

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) is coming to an end

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Over the past 16 months, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, otherwise known as furlough, has protected and supported over 11 million UK workers. But, with the £66 billion scheme set to be phased out by September 2021, it is now time to consider how we can help clients prepare their workforce for life after furlough.

With many businesses coming to rely on this Government scheme as a lifeline to support its employees, planning for the transition out of furlough is now a must to avoid any unpleasant surprises next month when it ends.

Now is the perfect time for business planning. For some businesses, bringing back furloughed employees may be immediate. Planning and communication is key during this transition out of furlough. The employer must keep employees informed and open up communication channels, encouraging staff to raise any concerns or problems with returning back to work.

Whilst this process may be seamless for some, for other employers bringing back furloughed employees may no longer be necessary due to the impact of the pandemic. This is where business

scenario planning will be invaluable. Setting out an action plan and a response for a multitude of scenarios will mean less pressure and more clarity for those involved.

Recent data has shown that 2.4 million people remain furloughed or flexi-furloughed across the UK, at the height of the pandemic last year; this figure was closer to 10 million people. The government scheme paid 80% of wages for hours not worked, but during July their contribution reduced by 10%, with employers required to make up the shortfall. This employer contribution will further increase to 20% in August and September before furlough comes to an end on 30th September 2021.

Our HR partner at NatWest Mentor, has highlighted a few key points business owners might need to consider.

Financial options

The harsh reality is some businesses are still struggling, which impacts their ability to pay employees when the government support is withdrawn. If you find yourself in this situation, start to consider your options now:

- Are there any alternatives to redundancies such as offering reduced hours or pay?
- Can some employees take a period of unpaid leave or gradually phase back to work as your business recovers?

As well as this, for some business's redundancy will be the only viable option. If you anticipate 20 or more potential redundancies within your business, there may be a requirement to collectively consult (a consultation between employer and employee regarding proposed dismissal) for 30-45 days. It's also worth remembering that furlough grants can't be used to cover notice pay, annual leave, maternity, sick pay or redundancy pay. Make sure you aren't caught short and seek relevant advice to build a plan now.

Employees returning to work

Consistent engagement with your employees will help make sure their return to work goes smoothly.

Here we have listed a few actions your business can take to welcome furloughed team members back into the office:

- Consider your employees' personal circumstances and identify any concerns or issues in advance in order that you can build clear plans to address any barriers or further requirements for support well in advance.
- Re-evaluate employees' skills, employment status and establish any areas of training required to boost their confidence
- Invest in culture and wellbeing at work. This can be done by introducing wellbeing training for all staff, managerial refresher training, host social events (in a covid friendly location).
- Consider your work policies and procedures and whether any of them need to be re-written to reflect your new working model.

How can Natwest Mentor help?

No matter what your plans, it's really important that you seek expert advice to make sure you are doing the right thing for your employees whilst keeping your business safe. Our HR partner at NatWest Mentor consists of a team of strategic experts who can provide you with guidance on best practices, whilst also supporting your compliance with the relevant employment legislation.

If you would like further information or advice on how Natwest Mentor can support your business visit our HR Consultancy Services page [here](#) to contact one of our team for an initial consultation.

For more information please contact [Deval Patel](#) or call us on +44 (0)20 7299 1456, or to read the full article and find out more about Gerald Edelman, [visit our website](#)