

IMSP060BP: HYBRID WORKING POLICY

Version 1.5 (10/2024)

.

Reference number/version: 1.5

Departments: HR

Document Owner: Group HR Director

Effective from date: October 2024

Review date: Every 2 years

Document History			
Version number	Edited by	Date reviewed	Summary of changes
1.0		June 2020	Version 1
1.1	HR	October 2020	Workday requirements and form
1.2	HR	October 2020	Amendment to Appendix one
1.3	HR	October 2020	Update to IMS references in Appendix one
1.4	HR	October 2022	References to working from home amended to hybrid working, clarification of potential arrangements, policy context and references updated, appended guidance on completion of assessments removed
1.5	HR	October 2024	Cyclical review.

1. PURPOSE

This policy is designed to ensure adequate arrangements are put into place to deliver an effective service with the employee working on a hybrid basis. All employees will continue to have a work base as their contractual location, however, may operate hybrid working subject to the criteria in this policy.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Mears Group Plc employees. It does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

3. DEFINITIONS

Line Manager - refers to the direct Line Manager on Workday for the employee, or alternatively in the event that they are not available, then the manager's manager.

HR – primarily refers to the HR Administration and the HR Advisory team.

Health and Safety – refers to Regional Health and Safety Managers and whilst are usually aligned to particular contracts, may be a different Regional Health and Safety manager for the Group.

Employee – is an individual who is directly employed by Mears Group and or any of its subsidiaries. It does not include self-employed, agency or contractors for the Group.

Hybrid working – an arrangement to facilitate an employee working from a remote location for a specified number of hours or days per week. This may be agreed on a temporary or permanent basis, but employees will be required to attend their normal workplace on at least a weekly basis. Fully remote working will not normally be agreed, unless in exceptional circumstances.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

Line Manager - It is the responsibility of managers to ensure the implementation of the policy is applied fairly and consistently to employees, ensuring any Equality, Diversity and Inclusion impact is considered. Particular consideration will be given to hybrid working as a reasonable adjustment and the importance of safeguarding employees' mental and physical health and wellbeing in all settings.

Line Managers will be responsible for ensuring that employees follow the correct health and safety procedures for each hybrid working arrangement to ensure their employees are safe when working remotely, on either a temporary or permanent basis. Any individual concerns regarding health and safety must be raised to their Line Manager or relevant Regional SHE manager immediately.

Line Managers must also ensure the appropriate record is updated and maintained in Workday, confirming the employee occupies a job profile where hybrid working has been agreed and further the employee has been appropriately assessed as meeting the Company criteria.

HR - Will be responsible for ensuring appropriate advice and guidance is given to both employees and managers on the application of this policy, in addition to reviewing the Workday assessment to ensure an appropriate record is made.

Employees - Are responsible for actively co-operating with their Line Manager in the application of this policy. This will include ensuring that their proposed remote location is suitable and implementing any amendments to their working arrangements. Any concerns or developments which impact their ability to work on a hybrid basis must be raised with their Line Manager at the earliest opportunity.

5. POLICY

Mears Group recognises that remote working may be an appropriate response to the needs of the business, employees and candidates and is consistent with the Red Thread values, particularly those of Empowerment and High Standards. Arrangements have been put in place to enable employees to access a wide range of systems and applications remotely as part of our commitment to an agile and sustainable business model.

Occasional remote working in response to adverse weather, other unforeseen emergencies or to undertake a particular task should be dealt with separately at the discretion of management on a case-by-case basis.

Where temporary or permanent permission for hybrid working is provided this will be communicated by the Line Manager at the time and is anticipated to be used for a specified period of time for either health, safety and welfare of an employee and/or the public, to further the Company's objectives to address issues around attraction and retention of talent, diversity, inclusion and under-representation. Hybrid working can also help to meet the needs of the specific contract, workstream or function or in line with legal requirements.

Requests from the employee for hybrid working should be addressed through a Flexible Working Request, in accordance with the Flexible Working Policy and with reference to the principles in this policy.

This policy does not form part of the employees Contract of Employment and will vary from time to time in response to organisational, legal and other environmental developments.

Irrespective of the arrangement, hybrid working does not change the employees' working hours or duties; it just means the role is partly carried out remotely as opposed to a permanent office base. Contractual obligations such as working hours continue to apply and any further changes would need to be agreed with the relevant Line Manager.

Subject to line management approval, employees may work remotely if their job duties permit this and the employee has access to adequate available resources to facilitate this.

Examples where this would not be suitable would include those roles requiring high levels of supervision, where tasks are not suitable for remote working, equipment or access is required which cannot be provided outside of the normal workplace or the employee's physical presence is required. Hybrid working which involves an employee regularly carrying out duties whilst overseas will not normally be agreed.

Role suitability

In line with the job catalogue, the role profile must have been previously assessed as suitable for hybrid working. The decision on suitability is made by Workforce and recorded accordingly.

An assessment concerning the employees suitability will require completion in Workday.

Whilst employees are working remotely, there must be confirmation that their chosen location is suitable for their purposes which includes having a decent working area, and a strong internet connection.

In the course of business as usual, if remote working is required within a specific role then the approval from a Regional Director level or above is required. This should be supported by a satisfactory Remote Working Risk Assessment and Remote Working H&S Self-Assessment. These should be approved by their Line Manager and/or Regional SHE Manager in line with the Remote Working assessment procedure found on Workday.

Types of hybrid working

Employees undertaking hybrid working are defined as completing their work at a place located outside of the company's premises. This will involve the employee dividing their schedule between attending an office and working from a remote location, for specified hours or days.

These arrangements can be temporary or permanent to meet the needs of the employee and/or business, at the discretion of management.

Reasons that could require working remotely on a temporary or permanent basis include but are not limited to:

- Medical advice and guidance
- Matters of Health & Safety
- The effective conduct of the role or specific duties

How to determine whether an employee can work remotely

We advise both employees and managers to consider these elements before asking for, or approving, hybrid working:

- Is the employee eligible by nature of their role profile?
- Are there any security concerns and data privacy concerns?
- Will collaboration with the employee's team become difficult?
- Can the necessary equipment or software be installed at the remote location?
- What are the conditions of employees' home or alternative place of work?
- Can we still provide effective service to our customers

Compensation and benefits

Hybrid working arrangements does not affect an employees' employment terms. If working remotely has any effect on compensation and benefits, this should be considered by management in line with Company policies.

Setting up hybrid working

In the event hybrid working is agreed on either a temporary or permanent basis, it is important to ensure appropriate measures are put in place. Additional suggested guidance for working remotely is set out in appendix one.

Property and equipment

In the event that hybrid working is agreed, employees will be provided with the IT equipment needed to do their job properly and securely remotely, including laptop/desktop computer and mobile phone. Other equipment such as desk and chair, printer, shredder etc, may be provided depending on the individual circumstances. Where equipment is provided, the employee will be responsible for ensuring that it is safely and securely transported between the office and remote location and available for use as required. The company will not cover the cost of fixed or mobile broadband connections.

Employees must take good care of all company property and return it when requested. They may not use the equipment or other property provided for personal or family use.

Should damage to company property occur then disciplinary action may be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Under normal circumstances, employees will not be expected or required to use any personal equipment such as a computer for work purposes. Where this is unavoidable, please check with your Line Manager first. Any personal equipment that is approved for use remains the employee's responsibility, and the company would not cover the cost of any upgrades or repairs required.

Employees must install any legitimate update to computers or other equipment, if requested by the company, straightaway.

Should company equipment be used for personal use then disciplinary action may be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Household bills

If working from home, employees will be expected to cover the cost of utilities including heating and electricity as necessary for periods of remote working.

Mortgage, lease and insurance

Employees are responsible for making sure that their mortgage or lease and home insurance do not restrict or prevent their home or other location being used for work.

Employees should discuss with their home insurer any changes that may need to be made to their policy to ensure that they are fully protected while working from home. They are responsible for any additional premiums.

Tax

There may be tax implications to working from home and employees should get specific advice on this.

Managing hybrid working

Employees who work on a hybrid basis are subject to the same rules, procedures and expected standard of conduct and performance regardless of where they are working at any time. Contractual obligations, duties and responsibilities remain in place, as do other workplace policies.

Employees should remain as involved as possible in the business and its activities while working remotely. This includes having access to company news, events and benefits, as well as opportunities for professional development, training and promotion.

Line Managers will keep in regular contact with their employees during any periods of remote working via phone, email and video conferencing. Face-to-face meetings will also be held when employees attend the office. These contacts will be an opportunity for employees to discuss their working arrangements and to raise any concerns.

Where an IT issue or other problems prevent an employee from working effectively remotely, they should contact their Line Manager immediately. Employees may be required to come into a work office location until the issue has been resolved.

Employees who cannot work on a remote working day because of illness or injury, must follow the procedure set out in the Management of Attendance Policy.

Expenses

The company will reimburse employees for any reasonable costs incurred in the conduct of their duties, including travelling costs in respect of meetings, in line with the Expenses Policy. Travel costs to the employee's normal place of work will not be reimbursed.

Health and safety

The company may carry out periodic health and safety assessments of remote working locations, as well as equipment checks including electrical testing. If hybrid working has been agreed, employees will be required to complete the remote working self assessment and follow relevant guidance. In the event of extreme business operating conditions, the company may issue separate health and safety guidelines, which will be communicated at that time.

Employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care. If they have any health and safety concerns, or if an accident takes place, they must immediately report this to their line manager in line with the Health and Safety Policy.

Any in-person meetings held during a period of remote working must be arranged in an appropriate Mears office or alternative venue approved by the Company.

Security, confidentiality and data protection

The company's high standards of confidentiality must be adhered to at all times. Employees should familiarise themselves with the Data Protection Policy in particular. Data protection risk assessments will be carried out periodically and employees should raise any queries about security, confidentiality or data protection with their manager.

Accessing the employee's home or remote location

The company may need to access the employee's home or remote location to set up the equipment, to assess specific health and safety individual requirements, checks and any subsequent repairs.

What if employees move to a new house?

The company will reassess the remote working arrangement regularly (at least every 6 months) to ensure that they continue to be appropriate. If necessary, the company may decide to bring the hybrid working arrangement to an end. If that happens employees will usually be able to work at their contractual place of work for all of their contracted hours, although that cannot be guaranteed.

Ending the hybrid working arrangement

If the employee wants to bring their hybrid working arrangement to an end, they should speak with their Line Manager.

The company may decide to end the hybrid working arrangement on reasonable notice if they think that it is not working as it should, is no longer necessary for business reasons or that it has become, or will soon become, unsuitable for other reasons.

If hybrid working has become unsuitable because of an employee's conduct or performance the hybrid working arrangement may be terminated immediately and the employee will be required to return to the normal office location for their role. Formal action under the Disciplinary Policy or Improving Work Performance Policy may be invoked, including suspension from duties pending investigations and/or their employment being brought to an end.

When the hybrid working arrangement has ended, the employee will work their contracted hours from the contractual workplace, unless agreed otherwise.

6. OTHER RELATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- Flexible Working Policy
- Maternity Policy
- Shared Parental Leave Policy
- Parental Leave Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Improving Work Performance Policy
- Management of Attendance Policy
- Authorised Leave Policy
- Data protection Policy
- Hybrid Working Procedure
- Hybrid Working Risk Assessment
- Hybrid Working H&S Self-assessment

7. APPENDICES

- Appendix one – Guidance on Working practices whilst working remotely

APPENDIX ONE – GUIDANCE ON WORKING PRACTICES WHILST WORKING REMOTELY

Designated workspace

It is important to ensure you have a separate space for work where you can focus on tasks without being distracted and have everything you need for a normal working day e.g. computer, phone, any necessary files, chargers etc. This should be arranged and in place before you start work.

When living and working in the same space, NHS advises this can create anxiety and stop us being able to focus. It is helpful to have a specific dedicated workspace, even if in a shared space, try to designate an area as your working space.

Ensure your workspace is set up correctly as much as you possibly can and whilst you are working shut the door if you can. This includes sitting at a desk or table where possible and avoiding working from a sofa or bed. Please refer to the health and safety guidance to assist you.

Technology

Before commencing working remotely, it is advisable to ensure you have a reliable and secure internet connection, access to the Company network and know how to contact IT support if required.

Clothing

Changing into working clothes can mentally switch you to a productive work mode and can also help separate 'work' and 'home life'.

If you are asked to attend video conference calls, it is important to ensure appropriate work attire is worn unless otherwise agreed separately with the organiser of the meeting.

Organisation

Writing daily achievable and realistic tasks each day can help you keep focussed and motivated whilst working remotely.

Remember to be kind to yourself, acknowledge and be realistic about what you can achieve. In the event you are concerned about certain work deadlines you have been given, speak to your line manager at the earliest opportunity who can assist with either reprioritising your workload or distributing your work amongst the team where available.

Breaks

It is important you are clear with yourself on when your working day begins and ends and take regular breaks. Work life balance is important whether working remotely or from an office. It is recognised that work life balance can in some circumstances become more challenging especially when your home and office are the same place. It is recommended that when your working day is over, ensure you switch off to avoid burn out or issues with mental wellbeing; this includes constantly viewing your emails on your work mobile phone.

Whilst working remotely, people may feel as though they have to be available all the time, however this is not effective if your mental health is suffering. In the event that you start to feel this way, please speak to your line manager.

Taking breaks can be important in helping manage feelings of stress, therefore taking a lunch break and regular screen breaks is recommended. By focussing on something else when taking a break can assist with feeling more focussed when you return to work and improve productivity.

Where possible, set time aside to go for a walk and get fresh air as part of your breaks during your working day. This should be in line with any government guidelines that are in place at the relevant time.

Working remotely may also mean less time moving. In the event you feel discomfort from sitting in one place for a duration, try doing some light stretching or exercise.

Connecting with people

It is important all employees, whether working remotely or in an office, feel connected with their team, which can help boost mental wellbeing for both you and your colleagues. If you are struggling with hybrid working then speak to your colleagues or your Line Manager about your concerns.

Interaction with people whether inside or outside of work is important. During work it is advisable to regularly contribute to team chats and group emails to ensure you feel included and do not drop off the radar.

Share with colleagues what you are currently working on and ask colleagues what they are working on to stay informed. By having these discussions, you may discover where you can help and support each other by working together.

Foster relationships

Making time for non-work chats as you would do within the workplace is recommended and could be included as part of your breaks during the day. Video calling could be used where available as a good way to maintain face to face contact virtually as an alternative to physical meetings where appropriate.

Where happy to do so, make time to socialise virtually with colleague such as a digital coffee break or Friday online get together.

Communication

For effective communication, it should be concise and clear; working remotely can present additional challenges to this. Speaking in person gives you audio and visual cues to assist the communication message, therefore additional considerations should be made such as method used to communicate e.g. a phone call or video call is sometimes more effective than an email.

Support

If you need help, ask. Whether you feel further training or support from your Line Manager, or a colleague is appropriate, remember you can always ask for support. Remembering you are all part of a team and therefore should be supporting each other is important, especially when working remotely.

Make it work for you

Hybrid working can take time to balance, so you should not worry about getting it right straight away. Change where you sit, put music on, whatever helps you work. There are some perks of working remotely including no commute and being able to be more flexible. It can also be difficult with new distractions such as children at home who may not understand you are working and want to spend time with you. You should not be taking care of children whilst working. If you have childcare issues then please speak to your line manager.

Setting boundaries with other members of your household is key to mental wellbeing during while working remotely. By having a discussion about your needs where possible, reminding them you still have to work, requirement for quiet time and share your schedule may assist.

Equally, it is easy to stay logged on when your office is at home, therefore switching off when the working day is over and enjoying time outside of work is also important.

Helpful links

Additional further information relating to working from that may be of assistance can be found at:

- NHS 7 Tips working from home: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/7-simple-tips-to-tackle-working-from-home/>
- CIPD 10 Tips for working remotely: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexibleworking/remoteworking-top-tips>
- HSE Protect Homeworkers: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm> • ACAS Working from Home: <https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home>