



Supporting occupational health
and wellbeing professionals

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Society of Occupational Medicine and partners launch free toolkit to help employers create safer workplaces for returning employees

18th May: Businesses can get free expert advice on how to make their workplaces COVID-secure, from The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM).

With the support and input from several national organisations, SOM today launches a **Returning to the workplace after the COVID-19 lockdown** toolkit designed to help employers and occupational health professionals get the nation back to work, safely.

Dr Will Ponsonby, President of SOM, said: *“Our toolkit supports the directions and advice from the UK Government, the Health and Safety Executive, and Public Health England. It provides advice, guidance and links to other resources that will help employers manage risks in reopening workplaces, and help them understand and conform to their legal obligations. Following the toolkit’s guidance will ensure workers feel confident to go back to work safely.”*

The toolkit, free to download from the SOM website, has been developed with help from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Business in the Community (BITC), and Mind, the mental health charity.

Peter Cheese, CEO CIPD, said: *“We have to plan ahead for what is likely to be a staged return to work over what could be prolonged periods. Employers need to be clear about the principles of how we do this well. Central to those principles should be how we take care of our people, and support their wellbeing wherever they are working, including concerns or anxiety about their safety in workplaces or getting to work. The toolkit from SOM will help employers put into place systems that will allay those fears.”*

Amanda Mackenzie OBE, CEO BITC, said: *“We want people coming back to work motivated to build back better. Companies must realise that COVID is not a great leveller. Some groups require more support than others. As responsible businesses, we must step up and meet this new challenge with our eyes open, which this toolkit will help people do.”*

Emma Mamo, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at Mind, said: *“The coronavirus outbreak has caused large and sudden changes to the way we work, with businesses and employees forced to adapt quickly. Adjustments can present challenges, including to the mental health and wellbeing of the UK workforce. As lockdown measures begin to lift, staff will be looking to their employers to provide guidance during these uncertain times. Many employers are having to make tough decisions and plan for lots of different outcomes. We hope this Returning to the workplace toolkit will be a useful resource in helping ease the transition and make sure staff coming back to the workplace are reassured that their safety and wellbeing are a priority.”*

Susan Clews, Chief Executive Acas, said: *“The COVID-19 outbreak has been an incredibly challenging time for workplaces. We know that businesses and workers are looking for practical tips on how to get back to work safely.”*

“It is clear that real engagement and dialogue with employees is crucial to organisations adapting successfully, which is why Acas is pleased to support this new advice from The Society of Occupational Medicine and partners. It accompanies existing guidance from the Government and Health and Safety Executive which aims to address the very real concerns people have on managing the safety risks on returning to work post lockdown.”

SOM understands that for most businesses, helping workers return safely and productively will be a considerable challenge. Its advice is for businesses to plan for any return, and any plans should have the agreement of managers, human resource professionals, the workers themselves and the unions that represent them.



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The complexity of any return to work plan will reflect the size of the organisation and the SOM toolkit includes step-by-step advice on how to do this. It also includes advice for occupational health professionals advising businesses.

The toolkit is available to download from www.som.org.uk/return-to-work/

#ends#

Notes for editors

- Case studies are available, please contact Maya Anaokar, Brightbay Media on 07976 835 658 and info@brightbaymedia.com
- The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy is available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB_1_.pdf

About The Society of Occupational Medicine:

- The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) is a multi-disciplinary professional society whose membership includes over 1,700 OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and technicians. SOM Patrons are Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black and Sir Norman Lamb.

About occupational health:

- Occupational health (OH) helps people of working age access and stay in appropriate work and live full and healthy working lives despite underlying disabilities or health conditions. Occupational clinicians help employers reduce sickness absence and increase productivity by providing advice on best practice and how to comply with legal duties such as the Equality Act 2010 and Health and Safety legislation. They advise on fitness for work, return to work programmes, workplace adjustments to enable people with health conditions to return to/remain at work, suitable alternative work and early retirement on ill health grounds.
- Occupational clinicians interpret the instructions of the government and Public Health England/Health Protection Scotland and the most up-to-date clinical evidence to support businesses in keeping their workforce well. They use their combination of clinical expertise and deep understanding of how health affects work to empower managers and employers to make the right decisions, at the right time, to ensure the health both of their employees and their businesses e.g. what employers should do when workers are pregnant and what steps managers should take with their older and more vulnerable employees.
- The need for robust and increasing OH services in many sectors has been highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. The need for advice from occupational health doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, hygienists, ergonomists etc. on all aspect of business policy, the adequacy of control and how to protect our workers continuing to face the public has never been greater, and is the core role of OH.

About Acas:

- Acas is an independent and impartial statutory body governed by a Council. The Council consists of a Chair and 11 members who represent employer, worker or independent interests.
- Acas aims to make working life better for everyone in Britain. It advises millions of people every year on how to resolve issues at work, through its website, through its helpline, and through workplace training. When things go wrong at work, Acas offers conciliation, both to individuals and to groups represented by trade unions. www.acas.org.uk

About Business in the Community (BITC):

- Business in the Community (BITC) is the oldest and largest business-led membership organisation dedicated to responsible business. BITC was created nearly 40 years ago by HRH The Prince of Wales to champion responsible business.
- BITC inspire, engage and challenge members and mobilise that collective strength as a force for good in society to:
 - develop a skilled and inclusive workforce for today and tomorrow;
 - build thriving communities where people want to live and work;
 - innovate to sustain and repair our planet. www.bitc.org.uk



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About the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD):

- The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has a community of more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development. www.cipd.co.uk

About Mind:

- Mind, the mental health charity, provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Mind campaigns to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. Mind won't give up until everyone experiencing a mental health problem gets both support and respect. mind.org.uk
- Please note that Mind is not an acronym and should be set in title case.

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