

23 May 2024

Hybrid working is the future, not arbitrary targets

Industrial action could be considered as part of a PCS campaign to protect access to hybrid working and resist arbitrary targets on office presence.

Following the adoption of national conference motion A82 on hybrid working and civil service office closures, the NEC was instructed to oppose mandatory targets on time spent in the office and to negotiate a national agreement that grants access to hybrid working for all staff, where it is possible for their work to be done from home.

Conference condemned the “arbitrary, ministerial instructions, issued in November 2023, that civil servants must ‘spend a minimum of 60% of their working time face to face with colleagues either in offices or on official business, rather than at home’.

The motion also addressed the linked issue of the government’s estates strategy, which seeks to reduce the total number of civil service offices, in favour of fewer multi-occupancy hubs. This strategy puts pressure on civil servants to travel further, and often means reduced access to parking, leading to longer working days, higher expenses and an impact on staff with protected characteristics including caring responsibilities and disabilities.

“Enthusiasm for hybrid working amongst civil servants is wholly understandable in this context,” said the motion.

Moving the motion on behalf of BEIS Scotland and the North of England, Lauren Hyatt said the arbitrary 60% figure is “not based on what's best for employers and it’s not based on what's best for employees”.

Hybrid working is the future and we want to make sure the employer agrees with that and continues to implement it,” she said.

In passing the motion, delegates instructed the NEC to “demand a government estates strategy worth the name, which protects local services, guarantees

investment in our workplaces and which mandates a union-negotiated transition to environmentally-friendly workplaces”.

The motion also included instructing the NEC to: fight for a guarantee of no office closures except by agreement; argue for access to hybrid working for frontline staff when there is non-front-facing work that can be done from home; support devolved, non-civil service and privatised areas to negotiate equivalent hybrid working policies; and ensure agreements rule out any attempts by employers to use IT to monitor staff productivity while working from home.

It concluded that all options up to and including industrial action should be considered to secure these aims.

Further, the NEC should be “proactive in consulting all bargaining units to ensure that nothing done at a national level could be seen to undermine victories already scored at any other level”.