

Members' Briefing **REVENUE & CUSTOMS GROUP**

To: **All Members**

cc: **Branch Secretaries, Group Executive Committee, Equality Chairs, VOAC** (for info)

Can this Briefing be circulated via HMRC IT systems: **NO**

Website: **YES**

Action to be taken: **For the attention of all members**

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LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS **Ways of working and the location strategy**

- *PCS calls on Chief Executive to learn lessons of crisis*
- *Covid-19 response shows alternative to mass redundancies possible*

[PCS has written to Jim Harra](#), the Chief Executive of HMRC, to call on the department to use the lessons learned from the Covid-19 crisis, to avoid mass redundancies and to maintain a responsive HMRC.

'That was then...'

Back in 2015, when the department first announced its current location strategy, HMRC operated on the basis that, for the most part, the department relied on the overwhelming majority of staff working from the office.

Given that the strategy aimed at reducing the (then) 170 offices by 90%, for those workers who were outside reasonable daily travel of one of the 17 remaining sites, or whose personal circumstances meant that traveling large distances wasn't an option, the strategy left little or no possibility of continuing to work in HMRC.

As time went on, despite the office-based way of working underpinning pretty-much all of the department's thinking, HMRC began to talk a great deal about 'smarter ways of working'. This, we were told, was the future way that HMRC would operate, with staff no longer being tied to an office in order to deliver the department's services. Regular meetings took place between PCS and the department, to discuss how these more modern ways of working could be introduced.

Then last year, HMRC had a golden opportunity to 'walk the walk', when agreement was reached on a pilot of more flexible ways of working to be trialled in International House in Ealing, where the overwhelming majority of staff were outside reasonable daily travel from a regional centre, and therefore faced the real likelihood of redundancy.

PCS and the department agreed 'terms of reference' for the pilot; and we began to meet regularly to discuss the resources the pilot would need, and a timetable for implementation and review.

However, before the pilot could even begin, it became apparent that there was not enough support for the trial amongst the department's senior management, with some 'lines of business' leaders not accepting that anything other than working from the office was possible. As a result, our Ealing members again faced the threat of wholesale job losses.

‘...and this is now.’

Fast forward to less than a year later, and in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, with government advice now insisting that working from home should be the norm, in a matter of a few short weeks, we have seen in the region of 51,000 HMRC staff routinely working from home every day.

Even areas of the business such as telephony/customer contact, where it was previously argued that there was no alternative to office-based working, are now seeing both an expansion in home-based working for the newest workstreams (such as the Job Retention Scheme) and a trial of home-based working for staff working in the more traditional telephony areas.

On the wider issue of the need to retain skills, recent weeks has seen HMRC considering it necessary to ask staff who were due to leave on redundancy in the Spring of 2020, if they would be prepared to stay until the Autumn, to help HMRC deliver its essential services during the crisis.

Learning lessons

As we have said to the Chief Executive in our latest letter: *“We are clearly past the point of asking ourselves if the work can be done differently – it already is.”*

Likewise, it’s clear that HMRC needs to explore every avenue it can to retain the essential skills still present in the department.

PCS believe that the department has a choice: it can tether itself to an old-fashioned concept of ‘the work can only be done this way’, or, as PCS put it to the Chief Executive:

“Alternatively, if staff in Ealing and elsewhere, are given the opportunity to continue their service, we don’t just safeguard the skills-base we have accumulated, we protect the stability of the service we provide and put ourselves in the best possible place to respond to a future crisis such as this.”

The lessons from Covid-19 are abundantly clear. The only question remains: ‘is the department ready to learn?’

Get involved!

Remember, HMRC applies restrictions on the content of union circulars distributed using the department’s email system, so make sure that you stay in touch with your union.

If you haven’t already done so, let PCS have your personal/non-work email address and your mobile phone number. We’ll only use it to keep you informed about PCS matters. You can update your details securely online by registering for [PCS Digital](#) or by contacting membership@pcs.org.uk. Alternatively, ask your local PCS rep to enter your details securely on the PCS Organising App.

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