



Evolving Markets Webinar Series: Reopening your workplace Q&A

Thank you for attending our 'Reopening your workplace' webinar on Wednesday 6 May 2020. We had a fantastic response to the Q&A and therefore were unable to answer all of your questions live so our panel have reviewed them all and provided a response below.

- [Cerys Jones](#), Director - Workplace & Facilities Management
- [Liz Clements](#), Director - Workplace Strategy & Change
- [Simon Miller](#), Chief Operating Officer
- [Tony Burchett](#), Managing Director - Workplace Arts & Culture
- [Daryl Perry](#), Director & UK Head of Research

[Click here](#) to visit the Reopening your workplace resource centre where you can find out more about the framework.

13 May 2020

The spread of COVID-19 and the containment policies being introduced are changing rapidly. While information in the briefing notes is current as of the date written, the views expressed herein are subject to change and may not reflect the latest opinion of Avison Young. Like all of you, Avison Young relies on Government and related sources for information on the COVID-19 outbreak. We have provided links to some of these sources, which provide regularly updated information on the COVID-19 outbreak. The content provided herein is not intended as investment, tax, financial or legal advice and should not be relied on as such.

Workplace Strategy & Framework

Could you give us an example of the type of initiative you are working on to support a company who are returning to the work place?

Our facilities managers and workplace consultants have been helping clients work through our Avison Young 'Reopening your Workplace' Framework. This includes using a measures checklist to identify what they want to put in place to support their staff coming back into the workplace, as well as reviewing space plans to apply a 2 metre distancing rule, make recommendations on cleaning schedules, front of house policies and developing and maintaining continuous communications with the workforce.

Why has Avison Young decided to adapt a different approach to supporting a return to the workplace?

At Avison Young we offer a tailored, consultative approach. Whilst we have an established toolkit of well-developed checklists, guidelines and protocols, we are highly conscious of the fluidity of the current situation and therefore we have refrained from publishing data that could quickly become out of date. Instead we work with our clients to develop a bespoke solution based on the nature and location of the workplace, what capacity the layout will accommodate when the 2 metre rule is applied and the criticality of employees returning to the office. We recognise one size does not fit all.

You mentioned a checklist in step 3, what's on that?

The checklist is constantly evolving to accommodate updated information and guidance released from the UK Government.

It currently covers FM services; IT; HR; communications as well as statutory and government guidance on achieving a compliant and COVID-secure workplace. It is worth noting the government guidance on the appointment of a H&S representative that this needs to be someone chosen by a trade union or by employees.

It can be adapted to suit your needs – so some of the elements may be relevant if you occupy a multi-tenanted building in a city-centre location or you occupy space you own.

13 May 2020

I've read in the press some concerns about risks, do you cover that in the framework?

Yes, in Step 3 one of the activities is to run a risk workshop to capture risks and to keep reviewing them throughout. Employers have a duty to consult their people on health and safety. You can do this by listening and talking to them about the work and how you will manage risks from COVID-19. The people who do the work are often the best people to understand the risks in the workplace and will have a view on how to work safely; involving them in decision making shows that you take their health and safety seriously. You must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by workers. As an employer, you cannot decide who the representative will be.

You will also need to enlist support from your legal and risk teams.

As part of the Government guidelines issued 11 May 2020 it outlines the responsibilities of the employer, this includes the appointment of a HSE representative along with the requirement for an up to date risk assessment and register to be maintained.

The Government propose that the results of your risk assessment are shared with your workforce. If possible, you should consider publishing the results on your website (the Government are expecting all employers with over 50 workers to do so). There is also a notice that should be displayed in your workplace to show you have followed this guidance.

This should include the following statements:

We have carried out a **COVID-19 risk assessment** and shared the results with the people who work here

We have **cleaning, hand washing and hygiene procedures** in line with guidance

We have taken all reasonable steps to **help people work from home**

We have taken all reasonable steps to **maintain a 2 metre distance** in the workplace

Where people cannot be 2 metres apart, we have done everything practical to **manage transmission risk**

The statement is available to download from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres> and should be signed by your HSE representative.

13 May 2020

If we are going back to the drawing board – how do we ensure we are keeping sustainability at the core of any plans that we undertake?

Part of our Workplace Strategy and Change framework poses the questions around sustainability aspirations from the outset.

What do we do if there's a change to the Government guidance while we're building our plans?

On Tuesday 12 May, the government issued its guidance for offices as we work through the various COVID-19 alert stages. The success of each stage is being measured and may result in the tightening of restrictions or new restrictions if success is not met. Page 5 of the government's guidance on working safely in offices states:

“Employers have a duty to reduce workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level by taking preventative measures. Employers must work with any other employers or contractors sharing the workplace so that everybody's health and safety is protected.

In the context of COVID-19 this means working through these steps in order:

- In every workplace, increasing the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning.*
- Businesses and workplaces should make every reasonable effort to enable working from home as a first option.*
- Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every reasonable effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government (keeping people 2 metres apart wherever possible).*
- Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.*
- Further mitigating actions include:*
 - Increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.*
 - Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.*
 - Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.*
 - Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.*

13 May 2020

-Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).

-Finally, if people must work face-to-face for a sustained period with more than a small group of fixed partners, then you will need to assess whether the activity can safely go ahead. No one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment. "

With any project there's always a change – big or small. Our recommendation is to get the whole team to review the principles agreed at the beginning and then look at the measures and what needs to change. Agree them and then adjust your plans.

We have built in a review process into the framework. So as you go through it you're checking to make sure that what you're about to do is still the right course of action.

How do we decide who should return to the workplace?

On Sunday 10th May, the Prime Minister stated that if you can continue working from home in order to limit contact with other people then you should do so. On Tuesday 12 May, the Government guidance on offices was released and it sets out in section 2 the types of groups that organisations may want to consider returning to the workplace. As an organisation you may identify certain activities that cannot be completed at home and remain critical to your business. Once these groups are identified we suggest speaking with those people to understand their journeys into work (i.e. do they need to use public transport) and any obstacles which would make it difficult for them to do so. Once you have numbers identified you can start to address shift patterns and operating times to accommodate these groups whilst applying physical distancing, which in most cases would dramatically reduce the occupancy levels to between 20% and 50%.

13 May 2020

Workplace management and practical considerations

What is expected to be the guideline for the use of lifts? Is it one person at a time/half the lift capacity?

The use of lifts should be minimised and the use of stairs actively promoted. Where lifts have to be used employers and landlords should provide clear guidelines i.e. occupants to face away from each other, face masks to be worn and the use of floor markers to restrict the number of passengers. Limiting those using the lift at any one time is essential and will be based on the capacity of the lift and the ability to space individuals out. Clearly defined cleaning schedules to accommodate cleaning of all touch points in and around the lift will be required along with increased cleaning throughout the day for stairwells.

What is your view on the use of meeting rooms and kitchen areas/coffee stations for the foreseeable future?

The approach you choose to take will largely be dependent on being able to maintain a 2 metre distance and so these are areas which need to be looked at both in terms of the amount of space and the cost of implications around increased cleaning regimes.

Where meetings can be carried out remotely then continue to do so. If it is impractical to hold meetings this way then we can help you look at the number of people you can accommodate in a meeting room.

You may choose to keep facilities open but to have someone on hand to clean after each person; you could choose to direct staff to bring in drinks and food from outside.

Should we close shared spaces (kitchens etc.)?

The approach you choose to take will largely be dependent on being able to maintain a 2 metre distance and so these are areas which need to be looked both in terms of the amount of space and the cost of implications around increased cleaning regimes. You may choose to keep facilities open but to have someone on hand to clean after each person; you could choose to direct staff to bring in drinks and food from outside.

13 May 2020

Cycling to work has been talked about in the press as a way of avoiding busy public transport options. However in most multi-let buildings the changing/shower facilities are unsuitable for social distancing. Have you looked at any solutions and do you think it possible to manage this in multi let buildings to enable people to cycle?

Putting place the right facilities to support staff returning to the workplace is essential to the success of transitioning the workforce back into the office. This requires engagement with landlords as part of your overall Return to workplace planning; a full comprehensive building plan should be published to building users.

Clearly lift usage is problematic but stairwells, as an alternative, will be that much busier. Surely social distancing will be impossible?

If you have a building manager or landlord then step 2 of the framework looks at finding out from your building manager or landlord what measures they are putting in place for your staff to get to your floor(s). We would advise that you communicate those measures with your staff. You may choose to consider controlling access to lifts and stairwells through a queuing system.

What is the role of janitorial services in ensuring the workplace is safe for reopening? How often should the desk, stair hand rails be cleaned?

Cleaning schedules will need to be developed in partnership with the cleaning provider and will be based on the levels of occupation. Ideally areas which are not required such as breakout spaces will be closed off, workstations will be cleaned after use and those that are not in use or allocated will be clearly defined. Continuous cleaning of high impact areas such as washrooms, staircases etc. will need to take place throughout the day. Cleaning of common areas will be delivered through the landlord and should be agreed in advance, supplying opening times and volumes of people expected to the landlord will help them prepare fully for the new enhanced cleaning regimes

Assuming staff feel safe commuting, what % of your staff can you accommodate day 1 in your offices?

In space planning our own offices, we have seen between 15-30% of desks being COVID-19 secure. This will vary from organisation to organisation and floor to floor, so each one needs to be looked at individually.

13 May 2020

What do you think will be the typical % of workforce returning to the office in the 1st/2nd and on-going return to workplace phases? 20% - 30%?

In space planning our own offices, we have seen between 15-30% of desks being COVID-19 secure. This will vary from organisation to organisation and floor to floor, so each one needs to be looked at individually.

Do you have any thoughts/advice about employees using public transport to get to an office other than staggering working hours?

The Prime Minister's guidance on Sunday 10 May 2020 is that those who can continue to work from home should do so and that where possible to seek alternatives to public transport such as walking, running or cycling. Where that is not feasible for those that must return to the workplace, then staggering hours is advisable.

Have you worked out what the pinch points are in terms of getting people back to the office?

Pinch points are likely to include anywhere where which impedes the 2 metres distancing - e.g. lifts, entry and exit points onto the floor; toilets; some tea points.

13 May 2020

Desks

Is the suggestion that hot-desking will come to an end?

Hot-desking for the immediate future should be removed along with any options to share equipment such as keyboards etc. Instead offer employees bookable spaces which will help you manage the number of occupants coming into the workplace on a daily basis and allocate desks allowing for a 2 metre distancing.

Controlling the desk allocations will also allow for suitable cleaning schedules to be applied so all workstations are cleaned thoroughly between uses. Longer term we will inevitably see hot-desking return as a prominent setting within the workplace but probably some of the restrictions and guidelines that are being put in place today will remain as an on-going feature in order to protect the workforce.

Please explain more about desk booking system

Most resource booking systems offer extensive tools to manage meeting rooms, catering, car parking, visitors and more. If you have an existing system, talk to your provider about acquiring a desk booking module as part of your solution. These can be quickly configured and will help you manage desk allocations, volumes of employees attending the office each day and planning of cleaning requirements. Avison Young have extensive experience in the selection and implementation of resource booking solutions and can assist with this process.

For desk booking, can you provide details of what tech you are using and the costs perhaps on a per desk basis?

There are a vast number of resource booking providers who provide both meeting room and desk booking software. We cannot recommend a single provider but would be able to help you review the market place and identify suitable solutions based on your portfolio size, requirements and budget.

Are you assigning meeting rooms as 'desks'?

Yes - it might be possible to assign meeting rooms as desk space. However it would be worth considering what changes you might need to make - for instance, if you need to provide power, data, monitor, keyboard, mouse, phone. Other considerations include whether the lighting, temperature and airflow is conducive for long periods of time. Thought will need to be given to how the space will be managed - i.e. will people book the room, will it be dedicated to one individual, the same individual?

13 May 2020

Staff Engagement

[Click here to view example staff survey questions](#)

A survey of staff, was mentioned what sort of questions were you asking, please?

We typically engage with staff on a fortnightly basis to understand how effectively they feel they are operating remotely, if they need any additional support or equipment, what they believe their requirements are from the office or need to visit a client site, and how frequently they feel they need to make such visits. We also capture information around travel times and journeys along with the individual comfort levels of employees making such journeys and being back in a shared environment. By using this data we are able to develop an informed and evolving plan. It is recognised that employees who attend offices in city centres, where public transport is key, that there is a much higher level of nervousness around a return to the workplace, too soon.

How often should you be engaging staff in a survey?

As a minimum - definitely in step 2 when you're gathering your info and while you're getting ready for day 1.

Thereafter - you'll be best placed to know if your staffs feel survey weary or if some teams really need greater levels of engagement. But also get some feedback from that staff that have moved back into the office – did they feel safe? Would they come back in? Balance between having lots of rules and giving people a sense of control and freedom.

From your surveys what do you think the appetite/ percentage of staff that wants to could return to the office on Day 1?

It's probably fair to assume that not everyone who could return wants to, and vice versa. You may as an organisation choose to prioritise those returning into those whose roles mean they must be in the office, and then those for whom working from home is no longer sustainable. However you choose to prioritise - asking people how they feel and what they are concerned about will help make the right decisions and engender confidence.

Do you have a list of those survey questions that you could share?

Avison Young can support you to build a tailored suite of employee communications, we recognise that each of our clients maybe at different stages of their Return to the Workplace journey and therefore we work with you to build clear and appropriate messaging.

13 May 2020

What do you think the implications are for those employees who feel “coronaphobic” and still don’t feel safe to come back to a physical office until, say a vaccine is available?

Implications for anyone who feels trapped by circumstance without the opportunity to discuss how they feel, will impact anyone’s mental wellbeing and their capacity to work at their best. Your HR teams may already be looking at what they can do to support those that need help. Clear employee communication plan is critical but should remain adaptable to reflect individual client circumstance.

I am extremely nervous about returning to the workplace so soon, I like many have a 3-4 hour commute a day and I also have underlying health conditions. Am I likely to be penalised if I decide it is safer for me to work at home, as my role fully facilitates this.

The majority of employers with whom we are working with are actively encouraging their staff to remain at home for the foreseeable future. We are assisting these organisations to ensure their employees have a good level of support and the right equipment to operate remotely. Returning those who don’t need to be in the office short term is not feasible for many businesses due to the restricted capacities. Employers are concentrating on doing the right thing and developing strategies that support those with critical needs to ease back into the workplace or a field based role.

Many London knowledge workers are concerned about going back to their offices not only because of the risk traveling with public transport but the time they spend on traveling for example. Through this time working remotely they have found that working from home could save this time which has a positive impact on their wellbeing. Hence, there are some publications predicting that offices might not be needed. However, how to encourage these workers to come to the office? Why do we need offices?

Undertaking a workplace study would help to identify what it is that staff need from the workplace. The response to this may be different today as it was before lockdown but taking the steps to engage your people will unlock some answers.

13 May 2020

Health & safety considerations

How will we deal with a scenario where a member of the team in the office has COVID-19?

A number of HR policies will need to be decided on. Further guidance is expected from the UK Government on how businesses should operate as a minimum, you may choose to go further. If the question is how to deal with a situation where someone has been in the office and then gone on to test positive for Covid-19, then steps you may choose to take could include: contact tracing; if you are in a multi-tenanted building then advising your landlord/building manager; stopping anyone further coming into the office until there has been a deep clean; keeping a record; advising staff of the steps you have taken.

Cerys, I believe you previously mentioned the use of 'temperature cameras'. Please could you elaborate further on this and the complications which could come with this use of technology?

Temperature cameras and thermal imaging are being assessed by a number of clients. This is likely to be a bespoke solution and the big question is then how you deal with an individual that is identified with a high temperature. This approach needs to be carefully introduced due to legal/GDPR implications of storing and using personal data.

What sort of PPE are you recommending for sites?

The guidance issued by Government on Tuesday 12 May reads: "Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against COVID-19 outside clinical settings or when responding to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high, your risk assessment should reflect the fact that the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited. However, if your risk assessment does show that PPE is required, then you must provide this PPE free of charge to workers who need it. Any PPE provided must fit properly." Although many organisations with whom we are working have opted to make PPE available either at request or as a business requirement. For more information of the use of face masks refer to section 6 of the government's guidelines.

13 May 2020

What steps are you seeing people taking with regard medic response? Those returning to the office that have had COVID-19 may have life changing respiratory conditions, and indeed we have a workforce who aren't necessarily used to handling 28 flights of stairs to reach the 14th floor - this gives me elevated trip, slip and fall risk, as well as the potential for increased cardiac conditions?

The topic of medics on site has been discussed by many, it is not one we are putting in place right now, for Avison Young, we have embarked on ensuring that every individual can continue to work from home full time until December 2020 and we will review during this period how we will assist more vulnerable individuals in our workplace or on site visits.

We will need guidance on fire evacuations also and maybe a "starburst" procedure implemented?

This is a good point to review existing evacuation procedures in line with changes to how the building is occupied and being operated. Any changes to the occupied space, walkways etc. will require a risk assessment.

Health and safety and building audits have always been a feature of the asset management of clients' premises and portfolios, whether in relation to statutory compliance or routine/planned maintenance. What are your views on what this regime may look like in practice in the post lock down environment, including regulation/enforcement?

During the lockdown period HSE have not relaxed the requirements for statutory and mandatory inspections therefore these should have continued during this period. However we recognise there may have been some disruption where the supply chain is complex or the requirement for parts has been necessary. If the building has been mothballed/shutdown, the BESA publication 'SFG30' provides guidance on ensuring the building is maintained and compliant for reactivation (to be read in conjunction with 'SFG20' guidance).

There may also be a requirement for additional checks on items such as water testing or HVAC, which would have been unused for prolonged periods whilst buildings have been unoccupied; or revision to maintenance schedules where the level of utilisation of specific items is likely to change due to changes in occupancy levels and requirements. A full review of all planned maintenance and compliance will be required as part of the return to the workplace planning.

13 May 2020

Longer term considerations

The changes to the office environment are critical, but, with remote working a reality for the foreseeable future what plans should businesses have in place for investment in equipment and infrastructure to support people working in their homes to ensure their environments are safe, productive and protect well-being as we would in offices?

Understanding your employees and their needs is critical at this time. Undertaking surveys including online DSE assessments will help you define those requiring additional equipment and support. Some organisations have decided to redistribute screens and chairs from the workplace via couriers and others have opted to purchase additional equipment to support their employees. A strategy and budget will need to be defined by your steering group and will no doubt be based on the volume of requests and the date for which you are looking to reoccupy your space. Remember everything going out will need to come back to the workplace at some point.

Could you please cover some costs considerations - for example, if there are some negotiations with providers, partners or even reducing size of the offices and hence saving costs?

In the short term you may see cost increases in cleaning; security; business insurance; service charges as well as any cost of implementing any changes to the physical workplace e.g. if you decide to install screens. Longer term you will have the opportunity to review how much space your business needs and define new ways of working to deliver cost containment where practical.

Are we talking paradigm shift here in terms of office use or a temporary change? Or just an acceleration of existing trends? What about the WeWork model, and other 'collaborative' workplaces? This seems to me that this is still a trend and that this is a temporary setback.

The requirement for flexible space is currently at an all-time low, whilst the strong shift to remote working continues. Once confidence in travel and managing the spread of infection is gained it is likely flex offices will again form part of many organisation's property strategy.

In the long term the workplace will change dramatically I agree, do you think that this will have an effect on business' culture? And how will a company like Avison Young, that is known for a good culture, deal with that potential risk?

Good culture is when there is alignment of our behaviours with what we believe to be our agreed values. Perhaps COVID-19 may prompt us all to re-evaluate our values and how we choose to behave, and therefore consider what, if any changes, we need to make to our physical workplace.

13 May 2020

Do the panel think that remote working in the future will increase and employers may downsize their offices because of current circumstances?

We believe remote/home working will be an increasing feature of working life in the future. Technology will be at the heart of this and the traditional workplace will need to evolve to meet the demands of the next generation. We believe this will include a blend of fixed term space, flex, and the adoption of more agile solutions.

How do businesses overcome managing social distancing outside of their units? E.g. customers needing to queue 2 metres apart to get in to shops / banks etc. If this is on a High Street or within a shopping centre, feels like permissions could be a challenge with Local Authorities / Centre Management around what can be used to achieve this and whose responsibility does it fall to?

The Government guidelines continue to state that physical distancing remains at 2 metres in all public spaces, at least in the short term. Many supermarkets and other businesses are already showing the way in this regard.

Trades Unions and other relevant bodies do not appear to have responded favourably to initial Government RTW draft guidance - particular concern that it gives employers too much scope to interpret the regulations. How much of a challenge is there in assisting clients in situations where Government advice is at odds with the views of other expert/interested organisations?

One of the key questions to answer in step 1 of our framework is to agree on what basis the measures are to be planned. We know that those business groups consulted by the Government on its proposals, raised concerns over needing greater clarity and to understand if the measures which employers are to take will be enforceable.

If offices can only be occupied with partial capacity, the cost per head becomes very high. What strategies for alternative occupancy are available to bring this back down and maintain social distancing?

We suggest getting in touch so that we can understand your spaces and how you operate to see what opportunities may exist to reduce occupancy costs.

13 May 2020