

JET operations under Covid-19 restrictions

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During March 2020 it became obvious that the Covid-19 infection rates were accelerating in the UK and that we would be heading for a National lockdown. It was decided to put JET into a safe state. The site was then shut down, all but for a skeleton staff, there to ensure essential safety and security, with everyone else working from home. Over the next couple of months arrangements were made to bring maintenance teams back on site to ensure the integrity of the JET plant so that it could be re-started when conditions permitted. Plans were prepared to limit operational staff in the JET Control Room and surrounding areas to allow a return to work while ensuring Covid-19 distancing. A major refurbishment of the Control Room HVAC system had already been planned but pending completion of this the maximum number of people in the area was limited to 10, all required to wear face coverings. In order to reduce the number of people in the Control Room from the usual 20 –30, workstations had to be re-located to a meeting room in the same building involving considerable re-cabling and extending the JET operational networks beyond their usual areas. In addition, arrangements were made for many roles to be executed from offices or even off-site using our existing remote access system. The number of video conference channels (Zoom rooms) dedicated to operations was increased from 1 to 3 and then 4 to enable communications between the Control Room staff and remote operators. This was supplemented with MS Teams for more ad-hoc communications. Our operations and plant mimics, an in-house development based on Oracle/Solaris, were web enabled and made accessible from the office network and our real time plasma operations camera system was augmented to provide web based streaming video (inc. the live Torus Hall audio). Work is also ongoing to convert many of our paper-based forms for approval of operational exceptions work in controlled plant areas to integrated computer-based workflows. All these measures have proved to be very successful and enabled us to restart JET operations. In several cases this has made operations more effective as it gives remote experts easier access to operational information, and control room staff easier access to remote experts. Initially operations commenced in Deuterium (2H) plasmas and have now moved on to 100% Tritium plasmas. We are now preparing to an increased return to site together with allowing increased numbers of people back into the Control Room following completion of the HVAC refurbishment, ready for DT plasmas later in the year.

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