

HR roadmap - staff returning to work and the office

START

Making the decision

- 1) Is it **essential** staff come back to the office?
- 2) Is it sufficiently **safe** for employees to return to the office and is it **mutually agreed**.
- 3) Does the return align with your **culture**
- 4) **Will staff returning to the office match your company strategy and values**

Warning: You can potentially be liable if your staff catches Covid-19 at work (police may be involved; discrimination claims bought by staff).

Communication strategy

Regularly communicate to staff (townhalls; emails; posters around the office; during one to ones).

Communications should be **clear** and **not open to interpretation**.

Ensure all communications produced are emailed to staff and placed on intranets.

Ensure all communications are **easy to follow**.

Remind employees what to do if they feel unwell.

Ensure communications are empathetic in their tone.

Flex your approach

- Going back may be unsettling for many.
- Regional lockdowns may be imposed by the government.
- The effects of the pandemic are psychological as well as physical.
- Staff may have concerns about travelling and socially distancing on public transport.
- **Everyone** (after 26 weeks employment) has a statutory right to ask for flexible working.
- Employee Assistance Programme or access to Occupational Health advisers - make staff aware of the services they can provide.

Contractual considerations

- Does each staff member have a signed contract of employment or service agreement?
- Have contracts of employment got a clause that allows for an alternative work location?
- Do you need to bring staff back off Furlough?
- Is your payroll team aware and ready for the change in Furlough status for staff?
- Flexible working requests **need to be in writing** (changes to T & C's need to be auditable). Expect **volume in flexible working requests**.
- You cannot ask staff to share if they have been vaccinated before they come back to work (unless you work in a care home or medical environment i.e. hospital).

Practical HR hints and tips

- **Look at your strategy** – be clear on the approach to the return to the office and flexible working
- **Know the issues you're likely to face** – there are more HR and legal issues than you will think.
- **Support your people** – ensure managers have the tools they need to support their teams.
- **Office cleaning** – ensure this continues on a daily basis and continue to provide hand sanitisers.
- **Culture** – you should be aiming for a culture of give and take!
- **Launch a pilot** – consider trialling a small-scale pilot scheme. Gather feedback, evaluate and make changes as required.

Hybrid working = best of both

- Consider how to manage client interactions/**expectations** when staff are in different locations.
- Plan how to ensure team meetings are run effectively **when** some staff are on video and some in a meeting room.
- Look at **lessons learnt** from working from home during the pandemic (evidence).
- Review changes needed to the **office** footprint.

Legal supervision

- Understand the current guidance on reopening workplaces

- No longer a criminal offence to leave home to go to work
 - BUT... don't ignore Government Guidance when it comes out – be prepared for regional lockdowns
- Ensure the office is safe to return to
- Do comply with Government's Covid-secure workplace safety guidance
- Risk assessments:
 - Carry out risk assessment
 - Implement measures to minimise risk
 - Publish risk assessments for staff to read
- Consult with employees about work safety plans

↳ Do enforce self-isolation rules

- Offence for an employer to knowingly allow staff to come to work when required to self-isolate
- Be clear with employees that they must not attend work if they are told to self-isolate
- Take care with temperature checks
- Workplace testing – compulsory v encouragement

Be prepared to deal with employees refusing/reluctant to return to the office

- Refusing to attend citing serious and imminent danger – dismissal/detriment protection
- Unwilling/reluctant to return even if can't work from home
- Discuss with employee to try and address concerns
- Disciplinary/dismissal the last resort – look at alternatives
 - Unpaid leave
 - Place on/continuing furlough

↳ Be flexible. Be prepared to deal with/hybrid working requests

- Anticipate requests and consider implementing hybrid working
- Statutory flexible working requests – know the rules
- Don't ignore informal flexible working requests
- Consider trial periods

FINISH



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