

21 November 2023

# CPS Return to Offices: PCS Update

The government wants civil servants to attend their office or other departmental site at least 60% of their working time.

Members will have seen a recent communication from CPS regarding hybrid working. The government is seeking to have civil servants attend their office or other departmental site at least 60% of their working time: so someone working 5 days a week would be expected to attend an official workplace 3 days per week (*please note that this doesn't affect those with reasonable adjustments to work from home*).

This is not going to happen immediately. The CPS message made that clear.

However, PCS sees no justification for this happening at all. The government announcement gave little in the way of evidence justifying this requirement. They only mention the importance of collaborative working: if by this they mean getting together to discuss policy, new initiatives, problem solving strategies, then most staff in CPS are not engaged in that kind of creative collaboration. The daily tasks for most of us are more routine. We know what we have to do and we get on with it. Occasional problems can be quickly resolved by a short phone call.

By contrast the benefits of hybrid working are numerous:

- It has enabled staff to save money during the period of low pay increases and high inflation and while the rate of increase has lowered the actual prices haven't;
- While the government boasts that wage increases are now higher than inflation and have been for some time, that is not the case for their own staff who work in the public sector;
- Homeworking is a feature of CPS recruitment and so people have joined in the past 20 months on the basis of a promise that is now being reneged on;
- The government's proposal is not evidence based: if it were they would acknowledge that productivity has been higher with HW and sickness levels lower;

- Since we moved into new premises (e.g. Petty France) we have seen staff numbers increase by a third. At the time we moved in there was barely a seat/desk for every member of staff who turned up. With the increase many premises simply won't be able to accommodate the additional staff;
- Some Areas have closed offices and moved into smaller accommodation so there will just not be the space for such a large scale return;
- Recruitment and retention is already a problem. Take hybrid working away it will be worse;
- It has played an important role in CPS stated aim of being an inclusive employer. Many with caring responsibilities for example would struggle with frequent mandatory attendance.

PCS in CPS will therefore be seeking discussions as will PCS nationally in relation to all civil service departments. We expect those discussions to be evidence based rather based on the prejudices of those who long for the return of outdated working practices.

In the meantime, staff in CPS should not be seeing any changes to current practice. We have a workable policy called hybrid working; nothing has replaced that and in fact it is currently scheduled for a pre-planned review to see what works well and what needs improving. PCS will be involved in that review.

We are aware that court-based staff would appreciate equity wherever possible when it comes to the hybrid working policy and for example with PAs we would contend that there are certain aspects of the role that could be accommodated within a necessarily more limited use of remote working on a rota basis for example.

Please report any concerns to PCS. Please encourage your colleagues to join PCS.