

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: **YES**

Website: **YES**

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

Date: **20 JAN 2022**

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HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

Working from home changes in progress

- *Four weeks' notice to be given before returns to the office*
 - *Discussion toolkits to be revisited*
 - *Fire safety policy and process changes*

Working from home changes and COVID-19 health and safety

On Wednesday 19th January, the UK Government announced the requirement to work from home in England was immediately rescinded. This was followed by an intranet announcement on Thursday morning from Jim Harra advising "Our offices, with existing safety measures, remain open and colleagues in England are now no longer required to work at home".

HMRC has advised PCS that there will again be a four-week notice period before people are expected to attend workplaces, with further information to follow on that process next week. The work from home requirement remains in place for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales at present, but with further announcements on working from home expected to be made in the coming weeks.

While HMRC staff in England have been advised they can now attend offices, there is no requirement or expectation to do so and attending English workplaces remains entirely a personal choice at this time, unless there are wellbeing or business critical reasons for working in the office. If anyone feels pressured to attend the office, they should contact a local PCS rep. All those who are returning to the workplace after a period of working from home should ensure they are revisiting their 1-to-1 discussion toolkit and this should reflect personal circumstances and any specific local guidance.

There will be additional work taking place on reviewing and revising as appropriate the COVID-19 safety measures currently in effect within HMRC workplaces, including a new COVID-19 risk assessment which everyone should ensure they are aware of and are familiar with before returning. Wearing a face covering will continue to be an HR policy requirement in all HMRC workplaces, and a legal requirement in Scotland.

Ventilation surveys have been carried out in all buildings and remedial works carried out to improve ventilation standards as required, or to lower occupancy in areas where there are reduced air flow rates. Work is also underway at present on a system to make available the number of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive cases in each building, and there will remain a requirement to inform all building users by email whenever there is a positive case in the building during the previous 72 hours.

Fire safety policy and process changes

HMRC are currently undertaking a review of the fire safety requirements for each building, seeking to implement British Standard 9999 (BS9999). Building management teams should have now undertaken a floor-by-floor review of each building to establish any particular risks and identify the number of Incident Marshals (IM) required, moving to one IM per floor exit. This will mean IM cover will move away from the previous standard of one IM per 25 staff, in line with BS9999.

The number of IMs in place for each floor will depend on a number of factors including the layout of the site and coverage of any secure or public areas, and a requirement for areas to be swept by IMs within three minutes. The fire safety review also requires building management teams to ensure there are sufficient means of escape for those with particular evacuation requirements, including the use of evacuation lifts where available, and any considerations required for those potentially at additional risk.

PCS has had a number of discussions with the Estates Fire Safety Manager and will continue to do so as fire safety plans and processes are reviewed, revised, and implemented in the best interests of safety.

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