

## Tip Sheet: Employee management and support

Employees are a business's most valuable assets. The following tips have been assembled to help advise, support and manage your staff during this turbulent period.

*NB: For those that are self-employed, please refer to the forthcoming 'Tip Sheet: Self Employment' guide*

### Tip 1: Explore the option of taking up the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

If your business has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, then it will be eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ("CJRS"). The scheme has been created to help employers retain their staff during the next several months as businesses, and the wider economy, battle with the economic impact of the pandemic.

The CJRS is open to any UK employer who had started a PAYE payroll scheme on/before 19 March 2020 and is available for at least three months starting from 1 March 2020. Under the scheme, eligible employers can claim up to 80% of a furloughed employee's usual monthly wage costs, up to a cap of £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage.

A "furloughed worker" must be kept on the payroll but cannot undertake any work for the company for a minimum period of 3 weeks. "Furloughing" avoids the need to lay off workers because of the impact of COVID-19. Eligible employees can be drawn from any role within your company or organisation, including company directors. Whilst they cannot undertake work for, or on behalf of, the organisation whilst furloughed, workers can undertake voluntary work, training or statutory duties (in the case of directors). If an employee is working, but on reduced hours, or for reduced pay, then they will not be eligible for this scheme. There is no restriction to the types of employment contract (including temporary) the employee is on, nor the starting point at which they can be furloughed during the period (subject to a minimum of 3 continuous weeks).

The furlough process should be carried out in full discussion with your staff, with any change to employment contracts made by agreement. When you are making your decision on which employees will be furloughed it is important to consider equality and discrimination laws. Once a decision is made you should [write to your employees](#) confirming the action that will be taken and keep a record of this communication. HMRC have outlined that they may audit claims after the scheme concludes.

CJRS details and guidance can be found on the [Gov.UK website](#). It is advisable to read the information available in full and to consult with your HR/legal advisors where possible. You can enquire [here](#) about limited pro bono professional advice for businesses responding to COVID-19 through Growth Platform. Contact your local growth hub or the [Growth Platform](#) for more information.

### Tip 2: Take steps to safeguard employees in your workplace

The pandemic presents an unprecedented risk to our community, homes and workplaces. Ensuring that your workplace has well-thought out, long-term practises in place which addresses COVID-19 challenges is essential in keeping your staff safe and healthy. It is also a statutory duty in line with health and safety at work regulations. Potential steps to protect your employees can include:

- Facilitating home-based working where possible, especially for those employees identified as falling within defined vulnerable groups.
- Taking a zero-risk approach to sending employees home if they begin to exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. Self-isolation steps should subsequently be taken in line with [Public Health England guidelines](#). NB: Government support is available to help cover the cost of Statutory Sick Pay.
- Actively ensuring that social distancing of at least 2 metres (6ft) continues in your workplace. This includes employee movement at their workstation and in communal facilities such as break rooms and changing facilities.
- Encouraging thorough and frequent hand washing by employees; ensuring that adequate supplies of soap, water and alcohol-based (60-95% alcohol) hand rubs are maintained at all times.
- Identifying and implementing a comprehensive cleaning schedule for all frequently touched surfaces such as workstations, countertops and door handles.
- Frequent evaluation of the necessity to hold in-person interactions between employees and external partners/customers; taking steps to provide alternative solutions where possible.

### Tip 3: Establishing and maintaining, frequent and consistent dialogue with employees

The emergence of the pandemic has given rise to an increasing amount of pressure on all employees, regardless of role or responsibility. The growing levels of stress and anxiety that are being seen as a result of the disease stem not only from the physical health threat to employees, and by extension their friends and families, but also the growing threats to job security as a result of the pandemic's economic fallout.

You will no doubt already play an active role in ensuring that your employees have a strong support network within your workplace. It is now essential to ensure that this support network can adapt to the changing landscape, especially for those employees who are working remotely or are furloughed, as they may have little to no face-to-face interaction with you as an employer. It is advisable to be up front about the challenges your businesses face. Transparency and flexibility are key in these situations in order to support your employees - especially for those who are faced with increased care commitments as a result of COVID-19. It is also key to building trust and responsibility within your team at a time when it is most needed to maintain productivity in the face of necessary changes to your standard working practises.

A routine of weekly phone or video calls will provide an opportunity to answer employee questions, overcome remote working roadblocks and will importantly provide a regular opportunity to set goals and KPIs for employees. This should help to motivate your staff and maximise your business' productivity, despite the challenging circumstances.

Finally, extend your open door policy on mental health to cater for remote working. Not only will supporting your employees at this time help them personally, but it will also help your business by strengthening employee relationships and job satisfaction, ready for when things get back to normality.

### Tip 4: Keep up to date with guidance and support

There are a range of schemes and initiatives available both locally and nationally which can aid your business in relation to staff costs, training and support. New support schemes are set to come online in the coming weeks, and more details are being released on a daily basis, so please keep checking the guidance websites. These can include:

- [Growth Platform website](#) & #HereToHelp support line (0151 705 1985)
- [COVID-19: guidance for employees, employers and businesses section of the GOV.UK website](#)
- [ACAS website](#) for advice, templates and training resources.

Please contact Growth Platform to hear more information on any of the schemes mentioned, to be updated on any additional schemes for which your business may be eligible or if you have any further questions relating to support that could be on offer