Northern Ireland Civil Service
People and Organisational Development

Review of HR policy 3.15 NICS Hybrid Working

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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Document Status: Revision

Revision History

Version number	Revision date	Summary of changes
V.01	Jan 24	

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide the Terms of Reference (ToR) to review the NICS Hybrid Working policy and supporting guidance.

2.0 Background and Context

2.1 The way the NICS delivers its services has changed irrevocably since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting scale of home working in the NICS was unprecedented and proved the NICS capability and effectiveness to deliver key functions, across central government, remotely.

2.2 The New Ways of Working project was established to support departments to implement hybrid and remote working.

2.3 The Hybrid Working policy was developed as a result of new ways of working in the NICS. In line with the policy, workstyle agreements were prepared however were not introduced until COVID-19 restrictions enabled the policy to be introduced. The policy was effective from June 2022.

2.4 When developed it was agreed that the policy should be subject to regular review. A staff survey to gather feedback on implementation of the Hybrid

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working policy was carried out with results published in February 2023. Overall, the survey indicated a promising start to hybrid working with the vast majority of responses being positive. The survey highlighted that many staff were reluctant to return to the workplace and adopt a hybrid working pattern, perceiving the policy implementation as a move from the exceptional homeworking arrangements adopted during COVID rather than a change from their workplace attendance arrangement in normal (pre-COVID) times.

2.5 Despite the majority of survey results being favourable, circa 8% of respondents overall expressed dissatisfaction. Their feedback was wide-ranging; from relatively minor aspects such as how the forms and guidance materials are presented to more concerning issues relating to some business areas or spans of control where the spirit and the collaborative, collegiate aspects of the policy do not appear to have been followed in all cases.

2.6 Key recommendations include:

- consideration of workstyle agreement forms with the focus of using only one form;
- clarifying the arrangements for part-time members of staff operating hybrid working;
- clarification of the decision maker on workstyle agreement requests;
- clarification on how disagreements and difference of opinion on business requirements between line manager and more senior management are managed; and
- that the policy is regularly reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of the service and reflects any new and emerging aspects of hybrid working.

2.7 The survey results, along with the results from the 2023 People Survey, analysis of reasons for increasing NICS sickness absence levels; and stakeholder engagement will help inform the review. Detail on scope of the review and wider analysis is included at paragraph 5.0.

3.0 Purpose of review

3.1 The purpose of this review is to ensure that hybrid working arrangements in the NICS are fit for purpose.

4.0 Objective

4.1 The objective of the review is to agree, in consultation with stakeholders, a revised Hybrid Working policy that:

- appropriately addresses the main concerns of the current policy;
- takes account of best practice; and

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- equips managers to be more capable and confident in managing the hybrid working process.

5.0 Scope of the review

5.1 The review will focus on the NICS Hybrid Working policy and supporting guidance documents including Workstyle Agreement forms. It will also explore mechanisms to allow monitoring and management information of numbers of staff availing of hybrid working to be provided.

5.2 The following will be considered:

- NICS People Survey results;
- NICS Sickness absence data;
- NICS Hybrid Working policy: Implementation Survey results;
- Stakeholder Feedback
- NICS Estate Strategy;
- benchmarking against other public sector organisations (e.g. Irish Government, Cabinet Office, Welsh Government; Scottish Government, Cabinet Office other government departments) to evaluate best practice;
- consideration of recent academic research; and
- interdependencies/interactions with other NICS HR policies, eg Alternative and Flexible Working Patterns, NICS Travel and Subsistence, Travelling Time, and Uniform Appeals.

6.0 Review method

6.1 There will be 4 phases to the review.

Phase 1 – Preparation

- Development of Terms of Reference (TOR)
- TOR shared with Finance and Human Resource Advisory Group (FHRAG)
- Scope interdependencies/interactions
- Benchmark and identify best practice
- Analyse survey results
- Scope design principles for consideration & approval by FHRAG

Phase 2 – Review

- Analyse FHRAG feedback
- Draft policy document against design principles
- Engage with stakeholders on draft policy
- Analyse stakeholder feedback
- Review / revise draft policy and guidance against stakeholder feedback
- Finalise draft policy and circulate to FHRAG & NICS Board
- Obtain Ministerial approval

Phase 3 – Formal consultation

- Formal consultation with trade unions on draft policy

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Phase 4 - Delivery

- Communicate changes to staff (with assistance of NICSHR)
- Publish policy and guidance

7.0 Stakeholder engagement

7.1 The review will require input from trade unions and the following key stakeholders:

- FHRAG
- HR Business Partners
- People & OD colleagues
- NICSHR colleagues
- Properties Division
- NICS Staff Networks
- CTUS

8 Costs

8.1 Any change to the HRConnect system to support the revised Hybrid Working policy will require a financial resource. In the current climate, costs for change control are likely to be prohibitive. DN Can we include consideration on how we manage changes in the interim?

8.2 Actual costs will be presented in a Business Case when known.

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9.0 Key milestones

Activity	To be completed by
Draft ToR	End Jan 2024
Agree ToR and design principles with FHRAG	End May 2024
Conduct desk research into best practice	End Jan 2024
Conduct benchmarking exercise	End Feb 2024
First draft policy document	End June 2024
Share first draft with NICSHR and stakeholders in P&OD for comment	June 2024
Process mapping, system changes considered	May-June 2024
Share draft policy with FHRAG for comment	July 2024
Produce supporting guidance for all users through creation of User Guides and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	June 2024
Liaise with HRConnect Service Management to create the required changes to support the revised policy- proposed online form will be hosted through APEX/FACES system	June/July
Share final draft policy with NICS Board (recirculate to FHRAG)	August 2024
Seek Ministerial approval on policy and to commence consultation	August 2024
Commence consultation with CTUS, GMB and UNITE on draft policy with trade unions.	August 2024
Update final policy and circulate with unions, NICSHR and other stakeholders	September 2024
Formally launch revised Hybrid Working policy	September/October 2024

10.0 Success Criteria

10.1 The success of the review will be measured against the noted objective.

11.0 Review

11.1 A review of the revised policy will be carried out 12 months following its launch by means of a staff survey to capture feedback from staff and line managers.

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