

Members' Briefing **REVENUE & CUSTOMS GROUP**

To: **All Members**

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

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

Website: **YES**

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

Date: **11 May 2020**

Ref: **R&C/MB/029/20**

COVID-19

Central 'work from home' message unchanged

- ***Covid-19 'strategy document' published***
- ***Members should continue to work from home wherever possible***

Following the speech by the Prime Minister on Sunday 10 May, and the publication of the 60-page explanatory document earlier today (11 May); it's clear that the central, default message of "work from home if you can", is entirely unchanged.

'Strategy document' published

The government's much trailed Covid-19 "recovery strategy", grandly titled "*Our Plan to Rebuild*", has now been published.

From the start, the strategy document makes it clear that there is no prospect of a safe, early return to normal; with subtle phrases like "*in the near term, we cannot afford to make drastic changes*" and "*there is no easy or quick solution*". The document confirms that key elements of the approach to date, such as social distancing "*will be in place for some time*".

Of course, it wouldn't be central government without some good, old-fashioned confusion thrown-in; this time with a message from the Cabinet Secretary saying "*From today, apart from the shielded groups, those who cannot work from home – and are not already operating from their workplace – are being encouraged to return to work*". Of course the fact that two-thirds of the workforce in HMRC can't return to work without compromising the government policy on social distancing, doesn't seem to have reached that high-up the food-chain; as well as the statement managing to contradict the strategy document itself, which says:

"Many businesses across the UK have already been highly innovative in developing new, durable ways of doing business, such as moving online or adapting to a delivery model. Many of these changes, like increased home working, have significant benefits, for example, reducing the carbon footprint associated with commuting. The Government will need to continue to ask all employers and operators of communal spaces to be innovative in developing novel approaches..."

Or, may we offer you the even more spectacularly unambiguous:

"For the foreseeable future, workers should continue to work from home rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible."

Then there's the devolved assemblies; with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all flatly refusing to mess around with 'staying alert', and deciding not to budge from the simple "Stay at Home" message.

In short, and for the avoidance of doubt, whatever people might have thought was going to happen today, don't plan to be rushing back to your hot-desk anytime soon.

The 'Excom' position

PCS understand that the department's Executive Committee has met and agreed that the current approach – with the emphasis on working from home – will continue.

This is welcome news; and PCS will continue to engage with the department not just to make this approach as successful as possible, but to continue to examine ways of increasing the number of members who can work from home, through initiatives like the telephony trial.

Advice to members

Despite last week's tabloid frenzy of 'everyone back on the merry-go-round from Monday', and despite the odd contradictory speech and statement, it's clear that the central message is unchanged: You should work from home if you can; and for those of you who currently can't, we'll carry on trying to resolve that.

If you're currently working from home, you shouldn't get told by your manager to get back to the office in the near future. In the unlikely event that happens, contact your local PCS representative.

Stay safe.

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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