

Top Ten Tips for Managers

Supporting Shielding Employees Return to the Workplace

1. Consider how you can help a shielding employee prepare to return to the workplace. For example, offering the opportunity for a short visit to the workplace before they return could help them familiarise themselves with the changes and to experience the new social distancing and infection control practices. The completion and review of the COVID-19 Risk Assessment / return to work discussion may provide a perfect opportunity for such a visit.
2. Make contact with your employee who is currently shielding at home as soon as possible. This will ensure that you can arrange to meet with them prior to the 16th August 2020, to complete a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, review the outcomes and agree and sign off, where appropriate, a supportive and documented return to work plan. This approach will provide you and your employee with the time to consider the risk assessment outcome(s) and to implement any changes or reasonable adjustments required to support the return to the workplace. It will also provide you and the employee with sufficient time to seek additional advice /guidance on specific issues from Workforce and OD, Occupational Health Department etc.
3. The return to work meeting should:
 - ✚ Be arranged and held well in advance of the shielding employee's planned date to return to the workplace;
 - ✚ Be held in a location where the employee is comfortable to meet with you and can be conducted in private (these meetings do not necessarily need to be held in the workplace and may more appropriately be held virtually e.g. via MS Teams)
 - ✚ Be supportive and conducted in a sensitive and considerate manner with the primary focus being on supporting the employee to safely return to the workplace.
 - ✚ Explore issues and concerns in a caring and compassionate manner, with an open mind and without making judgements and assumptions.
 - ✚ Provide the employee with the opportunity to discuss their anxieties, concerns etc. about safely returning to the workplace.
4. Provide an opportunity to sign post the employee to relevant Health Board/Trust Health and Wellbeing services and resources. Carry out an NHS Wales COVID-19 Risk Assessment for all shielding employees who are required to return to the workplace, taking into account their health condition, circumstances etc. Where appropriate, work with the

Occupational Health and Workforce and OD Team to identify reasonable adjustments.

5. Where an employee is returning to work and they are a new or expectant mother, managers should also ensure they follow the HSE expectant mothers risk assessment guidance [HSE Expectant Mother Risk Assessment Guidance](#).
6. Hold a structured return to work discussion with each returning employee, in a sensitive and compassionate manner. The purpose of the discussion is to:
 - ✚ Enquire and gain an understanding of how your employee is feeling about returning to the workplace and consider how you can support them.
 - ✚ Thank them for their contributions to work during the COVID-19 pandemic or acknowledge anything they may raise if they haven't been able to work in the same way as their colleagues or have not been able to work during this period.
 - ✚ Complete the NHS Wales COVID-19 Risk Assessment, review the outcomes, agree actions and a structured return to work plan. The return to work plan must be documented and agreed and signed off by the manager and the employee.
 - ✚ Identify any signs of distress, anxiety or psychological ill health which may need further professional advice and/or specific support. Where a manager has such concerns, they should refer the employee to the Occupational Health Department for assessment, prior to agreeing a return to work plan and date.
 - ✚ Discuss any factors outside of work that may affect the employee returning to work and encourage them to consider any interim adjustments or changes they may need to make. For example, do they have childcare or caring responsibilities and how can these be managed when they return to work?
 - ✚ Signpost employees to the wellbeing support and resources provided by the organisation and NHS Wales (insert links), to assist them to take responsibility for and proactively manage their health and wellbeing.
 - ✚ Update the employee on changes. There may have changes in ways of working, the physical work environment, team roles etc. during the pandemic, so make sure you update each employee and re-induct them as they come back into the workplace.

✚ Identify any additional training, clinical supervision etc. needed to support the shielding employee to return to the workplace.

7. Proactively contact your employee if they do not return to work on the planned date, to identify the reason and establish whether they are experiencing any issues or barriers, not already identified via their COVID-19 Risk Assessment / return to work plan. Where new issues or barriers are identified, the manager and employee must review the COVID-19 Risk Assessment to determine the action(s) to be taken, to assist with the revised return to the workplace date, if appropriate for them to do so.
8. Regularly meet with your returned employees to assess how they are settling back into the workplace and to enquire about their health and wellbeing. You should be mindful that an employee's circumstances might change rapidly, and they may need different support over time. It is therefore important that you continue to focus on the health and wellbeing of returning employees. Risk assessments must be reviewed where there is a change of circumstance or if the employee requests it.
9. Shielding employees who are returning to the workplace after a significant period of time away may feel nervous, anxious, and guilty. Equally, employees who have been in the workplace during the pandemic may feel resentment towards those shielded staff, regardless of whether they have been working from home or not.

You and your team leaders have a role to help employees understand each other's perspectives and experiences. Advice and support is available from your Workforce and OD Team if you have any issues that you are unable to resolve.

10. Consider what peer support returning employees might want or need. For example, could they be paired up with a colleague that has been in the workplace throughout, for most of the pandemic or recently returned to work?