

### SEAI Blended Working Policy

Title	Date	Author	Approved by
Blended Working Policy	December 2022	Human Resources and Office of the CEO	CEO and Executive Leadership Team

This policy will be reviewed and updated if further legislation comes into effect. As a new policy and approach for SEAI, this policy will be reviewed initially at three monthly intervals. It will also be reviewed when and if further Government guidance is published.

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## 1. Introduction and Key Principles

SEAI is a progressive organisation that values our people and the contribution they make to achieving our organisational goals. In response to the recent pandemic, SEAI transformed the way in which it works. In line with our purpose as key contributors to our national climate actions, this policy aims to enable our people to deliver our organisational ambitions through climate-friendly and flexible work practices which support high quality delivery of services to Government, the public and businesses, while providing colleagues with choice and opportunity.

The Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations was published on 31 March 2022 by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)<sup>1</sup>. SEAI has used this to structure our Blended Work Policy.

**Remote work** is a flexible working arrangement which allows an employee to work from an agreed location outside of SEAI's offices. **Blended working** is a working arrangement that involves a combination of working from SEAI's offices and working remotely, based on an agreement between the employee and the Head of Department. This policy replaces the previous flexible working/working from home policy.

This approach will require regular review as the organisation and our people adjust and adapt both culturally and behaviourally to a blended working environment. Success will involve commitment from across the organisation and its leadership to ensure effective implementation of this policy. It will require a spirit of collaboration so we can share experiences to make this work best for all. As a new policy and approach for SEAI, it will be reviewed at **three monthly intervals** in the initial implementation.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that SEAI's approach to where we work is:

- climate friendly.
- effective and practicable.
- meets business needs.
- mutually beneficial for both the employee and SEAI.
- attractive to current and prospective employees.
- competitively positioned against the backdrop of flexible work offerings from other organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da010-blended-working-policy-framework-for-civil-service-organisations/>

<sup>2</sup> Note: SEAI's Work Safely Protocol details measures to protect employees from the spread of COVID-19 and will continue to apply in line with public health guidelines. The COVID-19 Workplace Response Plan will remain in place until further Government guidance is issued on the removal of restrictions.

This policy builds on the mutual integrity and trust displayed throughout the enforced period of remote working due to Covid-19 and demonstrates our ability to deliver in the public interest, whilst acknowledging the important aspects of working together in an office environment.

SEAI strives to be a progressive employer of choice, supporting the business needs of the organisation at the same time as supporting climate-friendly, flexible work practices for our people. This policy will ensure we maintain and improve our contribution towards greater organisational flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness while supporting SEAI's Mission, Vision, Values and Culture.

Blended working can deliver the following benefits:

- Assists employees in achieving a greater work life balance.
- Reduces commuting times and resulting carbon emissions.
- Enables appropriate work environments and approaches to match the task at hand, i.e., collaborative versus focus-based work.

This policy includes guidance and information on arrangements to support blended and remote working arrangements in SEAI in a fair, transparent, and consistent way.

Please note the Health and Safety of our employees is of paramount importance. SEAI and every colleague have responsibilities in this area and this policy outlines these responsibilities and the duty of care everyone carries in implementing a blended working approach in SEAI.

### **3. Scope**

SEAI's physical offices will remain the primary workplace for all employees (in Dublin, Cork and Dundalk). Co-sourced office space in alternative sites, such as Sligo, will be a consideration as a base, in line with agreements in place. In accordance with the National Remote Working Strategy, all employees have a right to request to work remotely and this policy outlines how SEAI is implementing that Strategy to create a blended working environment.

This policy applies to all colleagues in SEAI who wish to work on a remote basis for a number of days per week. Eligibility criteria and the application process are outlined in this policy. In the case of non-direct employees who wish to avail of the blended working policy, agreement will be required with the relevant agency employer. The eligibility criteria takes into account that some roles/tasks may not be suited to remote working. This will be at discretion of the organisation.

## **4. Operation of the Scheme**

### **4.1 Eligibility to apply**

SEAI considers that all current roles are suited to some form of blended working and as such all SEAI employees are eligible to apply for blended working for approval by their Line Manager. In the case of non-direct employees who wish to avail of the blended working policy, agreement will be required with the relevant employer before final approval. It is noted that there may be new roles in the future that will require full time presence in SEAI offices.

If an application to work remotely is approved, employees are required to sign a remote working agreement for 12 months. This document relates only to the working arrangement and does not in any way change the employee's contract of employment.

All colleagues are encouraged to submit an application to ensure the ability to work remotely is approved in principle and can be utilised when needed.

In the event an individual cannot be approved for remote working, this will be communicated via the employee's Line Manager and confirmed to the individual in writing. Participation is subject to the individual satisfying the health and safety requirements, including having a suitable designated remote workspace, and having access to reliable Wi-Fi/internet connection of sufficient quality and other parameters as set out in this policy.

Participation in the scheme does not confer on an employee any rights to working arrangements/patterns of future working arrangements, including remote working in any subsequent years of the scheme (i.e., SEAI will run this scheme on a 12-month basis).

Any individual who participates does not retain any right to presume that this will be a permanent arrangement. Blended working agreements will be issued for a year and will cease on the relevant date (January to December). Individuals can then reapply if they wish, but there is no guarantee that blended working will continue after the initial period.

New employees hired after the closing date for application each year should proceed with an application on a pro-rata basis for the remainder of the calendar year (i.e., arrangement ceases 31 December). This means that all employees will be clear about their working arrangements and there is an agreement and approval from commencement of employment to avoid any ambiguity.

### **4.2 Application process**

The application process will commence annually on 1st November and will close for applications on 30th November to determine working arrangements starting the following calendar year.

### 4.3 Attendance at your place of work

All employees are required to attend the office for a minimum of two days per week. The policy is expected to be fully implemented by January 2023, and you will be advised when the application phase is required.

The organisational principles for in-office attendance are:

- Greater cross-organisational team interactions
- Successful inductions and embedding of new colleagues
- Knowledge sharing across teams and departments, and areas of expertise
- Getting to know each other – supporting interpersonal relationships and empathy amongst colleagues

### 4.4 Blended Working Scheme Requirements

To avail of the Blended Working scheme, employees are required to:

- a) Attend the office as stipulated as your main work location in your employment contract (or alternative SEAI office as agreed for a trial period with your line manager) for a minimum of **two full days per week**:
- One of these days should be the day on which the employee's full Department attends the office. This will be agreed and set by the Head of Department in consultation with the team. Each team will be asked to develop a Department Charter which will outline the agreed team approach to the SEAI key principles for blended working. The team charter is fundamental in supporting blending working for all.
  - The standard second in-office day needs to be agreed by the employee in advance with their Line Manager, but may be changed for business or personal needs in agreement with both parties as required
  - The effective and timely delivery of the work of SEAI is paramount. There may be periods where office attendance is required for work, or strategic team building sessions. Your Line Manager can request your attendance at the office on certain days to carry out tasks which may not be considered suitable for remote working. Reasonable notice shall be given in so far as possible when this happens.
  - Where possible, face-to-face meetings will be arranged around the employees approved attendance pattern. In addition, attendance at the office may be requested for the following\*\*:
    - Knowledge sharing
    - Coaching, collaboration, cross team working and/or brainstorming
    - Stakeholder Meetings
    - Inductions (attendance and presentation)
    - Training courses
    - Probation meetings
    - When a new employee joins the team

**\*\* this list is not exhaustive and there may be other requirements for which office attendance is beneficial and necessary**

- Certain work events, such as business travel, off-site meetings, and inspections may be conducted, where required, on office attendance days. These may be considered “Working From Office” days as part of a colleague’s two days on site per week.
- b) The employee is expected to attend a companywide on-site day
- We expect this would take place up to four times per year, for sessions such as strategy workshops, team collaboration on business planning, townhalls, the SEAI Energy Show etc. As much reasonable notice shall be given in so far as is possible for these meetings. All colleagues will be required to attend on these days.
- c) Apply to work remotely up to three days per week annually.
- An employee is required to outline their preferred days to work remotely, in line with their Department Charter, at the time of application to allow for better planning and work continuity.
  - Flexibility will be given to change an employee’s agreed office-based days as required. An employee requesting to change an office-based day should seek Line Manager approval a week in advance. If the change is longer term, it should be addressed through the formal application process.
  - Employees can attend the office on additional days not set out at application stage.

#### **4.5 Appeals Process**

An employee has the right to appeal an application refusal. Such an appeal should be made in writing, within 10 working days from the date of notification of the refusal, to the HR & OD Team.

Before seeking a formal review, applicants should have an informal discussion with their Line Manager to discuss the reasons for refusal and to explore if there is an opportunity to resolve any issues identified. If the issues can be resolved, the Line Manager can re-assess the application and may amend their decision. If the issues cannot be resolved, the applicant can seek a formal review.

The applicant’s request for a formal review should set out the grounds of the review. The review will focus on whether the application process was appropriate and in line with this Blended Working Policy. The review will be undertaken by a Review Officer, normally at Director level who was not involved in the original decision-making process. The Review Officer will examine this appeal in consultation with the HR & OD Team and make a decision. All records relating to the application and original decision should be made available to the Review Officer. The Review Officer will, determine the process for review and may give due consideration to any request for a meeting in a specific case, however their decision will be final on whether a meeting is necessary with the applicant, the Line Manager and/or the HR & OD Team. A decision will be communicated in writing by the Review Officer to the employee and a copy of notification will be retained on file. For Grade Level F and above, the appeal will go to the CEO for review in consultation with the Head of HR & OD

The outcome of the appeal will be communicated in writing by the HR Manager to the employee and will be final. In general, this should occur within 10 working days of receipt of the formal request for review.

#### **4.6 Termination**

Blended working arrangements may be terminated by the employee Recommender/Approver following review on reasonable notice. For example, blended working arrangement may be terminated by the Recommender/Approver due to business needs, team mobility, performance management purposes, poor broadband connectivity, health and safety risks, or where other eligibility criteria are no longer met. Arrangements may also be terminated due to the employee declaration no longer being honoured. Recommender/Approver should discuss the reason(s) behind any decision to terminate the blended working arrangement and confirm the decision in writing. Alternatively, an employee's circumstances may change, requiring them to return to working in an office-based environment.

In most cases, reasonable notice will be eight weeks' notice on either side in writing. Subject to agreement of both parties, this notice period may be reduced.

#### **4.7 Short term remote working block requests**

SEAI will accept requests for short term (1 – 4 weeks) exemption from attending the office. Online application process for this will be available from December 2022 for 2023 applications.

A block of between 1 and 4 weeks annually can be requested where office attendance is not mandatory. The purpose of this is to facilitate colleagues who wish to work remotely for short periods of time working around holidays, other events, etc.

- This block of remote working must be taken at the same time and cannot be split out over the year.
- Any annual leave that is to be taken either side of this block must be requested at the same time as the remote working request is submitted to assist Line Managers and directors with the following year's work plan.
- This is subject to compliance with SEAI's policies and procedures, such as core working hours, Health and Safety, Data Protection, IT, and Governmental Travel advice and restrictions. Any flexibility on core working hours, considering time zones, will be dependent on business needs.

Note: SEAI is not liable for any costs incurred for remote working from another location under this exemption. This includes travel to/from location and funding for any ICT/office equipment / internet costs at the remote location.

Note: The HR & OD team will require further advice in certain circumstances under this application process (such as with regard to sick leave benefits).

#### **4.8 Process to request exemption to in office attendance requirements**

In very exceptional and unique short term circumstances employees may request an exemption from attendance at the office for a period between 4 weeks up to a maximum of 12 months. Reasons could include critical illness, accessibility, or medical treatment, short term caring responsibilities, or critical skills shortage only available on a remote basis. The decision to facilitate the request will be at the discretion of the organisation and based on an individual's unique situation and request, the details of which will be treated confidentially.

The following process will be followed to handle the requests, to ensure a fair and consistent approach that considers equality and inclusion wherever possible. The company expects a very small proportion of employees will be eligible to apply for exceptions and line managers will exercise a sensible approach to the requests that they recommend.

##### **Step 1 Line Manager**

Staff member discusses and applies in writing to their Line Manager seeking approval to work remotely outside the parameters set out in the Blended Working Policy. The application should specify the grounds on which the request is based and should include any evidence that the employee wishes to have considered.

##### **Step 2 HOD**

The Line Manager considers the request, makes a recommendation, and forwards all documentation to the Head of Department for consideration. The Head of Department reviews and makes their recommendation.

##### **Step 3 Head of HR & OD**

The application from the employee and both recommendations (line manager and HOD) are sent to the Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development for review to ensure consistency and fairness in the application of the exemption across the whole organisation, as well as the overall organisational impact.

##### **Step 4 Directors**

The Head of HR & OD will prepare a final recommendation for consideration by the ELT Directors, excluding the CEO. This will be circulated electronically to the Directors ahead of the next ELT meeting, and a decision taken at that meeting. The Directors have the final discretion in relation to the decision and can accept or reject the recommendations. The decision will be relayed to the employee in writing by the HR department. The Head of HR & OD will monitor exemptions granted and report periodically to the Director of Corporate Services & ELT.

##### **Step 5 Appeal**

An employee has the right to appeal an application refusal. Such an appeal should be made in writing, within 10 working days from the date of notification of the refusal, to the HR & OD Team. The Appeal will be heard by the CEO, who will not be involved in the ELT Directors decision at step 4. The decision of the CEO is final.

**All exceptions should be time bound and no longer than a 12-month period, after which time a further application by required.**

## 5. SEAI Working Hours

Working hours will be in accordance with the standard arrangements for SEAI as set out in the employee's contract of employment. At present SEAI operates a 35 hour work week net of breaks and normal working hours are 9am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday, with one hour for lunch each day, with occasional work required beyond these hours to deliver on business needs of the organisation.

As part of this Blended Working approach, employees will continue to be able to avail of a flexible start and finish time, where SEAI operates a staggered hours system to facilitate colleague discretion where possible to start and finish at differing times.

SEAI's core working hours are 10am to 3.30pm, and all employees are required to be available for work during these times. We ask that colleagues look to plan meetings during core working hours where possible. To facilitate teamwork and planning, employees should agree a set working pattern with their Line Manager, which equates to 35 hours per week, net of breaks and that follows the normal working pattern of 7.0 hrs Monday to Friday, net of breaks.

The above, combined with the various leave policies in place in SEAI (e.g., Family Leave etc.) and blended working, provides employees with more control over their working arrangements. Through these combined policies SEAI aims to support colleagues to accommodate other commitments while continuing to deliver on SEAI's targets and objectives.

## 6. Roles and Responsibilities

### SEAI

As an employer, SEAI is responsible for assuring itself that:

- Our employees are aware of any specific risks regarding working remotely
- Employees' work activities and their remote workspace are suitable for remote working
- Suitable ICT and office equipment is available to enable work to be done remotely
- There is a pre-arranged means of contact with the employee
- We can manage and conduct all necessary/required work activities when employees are working remotely
- Work can be organised to protect the safety, health, and welfare of employees
- We can provide information, instruction, training and supervision regarding safety and health to employees working remotely
- We can keep an accurate record of hours (daily) worked by each employee

Please note SEAI has no obligation to pay for additional costs incurred for internet connectivity or for any other expense incurred as a result of remote working.

Importantly, as a climate-friendly organisation, SEAI may look to measure the impact of this policy on carbon emissions and climate action and promote the results.

#### All Employees (Direct and In-Direct):

- Be self-motivated and self-disciplined.
- Have the ability to work independently with minimal supervision.
- Be comfortable with the concept and use of software provided by SEAI to facilitate remote working e.g., MS Teams, MS SharePoint, Webex, and any additional software particular to the remote worker's role.
- Have access to reliable Wi-Fi/internet connection of sufficient quality
- Comply with policies regarding the handling of sensitive and confidential information.
- Comply with training requirements around cybersecurity, health & safety, etc.
- Comply with policies and procedures relating to the accurate recording of hours (daily) worked, including annual leave entitlement procedures.
- Be comfortable with the concept of working alone.
- Contribute to, agree, and participate in a Department Charter that will identify the team approach to blended working.
- Have an effective working relationship with co-workers and be able to determine how to facilitate and provide support to co-workers while working remotely.
- Be an effective communicator and team player with director, head of department, Line Manager, co-workers, and stakeholders/customers.
- Have a good/suitable attendance and performance record.
- Be cognisant of the less formal communication and interactions that are not possible while remote working and be pro-active in addressing their absence.
- Report any 'accidents' and/or 'incidents' in line with SEAI's processes (further information available in the employee handbook and Safety Statement).
- Employees should be aware that the approval for remote working will only be granted or continue if the employee continues to honour and fulfil their obligations outlined above and throughout this policy.
- Provide up to date and accurate contact details including address of remote working location and emergency contact information, in the event that the employee is unable to contact the office for a period of time.
- Arrange IT support in the event of technical problems arising.
- Ensure that formal and informal contact is maintained with Line Manager and colleagues e.g., meetings, town halls, attendance at social events, where possible.

#### Line Managers:

- Be satisfied that the employee can carry out their work remotely in accordance with the criteria set out in this policy.
- Have access to a completed Department Charter following consultation with Programme Managers. This outlines the approach the overall team will take to in-office attendance, including an agreed day per week for all team in office attendance.
- Have established clear and measurable targets/outputs within a specified timeframe, such as within SEAI's performance and growth planning (PGP) process.
- Have in place, a mechanism to allow communication in relation to any aspect of the remote worker's job and be willing to trust the employee to deliver on work.
- Ensure that employees comply with any policies and procedures relating to the accurate recording of hours (daily) worked, including annual leave entitlement procedures.

- Ensure compliance with SEAI's Health & Safety practices, such as the reporting of near misses and/or incidences/accidents.
- Ensure that employees comply with the parameters set out within this policy and that all employees attend for 2 days a week as stipulated. Any ongoing deviations from the requirements are expected to be dealt with informally between the line manager and the employee and only escalated formally to HOD if the line manager is unable to resolve the situation.
- Ensure the policy is applied reasonably and consistently across all members of the team, whilst ensuring the flexible ethos of the policy is also lived in its application.

All applications for remote working will be required to have completed forms that have been signed off by the relevant Line Manager and Head of Department.

A Department Charter will be completed by each team and agreed with the Head of Department. Feedback will be sought from Departments on how their departments are operating under their charters as part of the quarterly review in the first year of this policy.

## **7. Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

SEAI, as an employer, has certain responsibilities for health and safety in the workplace in a remote working environment. Under the Safety, Health, and Welfare at Work Act 2005, there is a requirement that a safety statement be in place for all work locations. SEAI reserves the right to inspect the home environment to be used for remote working, either by a member of the HR & OD team, their appointee, or by a third-party health and safety consultant. If any health and safety issues arise, these must be resolved to SEAI's satisfaction before remote working commences or continues. Employees should be aware that Inspectors from the Health and Safety Authority have a statutory right to visit the workplace of any remote worker.

Remote workers will be provided with a health and safety checklist in the application form prior to the commencement of remote working. If, through a review of this form, the proposed work area is found to be in breach of health and safety guidelines as set out in the application form, the remote worker will not be considered suitable to partake in the scheme. The decision of the health and safety review is final and not subject to appeal. Ergonomic assessments will be provided to all new employees who have been granted remote working. All employees will be offered ergonomic assessments and VDU eyesight testing every 2 years.

Furthermore, SEAI may look to review the following based on learnings from the initial implementation of this policy:

- Determining work-related incidents and near misses
- H&S incident management process
- Manager guide on H&S responsibility
- Employee guide on H&S responsibility
- Manager PGP guidance as appropriate

## **8. Designated Remote Workspace**

SEAI is responsible for all employees' health and safety at work. This is of paramount importance and applies to the remote workspace. Employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and other people who may be affected by the work they are doing. SEAI has no obligation to pay for additional costs incurred as a result of remote working.

Physical meetings should not normally take place within employee home designated workspaces.

### **8.1 ICT, Hotdesking, and Office Equipment/Support**

With our blended working policy we have introduced hotdesking in SEAI.

This means that all employees must book a desk for the days they attend an SEAI office. A desk can be booked for up to 14 days in advance. When booking a desk you can see "zones". For department days you should book a desk in your "team neighbourhood". Once you arrive at your booked desk you will need to check in using the QR code at the desk. If you do not do this before 10.00 am on the day the desk will become available for somebody else to book. Even if the office is quiet you will still need to check in as this helps us with all important tracking of the use of our offices.

SEAI will provide ICT equipment as necessary (laptop, monitor, keyboard, mouse, and headset) and maintenance of same for the duration of the agreement. All equipment supplied by SEAI will remain SEAI property. This equipment should be used solely for work purposes and is only for use by the employee. The employee must ensure that no one gains access to any confidential information on the laptop or to their passwords or to an unauthorised site via the equipment supplied by SEAI. In the event of this happening, the responsibility for such action will rest with the employee and disciplinary action may be taken which could, inter alia, result in the termination of the remote working contract.

Each desk in the SEAI offices will have all necessary equipment. Wipes and other cleaning products will be available throughout the office should you wish to avail of it. It is the responsibility of the remote worker to bring their laptop and headset to and from the office. All ICT equipment must be returned to the office when either maintenance or servicing is required (as determined by the IT team and upon cessation of employment).

In the event of termination of employment with SEAI, they will be responsible for the return of all SEAI property as instructed by HR & OD and IT (such as IT assets and workstation equipment).

The employee will continue to have access to desk facilities at the office for the days they are not remote working. Blended working employees will generally have no automatic right to a dedicated workspace when in the office. This will be considered as the organisation grows and the Blended Working approach is embedded in SEAI. SEAI may gradually transition to shared versus dedicated workspaces.

If the employee experiences technical difficulties, they will be provided with telephone or remote (via dial-in) support.

## 8.2 Office and Equipment

Employees will be required to undertake a risk assessment of their remote working space before remote working under this policy commences. SEAI will appoint competent persons to undertake this assessment and will include an assessment of equipment and ergonomics. Should the assessment deem it necessary; SEAI will supply the following:

- Office Chair
- Riser
- Lamp
- Footrest
- Desk

This equipment remains the property of SEAI and must be maintained by the employee to the highest standard and returned to SEAI upon expiry of their contract of employment.

## 8.3 Designated Remote Workspace

It is a condition of this agreement that the employee provide a single designated workspace in the home, which is suitable and meets the health and safety requirements set out in the policy. The employee agrees not to engage in any form of conflicting non-SEAI work or home activity while remote working. The employee must be able to connect to work via their own reliable broadband connection and have a working environment which complies with SEAI data security and confidentiality standards, and as outlined in Section 13 of this policy.

The employee must provide a designated workspace that is secure, with adequate access and egress routes and that satisfies all the following:

- **Lighting**  
In addition to adequate room lighting, there must be natural light.
- **Heating**  
There must be heating that can be easily adjusted and which can maintain a comfortable temperature.
- **Ventilation**  
There must be some method of ventilation available, either naturally (windows) or mechanically (air conditioning).
- **Electrical Installation**  
There should be a sufficient number of sockets, fuses and/or circuit breakers serving the proposed work area.

## 9. Training and Induction

Blended working training will be provided at induction for all newly recruited employees. Refresher training will be carried out for all employees every 2 years. This will include the following:

- An outline of SEAI's principles for blended working.
- What is expected of the employee while remote working.
- Guidance for Line Managers of teams on blended working.
- Home office safety.
- Termination/Amendment of remote working arrangements.

## 10 The Right to Disconnect

An employee's right to be able to disengage with work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours and holidays is referred to as the 'right to disconnect'. SEAI is responsible for ensuring that colleagues are afforded sufficient time away from their workplace for rest. SEAI is preparing a Right to Disconnect policy. This will inform the Blended Working policy. In the interim, SEAI is committed to the three main elements outlined by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) Code of Practice for employers and employees on the right to disconnect:

1. The right of an employee to not routinely perform work outside normal working hours.

*SEAI commits to not routinely request employees to perform work outside of normal working hours.*

2. The right to not be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours.

*In exceptional circumstances, SEAI may request employees to work outside of normal working hours, however, a colleague who cannot do so will not be penalised.*

3. The duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (e.g., by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours)

*Some employees may choose to work outside of core office hours and/or avail of flexible working arrangements. While some emails and phone calls may be made during these times, colleagues are not expected to respond outside of their own working pattern.*

SEAI has included a message on all emails stating.

*"In line with current public health guidelines, many SEAI employees are working from home. In these circumstances, while it may suit us to send emails outside of normal business hours, we do not expect a response or action outside your own working hours."*

Details of hours of work and annual leave that employees can avail of are set out in employee contracts.

## 11. Compensation

Expenses will not be paid where an employee makes changes to premises (such as a home office) to allow for remote working.

Employees availing of blended working arrangements may make claims directly from the Revenue Commissioners in respect of tax relief for certain costs when working from home, further information can be found through Revenue<sup>3</sup>. The application can be made at the end of the relevant tax year, in accordance with the relevant tax laws. Any claim made is solely a matter for the individual concerned. Further details on eWorking and tax are available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-taxcorporation-tax/part-05/05-02-13.pdf>.

**Travel and subsistence will not be payable for attending the office during a blended working arrangement.**

## 12. Insurance

- SEAI confirms that it is responsible for all SEAI owned equipment, including theft, fire or damage to equipment or materials and third-party liability. SEAI is also responsible for employer's liability cover for that area where work is carried out and for the period of the hours of work.
- The State Claims Agency has advised that where a formalised blended working arrangement has been agreed between employer and employee, and where the employee has home insurance, **it is recommended that the employee notify their insurers of their blended working arrangements.**
- Where participants are in rented accommodation, it is their responsibility to ensure that the homeowner informs the insurance company of the change in status.
- **Any increase in insurance costs** notified to the employee by the insurance company relating to the use of their home for the purpose of remote working **will be borne by the employee** and will not be paid for by SEAI.

## 13. Data Protection and Cybersecurity

SEAI has the utmost confidence in the integrity of people in dealing with confidential information. All colleagues are bound whether working in the office or working from home by SEAI's confidentiality agreement and Code of Conduct policy.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.revenue.ie/en/jobs-and-pensions/eworking/index.aspx>

**SEAI employees should be aware that their obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018 are not confined to SEAI's office work premises. They also apply when working remotely in any location.**

### **13.1 Data Protection**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018 (as amended) places responsibility on all employees regarding the processing of information (see table below). All SEAI information is confidential, and any disclosure can leave individuals liable under the Acts.

#### **Data Protection Guidance for Remote Working**

- Data protection applies to not only electronically stored or processed data, but also personal data in manual form (such as paper records) where it is, or is intended to be, part of filing system.
- Where you are working remotely with paper records, take steps to ensure the security and confidentiality of these records, such as by keeping them locked in a filing cabinet or drawer when not in use, disposing of them securely (e.g., shredding) when no longer needed, and making sure they are not left somewhere where they could be misplaced or stolen.
- If you're dealing with records that contain special categories of personal data (e.g., health data) you should take extra care to ensure their security and confidentiality, and only remove such records from a secure location where it is strictly necessary to carry out your work.
- Where possible, you should keep a written record of which records and files have been taken home, in order to maintain good data access and governance practices.

### **13.2 Cybersecurity**

Every effort must be taken to minimise cybersecurity risks, these include,

- Participate in all Cybersecurity Training programs as requested.  
**Failure to complete cybersecurity training by the deadlines communicated may result in the revocation of remote working arrangements.**
- Regularly reviewing SEAI's ICT Policies, and in particular the [SEAI Information Security Policy](#), the [SEAI Bring Your Own Device \(BYOD\) Policy](#), and completing SEAI Cybersecurity and Data Protection training, which informs employees on how to handle and protect sensitive personal and business information. All ICT Policies apply to users irrespective of their location therefore colleagues should read and understand all Policies as published on SEAI SharePoint.
- Ensure that passwords are strong and are changed on a regular basis. All ICT System Users must adopt the use of multi-factor authentication (MFA).
- Take the time to read and understand all ICT communications sent to all colleagues and seek clarification if required.

- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that SEAI systems, networks, data and users are protected, ensuring that only secure WI-FI networks are used and remaining vigilant in respect of phishing and malware attacks, and reporting suspicious activity if detected.

#### **14. Review of Blended Working Scheme**

An overall report of participation in the scheme will be submitted annually to Senior Management.

##### **14.1 Risks and Challenges:**

It is noted that, as this policy is embedded, a blended working approach presents many opportunities to the way of working in SEAI. It must also be noted that there are challenges and risks that need to be regularly reviewed and assessed, to ensure continuous process improvements are applied. These challenges and risks include, but are not limited to:

- The arrangements are consistently meeting the business needs of the organisation.
- Maintaining and supporting cross-organisational collaboration.
- Maintaining a cross organisational culture that embodies SEAI's values.
- Ensuring good team working and communications within teams and across the organisation so that SEAI and the SEAI team share collective values, culture, and collegiality, and ensuring effective induction, performance management, creative/expert input, and mentoring.
- Supporting and developing management capability to manage effective blended working arrangements that deliver business objectives and including employee health and wellbeing.
- Ensuring that the blended working approach is supported throughout the organisation, its people and leadership
- The policy is applied in an equitable and consistent manner across each area, in line with the provisions of the policy
- Consistent reviewing of technology requirement to effectively support a productive, innovative blended working environment.
- There is no discrimination under the Employment Equality Acts, or other employment provisions.
- We are aware of the impact of arrangements on team productivity and performance and on the organisation in general
- Appropriate reporting on the number of employees availing of blended working arrangements.

##### **14.2 Policy Review:**

In its first year, the scheme will be implemented for a 12-month period, with quarterly progress reviews taking place throughout 2022. An Implementation Group has been established with membership from various teams across the organisation to operationalise the policy, monitor its success and make recommendations to the SEAI Leadership Team through the 12-month period.

This is a new approach for the organisation and this regular review will aim to ensure the policy is fit for purpose. It is expected that the policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis from that point onwards. SEAI reserves the right to make any change or amendments or indeed cancel this scheme if they feel the needs of the organisation are not being fulfilled. Three months’ notice period will be provided in this event.

### 14.3 Abuse of the Blended Working Policy

We expect all colleagues will enjoy the freedoms that remote and blended working brings and are conscientious in their employment in SEAI delivering Irelands energy revolution. Therefore, we trust that people will apply and utilise this policy fairly and honestly so that it can continue. It goes without saying that SEAI retain the right to take appropriate action where the remote working is being abused including temporary or permanent suspension or termination of individual remote working agreements and the individual’s concerned may be subject to the Authority’s disciplinary process up to and including dismissal.

#### NAME OF DOCUMENT: Remote Working Policy

<b>Compiled By</b>	Human Resource Department and Office of the CEO
<b>Reviewed By</b>	Executive Leadership Team
<b>Date of Approval</b>	
<b>Date of Next Review</b>	

<b>Version No</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Compiled By</b>	<b>Ordered By</b>	<b>Date of Issue</b>
V2.0	Complete	HR & OD Team		

## Appendix . Guidance and Legislation

This policy is informed and guided by the following:

- [Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations](#)
- [National Remote Working Strategy 2021](#)
- Organisation of Working Time (Amendment) (Right to Disconnect) Bill 2020.
- Organisation of Working Time Act 1997
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, general regulations of 2007, and other relevant regulations
- Circular 14/2022 Revision of Working Hours in the Civil Service
- [HSA Home Working Guidance for Employers and Employees 2021](#)
- [Blended Working in the Civil Service 2021](#)
- [Code of Practice for employers and employees on the right to disconnect](#)
- Agency Work Act 2012
- Statutory Leave (maternity leave, parental leave, part-time)
- Relevant work permit restrictions