

New framework to support flexible working in the NHS

25 August 2023  Helen Badger

Since the pandemic home/hybrid working has become a reality for many workers with jobs which may have previously been considered unsuitable for such an arrangement now routinely undertaken by home/hybrid workers. The NHS is no exception, with many typical in-person consultations now taking place remotely either by telephone or video conference. Virtual wards have been developed, allowing for patients to be cared for in their own homes, giving clinicians greater flexibility over how their roles are performed.

In support of this, the NHS Staff Council have agreed to incorporate a [home and agile/hybrid working framework](#) into the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook. The new Section 35 will be effective from 2 October 2023 and should be applied in conjunction with all other parts of the NHS terms and conditions, including Section 33 which contains provisions on flexible working (which is a day one right for NHS employees).

The new framework is aimed at supporting The NHS People Promise and its commitment to make the [NHS a good, modern employer](#) of choice and to improve staff experience over the long term. The framework agreement also builds on the long-term workforce plan and seeks to recognise the differing needs of the NHS workforce. However, the framework makes it clear that it is only intended to apply to homeworking arrangements in the UK. To ensure maximum reach it is suggested that home/hybrid working policies should be communicated to all employees and included in recruitment and selection material where appropriate.

The framework contains clear definitions and guidance to support NHS organisations to create and/or update local policies, including contractual consideration. It also highlights the potential benefits of home and hybrid working including:

- Improved work/life balance
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Increased productivity
- Improving opportunities to increase inclusivity
- Ability to recruit from a wider geographical pool.

It is recognised that not all roles will be suitable for homeworking and not all employees will either want, or be able to, work from home. However, employees in posts which are deemed not suitable for home/hybrid working should be treated fairly and equitably and managers should be encouraged to discuss and consider other forms of flexible working that may meet the employee's needs.

NHS organisations should familiarise themselves with the provisions of the new framework and conduct an audit of any existing home/hybrid working policies currently in place to identify any changes required. In the event changes are required this should be undertaken through a process of consultation with staff and agreement with trade unions through local partnerships.

The NHS Staff Council is also working on producing a suite of additional guidance to support organisations to implement Section 35.

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