



**etbi**  
Education and Training  
Boards Ireland  
*Boird Oideachais agus  
Oiliúna Éireann*

# **HYBRID WORKING**

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# **POLICY & HANDBOOK**

***For all staff in  
Education and  
Training Boards  
Ireland***



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## I. Introduction

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, Education and Training Board Ireland's (ETBI) first priority has been the wellbeing and safety of our staff members and we have followed public health advice to keep our staff and communities safe.

Our goal is to give staff members ongoing flexibility, allowing staff to work where they feel most productive and comfortable. ETBI would like to ensure that as many of our staff can continue to benefit from an enhanced work-life balance by giving them the choice to return to the office, or to continue working remotely or have the flexibility to do a mixture of both. ETBI has developed this Hybrid Working Model policy that is aligned to our core principles.

- Physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing is our top priority.
- Supporting staff members needs and offering flexibility to work remotely and/or at the ETBI office, as conditions allow.
- Serving members of the ETB community and continuing critical business operations (we have developed smart and productive ways to meet our service delivery goals).

The Hybrid Working Policy and Handbook is a guide for all ETBI staff and outlines the terms and conditions for hybrid working, and supports available to ETBI staff. ETBI wants to ensure that staff members and ETBI benefit from these arrangements.

Hybrid working arrangements shall be considered by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) in a fair and transparent manner in line with this policy. A formal arrangement will be agreed with the staff member that will outline the conditions governing the hybrid working arrangement, the responsibilities of ETBI and the staff member, and any governance controls or measures required for this arrangement. The staff member's existing obligations under their contract of employment remain unaltered. This policy will be subject to review in accordance with anticipated legislation on the right to request remote work and in line with best practice.

All ETBI's policies and procedures apply equally to staff members in a hybrid working arrangement. This policy is not intended to confer any legal or contractual entitlement on an employee to work remotely. ETBI reserves the right to refuse, modify or terminate any hybrid working arrangement.

## 2. Scope & Definition

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This policy applies to staff who meet the eligibility criteria set out further in this document. The hybrid working policy allows staff members to work from home, the office or/and hub for

all or part of their working week. Requests for a hybrid working arrangement will be agreed on a case-by-case basis. ETBI seeks to support its staff members to achieve a better balance between work and personal commitments. ETBI will make every reasonable effort to accommodate hybrid working requests, taking into account the needs of the business as well as individual needs. The hybrid working arrangement may be appropriate for some jobs but not for others.

### Definitions

**Hybrid:** For the purpose of this policy, 'hybrid' working means staff who work a portion of their contracted hours on-site and a portion of their contracted hours remotely from their home or hub location. It may be the case that the majority of the staff members' hours are worked at the home location.

**Remote:** For the purpose of this policy, 'remote' or 'remotely' refers to the agreed home location where the staff member works from.

## 3. Objective Requirements

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ETBI's objective requirements for implementing a hybrid working policy are to:

- Attract and retain talent, including those with specialist skills and be more human-centric;
- To have greater access to talent as location can be removed as a barrier;
- Reduced distractions and interruptions where the employee undertakes focused work, increasing productivity.
- Reduction in commuting frequency can contribute to higher productivity levels;
- Reduce demands on providing office space as capacity is limited in ETBI;
- Reducing carbon footprint by minimising travel requirements to ETBI;
- Respond to the general shift in employees' expectations for a more flexible approach to work;
- Support retention of experienced staff;
- Promote employee well-being and work-life balance;
- Improves equality and inclusion as remote working can be an ideal platform for reasonable accommodation where applicable and can be attractive to certain groups where labour market participation is low (e.g. persons with children or caring responsibilities, persons with additional support needs).

## 4. Who is eligible for a hybrid work arrangement?

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Generally, the pattern someone can work will depend on the activities of their role and how the team can deliver excellent service overall, be it either remote or in-office. ETBI staff who are eligible for hybrid working can make a request to their line manager on an annual basis.

The staff member and the designated line manager discuss the job responsibilities and determine if the job is appropriate for a hybrid working arrangement. The policy applies to all staff employed by and seconded to ETBI.

## 5. Suitability for a hybrid work arrangement?

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While individual preferences can be discussed with your manager, each employee's pattern of hybrid working requires management approval. ETBI reserves the right to request more on-site attendance on a temporary/permanent basis, depending on business needs. This policy does not amend the employee's normal place of work. A suitable role is a role with activities that ETBI determines can be carried out effectively and productively from the employee's home.

Whether a role is suitable for hybrid working will typically depend on:

- the nature of and activities required in a role;
- customer/stakeholder requirements;
- any health and safety issues identified if activities are undertaken outside the normal workplace;
- the equipment required for the adequate performance of a role;
- the training or supervision that may be required in a role;
- what is happening in the business, the team and the role at the time, and the overall needs of the business.

## 6. Procedure for requesting hybrid working

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ETBI regards hybrid working as a benefit for which our people may voluntarily apply. There is therefore no intention in this policy to enforce working from home on any staff member. When approved, a Hybrid Working Agreement will be put in place for an agreed period.

The approval process is managed in ZOHO People. The staff member and the designated line manager will sign the hybrid working agreement.

Staff must demonstrate that they have a suitable workspace for remote work. ETBI will conduct a workspace assessment to ensure that it meets the workspace requirements. Should their workspace change, a further workspace assessment is required.

If a staff member's circumstance changes during their initial hybrid working agreement, the designated line manager should be informed of these changes and any impact discussed with regard to the agreement.

Staff requesting hybrid working arrangements must be available to attend in-person meetings/events at the requested location(s) by their designated line manager or relevant external stakeholders as required.

Hybrid working arrangement will be reviewed annually.

## 7. Responsibilities

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The staff member and the designated line manager are responsible for making the hybrid working arrangement successful.

### Staff member

**Staff member performance:** Staff members working remotely or in the office should be able to work independently, manage time, adhere to deadlines, and effectively communicate with all. Additionally, the staff member and the designated line manager should discuss how the staff member intends to meet goals and targets, stay productive and ensure excellent customer service through continuous discussions and as part of the performance management development system (PMDS) process. It is the staff member's responsibility to communicate regularly with their designated line manager, their team, and members of the ETB community, including relevant stakeholders.

**Work schedule:** Staff members should establish and maintain set working hours with their designated line manager and be available during those times. Staff members should establish well-defined breaks throughout the working day.

**Dependent care:** Hybrid work is not designed to be a replacement for appropriate childcare. Although an individual staff member's schedule may be modified to accommodate childcare

needs, the focus of the arrangement must remain on job performance and meeting business demands.

**Travel:** All travel arrangements will align with ETBI's travel and subsistence policy.

**Etiquette for meetings:** Staff members should be aware of and apply best practice for hosting meetings virtually (See Appendix 1). All meetings should be organised in Teams or Zoom to allow all team members to participate, whether working on-site or remotely, unless a meeting is organised by the designated line manager, where all participants are asked to attend in person.

Staff members may be required to attend meetings away from ETBI or their agreed remote working location in pursuance of delivering the service. In all cases, time away from the ETBI office/agreed remote working location should be discussed and approved by the designated line manager and noted on the ETBI team's shared calendar. It is not permitted to be absent from the ETBI office/agreed remote working location without the approval of the designated line manager. ETBI will continue to provide staff members with appropriate reimbursement related to ETBI business travel in accordance with ETBI's travel & subsistence policy.

**Other activities:** Hybrid work does not permit staff members to have time to work at other jobs or run their own businesses. Engagement in such activities during expected work time may result in disciplinary action.

### **Designated line manager**

The designated line manager has several key responsibilities when considering hybrid work situations for their staff members. Resources for supporting designated line managers while managing hybrid arrangements can be found in the resources section 18.

**Eligibility:** The Directorates and designated line managers should consider other factors such as the nature of the job/work, operational costs, including travel, and whether the functional area can maintain the quality of service to ETBI, members of the ETB community, government bodies and the public.



**Communication:** The designated line managers should address expectations regarding communication between staff members and themselves, staff members and their team, staff members and ETBs/clients, and staff members and others (e.g., via in-person, telephone, email, Zoom, MS Teams, messages, or a combination).

**Performance:** The designated line manager is expected to manage the staff member's performance to ensure success for the staff member and the functional area. Measurable performance goals are required. The designated line manager must review this regularly to support staff members' professional development through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). The staff member and designated line manager are expected to discuss how the staff member intends to meet goals within timeframes, stay productive and ensure excellent customer service.

The designated line manager is responsible for supporting/managing the staff member's performance, including regular conversations, goal setting, and professional development opportunities.

**Attendance:** The designated line manager is expected to manage a staff member's attendance and leave requests through ZOHO People. The designated line manager is responsible for accurate time tracking and leave usage for all staff members. The designated line manager is also asked to encourage breaks and establish schedules as needed.

## 8. Equipment and Supplies

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Equipment supplied by ETBI is maintained by ETBI. ETBI accepts no responsibility for damage or repairs to staff member-owned equipment. ETBI reserves the right to determine appropriate equipment, which is subject to change at any time.

ETBI staff are responsible for regularly checking the fitness and safety of equipment and reporting any faults to the ICT Communications and Facilities Officer.

Equipment supplied by ETBI is to be used for business purposes. ETBI may supply the staff member with appropriate office supplies (pens, paper, etc.) as necessary.

Staff members have a responsibility to update details of their equipment inventory on tZoho people.

Upon termination of employment, all ETBI property must be returned to ETBI within ten business days unless other arrangements have been made.

### Standard Equipment & Supplies

Each staff member is provided with the following equipment for their primary workspace. This list is subject to change based on availability and the department's budget.

- Laptop
- One Monitor (Second monitor available on request)
- Mouse
- Keyboard
- Office Chair (By collection)
- Printer (On request and approved by your designated line manager)
- Mobile (Depending on the grade/approval by the designated line manager)
- WIFI Device (On request and approved by your designated line manager)
- Headset (If required)
- Footrest (If required)
- Laptop riser (if required)

### Costs not Covered

ETBI has determined that it will not cover costs for the following services related to hybrid work. Other items may not be covered in addition to this list.

- Internet service or set up
- Remodeling costs related to office space
- Utility supplies
- At-home storage of supplies

## 9. Working from the Office

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### Booking an office space

A designated office space may be assigned to staff members who work in the office on a regular basis.

Staff members who mainly work for home, and are attending the office, should book an office space on the **Booking App** by selecting the date, time and room, if required. The same procedure is required for booking a meeting room.

Appendix 2 outlines procedures and guidelines for managing COVID in the office.

## 10. Health and Safety

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A hybrid working arrangement can only be facilitated on the basis that the designated workspace is a suitable work environment, allowing ETBI and staff members to fulfil their corresponding obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. This includes cognisance of the Display Screen Regulations and the minimum requirements detailed in [Schedule 4, Regulation 72](#) that govern staff members working in a home or other office location.

While ETBI is cognisant of and implements safety measures to meet its obligations as far as practicable, staff is also responsible for providing a safe place to work remotely and for their health and safety and that of others.

The staff member will use the equipment correctly and as instructed, cooperate with ETBI on all health and safety matters, attend training sessions, and report any suspected health and safety defects or issues, including any work-related stress issues.

### Accident & Incident Reporting

Staff members are reminded of the continued importance of reporting any incident or near misses that occur that are related to their hybrid working arrangement or in the office and should follow the procedure outlined in the ETBI's Safety Statement.

## 11. Insurance

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ETBI property, whether in the building or in a person's home or hub, is insured under ETBI's insurance policy.

## **12. Attendance Management**

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Staff members who have been approved for a hybrid working arrangement must comply with ETBI's Time and Attendance Policy. The Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, Part II, specifies the minimum rest periods and other matters relating to working time.

Staff are required to accurately record attendance for their contracted hours using Zoho People's Time and Attendance system. Overtime should be avoided or minimised, where possible, by careful planning and scheduling of work. Advance approval is required in all cases from the staff members line manager, to work beyond contracted hours.

Unless prior approval has been given, a staff member who is absent from work must notify their line manager as to the cause and likely duration of absence within half an hour of their scheduled starting time on the first day of absence and record the details on Zoho People.

All leave applications/reporting will continue to operate as normal without being impacted by the hybrid working arrangement. Hybrid working staff are deemed at work; therefore, application and reporting processes remain unchanged.

Remote working is marked as time in work; therefore, it cannot be used in conjunction with or to replace leave arrangements. During an absence, the staff member must arrange to have their calls diverted to voicemail/department and set up their out-of-office message.

### **Flexitime**

Before COVID and the introduction of hybrid working, flexi-time was a benefit for particular grades included in the Time and Attendance policy. Staff are afforded significant flexibility when working from home under the hybrid working arrangement. Flexi-time will no longer feature and has been removed as an option for staff.

## **13. Suspension of Hybrid Working**

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There may be an occasion where hybrid working arrangements for a staff member may have to change or be temporarily suspended. Such situations will typically occur in response to specific organisational needs, e.g., during peak business periods, training/conferences events, etc. In such circumstances, as much notice as possible will be given.

## **14. Termination of Hybrid Working arrangements**

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The hybrid working arrangements may be terminated by ETBI if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the hybrid working arrangements are not working or not being used for the purpose intended. i.e., a replacement for appropriate childcare, running your own business, or because the staff member is not meeting their goals and targets within agreed timelines.

## **15. Data Protection/ General Data Protection Regulations**

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Staff working from home or allocated workspace should maintain personal information collected in line with GDPR requirements.

Staff members are reminded of the continued and heightened importance of data protection and privacy rights while working remotely, as with all ETB policies. They are referred to the ETBI policies in this regard, especially those outlined in ETBI's Data Protection, Email, and social media policies that relate to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) usage and documentation storage.

The IT, Communications & Facilities Officer may need to assess the staff member's access, storage and backup requirements and make recommendations for the necessary measures and safeguards required to ensure that such measures implemented are appropriate for a hybrid working arrangement. These measures may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Commitment to adhere to IT/data protection protocols, policies and procedures when working remotely.
- Undertake additional IT training on data protection and IT security.
- Keep passwords secure, and never share user accounts, passwords, or credentials with anyone else.
- Take reasonable care to prevent the loss or theft of mobile devices, laptops, and associated IT equipment, etc., and prevent unauthorised access to data or systems, including paper-based documents.
- Report any loss or theft of mobile devices, laptops, and associated IT equipment to the IT Department.

## 16. People

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Google's research shows that distributed work can be as effective as working in the same office, but it isn't always as easy or enjoyable. There are three things staff can invest in to optimise the experience of hybrid working.

1. **People:** Focus on relationships.
2. **Place:** Focus on physical space and technology.
3. **Practices:** Focus on communication structures and norms.

Building and maintaining relationships is important for remote collaboration.

**Be transparent about your schedule:** Let team members and designated line managers know where and when you are working. It is important that others know how to reach you and when you are available for meetings. Share your calendar with your team. Doing so makes it easier for people to find time to meet with you. Use email effectively. Use the subject line to alert the reader to the topic, the level of urgency, and the required action.

**Get Talking:** Use MS Teams as a means for quick questions and answers. Despite the informal nature of MS Teams, always begin with a greeting, and remain courteous and professional. Be responsive: Stay connected to your workplace and team members by being available and responsive during work hours (e.g., answer calls and respond to emails promptly).

**Communications Charter:** ETBI has established a Communications Charter that sets out guidelines for best practices, expectations and understanding when responding to emails, queries and all calls.

**Be Present:** Some engagement signals are lost when working together virtually, particularly when we mute the microphone or focus intently on our laptops. Be sure to:

- Unmute your microphone and validate contributions from others. A head nod, "mmmm", or "yeah, good idea" will do it!
- Ensure you're clearly visible on the screen, making eye contact, and expressing your reactions noticeably.

## 17. Place

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An effective workspace starts with set-up, logistics, and the right tools.

### Remote Workspace

A well-designed office allows each staff member to work comfortably without needing to over-reach, sit or stand too long, or use awkward postures (correct ergonomic design). Sometimes, equipment or furniture changes are the best solutions to allow staff members to work comfortably.

#### Creating a remote workspace

- Have a dedicated area for work.
- Customise your space for efficiency to maximise productivity. Think about a small whiteboard or planner for tracking deadlines. Ensure supplies are within reach.
- Arrange your workspace and keep it clean.
- Schedule even the little things on your calendar.
- Ensure you have good lighting.
- Use a comfortable chair with the correct height for your desk space.

## 18. Practices

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Having a plan for communication, structures, and norms is critical for hybrid working teams. A new environment can offer a fresh mindset on work or many distractions. Talk with your family members who are home during the day about your schedule to limit interruptions. Set time on your calendar for short breaks, take a quick walk to reset your mind.

**Match the Comms Channel to the Need:** Video is best for more sensitive or detailed discussions, while a quick message is great for check-ins or clarifying simple matters. Don't default to a message when a richer format is warranted; don't force a formal video meeting when an email is enough.

**Reach Out:** It can be hard for teammates in other locations to be heard, as they often have to overcome barriers to jump in and share. You can help create the space for them to speak up.

- Ask for input from the most isolated meeting participant any time the meeting breaks into a discussion.
- If you see someone trying to enter the conversation, stop and invite their comments.

**Make the Most of Meetings:** Fewer opportunities to connect necessitate good meeting practices. Set meeting agendas in advance, kick off meetings by recapping where things left off previously, and be mindful of timing to avoid ending a meeting without getting through key agenda items.

**Don't Wait for a Formal Meeting if you Don't Need to:** Physical distance can lead some people to avoid communicating as much as they need to. If something comes up that you'd normally ask an in-person colleague about right away, don't let physical distance stop you; message or call your colleague to keep progress moving. When remote team members can count on being able to quickly receive information they need, trust improves more quickly.

**Prioritise Your Well-being:** Focus on your well-being while working from home by setting up a comfortable office space to physically separate your work and home life; setting limits on your workday so that you don't accidentally work more hours than normal; achieving your stand up goal by getting up at least every hour. Mindfulness is another useful tool to increase well-being and focus, while relieving stress.

## 19. Staff Supports

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**Employee Assistance Service (EAS):** The well-being of all staff members is paramount. Staff members are reminded to familiarise themselves with the ETBIs Employee Assistance Service arrangements and supports. The Employee Assistance Service is a free, confidential service available to staff members of the ETBI and their families. Contact details can be found on the [ETBIs' Staff portal](#) or through the Human Resources Department on request.

**Right to Disconnect:** The ETBI recognises the importance of appropriate work-life balance to maintain the well-being of all our staff members. It encompasses the staff members' right to disconnect outside of their regular working hours. Where a staff member chooses to exercise this right, there is no expectation from ETBI or their team to engage in work-related matters outside their regular working hours unless in the event of a critical incident. More details can be located on ETBI's Right to Disconnect policy.

**Resources available on the Staff HR Portal:** Human resources have provided several resources and tips for staff on [ETBI's staff portal](#).

## 20. Claiming Tax Relief On Costs Working From Home

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ETBI does not pay hybrid working expenses. Staff who work on a full or part-time basis from home can claim tax relief on the additional costs incurred working from home for electricity,



heat, and broadband directly from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. Staff members can claim E-Working expenses by completing an Income Tax return on the Revenue website as follows:

1. sign into [revenue.myaccount](https://revenue.myaccount)
2. click on 'Review your tax' link in PAYE Services
3. select the Income Tax return for the relevant tax year
4. select 'Other PAYE Expenses' in the 'Tax Credits and Reliefs' page and insert the amount of expense at the 'Amount Claimed' section

As a claim may be selected for future examination by Revenue, all documentation relating to a claim should be retained by the staff member for six years from the end of the tax year to which the claim relates. Please check the [Revenue website](#) for details on how such relief is calculated.

## **21. Right To Appeal Decision**

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The staff member may appeal the decision if their request for hybrid working is not approved. Such appeals must be made in writing within seven days to the HR/IR Governance Officer for the attention of the General Secretary, and they must clearly state the grounds on which they are appealing the decision. The appeal will be heard within 14 days. The staff member will then be informed of the outcome of their appeal within 14 days of the appeal meeting. The decision made on the appeal will be final.

After 12 months or if a staff member changes roles in ETBI, they can request to be considered for hybrid working.

## **22. Variation**

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The policy may be amended at any time following consultation between management and staff.

## **23. Review Of Policy**

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ETBI will review this policy a year after its introduction or earlier if deemed necessary by ETBI management.

## APPENDIX 1 ETIQUETTE FOR HOSTING A VIRTUAL MEETING

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Below you will find tips on etiquette for setting up and hosting a meeting.

**Always set a virtual option:** When scheduling any meeting, set up a Zoom or Teams link so that colleagues always have the option to participate hybridly.

**Provide an agenda:** Provide an agenda to participants so that they can adequately prepare for the meeting.

**Sharing documents:** When sharing documents during the meeting, plan ahead and share files with any participants who will be participating hybridly or set up a virtual collaboration resource using ETBI's approved technology, such as MS Teams, Zoom, etc.

**Clarify attendees:** Encourage meeting participants to state their name(s) if they only attend via phone when they speak.

**Set meeting norms:** Set expectations at the beginning of the meeting if you need participants to mute their lines or be engaged in a certain way.

**Monitor participation:** Encourage participation from hybrid participants and in-person attendees alike. Be inclusive of those virtually attending, ensuring to ask for their participation.

**Timing:** Consider setting meeting durations for 25 or 55 minutes and allow for at least five-minute breaks between meetings.

### Etiquette for Virtual Meeting Participation

Participating in Zoom or MS Teams is a regular part of hybrid work responsibilities. Below you will find tips on etiquette for participating in a meeting virtually.

**Quiet space:** When participating in meetings, find a quiet space and join the meeting from somewhere free of loud background noise.

**Mute your line:** When not speaking, remember to mute your phone or microphone to minimise background noise.

**Speak clearly:** If some team members are physically in a meeting room, make sure they speak close to the phone or microphone so people on the call can hear clearly.

**Actively listen:** Be an active listener on calls by verbally acknowledging that you are listening or using non-verbal cues like nodding your head if you are on video, by using short statements to paraphrase the main takeaways, and asking for permission to ask questions. Give and receive feedback: When giving feedback to your colleagues, ensure it is specific, constructive, and empathetic. Use your feedback to discuss outcomes and actions.

**Be engaged:** Give the hybrid meeting your full attention. Avoid multi-tasking or reading emails.

**Participate:** If you have something to contribute or missed something that someone said, be sure to jump in rather than waiting to be asked. Meeting facilitators cannot read your body language and may not recognise the need to pause and invite your participation.

**Appear professional:** Remember to maintain a professional appearance if you participate in a meeting via webcam. Remember, getting dressed for work will help you get in a mindset for work. Use your video features: Turn your camera on as much as possible to stay engaged with your colleagues.

**Use your calendar:** Keep your calendar up to date to avoid confusion and breakdown in communication as it relates to your availability.

**Dress code:** Staff members working remotely are expected to dress professionally when conducting video conference calls with clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

## APPENDIX 2 MANAGING COVID-19

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If you develop symptoms of coronavirus, self-isolate and phone your GP. Do not come to work if unwell or are awaiting a test or test result.

### Use of Printers/Photocopiers

Sharing of printers & photocopiers is permitted. Staff will be expected to clean and disinfect the printer/photocopier before and after use. Wipe down disinfectant will be available at every printer/ photocopier.

### Hand, Respiratory and General Hygiene

Good hand, respiratory and general hygiene is vital for reducing the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19. Frequent hand washing is encouraged, and hand sanitisers are available around the ETBI building. Hand sanitising stations are located at various entry and exit points around the building; staff will be instructed to sanitise hands at each point.

### Ventilation

Windows will be required to be open when working in the office. Windows must be closed at the end of the day.

