



30 June 2020

**JOINT STATEMENT POST OFFICE, CWU AND UNITE
Clinically Vulnerable, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and living with
Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people – return to work announcement**

Since March with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the issuing of associated government guidance, Post Office, Unite and CWU have worked collaboratively on a daily basis. We have been committed to seek agreement and review policies and approaches, including those affecting our employees who:

- Are clinically vulnerable
- Are clinically extremely vulnerable
- Live with a clinically extremely vulnerable person.

The current arrangements are for these colleagues who cannot work from home, to be on paid special leave until June 30.

Recent government announcements starting on June 19, lowered the Covid-19 alert level to level 3 meaning that whilst the virus is in general circulation, social distancing can be relaxed. On June 22, the government announced that people who are clinically extremely vulnerable and are currently shielding would no longer need to do so from August 1 in England. As a response to these announcements, we have agreed a structured and phased approach for the return to work of those currently on paid special leave.

We are aware that some colleagues will be anxious about returning to the workplace. As such, we have agreed a flight-path process designed to ease people back to work in a supportive way that treats everyone as an individual. We are not proposing a one size fits all approach. Your return to work will involve a risk assessment by your line manager of your specific circumstances which gives an opportunity to understand any issues or concerns and also allows for any reasonable adjustments to be made ahead of an agreed return date.

Although we have treated everybody in the categories above in the same way so far, this will change slightly. The government guidance for some time has been that people in the clinically vulnerable category and those who live with extremely clinically vulnerable people could go to work, albeit taking extra care due to their circumstances. We are therefore going to prioritise the return to work of both of these categories in July and shift priority to the clinically extremely vulnerable in August.

Clinically Vulnerable and Living with Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people categories

We want colleagues to feel confident and safe about returning to work in July, therefore we aren't stipulating a specific date. This will be determined between you and your manager dependent upon your individual circumstances and how long it takes to work through the flightpath.

Managers are encouraged to adopt a sensitive and empathic approach in welcoming back colleagues who due to the pandemic may have a high degree of trepidation. The Post Office has a duty of care to ensure overall wellbeing whilst at work, additionally it is vital the environment is safe and that is why nobody will return to work before a **workplace risk assessment** and an **individual risk assessment** has taken place to ensure that it is safe. These risk assessments will be shared with individual colleagues.

Your trade union representatives will be involved throughout the process and are in continual contact with both your line Managers and at a national level.

What happens next?

Colleagues will be on a flightpath to returning to normal duties. This could take up to 4 weeks following on from the initial call with your manager because potentially there is a lot of work to do. The next steps:

- Within the next week, your manager will be in touch to have a chat about how you are feeling about returning to work and to complete the **individual risk assessment**.
- Ensure that your workplace remains Covid-19 secure and that social distancing continues to be adhered to once we have more colleagues returning. There could be slight **operational adjustments** needed, all of which will be through consultation between local management and union representatives or individual adjustments to facilitate a return. We will commit to all arrangements being in place before a return to work date is agreed.
- The return to work flightpath is going to include conversations between line managers and returning colleagues about new ways of working and anything that has changed because of Covid-19. There will also be a **half-day induction** for colleagues to go into their workplace to familiarise themselves before their return to work.

We would anticipate this happening no later than in 3 weeks' time although it could be sooner if individual circumstances allow for that, the relevant risk assessments tell us that it is safe and that the individual is happy to move through the flightpath at a quicker pace.

The return to work process will be sympathetic and geared towards making sure that colleagues can confidently return to work in the knowledge that we have your safety as a priority. That is why we aren't fixing a set date for everybody. All colleagues will remain on paid special leave until they return to their workplace.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

Colleagues in this category will remain on paid special leave throughout July and until they return to their workplace. We will begin the flightpath in August. Managers will contact you throughout July to check-in on your wellbeing and understanding how you feel about returning to work in August.

Towards the end of July, managers will start the conversations about individual risk assessments and the flightpath will follow the same timescales as in the above bullet points with the same focus upon familiarisation around new ways of working, operational amendments or individual adjustments prior to any colleagues returning to work. Again, there will be a half day induction once the risk assessments are complete and approximately 3 weeks after a manager has started the individual flightpath conversations.

We know that this is potentially a worrying time for many of our colleagues who have been trying to keep themselves and their families safe as we have gone through the peak of Covid-19 in recent months. We want you to feel assured that Post Office, CWU and Unite will continue to talk and review the approach. We want to assure you that we have scrutinised these decisions and it has not been taken lightly. Should government guidance change or anything else which impacts on this return to work flightpath process, then we will work collaboratively to implement amended and appropriate policies.

Where there are differences across the UK regarding the lifting of shielding rules, we will ensure that nobody returns to work before all shielding rules in the relevant country allow for this for an individual's circumstances.



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