



Public and  
Commercial  
Services Union

# 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: **9 March 2022**

Ref: **R&C/MB/012/22**

## COVID-19 Office Safety Guidance

- ***PCS escalates members' concerns***
- ***Workplace safety measures remain in place***

### Members express safety concerns

PCS has received a number of concerns around returning to the office and the increased potential for contracting COVID-19. The majority of these concerns relate to increased occupancy levels and removal of the previous social distancing capacity limits. PCS has discussed these concerns with HMRC and ensured an awareness of members' anxieties, which are understandable given the continued prevalence of COVID-19 across the UK.

With returns of the office in England and Scotland commencing from 28<sup>th</sup> February, there has been an increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases in HMRC offices. PCS closely monitor the number of COVID-19 cases and has requested Serious Incident Protocol meetings in four offices so far, following relatively high positive case numbers. Each Serious Incident Protocol meeting reviews the location of the cases, local circumstances, the business areas affected, and adherence to COVID-19 safety measures, with recommendations to address any specific concerns and reduce where possible the risks presented. Where required, additional safety measures can also be implemented, such as closing areas of the building, recommending face coverings be worn, or undertaking a deep clean of the area, for example.

Existing COVID-19 policies will remain in place until the end of March and everyone returning to the office must have had a 1-to-1 discussion with their manager in line with the toolkit document. Anyone who needs longer working from home due to particular vulnerabilities or caring requirements should complete the Supported Return Plan, which is part of the toolkit.

### New case process

A new COVID-19 case process has recently been implemented for HMRC workplaces. Where someone has tested positive but has not been in the office within the previous 72 hours, the building management team will report the case to HR and take no further action. Where a positive individual has been in the office during the previous 72 hours, the building management team will report the case to HR and issue an all-users email to the site to notify everyone. This is in addition to any enhanced cleaning required or other building safety measures. The total number of all cases for each location are now available to view on the intranet, with a live-update SharePoint accessible for every building through your regional intranet pages, within the Working Safety Together Guide page. You should also be able to find the latest version of your building COVID-19 Risk Assessment through that page.

## Workplace safety measures

PCS has been made aware that not all workplace COVID-19 safety measures are being adhered to. Despite the removal of some safety measures, the following steps should still be taken at all HMRC workplaces to ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of yourselves and your colleagues:

- Adhere to any capacity restrictions. There may still be occupancy limits in some areas, such as meeting rooms, and these will typically be in places where the ventilation is insufficient for full occupancy. These limits must not be breached.
- Only use desks and areas which have been cleaned. Desks, meeting rooms, and collaboration areas must only be used if they have been cleaned since the previous user. The flip cards will indicate if a desk is available to be used or not. Using an area which has not been cleaned increases the potential risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Practice good hygiene standards. Use hand sanitiser or wash your hands on a regular basis whenever moving throughout the communal areas of the building and before touching your face or eating food. Desk wipes should also be used for additional cleaning of your work area.
- Wear face coverings if able to. While there is no longer an HMRC policy or legal requirement (except in Scotland) to wear face coverings in the workplace, PCS recommends that you continue to do so when moving away from your desk, unless you are exempt for health reasons. Wearing a face covering continues to provide a barrier (to varying extents) against COVID-19 transmission.
- Do not attend the workplace if unwell. If you are displaying either of the main COVID-19 symptoms of a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss of change to your sense of smell or taste, do not attend the office and arrange for a PCR test. If during an asymptomatic Lateral Flow Test there is an indication you may be positive for COVID-19 also do not attend the office. Managers must also continue to report positive cases to building management teams, and onward from there to HR, to ensure the COVID-19 case data for each location is accurate.
- Maintain a respectful distance from your colleagues. While the legal requirement to maintain a safe distance from others has ended, everyone should continue to stay a respectful distance away from colleagues and be mindful of the wishes of others.
- Be aware of the COVID-19 risk assessment requirements. Every HMRC workplace has a COVID-19 risk assessment and everyone should be aware of where to find this and know about the measures outlined in the risk assessment to keep them and others safe. Information on workplace safety measures and arrangement are also available for each building through the local Working Safely Together Guides, accessed through the regional intranet pages.
- Continue to work from home in Northern Ireland and Wales, unless required to attend the workplace or carry out remote duties to support health and wellbeing or for essential business.

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