggested inclusion 'The required **minimum** 40% workplace attendance will not impact staff with existing reasonable adjustments'.	Suggest Inclusion	Accepted
	Para 7.9	Reasonable adjustment might benefit from a paragraph all of its own to emphasise the point. There have been numerous examples of line managers not applying the guidance properly. For the avoidance of doubt, it would be beneficial if the draft Hybrid Working Policy also clarified the relationship between Hybrid Working and Reasonable Adjustments as stated within the Procedures document. A similar requirement applies to offering clarity regarding hybrid for part time staff and those working compressed hours.	Policy requires more clarity on Reasonable Adjustment and AWPs	Accepted - Para 7.9 of procedures updated as below: **"Requests to avail of home working or working from another location as a reasonable adjustment due to a disability are separate to requests for hybrid working under the Hybrid Working policy. Implementation of reasonable adjustments is a legal duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).**

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				The existing process to request and consider reasonable adjustments remains unchanged and reasonable adjustments will continue to be carefully considered and managed on a case-by-case basis. Further guidance on reasonable adjustments is available Reasonable Adjustments | NICS Intranet".
	Para 5.2	Suggested inclusion 'A decision to approve a request for hybrid working will depend on several factors, including **corporate** business need and the nature of the job role **(branch need).** Not all job roles will be suitable for hybrid working	Suggested inclusion to reflect corporate aspect	Accepted - Para 5.2 will be updated to account of previous changes to para 4.2 re business need as follows 'A decision to approve a request for hybrid working will depend on several factors, including business need **(as defined at para 4.2 of the policy**) and the nature of the job role. Not all job roles will be suitable for hybrid working'.
	Para 5.4	'…may be required to attend the workplace more than the 40% workplace **minimum** attendance requirement'. This reads better than in the policy where it says, 'are encouraged'.	Suggested inclusion	Accepted
	Para 6.3	As it stands this undermines the principle of business need as it creates a defined list that is more suited to	Suggest inclusion	The term business need is used across a wide range of other

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		branch than corporate need. Suggested inclusion **'Will the working arrangement meet corporate business need requirements.'**		existing HR policies without further clarification. The definition of business need will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. Internal communications to support implementation of any policy changes could also capture this.
	Para 6.4 & 6.5	Suggested inclusion 'workplace **minimum** attendance'	Suggest inclusion	Accepted
	Para 7.1	Suggested line at end of para **'Information on storing Workstyle related information is provided at Annex E'**	Suggest inclusion	Accepted
	Para 7.3	Suggested inclusion 'If staff have concerns about **exceptional circumstances not covered by the policy or guidance that impact** their business area workplace attendance requirement being applied to them, they should firstly try to resolve any concerns informally with their line manager. If staff are unable to agree an acceptable outcome and continue to have concerns, they may appeal the decision under the Uniform Appeal process. **Personal disagreement with business need or office attendance are not grounds for appeal'**.	Suggested inclusion grounds for appeal	Not accepted – Personal Disagreement falls under the Uniform Appeals process.

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	Para 7.5	Suggested inclusion '…within 10 working days of receipt of the request **or as soon as reasonably practicable'**	Suggested inclusion flexibility on timeframe	Not accepted -10 working days sufficient to arrange meeting
	Para 7.6	Suggested inclusion ...the workplace attendance requirements and **proactively seek** to maximise..' '..to support health and well-being, **knowledge exchange** and teamworking'.	Suggested inclusion benefits of workplace attendance	Accepted
	Para 7.7	Suggested line at end of para 'The requirement for flexibility and availability are not undermined by a set day minimum attendance although every effort will be made to give advance notice of a requirement for additional attendance on any given week'.	Suggested inclusion on additional attendance	Not accepted – Considered that staff require some level of certainty and sufficient notice for additional attendance
	Para 7.11	Suggested line at end of para '**Personal disagreement with business need or office attendance are not grounds for appeal'.**	Suggested inclusion re grounds for appeal	Not accepted - Personal disagreement falls under the Uniform Appeals process.
	Para 7.14	Suggested inclusion 'Line managers should only refuse a request for hybrid working for valid business reasons **or where sections 5.3 or 5.4 of these procedures apply'.**	Suggested inclusion on grounds for refusal /suspension of Hybrid	Accepted - Where para 5.3 of the procedures apply. Para 5.4 should remain discretionary re New entrants etc
	Para 8.2	Suggested inclusion • **A performance management or supervision requirement is identified.**	Suggested inclusion re review of Hybrid Working	Partially accepted - 'Supervision' not required as performance management encompasses this. A bullet point will be included at para 8.2 to state:

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				• **A performance management requirement is identified.**
	Para 8.3	The LM only option created issues before and needs reviewed in the context of the HULRG RD in DfC. Suggested change '~~**Line**~~ **Management** may end…'	Suggested deletion to recognise SCS authority	Not accepted – DfC is the only department to raise this concern. The suggested change creates ambiguity as to the level of decision maker. By extending the potential grades of decision makers, the policy would potentially be replicating the issue which led to a Registered Disagreement in DfC and would elevate the grade level for considering any potential appeals.
	Section 9	This addition is welcomed	Failure to maintain required attendance	Noted.
	Para 10.1	Take reasonable steps to ensure that their member of staff's working environment is **suitable**'. What constitutes '**suitable**' in an ageing estate?	A question regarding the estate	Noted – Para 10.1 should be read in context with para 10.2. The paragraphs provide guidance for managers and staff regarding working from home and preventing work related stress. Managers should ensure that home working risk assessments are completed, and issues addressed.

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	Para 11.7	What happens if the home working issues can't be resolved - is it a case of come into the office 100%	Risk assessment unresolved issue impact	This is dealt in Procedures at para 11.7 '***The NICS may not permit home/remote working to commence or continue until any issues identified during the assessment process have been resolved.'***
	Annex A Business need & job role	Distinguish between corporate and branch need, Suggest inclusion of Corporate Business Needs as an additional box.	Suggested inclusion to reflect corporate aspect	The term business need is used across a wide range of other existing HR policies without further clarification. The definition of business need will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. Internal communications to support implementation of any policy changes could also capture this.
	Benefits & Pitfalls	Pitfalls for individual should include **disconnection from corporate purpose; reduced awareness of evolving environments, disconnection from team.** Benefits for NICS include **support for succession planning and knowledge exchange.**	Suggested inclusions Pitfalls Suggested inclusion Benefits	Accepted to include; '**Disconnection from departmental business'** Accepted
	Annex B	Needs to expand to include both **corporate and branch need**. Suggested inclusion		The term business need is used across a wide range of other

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	Annex C	• The objective of the conversation is to agree how staff will achieve your department's and business area's workplace attendance requirement. • Ensure your member of staff understands your department's and business area's workplace attendance requirements.	Suggested inclusion to reflect corporate aspect Suggested inclusion to reflect corporate aspect	existing HR policies without further clarification. The definition of business needs will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. Internal communications to support implementation of any policy changes could also capture this.
Justice	**Hybrid working Policy** **Para 1.1**	Suggested inclusion '**However, it is recognised that not all business areas or job roles will be suitable for hybrid working'.**	Suggested Inclusion Clarify not all role suitable	Accepted
	Para 4.5	Suggested inclusion 'you are **required** to attend your workplace'.	Suggested change to strengthen line	Not accepted - Not all Departments agreed with this comment. '***Encouraged***' is consistent with benchmarking with Cabinet office.
	Hybrid Working Procedures Para 3.3	It would be helpful to review reasonable adjustments in light of the new policy and procedures even if the outcome is no change.	Clarify that existing reasonable adjustments to be reviewed	Accepted include a line that reasonable adjustments will be reviewed

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	Para 4.3	Danger of solutioning - *Suggest it is best to avoid providing solutions/options and leave this to be agreed at local level.*	LM flexibility	Accepted
	Para 5.3	As there are so few staff who receive an unsatisfactory performance review - should we be as prescriptive as there are likely to be numerous issues at play and could lead to other issues?	Performance issues to be less specific	Not accepted at this time – The Performance Management policy is under review. The issue will be monitored
	Para 5.4	I would expand this out. I would be inclined to stress the importance of building the culture and capability and put an onus not only on new entrants but on their managers.	Include benefit to culture & capability and LM attendance	Partially accepted - Update wording of procedures para 5.4 "to maximise in-person interaction, learning and development, **capability,** mentoring **opportunities and culture".** This will be for business areas to manage. All staff are entitled to Hybrid working / flexibility. Wording is from extant Hybrid Procedures, used in context of determining job role suitability for hybrid working.
	Para 6.2	and (iii) communicating the business area workplace attendance requirement to line managers in their business area	Who performs this function for full-time TUS staff?	While on secondment to NIPSA, staff are managed by NIPSA and should discuss hybrid working arrangement with the NIPSA manager.
	Para 6.3	Working alone at a desk' I don't like this as the first bullet point - remove the word **alone** - there are H&S concerns around this depending upon interpretation.	Suggested deletion of alone due to H&S concerns	Not accepted – Working alone is used in the context of management consideration of role suitability for hybrid working.

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	Para 7.6	Is there something here about desks, screens and tables - to be included here	Benefits of workplace attendance - equipment	Accepted – Para 7.6 amended to read "maximise the opportunities and benefits workplace attendance can offer to support health and well-being **with provision of desks, table and screens** and teamworking".
	Para 7.11	Should we not be stronger here and state that it is the responsibility of the Agency to provide staff on a full time on site basis.	Agency worker issues workplace attendance	Not accepted – In accordance with the Agency Worker Regulations (NI) 2011 after 12 weeks in the same job agency workers are entitled to the same basic terms and conditions as directly recruited employees.
	Para 8.3	If there is a performance management or health & safety risk, 3 months is too long. There may be need to action asap.	Shorten notice period to end Hybrid working agreement	Several departments have raised concerns on the 3 months period of notice required to end hybrid working arrangements particularly where there are health and safety concerns or changed business needs. The proposed 3 months period of notice 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 contractile unlike hybrid working, which is non-contractual.

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				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. A reduction of the notice could potentially be contentious for trade unions. FHRAG is asked to consider whether the notice period of three months should remain or be revised to allow for a reduced notice period if mutually agreed by the parties i.e. line manager and individual. A decision on this will be required from FHRAG
	Risk Assessments Para 11.6	Annual PAT test	Inclusion of NICS PAT tests?	No requirement to include in policy. Will be in line with existing arrangements i.e. to bring electrical equipment/leads to a workplace location annually.
	Para 11.8	I would prefer this to be stronger in terms of what is been offered.	Inclusion of examples of furniture/equipment	Not accepted- The furniture or equipment required will be included in the individuals risk assessment.

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	Annex C LM Discussion	There are a wide range of issues including menopause etc and medical issues not sure a list is helpful. Need to be clear that these issues need considered under the relevant policy not the hybrid policy.	Remove mention of specific medical conditions.	Accepted - First column last section amended to read "Gender reassignment, Pregnancy, maternity, menopause **and other medical conditions"**
PPS	**Hybrid working Procedures** **Para 8.3**	Does not have PPS logo on front page, along with the other Departments' logos. *Line management may end hybrid working arrangements due to business needs, **performance management purposes,** or health and safety risks. Generally, line management will provide staff with: (i**) at least 3 months' notice of management's intention;** and (ii) cogent reasons for the cancellation of the arrangement*. I would suggest that one month is enough notice on performance grounds. I appreciate that the wording is 'generally' but underperformance needs to be dealt with promptly and where it is felt that working in office full time would improve performance, leaving it 3 months would not be helpful. Likewise is 3 months sensible where there is H&S risks?	Inclusion of PPS logo Shorten notice period to end Hybrid working agreement	Accepted - PPS logo will be added to cover page Several departments have raised concerns on the 3 months period of notice required to end hybrid working arrangements particularly where there are health and safety concerns or changed business needs. The proposed 3 months period of notice 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 contractile 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'

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				which may help to address some of the concerns raised. A reduction of the notice could potentially be contentious for trade unions. FHRAG is asked to consider whether the notice period of three months should remain or be revised to allow for a reduced notice period if mutually agreed by the parties i.e. line manager and individual. A decision will be required from FHRAG on this.
	Para 6.2	It would also be helpful if Senior Management could be defined as *at least Grade 7,* as given PPS structure this decision will be made at Grade 6 or 5	Definition of Senior Management as **'at least Grade 7'.**	Accepted - Paragraph 6.2 of the procedures will be updated to reflect the PPS grade structure.
Infrastructure	**FAQs 15 & 16**	We welcome the clarity on roles and responsibilities in the policy and related FAQs - in particular, around decision makers, working in Connect 2 Hubs / offsite meetings/events as "days in the office" and the move to more streamlined online Work Style Agreements which will hopefully provide more robust management information.	Welcome improved clarify	Noted

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	Hybrid Working Procedure **Para 3.2**	However, following the rationalisation of the NICS Office Estate, there may be capacity issues in buildings that could impact on the quality of collaboration amongst teams being in the office more frequently – for example, following the closure of our former HQ, Clarence Court, we have moved to James House which has reduced capacity greatly (our current floor space allows for 40% occupation). This will, therefore, require careful management and is something DfI's senior management will monitor closely. We anticipate more staff will use Connect 2 Hubs when the policy is rolled out so it would be useful if DoF could monitor trends in the short to medium term to identify where capacity may need to be enhanced, through the expansion of existing sites and / or bringing more regional sites online.	Reduced estate limits capacity to 40% and will require careful management. Increased use of connect2 Hubs DoF need to monitor and expand number of sites	Noted Noted – impact of policy will be evaluated in the future.
DAERA	**Hybrid Working Procedures** **Para 3.2**	Connect 2 Hubs are invaluable for staff who want to work flexibly, but do not have the space at home, and do not want to travel to the office. However, Connect 2 Hubs were never intended as a substitute for workplace attendance, rather a substitute for home working. It has been previously decided which functions should be delivered from which workplace. Travel & subsistence and excess fares are calculated on that basis. It is wrong to set a base, then not require hybrid staff to work from this base when workplace attendance is required. Need to increase staff attendance at the designated office and avoid the perception that hybrid staff can work	Hubs intended as a substitute for homeworking only.	The management of Connect2 Hubs to be considered - Departments have differing opinions on issue. Reference to connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed. Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to retain management discretion to use Hubs. Para 3.1 of the policy definition of workplace may be updated to read

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		where they choose. This defeats the objective of the workplace attendance requirement. We need to ensure there is no misunderstanding on this point. **Workplace definition – suggested update** The revised draft policy defines 'workplace' as a member of staff's designated office or, where it is necessary to conduct official business, other work, or remote location (other than your home) as specifically agreed by line management. Workplace includes travelling on official business, visiting other NICS sites on official business, including Connect 2 Hubs, face-to-face meetings with colleagues, suppliers, or external organisations at their premises and face-to-face conferences and training.	Avoid perception hybrid staff can work from wherever they choose. Suggested change to definition of the 'workplace'.	**"'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".** Para 3.2 as referred in main comment of the procedures may be removed. A decision will be required from FHRAG.
	Hybrid working Policy Para 4.4	Preference for a 60% workplace attendance model.	60% office attendance preferred.	FHRAG have discussed & agreed 40% and consistent with benchmarking and taking account of the NICS estate strategy.
	General comment	A consistent approach of 40% in the workplace across NICS is helpful, as is the emphasis on business requirements / need. There will be some practical arrangements to be resolved e.g. to ensure all teams do not come in on the same day, given our restrictions on accommodation, but these can be managed locally. our assumption is that the 40% figure will be agreed centrally with TUS and this will negate the need for individual negotiations which is also welcomed.	Reduced estate requires workplace attendance coordinated across teams	Noted - Consultation with trade unions will be held centrally on the 40% requirement on the workplace

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	Hybrid working Policy **Para 3.1**	The definition of workplace requires clarification as page 6 of the policy document refers to the workplace as a designated office, or other work or remote location as agreed by line management. It is important that staff do not confuse workplace with location of their post.	Clarification re definition of workplace to avoid confusion.	Not accepted - This has not be raised by other departments. Designated workplace place is the location of the post.
	Hybrid working procedure **Para 3.2**	It is difficult to understand the rationale for including Connect2 hubs and alternative offices as workplace attendance. This does not support the aims of bringing teams together, as unless the team is all in the same place i.e. team working, supporting staff, and enhanced learning through interaction with colleagues.	Workplace attendance to **not** include Connect 2 hubs / alternative offices.	The management of Connect2 Hubs to be considered. Departments have differing opinions on issue. Reference to connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed. Para 3.2 of the procedures has been removed and Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to read **"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".** A decision will be required from FHRAG.

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	Suggested FAQ	it may be helpful if the FAQs included "*why does my workstyle agreement need to change if I am currently delivering my work with less time in the workplace?*" with the answering including the research/justification behind 40% figure. This would assist line managers enforcing the requirement.	FAQ to outline reason for change to 40% workplace attendance	Not accepted - The rationale for the requirement has been dealt with at FAQ 5.
	General comment	Some of the wording is not strong enough with the use of phrases 'will be encouraged to…' implying that there is scope for some aspects not be enforced. We would recommend strengthening wording to impress the point that line managers need to address non-attendance rather than being encouraged to do so.	Strengthen language throughout, actions not viewed as optional.	Not accepted - Not all Departments agreed with this comment. "***Encouraged***" is consistent from benchmarking with Cabinet Office.
	General comment	it was noted that staff may be required to attend more than the 40%, in addition there is also a risk that staff will continue to work later at home and not clock off, highlighting the need to manage this aspect of hybrid working as well.	Need to manage risk of staff working longer hours at home.	Noted – This is a line management responsibility.
Education	**General Comment**	I am content to endorse the policy as drafted.	None	Noted
Finance	**Hybrid Working Procedures** **Para 3.2**	Not so concerned with staff attendance at 'home office'. Increasingly seeing a move to staff working across offices and for smaller teams working from the Rathgael hub, with all the in-office benefits of team building and reduced commuting etc. NICS has become less attractive as an employer to many professions, which DoF relies on. Happy with the flexibility offered by multiple locations for team or 'in-	The use of Hubs is beneficial to both staff and management. To enhance NICS attraction & retention	The management of Connect2 Hubs to be considered, Departments have differing opinions on issue. Reference to connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed.

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		person' activity and the discretion provided to managers. Removing the reference to Connect 2 hubs form the workplace definition would not prevent staff considering hubs a NICS site.	need flexibility in respect of workplace locations	**Para 3.2 of the procedures has been removed and Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to read** **"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".** A decision will be required from FHRAG.
	General Comment	DoF supports the People & OD recommendation on hybrid working policy.	None	Noted
TEO	**Hybrid Working policy Para 4.4**	The 40:60 split, while welcomed it, may seem somewhat arbitrary. Is there an evidence base to back this up?	How was the decision on 40% attendance made	The 40% minimum attendance requirement was based on the NICS Estates Strategy, Benchmarking and Academic Research.
	Para 3.1	Needs to be clarified whether working in a hub counts towards office attendance.	Are Hubs to be considered workplace attendance	Reference to Connect2 Hubs counting towards 40% attendance has been removed.

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				Para 3.2 of the procedures has been removed and Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to state: **"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".**
	Hybrid Working Policy **Para 4.15**	Officers may be pressurised by family, to care for children or elderly relatives while they are working at home. To strengthen the line "**having care arrangements in place during your contracted hours" add "whether you are working at home or in the office".**	Clarification regarding care arrangements required whether at home or office.	Accepted – Line will be added as suggested
	Para 4.4	Staff with a long work commute may find the 40% attendance requirement impracticable. Roles taken in good faith they could largely work at home. Concern that, good staff could be lost.	Staff retention for those with long commutes	Point noted – However, it has always been the case that business need will be the priority, and the workstyle agreement could change at any time.
	Para 4.14	Does the home-working safety checklist cover domestic abuse. It might be helpful to take advice on what sort of questions are likely to elicit useful answers in this context.	General Risk checklist / Domestic Abuse	The current Risk Assessment for Homeworking questionnaire includes this at Q28

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				"**Do you believe you are at risk of violence in your home or the vicinity of your home?".**
	Hybrid Working Procedures Para 2.1	Not sure what this is referring to. I think it would need to be clarified or it could be open to misinterpretation.	Clarify workplace location	Para 3.1 of the policy definition of the workplace has been updated to state: **"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".**
	Para 3.2	Clarify that 'travelling on official business' does not include home to work journey.	Clarification of 'travelling on official business'	Accepted – Para 4.3 of the policy will be updated to read: "**Workplace includes travelling official business [not home to workplace], visiting other NICS sites on official business, face-to face-meetings with colleagues, suppliers, or external organisations at their premises and face-to-face conferences and training".**
	Para 9.3	Replace ~~misconduct~~ with **'non-attendance against Workplace Agreement'**	Suggest change in wording	Not accepted – this term is used in accordance with Discipline policy when formal action is taken.

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NISRA	**General Comment**	Concerned regarding the requirement for 40% office attendance and moving away en masse from workstyle agreements between employees and managers. Many staff currently attend the office considerably more than 40% of their time due to business need (4 or 5 days as standard). Hybrid working arrangements are documented in workstyle agreements. A move away from workstyle agreements entirely, could inadvertently unravel arrangements (which have been hard fought and won), bringing staff into the office to ensure service delivery.	Many staff are now working more that 40% in the workplace Removing workstyle agreements could unravel existing arrangements.	Further clarification provided to P Wales on 20 January 2025.