

COVID-19 Business Resumption Guidance

Overview

COVID-19 has impacted all businesses in a way no one could ever have imagined, and whilst the pandemic isn't yet over it's important to think ahead to once lockdown is lifted, and the workforce is able to return to the office. Even with the restrictions relaxed, COVID-19 still poses a high risk, which will continue to impact how businesses operate.

This document provides a number of considerations around the practicalities of reopening buildings and returning employees.

The contents of this document has been created by members of the Manchester Digital Employers Forum, and has been produced to inform and support your business strategies.

Considerations

Once the rules relax, it is just the start of the journey towards the new normal, there is still a possibility that further measures could be introduced and so planning for all eventualities must be considered.

There is a need for employees to continue to be open to change, and it's important to consider how you report, implement and communicate additional changes along the way.

Some office restrictions may not become apparent until your team returns, it's important to have a clear reporting structure in place to quickly address and implement any additional concerns that are highlighted to you.

People

There isn't a one size fits all approach when it comes to your people. They will all have been, and may continue to be, impacted by the pandemic in very different ways. It's important to take this into account when planning their return to work and the office. The below highlights a number of scenarios to take into consideration.

- Vulnerable employees
- Furloughed staff – how and when should they return?
- New remote recruits who have never been to the office
- Those taking public transport – are they more at risk?
- Employees who are high risk, or from high risk households
- Those with ongoing childcare issues, if schools or nurseries remain closed
- Those who may be considered for redundancy
- People who wish to continue working from home
- People who want to return to working in the office
- Those with compromised working environment at home
- Those caring for someone with COVID
- Employees who have been tested and can present evidence of immunity

It's worth considering how you go about categorising your employees and whether there is an option for them to self categorise. It is however important to consider how you approach this both from the wording used and the tone of communications to minimise the potential impact or distress this may cause.

Furloughed Employees

Whilst there is nothing in the guidelines to stop an employee returning to work immediately after being on furlough, there are potential impacts to your business and you should consider.

- Which furloughed staff return first, is this dependent on the business need?
- Will their role be identical to when they left or will changes need to be made inline with business need?
- How long have they been out of the business, are there any business changes or updates that they must be aware of before returning?
- Will furloughed employees need any additional support? Will then need refresher training on any aspects of their role?
- How will you communicate the plans to both the furloughed employee and the rest of the business?
- Are these employees at risk of redundancy? How and when will this process be started?

Office Environment

As Government guidelines are relaxed, there is likely to still be many restrictions in place. These will impact not only the physical set up of the office, but how your employees use the spaces. You may want to consider the following.

- Does the office allow for social distancing? Consider the entrance and exits of the office. Small spaces such as cupboards, toilets, kitchens as well as high traffic areas such as printers, break out spaces, coffee machines.
- Do you need to review the layout of workstations to allow employees to work further apart, or can you introduce screens to create a physical barrier?
- Are rules required within these areas and how will that impact the way you work?
- Will start/finish/break times need to be amended to allow for social distancing?
- Can you limit the use of shared office equipment, or how can you ensure equipment is cleaned after each use?
- Is PPE now required, and will you be providing it to your employees?
- Has your supply chain been impacted, can the office operate as normal?
- Are current office cleaning arrangements sufficient?
- How will you communicate and monitor these changes?

Employee Health

Until a vaccine is in place it will be essential to have a programme in place to monitor the health and wellbeing of your employees, and to take the relevant preventative measures to protect your people whilst at work.

- How will you monitor those without proof of immunity? Are temperature checks a possibility? Or private testing?
- Will employees be required to use to contact tracing app, once live?
- Will there be a process for any employee showing symptoms, or concerned about another person showing symptoms?
- Are there any changes required to your sick pay policy to cover COVID related illness or impact?
- Is there a plan in place to support the mental wellbeing of employees who have been impacted or have anxieties related to COVID-19?
- Are you doing anything to support the physical wellbeing of employees?
- Do you need to provide guidance around other illnesses such as cold and flu, and is there a need to isolate?

Home Working

The past few months have proven that for a large number of businesses home working can work well, and the barriers to working remotely have been overcome in many cases. Some businesses have seen an increase in productivity during this time, so it's important to think about how homeworking could fit in to your future plans for the business.

- Will home working be an option for employees in the future? If so will there be restrictions around this?
- Has home working had a positive or negative impact on the business so far? What will be the impact of home working moving forward?
- Are there cost benefits to the business by having employees working from home?

Travel & Visitors

As well as planning for your employees returning to the office, it's important to consider whether employees are permitted to travel – be that to other offices within the company, or external businesses?

- Will employees be permitted to travel between company buildings?
- Will employees be allowed to leave the premises during their lunch hour to purchase food? If not do alternative arrangements need to be made?
- Will employees be allowed to travel to external meetings? If so, will they be allowed back into the office? Will there be an isolation or testing process?
- Will you be allowing external visitors into your building, and what will be the restrictions? Consider suppliers, cleaners, maintenance etc as well as guests.
- How will you communicate them?

Holidays

Guidance published in the press has misled some people into thinking holidays can be accrued for up to two years following the pandemic, this could have a huge impact on your business.

- Have you amended your holiday policy for 2020, and are all employees clear on the new changes?
- If your current policy remains the same, do you need to add any additional clauses to avoid a backlog of holidays at the end of the year?
- If employees are taking holidays post lockdown, will you be placing restrictions on where they can travel to? Or will there be an isolation period required?

Communications

Internal communications are now more important than ever, the changes to the way you conduct day to day business may continue to be impacted in some way on an ongoing basis as you continue to navigate the pandemic. It's important that employees are aware of the potential for ongoing change subject to Government guidance, and to know how and when to expect communications.

- Firstly it's important to consider the tone and the timings of your communications, how much information are you willing to share, when and how?
- Consider the channels you're using for comms in relation to the people in your business, multiple channels may now be required.
- Who will the communications come from? Will it be the usual comms team or do communications need to come from senior leaders?
- Is there a need to communicate to line managers before all other employees to equip them with answering any questions their teams may have?

Remember the Positives

And finally, many companies and employees are reporting positives that they have found as a result of the new working arrangements, from getting to know colleagues families and pets, to more frequent team building activities.

In amongst the restrictions which must be introduced to keep everyone safe, it is important not to lose the positive changes everyone has seen.

Do you know what these are within your business?

Can you include your employees in sharing these positives?

Can these become part of the new normal?