

# Revenue & customs briefing

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## 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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### **COVID-19**

#### **'Excom' and the big decision on jobs**

- *'Excom' to meet to decide on new voluntary redundancy launch*
- *PCS warns launching scheme will breach Cabinet Office assurance and undermine HMRC's own 'Learning from Covid' programme*

PCS understand that the senior managers that make up HMRC's Executive Committee ('Excom') are meeting tomorrow (Tuesday 9 June) to decide whether or not to launch a new voluntary redundancy (VR) scheme.

#### **The need to learn lessons**

Cast your mind back a year or so, when HMRC pulled the plug on a pilot of flexible and remote working for International House in Ealing; where the overwhelming majority of staff face redundancy, because they are unable to travel 2-3 hours each way by public transport to the nearest regional office. The department scrapped the programme, because they said that working remotely was incompatible with HMRC's delivery model.

Fast forward to today, and out of around 65,000 members of staff, the latest figures tell us that just over 4,000 are working from the office.

[PCS wrote to HMRC's chief executive on 30 April](#); and pointed out that although once upon a time, HMRC thought that the work can only be done from giant office blocks, that the staff had reached, having been packed-into overcrowded public transport - this is clearly no longer the case. We argued that not only are the overwhelming majority of staff working remotely and working effectively, but government policy going forward, is the polar opposite to the 'giant office block/packed-into public transport' model that the department's current location strategy depends on.

So having said that, we welcomed [the response from the chief people officer on 7 May, saying that the department was launching a new programme of four projects; to examine what we have learned from the way we are working, during the Covid-19 crisis](#). We particularly welcomed the fact that one of the projects in this programme would examine whether, in light of what we have learned about how we can work, there will be any further need for redundancies at all.

At that point, the department was still considering launching a new VR exercise in June, because – they argued at that time - the Cabinet Office assurance on applying the 2010 redundancy scheme terms, was due to expire in July 2020.

**Public and Commercial Services Union – Revenue and Customs Group**

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PCS nationally pursued the compensation scheme issue with the Cabinet Office, and consequently, we received the confirmation from the Cabinet Office and Treasury Minister, Lord Agnew, of the extension of 2010 terms until at least the Spring of 2021; along with the clear written assurance from the Minister, that *“The Cabinet Office will also be taking action to ensure that redundancies only proceed where they are absolutely necessary.”*

In light of the launch of the programme, the extension of the 2010 terms, and the assurance from the Cabinet Office; [PCS wrote to the chief people officer](#) and called on the proposed VR scheme to be paused, to allow the department’s programme to report. We also provided [a written submission to the programme director](#), setting out the steps PCS are calling on the department to take, in light of what we’ve learned since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, and in light of government policy for making sites ‘Covid-secure’ in the future.

The original plan was for Excom to make a decision about the new VR exercise on Friday 5 June, but we now understand that this decision will be taken on Tuesday 9 June.

### **The big decision**

When PCS met with senior management on 4 June 2020, we reminded HMRC that one of the key projects in the department’s new ‘lessons learned’ programme, is to examine whether or not we need redundancies.

We added that launching a voluntary redundancy scheme now will put the department on a collision course with the assurance we’ve had from the Cabinet Office; after all, you can hardly argue that launching redundancies in June 2020 is “absolutely necessary”, when the project you’ve launched to see whether they’re necessary or not, doesn’t report until January 2021.

In an attempt to justify a possible ‘act now, analyse later’ approach, HMRC told us that if they did launch the VR scheme now, staff could rescind their VR request “right up until their last day of service”. We’re not sure how helpful that is, if your last day of service is before the ‘need for redundancies’ project reports.

If the department does decide to launch a redundancy exercise, when they’ve only just launched the project to look at whether the redundancies are needed at all, it will look like what it would be: HMRC making a decision, and then spending seven months on a project, to justify the decision they made at the beginning. No-one will think that the ‘need for redundancies’ project has any credibility; and it risks ‘poisoning the well’ of credibility for the other projects in the Covid-19 programme too.

**So Excom has a big decision to make: Are they going to launch a series of projects, then once they’ve reported, make a decision that follows the evidence? Or are they going to decide to announce redundancies now, because that was what they decided to do nearly five years ago; and risk not just their own programme’s credibility, but the credibility of an assurance made by a Cabinet Office Minister?**

### **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](mailto:membership@pcs.org.uk). Alternatively, ask your local PCS rep to enter your details securely on the PCS Organising App.

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