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**From:** TEO HOCS (DS)  
**Sent:** 04 March 2020 14:00  
**To:** Minne, Jill  
**Subject:** RE: HPRM: URGENT OFFICIAL SENSITIVE - COVID-19 Guidance

**Sensitivity:** Confidential

Jill

David is content with no comments to add.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Minne, Jill  
**Sent:** 03 March 2020 20:53  
**To:** [REDACTED] Brennan, Mike [REDACTED]  
Browne, Mark (Deputy Secretary) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Baker, Derek [REDACTED]; DfE Permanent Secretary Support [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Godfrey, Katrina (DfI – Perm Sec) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Gray, Sue (DoF) [REDACTED]  
King, Brenda [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] May, Peter [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] McMahon, Denis [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Meharg, Tracy <[REDACTED]>  
[REDACTED] Pengelly, Richard [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Widdis, Hugh [REDACTED] Sterling, David [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** Cooke, Michael (HR) [REDACTED] McLaughlin, Mark (DOF) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] McNabb, Chris [REDACTED]

**Subject:** HPRM: URGENT OFFICIAL SENSITIVE - COVID-19 Guidance

**Importance:** High

**Sensitivity:** Confidential

Dear NICS Board colleagues

Very many thanks for your responses to the proposals I sent yesterday in relation to COVID-19 and the HR decisions required.

The ER team, DoH colleagues and I have been working on guidance for managers and staff and while we haven't been able to reach agreement with every Board colleague on our overall approach the attached guidance is proposed on the basis of the predominant view. As set out in the attached draft guidance, the NICS' approach to managing its people in relation to COVID-19 is subject to ongoing review and may change.

Specifically there were a number of issues raised by Board colleagues which are now more clearly articulated in the guidance including:

- a. **Issue** Managers will be reliant on the information provided by staff in support of special leave applications; there will be a need for flexibility.  
**Response** Included in Annex A – 'Managers will have to consider the information provided by the staff member in support of the application; managers may have to exercise discretion on occasion as to what information can be provided.'

In developing the guidance we didn't want to present a draconian position of challenge as it is evident from comments made by there may not be enough medical staff to do tests / give fit certs etc when COVID-19 really hits. Key to remember the guidance is a live document which is subject to review and will change as necessary circumstances change.

- b. **Issue** Absence due to COVID-19 symptoms being discounted for absence triggers and absence pay calculations.  
**Response** This has been revised in the guidance and more clearly states in the manager guidance – 'If medical advice has confirmed that a member of your staff's symptoms are consistent with COVID-19 the sick absence must be reported on HRConnect and by email to NICS ER, see Annex 'A' immediately or within 24 hours at the latest. This will not impact on absence trigger points or contractual sick pay, the period of absence will be discounted.

So absence due to symptoms and infection will be discounted. At this stage to try to mitigate against potential abuse of the system we have included the words 'medical advice' in the guidance. If such advice availability becomes unsustainable as the impact of COVID-19 develops this can be amended within the guidance.

- c. **Issue** Consideration of the need for medical certificates to minimise demand on GP services.  
**Response** Michael Cooke will write an options paper for the NICS Board members on the certification issue to seek a decision as to how we move forward

- d. **Issue** Home working is not suitable for all staff.  
**Response** The guidance contains the use of the words **if possible** consider homeworking.

**Sincerest apologies for the timeframe but I should very grateful for any comments by 3.00 pm tomorrow if possible.**

Should you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact me.

**Jill Minne**

**Strategic HR Director, NI Civil Service**

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**Contact:** [REDACTED]

