



Managing the return to the workplace: A 6-step plan

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Topics for today:

- Covid-19 and the world of work
- Health, safety and wellbeing at work
- A note about mental health
- The 6-step plan
- Time for discussion/questions

2 little disclaimers

- Novo Nordisk provided the funding to Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to undertake the the production of this toolkit as part of a programme of work that we are currently undertaking looking at obesity and employment. Novo Nordisk had no influence over the content of this toolkit or this programme. IES retained full and final editorial control over this toolkit and all aspects of the PURPOSE programme.
- This presentation is not in any way suggesting that you should be asking employees to go back to the workplace, but aims to provide practical tips to help if/when any future decisions about a return to the workplace occurs.

Covid and the world of work

- Covid-19 has had unprecedented and wide-ranging implications for the world of work and individual working lives
- UK we have 'opened-up' – what impact had this had on work and the return to the workplace?
- How the return to the workplace is managed is critical for both organisational and individual outcomes.

Health, safety and wellbeing at work

The summary of key points of health and safety regulation that workplaces need to comply with (in addition to any specific Covid-19 government regulations that are being developed and updated) include:

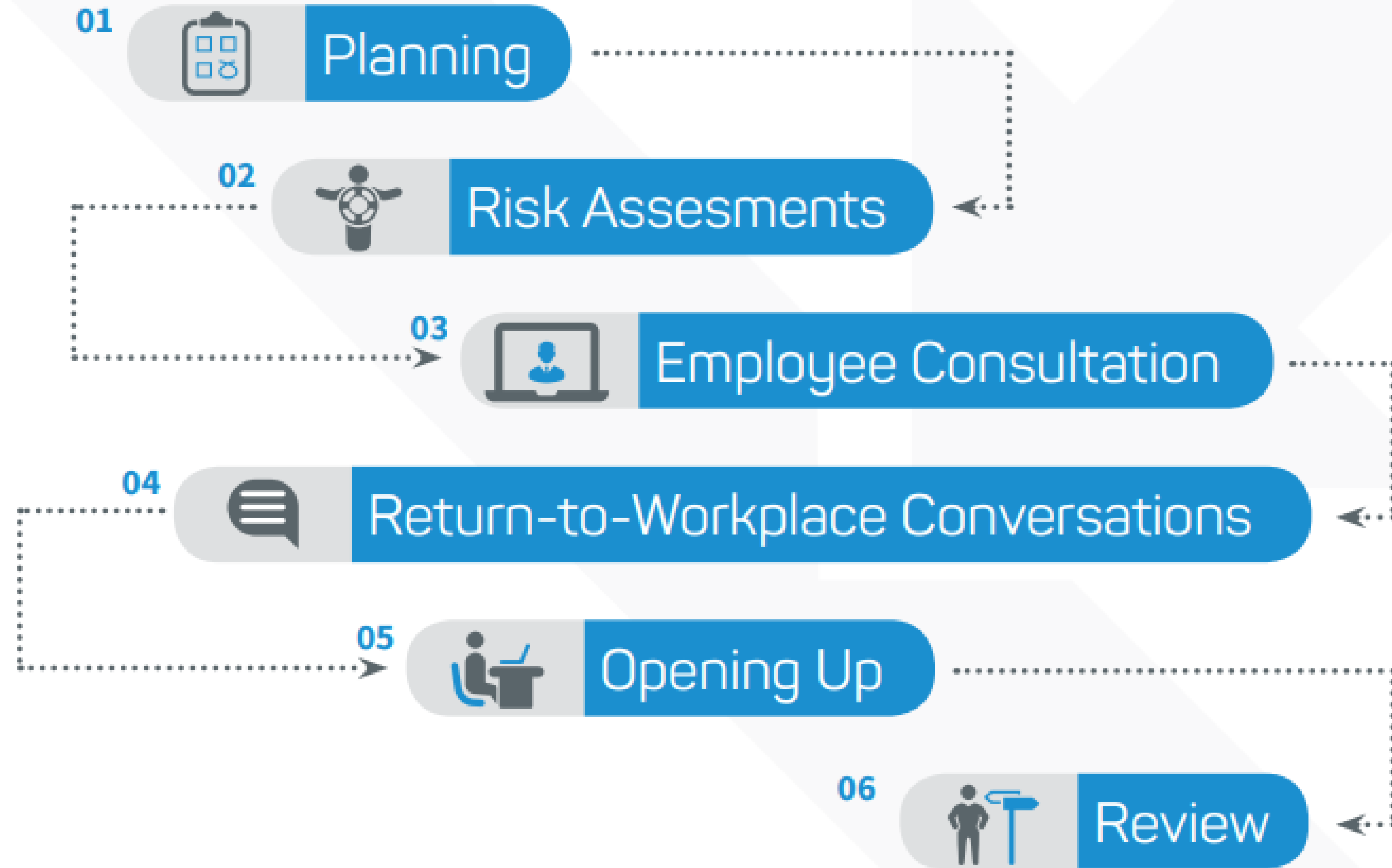
- The provision of adequate training of staff to ensure that health and safety procedures are understood and adhered to by all staff.
- To provide a safe working environment that is properly maintained and where any workplace operations within it are conducted in a safe manner.
- The suitable provision of relevant information, instruction and supervision.
- Having a prepared and regularly revised written health and safety policy that all employees are informed of and notified when any changes or modifications to it are made.
- Employers conducting risk assessments to identify risks to health and safety to employees and taking steps to remove these risks.
- An obligation to provide employees with information of any identified risks, any preventative measures that have been taken, procedures in place to reduce any danger and information about who is responsible for implementing them.

A note about mental health

- Employers have a responsibility and duty of care to enhance employee health – including mental health.
- No two employees will have had the same experience of the pandemic.
- Some employees with long-term health conditions may have a comorbid mental condition that could also have an impact on employment.
- Covid may have exacerbated mental health conditions in a number of ways:
 - uncertainty
 - delay in medical treatment
 - social isolation
 - media stigma

The 6-step approach

The key steps are presented below and will be discussed in more detail in the following section.



Step 1 - Planning

A RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS PLANNING STAGE, INCLUDING:

Organisation Directors: Directors will have an important role in overseeing the process, ensuring that a co-ordinated approach is taken before any decisions about returning to the workplace are made, and that the approach used means that all staff have equal access to support.

Questions they may wish to consider in the planning stage include:

- When is best to start the planning, to allow all staff an opportunity to be involved in any consultation process before workplaces are re-opened?
- If any staff have been 'key workers' and have been in the workplace throughout the pandemic how can you make sure they are also consulted?
- Is an inclusive approach being used when discussing return to workplace plans, including people first language?
- Are government and local guidelines/updates being checked regularly?

HR: It will be necessary for HR to review current policies and practices in relation to return to workplace guidelines, health and safety and wellbeing, sickness absence and flexible working to make sure that these are fit for purpose or if they need updating in light of Covid-19 and resultant risks.

Other questions for HR to consider during this planning stage include:

- Are policies centrally located for all staff to access?
- Are policies and other internal communications written in non-stigmatising, people-first language, and do not discriminate against certain employee groups?
- Are all line managers aware of relevant procedures related to sickness absence, employee wellbeing, rules about Covid-19 and work and local government guidance?
- What is the current level of communication to employees about returning to the workplace after lockdown, and who is this from?
- Are line managers aware of contingency plans and how to discuss any concerns that may be arising from concerned employees or those in a vulnerable group?

Line Managers: Throughout the lockdown, line managers had a critical role of remaining in contact with those they manage to see how they have been feeling throughout lockdown, and if anything further could be done to support employees when working from home. In planning a return to the workplace, managers will have a key role in engaging and consulting with employees.

Questions for line managers to consider at this stage may include:

- Have you been in frequent contact with your employees?
- Are you aware of any challenges (both personal and health related) that they may have had during lockdown that could have an impact on their return to the workplace?
- Are you aware of organisational policies and practices related to any of these concerns?
- Do you know of organisational and/or external support services that may be helpful for employees to contact for further information or support?

Employees: Individual employees are just as important as any other stakeholder in this planning stage, and throughout the re-opening pathway.

You may want to think about:

- Do you know how and to who in your organisation you can raise any concerns with?
- What extra steps can you take to protect your health and wellbeing at this time (e.g. continuing to shield, getting the vaccine when offered, ensuring you know government guidelines)?
- What would be best for you at this time for both your physical and mental health?

For all stakeholders, during this planning stage, it could be a useful time to think more widely and creatively about what will be both best for the organisation and employees for the future of the workplace. Is it necessary for the workplace to re-open fully, or will hybrid working, or a phased re-opening be a more appropriate strategy for certain workplaces. How can this be achieved keeping the health, safety, and wellbeing of all a main priority?

Step 2 – Risk Assessments

- Are some employees at higher risk/more vulnerable than others?
- Who should undertake the risk assessment?
- Do current risk assessments take account of employees with long-term health conditions?
- Additional risk assessment questions could include:
 - How will people in vulnerable groups be identified?
 - How will organisations encourage vulnerable groups to engage in the risk assessment process?
 - How will this be done in a non-stigmatising/non-discriminatory way?

Step 3 – Employee Consultation

A return to the workplace questionnaire can ask questions such as:

- Do employees want to return to the workplace?
- Is a hybrid-model of working preferable?
- When would it be preferable to re-open the workplace?
- What concerns do employees have about returning to the workplace?
- What can the organisation/line managers do about alleviating these concerns?
- Have any new workplace needs arisen as a result of the pandemic?
- Do employees have a long-term health condition that has meant they have had to shield, or put them in a vulnerable category? (employees do not have to name the condition)
- If employees are in a vulnerable category, what advice do employees need to help them, and what adjustments may they require?
- Do employees know who they can voice concerns with?
- Are there any other concerns that employees would like to highlight (e.g. vaccination status)?

Step 4 – Return-to-Workplace Conversations

Considerations should include:

- Are managers confident to have these conversations?
- Do managers understand the importance of using people first language? (e.g. an employee living with obesity, instead of obese employees)
- Are managers aware of what sources of help and support for employees are available in an organisation, and feel comfortable to signpost employees to these resources?
- When would be an appropriate time to have these discussions so that employees feel comfortable to discuss potentially sensitive topics?

Step 5 – Opening Up

There are a number of actions that employers may wish to consider:

- If the office has not been used for a long time, a deep clean may be necessary to protect hygiene measures, and to make sure that the premises are as clean as possible before employees return.
 - How many people can safely work in the workplace at one time? If certain employees or roles are required to be in the office, how will the selection process occur and be communicated in a way that is not discriminatory or stigmatising or raise other issues of workplace unfairness?
 - Will screening measures be used (e.g. temperature). If so, who will conduct the screening, and how will this be communicated so not to increase added anxiety to those who may be considering returning to the workplace. What will be the process for denying entry?
 - How will contact track and tracing be implemented. Employers must make sure that processes related to such measures are properly adhered to, including training, data security/GDPR etc.
 - Will there be a phased return to the office, both in terms of how many people are in the office, and phased starting and leaving times, to avoid entrances and exits being too busy and to maintain social distancing.
- Will one-way systems be implemented? And if so, will this have implications for the use of lifts or stair wells. This could be an adjustment that could affect accessibility for employees working with overweight or obesity, and so discussions about these plans need to be held sensitively and alternative adjustments may need to be made.
 - Adaptations to the office layout may need to be made to allow for social distancing. This could include for example, spacing out workstations, or adjusting workstations so employees are working back-to-back, or side by side (instead of sitting face-to-face) to reduce transmission risks. However this is done, employers should be aware of how any adaptations could affect accessibility of getting to certain areas of the office within social distancing rules for employees living with overweight or obesity.
 - What is the level of PPE provision required for the workplace to sufficiently safeguard employees? Will masks need to be worn in the workplace? Will hand sanitisers and anti-bacterial wipes be provided at major touchpoints?
- Employers should avoid the use of hot desks as these could become infection transmission risks if not adequately cleaned after successive use.
 - Considerations need to be made regarding the use of communal spaces and meeting rooms. Can employees adequately socially distance in them? Will they be cleaned after each use? On some occasions it may be more appropriate to close some spaces altogether and to minimise in-person meetings.
 - Is there adequate signage? Are the images and language used on the signage non-stigmatising?
 - As Covid-19 can be spread by airborne transmission, the workplace must be well ventilated at all times, including opening windows where possible, the use of air conditioning and fans.
 - Due to the level of changes necessitated by Covid-19 regulations to make workplaces safe, information about changes to policies, and new workplace adjustments should be available and easily accessible to all staff.

Step 6 – Review

- Any new policies and practices will need to be reviewed and possibly updated.
- Continue to have ongoing discussions with employees.
- Are any other interventions necessary?
- Ensure that employers do not de-risk.
- Do employees know what support they are entitled to?

Over to you for
questions and
discussion...



For more information, questions or follow-up discussions, please let Emma, Clare or myself know and we will be happy to get back to you

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