RETURNING TO WORK DURING COVID-19
ACAS GUIDANCE UPDATED

INTRODUCTION

In Workforce Matters Issue No. 10 (dated 11 May) we provided information on the Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy as it moves to the next phase of its response by easing some of the existing lockdown measures.

As part of these measures, Government has confirmed that, whilst those that can work from home should continue to do so, anyone that cannot, which includes those in construction and manufacturing, is actively encouraged to return to work.

In response to this, ACAS has updated its previous advice to employers and employees on COVID-19 to include guidance on returning to the workplace and doing so safely. The key elements of the guidance are summarised below.

PLANNING A RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

- It is important for employers and employees to talk as early as possible about when they can return to the workplace. As above, if staff can continue to work from home, they should.
- Where an employer is planning for employees to return to the workplace, ACAS advise that they must consult with staff and employee representatives, including any trade union representatives and health and safety officials.
- They advise that risk assessments should be completed to ensure the workplace is as safe as possible for staff, customers and anyone else who visits. Employers must adhere to the Government's recently published guidance on working safely during COVID-19.
- Some employees may feel anxious about safety and returning to the workplace and are encouraged to discuss any concerns with the employer.
- Employers should provide any health and wellbeing support, for example occupational health or mental health services.

WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYEE DOES NOT WANT TO RETURN TO WORK?

- Some people might feel they do not want to go to work if, for example, they're afraid of catching coronavirus, particularly those who are at higher risk. Where this is the case, ACAS advise employers to take any issues raised seriously, listen to any concerns and take steps to protect employees.
- If they still do not want to return to work, then employers may wish to discuss alternatives such as taking time off as holiday or unpaid leave, at the employer's discretion.
- If an employee refuses to attend work without a valid reason, this could result in disciplinary action.

OTHER KEY AREAS TO NOTE

➢ **Support the Health and Safety of the workforce** – ensure social distancing is in place e.g. 2 meters apart and extra safety steps are taken for employees within vulnerable groups. Avoid busy commuting times on public transport where essential travel is required. Hand washing facilities including hand sanitiser and tissues are recommended and employees should be encouraged to use these.

➢ **Coronavirus Awareness –** managers should be clear on how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and know the steps to take should this occur. Employees should be kept abreast of actions taken by the company to reduce risks of exposure to Covid-19 in the workplace.

➢ **Flexible Working and Home Working**– employers should continue to support employees return to work as efficiently and safely as possible which might include agreeing more flexible ways of working. Remember, employees who continue to work from home should be paid as usual. Employers should also maintain regular contact to check on health and wellbeing.

NOTE:
BESA Employment Affairs will issue further information as this becomes available. Meanwhile, please visit the COVID-19 hub at www.thebesa.com or contact employment.affairs@thebesa.com for further information.