

Update on Coronavirus

Government Roadmap and Remote Working

On Friday May 1, 2020 the government published a roadmap for the planned re-opening of societal and business activities in a phased manner. The roadmap, which commences on May 18, 2020, outlines the manner in which Ireland will re-open and sets out five stages for the easing of restrictions in 3-week intervals.

Importantly it has been noted that each of the 5 stages are contingent on constant review in terms of progression or suppression of covid-19, which may in turn impede the natural sequential progression throughout the phased approach. Contained within the roadmap are timeframes for re-engagement of employment types within the various phases as outlined below.

Phase 1 (18 May)	Open up childcare for healthcare workers
	Phased return of outdoor workers
	Open retailers which are primarily outdoor or those which were open during first level of restriction (e.g. opticians)
	Opening of certain outdoor public amenities
Phase 2 (8 June)	Open small retail outlets and marts where social distancing can be observed
	Open public libraries
Phase 3 (29 June)	Opening of crèches, childminders and pre-schools for children of essential workers in phased manner
	Return to work for those with low levels of interaction
	Open non-essential retail outlets with street level entrance and exit
	Open playgrounds
Phase 4 (20 July)	Opening of crèches, childminders and pre-schools for children of all other workers on a gradually increasing basis
	Return to work for those who cannot work from home
	Gradual easing of restrictions for higher risk services (e.g. Hairdressers)
	Opening of museums, galleries, places of worship
Phase 5 (10 August)	Return to work across all sectors
	On a phased basis, commencing at the beginning of the academic year 2020/2021, opening of primary and secondary schools and 3rd level institutions

Planning the Move

In light of the timeframes provided within the roadmap, Employers must commence planning for a return to work. Paramount to the re-opening of businesses is the health and safety aspect, both for Employees and customers/ clients alike. Employers must assess the risks associated with re-opening and follow the HSE and WHO guidance in respect of operating safely within the realms of Covid-19.

The current pandemic accelerated remote working for most businesses at a rate that left many without the technical and operational support necessary. However, in the space of a few months infrastructure and operational plans have been put in place that allow for the efficient use of remote working policies and practices. The increased resilience attributed to adaptations in how we work remotely has meant that efficiencies and have been gained, but is that reason enough for remaining in a remote working environment? The answer is subjective to the type of business or sector you operate in and for many a new normal will emerge over the coming months, one that has grown from re-prioritised objectives and goals. What Employers must now recognise is that the decision to move from remote working has many facets including health and safety, employee well-being, operational practicalities and a newly emerged employee value proposition. As we move through the five phased approach Employers must recognise that the business may not be operating at full tilt so a decision to move from remote working should have a business benefit, presumably unique to each Organisation.

An examination of efficiencies garnered through the operation of remote working may lend itself to a continuance of these practices, but it is widely recognised that at the heart of any business are the people who operate within it. On this basis collaboration and engagement may be critical components in furtherance of your business/ organisational model, one that may have an added benefit by resuming within the employment site.

We previously discussed the considerations necessary in moving to remote working in the early stages of the pandemic. These included communication management, work planning and well-being management. Where the restrictions ease in the coming months the relevance of these considerations remains true and should be maintained when transitioning from remote working, which is why planning this type of move must be a top priority for all Employers.

Communication Management

Maintaining communications is paramount to ensuring each Employee feels and stays connected to the business or Organisation. Where an Employer seeks to stagger the return to work of different Employee groups/ departments, it is essential

that technological platforms be maintained to continue with Employee/Employer contact.

In this environment the right type of communication is integral to a transitional period of this nature. This will include transparent communication from the Employer in relation to how the transitional period will work, what the plans are and the rationale behind them as well as what measures will be taken to maintain the health, safety and welfare of Employees within the workplace. Structures should be put in place that will build and maintain rapport in this altered environment ensuring that all Employees feel protected and heard. Done correctly, all of these can create a culture where Employees feel valued, informed and safe within their new environment, which may in turn lead to better Employee engagement and a happier workforce.

Work Planning

The changes made to daily routines while remote working will have led to new work plans emerging that may not be congruent to the office environment. Where an Employer is seeking to re-open the business and transition back to an office environment, for example, then it is highly important that a transitional period is planned for that accounts for a different way of working or different practices. Congruent to maintaining productivity and morale is the requirement to identify the daily and weekly work plans especially in a transitional period of moving from remote working. Employers will have already seen the agility of their workforce and now is the time to understand the benefits of what has been established in terms of efficiencies and processes and adapt these in your transitional plans to re-prioritised objectives and new activities. Where focus has changed, ensure that work plans are developed to fit into the new focus and the 'new' environment back on site. This should be completed daily or weekly and can support productivity by providing a control on the working day for each Employee.

Finally consider proportioning time over the course of the working week for Employees to focus on professional development as this may lead to improved engagement levels and Employee work satisfaction.

Well-being Management

With the prospect of re-engaging your workforce throughout these phases it is essential to maintain a focus on health and well-being especially where Employees may approach a return to a work site with trepidation. As an Employer you should prepare for mix feelings of resuming work activities on site and have a strong and clear communication plan that addresses all health, safety and well-being aspects from commuting to engagement within the office environment so that expectations on both sides can be very clear. Operating a transitional period allows an Employer to maintain a health and well-being focus while demonstrating an investment in your Employees and creating value. This type of investment will promote Employee engagement and support productivity throughout this re-integration period.

The impact of a phased approach in resuming societal and business activities is that Employers may face challenges from within their workforce when seeking to resume activities. It is therefore essential that proper planning is completed to implement re-integration to the work site. This includes risk assessments, health and safety guidance and maintenance, clear communications and planned transitional periods but most important and what should be to the fore of any decision making process is the need to analyse the benefit to your business one that centres on your people, customers, clients and service users.

Disclaimer - The information in this section is provided to assist Employers on the implementation of the government schemes and roadmap in easing of restrictions and must be read in the context of information provided by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection website (www.gov.ie) and should not be interpreted as a legal definition of any of the information provided. The information is changing constantly, and any information provided is correct of May 5, 2020 and is per information on the above websites as of that date.

**For further information or advice, please contact the experienced HR team
in Adare Human Resource Management on (01)
5613594 or jpihrhelppdesk@adarehrm.ie .**