

Ibec survey shows bulk of employers eager to get staff back to workplace

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New research from employers' body Ibec reveals four out of five employers expect to have staff back at the workplace by September 2021, with CEO Danny McCoy stressing the need for a revised Government roadmap for reopening parts of the economy.

Nearly 80% of employers are planning to have staff returned to the workplace by September of this year, according to new Ibec survey statistics.

Speaking on the survey, Ibec CEO Danny McCoy, said there is a pressing need for clarity from Government on the timing of graduated workplace reopening for companies "in order to reignite collaboration, culture and confidence in their workforce."

He said the Government's roadmap "must be aligned with an ongoing review of reopening timelines that reflects the risk reduction that the vaccine programme is delivering. This means a potential earlier gradual return to workplaces than the previously flagged expected return time of September."

Four-fifths of employers intend to use a hybrid working model – some days onsite, some remote working – while 15% said all employees will return to work fully onsite. Just 4% of employers said they will allow some employees to continue to work fully remotely.

Of the various ratios of hybrid working (between onsite and remote work), three days onsite seems to be most popular. However, over one-third of employers have yet to decide or agree on what the ratio will be.

The types of work that need an onsite presence were listed as: collaborative work; client or other meetings; administrative work; manufacturing and production activities; technical work; lab work; facilities, IT; reception; printing, post; and warehousing

Remote work types include: routine administrative work, email follow up, transactional work; data analysis/research; desk-based activities; work that requires focus; finance and accounts; less sensitive work; some customer service; procurement; project management/project work; and some HR and Legal.

Just over 80% of employers are expecting increased requests from employees for remote working, while 87% of employers are expecting increased requests from employees for hybrid working.

Around 70% of employers said they will increase training for line managers in managing flexibility, and use new ways of working to facilitate flexibility.

INCREASED AMBITION

Around half of employers intend to limit national and international business travel, for a period; just under half of employers intend to limit business event attendance for employees, for a period as well. However, in the long run, less than 20% of employers intend to apply such limits.

Mr McCoy said that the employer survey trends point to a need for “increased ambition in the delivery of necessary infrastructure such as remote working hubs, alignment with childcare facilities, and the National Broadband Plan.”

However, “first and foremost” is the need for Government to outline to organisations how and when they can begin efforts to gradually return their staff safely to the office, he added.

“As swift a return as possible to office work is also vital in order to preserve the future of the many Experience Economy businesses in our towns and cities that rely on office worker footfall for their survival”, said the CEO.

OUTPUTS FOCUS

The Ibec survey also shows a long-term emphasis on mental and emotional wellbeing of employees, with over 60% of employers saying they will provide relevant supports indefinitely, with just over half of employers planning to provide supports for physical wellbeing.

There is also a clear shift in priorities when it comes to employee performance: more than half of employers said they will increase their focus on outputs rather than employee presence, while 45% said they will increase flexibility on work start/finish times.

On the use of physical space for offices/sites over the next two-three years, roughly the same proportion of employers (15%) said they would increase the amount of available physical space as those who said they would decrease physical space (16%). Just over 60% said they would keep the same amount of physical space.

On commuting times, a majority said a large proportion of their workforce will not face a long commute on returning to the workplace.