# HAYS
**Recruiting experts worldwide**

# A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO BRINGING EMPLOYEES BACK FROM FURLOUGH LEAVE

Over a quarter of UK employees have been furloughed via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme since it was introduced in March. However, as lockdown restrictions begin to ease and the scheme winds down over the coming months, it is likely that many employees will return from furlough leave in order to support their organisation as they navigate the new era of work.

## THE WORLD OF WORK HAS CHANGED

Whilst returning to work does not necessarily mean returning to the workplace for everybody, all of our professional lives have changed since the pandemic began. Those employees returning from furlough leave will have to get accustomed to these changes at pace. For many, this return will be to a new, entirely virtual world. For others, the workplace they once knew will be changed, with a host of new policies designed to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 spreading.

Both these scenarios bring challenges for returning employees and their managers. So, how can managers prepare for the reintroduction of previously furloughed employees and help enable them to get back to work quickly, safely and with confidence?

> " Before you map out your re-induction process, be sure that a tone of sensitivity runs throughout every stage of it. "

## 10 STEPS TO ENSURE THE SUCCESSFUL RE-INTEGRATION OF FURLOUGHED EMPLOYEES

**1** **Set a sensitive tone:** First and foremost, it is vital that managers understand that everyone's experience of the pandemic will have been different. Furloughed workers will have undoubtedly been anxious about the potential impact of the pandemic upon their health and their career, and they may well have had difficulties in their domestic situation that you are not aware of. Before you map out your re-induction process, be sure that a tone of sensitivity runs throughout every stage of it.

**2** **Define how returning employees will work:** Before you begin your re-introduction process, you also need to define how employees will work upon their return. Many will be required to work remotely for the foreseeable, some will work in a 'hybrid' manner – sometimes in the workplace and sometimes remotely – and for others, working outside the workplace is not possible. If workers can work remotely, perhaps now is a good time to review your existing flexible working policies – and be sure to read our definitive guide on how to manage a remote team.

**3** **If applicable, brief your other team members:** If you have other team members who have been working throughout or have been brought back from furlough leave earlier, you may need to re-clarify how the employee's return affects everyone's responsibilities and how tasks are distributed going forward. Ensure also that your team are factoring the employee's return into their own schedules and taking time to bring them back into the loop on key projects.

**hays.co.uk/lead-in-the-new-era**

**4** **If relevant, define your safety procedures:** If employees are expected to return to the workplace, ensure you have clear health and safety procedures and that these are clearly communicated to those people returning from furlough. For more advice on returning to the workplace, read our A New Era of Work: What to Consider guide.

**5** **Schedule one-to-one meetings:** Every re-induction should begin with a one-to-one meeting between the returning employee and their line manager. These conversations should focus on the employee's physical and psychological health, safety and wellbeing. Anxiety is high, so reassure them about the procedures you have in place to ensure their continued safety and wellbeing upon their return to work, and if applicable, discuss any adjustments and/or ongoing support they may need to facilitate an effective return to the workplace.

**6** **Clarify your professional expectations:** Of course, employees knew what their roles were before the pandemic and what was expected of them. Has this changed? If not, make that clear. If so, how and why? For example:

- Will their daily agenda look the same, and if not, what duties and tasks should they complete and when?

- If they were working to a set of objectives or KPIs beforehand, how might these be different?

Whilst employers should not attempt to unilaterally modify previously defined job specifications, some roles may need to shift in line with changing organisational priorities, which should be communicated to returning workers as early as possible.

**7** **If needed, provide returners with technical support:** Our reliance upon technology has increased exponentially. Those returning from furlough may need extra support to get them up to speed on any new software, technology and platforms that are being used. Wherever relevant, you should:

- Ensure they have access to any hardware they might require, such as a working computer or laptop.

- Ensure they are set up to access any new systems.

- Provide clear instructions on how to download and access any new software they will be using, such as remote access portals, MS Teams or Zoom.

- Provide clear instructions on how to use any new hardware, such as contactless payment devices.

- Suggest they test whether they can log-on and use new software before their first day back, and let them know who to contact if they are having difficulties.

- Provide context to new technology – for example, highlight which video call platforms you would prefer they use and in what circumstances, and how best to communicate with colleagues and customers.

**8** **Update them on any wider organisational changes:** With so many things having changed, it's likely that there will have been some wider organisational shifts beyond social distancing. You should ensure workers returning from furlough are up-to-date with these, which might include:

- **Shifting priorities:** You should provide returning employees with context about how your organisation is responding to the wider market changes, for example whether there has been a shift in the priorities of your organisation in line with changing customer behaviours or an increase/decrease in demand for its services.

- **New or obsolete products and services:** In line with the above, you should clearly explain any new products or services your organisation may now offer customers since the pandemic began – as well as any products and services that are no longer available.

- **Any new points of contact:** Let employees know if any key points of contact – whether within your organisation or externally – have changed since the pandemic began.

**9** **Allow for a period of readjustment:** Not only have employees returning from furlough leave been away from the work environment for a while, but they will be returning to a very changed world. They may be dealing with their own anxieties, stresses and worries, and some may have experienced illness or suffered bereavement. Furthermore, the pandemic did not have an equal impact across society. Some groups of employees or individuals may have been affected in different ways according to their role and unique circumstances.

Make sure that you allow for a period of readjustment – and accept that not all returning employees will hit the ground running at the same pace. Some may require a little more support than others. Try to communicate the need to be understanding and kind across the entire workforce to prevent any employees feeling marginalised or resentful.

**10** **Remember to give feedback:** As lockdown lifts and organisations throw all their efforts into ensuring a smooth recovery from this challenging period, it can be easy to let some old processes fall by the wayside, such as regular feedback to employees. However, this is especially important to do with those employees returning from furlough, who may be anxious about whether the leave has or will yet have an impact on their career progression. Continue to have one-on-one meetings, during which you should:

- Celebrate tasks they are doing well

- Highlight areas in which they need to upskill

- Define how they can improve in these areas

**hays.co.uk/lead-in-the-new-era**