

# PCS People

Issue 2 • 2020

100,000 SIGNATURES = CONSIDERED FOR DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT



## Sign your name for pay justice

Parliamentary petition with 100k goal is next key step in our national campaign to tackle scandalous pay and unjustified pensions overpayments

**P**CS is aiming to secure a debate in parliament over the shocking pay situation our members are facing, by getting 100,000 names on a mass petition we have lodged with the UK Government.

Our parliamentary petition demands a fair pay rise for government workers – including the civil service, NDPBs and outsourced staff – who have delivered vital public services during the Covid-19 pandemic, and who should not be expected to accept another real-terms pay

cut, as has been outrageously proposed by the UK government.

With members’ help, we can take this issue directly to the heart of Westminster. Petitions with 10,000 signatures get a government response; after 100,000 signatures the issue will be considered for a debate in parliament.

Everyone is urged to sign and share the petition, and take part in this and other campaign activities.

We will not campaign with this petition alone – but it’s a vital tool to demonstrate members’ anger, help strengthen the union by recruiting

more members, get people involved in the campaign and ultimately prepare for the possibility of another ballot for industrial action.

The government pay remit issued in May – capping pay rises at 1.5%–2.5%, when RPI inflation is at 2.6% – made it clear that despite the extraordinary efforts of members to keep critical services running during the pandemic, the union’s reasonable demands for an interim above-inflation pay rise and other measures to get through the crisis had been ignored. The 10% rise PCS has demanded for 2020 would start

to restore the value of members’ pay, decimated by 10 years of cuts and pay freezes, but the pay remit made it clear they don’t intend to even begin that restoration.

By contrast, an interim 3% rise for Scottish Government workers has already been implemented.

While launching the petition as part of our national campaign on pay, pensions and the CSCS (see p10), the union has also been working flat out to protect members’ safety during the Covid-19 lockdown and beyond.

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PCS is opposing any attempts to force people back into their workplaces before it is safe to do so, and we have launched our ‘5 Tests for Safe Working’ to help reps and members navigate the situation in their areas with a set of clear principles (see p11).

As soon as the crisis escalated, the union temporarily reorganised the way it works in order to support and represent members most effectively and keep them informed of rapidly-changing developments. The union’s work secured numerous key improvements for members collectively, and for many individuals in challenging situations (see pages 6–9 for more).

The lockdown has also impacted on the civil service’s 8,500 apprenticeships – many of which have been ‘paused’ – and PCS is carrying out a survey of those members. The Cabinet Office is also looking into the impact of the pandemic on apprentices.

The crisis has brought even more sharply into focus the urgent need to recognise every PCS member’s contribution to society with a long overdue, above-inflation pay rise.

Look out for news of our national campaign activities and get involved. Ask a colleague to join PCS. And please sign and share the parliamentary petition.

**GIVE GOVERNMENT WORKERS A FAIR PAY RISE**

**SIGN & SHARE**

**WWW.PCS.ORG.UK/PAYPETITION**

# Black Lives Matter: PCS speaks out

Our union condemns the institutional racism that has long caused black communities in the USA, the UK and all over the world to live in fear for their lives



The union’s National Black Members’ Committee has spoken out in the wake of the murder by US police officers of George Floyd – which has sparked global Black Lives Matter protests – calling for changes to the institutional barriers faced by black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

The union also sent solidarity to George Floyd’s family, black people globally, and PCS members left traumatised and anxious by seeing the coverage of his murder, and who may have experienced police racism and racial profiling.

PCS has always stood up against racism and supported our sister

trade unions in their campaigns for justice, and will continue to do so.

“We are frustrated and angry that despite the work done by

families, campaigners and trade unions, and promises of changes, we are no closer to eradicating institutional and other racism,” said the NBMC.

In a further step, PCS has written to the Cabinet Office, calling on them to work with the union to take decisive action to eradicate racism from the civil service.

**“We are no closer to eradicating institutional and other racism”**

## PCS HELPLINE: REPORT RACISM WHERE YOU WORK

Pre-Covid, there had already been a disturbing resurgence – often under the guise of ‘free speech’ – of overt racism, homophobia, misogyny and other hate, and the pandemic emergency has exacerbated the situation. Workplaces are not free from the trend of scapegoating the most vulnerable in society, and trade unions have a central role to play in defending our communities and campaigning for fairness and equality.

Please report incidents of racism to your PCS rep. If you feel unable to discuss it, call the union’s confidential 24-hour helpline on **020 7801 2678**.

The union has also backed calls for a public inquiry into the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on BME groups, and our collective

action with the TUC led to the Equality and Human Rights Commission announcing it would hold such an inquiry.

BME members are urged to share their experiences of racism and unfair treatment at work during the Covid-19 crisis, via an online TUC survey, at [surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9YCCB79](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9YCCB79).

## 4 things to know about PCS Covid response team

1.

We changed the way we work in order to support our members during the Covid-19 emergency. A coronavirus central response team was launched so we could respond to questions more quickly, give members the answers they need straightaway and, where necessary, act to keep people safe. The team has helped and supported more than 2,000 members since it was established in April.

2.

The team is the first point of contact for members’ coronavirus-related queries and representation requests, handling 60–70 cases a day. Some of the most common issues raised include: being on special leave and being asked to take annual leave; social distancing; being a clinically vulnerable vs extremely vulnerable person; returning to work; furlough; health and safety; working from home/in the office; and what is essential work.

3.

Setting up a central coronavirus response team means we have been able to identify trends and issues that cut across more than one employer. This has allowed the union to share higher-quality advice and information with members and reps, and it helps when we are talking to and negotiating with the employers about safety and other issues. The team is being led by the union’s acting head of equality, Karen Foster.

4.

**Need help?**  
If you have concerns or queries you can consult our coronavirus Q&A – then if you still need to get in touch, log an enquiry with our response team by email and we’ll get back to you. Don’t forget there are also updates for your area on the PCS website’s employer pages.  
 ■ [www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp](https://www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp)  
 ■ [www.pcs.org.uk/employer](https://www.pcs.org.uk/employer)  
 ■ Log your enquiry: [responseteam@pcs.org.uk](mailto:responseteam@pcs.org.uk)

[www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp](https://www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp)

Photograph: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

# CSCS cuts plans halted until at least 2021

## REDUNDANCY RIGHTS

Plans for major cuts to the civil service redundancy scheme (CSCS) have been stopped until at least April 2021, following sustained pressure from PCS.

The result meets one of the union's demands for immediate action on pay, pensions and CSCS.

In 2016 the government cut the CSCS by 30%, and in 2017 PCS won a court case that overturned these cuts and reinstated the more favourable 2010 terms. Despite the union's legal victory, successive governments have threatened to reinstate the cuts, and PCS has since been in talks to try to stop it.

Due to the 2017 court win, thousands of members have benefited from larger redundancy payments, and many more

redundancies have been avoided as a result of the higher costs of making job cuts. Many PCS members also received significant compensation pay-outs as a result.

The recent confirmation from the Cabinet Office that no cuts will happen during this financial year will bring certainty to members facing redundancy.

PCS made four interim demands to help staff facing challenging times during the coronavirus pandemic, many of whom are carrying out essential work, but the government has not addressed the other key issues: above-inflation pay; a 2% reduction in pension contributions; and a moratorium on office closures and redundancies (see p10 for more).

## Our voice in parliament

The Covid-19 crisis and how it has affected PCS members has dominated the union's actions in parliament since March.

PCS has been working tirelessly with its parliamentary group MPs and shadow ministers on key campaigning issues in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, at a national and group level.

MPs have been kept abreast of the ever-changing situation for our members working across government departments, including both the people still attending workplaces and those able to work from home.

The PCS parliamentary group is currently meeting every two to three weeks, with attendance averaging almost 20 MPs.

Briefings and letters have been distributed on numerous issues including the British Council, HMRC redundancies and outsourced workers, and several meetings have taken place with shadow ministers and members of select committees.

The group has written to the Cabinet Office regarding PCS's national demands – on pay, pensions, CSCS, and office

closures – an Early Day Motion (445) has been tabled highlighting these demands and dozens of parliamentary questions have been tabled across departments.

Following a meeting with the MoJ group, Lyn Brown MP wrote to the justice secretary about the case of cleaning staff who died after contracting Covid-19 whilst working at the MoJ HQ.

A campaign launched to save the British Council, which is facing an uncertain future due to Covid, has so far resulted in short-term extra funding. An e-action has been signed by more than 1,500 people (see p4).

The group is also involved in the campaign to save the jobs of members in Ealing tax office, with the pandemic proving the union's point that they can work from home and do not need to be made redundant.

Evidence has been submitted to select committees, including DWP, Treasury (HMRC), Justice, Home Affairs and Transport.



Photograph: Guy Bell

## Participation is key to prevailing on pay

### MARK SERWOTKA PCS GENERAL SECRETARY

These are still extremely challenging times and your continued hard work is keeping the country going during the Covid-19 crisis.

Our negotiating team has been meeting with the Cabinet Office regularly to secure important national agreements on your safety. The Cabinet Office line remains that everyone should work from home where they can and we've made good progress on this. We've also been working hard to make sure that for those of you who have to go into work, your employer is doing everything it can to make it safe.

Our top priority is your safety and we've made it clear to the government that it should be theirs too. That's why we've launched the PCS '5 Tests for Safe Working' (see p11). These tests are a vital way to health-check every workplace and you are all encouraged to talk to your union reps about applying them where you work.

On pay, you've been disgracefully betrayed again with the offer of yet another below-inflation pay rise. The government is happy to praise you at the despatch box for your contribution during the pandemic one minute, and insult you with a derisory pay offer the next.

We're asking members to sign and share a petition that recognises the essential role you've played during the pandemic, opposes real-terms cuts to your pay and calls for a pay rise across the civil service and related areas. It will put some pressure on government but it won't be enough on its own. It will help us to recruit and strengthen our union in case we need to ballot for industrial action in the future.

Member participation will be the key to success in these campaigns. Please get involved, talk to your reps and recruit your colleagues to PCS.

As you continue to battle the impacts of the pandemic and the government's unfair treatment, PCS will be there fighting by your side.

### Black Lives Matter

I also want to express my solidarity with all those taking part in the Black Lives Matter protests. PCS fully supports international efforts to eradicate the systemic racism that is a daily reality for millions of people.

PCS is extremely proud of its diverse membership and has been at the forefront of campaigning against racism and fascism. BME workers have played a pivotal role during the pandemic, often on the frontline, and this has exposed deep-rooted inequalities. It's an outrage that BME workers are four times more likely to die from the virus than white workers of the same age.

I'm pleased that after pressure from PCS, the Equality and Human Rights Commission will carry out an inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on BME workers.

With divisions in the UK widening and an emboldened far right on the march, PCS is more determined than ever to challenge the evil of racism.

**“It's an outrage that BME workers are four times more likely to die from the virus than white workers of the same age”**

 **GET INVOLVED** Support our campaigns at [www.pcs.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.pcs.org.uk/campaigns)

Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA Wire/PA Images



**WORKPLACE SAFETY**

**Ballot threatened as Commons falls short of '5 tests'**

PCS members working at the House of Commons are threatening to ballot for industrial action after the re-opening of parliament unnecessarily put their health and safety at risk.

The union said the House of Commons Commission was failing to adhere to PCS's '5 Tests for Safe Working' (see p11), which made the site unsafe for those members who cannot work from home, such as security, catering, cleaning and maintenance staff.

Talks have been held with the employer, but they have so far failed to agree to the union's safety criteria.

When the decision was made to scrap the hybrid parliament and re-open it in early June, PCS wrote to the prime minister to highlight its safety concerns. The union said members had warned the Leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg MP (pictured top left, waiting to vote outside the Commons), about the impracticality of reopening parliament, where social distancing is impossible.

"The government would rather put the lives of staff and MPs in danger in direct contradiction of their own advice to the public," said Mark Serwotka. In one case, members reported chaotic scenes with MPs failing to distance themselves from staff while queuing to cast their votes. They had previously been able to attend remotely via video link.

**FUNDING CRISIS**

**Campaign staves off insolvency for British Council**

PCS has welcomed the news that the UK government has given the British Council an emergency £60m loan to avoid impending insolvency, but the union is still campaigning to secure its long-term future.

The British Council (BC) - which develops cultural relations and promotes knowledge of the UK and the English language abroad - was plunged into a dire situation when the Covid pandemic led to the closure of most of its overseas English-language schools and test centres. PCS launched a campaign after it furloughed a quarter of staff and said it planned to let go 15% of non-permanent workers.

The campaign received cross-party parliamentary support and had a global reach through working with

educational institutions such as the University Council of Modern Languages. More than 1,500 people signed a PCS e-action directed at the foreign secretary and 40 MPs have supported an Early Day Motion.

As a result, additional funds were allocated, also including the up-front payment of some 2020-21 Grant-in-Aid funds. BC management reported that the union's campaign and political pressure were key factors in the release of more cash.

But the funding gap remains at £40 million a month until operations abroad can re-open. PCS is calling for additional funding to enable the BC to continue operating post-crisis and to do so independently of ministerial control. The £60m loan will cover operational costs until mid-August.

- Sign the e-action: [pcslive.bsd.net/co/save-the-british-council](https://pcslive.bsd.net/co/save-the-british-council)
- Sign the petition: [you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-british-council](https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/save-british-council)
- Urge your MP to sign EDM 375

**FRONTLINE WORKERS**

**Home Office relents over face masks**

Pressure from PCS has led to the Home Office reversing its policy on allowing face masks to be routinely worn by frontline Border Force officers and other staff in operational and public-facing settings.

The union objected from the start to the department's stance of not sanctioning the wearing of masks by public-facing staff, and not installing screens at passport controls and other enquiry points.

Those workers are now being provided with face masks to be worn when social distancing in a public setting is impossible. The fitting of protective screens is also taking place at ports, airports and public-facing offices.

The union has called on the Home Office to support the wearing of face coverings for all staff going back into workplaces or where they may come into contact with the public and colleagues.

**OFFICE CLOSURES**

**PCS condemns huge HMRC redundancy scheme**

The launch of a massive redundancy scheme affecting 2,000 members of staff in HMRC has been condemned by PCS as "unnecessary and avoidable".

The cuts form part of plans to close 90% of local offices and replace them with fewer than 20 large regional hubs.

The Covid crisis had put this planned tranche on hold, with some staff due to be made redundant in June being asked to stay until September to help with HMRC's essential work. Moreover, the department had agreed with PCS that the crisis had shown staff could

work effectively from home and that the location strategy, and related redundancy plans, should be re-visited and "lessons learned".

But despite just launching the project to examine whether redundancies are needed, HMRC has told PCS its "current thinking" is to go ahead with the massive cuts exercise planned for June.

Crucially, PCS had also received written assurance from the Cabinet Office and Treasury minister that redundancies would go ahead only if "necessary and unavoidable". These cuts were the "very opposite of that," said PCS's Mark Serwotka.

**CULTURE SHUTDOWN**

**Full pay secured for most in museum and galleries**

Museum and gallery workers hit hard by closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic have had their pay protected by agreements secured by PCS, FDA and Prospect.

The unions ensured 90% of furloughed staff in the sector, across the UK, have continued to receive their full salaries in spite of government objections.

All museums and galleries closed in March, but the unions insisted that no detriment should be faced by staff. PCS supported the use of furloughing across the sector - which mostly faces significant financial pressures due to mixed funding models - on the condition that those impacted received 100% of their salary, with the 20% top-up

paid by each institution.

Despite issues with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) advising against top-ups, after working closely with fellow unions and the institutions PCS was able to confirm that all furloughed staff working directly for publicly-funded institutions were kept at 100%. Some chose not to furlough and kept pay at 100%.

In organisations that don't receive DCMS funding, such as the Southbank and English Heritage, PCS won significant enhancements for the lowest paid. In many private sector areas where the union is recognised, enhanced furlough arrangements were secured.



**SICK PAY JUSTICE:** A PCS campaign has been launched to ensure outsourced staff working on civil service contracts, such as cleaners, porters and security guards, are paid full occupational sick pay from day one.

Most outsourced staff only receive statutory sick pay at just £19.17 a day, and only from the fourth day of illness, which means many are forced to work while unwell. During the coronavirus pandemic, PCS has been able to secure a commitment from most civil service departments that outsourced staff will receive full pay for coronavirus-related absences, and now the union is campaigning to defend and extend that right beyond the crisis.

The Dying for Sick Pay campaign launch, held online on 15 June – which is International Justice Day for Cleaners and Security Guards – was attended by PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka, president Fran Heathcote, and former shadow chancellor John McDonnell. The meeting heard from PCS member Ahmed, who works for ISS in the mail room at BEIS, who said he and his fellow workers didn't want to be treated as "second class citizens" by their employers. Toni, a park attendant employed by Vinci at the Royal Parks added: "People are scared to go off sick due to the reduced pay. You ask yourself 'what bill can I pay first?'"

John McDonnell said the PCS Parliamentary group of MPs would use every possible avenue to draw attention to the reality of the situation.

■ **Please urge your MP to sign Early Day Motion #596.**

■ **To get involved email [outsourcedworkers@pcs.org.uk](mailto:outsourcedworkers@pcs.org.uk)**

## CSCS CLAIMS

### Potential discrimination cases backed by PCS

More than 450 PCS members have registered to pursue an Employment Tribunal (ET) claim over redundancy payments that were, or are being, capped at six months because of their age.

An ET ruling has already said that CSCS rules on payments for those over retirement age amount to direct age discrimination. Under these current rules, entitlement to compensation for voluntary exit or redundancy is gradually lowered from the 21-month maximum after CSCS members reach 15 months from their civil service pension age, then from pension age onwards it is capped at six months.

The government is appealing the judgment that it is discriminatory, and PCS lawyers are supporting the claimant in defending the appeal.

Meanwhile, PCS is preparing for a potential legal case involving the hundreds of members coming forward. So far more than 100 of the ET claims have been submitted.

## HIGH COURT

### Second check off damages claim launched

PCS is pursuing a claim against the Home Office after winning £3m in damages from the DWP as a result of ministers stopping the 'check off' system of directly deducting union subs from government workers' pay packets in 2015.

The union wrote to the Home Office, inviting them to settle a similar claim against them. They declined to do so and PCS is lodging proceedings with the High Court.

PCS is also preparing to write to all departments that withdrew check off, with the same invitation.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "It is clear from the [DWP] case that our members have a contractual right to check off and that PCS is entitled to damages for the financial loss caused by the breach of our members' contracts.

"We urge all departments to take a sensible view and avoid racking up costs to the taxpayer, in legal fees, by settling without the need for legal action."



## Use this energy to help keep our members safe

**FRAN HEATHCOTE** PCS PRESIDENT

This year has seen unprecedented challenges for our members across the civil service and related areas, who are dealing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the partial easing of lockdown there has certainly been no easing or letting up for the union, which is defending members and ensuring that our '5 tests' are applied before we say people can safely go back to the workplace (see p11).

The challenges of coronavirus have also set the scene for longstanding injustices to once again be brought to the fore.

I, like most of the population, have been shocked by the callous murder of George Floyd in the United States. His death not only sparked a global outcry for justice but has morphed into a movement that is willing to challenge racism and prejudice everywhere, including here in the UK.

PCS has proudly supported Black Lives Matter in this country and the marches that have taken place in our towns and cities.

With the ugly spectacle of the far-right giving Nazi salutes in central London recently, it shows the BLM movement is needed now more than ever.

People are starting to question many aspects of our society –

who we memorialise, what we teach our children about British history and how the coronavirus has disproportionately affected BME communities.

In PCS, we are all too aware of the real fear our BME members have around Covid-19.

As well as being employed by the civil service, BME members often work as contracted caterers, cleaners and security guards for private companies who have a brutal anti-union attitude and care not a jot for their health and safety.

Once again, the only guarantee of safety is to be a union member and to organise collectively to ensure everyone's wellbeing.

The BLM movement has injected new life and a sense of urgency into tackling racism in society.

We must take this energy into our workplaces to make sure our members are kept safe and are not returning to workplaces until our union's clear 5 tests are met.

**"People are starting to question many aspects of our society"**

## JOBS AND PAY

### PCS wins jobs and pay for Home Office apprentices

Hundreds of apprentices across the Home Office have been given permanent contracts and a pay rise, thanks to a PCS campaign.

For some of the lowest paid members, this has resulted in a pay increase of almost £7,000 per year.

Those affected had been recruited externally onto AO apprenticeships but were being paid below the grade minimum. Following pressure from the union, it was confirmed that from 1 April all apprentices were being moved to new pay scales at the AO substantive grade and put on permanent contracts.

The win resulted from a comprehensive bargaining, campaigning and organising plan

by the group executive committee. It included a letter from the PCS general secretary to the permanent secretary, highlighting the potential damage to the department's reputation, in particular to the Border Force.

The letter said that, with Brexit approaching, the Border Force recruitment exercise opened the government to accusations that it was trying to run UK borders "on the cheap", with inexperienced staff on poor wages, who may not be authorised to undertake the tasks they carry out.

The union is continuing to push for further improvements of the apprenticeship schemes.

# Covid crisis around the union

For updates on other areas of PCS, go to [www.pcs.org.uk/employer](http://www.pcs.org.uk/employer)



Significant progress has been made in negotiating an increased number of HMRC members of staff working from home. At the beginning of the Covid restrictions, around 75% of HMRC's main departmental staff were working from home, plus all but around 300 staff in the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) were either working from home or on special leave.

Around 6,000 staff - mainly in telephony roles - were still required to go into the office, but PCS worked with the department on piloting the system from home, and from 18 May the majority of telephony staff in the customer services group were able to work from home.

PCS estimates this means only around 1,000 of the department's 65,000 staff are still being required to go into the office. The union has continued to explore ways of allowing those remaining staff

to work from home too.

PCS has also reached agreement with HMRC on a 'serious incident protocol', which sets out the procedures to be followed if an increase in cases or another pattern indicates that normal procedures aren't sufficient. It can be triggered by either the employer or PCS.

As a consequence, there have been four incidents in which staff have been sent home from sites.

Around 1,000 display screen-compatible chairs have been provided by the department for staff who do not have these at home. A further 1,000 are in the process of being provided to home-working staff. Likewise, in the VOA, management are providing the necessary furniture.

Because many members rely on public transport to get to work, PCS has raised concerns about staff not being able to remain socially

distanced while travelling to the office. In response, HMRC has agreed to meet car-parking and - where necessary - taxi costs.

## Office closures

For almost five years, HMRC has been closing offices under its 'Building Our Future' programme which aims to cut its offices from around 170, in 2015, to fewer than 20. This meant the likelihood of thousands of redundancies, arising from staff being outside reasonable daily travel distance from one of the new sites. Given what we now know from the Covid-19 crisis (that jobs can be re-engineered to allow staff to work remotely; staff being asked to travel long journeys to hot-desk in busy offices increases the chance of virus spread), we have called on HMRC's chief executive to change the location strategy.

The department is now launching projects to look in more detail at the longer-term viability of remote working and, crucially, whether we can use what we have learned

to avoid redundancies and even to examine whether the location strategy itself needs to be adjusted. PCS has set out the steps we believe HMRC needs to take to become what the government calls "Covid-secure".

Disappointingly, HMRC then told PCS that the "current thinking" was to continue with its planned huge tranche of redundancies in June, despite the fact that its own project is aimed at identifying whether redundancies are even necessary, and despite assurances PCS centrally has received from the Cabinet Office. The union wrote to the chief people officer, urging HMRC to reconsider but, in a move that drove a coach and horses through ministerial assurances, HMRC has decided to go ahead with its scheme at the end of June.

We have held an immediate meeting with the Cabinet Office, calling on them to intervene.

**STAY UP TO DATE:**  
[www.pcs.org.uk/hmrc](http://www.pcs.org.uk/hmrc)



There have been myriad issues and concerns affecting members in the MOJ and related bodies, HMCTS, HMPPS, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), OCS Security and Engie Facilities Management - most of whom have been in their workplaces throughout the pandemic.

In the courts, HMCTS has been chaotic and inconsistent with other sector agencies and the wider civil service - for example, only managing to get 28% of staff doing remote working. Despite repeated requests HMCTS has failed to define essential and business-critical work and maintains all work is essential and must continue. They have given an assurance to continue to support remote working where relevant. The union's biggest concern remains the health and safety of members in the workplace, as while union representation has led to significant improvements, PCS has been unable to reach an agreement on a risk assessment process. Advice on this was issued to members' personal email


addresses on 15 May.

There is now a concerted effort to re-start more work and open courts that were temporarily suspended, which has raised serious concerns.

Despite HMCTS's approach, PCS has secured improvements, including: the ability to cancel/carry forward annual leave; special paid leave for those with limited ability to work; protections for those in vulnerable categories; supply of PPE; and flexibility on issues such as Covid-19 absences, flexi limits, and start and finish times.

In HMPPS, there are around 1,000 confirmed infections among staff in the prison service and more than 30 fellow workers have tragically died. Safety is the highest priority. A Public Health England report highlighted the risk of further waves unless rigorous, planned safety measures are maintained and new ones adopted around new receptions and contact tracing. Negotiators are seeking commitments in line with PCS's '5 tests', including agreeing a 'know your rights' campaign and a

“ During the pandemic, my usual workplace was suspended. As a local-only driver with an old car, I was asked in May to take public transport (trains and underground) 39 miles into London, despite the clear government advice that even employees who usually take public transport should avoid it. Despite constantly confirming my availability to work from home, or at an office closer to home, I then suffered seven days of silence followed by an intimidating email in the evening from senior management. It caused me countless sleepless nights. Fortunately, my union rep fully supported me along the way, advising me that my opinion was correct, and reassuring me that PCS would back me to a higher level if necessary. Their intervention has stopped the management threat of going to London on public transport and of suffering the 'AWOL' disciplinary process. I've become a PCS rep after suffering this and hearing similar complaints from colleagues. I felt the need to become involved. ”



Dean, HMCTS

commitment to intervene to prevent contractors or governors enforcing unsafe working practices.

The union has made significant achievements for members in the CPS including: major changes to the way media is dealt with to enable more employees to work from home (currently 90%); agreeing court deployment principles that enshrine the importance of health and safety; interim changes to the T&S policy to reflect use of public transport being discouraged; protections for those who live with or care for someone who is vulnerable; and increased flexibility

around working hours and carry over of annual leave.

Members at OCS Security and Engie Facilities Management have continued to attend workplaces, highlighting how they keep justice running, and courts and tribunals safe and clean. They have suffered pay detriment for Covid-19-related absences, with officers on the OCS contract being paid Statutory Sick Pay rates. PCS demands that all Covid-19-related absences are paid at full contractual rates.

**STAY UP TO DATE:**  
[www.pcs.org.uk/justice](http://www.pcs.org.uk/justice)

# Covid crisis around the union

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## Dept for Transport (DfT)

Around 94% of DfT staff are working from home, with a small number on special leave.

The immediate issue was the safety of the DVSA's operational staff - mainly driving and vehicle examiners - and enforcement staff, who were unable to adhere to social distancing. Following this were the members in DVSA and DVLA call centres who were dealing with the processing of licences for key workers such as nurses, and ambulance and delivery drivers.

By 20 March, the DVSA had cancelled all driving tests for three months, following representations by PCS. It became necessary to provide emergency tests for key workers and an agreement to do this via volunteer examiners was reached, including ensuring PPE was being used. While tests are still cancelled, negotiations are ongoing on standing up some critical DVSA services, such as vehicle testing. For driving tests, problems remain on social distancing, and guidance is being sought from the government.

DVSA contact centres were also closed. PCS agreed that processing applications for tests from critical workers was essential, but argued for this to be done remotely.

The Swansea-based DVLA has

more than 6,000 staff, and initially around 8% were still attending the workplace to do critical work. This has since increased to about 20%. PCS has argued for more work to be done remotely. This wasn't simple, due to the inability to access core IT systems, but some processes were changed. For those remaining in work, safety measures, risk assessments and inspections have been put in place.

Equally essential was the need to protect coastguard members involved in 24-hour search and rescue operations. These offices were immediately closed to the public. Operations work continues, with a system of social distancing, cleaning and reducing social contact at shift change.

In the rest of DfT and Highways England (HE) the vast majority of those usually working in offices have been working from home, except a few critical IT staff. HE has temporarily reduced the numbers of staff working in Regional Control Centres. Uniformed Traffic Officers have continued to work, in often testing circumstances, amid a push to ensure that freight gets through to hospitals, care homes and shops.

PCS agreed to a very gradual return to work from 1 June, starting



“Where I work in the DVLA we were told we were key workers because we needed to, eg, answer calls from other key workers such as nurses, about their vehicle taxes, changing their cars etc.

I have two children, one at primary and one at secondary school. My husband works as a contractor and his job includes working in the NHS on plumbing, heating, ventilation and wastewater systems. Because of Covid, he was also helping build temporary mortuaries and wards. He has to go into work, but he wasn't designated as a key worker by his employer.

I was expected to go to work, but when the schools closed they said I could stay off for the following week to get things sorted. We were looking for school places for our children in two separate hubs. But the schools had different ideas of what constituted a key worker, and both parents had to be in that category, so we didn't get places.

I was due back at work on the Monday and by the Friday afternoon I felt like everything was spiralling out of control. Both sets of our parents were on the vulnerable list - we had nowhere to put our children. I got an email from work saying I should come in on Monday and my husband and I would be expected to share the childcare, but his job doesn't work like that - he works anti-social and unpredictable shifts and is frequently on call. I was in a horrific state when I rang Kathy [Prendville] at PCS. I was thinking I'd have to take long-term unpaid leave and we'd end up defaulting on the mortgage and losing our house - that's where my mind was going. Kathy was amazing, I was a mess and she really empathised. She said I wasn't going in and she would speak to HR and explain. She said I wasn't the only one in this position. Management had an emergency meeting at the weekend, and on the Sunday I got a text saying I didn't need to come in. I've been at home on special paid leave ever since. I've asked to be allowed to work from home but they say there aren't the facilities. I don't think I would have got anywhere without the union. It's one thing for me to stand there alone saying 'I can't do this', but to know there were more of us and someone had our back 100% makes all the difference.”



Anon, DfT

with 70 people - out of 5,500 - who passed strict criteria to return at their own request. PCS worked with management to ensure stringent risk assessments were carried out to ensure the re-opening was safe.

Union officers report that the crisis has brought about an improvement in industrial relations in the DfT.



**STAY UP TO DATE:**

[www.pcs.org.uk/dft](http://www.pcs.org.uk/dft)



## Culture Sector

The culture sector was one of the first areas within PCS's groups to close wholesale. For weeks it was clear to most people that buildings would have to shut, which caused members huge stress.

By the time it happened PCS had secured full pay commitments for virtually all members, including those on zero-hour and flexible-hour contracts. PCS secured enhanced furlough schemes in nearly all its workplaces, putting more than 90% of members on full pay. This involved many private sector members too, such as those working for security firms Wilson James and Axis, and Artisan People.

In those areas where 100% has not been secured, PCS has won

significant improvements for those at the lower pay scales, with tapered furlough for the lowest bands (starting at 95%) down to 80% for more senior staff. In English Heritage PCS successfully argued for an underpin of the National Living Wage which means that the vast majority of operational grade staff are being paid at 100%.

There are still some issues with places not paying enough. Securitas, at the National Gallery, is the only major contractor in a public sector gallery that is not paying at least an enhanced furlough rate. The union has continued to raise this with them.

The pandemic has again shown the added complexities of working

with private sector companies in public sector settings, and further highlighted the two-tier nature of many of these workplaces.

The only staff who have continued working 'normally' in the sector are those in building security posts. Facilities and working conditions have not always been up to standard but H&S reps have taken up all of these cases, including in the British Museum, British Library and National Gallery. The union has secured extra break room spaces, more PPE and additional cleaning of toilets.

As lockdown began to lift some of the satellite offices re-opened, such as the Tate Distribution Centre, as well as sites managed by the Historic Royal Palaces charitable trust. The government has now said that museums and galleries can re-open in England from 4 July.

However PCS is clear that no museums or galleries should re-open until it is safe. The group has prepared a Covid-19 health and safety guide for negotiators, which supplements the NEC's demands and the union's '5 tests'.

Changes to the furlough scheme mean the sector is starting to see announcements of significant redundancies and cuts, with employers saying they may not be able to maintain the 100% pay for furloughed staff. It is even more vital that the government heeds PCS's call to respond quickly by investing so the sector can thrive post-crisis, and members' jobs are fully protected. This includes a call for full public funding for all of our cultural employers.



**STAY UP TO DATE:**

[www.pcs.org.uk/culture](http://www.pcs.org.uk/culture)

# Covid crisis around the union

For updates on other areas of PCS, go to [www.pcs.org.uk/employer](http://www.pcs.org.uk/employer)

## Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)

The largest group of PCS members who have remained in the workplace during the Covid-19 crisis are those working at the DWP. Nearly 1,000 new members have joined PCS in the department since the beginning of March.

All DWP staff have been classed as key workers, and as the department has limited IT to enable working from home, most staff have been expected to attend.

PCS's actions have resulted in the number working from home going from virtually nil to 15,000. Around a third of DWP staff are now either on special leave with pay (SLWP) or are working from home.

DWP recently agreed to the union's demands for a shorter working week for members still having to attend work, by agreeing to award a one hour per week flexi credit to all those working in their office. This credit will apply for a 14-week period until the end of July. These staff have been key to the

DWP coping with the huge intake of work and they have continued to attend, despite the risks.

The union has also intervened to: ensure all vulnerable staff were placed on SLWP; secure access to SLWP for members unable to access satisfactory childcare, and those looking after vulnerable relatives; and improve the implementation of social distancing, access to cleaning products and the frequency of cleaning in DWP offices.

PCS is demanding the hiring of 20,000 extra staff in DWP. Several thousand are being recruited but on a casual or agency basis, which PCS is opposing, calling instead for permanent staff.

The pandemic crisis has forced DWP to review its estate as it needs more space to house extra staff and adhere to social distancing. This has led to it reviewing its plan to close 40 sites. As a result, several hundred potential redundancies have been avoided for the

“ My rep, Kip Collins, has helped ease lots of my worries. I live alone with my two-year-old daughter, who was born prematurely and has under-developed lungs and frequent breathing problems. I also have health issues and am in and out of hospital regularly. My little girl was classed as high risk, but when lockdown started there was no guidance at DWP and I was still expected to work. I was really worried about it and already felt guilty about how much I had been off sick. I was constantly worrying about what I was bringing home to my daughter. My childcare provider closed and I had to send her to emergency nursery care. I felt awful, I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. She was there for about two weeks. Then when the new policy was agreed at DWP on working from home, Kip thought of me straight away. He contacted me at work, and I was home within 45 minutes!

I am now in the process of working from home. I met the criteria because I have a big enough working space, but I was worried about how much I could get done with a two-year-old at home. Kip managed to protect me. I'm still waiting for the DWP to clarify the work expectations and to set me up. He is just such a friendly, approachable guy. Nothing is too much for him. We have a branch Facebook page and he's always posting on it, from 6am until evening. He's always on top of everything. I don't know what will happen with returning to the office, but I know that if something happens that's not correct, I've got Kip.



Tanisha, DWP Forth Valley

foreseeable future. It also seems likely that working from home will become more usual for many staff.

In a survey of DWP members in May more than a third said they did not feel that their workplace was safe or adequately clean. DWP staff

have been praised for helping keep the benefits system going, but 87% said they didn't believe they were properly rewarded for their work.

**STAY UP TO DATE:** [www.pcs.org.uk/dwp](http://www.pcs.org.uk/dwp)

## Home Office

Around 80% of the Home Office group's membership were working from home during the height of the lockdown, during which passenger/traveller numbers plunged to less than 1% of normal rates. PCS has supported those frontline members who have continued to attend work.

Issues in several areas of the group have required intervention from the union, most notably in HMPO and Border Force.

With the lower levels of travellers coming through borders and applying for visas and passports, PCS has continually argued that the safest place for members to be working is at home, where possible.

Where the employer does seek to return some staff to the office, the union is seeking extensive consultation on workplaces being as safe as they can practically be.

With security guards and cleaners particularly at risk from Covid-19, PCS has also been pushing the department to ensure contractors are acting appropriately.

PCS gave a cautious welcome to the HM Passport Office's move to send many staff home at the beginning of the lockdown. But a lack of information or consultation, confusion and misinformation, and staff feeling pressured to return to work earlier than necessary has since dogged HMPO.

Things came to a head in early April when an HO deputy scientific adviser appeared to suggest that the virus situation was the new normal and it was time to get back to business, regardless of government advice. The union's response got wide media attention and a PCS petition gathered 2,500+ signatures.

After continued pressure, HMPO said it would postpone plans to re-open offices and increase staff numbers at other sites, to allow for discussions with the union.

With staff still feeling pressured to come back, PCS set up an online H&S incident reporting tool. The numbers returning slowed down and there are strict social-

distancing measures and stricter cleaning regimes in place. However, with around 29% of the workforce now in the office, PCS has urged the Home Office to introduce mandatory temperature screening.

Issues around PPE and members' safety were raised daily with Border Force managers from the start. PCS opposed the Home Office stance of not allowing frontline officers to wear face masks and not installing screens at passport controls and other public-facing enquiry points. Union pressure led to the employer reversing its policy (see p4).

Immigration Enforcement (IE) has engaged meaningfully with PCS, which supported the decision to require staff to wear face masks and gloves when dealing with 'clandestine arrivals'. IE introduced a limit of two members of staff being allowed to travel together in an official car. Reporting centres were closed and their screened interviewing areas made available to other areas of the Home Office.

When PCS opposed the carrying of symptomatic detainees, IE made adjustments. There were less welcome decisions on issues around

the limiting of premium day working for staff on shift disturbance allowance, and the carrying over of leave.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) launched a new IT system in 2017 to allow barring and disclosure work to be carried out on one platform. The project failed, and most disclosure work still has to be done on the legacy system. This has meant while the majority of the DBS staff can work safely from home, there are members in disclosure who have to attend the office. Agreements are in place to try to limit the number of members needed to attend the building in Liverpool.

Initially there were serious health and safety concerns, with a lack of social distancing and minimal cleaning equipment. After a union inspection notice was issued by PCS, the workplace is now significantly safer. The office in Darlington has remained closed with staff working from home.

**STAY UP TO DATE:** [www.pcs.org.uk/home-office-group](http://www.pcs.org.uk/home-office-group)



# Ahead of the curve: your digital PCS

Before the Covid crisis hit, PCS had already made great strides in developing digital ways to keep in touch with members, provide support, organise campaigns and get people more involved in the union. Under lockdown those innovations helped us switch to virtual ways of working with members – including online branch meetings – and we have kept forging ahead with our plans to transform the way we organise

## PCS DIGITAL

Early this year the union revamped the way members and reps can manage personal information, get organised in workplaces and branches, and keep in touch – all under the umbrella of our new PCS Digital application.

Members can access their membership profile, find details of their local branch reps and keep on top of PCS updates. Reps can use it for crucial branch admin, sharing and receiving information, communicating with members (see right for ‘Chatter’) and accessing their branch organising app.

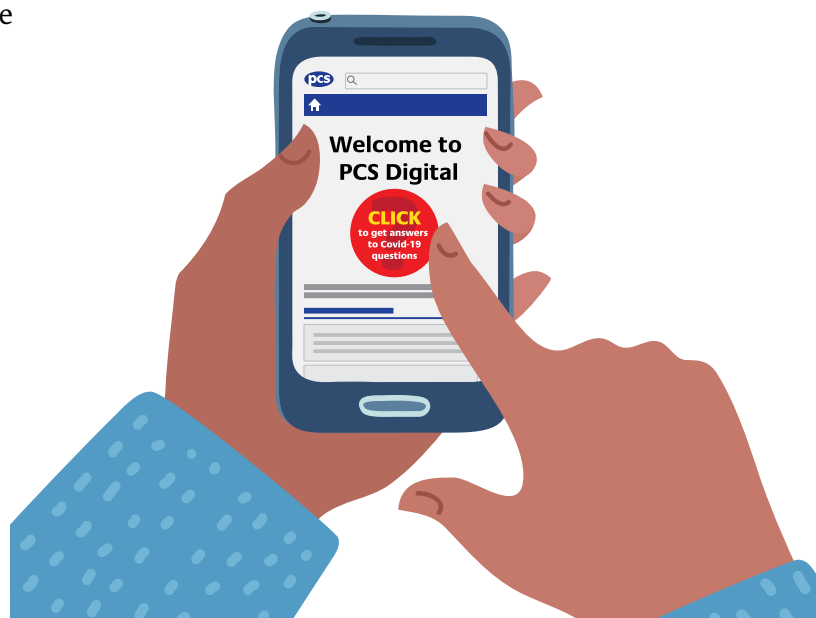
It can help with vital jobs like recruiting new members and getting people involved as PCS Advocates, surveying members, or reminding people to vote in ballots.

■ [www.pcs.org.uk/digital](http://www.pcs.org.uk/digital)

## CALLHUB

CallHub makes it easy for our volunteer activists and staff to phone up members at the click of a button via tailored software. It can be used, for example, to check if members have remembered to vote in a ballot or to ask what people think about certain issues.

During the Covid-19 crisis, our volunteer activists and full time organisers have personally called thousands of individual members to check how they are coping and whether they need any help, as well as asking them if they would be prepared to get involved in union campaigns.



## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE TEAM

In a time of crisis, and with so many members suddenly working from home, it was clear we needed to quickly move to a more centralised response service to deal with members’ questions, concerns and requests for representation (see p2 for more).

An online Q&A was compiled featuring the most common themes, and members invited to email the coronavirus response team if they needed help.

The team has helped and supported more than 2,000 members since it started in April.

We also made sure the PCS website’s employer pages were being regularly updated.

■ **Q&A:** [www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp](http://www.pcs.org.uk/covidhelp)

■ **Log your enquiry:** [responseteam@pcs.org.uk](mailto:responseteam@pcs.org.uk)

■ **Employer pages:** [www.pcs.org.uk/employer](http://www.pcs.org.uk/employer)

## CHATTER

In June, we launched Chatter, a collaboration channel that you can find when you log in to PCS Digital.

Branches can invite members to join their Chatter group, and it will be used to share information and messages, have discussions, and run polls on issues affecting members in your area and/or nationally. It means branches can contact members without having to use their personal data.

■ **For training on Chatter, email** [organising@pcs.org.uk](mailto:organising@pcs.org.uk)

## SOCIAL MEDIA & VIRTUAL MEETINGS

All levels of the union have turned to social media, more than ever before, to support and stay in touch with members. And as we’ve seen across the world, physical meetings have been replaced by Zoom, Skype, Teams and other systems.

Branches have been using WhatsApp and Facebook to message members working at home and in workplaces, on furlough or special leave, or self-isolating. Some have held online induction meetings with new starters, to tell them about PCS and ask them to join.

The union has held several Facebook Live events about Covid-19 and how it’s impacting our members, with individuals able to submit questions and interact. Our Facebook page has also been invaluable for rapidly sharing vital messages such as our ‘5 Tests for

## STAYING CONNECTED FROM A DISTANCE

Members looking for advice and guidance have been turning to the PCS website and social media channels in record numbers:

■ **1.4m+ website page views from March–May (compared with 2.9m for all of 2019).**

■ **89.27% of PCS website interactions come from our Facebook page.**

■ **More than 61% of web visits are made from mobiles.**

■ **25–34-year-olds are our biggest demographic (24%).**

■ **On Twitter, May was our busiest month with 693,100 views of our tweets, 2,200 retweets and 3,200 likes.**

■ **Sign up for PCS Digital, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.**

Safe Working’ (see p11) to help members and reps navigate the push to return to work.

General secretary Mark Serwotka has been posting regular video updates on YouTube, both on coronavirus issues and our national campaign (see p10).

On Twitter, our most ‘popular’ tweet was about the government’s decision to offer members yet another real-terms pay cut.

■ **facebook.com/PcsUnion**

■ **youtube.com/user/pcstradeunion/videos**

■ **Twitter: @pcs\_union**

## ONLINE TRAINING

The process of moving PCS Academy’s trade union education courses online started as soon as the lockdown halted face-to-face tuition. Some courses were piloted in April and May, including ones on mental health awareness, racism and domestic abuse.

Successful trials of Zoom webinar versions of PCS Advocates training have also been held, and the recorded sessions made available as a resource for branches.

The one-day Welcome to PCS course has also been adapted for remote learning, while more complex reps’ training is being temporarily diverted to existing TUC online courses.

The union is now fast-tracking training for reps on how to implement the union’s ‘5 Tests for Safe Working’.

“I see this as an opportunity to get involved and talk to members in a range of workplaces... to connect and let them know that PCS genuinely cares about them and their wellbeing.

I am impressed by members’ friendliness and appreciation when I call. They have shared vignettes about how they’re coping, and many have childcare or other caring responsibilities which make these challenging times even more challenging for them.

It’s heart-warming when I’m told to take care and stay safe as I end the calls, and I want to say thank you to the members I’ve spoken to so far – you encourage me to carry on phoning.”

Jill Brinkworth, CallHub activist volunteer

# GET INVOLVED: Help pay petition reach 100k

Our major PCS parliamentary petition, demanding fair pay for government workers and recognition for our members' work during the pandemic, needs 100,000 signatures for maximum impact

Instead of taking the chance to reward our members for their stellar work towards keeping the country running during a national crisis, the UK government has come up with yet another insulting offer that caps pay rises below inflation.

Members reacted angrily to the news and many have told PCS via social media and our latest survey that they support action on pay.

As a first move, PCS has lodged a petition on the UK Government website, demanding that they start to restore the value of our members' pay by agreeing to our 2020 claim for a 10% pay rise. We are urging all members to sign and share the petition. Reaching our critical goal of 100,000 signatures means it would be considered for debate in parliament, ensuring widespread



publicity for this unacceptable situation, and showing the strength of feeling there is over pay.

The petition – which also raises the issue of civil servants overpaying on their pension contributions by at least 2% – is just one key part of our national campaign over pay, pensions and redundancy rights.

It can succeed if as many members as possible take part,

spread the word, recruit new members and become more active, for example, as a PCS Advocate.

If our demands are not met with serious negotiations, another ballot of members could be on the horizon. By getting involved in huge numbers, we will strengthen our union and make it clear to the government that we would be willing to turn support into action.

## PAY UPDATE: Below-inflation rise is hypocrisy

This year PCS submitted a national pay claim for 2020, for all civil and public servants.

It demands a fully-funded 10% pay rise for all, with a minimum underpin of £2,400, and an hourly living wage of £10 (London, £11.55).

Our claim also includes calls for national pay bargaining, pay coherence, equal pay, measures on pay progression and no detrimental changes to terms and conditions or

cuts to services.

As the Covid pandemic took hold, PCS made interim demands to immediately ditch the delegated pay system and raise pay above inflation across the board, reduce pensions contributions by 2% – as owed to members – stop cuts to the CSCS, and agree a moratorium on redundancies and closures. We won a significant concession on CSCS and some early commitments that meant a slowing of some closures and redundancies,

but overall the UK government chose to ignore the fact that our members – many classified as key workers – deserve more money in their pockets now.

In May, the Cabinet Office issued its pay remit guidance, which limits increases to 1.5–2.5%. RPI inflation is running at 2.6%.

This underlines the hypocrisy of ministers who like to be seen applauding public sector workers, but “do not think they are worthy of a genuine pay rise,” said general secretary Mark Serwotka, who called it an “outrageous swindle”.

## Petition to the UK government

### Give government workers a fair pay rise:

“During the pandemic government workers have **delivered vital public services**, benefiting millions and keeping our country safe and secure. After ten years of pay cuts many **face real hardship**. The government must start to restore the real value of their pay with a 10% increase in 2020.

Government workers are UK civil servants, those working for NDPBs and on outsourced government contracts.

Civil service **pay has fallen in value** by up to 20% over 10 years.

Civil servants **overpay pension contributions by 2% a month**.

Government pay policy for 2020 restricts increases to 1.5-2.5%. Government workers have delivered the Job Retention Scheme, kept our courts running and our borders secure.

It's time to **recognise their contribution** and restore the real value of their pay.”

### PENSIONS UPDATE:

#### Legal action over robbery

Members are overpaying into their pensions by at least 2% per month.

A 2018 pensions valuation shows members are owed a 2% reduction in pension contributions and improved benefits. But after losing an age discrimination case taken by the FBU – which affects all public sector pensions – the government put the valuation on hold in January 2019. This means they are withholding the reduced contributions that should have been applied already.

They have refused to address this part of our 2020 pay claim. Along with the FBU, POA and GMB unions, PCS has filed High Court proceedings aimed at compelling the government to cease withholding the 2% reduction and improved benefits.

#### Tribunal cases considered

PCS will also protect the position of members whose pension benefits should be restored to the pre-2015 arrangements.

In the FBU case, it was found that unlawful age discrimination was involved in changes imposed in 2015. The government has agreed an interim declaration, saying claimants are entitled to be treated as members of the appropriate pre-2015 scheme.

The same position will apply to non-claimants who suffered the age discrimination involved in the transitional arrangements to the Alpha scheme, but the legislation needed is unlikely before 2022.

This means a number of scheme members will be unable to benefit from the legal remedy at the point they start to draw their pension. PCS is examining whether it may be necessary to lodge a case with the Employment Tribunal for these particular cases. More details soon.

### CSCS UPDATE:

#### No cuts until at least 2021

PCS has welcomed the government's agreement that they will not implement any of their proposed changes to the CSCS before the end of this financial year (see p3). The union's position remains that no detrimental changes to the current scheme are necessary at all.

Photograph: Andrew Aitchison

**SIGN AND SHARE: [WWW.PCS.ORG.UK/PAYPETITION](http://WWW.PCS.ORG.UK/PAYPETITION)**

# 5 TESTS FOR SAFE WORKING

PCS has launched 5 clear tests so reps can negotiate, organise and campaign for safe working as UK governments push ahead with the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions and some departments try to return more staff to workplaces.

## Does your workplace pass the tests?

### 1 No wider return until communities are safe

Significant reduction of cases and the ability for widespread testing and tracing.

### 2 Workplaces must only be for essential work

Only open for essential work that can't be carried out remotely.

### 3 Workplaces must be safe places

Open workplaces must have union-agreed risk assessment to include all factors known to affect virus transmission + equality impact assessment.

### 4 Staff must be individually assessed

No one required to work at an open workplace if they are vulnerable, shielding, or cannot travel to work safely.

### 5 Outbreaks must be controlled

Preventing infection at work is vital + monitoring the effectiveness of prevention and having a plan to manage any outbreaks.

FIND OUT MORE: [www.pcs.org.uk/5tests](http://www.pcs.org.uk/5tests)

Photographs: Ed Maynard



**ME AND MY JOB**

# Covid number-crunching

**Michelle Battlemuch** is a former DWP civil servant turned midwife who went on to specialise in public health and now works for Public Health England Midlands. During the Covid-19 crisis her role has involved ensuring they have the capacity to respond to the pandemic – including a test and trace team – and making their workplaces safe

**Tell us about your job**

I'm an Operations Manager for PHE Midlands, which involves managing a team, dealing with finance, HR, risk, facilities and estates issues and so on. I took on the role last year to cover for a colleague. My usual job as a Programme Manager involves setting up and/or overseeing major programmes in the area – for example, reducing the burden of tuberculosis (TB), or internal matters like reviewing governance systems.

**How has Covid-19 affected your day-to-day?**

We set up an Incident Control Centre (ICC) in January, to manage the local response. I was responsible for calculating our capacity requirements to respond effectively.

When the lockdown came, we acted swiftly to send staff home and equip everyone to work remotely.

Our health protection specialists frequently deal with outbreaks like E.coli, salmonella, TB etc, but the nature and scale of this is different.

I help make sure we have the right people with the right skills to respond. We've had to move staff around the organisation and train them for different tasks, including contact tracing. I have set up training desks in our office and ensured the building is a 'Covid-safe' workplace. When the government said people could start returning to work, I did another risk assessment and concluded that the usual 110 desks in our office would need to reduce to 25. It's been a lot of number crunching and logistics, and a big focus on staff welfare.

**What's it been like?**

It was incredibly busy in February and March in particular. Everyone had to pivot into another gear. Not only working longer and different hours but getting to grips with a new virus. We had systems in place for a pandemic but unlike, say, swine flu, we had no treatment or vaccine.

Everyone's being doing a bit of everything. I sat on reception to take

deliveries one day; I've worked in the ICC as the 'local resilience liaison' to support partners in local authorities and other parts of the system. The guidance changes rapidly and there are often queries about PPE, social care, testing and such like.

All of our colleagues are doing Herculean work. Civil servants and public health staff harvest the evidence, crunch the numbers, and write the guidance, then support organisations like the NHS in their implementation. Just like most civil service jobs, it's not that visible.

**Are you involved in PCS?**

Most people in my workplace are in different unions, but I stayed with PCS as it's the union I started in. Up until now I have been an interested member, but I recently signed up to become more active as a PCS Advocate and I'll be doing my training in a few weeks.

**HEALTH HAZARDS: THE FACTS IN FIGURES**

**5,500**

People are employed by PHE – mostly scientists, researchers and public health professionals.

**70**

Organisations were brought together into a single public health protection and improvement service when PHE was set up in 2013.

**7**

PHE Regional Teams provide specialist support to prevent and reduce the impact of infectious diseases, chemical and radiation hazards and major emergencies.

**FIND OUT MORE:**  
[www.pcs.org.uk/health-group](http://www.pcs.org.uk/health-group)

# (Virtual) out and about

News, reviews and things to do

## Home entertainment

Artists have been bringing their work into our living rooms during the Covid-19 crisis

The words ‘out and about’ haven’t felt relevant to most people living under the conditions of a pandemic lockdown. While certain elements of a social life might be slowly emerging from confinement and returning to a version of ‘normality’, most of the big group activities that many enjoy are still off limits for a while.

The lack of events such as live music, theatre, comedy, festivals, dance and exhibitions has been keenly felt by the public and, more importantly, has been devastating to those people who work in the culture sector – including many PCS members.

But, where possible, creatives have been doing what they do best and coming up with imaginative ways to bring their work to the fore online, while trying to raise some much-needed funds through appeals for voluntary donations.

### Featured:

- The **National Theatre At Home** is releasing some of its biggest hits every Thursday and making them available online for a week. They’re also holding a quiz, hosted by A-listers of the acting world, on the final Monday of each month. May’s event featured Simon Callow, Meera Syal, Tamsin Greig and Imelda Staunton. Anyone can play along by going to the theatre’s Facebook page or YouTube channel.
  - [nationaltheatre.org.uk/nt-at-home](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/nt-at-home)
- Graeae Theatre Company’s “raucous” hit show **Reasons to be Cheerful** (pictured) has been released online and will be available on YouTube until 3 August. Part gig, part play, it features the music of Ian Dury and the Blockheads, and was filmed in 2017 as part of a national



**ENJOYED THE SHOW?**

**DONATE FOR YOUR ‘TICKET’ IF YOU CAN**

Many events that are being streamed online include a link to a fundraiser, to help the performing artists, support workers, venues and charities who have made it possible. If you watch something and want to chip in, have a look for information on how to donate.

tour produced alongside the Belgrade Theatre Coventry. Graeae, a human rights charity, champions and cultivates the work of Deaf and disabled artists, including “boldly placing D/deaf and disabled actors centre stage and challenging preconceptions”, and relies on donations.

- [graeae.org](http://graeae.org)
- The **Half Moon theatre** for children and young people is releasing a new production online every Wednesday, and the Polka Theatre for kids has storytelling and related activities online.
  - [halfmoon.org.uk/halfmoonathome/live/](http://halfmoon.org.uk/halfmoonathome/live/)
  - [polkatheatre.com/polka-online/](http://polkatheatre.com/polka-online/)
- Plans are being made for elements of the annual **Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Festival** – on 17, 18 and 19 July – to be brought to its fans online. Keep an eye on their Facebook page.
  - [facebook.com/tolpuddlemartyrs](http://facebook.com/tolpuddlemartyrs)

■ **Sadler’s Wells dance theatre** has a new Digital Stage presence on YouTube, including free dance performances and workshops for young children and the over-60s.

- [sadlerswells.com](http://sadlerswells.com)
- The **Stand comedy club** – which normally has live events at its venues in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Newcastle – is streaming Saturday night gigs while it’s closed to audiences.
  - [thestand.co.uk/saturday-night-live-at-the-stand/](http://thestand.co.uk/saturday-night-live-at-the-stand/)
- **Comedy at the Covid Arms** is a weekly show involving Rachel Parris, Josh Widdicombe and others. The money raised is split between the performers and the Trussel Trust, which provides emergency food banks.
  - [comedyatthecovid.co.uk](http://comedyatthecovid.co.uk)
- Comedians can also be supported via subscriptions to digital comedy club **Next Up**. Artists get 50% of the fee.
  - [nextupcomedy.com](http://nextupcomedy.com)

### Book Review

**THE DANCING MAHARANI & Other Stories**  
by Ranjit Kaur



With women and girls at the heart of every story, *The Dancing Maharani* tackles cultural alienation, xenophobia, sexism, female empowerment and family dynamics in 12 easily-digested stories focusing on the characters’ experiences in both the UK and India.

The small details and natural dialogue in these simply-told, warm, and often amusing short stories combine to serve up subtle yet powerful messages about the everyday realities of being both an immigrant and a returning immigrant.

Former PCS activist Ranjit Kaur’s tales also succeed in breaking down stereotypes about “passive and subservient Asian women” – from the grandmother “dancing, drinking, and cavorting with men and women” at her birthday party while quietly revelling in defying her late mother-in-law’s social edicts, to the lioness of a mother defending her daughters’ rights to enjoy their boisterousness and lust for life.

The author set out to ensure the voices of women from her mother’s and grandmother’s generations were heard before they were lost, and this is a delightful, and important, contribution to that record.

Proceeds from *The Dancing Maharani*’s sales are being donated to charities including the Women’s Resource Centre’s Pay Back the Tampon Tax campaign, King’s College Hospital Charity, and – in response to the coronavirus crisis – food banks in London. It’s available in book shops including Foyles, the Book Depository and Abe Books, and on Amazon.

Photograph: Patrick Baldwin

## WEBSITES TO WATCH

Check out the listings on these sites to see what other virtual events are coming up:

**Theatre:**  
[whatsonstage.com](http://whatsonstage.com)

**Music:**  
[bandsintown.com](http://bandsintown.com)

**Comedy:**  
[chortle.co.uk/venues/84/online](http://chortle.co.uk/venues/84/online)

The 2020 PCS Financial Report was published on the PCS website ([www.pcs.org.uk](http://www.pcs.org.uk)) on 9 April 2020 and is available for download. The financial breakdown summary provided here is best read with the full financial report, which includes detailed commentary and a strategic review of the union's financial position.

## Income and Expenditure

The total income of the union for the period was £23.15m. This amount included payments of £21.33m in respect of membership income of the union.

The union's total expenditure for the period was £24.55m.

The General Secretary's remuneration was: salary £95,327; pension contributions £15,187; employer's national insurance contributions £12,110.

For a detailed overview see page 6-10 of the Financial Report 2020.

## Political Fund

In respect of the union's political fund, its total income was £196k and total expenditure was £74k.

## John Moloney      Jeff Evans

National Treasurer      Director of Central Services

## Statutory Statement

A member who is concerned that some irregularity may be occurring, or have occurred, in the conduct of the financial affairs of the union may take steps with a view to investigating further, obtaining clarification and, if necessary, securing regularisation of that conduct. The member may raise any such concern with such one or more of the following as it seems appropriate to raise it with: the officials of the union, the trustees of the

property of the union, the auditor or auditors of the union, the Certification Officer (who is an independent officer appointed by the Secretary of State) and the police. Where a member believes that the financial affairs of the union have been or are being conducted in breach of the law or in breach of the rules of the union and contemplates bringing civil proceedings against it the union or responsible officials or trustees, they should consider obtaining independent legal advice.

## Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 section 84A

PCS members who joined on or after 1 March 2018 and have chosen to opt in to contributing to the Union's political fund have the right to withdraw their decision to opt in by giving notice to the union (a withdrawal notice). The withdrawal notice can be given by:

- (a) delivering the notice (either personally or by an authorised agent or by post) at the head office

- or a branch office of the union;
- (b) sending it by e-mail to the following email address: [membership@pcs.org.uk](mailto:membership@pcs.org.uk)
- (c) completing an electronic form provided by the union which sets out the notice and sending it to the union by electronic means with instructions to the union.

## Independent auditors report to the members of the PCS Union

We have audited the financial statements of the Public and Commercial Services Union ("the Union") for the year ended 31 December 2019 which comprise the total funds income and expenditure account, the general fund income and expenditure account, the statement of comprehensive income, the balance sheet, the statement of changes in funds and reserves, the cash flow statement and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial preparation is applicable by law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102, the Financial Reporting

Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the Union's affairs as at 31 December 2019 and of its surplus for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

## Financial breakdown

### Summary income and expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2019

All figures: 000s

Income	£23,151
Analysis:	
Membership subscriptions	£21,326
Members fighting fund contributions	£607
Investment income	£82
Other income	£1,136
Expenditure	£24,545
Analysis:	
Network administration	£16,033
Members representative costs	£2,409
Members communications	£1,489
Members benefits	£1,257
Affiliations and donations (TUC £514)	£717
Depreciation	£1,055
Transfer to campaign and disputes fund	£585
Political fund contributions	£196
Transfer to fighting fund	£607
Subscription collection costs	£197
Net operational deficit	(£1,394)
FRS 102 actuarial adjustments on pension Schemes	£3,500
Gain on revaluation of investment property	£3,650
Transfer from property fund	£405
Taxation	(£594)
Net surplus for the year to general fund	£5,567

### Summary balance sheet for the year ended 31 December 2019

Fixed assets	
Tangible fixed assets	£25,317
Investments	£1,492
Current assets	
Debtors	£2,842
Cash	£1,021
Current liabilities	(£2,204)
Deferred tax	(£917)
Total assets less current liabilities	£27,551
FRS 102 pension asset	£16,100
Net assets	£43,651
Represented by:	
General fund	£13,496
Property fund	£11,899
Campaign and disputes fund	£112
Political fund	£774
Fighting fund	£1,271
Pension reserve	£16,100
Total funds & reserves	£43,651

For the full audit report, please see p14 and p15 of the PCS Financial Report 2020.

**BDO LLP, Chartered accountants & Registered auditors, Gatwick, United Kingdom**  
Date: 6 April 2020

BDO LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales (with registered number OC305127).

## CIVIL SERVICE PENSIONERS' ALLIANCE (CSPA) VACANCY FOR DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY



The CSPA is seeking a new Deputy General Secretary (DGS) to take office in winter 2020.

The CSPA aims to maximise the benefits of the Civil Service Pension and to promote a better later life for all pensioners.

We campaign on matters such as pensions, health & social care, transport, social exclusion, housing and intergenerational fairness, and provide bespoke services for members.

The DGS will support the General Secretary on selected policy issues and deputise where required. An enthusiasm for recruiting new members and supporting volunteers, local group networks and regional representatives, is essential. A willingness to travel in the UK and present on the CSPA's work is also required.

The Alliance is currently working on its future

strategy and the successful candidate will bring a creative and flexible approach to help us steer this course successfully.

The new DGS will join a small, dedicated team, based in Croydon, and will take on responsibility for the management of the office manager and clerical staff.

The position is full-time, with a starting salary of £44,330 pa, with six weeks paid annual leave, excluding public holidays.

Please contact CSPA HQ for a pack, an application form, outline job description and draft contract of employment, by emailing [marion.mcauliffe@cspa.co.uk](mailto:marion.mcauliffe@cspa.co.uk).

The closing date for applications is **10 July**. Interviews are planned for July and may take place by telephone or video conference.

# In your words

Send your views to [editor@pcs.org.uk](mailto:editor@pcs.org.uk)

# PCS People

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**EDITORIAL BOARD**

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**Conference elected members** Bobby Young, Kevin McCafferty, Nick Parker, Malcolm Clark, Clara Paillard.  
Editorial board members can be contacted via headquarters.

**Membership details**

If you change address or move job please call membership on 020 7801 2670 or log in to [www.pcs.org.uk/login2digital](http://www.pcs.org.uk/login2digital).

**Publication of advertisements does not imply any form of recommendation.**

Please recycle this magazine when you have finished reading it or pass it on to a colleague to read.



## Outstanding support from my PCS rep

I want to tell you about the outstanding support I have received from my PCS rep, Abe Allen, who's been supporting me with a racial harassment/discrimination case.

I am suffering with PTSD. It has only been due to Abe's support, dedication and hard work that I've been able to pursue my case.

He is a very knowledgeable rep who is always passionate and also shows a great deal of empathy.

Going the extra mile includes his support for members during the Covid pandemic. The information on wellbeing and courses has been very beneficial during a time where I have been feeling quite isolated.

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks for all the time and energy Abe has spent supporting me with my case.

**MOD employee**

## Star letter

### H&S course was an eye-opener

I recently took the PCS 'Safe Return to Work' health & safety course as a complete beginner. I had been a union advocate in my branch for some time and was looking for ways in which I could contribute. Like many workers in the culture group I am currently furloughed. Like many others I was concerned about the safety of returning to my workplace. Our trainer was obviously very experienced in his field and his passion was completely inspiring. I left the course understanding the basis of H&S laws and with the confidence to discuss them with my employer. I'm now a safety rep and am getting involved in the Health and Safety committee as the first enterprise contract member! The course was an eye-opener. It has set me up for future learning and a much more active role within my branch.

**Kate, V+A Museum**

### Dying for work

I agree that the people who work in the NHS should be applauded for the risks so many of them take every day in working through this pandemic.

But we all deserve to have key worker status recognised in our pay packets - not some one-off gesture,

but a decent pay rise for all of us, which is long overdue.

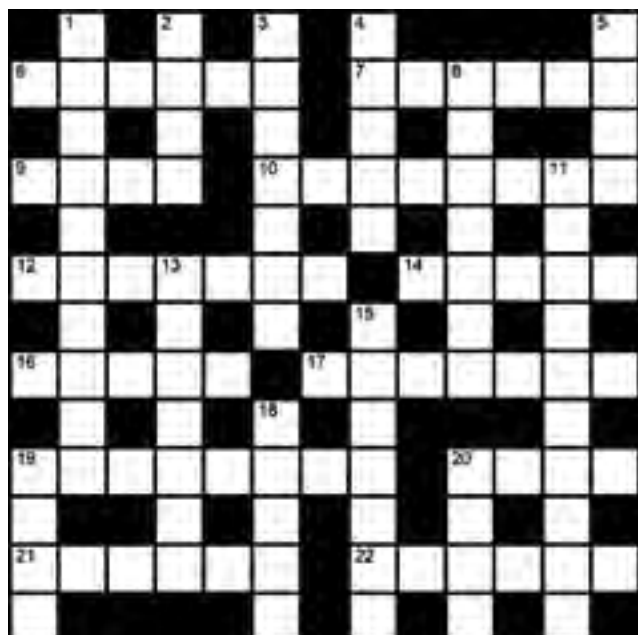
And surely the deaths of those amongst us due to Covid-19 should be marked? We should never forget those workers who were sacrificed to coronavirus.

**Andy, MOJ**

**Send your letters to:** The editor, PCS People, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN. Email [editor@pcs.org.uk](mailto:editor@pcs.org.uk) The letters page is for members to exchange views. Publication of any letter does not imply support for the views of individual members, either by the union or the editor. Letters should be under 250 words and may be edited for length or clarity.

# Prize crossword

One winner, to be picked at random, will win a £25 Love2Shop voucher



**Across**

- 6 Tiger Woods or Justin Rose, for example (6)
- 7 Seize an opponent, in rugby (6)
- 9 Rip (4)
- 10 Short stories: The Dancing \_\_\_ (8)
- 12 Je ne sais quoi (1,6)
- 14 Shrewd (5)
- 16 Passport documents (5)
- 17 PCS campaign to save the \_\_\_ Council (7)
- 19 Very angry (8)
- 20 Someone who prepares food (4)
- 21 Afraid (6)
- 22 Serviette (6)

**Down**

- 1 Win for apprentices in \_\_\_ (4,6)
- 2 Remote (4)
- 3 Shade of red (7)
- 4 Prickly (5)
- 5 Abominable creature (4)
- 8 Raisin-like fruit (7)
- 11 Canadian province (4,6)
- 13 New PCS digital collaboration channel (7)
- 15 Mediterranean herb (7)
- 18 Flying creatures (5)
- 19 Piece of cloth worn over the shoulder (4)
- 20 Manage (4)

**Send your completed crossword to:**

Competition editor, PCS, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN to be in with a chance to win. Please write the relevant PCS People issue number on the outside of the envelope. Crosswords can also be submitted by emailing the editor: [editor@pcs.org.uk](mailto:editor@pcs.org.uk)

The closing date is **4 September 2020**.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Membership no \_\_\_\_\_

PCS People issue 1 2020: Across: 7 Bureau, 8 Tandem, 9 Taco, 10 Tortoise, 11 Aramark, 13 Venom, 15 Russo, 16 Everest, 18 Resistor, 19 Ogre, 21 At once, 22 Glitch. Down: 1 Pupa, 2 Re commissions, 3 Culture, 4 Start, 5 Endometriosis, 6 Pensions, 12 Roulette, 14 Average, 17 Steer, 20 Race. PCS People issue 1 2020 winner is Garry Bohne, East Calder.

### USEFUL NUMBERS FOR PCS MEMBERS

<b>Benevolent fund</b>	<b>020 7801 2811</b>	<b>Financial advice</b>	<b>08000 858 590</b>	<b>Personal case advice</b>	<b>020 7924 2727</b>
<b>Breast Cancer Care line</b>	<b>0808 800 6000</b>	<b>Joining PCS</b>	<b>0800 317 464</b>	<b>Racial incident hotline</b>	<b>020 7801 2678</b>
<b>Credit Union</b>	<b>0141 552 8408</b>	<b>Legal advice (non-work issues)</b>	<b>0800 916 9066</b>	<b>Wills</b>	<b>020 7801 2811</b>
<b>Debt management</b>	<b>0800 716 239</b>	<b>Member support</b>	<b>0800 317 464</b>		
<b>Domestic violence helpline</b>	<b>0808 2000 247</b>	<b>PCS Proud</b>	<b>020 7801 2683</b>		



## Good times are waiting to be discovered...

PCS Plus is entirely free and offered as part of your PCS membership.

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Save on sportswear with Runners Need.  
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