



16 April 2018

ARC Update 8 of 2018: Meeting with Jon Thompson

On 12 April ARC and PCS met with Jon Thompson (yes, he was there this time) with Rebekah Ayres standing in for Esther Wallington. Paula Houghton, Loz Hutton, Jawad Raza (our new FDA National Officer) and I attended for ARC.

Jon opened the meeting by giving some context to the Universal Credit announcement from 11 April 2018. It does not affect ARC Members in the same way or with the same impact as PCS members but it is nevertheless an important issue and one which we need to be sighted on because of the Regional Centre commitment given.

Jon had visited Preston earlier in the year and could see the impact the uncertainty was having, he had spoken with his DWP counterpart and the announcements on Wednesday were the result. He also said that discussing 'who said what' was counterproductive and the department (Dorothy Brown) was now working extremely hard to provide as much certainty as possible as soon as possible. I was the only person in the room who had been party to any of the recent discussions with Dorothy on this and I was able to state, with some conviction, that it was very clear how hard Customer Services Group were working to find a solution for the staff affected.

Jon went on to discuss how the need to find certainty for the B & C staff played into the Brexit planning as they now had authority to recruit an additional 5,000 staff. They needed to juggle closing down Tax Credits, which were scheduled to last until 2022 with recruiting for Brexit.

PCS played this into their BOF location concerns, mentioning the meeting lined up on Brexit on Monday 16 April which is our long awaited discussion with Cerys McDonald's replacement Lucy Pink and not a strategic recruitment or work meeting. We were able to clear this up and Jon undertook to arrange a meeting for us with Jim Harra who is now leading on all things Brexit, including leading discussions with the EU. Jon also confirmed that the Brexit jobs were the only increase and were very much dependent on the deal and the options taken. He confirmed that as soon as the options for exit were known there would be appropriate consultation with the unions.

Jon is in front of PAC again on Monday 30 April, he now has good access to Cabinet discussions and to the negotiators which is good for HMRC even though it is still far from perfect that we have no clarity on which option will be taken .

ARC raised the gender pay gap, asking what Jon proposed to do to reduce it as the report produced was light on the detail. Jon was pleased to note that there has been an increase in female SCS but he recognises the need to address the flow from the feeder grades by improving gender equality in those grades. The department has more women in it than men but there is a cut across at around SO level that means there are more men than women in the grades above SO. He acknowledged that freezing pay gave the gap permanence and said that were he to be able to pay more than 1% he would want a discussion about how to address that. This was very encouraging as was the undertaking to provide us with the statistics at 31 March 2018 showing the breakdown of grades by gender and protected characteristics together with the declaration rates. He is working on trying to make sure that any funding required for the national living wage increases is separate from the 1% - this is most welcome as it has not previously been the case, but is something we have pushed for.

PCS were concerned about the use of the non-consolidated pot and could not agree to the delegation of it. They asked Jon to commit to a longer term review of it, which he could do and which we don't object to as we don't agree with performance pay but if the department has to pay it we want to be discussing it to ensure fairness.

ARC raised the issue of Northern Ireland vacancies and the lack of reciprocity for our staff when it came to the Northern Ireland Civil Service being able to apply at the old 'stage 3' (now 'across civil service'). I explained the issue as it has been explained to me and also what we had done to try and address it. I asked Jon if he would agree to close the gateway until such time as it was made reciprocal. I was clear that it was reciprocity we wanted but as we had been unable to obtain this in the 14 months of trying we wanted the equilibrium returned until it was agreed. Jon agreed to take this away for Esther to take on as he thought he had already agreed it with his NI counterpart. PCS did not want the equilibrium restoring, despite having a motion to their conference asking that, but they do want the same as us in terms of reciprocity so how we get there is not as important as getting there.

BOFL was the next subject where both ARC and PCS were concerned about whether the workforce management team could cope if 51 offices were closing at the end of one year, 2020-21. I was able to say that the workforce team were looking at whether any of the 51 could be brought forward to spread the load and had agreed to share any revisions with us. Paula managed to explain that we had Key Skills as a training offering that might help the department with reskilling individuals who would not be able to stay with HMRC. She also expressed concern that the workforce team was

big enough to cope with that amount of closures, which Jon agreed to take away.

We accepted that Jon has tinkered with the programme since he began as CEO and those changes had been for the good.

ARC raised the issue of learning from Tribunal Judgements where we had been criticised - these tend to show on twitter and to be leapt on by those who wish to slate HMRC. Jon confirmed that we win around 92% of the cases we take to tribunal, which has been criticised in the past on the basis we cannot be taking enough, and that Gill Aitken would look at each decision where we had lost to see what learning we could take from it. Some of the issues we are now seeing are linked to disclosure of evidence and we are seeing difficulties where CPS are not convinced we have all the evidence available.

PCS raised the issue of 5 over 7 contracts and remuneration and were asked to send in some details to illustrate the point they were making.

The meeting lasted for 90 minutes.

Vicky Johnson
ARC President