

## **COVID-19 Return to Work case study example**

Mrs. Jones is 54-year-old Customer Service Operator in a busy office. Her day to day role involves dealing with customer queries on the telephone and via email, as well as training some of the newer staff members.

In late April 2020 Mrs. Jones developed a temperature, a dry cough, and then shortness of breath. Mrs. Jones was diagnosed with COVID-19, and admitted to hospital for 7 days, although not in intensive care. Mrs Jones was discharged in May and although she no longer carried the COVID-19 virus she was still experiencing ongoing fatigue (worsened when walking short distances or doing any physical activity). Her voice also began to fade and tire after talking for more than 30 minutes.

Mrs Jones had kept her manager informed from the start of her illness. Before her absence she had been working from home during lockdown, but since her hospitalisation, she hadn't been feeling well enough to do her whole job. She was also feeling isolated and anxious about her future at the company. After reading about flexible work plans on the Your COVID recovery website, she was keen to discuss this idea with her manager.

Mrs. Jones talked to her manager about what she felt she was currently able to do and discussed some of the options she had read about. Together they agreed a flexible return to work plan over June and July, starting with three 3-hour days per week to begin with, and only using emails while her voice and fatigue levels continued to recover.

Over the next 3 weeks, Mrs. Jones gradually increased the variety of work that she took on. She then progressed to helping new starters, and as her fatigue levels improved, she began to work with customers via email to protect her voice.

Mrs. Jones reviewed the return to work plan every week with her line manager to ensure that she was pacing herself, and at the halfway point of the plan they agreed that she could start doing some customer facing telephone work, initially for just an hour a day, increasing gradually over the next few weeks as her voice began to return to normal.

As lockdown restrictions began to ease, Mrs. Jones was able to do a couple of non-consecutive days a week in the office. As the office was only a 15 minute walk from her house, this walk helped form part of the structured exercise programme that she had been working on to build up her stamina and help reduce her fatigue.

By the beginning of August, Mrs. Jones was working her full-time hours with a mix of home and office-based work. Mrs Jones continued to take regular breaks as necessary to pace herself, and she ensured that she maintained breaks between her phone and email-based work to ensure her voice still had plenty of rest time.

By the first week of September, Mrs. Jones was working full time in the office and she was able to deal with phone and email queries as and when they arrived, as well as still supporting the new staff in the office as required.



# Your COVID Recovery

Return to Work Plan			
<b>Employee:</b>	Mrs. Jones	<b>Line Manager:</b>	Mr. Singh
<b>Job Title:</b>	Customer Service Operator	<b>Employer:</b>	Busy Call Centre
<b>Date of Plan:</b>	1/6/20		

This return-to-work plan has been designed to safeguard Mrs. Jones’ return to work. It includes a phased increase in hours and duties, to be introduced as her stamina and voice improves. The following guidelines are an important part of supporting her safe, timely and durable return to work:

- Mrs. Jones will review this plan every week with her line manager to ensure that she is continuing to manage the hours and duties and that there are no issues with the work that is being completed.
- It is important that Mrs. Jones paces herself and does not work above and beyond the proposed hours/duties to avoid unnecessary aggravation of symptoms. The dates and times in the plan are flexible and should be used as a guide with appropriate medical input at each stage of the plan if necessary.
- Mrs. Jones can use any vacant rooms in the office should she need to take a more significant rest break at any stage.
- Flexibility of hours should be considered for any medical appointments during this plan.
- If Mrs. Jones is struggling with any aspect of this plan, the next stage of the plan should be put on hold (and the previous week repeated if necessary) until a discussion has taken place between all parties (including Mrs. Jones’s GP or Occupational Health if deemed necessary) to outline potential strategies to overcome any difficulties.
- The following table outlines broadly the duties at each stage of the plan. Depending on Mrs. Jones’s symptoms at the time, these duties can be tweaked or discussed with occupational health if there are any concerns regarding safety.

Category	Agreed Duties
<b>A</b>	Minimal physical activity; take rest breaks as needed. Very basic administration duties assigned by manager. No phone calls or client facing work, no work targets. Out of office message kept on emails.
<b>B</b>	As above plus coaching new starters and trainees. Line manager to assign additional tasks one at a time (no multi-tasking) with no set deadline times. Customer contact via emails only.
<b>C</b>	As above plus return to the office on non-consecutive days. Turn off email out-of-office message. 1 hour a day of outbound telephone work, to be split across the day as comfortable.
<b>D</b>	Increase telephone work in line with comfort, with an aim to be able to complete full range of tasks. Incoming calls to be recommenced, with assistance from team members as necessary (breaks from hunt line etc). Add physical tasks but keep to a minimum and take a break if any signs of breathlessness.



# Your COVID Recovery

Week	Start Date	Days	Working Hours	Total hours	Location	Duty Category
1	1/6/2020	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday	10am-1pm <b>Rest</b> 10am-1pm <b>Rest</b> 10am-1pm	9	Home all week	A
2	8/6/2020	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday	9am-1pm <b>Rest</b> 9am-1pm <b>Rest</b> 9am-1pm	12	Home all week	A/B
3	15/6/2020	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday	9am-1pm 9am-1pm <b>Rest</b> 9am-1pm 9am-1pm	16	Home all week	B
4	22/6/2020	Monday-Friday	9am-1pm	20	Home all week	B
Review of return to work plan with all parties at this stage						
5	29/6/2020	Monday - Friday	9am-1pm	20	2 non-consecutive days in office	B/C
6	6/7/2020	Monday-Friday	9am-2pm	25	2 non-consecutive days in office	C
7	13/7/2020	Monday-Friday	9am-3pm	30	3 non-consecutive days in office	C/D
8	20/7/2020	Monday-Friday	9am-4pm	35	3 days in office	C/D
Programme review during week 8 to check if Mrs. Jones feels ready to return to full time hours and duties the following week and consideration of any ongoing adjustments.						

## Agreement

*We agree to follow this plan to the best of our ability with the goal of a return to full time work for Mrs. Jones within the above time period.*

*We will review the plan weekly, and we understand it may need to change as deemed appropriate following discussions between us.*

Employee (Mrs. Jones) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Line Manager (Mr. Singh) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_