



**NORTHERN IRELAND PRACTICE AND
EDUCATION COUNCIL FOR NURSING AND
MIDWIFERY**

**Hybrid Working Scheme Policy –
Guidance for Managers and Staff**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In response to the pandemic, the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC) acted quickly to protect the health and safety of staff by implementing government advice in March 2020 to allow all staff to work from home. Standard Operating Procedures for home and office working were put in place to facilitate this.
- 1.2 Since 6 June 2022, government guidance to work from home where possible, ended, meaning staff could return fully to their contracted place of work. Like other HSC ALBs, NIPEC adopted a gradual return to office working, commencing with encouraging staff to work at least one day per week in the office.

On 6 February 2023, NIPEC took possession of their new accommodation in James House. The accommodation offers a work station for each member of staff. NIPEC recognises the benefits to staff health and wellbeing and productivity for some members of staff through working from home. As a result, NIPEC produced a Pilot Hybrid Working Scheme to facilitate those staff who wished to split the balance of their working week between their contracted place of work and their home. This approach also sought to maximise the public expenditure invested in the new accommodation and assured NIPEC's Council that assets were being optimised and Value for Money achieved.

- 1.3 The purpose of this Policy is to set out the criteria and arrangements for how employees can apply for hybrid working. The Guidance shall ensure a consistent approach which meets the needs of our business and the health and wellbeing of staff. Productivity of NIPEC business will continue to be evaluated and reported to Council in line with NIPEC's Performance Management Policy.
- 1.4 To work effectively, any hybrid working arrangement must primarily meet the business needs of NIPEC followed by the individual needs of staff, to ultimately ensure the continued delivery of safe and high-quality effective services. There may be occasions when staff are required to work 5 days of the working week in the office to meet the business needs e.g. for induction of new staff or attendance at face to face events.
- 1.5 NIPEC has re-established the Health and Wellbeing Committee represented by staff throughout the organisation. The Health and Wellbeing Committee meet four times per year and take the lead in the development of Health and Wellbeing initiatives for the organisation. BSO has developed a number of Health & Well Being & Mental Health Resources in conjunction with regional HSC colleagues. As an employer NIPEC is committed to protecting the health and wellbeing of our staff and would encourage staff and managers to access these resources ([Health & Wellbeing SharePoint](#), [Regional HSC Workforce Wellbeing Site](#), [BSO Health & Wellbeing Support Pack](#)).

1.6 From 6 March 2023, staff are expected to work in the office a minimum of 2 days per week. Business Team have agreed that the entire team will work from the office each Tuesday. The second day remains flexible however staff should endeavour to plan the day around business need for example attendance/support at relevant meetings and to support SPO's.

All staff are required to mark in purple in their diary the days they will be in the office. Staff are also expected to fill out the James House attendance log to reflect when they will be in the office. This should be done at least two weeks in advance.

2.0 Scope

Where service needs can accommodate, this policy can be applied to all roles in NIPEC and is applicable to permanent, temporary, full time and part time staff and may be extended to Agency staff. The Chief Executive and Business Team will determine whether hybrid working arrangements will be viable based on the business need and specific role.

3.0 Definitions

At the outset of the guidance it is important to be clear exactly what is meant by different terms which are commonly used when talking about hybrid working.

The key terms are:

3.1 *Hybrid Working*

This is the term used to describe how a member of staff balances their working week between working at home and working at their contracted place work.

3.2 *Flexible Working*

This is the term used to describe when a member of staff applies to make a contractual change to their contracted hours or working pattern.

3.3 *Remote Working*

This term refers to staff who may be required to work from different NIPEC work locations during the course of their working week. This may mean working from another HSC office.

3.4 *Agile Working*

This describes a form of working which takes account of work processes, accommodation, collaborative working and technology and uses it in a way that allows work to be done from any location at different times.

Staff who for whatever reason need to change their contracted hours or working pattern to facilitate personal arrangements should do so by applying for Flexible

Working through NIPECs suite of flexible working arrangements.

4.0 Hybrid Working Principles

NIPEC's strategic approach to Hybrid Working will be based on the following key principles:

4.1 *Visibility*

Senior staff will be visible within the workplace to provide leadership to the organisation.

Senior staff's attendance in the office will be flexible and in accordance with business need. This will be demonstrated through the maintenance of the office spreadsheet.

4.2 *Balance*

Staff will be able to voluntarily request a maximum of 3 days per week working from home. Days at home may not be fixed and may vary from week to week depending on business needs.

4.3 *Equality*

Part time staff will be able to request hybrid working on a pro-rata basis. NIPEC will implement this Policy consistently across all staff and monitor all staffs' compliance.

Requests from staff who have a disability or caring responsibilities to work at home more than three days per week will be considered on an individual needs' basis.

Support from Occupational Health and HR may be sought to inform the decision.

5.0 Responsibilities

NIPEC Business Team has operational responsibility and oversight for the effective operation of this scheme with ultimate approval sitting with Council.

Delegated responsibility for overseeing its implementation has been given to the Chief Executive.

5.1 Staff Responsibilities

- Comply with all NIPEC policies and procedures whilst working at home or in NIPEC offices;
- While availing of hybrid working, maintain the professional manner that would be expected in workplace at all times. This includes ensuring a camera is turned on for virtual meetings;
- Ensure that staff are fully contactable during their working hours through the NIPEC IT and telephony systems provided;
- Understand that there is no right to avail of hybrid working, it is a management decision based on the needs of the business and can be withdrawn at any time with immediate effect, however in most circumstances staff will be provided with 4 weeks' notice;
- As part of the hybrid working arrangement, the days spent at home may vary depending on the needs of the service. Staff will be required to attend the office in line with service needs and manager approval;
- Be aware that where there is attendance, disciplinary or performance issues line managers reserve the right to withdraw hybrid working arrangements and request staff attend the workplace;
- Deliver the agreed work objectives set out by the line manager on a timely basis;
- Inform the line manager as soon as possible in the event of an accident or incident occurring whilst working at home. This includes reporting any damaged, lost or stolen equipment, breaches of confidentiality or loss of data;
- Complete a risk assessment before commencing a hybrid working arrangement. Staff will work safely and comply with any control measures identified in the risk assessment. Where any new risks become evident, you must notify your line manager immediately and review the risk assessment to reduce risk;
- Report any sickness in line with the NIPEC's Attendance at Work Policy and Procedures.
- The flexi time scheme (applicable to bands 2-6) provides flexibility for starting and finishing times subject to attendance during core hours with an opportunity to accumulate leave. Flexi leave is credit time taken off in lieu of additional hours previously worked and must be taken with prior agreement from line manager (reference NIPEC' leave pack 21-28).
- Appointments (reference NIPEC's leave pack 21-28) or work outside of normal business hours must be approved as normal by line management in accordance with normal policy arrangements (reference NIPEC's leave pack 21-28).

- Be familiar with and take personal responsibility for tax and insurance issues relating to working from home and to alert the HMRC and insurance provider when required to do so;
- Report any damage or significant “wear and tear” to equipment provided by NIPEC to your line manager and ITS at the earliest opportunity;
- Be available to attend workplace meetings/ training etc when required or requested to do so;

5.2 Ensure the safe storage of NIPEC equipment and confidential information in line with Information Governance procedures. It is anticipated that staff working from home should be working from electronic files and it will only be in exceptional circumstances that paper files should be taken home. Where paperwork containing personal information or confidential documents are taken home, it must have prior written authorisation and must be stored in line with NIPEC Information governance procedures.

5.3 *Line Manager Responsibilities*

- Consider hybrid working as a key enabler to more flexible, responsive working patterns and to facilitate better use of the NIPEC accommodation;
- Treat each request for hybrid working on its own merits and give it reasonable consideration;
- Consider the needs of the individual requesting hybrid working. Requests from people with disabilities for more than the maximum of two days may be considered as being a ‘reasonable adjustment’ under the Disability Discrimination Act as a recommendation from Occupational Health;
- Where a part time member of staff requests hybrid working, discuss with them what is the most efficient way of enabling them to do so;
- Ensure that regular contact is maintained with all staff availing of hybrid working through the use of technology, via video conferencing, telephone, face to face meetings and any other method of communication available. Managers must ensure that regular supervision and team meetings are arranged;
- Assess the sensitivity and confidentiality of the work to be undertaken from home and ensure that the member of staff has completed their mandatory Information & Governance training; which can be accessed via LearnHSCNI.
- Ensure that the staff member’s risk assessment has been completed prior to agreement of a hybrid working arrangement and discuss any potential risks with the member of staff;
- Ensure that incidents or accidents are logged appropriately and at the earliest opportunity via the Head of Corporate Services;

- Liaise with the BSO ITS Department before agreeing any hybrid working arrangements to discuss/agree potential IT equipment/access arrangements, where necessary (See section 7 ICT Requirements);
- Liaise with BSO Human Resources Department (Attendance / Health & Wellbeing team) where advice or guidance is required;
- Ensure staff are aware of expectations and the required standard of work: In some instances, it may not be appropriate for staff to avail of hybrid working where there are issues regarding conduct, attendance, disciplinary or performance. In these instances, managers should seek advice from Human Resources;
- Ensure staff adhere to their responsibilities regarding health and safety, information governance and confidentiality;
- Ensure that the scheme is not used to replace carer's leave or sickness absence in cases where a member of staff is unfit for work.

5.4 *Human Resources and Corporate Services*

- Ensure that this pilot scheme is applied in a fair manner through advice on its application;
- Evaluation of the impact of the Policy will be carried out at review to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations.
- Where appropriate seek advice from the Head of Corporate Services regarding Hybrid Working Health & Safety Provisions / Risk Assessments;
- Review operation of the scheme, providing reports at least annually to Business Team and Council as required on implementation of the policy.

6.0 Trade Unions

Trade Union representatives have an important role to play generally in providing advice, support and working in partnership with managers and the Human Resources team in looking to ensure that the Hybrid Working Scheme is implemented to deliver benefits to NIPEC, its staff, partners and service providers.

7.0 Requesting Hybrid Working

This process outlines the steps that should be taken by both staff and managers in consideration of hybrid working arrangements.

- 7.1** Staff wishing to avail of a maximum of 3 days per week working from home will be expected to complete a request through their line manager. Approval of the request will be subject to the staff assuring the manager about the suitability of their home working environment and ability to fulfil the full duties of their role.

7.2 Managers will be required to monitor the number of staff who avail of Hybrid Working and what days they work from home on. It is important to note that applications made by part time staff will be considered on a pro rata basis.

7.3 Any request made by a staff member for hybrid working must follow the below process:

Step 1: Submit a Request

Staff who wish to be considered for hybrid working should complete the Hybrid Working Request Form. On completion of this eform your line manager will receive an automated email detailing your request for consideration to assess suitability of your role for Hybrid Working who will then meet with you to discuss.

Step 2: Risk Assessment

When making your application you will be asked to complete a risk assessment. This risk assessment will be considered by the line manager as part of the meeting to discuss suitability for hybrid working arrangements.

The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 requires all employers to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of staff whilst at work. This duty also applies to staff working from home as part of a hybrid arrangement.

This also places an obligation on staff to ensure they take reasonable care not to put themselves or others at risk whether at their contracted place of work or at home.

Step 3: Consideration of Request

On receipt of a Hybrid Working Request a meeting should be held as soon as practicable between the staff member and the manager to discuss the suitability of the hybrid working arrangements. This meeting should happen within 10 working/14 calendar days of the request being made. It is expected that managers will review the arrangements periodically with staff at monthly 1-1 meetings and where appropriate meet with individuals to discuss any concerns.

The line manager should consider the following factors when discussing and considering a hybrid working request.

The business need	There should be no detriment to the service being delivered due to hybrid working.
The impact on team workload	The absence of the individual from the workplace will not create additional workload for other staff or affect operational effectiveness.
The suitability of the job/work task	Hybrid working will only be possible where the nature of the role allows it.
The suitability of the home work area	The member of staff's home, when this is being used as a work base, should be a safe and secure working environment. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to provide assurance of this through their completion of the H&S risk assessment.
The capability of the member of staff	The ability to deliver work effectively without supervision. Staff who are subject to either informal or formal conduct, attendance or capability proceedings will not normally be eligible for working from home arrangements, particularly if they require close supervision and coaching by their manager to make the necessary improvements.
ICT requirements	Due consideration to ICT requirements should be given prior to agreement to working from home. ICT equipment are subject to a costed business case by the line manager, with advice from the Information Technology Services (ITS). It should be noted that all costs to be incurred will require approval from the budget holder responsible for the member of staff's cost centre.

Step 4: Outcome

Following the meeting between the staff member and line manager, the line manager should complete the Hybrid Working Approval Form within 10 working/14 calendar days of the date of the meeting to inform the staff member of their decision. Once the Hybrid Working Approval eform is completed, an automated email will be issued to the employee to confirm in writing if their request has been approved, and if so how many days has been approved, or if the manager is unable to facilitate the request for hybrid working.

7.4 Request Approved

If the request is approved, the manager will agree the following:

- Clear work objectives and arrangements with the member of staff;
- If required, discuss any potential issues arising from hybrid working (e.g. caring responsibilities. Health and safety etc.)

- Managers should ensure staff undertake, where applicable, an up to date Display Screen Self- Assessment. This is a requirement of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment (DSE) regulation 1992 relating to regular users. The DSA will be undertaken by a Health and Safety official for staff if required. Staff are also required to undertake the eLearning module as part of their mandatory training and prior to completion of self- assessment. Once completed, assessment from e-learning module should be provided to your line manager to address any issues of concern.

Should any queries arise, further advice may be sought from NIPEC's Head of Corporate Services. The hybrid working arrangement cannot commence prior to these risk assessments being carried out and any necessary control measures having been implemented.

7.5 *Request Declined*

If a line manager declines a request for hybrid working they should provide the reasons to the member of staff in the Rationale Section of the Hybrid Working Approval eForm. Please note, that the information the manager contains in the Rationale section will be automatically shared with their staff member, and will be regarded as the outcome in writing. A copy of the outcome will also be forwarded to the manager's email address upon completion for their own records.

Staff members have a right of review to the decision not to grant hybrid working in line with this Scheme. If a staff member wishes for this decision to be reviewed they should contact their Line Manager within 10 working days/14 calendar days of the decision being communicated in writing. The Line Manager should then arrange for the requested review to be conducted by the Chief Executive/ Head of Corporate Services. NIPEC will seek advice from BSO HR to review the case to ensure an independent view is sought as part of the appeals process. Following this, the final decision will be conveyed in writing to the member of staff by the Chief Executive/Head of Corporate Services.

All documentation relating to an application for hybrid Working, must be retained by the manager.

7.6 *Withdrawal or Suspension of Hybrid working arrangement*

Agreed hybrid arrangements can be withdrawn or temporarily suspended if it is demonstrated that:

- The business needs are not being met;
- The performance of the member of staff suffers as a result of hybrid working;
- The effectiveness of the team in which the member of staff work is compromised;

- Change in Business Needs.

In most circumstances, if regular hybrid working arrangements are to be withdrawn, the member of staff will be given in writing, a minimum of 4 weeks' notice of this change.

However, if hybrid working arrangements are reviewed due to the staff members performance, attendance or conduct, the manager reserves the right to immediately withdraw the hybrid working arrangement and these may be dealt with under the appropriate NIPEC Policy should this be necessary.

8.0 Lone Working

Where possible NIPEC will discourage staff working in the office alone however, under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, NIPEC must manage any Health and Safety risks for those staff who may be working alone in the office. This also includes anyone contracted to work for NIPEC including agency staff, associates or work-related placements.

NIPEC and line managers are obligated to:

- Train, supervise and monitor staff who may be working alone;
- Know where lone workers are with agreed intervals of regular contact using phone, video call or email.
- Put procedures in place for staff who have medical conditions whilst working alone;
- Keep in touch with them and respond to any incident.

9.0 Terms & Conditions – Base and Business Mileage

9.1 Whilst working from home, a member of staff's base remains as defined in their contract of employment. Staff are only permitted to work from their own homes or other authorised HSC or NICS premises.

9.2 Staff entitled to claim Business mileage should ensure that home to base return miles are deducted as per normal claiming processes irrespective of whether a staff member attends their base or not as part of any journey on that particular day.

10.0 Security & Confidentiality

- 10.1** Staff are responsible for ensuring the security and confidentiality of NIPEC property and all NIPEC data, information, files, documents etc. within their possession. NIPEC Information Governance Policies will apply. Staff should ensure they complete mandatory eLearning in Information Governance and Cyber Security.
- 10.2** It is the responsibility of all staff to ensure the safety and security of any documentation containing personal data in transit, and whilst at home, and that access by unauthorised individuals is not possible at any time. Transporting records from NIPEC offices requires vigilance and the principles of confidentiality must be maintained at all times. It is anticipated that staff working from home should be working from electronic files and paper files will only be taken home in exceptional circumstances.
- 10.3** Where there is a breach of confidentiality or loss of data or information asset this must be reported to the Head of Corporate Services at the earliest convenience in line with Information Governance Policies. This will be managed via NIPEC's incident reporting process.

11.0 NIPEC Equipment and ITS Support

- 11.1** The use of laptops will continue to support the hybrid working model.
- 11.2** Equipment provided will remain the property of NIPEC and must not be used by other members of the household. These items must be returned should the hybrid worker cease employment with NIPEC or if a member of staff is suspended from work during an investigation process.
- 11.3** Where equipment is provided, NIPEC will be responsible for the service and maintenance of the supplied equipment. Any concerns regarding NIPEC equipment must be immediately raised with the Line Manager.
- 11.4** An application for hybrid working may be refused if there is not sufficient funding to accommodate all equipment necessary to effectively perform the duties at home.
- 11.5** Staff will be held responsible for the loss or damage to equipment where requirements of NIPEC's Information Governance Policies have not been observed. The matter may also be investigated in accordance with the NIPEC's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 11.6** Any ICT equipment that requires physical repair or complex troubleshooting should be delivered to the ITS Department. There may be a requirement for the member of staff to work from their contracted place of work when equipment is being repaired. ITS staff will not be required to visit the member of staff's home.

The employee will be responsible for connecting up the equipment themselves e.g. connecting screens, keyboard, mouse and power to docking stations / pc base units.

11.7 Connecting to home broadband (Wi-Fi) is the responsibility of staff and therefore the member of staff should contact their home broadband provider for support. Staff will be responsible for any additional or improved Broadband costs. Home devices such as printers should not in any circumstance be connected to NIPEC equipment without ITS approval.

11.8 ITS cannot provide replacement devices without notice, therefore in the interim period staff may have to attend work 5 days per week (pro rata for part time). NIPEC will not be responsible for the purchasing of any equipment such as chairs or desks. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to ensure they are set up appropriately to work hybrid.

12.0 Insurance

12.1 NIPEC will be responsible for any necessary insurance of equipment supplied by them and the employee liability insurance for use of the equipment.

12.2 It is the responsibility of the member of staff to have adequate home buildings and contents insurance.

12.3 NIPEC will not accept liability for damage caused to the home or its contents.

12.4 The member of staff must inform their insurers, mortgage lender etc. if they are working from home on a regular basis for any part of the working week.

13.0 Recovery of NIPEC Property

On the cessation of hybrid working, for whatever reason, any specific NIPEC property used to facilitate home working and data must be returned to the line manager. Should a member of staff fail to return any NIPEC property then the member of staff will be financially liable. In the case of a member of staff resigning their employment, withholding of any final salary payments will be applied and or further action deemed as appropriate by the NIPEC.

14.0 Monitoring and Review

The line manager must retain a record of the risk assessment for a period of 5 years. The member of staff must inform their line manager if there is any significant change to their working at home activity or the location of equipment used. If such a change does occur e.g. the member of staff moving home, then a new risk assessment must be carried out.

15.0 Equality Statement

This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The screening has identified specific equality impacts and outlines the way that these will be addressed. No significant equality implications have been identified therefore the policy will not be subject to an equality impact assessment.

The equality screening has been published and can be accessed here <https://bso.hscni.net/directorates/people-and-place/655-2/equality-and-human-rights-screening/equality-screening/>