

Work at Home where you can

The unions have made it clear to senior management that we expect the NPS and CRCs to adhere to the Government instruction that employees should work at home wherever this is possible. Notwithstanding the legal obligations on the Probation service to conduct face to face interviews for certain service users and to ensure compliance of Court Orders, it has become apparent that there is an unrealistic expectation regarding the numbers of staff required to attend at Probation Offices. We have agreed that individual face to face contact remains appropriate only where the public protection or safeguarding risks justifies that action. This also means that Home visits (entry into premises) must not take place and that only doorstep visits where the officer stands at least 2m from the property to engage with the service user.

This approach will significantly reduce the footfall of service users into offices and consequently the number of staff required in offices as well. In order to ensure this is happening we have been promised weekly data of how many service users are being seen on a face to face basis in each NPS region.

Regional Probation Directors have now been instructed to engage with local trade union representatives to review their Exceptional Delivery Models as a matter of urgency in this regard. Napo representatives are asked to ensure that representations are first made with Regional Probation Directors and CRC management if difficulties cannot be resolved locally. If this is unsuccessful contact should be made with your Napo Link Officers or National Official who will escalate the issue to the National Chair and General Secretary.

Programmes suspended

In response to the major concerns raised by the trade unions, HMPPS have taken the decision to require all NPS Regions and CRCs to suspend all face to face group delivery of Accredited Programmes with immediate effect. This suspension will remain in place until close Monday 25th January in the first instance, and will be reviewed ahead of that date. HMPPS have also agreed that they will amend Accredited Programme EDM to introduce a new Amber delivery level which aligns with this position. This will also involve the use of Alternative Delivery Formats wherever possible

Unpaid work

This has been an especially difficult area of discussion given the fact that this is an enforceable area of operations. It was agreed last night that:

- For the next 2 weeks (until 25 Jan) delivery of Unpaid Work individual placements or group projects will be limited those where there is a clear societal benefit in the context of COVID recovery (examples of permissible projects include: marshalling at vaccine centres, distribution of food parcels to the vulnerable, gritting pathways).

- For any project to go ahead it must:
 - Be fully risk assessed, with an individualised assessment of any staff or service user vulnerabilities to COVID that may be relevant to the placement decision
 - Be signed off by the CRC CEO or Director as in the public benefit
 - Have the agreement of the beneficiary of the project for it to continue
 - Not require a group size of more than 4 service users
 - No travel in UPW vans or beneficiary vehicles other than in strictly controlled circumstances where the UPW vehicle can accommodate a maximum of 1 service user and a supervisor while maintaining current government guidance on social distancing.
 - All individuals must adhere to social distancing guidelines as set out by government (currently a minimum distance of 2 metres to be maintained at all times
 - Projects and placements to be as local to a service user and member of staff as possible
 - Face coverings to be worn at all times
 - Local police to be advised of planned UPW in the community

- All other projects or placements should be suspended pending further review of what safe systems of work can be put in place to deal with the current lockdown restrictions.

- Individual work carried out at home such as 'project in a box' and ETE can continue.

Again we would want to thank our members and local Napo representatives for their valuable input on this issue which has greatly assisted the National negotiations.

Approved Premises

It has been agreed that HMPPS contact with an AP resident will be restricted to the relevant staff within that premises. It is expected that staff within the wider community will take steps by way of remote contact to help maintain this regime. As we have said previously, no location can possibly be 'Covid safe or secure' and even when all of the steps indicated by public health are taken there is still a risk. The intention is to limit travel, movement and circulation of people wherever possible.

Prisons

We have been receiving regular concerns from members about NPS staff working in prisons within a number of Regions. Our position has not changed in that attendance of NPS staff in Prisons must be reflective of the position in the community, in that it is based on risk and need as per NPS Guidance. As such, our position is that probation staff should only be attending the prison for essential tasks which they need to be in the prison to undertake, i.e. those tasks which cannot be completed from home. We have agreed that Senior Leadership Forums, chaired by RPDs and Prison Group Directors (PGDs), will monitor this and that RPD's must consult with unions as part of the EDM review process to ensure compliance. If there are any instances where NPS staff are being asked to attend a prison workplace more than is absolutely necessary this should be raised with the Regional Head of Stakeholder Engagement and RPD in the first instance. If it cannot be resolved please contact Katie klomas@napo.org.uk with the details.

Courts

Meetings have been taking place between HMPPS and the Court and Tribunal Service and are scheduled to take place with national unions today. However, our position reflects the above in that NPS staff should only be attending courts when it is essential to do so and otherwise work should be undertaken at home. This has been reiterated by senior NPS management to Court teams. Napo have worked with sister unions and organisations representing legal representatives to highlight the issues relating to Courts. Further updates will be provided to members as we have them.

Polygraph Examinations and Alcohol and Drug Testing

These services are currently paused for 2 weeks while a review of systems and processes is underway.

Covid Testing and Vaccination Programmes

Discussions are ongoing at Ministerial level about the availability of Covid Vaccine resource to probation staff across all employers. When the time comes for HMPPS to get the resource (although keyworkers we are not as high priority as those in health and care who must come into closer contact with their service users) we already have a priority plan for vaccination within HMPPS that is based on Public Health advice on work environments and tasks that are most risky.

This applies equally across NPS and CRCs. Vaccination is voluntary and there will be reasons why some do not participate, the vaccine will be offered to staff and any member who cannot or chooses not to accept it will not suffer any detriment.

We are aware that some staff may receive a vaccine via other routes ahead of the HMPPS programme and that there have been questions asked about the relative priority status of HMPPS compared to other workers. Public Health advice is crucial to prioritising vaccination and some jobs that may seem similar to Probation could be higher priority for specific reasons. An example is Social Work, these workers have to enter multiple different people's homes which we know to be higher risk than working with a discrete group in a residential setting or seeing clients in an office setting. We continue to make representations about the importance of a vaccination programme in HMPPS.

Meanwhile, we understand that the NPS are currently rolling out weekly testing in all Approved Premises across England and Wales; this is being offered to staff and residents in the form of a throat and nose swab PCR test. This is an important development and is designed to further mitigate the risks to staff, residents and the wider community by early detection of the virus.

To date, approximately 2,633 staff and resident tests have been conducted across 82 Approved Premises sites. From this there have been 19 Asymptomatic positive test results. Prior to regular testing, these would not have been identified and the virus would have spread undetected within the AP Estate and wider community.

Probation staff working in prisons who cannot work remotely are also eligible for PCR testing every 6-8 days that they are on duty, as part of a prison staff testing roll out.

In addition to PCR testing in Approved Premises, the NPS are in the process of piloting the use of the Lateral Flow Device (LFD) also known as the 30-minute test, for Probation colleagues in 3 Probation Contact Centres with a view to rolling this out to other Probation contact centres. Feedback from staff has so far been positive and we are grateful to all those being tested for supporting this important pilot.

Participation in all testing and vaccination programmes is entirely voluntary and we appreciate that some people may not want to undertake testing or vaccination. However, we believe that it is more important than ever to continue with the programmes given the concerns about a new strain of the virus and restrictions being increased in parts of the country.

Yours in solidarity

Ian Lawrence
General Secretary

Katie Lomas
National Chair