

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**

Date: **22 June 2020**

Ref: **R&C/MB/048/20**

COVID-19 **PCS puts '5 Tests' to HMRC**

- **Customer Services press for increasing the number of staff in the workplace**
 - **Excom considers 'safe working governance' model**
- **PCS sets out five tests which need to be passed before any wider return**

In the face of pressure from part of HMRC for a significant return to the office, PCS have set out the '5 tests' we consider need to be passed, before there is any wider return.

Chasing the targets, not following the science

The department has told PCS, that they'd received requests to bring more than 8,000 members of staff who are currently working from home, back into the office. The requests came largely from management in Customer Services Group (CSG).

During the next meeting involving CSG, we became more concerned when management in that particular line of business, talked about setting targets which are not far short of the targets set before the Covid-19 crisis hit.

PCS challenged CSG on the targets. We made it clear that moving to these targets would be unreasonable, and would fail to recognise we are still in the middle of a major pandemic. In response, CSG said that with restrictions being eased, and the shops opening again, customers had "an expectation" that the waiting times would reduce. Our answer to that was simple: "Just because you can go to Primark, it doesn't mean everything is returning to normal".

It's disappointing that an area of the department has started to think that they know better than the scientists; and that they seem more interested in 'chasing the targets' than 'following the science'.

The department are developing a 'safe working governance' model, for use when considering requests for a return to the workplace. Interestingly, at our most recent meeting, of the 8,000+ requested, PCS were told by HMRC that the board have only authorised the return to the workplace of 3,300 staff – effectively meaning that even HMRC senior management considered there was no reasonable justification for the other near-5,000 in the original CSG request.

Some reassurance

HMRC did assure PCS that the department is operating on the principle that, notwithstanding the discovery of a vaccine, for the most part staff will be working from home until at least November 2020; and that no-one will be forced to return to the office.

As well as those shielding or in vulnerable groups, the department made a point of assuring us that in particular, those who have caring responsibilities and those who are anxious about any return, would not be forced back into the workplace. A special mention was made about HMRC recognising the increased risk to those in the BAME community.

Whilst PCS oppose the sudden drive by part of the department to trigger a return, we accept that the department's stated commitment to 'no compulsion to return' does, for the present at least, offer a degree of reassurance.

PCS submit our '5 tests'

Although there's been a reduction in the number of daily deaths due to Covid-19, we're nowhere near 'out of the woods'. The virus is still in general circulation; and according to the latest figures from the government, as of 21 June 2020, there are over 300,000 confirmed cases in the UK, with 1,200 cases new cases recorded in the last 24 hours alone.

Clearly, despite the pressure from some Tory backbenchers, there needs to be real caution if our safety is to stay protected. [PCS have written to HMRC](#) to reiterate our concerns about the drive by some elements within the department to return to the workplace.

In that letter, we've also set out what we believe are the 5 tests which need to be passed before any kind of general return. The tests are intended to support both those currently working at open workplaces, and those homeworking and facing a potential return.

These tests are:

1. No wider return until communities are safe
2. Workplaces must only be for essential work
3. Workplaces must be safe places
4. Staff must be individually assessed
5. Outbreaks must be controlled.

You can find out more information about these tests [on the PCS website](#).

Keep up-to-date

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.

PCS in Revenue and Customs now send a weekly email directly to members' personal email address, keeping you up to date on progress on all-things Covid-19 as well as a range of other issues. If you haven't been receiving that email, that will be because we don't hold an up-to-date personal email address for you.

If you haven't already done so, let PCS have your personal 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.

LORNA MERRY
Group President

JOHN SMITH
Assistant Group Secretary

MARTIN KELSEY
Group Secretary

If you require this publication in any other format such as Braille or large print please contact the Group Office at RCGroup@pcs.org.uk or call 0151 298 3900