



the information arc

July 2020

Changes at the top

We have in these strange times welcomed in a new President (Loz Hutton) and a new Deputy President (Helen Baird-Parker) and as you might expect it has been a challenging time to take on these roles. Here are some updates from Loz and expect to hear more from him in the next *arcnews*.

Please do pass this newsletter to your colleagues who may be thinking about joining ARC. They can find out more about the benefits of being a member here.

Return to the office

We have weekly meetings with the programme lead responsible for looking at Sustainable Home Working and the Safe Return to Work strands of the Exiting Covid 19 project.

Hopefully those members working at home have been able to utilise the allowances we've managed to secure from the department for IT, chairs and desks. I know that working at home isn't ideal and for some returning to an office environment can't come soon enough but for the foreseeable future there will not be a wholesale return to the offices. Work is underway to return some roles to the office; primarily those roles that have previously been paused and now need to be restarted or where additional people need to return to the offices to bring customer services levels back up. Conversations will be happening shortly with people who are affected, and we have been intricately involved in designing the toolkit and advice to managers for those conversations.

I know returning to the offices will be an uncomfortable prospect for some members and I want to make something absolutely clear, if you are asked to return to the office and you do not feel safe or comfortable in doing so you cannot be forced to return. So, if you are asked to return, the agreed guidance remains that you should only do it if you are happy to do it. Many of you will no doubt have seen stories across



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the media recently about the call for people to go back to work, and in some places specifically for the Civil Service to return, to support business. I have made it clear to HMRC that ARC will not accept members being put at risk by brought back in to the office simply to prop up the high street.

To HMRC's credit the plans on potential office capacity are based on the 2m social distancing guidance rather the 1m+ accepted in other scenarios and there are plans in place to deal with office operations and cleanliness for those offices that are open or potentially going to be opened. The position remains that if people can work from home then they should do so.

Redundancy mitigation

We are in some robust talks with the department on those members facing redundancy and what options can be offered to those who wish to stay but need some flexibilities in order to move to the regional centres.

The message from ExCom has been quite clear; if there are flexibilities that could be put in place to enable those facing redundancy to stay with HMRC then they will aim to accommodate those flexibilities. The last 3 months has proved that being in an office for most of your working week is not the only way the business can be run productively and effectively.

I have expressed concerns and will continue to do so until convinced to the contrary, that business areas are not as receptive to allowing additional flexibilities as the message sent down from ExCom. I also have concerns that the conversations to potentially identify flexibilities that could mean redundancy is avoided are either not happening or are a benign conversation. If you want to explore whether there are genuine flexibilities that would enable you stay, then your redeployment plan must reflect everything you think might work.

We have a commitment from HR Operations that all flexibilities identified will be explored and considered so don't limit your thought process to what you think your business area might be willing to accommodate, think about what you want and put it down. We know that each affected person will have to consider their own circumstances, but if you want to stay with HMRC or the Civil Service rather than be



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made redundant, ARC will do everything we can to facilitate HMRC making that happen. We're here to support you.

If any there are any questions about the exit schemes or redundancy mitigation, I'm happy to dial in to Centre meetings if you arrange one.

Pay

The business case is still stuck in the Government machinery but HMRC remain hopeful that it will be signed off soon. I will update members as soon as there is news.

Centralising departmental Communications functions

I know that the recent Cabinet Office announcement has caused concerned for those who undertake a comms role and the continued lack of clarity from Cabinet Office is not helping. FDA are in discussions with Cabinet Office about the scope and intent of the proposals and I have requested a meeting with HMRC to discuss what roles are potentially in scope within the department and the response to the proposals.

Border & Protocol Delivery Group

We are in consultation with HMRC and Cabinet Office on the terms and conditions that will be applicable when BPDG roles move from HMRC to Cabinet Office as part of the movement of government process.

Centre meetings

Ideally, I would have liked to be on the road and getting to as many autumn Centre meetings in person as possible but that's obviously not going to be happening any time soon so if Centres want to arrange a virtual meeting, I'll be more than happy to dial in to give an update and answer questions members may have.

Loz: loz.hutton@fda.org.uk



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Update from Vicky Johnson

As the lead for CSG, I have been spending a lot of time talking to various senior leaders across CSG including Mary Barber (EOTHO, SEISS and CJRS schemes), Mark Gill (Debt Management), Angela MacDonald (Director General of CSG) and Vicky Brookes (HR Business Partner). Conversations up until now have been focussed on the work staff have been doing, including the home telephony trial, who has been temporarily redeployed onto Covid-19 work and supporting individuals through the lockdown.

Recently conversations have started to consider what a phased return to the office might look like. It is important to stress that this is not about forcing people back to the office, and full consideration is being taken into any issue which may stop people returning when the time comes. These issues include health, caring responsibilities, public transport, domestic circumstances and the type of work available. Staff have been holding conversations with their manager to discuss all these issues and to gather all the relevant information. So far only a very small proportion (around 3%) of those who have had their conversations have been identified as being able and willing to go back to the office. If you are invited to a conversation, please do engage with it so accurate information can be gathered and please do reinforce that these are for information gathering purposes only, nobody is going to be forced back into their office.

Update from Kenny Mitchell

Collaborative conversations have been ongoing with Directors and Senior leaders across MSB and WMBC, these included supporting the increase on the allowances for kit from £40 to £100, which can be backdated. We hope those of you who have new kit have found it helpful.

There have also been some issues with those who needed to return to the office just to collect something, however guidelines have now been agreed so you should be



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able to agree this with your manager if necessary (although note that some offices are still completely closed so it will depend on your area).

Update from Jonathan Kilner

Jonathan has taken over responsibility for facility time reporting and after finalising the 2019/2020 report for the union, work has been going on to confirm the allocations for Committee and all our other reps. If you currently use facility time in some capacity, you should hear from Jonathan soon with your allocation for the year. An update will be provided when contact with all our known reps has been made.

Jonathan has also started work supporting Tom Langrish dealing with TSP and Tax Academy issues. As well as the regular catch ups with Course Director, there have been lots of discussions about the pause of training, how to restart, the amended timetables, reasonable adjustments and kit etc. These conversations will of course continue throughout the rest of the year as the situation develops with digital classrooms and exams.

Like others on committee Jonathan has also been involved regionally, engaging in virtual centre meetings via Teams, with committee in place. There's been lots of consultation with the department on the Regional Centre move there and on the impact of covid. There is now a SharePoint for the centre—if you're from the Region and you want to join here is the [link](#).



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Update from Julie Lithgo

Communications work has been a challenge while we have been in lockdown, however we have got a plan in place now which we used to pull this Info ARC together, so issues will be back to their regular schedule now. You will also have a new edition of *arcnews* with you soon, which includes the details of what happened with motions that should have been at AGM this year, and the motions themselves as submitted by centres.

Personal Casework

Most of the committee members we spoke to have been dealing with difficult and sensitive personal casework over the last couple of months. Much as we would like to share more details with you, it is very difficult to do so without identifying individuals involved. Please know that personal casework is still very important to us, and we will continue to support members when they need it.

FDA President Ballot

Members are reminded that a postal ballot is currently underway for the Presidency of the FDA, and ballot papers should already be with you. Please take the time to consider your choice and return your ballot papers by the due date—3 August 2020.

If you have not yet received your ballot papers, please contact FDA HQ on info@fda.org.uk. The two candidates are Vicky Johnson and Tony Wallace, both of HMRC, and both currently FDA Vice-Presidents.

Just a reminder here if you get post from ARC and FDA sent to your office address please consider if you can now change this to your home address. We don't know how long this situation is going to go on for, but it is certainly not going to be a quick resolution. In the meantime, any ballots/*arcnews*/PSM etc will continue to wait for you in the office. If you'd like to update your address, please email membership@fda.org.uk

Committee



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The deadline for nominations to join committee was last Friday, so as soon as we have the report from the scrutineer you will get an update. We look forward to hearing from our new committee members soon.

What's next?

We will be preparing another *Information ARC* for you very soon, we will have updates from Iain Campbell on how lockdown has changed the engagement work he does, and from David Cooper who has been looking at the balance of the issues on returning to the office. If you'd like to comment on these issues you can get in touch at arc@fda.org.uk. Please do give us your ideas for further improving ARC communications—email arc as above, or you can contact Julie, Becky or Scott directly. *Take care all.*