

As the UK continues to open up and more businesses start to fully reopen, people across the country have started to return to work or have at least started the process of transitioning back to the office.

While many workers are coming back from remote working, others will be returning from being furloughed, as part of the government's job retention scheme, which was launched last year at the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

While not all employees have been fully furloughed or furloughed for the whole of the pandemic, some have now been out of work for over a year.

According to official figures from [Statistica](#), as of April 14th 2021 approximately 11.5 million jobs, from 1.3 million different employers were furloughed in the UK as part of the scheme.

With the scheme due to end in October 2021, employers should start considering how to re-engage their workers and make the transition back to work as smooth as possible.

For those employers who have already started transitioning employees off furlough, this need is even more pressing.



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employee wellbeing.**

For many people, going back to a central place of work can be a daunting prospect, whether that be anxiety over the commute, being around unvaccinated

colleagues or just getting back into a normal work routine.

To successfully navigate and support these [back to work emotions](#), employers need to recognise, understand and be sensitive to the reality that their employees have not all had the same covid-19 experience.

In particular, employers should be aware that furloughed employees specifically will face their own unique set of challenges when returning to work. A one size fits all approach to supporting employees in their return to the office simply won't cut it.

Tip 1 – Be empathetic to your employees' concerns

[Employee mental health](#) is probably the most important challenge that employers should consider when re-engaging with furloughed employees.

For those who have been furloughed and maybe have not had much opportunity to socialise outside their household, or do not come from a family household, they may be feeling extremely anxious about interactions with colleagues or be suffering poor mental health as a result of extended isolation.

Others may be experiencing increased stress or even depression from financial insecurity due to a reduction in their pay while furloughed.

Typically the government retention scheme covers 80% of income, but whether employers top this up is at their discretion, but for many this decrease in income is enough to impact their ability to meet fixed costs or cover unexpected expenses.

Employees who are parents or carers may be feeling anxious about how they will balance their work and family life responsibilities, particularly if their income has

been negatively impacted and they can no longer afford childcare or extra support.

Employers should be aware of the complex emotions around this process of returning to work and be sensitive in how they respond to these issues. It's vital that employees are not made to feel that they've got to suffer in silence or that they must just grin and bear these pressures alone.

By ignoring employee concerns or their mental health, organisations put themselves at risk of an increase in employee burnout, absenteeism, staff turnover, work errors, and lower productivity.



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The bottom line is that when your employees suffer, so too does your business; therefore, you should try to be empathetic to their situation and, where possible, address or accommodate their wishes and needs to feel safe at work.

If employees are struggling before they even return to work, it's important that employers take steps now to address those issues and avoid much larger problems down the road.

Tip 2 - Communicate plans clearly

and frequently

During a crisis communication plays a huge role in providing employees guidance and updates as to what is going on.

Uncertainty and a lack of clarity can stoke employees' anxieties and fears, so a solid communication strategy is vital for successfully transitioning furloughed employees back to work.

Early on, employees should be made aware of the following:

- What's expected of them
- What steps management has taken to ensure their safety
- What the new health and safety protocols are
- What support and guidance is available to them
- What means are available to employees to reach out if they have concerns or questions or need extra support

Communication around health and safety measures will be vital for reassuring returning employees that their work environment is a safe space for them to be, but also to keep their customers and colleagues safe too when it comes to reopening the workplace.

It's also important employers set and communicate clearly key performance indicators (KPIs). Doing this helps to reduce work uncertainty, gives returning employees tangible goals to work towards and helps them track their progress.

Setting KPIs can also help re-engage employees by providing them with a refresher about their role and what they should achieve; all of which can ease the fear of the unknown and enable them to slip back into the work environment more seamlessly.

Tip 3 - Give employees a voice

In addition to a solid communication plan, employers should provide time and space for employees to raise questions, ask for further clarification, or to make suggestions.

Employers should give their employees a voice and safe place to raise these concerns before they embark on their return to work.

Solutions are always more effective when employers listen to and collaborate with their employees to achieve better outcomes.

By facilitating this upward-flow of communication early on, leaders can initiate more effective evidence-based interventions sooner and ensure the transition process is as easy, smooth and productive as possible for everyone involved.

Ease of use and access to this platform is important: people need to be able to speak up in a way that is comfortable to them otherwise they are unlikely to be forthcoming or utilise the tool to its full potential.

Employers can encourage their employees to use their voice by regularly checking-in with them and asking how they're feeling.

The more genuine and demonstrative the concern you show your employees, the more likely they are to open up to you and trust that you have their best interests at heart.

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Tip 4 - Show your employees recognition and praise

It can be easy for furloughed employees to feel overlooked or disconnected from the company and their non-furloughed team mates.

Not having a sense of belonging or recognition can cause employees to become demotivated, unhappy and distant from the organisation and their colleagues.

They can also feel anxiety that their colleagues and managers have the negative perception that being on furlough has been the equivalent of a paid holiday and that they will be resented or ostracised by those who have been working full-time during the pandemic.

To re-engage returning workers and help ease those anxieties, managers and HR leaders should make a concerted effort to acknowledge the challenges those employees have faced and show them appreciation for their patience while on furlough.

Showing [meaningful recognition](#) and appreciation is a powerful mood booster and can help employees feel that they are being welcomed back into the fold.

This can be as simple as saying thank you or sharing public recognition and

appreciation.

Employers could also prepare some small return care packages that contain face masks or hand sanitiser to show returnees that consideration and care has been taken while planning their transition back to work.

How Trickle can help

Trickle enables you to be more proactive in how you engage, listen to and collaborate with your employees as you plan their return to the workplace and beyond.

Trickle brings together [engagement](#), [wellbeing](#) and recognition tools together into one intuitive to use online platform.

Operating in real-time, Trickle lets you have a finger on the daily pulse of your operation by bringing together voices from across your entire organisation in one place, ensuring nobody is left out.

With optional anonymity provided at each step, Trickle empowers your employees to openly share with you their true sentiment and to alert you to potential pain points as early on as possible.

Trickle's MoodSense feature lets you quickly check-in with employees to easily gauge their feelings on anything to do with the organisation, whether it be new safety policies, changes to shift patterns or just to see how they're doing in terms of their wellbeing.

Using Trickle's Shout About feature you can quickly disseminate information throughout the organisation, clearly sign-post support and guidance, and ensure that everyone is kept in the loop as situations develop.

With Trickle you can recognise, respond and take action to address all of your employees' concerns. Trickle tracks ideas, suggestions and concerns through their natural lifecycle in a way that everyone can see, contribute to, and vote on democratic solutions.

Trickle's powerful dashboard automatically analyses and ranks the top five issues that matter most to your people, so that you are able to focus your attention and resources where they will have the most impact.

[Find out more](#) about how Trickle can help your organisation improve employee wellbeing and make things better for everyone.

Book a short [20 minute demo](#) or [trial Trickle free](#) for 30-days.