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September 2020

Welcome

As the world navigates the bumps in the road on the exit from Lockdown, I hope that you're all safe and well. These remain challenging times and we know that our members are working hard to deliver our day-to-day business alongside the new and changing initiatives that Covid-19 brings. We have reached the point where staff are beginning to return to offices, and we continue to work with the department and with PCS to ensure that this is safe and not rushed.

In this month's bumper edition, we have an update from the President, updates from Committee, IT pitfalls and a view on pay for the SCS.



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Update from ARC President

Members facing redundancy

We have a significant number of members facing redundancy in the next few months as HMRC closes offices and for some members this means an uncertain future.

We continue to work with the department on additional flexibilities that could be available to enable members to staff with HMRC and I would urge any member who wants to find a solution that will enable them to stay that they have a conversation with their manager and make sure that any potential flexibility is put down on your redeployment plan.

We also have members who will be accepting the redundancy offer and retiring but may be affected by the ongoing employment tribunal case, Elliot v Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman.

In a nutshell the Employment Tribunal found that the cap on compensation under the Civil Service Compensation Scheme for those at pension age or close to pension age was direct discrimination. The decision has been appealed so it may be some time before we have an outcome.

We're working with FDA and our legal advisors on the appropriate course of action for members who are potentially affected as they will have left the department before Elliot is resolved.

I hope to be able to advise members who are affected very shortly, and I will contact you directly to let you know the process.

Pay

Negotiations have now started with HMRC on the content of the business case and what a potential offer on pay and contract reform might look like. I can't say much more than that for the time being because the talks are in confidence.



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Only being able to meet by Teams does create challenges for the talks but we have three meetings a week in the diary and I'm committed to getting through the talks as quickly as possible so I can get out to talk to members about any potential offer.

Communications function across the civil service

We have started talks with HMRC about the proposal to transfer the communication functions across civil service departments into one employer and what this will mean for our members in affected roles. If you have any questions or concerns, you can email them to arc@fda.org.uk

At the same time FDA are involved in talks with Cabinet Office from a civil service wide perspective. FDA are also holding virtual meetings for members who are comms professional with the next one scheduled for **Wednesday 16th September**. Details of how to join the meetings can be found in the ARC Member Update sent on 21st August.

Returning to the offices

Amidst the petty condemnation of civil servants not returning to offices in some parts of the press we are continuing to have regular discussions with HMRC about potential plans for part occupancy of some buildings.

As social distancing guidelines are still in place there is limited capacity in the estate so there will be no wholesale return to the offices while that remains the case. HMRC is prioritising returns where a person's role is essential, and it can only be done effectively in the office or where someone's personal circumstances and wellbeing means that being in the office is appropriate.

I'm firmly of the belief that members should not be returning to the office because of pressure from Government to support the high street or because of ridiculous headlines in the press and we continue to consistently demonstrate



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that our members are effectively working from home and delivering for the nation.

If you are asked to return to the office, you should only do so if you feel safe and comfortable to return; nobody can be compelled to return to the office.

Employee Relations Agreement

We are working with the Employee Relations team on reinvigorating the employee relations agreement both in terms of the wording, accessibility and usability. Once complete the revised agreement, and the associated support products, should improve union engagement at all levels across HMRC and provide consistency.

Centre meetings

I've had some good meetings via Teams with some Centres over the last couple of months and I'm more than happy to have a virtual meeting with any Centre so please get in touch to arrange one.

FDA Executive Committee By-Election - ARC Section

The nomination process has now closed, and I can confirm that Paula Houghton will be joining myself, Tom Langrish, Helen Baird-Parker and Tony Wallace to represent the ARC constituency until 31 May 2022. Many congratulations to Paula!

Loz Hutton

loz.hutton@fda.org.uk



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Updates from Committee

Helen-Baird Parker (Deputy President)

As Deputy President, Helen's month was spent primarily supporting Loz in discussions around Pay, Redundancy, the fallout from pension discrimination cases and our return to the office. Included within the last point has been consideration of the plans in place for local lockdowns; those plans can only be tested when called upon.

Helen is also a member of the FDA Executive Committee and is the chair of the newly constituted Equality Committee. If you have any ideas on what the FDA could or should be doing around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion please feel free to email **Helen** with "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion" in the subject line.

Conor Burke (ARC Treasurer)

As we know you'd usually see the accounts at AGM please note that the current year accounts (2019) are now online and can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/association-of-revenue-and-customs-annual-returns> alongside other certification. These are in the public domain.

Conor is also the CFO rep and meets with them a couple of times a year—we're not aware of any burning issues here though. If you work in CFO, are you?

David Cooper

The question on David's mind this month has been – "what can we do for people who don't need to be in the office but who want to be?"



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As we move back into offices attention is quite rightly on those who need to return for a variety of reasons—equipment, productivity, physical and mental health/wellbeing etc—but that does not mean that we should lose sight of those who might not ‘need’ to be in the office but would like to return. We need to consider what wriggle room there is in order to give people that choice.

So that we can properly consider this, please contact [David](#) if you have views/suggestions.

Iain Campbell

Following on from Jonathan’s update in the July edition, Iain reports success with the Edinburgh Centre’s SharePoint page. It provides a space for discussion, for the local committee, for News and for important documents.

Are Edinburgh the first Centre to use SharePoint in this way?

Centre Presidents/Secretaries should feel free to get in touch with [Iain](#) if you would like to see what happens in Edinburgh.

There is also an opportunity for some best practice here – if you are using SharePoint (or other tools) to keep in touch with members please let the [Comms Team](#) know. We’ll see about sharing these ideas in future editions of the *Information ARC* or *arcnews*.

Jonathan Kilner and Tom Langrish

Jonathan has been busy dealing with the very immediate impact that Covid-19 has had on the TSP programme, as well as speaking to Toni Bovill/the Tax Academy about the future of the programme. These conversations have covered issues such as alternative working patterns, accreditation and the timetable for existing and future cohorts.



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As the timetable for the programme is of the most immediate interest, if you have any questions please email [Jonathan](#) directly with "TSP: Timetable" as the subject line.

Other commitments mean that Tom has taken a short break from committee work, so Jonathan has been covering for him where he can. If there are any matters outstanding that Tom was dealing with, please email Jonathan.

Further to July's update, for those of you who make use of facilities time please remember to send monthly updates both to Jonathan (ARC) and to Vernon Nurse (HMRC Employee Relations Team). Please email Jonathan and/or Vernon if you do not have a copy of the Form B template and one will be gladly supplied.

Vicky Johnson

August was an interesting month for Vicky as she was elected President of the FDA Executive Committee – many congratulations to her!

At the same time, Vicky has continued to speak to the department both about staff wellbeing and our work. She held regular meetings with Debt Management and Customer Services Group to discuss the 1-2-1 process and the return of staff to offices, standing in for colleagues at meetings with LB, as well as discussions with Transformation about the various Covid-19 schemes and the compliance work that is now beginning.

Scott McFarlane

Locally (Glasgow), much of Scott's time has been on recruitment and the clash between decisions based on office headcount and staff working at home; he looks forward to the outcome of Esther Wallington's review of how and where we work.

Nationally, Scott has met with the H&S Joint Working Group on Covid-19. The primary points of discussions have been around how the department best



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responds to changing guidance, including differences between the nations, around social distancing and wearing of face masks.

Fahad Akhtar

Spot question to members: Is Fahad the only ARC member who can see his seat in the office even though he is working remotely?

Fahad has been busy engaging with the FIS Engagement Team around several aspects but had had very positive experiences from that. FIS are obviously one area of the department where remote working does throw up some challenges, but the discussions around return to operational activities have been positive, and the more frequent engagement with TUS is welcomed. Furthermore, we're not yet sighted on any specific issues arising from the move of insolvency from CA to FIS—but as always, if anything is impacting you and you want to talk it over with ARC then do just let us know.

Fahad is also one of centre secretaries for Manchester and has been considering what kind of social activities might begin to be possible— if you have any ideas on that score then get in touch with [him](#) and let him know

Jim Rogers and Tamsin Wallbank (Equality Team)

The new equality team would like to repeat their thanks to Helen for all her hard work, and to ask any members with questions, ideas or issues to take up to please get in touch with Jim or Tamsin.

The Race Audit has now been shared, and the Race Equality Action Plan has been developed. Jim and Tamsin have been involved in these discussions, attending regular meetings with Penny Ciniewicz, Simon Claydon and others. The findings of the audit are horrific, and ARC fully supports the actions planned to make improvements. You will all have started having team conversations by now, and you should expect these to continue, and training will be coming too. It is important that we support this work.



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The team have not forgotten hidden characteristics, and work will continue LGBTQ+ and hidden disability issues. ARC believes it is really important that you can bring your whole self to work, so please do contact [Jim](#) or [Tamsin](#) not just on race but any issues in the diversity and inclusion space.

PRISM [Pride](#) needs you!

PRISM Pride spot mentoring sessions are currently scheduled for Tuesday 8 September 1300 to 1600 and Thursday 10 September 1300 to 1600. You don't have to be available for the full 3 hours and, but we ask a minimum of 1 hour. We are still organising this event so hope to be able to provide the mentors with broad themes of what mentees would like to discuss or get help with. We expect run sessions for small groups or on a one to one basis.

To find out more about PRISM Pride check out our [yammer](#) page. There are events throughout September 2020.

If you'd like to volunteer to mentor or more information, please contact [Tamsin Wallbank](#)

Keep your diversity data up to date

Just a reminder to please check and complete your diversity data in HR, it helps the work in the diversity space. While we're at it, a reminder to also update your details with ARC if you change personal details, get promoted, move offices etc. Thank you!

Claire White

Claire has been attending regular meetings for Customer Insight and Design with Lucy Pink. Lately these have focussed on diversity and inclusion plans and



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ensuring that all need to act, that we cannot leave the responsibility up to the staff who are affected.

Claire has also been attending RIS meetings, lately focussing on considerations of people going back into office when they want to in a as safe a way as possible.

Claire has meetings coming up in both areas, so please do get in touch in with [Claire](#) if want any issues raised.

Heather Morrison (Health & Safety)

I hold the H&S (health and safety) portfolio on ARC committee which has always been hectic as it covers a wide range—from physical safety issues relating to buildings, health issues and accidents at work to mental health issues. With Covid-19 I have been even busier.

ARC traditionally has had a network of local H&S reps, but this has slowly withered over time. I am trying to reinvigorate it. My information is that we still have reps in the following locations: Bristol, Croydon, Hull, Edinburgh, Ipswich, Leicester, Manchester, Northern Ireland, Nottingham and Sheffield. There are clearly now a lot of gaps in coverage.

It is a role which can make a real difference to the daily lives of colleagues—the eyes and ears on the ground who can make sure that colleagues are kept safe and comfortable—and never more important than with Covid-19 and as colleagues start to return to offices. If you are interested in becoming a local H&S rep for ARC, please get in touch. Reps in the past have received training (I am looking into what can now be provided) and are entitled to facilities time. It's a rewarding role as you work with rather than against BRMs etc to flag and help solve problems.

If you are interested in taking up this vital role for ARC, please contact [Heather](#) for further information.



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John Parkhouse

Lockdown Affects us all in different ways and at different times. I have gone from a house with three people working at home, competing for quiet space to being on my own—far too quiet!

I have as usual been helping members resolve issues, some arising from lockdown and some not, if you have anything you want to discuss please get in touch. I have also been working with CDIO who have been working very hard to keep systems going in often difficult circumstances.

One thing I have learnt in these times is that it is good to chat. Think about it. You are in the office you will chat to people. I really have missed that and talking to some colleagues they felt isolated but a bit uncomfortable ringing someone without a 'work,' reason to do so. So, one thing I have done is encourage chatting. Ring up a friend or a colleague just for a chat it is really good for your mental wellbeing!

Tony Wallace

Meetings with Estates have been ongoing, and as you'd expect the focus has been on how to get staff back into the office in the safest possible way, and with a commitment that no one will be made to go back into the office if they don't want to. The safety of staff is paramount in the discussions. If you have any feedback in this area, please do let us **know**.

Working with John, Tony has been talking to the HR team looking at personal cases and grievances. Work is ongoing to look for improvements to the processes for difficult cases, including consideration of Respect at Work issues.



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Other news and issues

Working from Home: Acceptable use of IT

Working at home brings its own stresses and strains – ok no long commute but for many a dining table, a bedside table or the kitchen worktop has become a place of work.

We have had some success in getting the employer to pay for some IT kit to support us, but this falls a long way short of the real cost or what has been offered by other employers and even other government departments, but as we always, we try to do our best, we get on with it.

If you have had a problem with equipment while working from home and you need union help, please get in touch with your local rep or with [John Parkhouse](#).

Printing

One problem that has cropped up regularly, is printing documents. While some of us still like to print things to scribble notes in the digital age, this is not an option while we work from home. We **must not** attach our SP's or iPhones to a home printer even though they may be on the same home network.

We appreciate that this is frustrating, but we are beginning to see personal cases where colleagues are trying to get around this, usually bye-mailing a document they want printed to a personal e mail address and via this onto a printer for printing. If these documents are, or would be classified as 'Sensitive,' or above, this breaches departmental use guidance. Even if you delete everything after printing, this is a breach and could leave you open to disciplinary action. The employer has the capacity to monitor use of all our systems and has



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identified this as a concern, so if you have done this, even with the best intentions, you may find yourself being asked to explain your actions.

Please think before you hit 'print'. Where available, please consider using the central print service.

Mobile Phones: Charity donations

There has been a secondary issue which has raised its head too, which is people using their work mobile phones to donate to charity. This isn't around using the phone to donate via your own PayPal or bank account, but rather those fundraising efforts which say "Please text 12345 to give £5 to X charity" because the donation is added to your bill.

Please use caution when using your departmental mobile phone and – no matter how well intentioned – ensure you are not adding to the bill for any non-work-related issue.

SCS Pay, a comment from the FDA's Lucille Thirlby

Whilst the FDA welcomes the SSRB recommendations, we believe the government needs to put its foot to the pedal. The government's own evidence called for an SCS with world-class capability: to maintain and increase this it must allocate greater funding, invest in its senior leaders and resolve the long-term issues of a lack of pay progression and low confidence, both in the performance management system and morale.

However, 2% on the SCS pay bill will not be enough to resolve the years of pay restraint and that currently existing budgets are stretched to the max

There is no legitimate reason for the lack of progress on a structural reform other than lack of political will from Government.

At a time when the country is relying on the Senior Civil Service like never. The case for reform has been made and the time for action is now.