



HOW TO BRING PEOPLE BACK FROM FURLOUGH

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Following Boris Johnson's update on Sunday 10 May 2020 where he revealed the government's 'road map' out of the Covid-19 lockdown, businesses must now plan their employees' return to work strategy.

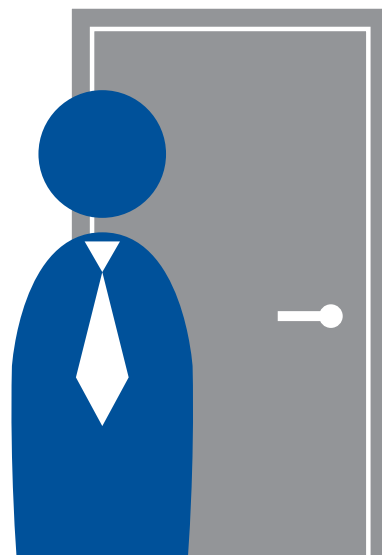
The government is encouraging everyone who is unable to work from home to return to work from Wednesday 13 May.

In this eBook, we'll share with you the steps you should take, and highlight the issues you should consider, as you plan how you are to keep your employees, and their families, safe and well over the coming months. In March it seemed like all UK's businesses stopped working overnight, but the restart will be much slower and a lot more complex.

For more sector specific information all businesses must carefully follow government guidance.

Here's what we'll cover:

- A snapshot of where we are now
- What to consider before the 'return to work'
- Working from home
- Notice to return to work
- Employee health – Managing a safe return to work
- Operational changes
- Policy changes
- The all important communications
- Continuing with management responsibility
- Government guidance



A snapshot of where we are now

The prime minister addressed the nation on Monday 23 March 2020 announcing the terms of the UK's lockdown.

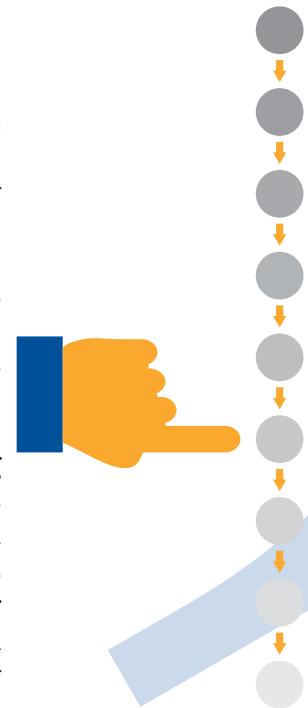
Since this date many employees have been able to work from home but approximately 25% of the UK's workforce have been furloughed. This translates to 6.3 million people being temporarily laid off by 800,000 businesses.

Even after just a fortnight's holiday many of us can forget passwords and struggle to get back into 'work mode'. So, after an unsettling 2 months don't underestimate how many of your staff will feel anxious about getting back to work and returning to the workplace.

As lockdown eases, it's crucial that you put plans in place to bring people back from furlough. Your communication strategy must focus on your employee's health and wellbeing. Having time away from work has given many people the space and time to address what is important in their lives - having more time with their family and their health - with this in mind, get creative with your communication plans, think about offering agile and flexible working permanently and really engage with the talent in your business.

“Good leadership involves listening to employees and customers. Use this time to look at your return to work plan and make communication a focus - this will be key in creating a willing workforce when you need it more than ever.”

This week we asked a wide selection of organisations to tell us what they have implemented as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The top 5 initiatives were: working from home (94%), furlough (76%), use of new technology (73%), new methods of communicating (70%) and employee engagement (56%). They also told us that they hope to continue with this new way of working minus the furlough element obviously!



What to consider before the 'return to work'

Who you bring back from furlough and when depends on a number of factors, many will be unique to your organisation. **Remember** a partial reopening may involve selection. Make sure a fair and objective criteria is used. Taking care not to discriminate think about:

- **Personal circumstances.** Employees with children of school-age will have unresolved childcare arrangements. If they are unable to work resulting from COVID-19 or work from home they can continue to be furloughed and could work part time from August.
- **Shielding employees.** Individuals who have been identified as high risk will not be able to return as quickly as others. Consider relevant dates following their 12 week shielding period and whether further medical advice is provided.
- **Team split.** To reduce numbers in workspaces, consider rotating teams and which particular members of staff need to return physically rather than work from home.
- **Working from home.** Again, to reduce numbers in workspaces allow some employees, who are able to, to continue to work from home.
- **Training on new technology.** Remember, not all of your employees may be familiar with video conferencing and the technology needed to work remotely. Provide relevant training for these members of staff to ensure they are able to fulfil their role.
- **Start and finish times.** Stagger start and finish times to limit the use of public transport at peak times.
- **Break times.** Spread out break times to make physical distancing easier in shared spaces.
- **Shift work.** This could reduce numbers in workplaces whilst maintaining productivity levels.
- **Contractors.** Define the rules for contractors and communicate this to all relevant parties.



Don't forget to regularly review your plans and don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself to sort it out all in one go at the beginning. Finessing the details over the coming weeks will give you the opportunity to engage with your staff and ask them what is working well and what isn't. Be transparent and honest with your workforce and encourage continual feedback – they're used to hearing the phrase "we're in this together" and their insight will secure the success of future plans.

Working from home

Look to provide additional support to those employees who find themselves in the situation where they will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future as they may feel socially isolated and/or anxious.

- Create and communicate a clear Working from Home policy. Tell your employees that this policy will be reviewed regularly and amended as your business continues to adjust and adapt. Make sure that any changes are communicated.
- As more people are now working from home, and likely to continue to do so for some time, ask your remote workers to conduct a risk assessment to address any issues. Maintain regular contact with your remote workers, listen to their concerns and ask what you can do to help them.
- You may wish to set up daily team video calls to help them focus their tasks for the day and to open up opportunities for them to speak up if they need extra support.
- For dispersed employees be clear about the recommended communication channels as too many can be anxiety inducing.
- Maintain human/social interaction to maintain your inclusive and supportive workplace culture 'post coronavirus'.

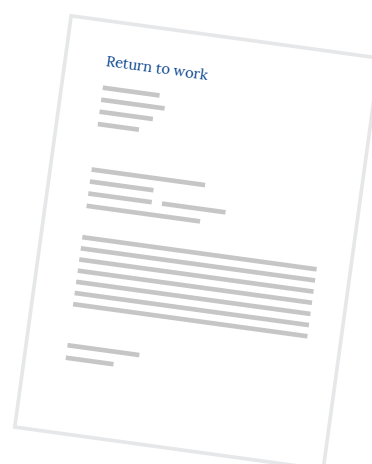


Notice to return to work

Your employees will no doubt be keeping a close eye, and ear, on the government guidelines, but ultimately, they will wait to hear instructions from you before acting on any news.

Give adequate notice for the return to work and if necessary speak with individuals separately and work out a plan that works for both parties, in particular those with underlying health conditions, those who live with someone who has an underlying health condition and parents or guardians caring for children.

Some of your returning employees may be doing so with changes to their previous terms. Ensure that all changes, whether they are temporary or permanent, (place of work, hours worked, etc.) have been agreed in writing by both parties before the return date. For all returning furloughed employees you must put all details of their return in writing and keep this signed letter on their personnel file for 5 years.



Employee Health - Managing a safe return to work

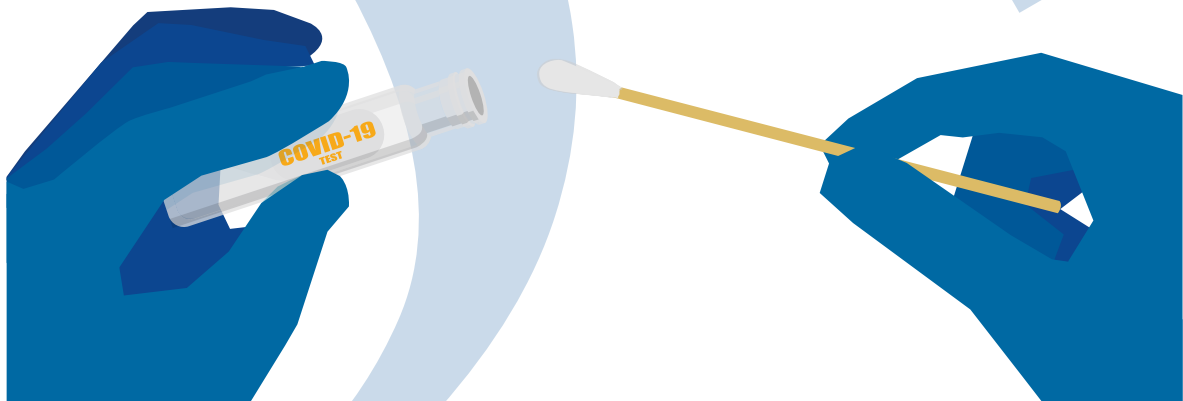
Physical (social) distancing is going to be a part of our lives for a while yet. Just because the government is easing lockdown it doesn't mean we're winning the coronavirus fight. You have a duty of care to look after the health of your workforce and to put strategies in place.

Guidance on working safely has been issued by the Government and Health and Safety Executive to ensure all workplaces are as safe as possible. [Here's a link to the Guidance](#) and you should refer to the latest updates in your planning.

- Liaise with your Health & Safety and Occupational Health teams if you have them. Put in place a contingency plan too to avoid a resurgence and second wave of high infection figures.
- Review your workplace and work out how you're going to manage the 2-metre physical distancing rule. Some businesses have installed plastic screens between desks, implemented one-way systems, marked out 2 metre spacings around desks, restricted the use of certain areas - think about what you can do to protect your employees and make them feel safe.
- Have a clear internal communication strategy to make everyone aware of what is being done to manage the situation in your company. Catching the virus will be a major concern for some, while others may have worries about family or friends in a higher-risk group.
- Share your internal communication strategy before you launch it with all line managers. They will need direction from the leadership team as they will face questions from their team members. Your line managers must understand the plan and know where to signpost staff for further support.
- Consider if you need to provide staff with new **personal protective equipment (PPE)**. If so, be clear about how you will do this, for how long and where they can access it from. It's key that you communicate and train staff in how the equipment is to be used (gloves, masks, visors etc). Communicate this effectively so as not to cause any further anxieties.
 - The government currently states that medical masks should not be used outside of clinical settings. If your organisation is not in a clinical setting and your employees cannot maintain the 2 metre distancing rule they should use face coverings. Here's a link to learn [how to make a face covering](#).
- Remember to **reassure staff and listen** to them if they have concerns. Keep them well informed about your policies and contingency plans, as well as the official guidance in relation to what they should do if they have been in contact with an infected person or have symptoms of the virus themselves. This should reduce employees worrying about their health on returning to the workplace.



- Take time to review individuals who were identified as **high risk**:
 - Revisit medical questionnaires and ask these employees to update them. When asking them, tell them that you are doing everything you can to protect them and will support them with their return to work. If necessary, look to make reasonable adjustments.
 - Advise your first aiders where appropriate
- **Promote the resources** that you have in place to support employee's health and wellbeing. This can include Mental Health First Aiders, employee assistance programmes and external providers such as [Able Futures](#). You should also display official 'hygiene guide' posters demonstrating how to wash hands, etc.
- **Taking staff temperatures.** Create a new policy on this and communicate it clearly stating how and why this is necessary. It's important that you confirm that this data will not be stored.
- **COVID-19 testing.** If your business employs essential workers you can register to refer your employee to be tested through a [new online portal](#) if they are self-isolating with symptoms. This will enable them to get an appointment quickly. The test tells them if they have the virus and if they can return to work. Inform your employees that they can self-refer for testing too.



- Review your **cleaning contracts** for frequency or intensity and communicate to your employees what they need to do to help prevent transmission. The government have produced guidelines for [how organisations should keep their workplaces clean](#) including handwashing and sanitation facilities, toilets, changing room and showers, handling goods and shared vehicles.
- Provide anti-viral sprays and wipes near to all entrances where an employee makes contact with a surface and in all shared workspaces. It's a good idea to put up posters reminding all staff to use them, how to use them and to keep them in situ for others to use.

Operational changes

How did your organisation operate before lockdown? Think about an average week and the actions your employees take - what changes can you put in place to keep your wheels turning while keeping them safe.

- **Face to face meetings and business travel.** If physical distancing cannot be maintained look for alternative solutions such as video conferencing to minimise travel.
- **Visitors/suppliers.** Revisit your access policies to include hand-cleaning and sanitising procedures. Install hand sanitising stations. You may want to remove access to some areas for external persons.
- **Regular breaks.** Encourage your employees to keep taking breaks and wash their hands frequently for a minimum of 20 seconds each time. Stagger breaks so physical distancing rules can be maintained.
- **Practices to maintain physical distancing.** Plan your approach to the day to day running of your business: access to desks and shared spaces, training, business huddles, recruitment and onboarding processes. This can be a mix of the suggestions given in the Employee Health chapter and the staggering of shifts.



Policy changes

Open and honest communications will help to reassure your workforce that you are working hard to protect them and those they share their homes with. Written policies also avoid misunderstandings and provide the organisation with an element of protection in the event of any claims. We recommend that you revisit at least the following policies, make the necessary alterations to them, or more simply create a COVID-19 supplement where relevant, and communicate to all staff and workers.



1. Sickness /Absence Policy

- a. The reporting rules. Ensure that your managers and staff understand which sick pay and leave policies and procedures apply to them and how they will be implemented. Highlight areas that differ from your 'usual' procedures and reiterate that the reporting on COVID-19 is key to prevent the spread of infection.

2. Holiday Policy

- a. Have you thought about whether employees can carry forward some holidays?
- b. Will you notify your employees about taking holidays for the remainder of the holiday year?
- c. Are you going to ask employees to utilise their holiday entitlement to support a phased return to work?
- d. Update your policy to reflect the [Working Time \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#).

3. Home Working Policy

- a. Create one or update your existing. Consider updating your Data Security Policy too.

4. Disciplinary Policy

- a. Deliberate breaches of physical distancing and Health & Safety policies should be included as misconduct/gross misconduct.

5. Getting Digital

- a. Consider introducing electronic signature processes. This can save time, reduce the use of paper and improve the employee experience. Electronic signature processes can be used in order to improve on-boarding to ensure that contracts are sent out and returned quickly and efficiently. Your business can also make use of electronic signatures for internal documentation, or customer documentation, to streamline all processes.

The all important communication

Your communication strategy should detail 'business-wide' communications, but don't forget to talk directly to individuals or teams too.

- It's crucial for managers to **have a 'return meeting'** with every member of their team focusing on their health, safety and wellbeing; find out how they are, how they have coped and whether they have any concerns about returning to the workplace. These 1-2-1 meetings will allow you to set immediate goals and give focus as well as to give your employees a voice.
- **Build and empower a Back to the Workplace team.** Work closely with your managers and make them a part of the conversation before messages are sent out. This will ensure they are equipped with the knowledge to hold conversations with their team members instilling trust and confidence.
- Communicate to all staff the **practical measures** your organisation is putting in place on a regular basis. Reassure them that you are doing everything possible to make their return to work safe. Provide a rationale as to why some members of the workplace are returning to work while others may remain working from home or on furlough.
- Make sure your employees know **who to speak to with any concerns** they may have. Collate their concerns and circulate the most common questions with clear answers.
- Be clear on the actions an employee must take if they begin to **experience symptoms of COVID-19.**
- Organisations have the right to take disciplinary action where an employee is found to have put themselves and/or others at risk by breaching the new rules and working practices.



Continuing with management responsibility



Here's some of our final reminders to help you in this transition period:

- **Notify your payroll team** of who is coming back from being furloughed and when. Don't forget that the national minimum and living wage rates increased in April.
- Encourage all managers to **set out a clear plan for work priorities** in their teams. Targeted measures will help individuals to maintain focus and increase their motivation and productivity levels.
- **Revisit any employee management activities** such as probationary periods, trial periods, flexible working applications, performance improvement plans, disciplinarys or grievance processes. Managers must meet with the individual to tell them that the process is to restart outlining the revised timescales. This does not have to be a difficult conversation as your organisation is showing that they care for the future of the individual and will support them to continually improve.
- **Remember documentation and letters.** Every member of staff returning from furlough must receive confirmation in writing as well as receive the news verbally. Additionally, remember to confirm any variation to their terms, explain the differences that you have agreed with them, for example a change to their rate of pay or number of hours worked.
- **The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)** has been extended until the end of October and with more flexibility. In August, September and October the scheme will enable organisations to bring workers back part-time to help support a phased approach (currently, and until the end of July, it only applies to workers who are unable to work). As this extension has only just been announced, we urge you to keep up to date with the CRJS as the government plan to ask employers to start making financial contributions.
- If an **employee started work with another employer** whilst furloughed then they may need to give notice to that employer in line with the individual's employment contract as it is unlikely they are able to continue to work for both employers at the same time.
- And finally, **keep up to date with news** from the government either through the daily televised coronavirus briefings and/or via the [government website](#).

Government guidance

We would like to reiterate the importance of keeping up to date with the latest government guidelines. To date, the government have produced [8 guides covering a range of different types of work](#).

- [Construction and outside work](#)
- [Factories, plants and warehouses](#)
- [Labs and research facilities](#)
- [Offices and contact centres](#)
- [Other people's homes](#)
- [Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery](#)
- [Shops and branches](#)
- [Vehicles](#)

We're Here to Help

If your organisation would like any further support on your return to work strategies as a result of COVID-19, please get in touch with our team of HR Professionals on 0161 941 2426 or visit our website www.p3pm.co.uk Alternatively, our clients are encouraged to email specific questions directly to their dedicated HR Advisor; Claire, Rachel or Katie.