



HSC Pension Service

Provided by



Business Services Organisation

GP STAFF NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS

1. COVID - 19
2. Newsletter
3. GP Locum - Temporary Extension of the '10 Week' Rule
4. Annual Benefit Statements for Practice Staff (ABS20)
5. Pension Scheme Registry Number - Reminder
6. GP1
7. 6.2% Employer Contributions for 2019/20 Year
8. HSCB Funding
9. Delivering through the Pandemic
10. Contact Us



HSC (P) 01-20/21

June 2020

1. COVID - 19

Since the lockdown in March the team have all been working remotely. We have been able to continue to complete all our 'Business as Usual' work and we continue to be very busy with all areas of administration. We are operating on temporary reduced telephone cover and request that only urgent queries are telephoned through. Most of the information that you require will be available on our website, or, and more often will have been covered in a previous Newsletter.

If you still need to get in touch with us the preferred way to contact the team is by emailing us at gpcertificates@hscni.net

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support and co-operation.

2. Newsletters

The purpose of our Newsletters is to provide current important information to all GPs, Accountants and Practice Managers.

The team take a considerable amount of time preparing the content for the Newsletters to keep the topics relevant to you. As this is our main means of correspondence and communication with you we would really appreciate it if you could ensure that all staff disciplines have access to and are encouraged to read the content of these. Many of the queries we receive are referred back to previous Newsletters or to our website for the information that is readily available.

All Newsletters published are available on our website at [Newsletters](#).

3. GP Locum - Temporary Extension of the '10 Week' Rule

The guidance on the GP locum forms A and B has been amended to allow for a relaxation of the '10 week' rule in year 2020/21 to take account of the current pandemic.

Although the forms and guidance state that GP locum work that is more than 10 weeks old cannot be 'pensioned' this rule is being temporarily removed during the current Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to give GP locums more time to complete their forms. The removal of the '10 week window' takes effect from 1 April 2020 until further notice. This means that, for example, a GP locum can declare work performed in April 2020 on their August 2020 Form B **subject to the Form A being validated at the time.**

The 2020/21 GP locum Forms A and B can also be found on our website by clicking [here](#).



4. Annual Benefit Statements for Practice Staff (ABS20)

Where the GP55A has been received and verified as correct, the information will then be uploaded to individual staff records to allow us to complete an Annual Benefit Statement (ABS), for each active scheme member. The ABS20 will be made available on Member Self Service (MSS) and all staff should now have registered for this service. Staff should not use generic email accounts to access MSS. All HSC employees should have their own personal email accounts ending in @hscni.net. Practice Managers should encourage staff to contact BSO IT at supportteam@hscni.net and then complete their registration for MSS at: <https://mypension.hscni.net/>

Practice staff included on GP55As where the GP55A has been received after the regulatory deadline of the 31st May 2020, or where an outstanding query on an earlier submission has been raised but remains unanswered, are not guaranteed to have an Annual Benefit Statement produced as part of our ABS20 process for active scheme members. HSC Pension Service staff will refer any queries from these members back to the Practice Manager. Subsequent production of the ABS20 are therefore likely to be delayed.

5. Pension Scheme Registry Number - Reminder

We are providing as a reminder for your information the Pension Scheme Registry numbers. These may be required for your payroll software packages for auto enrolment purposes. Please save these numbers for your future reference.

Pension Scheme Registry Numbers

2015 Scheme Members 10276692

1995/2008 Scheme Members 10000725

6. GP1

Thank you for continuing to submit the GP1s by the due date of **6th of each month**. Remember to enter in the reasons for any errors flagged on the GP1 form, even if you may have already told us in a previous month's submission, e.g. Maternity (spans more than 1 GP1 submission). The direct debit will be processed on 18th of each month unless this falls in either a weekend or a bank holiday. In this case the transaction will be next available banking day.



7. 6.2% Employer Contributions for 2019/20 Year

We have commenced the reconciliation to finalise the clawback for the 6.2% employer contributions in respect of practice staff, not previously deducted in the 2019/20 year. We will continue this exercise until all the practices have been completed. Each practice will receive an email confirming the amount and the date for the corresponding Direct Debit transaction. Please note that this will be in addition to and not part of your usual monthly Direct Debit amount.

8. HSCB Funding

HSC Pension Service will be sharing information in regard to Principal GPs, Assistant GPs and Practice staff with our colleagues at HSCB, to enable them to accurately assess and apply funding for employer contributions to each practice. All queries regarding funding should be addressed to Maria.Coyle@hscni.net

9. Delivering through the Pandemic

Two months & two metres.. How we did it!

As the world became exposed to the coronavirus so the strengths and weaknesses of different public and private sectors fell victim to a similar exposure. The outbreak of Novel Coronavirus certainly created great concern and unrest within the Business Services Organisation but there is strong evidence that it has driven positive change and creativity within our workforce. This was unquestionably apparent within the team at HSC Pension Service.

Certainly at the outset of the crisis the initial step was to reference the Business Continuity Plan (BCP). But really, did any BCP's make adequate provisions for a pandemic situation? The Senior Management Team in pensions met to agree Business Continuity levels in the event of pandemic levels of disruption. Key Performance Indicators were agreed correlating with reduced workforce levels. It was thought that a fully operational service could only be cautiously guaranteed if there was at least 80% of the workforce present; reducing to delivering on retirement applications and payroll functions only should the workforce reduce to as low as 20%. Premises were immediately made as socially distanced *friendly* as possible (if there is such a thing!). Yet the official guidance that soon followed meant that we needed to move quickly to remote working. Within days, almost 90% of the workforce was working from home (WFH). Those who remained on-site were happy to do so for personal reasons and their roles have proved essential to our overall success.



9. Delivering through the Pandemic - cont

More than two months on and it is remarkable to report that a full service has been delivered and continues despite the fast evolving pandemic situation that disrupted all of society on such a vast and challenging scale. Not only did normal service delivery levels prevail but the pension service team also managed to do this despite other non-pandemic related pressures. The delivery of these services under such extreme and unprecedented pressure is testament to the whole team in pensions and their close alignment with the BSO values; “*Working together, Excellence, Compassion and Openness and Honesty.*”

The Agency workers within the pension team are highly valued and there was a spirited mindfulness that providing a full service could go some way in securing their continued employment. As staff vacancies arose within the team due to natural movements, the contribution by agency staff became even more vital; even lending their talents to pioneering some technological advancement and invaluable assistance in the delivery of remote working. Despite training and induction constraints to recruiting new staff, 2 business critical posts have been filled by means of innovative remote induction and training methods. A recruitment exercise is currently well underway to fill the other vacancies in the coming weeks, with social distancing measures being fully considered for the approaching interviews.

End of year (EOY) is a pressurised time for most service areas but particularly so in a finance driven environment such as pensions. Traditionally, the financial year end sees increased numbers of retirement applications and yet all retirements were timely administered with all backs and direct debit transactions processed remotely. P60 advice notes were issued to almost 40,000 pensioners, weeks ahead of regulatory requirements and CETV's were prepared for disclosure on time.

Information required for the EOY resource accounts is firmly time bound and can only be provided once the financial year has ended i.e. after 31/03/2020 therefore this had to be managed very closely so that all statistics and processes completed by individual teams fed into the resource account disclosures. Due to excellent communications between teams working remotely HSCPS were able to supply the information required within the tight timeframes required by the Department of Health so that faster closing was achieved. During the challenging period that had emerged in March, not only were these deadlines met but there was the added challenge of a server move and a system upgrade within a one week timeslot.

Once EOY processes were completed, both Test and Live system services migrated over to a new infrastructure and software upgraded to enable regulatory disclosures to HMRC in the new financial year. The timeframes were constricted as this had to be achieved prior to week 1 payroll at the start of April 20. Parallel arrangements had to be made too for the ongoing NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) onboarding project. Although the NIFRS Finance Director offered to pause any project progression during the crisis, pension senior personnel felt this could still be progressed by the team and continues to move at a fast pace.



9. Delivering through the Pandemic - cont

The implementation of the HSC pay award in March 2020 meant added pressure too at this time. The Pension Payroll Team were required to recalculate almost 500 pensionable pay figures. Additionally, the Pension Admin team had to revisit hundreds of other pension events such as contribution refunds, transfers of service etc because of the revised pay figures.

Moreover the UK Government's Coronavirus Action Plan envisaged that changes to legislation might be necessary in order to give public bodies across the UK the tools and powers they need to carry out an effective response to this emergency. A key area of this legislation enabled action to increase the available HSC workforce by removing barriers to allow recently retired HSC staff to come back to work and tackle the outbreak without abatement of their pension. This change was made, implemented and communicated to stakeholders via newsletters, website and technical updates. Factsheets were quickly developed to help explain the changes. Restrictions do not permit that Pension workshops can yet be arranged for the forthcoming year and considerations to deliver these remotely are underway. However in the interim the team have increased the One to One Pension Consultations by 50% and are developing other One to One consultation services in order to fully support our members during this time of financial uncertainty. A 40% increase in finance and death benefit related queries has revealed how vulnerable we are as a society in terms of our health and financial wellbeing.

This success story is down to the remarkable talents and skills of all staff, some that may have otherwise remained hidden. Although physically distanced, and I deliberately do not use the term *socially* distanced, there has been and remains a united connection within the teams. Staff keep in touch regularly on a personal as well as a professional basis, setting themselves team challenges for personal goals. Staff shielding and living alone have been at the forefront of everyone's thoughts too. An occasional "how are you?" goes a long way and is a welcome act of kindness to show our fellow feelings to all. It was important also as a cohesive team to be mindful of some staff who had additional pressures at this time such as home schooling and increased caring roles. Staff can be proud of the connected, sense of belonging that they have established; showing strength to colleagues finding it difficult to weather the crisis, particularly in the early days. Staff have drawn on the profit of this empathy when chatting with vulnerable members and pensioners too as they witness a sense of isolation with some callers. They find a friendlier and longer chat seems to ease apprehension and as a consequence, has a positive effect on staff. Certainly there has been an increased sense of our members and pensioners wanting to put "financial matters in order". Staff are happy to provide extra reassurance and assistance at this time. We have also realigned processes to allow for difficulties that may be faced by those shielding, such as requirements for witnessing of declarations. Exposure to the upsurge in negativity can make the most optimistic of us feel frustrated and deflated and that can be as contagious as the disease itself.



9. Delivering through the Pandemic - cont

Although we miss face to face contact to an extent, thanks to technology, we can enjoy some visual contact. It's great to check in with our colleagues visually and to see their creative attempts at home hairdressing! And let's be honest, everyone has been enjoying a good old nose at all the WFH background scenes! We ensure we show our appreciation towards each other and encourage valuable downtime as the weekend approaches and particularly before the Bank Holiday breaks... yes we've had 3 in these two months!

There has been an overwhelming sense of pride among staff and there have been calls to have a platform to recognise and reward staff who have shown great strengths during this situation. This is something we will review once a fresh "new" normality resumes, whenever that may be. In the meantime, we aim to stay safe, stay connected and continue to deliver the best service we can to all our valued members and pensioners as proud employees of the Business Services Organisation. We consider it a privilege to serve our frontline staff.

When it rains...look for the rainbow!



10. Contact Us

By writing to us at:-

HSC Pension Service
Waterside House
75 Duke Street
Londonderry
BT47 6FP

Via e- mail at:- hscpensions@hscni.net

By Telephone: 028 7131 9111 Option 3

Due to COVID-19 we are operating on temporary cover

10.00 am to 12.00pm / 2.00 pm to 4.00pm - Monday to Thursday

10.00 am to 12.00pm - Friday



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Find us on Facebook - HSC Pension Service

If you have any suggestions for the newsletter or would like a particular topic covered in future publications please do not hesitate in contacting us by emailing: hscpensions@hscni.net

