



Hybrid Working

Guidance for Public Health Registrars,
Supervisors and Training Programme
Directors



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Contributions

This guidance was developed through the FPH Specialty Registrar Committee (SRC) following a discussion with the Vice President of the FPH, Tracy Daszkiewicz. All regions were consulted to understand what the wellbeing offer was in their area.

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Background

The Covid-19 pandemic drove fundamental changes in how workplaces operate, with many professions moving to remote working. As pandemic restrictions lifted, many workplaces moved to a hybrid way of working, with time split between working in an office and working remotely. This has had implications for Public Health teams and specialty registrars on placement with them.

Anecdotal feedback from registrars in training and regional registrar committee annual training survey responses indicated the experiences of hybrid and fully remote working greatly varied among trainees. Whilst some registrars reported they remained connected to colleagues via regular virtual check-ins and set “in the office” days, others reported feeling unsupported “isolated from the team”. Trainees highlighted concerns around the absence of ad-hoc opportunities to seek clarification or feedback from supervisors, which they felt negatively impacted their training. Some registrars also reported how the reduced in-person contact was detrimental to their wellbeing.

It is also recognised that registrars earlier on in their training may be completely new to hybrid or remote working, having previously worked predominantly in person in hospitals or other clinical environments, and therefore may require additional support to adapt to this new style of working.

This guidance therefore aims to outline “what good looks like” through descriptions of best practice for hybrid and remote working. It is recommended that this guidance should be widely disseminated. Through the promotion of best practice, we hope to standardise the experiences of registrars in training and ensure all trainees are receiving the right support to allow them to thrive in a remote or hybrid working environment.

Pros and cons of hybrid / remote working

There are a number of benefits and drawbacks to hybrid working, some of which are outlined below:

Pros	Cons
Reduced travel time	Risk of longer working hours, higher intensity of work
Greater job satisfaction	Risks of decreased productivity for those who favour interaction with others
Work-life balance may be easier with benefits to wellbeing	IT/internet issues
Increased productivity	Communication challenges
Better placement experience for registrars	Reduced social support/isolation
More diverse range of registrars accessing placements	Less access to training
Greater number of registrars can access placements	Perception of absenteeism
Fewer interruptions	Difficulties in collaborating

It should be noted that not all individuals will experience these benefits or drawbacks in the same way and they are often dependent upon an individual's personal preferences and life circumstances.

Guidance for Registrars

This section is intended for use by public health registrars, and summarises best practice information for making the most of hybrid / remote working.

Planning your placement

- When considering a placement find out from previous registrars about whether they worked remotely/hybrid/flexibly and whether that worked well for them.
- In your initial discussions with your potential placement supervisor be honest and open about your working hours, explore whether in-person office days are required in the placement, and clarify any necessary logistics of travel (e.g. on-site parking, local buses and train stations)
- Discuss what counts as “in-person” work, particularly if your placement organisation requires you to be in the office a minimum number of days. Does this require attendance from 9-5pm, or is it acceptable to work 10-4pm to accommodate travel? If you choose to take a flexible approach, ensure that you can make up the additional hours at another point in time.
- Before agreeing to take the placement, assess what is feasible for you to attend in terms of in-person days. This may be achieved by doing a practice drive to the location to see how long it takes, looking at train/bus times, or using Google maps estimated travel duration.
- If you have had negative feedback from a previous registrar about remote/hybrid working, or you may find it challenging to attend the office in the frequency requested, consider whether this is the right placement for you. There are many different placements out there!
- Consider what equipment you have available for home working and whether this will meet your needs if full-time remote working. Some deaneries may be able to help you meet the costs of improving your home working environment (e.g. covering the costs of a computer monitor). Alternatively, your placement may be able to loan you equipment such as desk chairs, computer monitors and laptops.
- You may benefit from an occupational health assessment if you have chronic health issues that could make working from home more difficult (e.g. chronic back pain).

At the start of your placement

- Effective communication is critical to successful hybrid and remote working. Communication should be intentional as you are unlikely to be able to rely on ad-hoc opportunities to talk. Therefore, during your first meeting with your new placement

supervisor, discuss the frequency and duration of your 1:1 meetings. It may be advisable to have weekly/fortnightly meetings set up for the first few months. Discuss whether instant messaging (e.g. via Teams) or emails is the most effective means of getting rapid responses to more short urgent queries.

- Have an agreed point where you review the frequency of 1:1 meetings and approach to communication.
- Meet with team members virtually early in your placement
- Be clear about what experiences you want during a placement. Saying these up front means that when these opportunities arise, even if your supervisor doesn't see you that day (and so can't casually mention them) they are more likely to let you know in your next 1:1.
- Ensure your calendar is open so that your supervisor and other team members can easily arrange meetings with you. See this as the equivalent of people being able to pop their head around your office door and see if you are free, rather than a means of keeping an eye on you.

During your placement

- If some in-person days are required, maximise their impact by checking if other team members, including your supervisor(s), will also be in the office.
- Prioritise 1:1 meetings with your supervisor and avoid moving them as much as possible. As there are fewer opportunities to spontaneously speak to your supervisor(s), ensure you are prepared for and engaged during 1:1 meetings.
- Find out if there are regular set days where people from the team / working on a particular project attend the office together and try to attend even if this is only for part of the day.
- If circumstances change during your placement and you are no longer able to attend the office as frequently as before (or at all), contact your placement supervisor at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the change in circumstances and that your working pattern needs to change. It is also advisable to let your TPD and your educational supervisor (if you have one) know too.
- When working unsupervised it's easy for motivation to slip. Consider the following approaches to maintain motivation and progress:
 - Set out SMART objectives
 - Set clear timelines
 - Using 1:1's as an opportunity to review these and tackle and issues with progressing the work

Time management and organisation skills

- Keep consistent work hours, even if these vary from 9-5.
- Avoid sending emails outside of regular office hours (you can always schedule the send if you have to write it after 7pm or before 7am, or on days off).
- Take regular breaks throughout the working day to promote mobility and ensure sufficient hydration.
- Break up the day so you are not expecting yourself to work solidly on a single task or project, but you have more variety. Consider using the pomodoro technique to ensure you get work done but have regular breaks.

Work/life balance

- Block off the time that you do not work – for example if you clock off at 3pm for school pick up block that time off in your diary as out of office. You can continue working when you return from the school pick up.
- Have something that pulls you away from your work, be that walking your dog, talking to your mum on the phone, or playing a sport. Have that set in your diary so you can't keep working to "just finish that bit of work off", only to discover it's 8pm and you haven't had an evening.
- If possible, have a dedicated part of your house where you work, which is separate from your home life. If this is not feasible, consider options to make a virtual or physical separation. This may be having a drawer to pack your laptop away at the end of the day, or buying a screen that you can use to separate your desk from the rest of your living space.

Working alone without being lonely

- Tap into your registrar network. Find out if there are registrar work hubs, or consider organising virtual coffees/lunches with colleagues in other placements.

General guidance

- Be proactive and engaged. If you are a remote attendee of a hybrid meeting, set goals to engage in the meeting. That could range from ensuring that you add a message into the chat to volunteering to present prior to the meeting. Close Outlook so you are less likely to be drawn to emails and you can stay engaged. Ensure that you are "seen" as a virtual team member.

- Be mindful of your communication, verbally and in writing to ensure you are as clear as possible. See Appendix for a checklist to use for communication.
- If you are not getting the support you need from your placement supervisor, address this early in a tactful way. Consider discussing what the issues are with a trusted colleague or friend so you can work through the emotions and identify what would be helpful, prior to having a discussion with your placement supervisor.
- If you are unwell, do not continue to work, even if you are at home.
- For further tips on collaborating remotely see this [article](#) from the Harvard Business Review.

After your placement

- If your region has an internal guide to placements, consider adding information about the current remote/hybrid working approach taken in your placement to the guide.

Guidance for Regional Registrar Committees

Regional Registrar Committees can provide opportunities to support their region's registrar cohort. Some examples of good practice are outlined below.

- Consider conducting annual wellbeing surveys of your registrar cohort to help identify any issues related to remote/hybrid working.
- Consider holding wellbeing drop-in sessions for people to discuss issues relating to hybrid working and any wider wellbeing issues.
- Work with TPDs to identify an office location where registrars can hot desk together to allow them opportunities to work together to help mitigate feelings of isolation.
- Consider ways to allow for regular networking and social support e.g. online coffee catch ups, in-person training days, social events.
- A list of possible actions to support registrar wellbeing is listed in the appendix.

Guidance for Placement Supervisors

This section is intended for use by placement supervisors, and summarises best practice information for supporting registrars who are working hybrid / remotely.

Before the registrar starts the placement:

- Discuss how the team currently works with respect to hybrid/virtual working. Be honest about what works best for that placement.
- Find out the registrar's current working pattern.
- Tactfully seek to understand registrar's needs in relation to in-person or remote working, for example caring responsibilities or health needs.
- For placements that are mandatory (local authority, health protection), the placement may need to be flexible in their expectations for in-person working. It is not always feasible for registrars to rearrange the structure of their lives (such as caring responsibilities and healthcare needs) to accommodate their next placement's structure, especially when placements are short (such as mandatory health protection training).
- Ensure that the registrar has all the equipment needed for the placement in advance of their start date. Make sure to check what they need; most registrars will require a new laptop at the start of a new placement, but many will already have a keyboard and mouse.

At the start of the placement:

- Effective communication is critical to successful hybrid and remote working. Communication should be intentional as you are unlikely to be able to rely on ad-hoc opportunities to talk. Therefore, during your first meeting with your new registrar, discuss the frequency and duration of your 1:1 meetings. It may be advisable to have weekly/fortnightly meetings set up for the first few months. Discuss whether instant messaging (e.g. via Teams) or emails is the most effective means of getting rapid responses to more short urgent queries.
- Have an agreed point where you review the frequency of 1:1 meetings and approach to communication.
- Consider, in conjunction with the registrar, whether it is possible to meet in person early in the placement, to facilitate settling in.
- Facilitate team members virtually meeting the new registrar early in the placement.
- Seek to understand what experiences the registrar wants during a placement, so that you can be aware should relevant opportunities arise later in the day

During the placement:

Meeting learning and development needs

- Provide learning and development opportunities that can be accessed remotely if a registrar predominantly works from home or has difficulty attending the placement in-person.
- Share information with registrars. This might be as simple as sharing a link in a Teams chat for information that may be of interest/useful. This helps keep lines of communication open.

Communication and contact

- Once it has been agreed what the expectations for in-person working are, should this need to change for your team, consider whether it is necessary for this change to include any registrars on placement. Consideration may be given to the remaining duration of the registrars' placements. A discussion about the feasibility of the registrars changing their working patterns may also be needed to guide this decision.
- It can be more challenging to supervise registrars remotely. Routine scheduling of short check-ins can be an option to give registrars an opportunity to troubleshoot, and a chance for you to be updated on project progress.
- Prioritise 1:1 meetings with your registrar. During meetings consider having a few standard questions to ensure that you identify any issues with remote/hybrid working ASAP. This may include asking about whether they hear back from team members and stakeholders quickly and whether they are happy with the current remote/hybrid working arrangements. Make time for social conversation within meetings.
- Listen closely. Everyone knows it's harder to read body language remotely, so additional attention needs to be paid to what is being said by registrars, and also the choice of language you use. Further guidance on communication can be found in the appendix
- Set expectations for how registrars should work, and then trust the registrars to work within them. If the registrar is struggling, then step in to provide additional assistance.

Embedding registrars in the team

- Consider having a daily/weekly virtual huddle to ensure everyone is aware of the different work that is happening across the team. Be mindful that these meetings don't appear to be you "checking up" on people, but are seen as supportive and a place to share information.
- Avoid an "us and them" culture by not using language that differentiates remote workers from in-person workers. Concentrate on what all team members have in common. Be generous and visible with praise for remote team members as it is easy for them to feel invisible.

- Try to integrate registrars into existing team structures, even if they are not directly related to their project work. This could include involving them in regular team meetings, including chairing meetings. This will help them to get to know other members of the team, and pick up some parts of the “hidden curriculum” of public health training that they would otherwise miss through remote working.

A list of good principles for the workplace that will also support wellbeing are listed in the appendix.

After the placement

- Invite feedback from leaving registrars about their experiences of hybrid working

Guidance for TPDs

TPDs have a key role in supporting registrars' wellbeing and, when considering remote / hybrid wellbeing, can provide support as illustrated below.

- Identify registrars for whom working in-person the majority of the time may be challenging. This may be obvious in some cases (due to long-term conditions) but may also change over time.
- Identify registrars who are working the majority of the time remotely, and consider putting them in contact with other registrars who may be able to provide social support.
- Seek feedback from registrars about how remote/hybrid working was facilitated (or not) in their placements.
- Share/signpost this guidance with registrars and placement supervisors.
- If registrars consistently experience challenges due to remote or hybrid working in a particular placement, consider discussing with the placement supervisor whether these issues can be addressed. If this is not feasible, advise registrars that the placement is only appropriate for those who can work in-person the majority or all of the time.
- Consider allocating funding towards supporting registrars to improve their home working environment.
- Consider identifying an office location where registrars can hot desk together to allow them opportunities to work together to help mitigate feelings of isolation.

Appendix

[The 7C's of communication](#), which can be used in meetings as well as emails and Teams messages.

Regional Registrars Committees: A list of possible actions to support registrar wellbeing is listed in the appendix

- Activities
 - Have a social and wellbeing representative who is responsible for developing support
 - Including a wellbeing element to training days
 - Set up a WhatsApp group for all registrars
 - Set up Registrar buddies or families (if not in place already)
 - Run a session covering the “[5 ways to wellbeing](#)” framework
 - [Randomised coffee trials can be a useful tool to connect registrars](#)
 - Develop and share work hacks (e.g. ways to manage your workload effectively and efficiently)
 - Have an annual wellbeing away day
 - Bring registrars from different specialty training years together to discuss practical aspects of projects (e.g. data sources, how to approach the project).
 - Have shared lunches at training days to facilitate socialising
 - Offer wellbeing walks
- Consider more involved work such as:
 - Running a wellbeing survey to understand what the challenges are for registrars
 - Building a toolkit for self-care
 - Developing a wellbeing plan with actions that registrars can control
 - Trying to access additional funding to facilitate some of the following:
 - Commissioning mental health first aid training
 - Arranging access to a shared workspace that registrars can use

Good principles for the workplace that will also support workplace wellbeing.

- Weekly team meetings could include a water cooler section where a member of the team talks about something of interest to them not directly related to work or a positive round where attendees volunteer something positive that has happened in their life recently.
- Encourage the team to schedule meeting-free focus time in your calendar.
- Try to avoid routine meetings around lunchtime to allow for consistently timed breaks..
- Meetings longer than 1.5 hours online need to incorporate comfort breaks to stretch legs and allow people to get drinks.
- Try to schedule meetings to be 25 or 55 mins to allow breaks between meetings.