

RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

Line manager 1:1 conversation guide

Version 1
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INTRODUCTION

As each country or location starts the process of returning to the workplace we need to balance 3 things – the work that can be better done in the workplace, the needs and personal circumstances of individuals and the numbers that can safely be accommodated in the workplace.

As a line manager it's important you understand both the business priorities and how the members of your team are feeling about returning to the workplace. The objective of your 1:1s with your team is to:

- 1) let them know if it is considered that their work is work best done in the workplace;
- 2) understand and hopefully resolve issues and concerns they may have about returning to the workplace OR continuing to work from home, and
- 3) be in a position to confirm to the relevant person/team who will need to be given access to a particular building.

You role is to set expectations, provide reassurance and give confidence about the next phase for your employees.

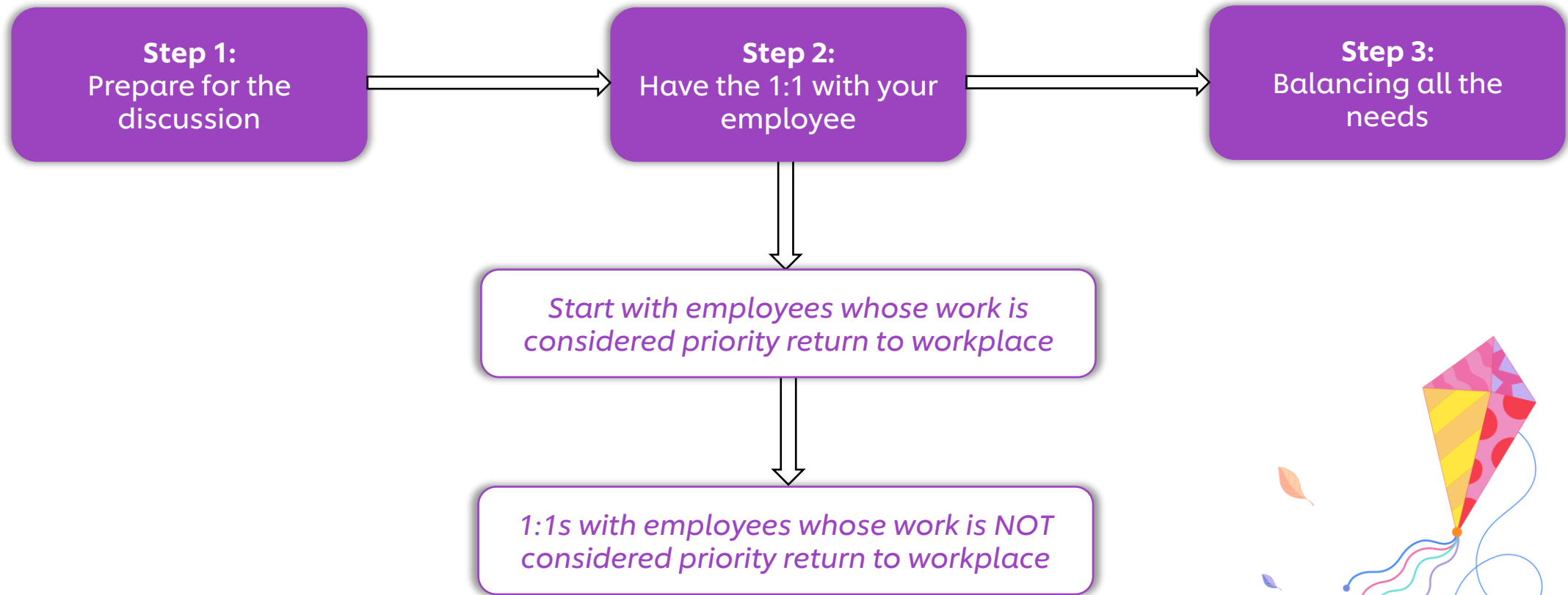
You may need to get input from others (eg MOH) before next steps for each team member is agreed.

Returning to the workplace or continuing to work at home may cause anxiety and stress for some individuals. Just as it was ok not to be ok about going into lockdown, it's ok not to be ok about moving to the next phase. There is guidance below about what to do if you are concerned about anyone in your team.

And remember, this is not a one-off discussion. It's likely to be the first of a series of similar conversations as the situation evolves and we hopefully move through the tiers with more people being able to return to the workplace. Conversations you have now are about working arrangements for this next phase of the current crisis. What's appropriate and can be managed for now, may not be right for the longer term so you should avoid over committing at this stage.

If someone in the team does want to make a permanent change to working arrangements (eg formally reducing their working hours) you should seek advice from the relevant People Experience Lead in the normal way.



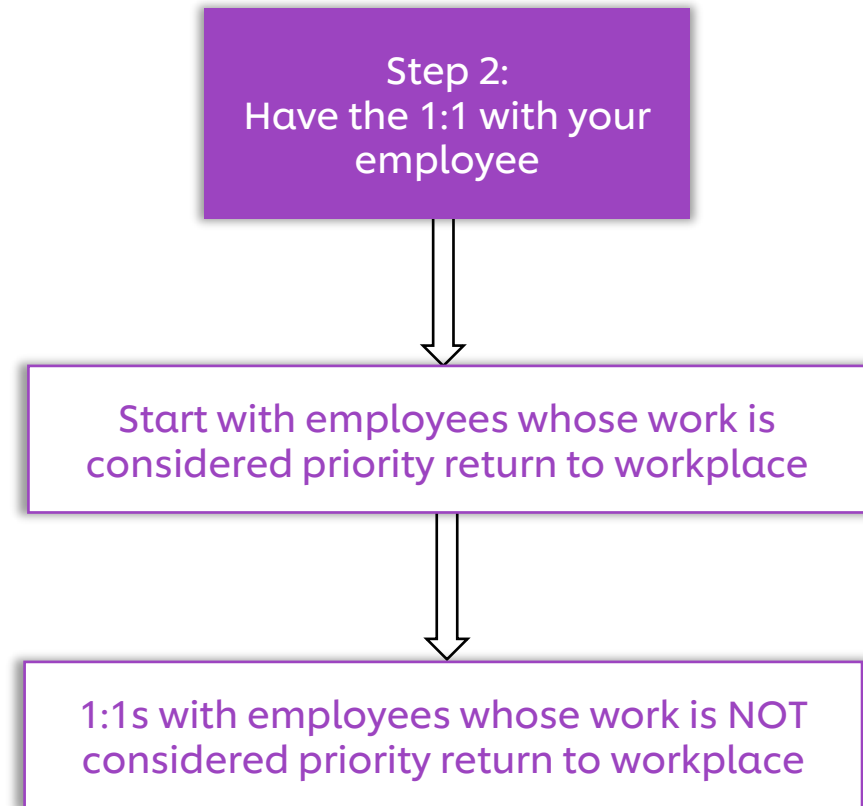


CLICK ON A BOX TO GO STRAIGHT THERE



STEP 1: PREPARE FOR THE DISCUSSION

- 1** Before having 1:1s with your teams, make sure you have had a conversation with your own line manager about your situation and discussed any concerns you may have either about returning to the workplace or continuing to work at home. Remember that the EAP is there to support you too.
- 2** Do you know which roles/teams have been identified and confirmed as the priority to return to the workplace? Does this impact your team? Are you able to explain why the work of your team has (or has not been) prioritised for return?
- 3** If yes, familiarise yourself with how the workplace has been prepared in readiness for employees to return and what will be required of individuals? You will need to know this to be able to answer questions and provide reassurance to team members.
- 4** If yes, but the workplace is not a Unilever building, are you familiar with the safety protocols your team members will need to follow when working? It's important that you are able to reassure the employee that safety is our No 1 priority and explain how we are doing this.



STEP 2: PRIORITY ROLES



Turn your video on that the beginning of the meeting. This will encourage your team member to do the same.



Check that they have attended a town hall/received the booklet which explains Unilever's approach to returning to the workplace. Explain that in a slow and very phased way we are preparing for employees being able to return to the workplace.



Explain that their work/role has been identified as priority to return to the workplace and why that is important to the business.



We want employees to open up about how they are feeling about the situation and flush out any issues and concerns so that we can deal with these in the best, most appropriate way. Avoid questions that can simply be answered with 'fine' or 'ok'.



Ask the employee to rate how they feel about their return to the workplace on a scale of 1 (actively want to go back to the workplace) to 10 (very anxious or concerned) about returning to the workplace.

Ask them to explain their score – what specifically were the factors that influenced what they said?

If the employee is expressing concern about returning, explore each of the issues with them. For example, "You mentioned you are worried about childcare. Tell me more about that" or "You said you are concerned because you have a vulnerable person in your household. What specifically about that is concerning you with regards to coming back to the workplace?"

Provide reassurance about the measures Unilever is putting in place to protect people returning to the workplace.

Consider whether the work that someone does, and the concerns that they have raised, mean we need to consider specific additional adjustments, over and above the standard measures that will be in place. If necessary discuss the feasibility of these adjustments with relevant people eg local MOH, local workplace lead.

If the concerns are not things that Unilever has control over, help the employee think through what they could do to deal with the issue. For example, "You said that were worried about getting the bus to work. What could you do that would make you feel more comfortable with taking the bus?" OR "What other options are there for you?" If appropriate suggest some alternatives for consideration – "Do you have a bike?" or "How far is it, have you considered walking?" or "What about if you travelled at off-peak times?"



Everyone's feelings about returning to the workplace are valid. But it's also important to understand if barriers to return are things they do not have control over, or, are a preference based on how the employee is feeling. For example, if schools are not open for their children at this point lack of childcare is likely to be a legitimate barrier to return. If schools are open, but it is the employee's preference not to send their child to school at the moment, that is a different challenge.

Are there outstanding concerns that can't be resolved in this discussion? You may need input from others to reach a conclusion about the employee returning to the workplace immediately. [See section below on dealing with possible barriers to work.](#)

If the employee is comfortable to return to work, and where applicable you have been able to reassure the employee on any concerns they may have had about return, let them know what the next steps are likely to be eg when you expect to have a date of return confirmed. [See section below on dealing with possible barriers to work.](#)

If there are adjustments that are agreed to facilitate the individual's return to the workplace during the current crisis, it's important that these are captured but also that it is made clear these are temporary and will be reviewed as the situation evolves. **What's right for now, may not be right in a few months' time.**

If applicable also reassure the employee that barriers they may currently have about a return to work don't in any way impact on job security. We understand the issues people are currently facing

If there are outstanding points for you or the employee need to consider further or get more information, make a note of these and be clear on what the actions are and for whom.

Keeping notes and confirming with employee

In either case, make a written note of what you have discussed and summarise it back to the employee to confirm that you and the employee have the same understanding of the conversation and the follow up actions.

Check if there are any specific requirements in the country in which your employee is based about keeping a written record of the discussion.

It's recommended that as a minimum you email the employee, cc'ing their People Experience Lead with a summary of your discussion (and agreed actions if applicable).



DEALING WITH POSSIBLE BARRIERS TO RETURN TO WORKPLACE

Employee is describing more than normal levels of anxiety about coming out of lockdown

Just as it was OK not to be feeling OK about lockdown starting, it is OK not to be feeling OK about coming out of it. Most people will have some level of anxiety about coming out of lockdown but for some it has allowed them to feel safe (perhaps from things they struggled with before the COVID crisis eg social interaction) and the prospect of needing to leave this safety may be triggering significant levels of anxiety.

Things to look out for when your employee talks about how they are feeling:

- Not able to think about anything else other than coronavirus/COVID-19
- Anxiety is interfering with daily life – eg not going out for exercise or to public spaces because of fears about the virus
- Isolating when it isn't necessary
- Feeling hopeless or angry about the situation
- Not eating or sleeping well
- Physical symptoms like frequent headaches or an upset stomach

If you are concerned that the employee is describing unusually heightened levels of anxiety about returning to the workplace, they should be referred to MOH who will advise on their fitness to return and what steps that could be considered to facilitate the process.

Employee is worried about using public transport to come to work and driving/walking/cycling is not possible

First consideration is government guidance on using public transport. If it is only to be used by 'key workers' and the employee does not fit the definition, there should be no pressure put on the employee to use it. If this is not the case other alternatives should be considered. Can journeys be done at less busy times? Could the employee take a taxi? (Check country specific guidance on costs for this option).

Employee is concerned because they have someone vulnerable or being shielded in their household.

Explain the measures that will be in place to keep employees safe. Even where someone is shielding at home because of serious health issues, those in the household are not normally required to isolate as well, although extra care does need to be taken with social distancing. If the employee is not reassured by the measures being put in place in the workplace, they should be referred to MOH who will determine whether or not a return to the workplace is safe for the employee, taking into consideration the specific health details of the vulnerable person in the household.



Employee cannot come to work because of lack of childcare

The specifics of school arrangements in each country need to be considered. If schools and nurseries are closed the employee will need to look after children for at least part of the time and this will need to be accommodate until the situation changes. In some households there may be others who can share this responsibility allowing the employee to return to the workplace at least part-time. If schools are open but parents are not currently required by law to send their children to school, then caution should be exercised about expecting parents to do so. In these circumstances you should continue to support the employee working at home.

Employee disagrees that their work is best done in the workplace

Explain why you believe it is best done in the workplace. Talk about the impact on the business of the work not being done in the optimal way. Listen carefully to employee's view and suggestions for how any issues may be mitigated.

What to do if the employee is not able to return to the workplace

As outlined above, for some employees there will be valid reasons for not being able to return to the workplace at this stage and in those cases, you should continue the discussions you have already been having about how to manage whilst working at home.

If it is the employee's preference to remain working at home for the time being and this is not validated by MOH, you should discuss with the relevant People Experience Lead how to deal with this taking into account the specifics of the employee's situation. This will include how practical it is to continue to do this, the potential impact on the business and what other compromise solutions may be appropriate in the specific case.



STEP 2: NON-PRIORITY ROLES



Most people will not be returning to work as part of the first wave (Tier 3). However, individuals will be asked to connect with you if they have particular concerns about continuing to work from home. Even if someone does not approach you directly, now would be a good opportunity to check in with your team and make sure that they have the help they may need at this time.



Check that they have attended a town hall/received the booklet which explains Unilever's approach to easement. Explain that in a slow and very phased way we are preparing for employees being able to return to the workplace.



Explain that their work/role has not been identified as priority to return to the workplace.



We want employees to open up about how they are feeling about the situation and flush out any issues and concerns so that we can deal with these in the best, most appropriate way. Avoid questions that can simply be answered with 'fine' or 'ok'.



Ask the employee to rate how they feel about continuing to work at home on a scale of 1 (happy about continuing to be at home) to 10 (very anxious or concerned).

Ask them to explain their score – what specifically were the factors that influenced what they said?

If the employee is concerned about continuing to work at home, explore the issues with them. Being in lockdown and having to work at home brings practical and emotional challenges for everyone. The purpose of this discussion is to try to identify if there is anything specific/exceptional about the individual's circumstances which would mean we should try to prioritise a facilitated return or partial return to the workplace, even if the work they do is not considered a priority. These might include:

- Concern for their mental wellbeing as a result of isolation
- Concern for their physical or mental safety because of domestic abuse
- Their physical safety (eg musculoskeletal damage) is at risk because of their working conditions eg cramped conditions, no appropriate workspace
- Limited access to technology (eg access to broadband) is seriously compromising their work output.



Concern for mental wellbeing

We have all dealt differently with lockdown and some have struggled more than others. Listen out for clues that someone may be in need of additional support. For example, people suffering from more than normal levels of anxiety may experience:

- Unusual decrease in energy and activity, listlessness
- Unusual restlessness and worrying
- Having trouble sleeping or relaxing
- Panic attacks
- Change in eating pattern (eating more, eating less)
- Easily startled and feeling 'on edge'
- Constant complaining, blaming others, increased irritability, angry outbursts
- Frequent crying
- Unexplained headaches and stomach upsets
- Increased use of alcohol

If you are concerned about a team member, encourage them to use the EAP support and consider making a referral to MOH to ensure they are getting the support they are need with their mental health.

Domestic abuse

Watch out for possible signs of domestic abuse. These might include a dip in performance since being at home, changes in the way an employee dresses (eg excessive clothing on hot days), excessive amounts of make-up, seeming nervous of a partner being around.

Give the employee an opportunity to open up if they want to although this may be difficult as their partner is likely to be at home too. Ask questions like 'I've noticed you haven't seemed yourself, is there anything which might help?'

If your employee does raise concerns of this nature, speak to your PEL who can signpost on where help may be available.

Home workstation set up

Through using video on Teams calls you will probably already have observed the employee's home-working set up. If you haven't already done it, take this opportunity to talk through how they are managing and assessing with them their workspace. If required, is it possible/practical for them to get additional equipment to avoid potential musculoskeletal issues?

Opportunity to review working at home arrangement

Even if there is no exceptional reason for prioritising someone's return to the office, this is a good opportunity to review their working at home arrangements – how they are managing to juggle workload with domestic responsibilities, helping them with prioritisation, considering redeployment if there is spare capacity.



STEP 3: BALANCING THE NEEDS

There are 3 things that need to be balanced:

1. It is possible that if your team or some of your team have been prioritised to return to the workplace there will be individuals who have concerns about this or practical barriers to doing so.
2. Although these cases are likely to be exceptional, you may also have individuals we should consider helping to return to the workplace sooner than would otherwise be required.
3. The measures that are being put in place for social distancing to keep our workplaces safe mean that capacity in the workplace is reduced and only a limited number people will be able to return.

If there is a mismatch in your team between people who are not able to return but their work can be done better in the workplace and those who have compelling reasons to return even where their work can be done at home, consider whether there is any possibility of temporarily reallocating work so that we can meet individual needs as well as business priorities.

If this is not possible, and you have someone in your team who you believe should be permitted to return to the workplace, even though their work can be done at home, speak to the team responsible for co-ordination of workplace returns in the employee's location

Further questions?
Please speak to your
People Experience Lead

