

9 January 2024

Annualised Hours in Customer Services: FWH attack spreads to Washington

After only one member of staff in East Kilbride and Portsmouth volunteered to give up FWH to join the 'Annualised Hours' pilot, and external recruitment manages just 64 appointments, Washington has been added to the list of 'pilot' sites.

In October 2023, HMRC informed us that they are proceeding with their plans for a 'pilot' of 'Annualised Hours' in Customer Services Group (CSG). The pilot – which they plan to run in East Kilbride and Portsmouth – involves asking you to volunteer to give-up your contractual right to Flexible Working Hours (FWH), in favour of a work pattern involving working fixed, longer hours during six months of the year; with fixed, shorter hours during the remaining months – plus HMRC keeping some hours in reserve, so they can call you in when they like.

Under the plans, any member of staff volunteering to give-up their contractual right to FWH would receive an 'allowance' totalling the princely sum of 1% per year. Basically, if you're an AO, that amounts to as little as £4.67 per week (before tax).

At the time we were informed about the launch of the pilot, [PCS issued a detailed members' briefing](#) which informed you of the pitfalls of the pilot, the alternatives that we'd proposed; and given the terms of these plans, we advised you in the strongest terms not to relinquish your contractual rights to work flexible hours.

Embarrassing take-up

In a response that should surprise absolutely nobody whatsoever, out of around 3,000 CSG staff working in East Kilbride and Portsmouth, PCS understands that

only *one* member of staff has volunteered to join the pilot.

Absolutely no AOs whatsoever volunteered.

On top of that unsuccessful hit-rate, we also understand that after an extensive external recruitment exercise, involving around 500 initial applications, CSG have only managed to muster 64 successful external applicants – and they expect that number to fall.

Frankly, so do we – especially when those new applicants discover that 98% of the people they're working with are on far better terms and conditions than they are.

You would think then, that at this point, common sense would prevail, and they'd drop these plans and talk to us about alternatives.

Sadly not. Instead of coming to terms with the fact that their scheme has been as welcome as a Typhoid epidemic, CSG's response to the abysmal take-up in East Kilbride and Portsmouth is - wait for it - to offer the same terms to members of staff in Washington.

The department started its quest for internal volunteers, and began the external recruitment process in Washington on 29 December.

Even if they manage to recruit a few more external candidates, all they'll end up with is tens of thousands of members of staff on one contract, and a hundred or so on another. Don't forget, harmonising the countless different contracts that were rife in HMRC, was central to what Pay and Contract Reform was supposed to be all about.

PCS advice to members

Unsurprisingly, our advice to Washington members is **exactly the same** as the advice to our members in East Kilbride and Portsmouth:

Volunteering to give-up the freedom to work flexibly, in favour of being told by the department precisely what hours you'll be working, in what month, depending on whether they think they need you in or not; and all you might get for volunteering is less than £4 a week after tax, all sounds absolutely barking mad to us. We strongly advise you not to volunteer.

There are still alternatives

PCS has already suggested a number of alternative proposals to the department, based on mechanisms already in operation in other government departments. We're still more than happy to positively discuss those proposals.

We'll keep you informed of developments.