



Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface Supporting staff & volunteers

Talking about returning to work

As lockdown eases, organisations need to think about how staff and volunteers can continue to work safely.

[Scottish Government advice](#) is that remote working should remain the default for all of those who can, and in phase 4 will still be encouraged. If your organisation has successfully moved to [home working](#) and [digital service delivery](#) this might mean that you do not need to reopen physical services or premises for some time.

If you do decide to reopen you have a duty of care towards staff and volunteers. You must do all you reasonably can to support their health, wellbeing and safety.

You should talk as early as possible about any plans to return to work. [ACAS](#) recommend talking about:

- when staff might return to the workplace
- how staff will travel to and from work
- how health and safety is being reviewed and managed – you should share the your latest risk assessment
- any planned adjustments to the workplace, for example additional hand washing facilities, staggering start and finish times to avoid overcrowding or floor markings to help people keep 2 metres apart
- if there might be a phased return of the workforce, for example some staff returning before others
- working from home arrangements

ACAS also recommend consulting with trade union, employee and health and safety representatives. Employers should check any agreements they have with a trade union or employee representatives to see if they must formally consult.

Wherever possible, you should speak to staff before making a decision or putting plans in writing. This can help staff understand, and feel included in, decisions. If you are [reopening premises](#) you will need to assess risks and make the workplace safe.

Wellbeing

The coronavirus crisis has affected us all. Many people will be feeling more stressed or anxious than usual. You should do all you reasonably can to support staff and volunteers.

Some of the key actions you could consider include:

- Increasing communication with managers – talk about work routines, work-life balance, home working environment, concerns about work reopening
- Promoting any external support your employees can access, for example an employee assistance programme if you have one
- Running fun activities to share personal news
- Share positive feedback and celebrate success
- Informal chats over coffee and cake
- Trying to keep video calls to a minimum, and not forgetting other communication methods

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Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface is a Company Limited by Guarantee in Scotland No. SC277345
Scottish Charity No. SC029947

Registered office: c/o Edward Street Community Centre, Edward Street, Dunoon PA23 7PJ



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- Staff on furlough

Furloughing staff means putting them on temporary leave. The Government's [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) was put in place to partially pay salaries of those who are unable work due to the coronavirus crisis.

The scheme closed to new entrants on 30 June 2020, and the level of support available is decreasing from August. The scheme will close at the end of October 2020.

If you have made use of the scheme you will need to plan for staff returning from furlough. This will look different depending on the unique needs of your organisation and your contractual relationship with each employee. Employees must be given notice in writing about the end of their furlough. [Acas have a template letter](#) you can adapt.

You might consider the following options:

- Flexible furlough – from July 2020 you can agree that staff return to work on part time hours. To make use of flexible furlough you need to put a new written agreement in place.
- Use of annual leave or unpaid leave – if staff are unable or unwilling to return to work at the end of their agreed furlough period you might consider allowing them to use annual leave, or unpaid leave for a period.
- Working from home – staff who have been on furlough may find it easier to return to their role as a home worker.
- Redeployment- it may be an option to redeploy staff to different roles or responsibilities as your business needs change in response to the crisis.
- Reduced working hours – you may consider reviewing the contracted working hours of a member of your team in order to meet needs they have, or needs that the business has.

Job retention bonus

The [Job Retention Bonus](#) is a one-off payment to employers of £1,000 for every employee who they previously claimed for under the retention scheme, and who remains continuously employed through to 31 January 2021. Eligible employees must earn at least £520 a month on average between the 1 November 2020 and 31 January 2021. Employers will be able to claim the Job Retention Bonus after they have filed PAYE for January and payments will be made to employers from February 2021.

Staff who are shielding or in a vulnerable group

The Scottish Government has [paused shielding](#) from 1 August 2020.

This means that anyone who has been shielding can now follow the [same guidance as the rest of Scotland](#). To stay safe, they should strictly follow physical distancing and hygiene measures.

Other staff may be in the 'clinically vulnerable' group and should also make your organisation aware of this.

Employees who were previously shielding are now able to return to work, if required and if it is safe to do so. Employers must [make premises safe](#) for all employees.

Staff who are self-isolating

The Scottish Government has put '[test and protect](#)' scheme in place to help break coronavirus transmission chains. Your staff will have to self-isolate for an extended period in these situations:

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- they have symptoms of coronavirus
- they have been informed by an NHS contact tracer that they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive
- they live with a person who has symptoms or has tested positive

If your staff are self-isolating, you must ensure they do not come into work. You can ask them to work from home if they feel well enough.

If your employees are self-isolating for one of the reasons listed above, they are entitled to any statutory sick pay due to them from the first day of absence.

Some employers can claim back up to 2 weeks' SSP they've paid to anyone because of coronavirus. [Find out more about claiming back SSP due to coronavirus on GOV.UK.](#)

You might also pay more than statutory sick pay to employees, depending on your contracts. Find out more about sick pay on the [ACAS website](#).

Staff with caring responsibilities

If you have staff who are struggling to work because of caring responsibilities (including childcare or caring for someone who is shielding) it is good practice to explore options to support them.

There is no statutory requirement to pay people if they are unable to work but many employers have been able to put flexible arrangements in place. These will need to be considered in the context of your business needs and employment contracts but could include:

- Continuing to encourage home working as default
- Agreeing flexible working patterns
- Agreeing a temporary reduction in working hours
- Agreeing to use of annual leave or unpaid leave
- Furloughing employees (the furlough scheme is now closed to new entrants)

Volunteers

Volunteers should be supported and protected from risk in the same way as staff. Although they may not have a formal employment contract, they are covered by health and safety legislation and any risks to their activity with your organisation need to be assessed.

If you have supported remote volunteering during lockdown you should ensure you have the same protections and supports as you would with a face to face service, for example PVG checks and safeguarding policies.

Detailed guidance about [volunteering safely](#) is available from the TSI, or on the Volunteering Scotland and [Ready Scotland](#) websites.

Published on the Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface Self-Serve system (www.argylltsi.org)
(Adapted from SCVO)

Version: 1.0

Published: August 2020

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Review date: August 2021

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