

# STAFF WELFARE



# DURING COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

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**Chris Goulding, Wade Macdonald**

Chris has worked locally within recruitment since the late 1990's. Having spent 18 years with a corporate recruiter, holding a number of Director roles, he made the move to Wade Macdonald two years ago to undertake the role of Managing Director.

During his twenty years' in the industry he has seen huge change in the way that head office functions are both perceived within business and the growing importance of those functions in the way that business decisions are made.

**Tina Wisener, Doyle Clayton**

Tina Wisener is one of the UK's outstanding employment lawyers advising corporates as well as senior executives. Her clients come from a broad range of sectors and she has particular expertise in advising financial services and tech businesses. Prior to qualifying as a solicitor, Tina served as an Army Officer specialising in human resources and change management providing an insight into both the strategic and operational issues that HR teams face, and a practical understanding of the day to day pressures and challenges her clients regularly deal with.



## FOREWORD

The COVID-19 pandemic has put many pressures on businesses that they have never felt before. Although the most obvious may seem to be the economic pressures, another consideration has been the genuine concern not only about the potential physical health implications to their workforce, but also the mental wellbeing with a huge rise in stress, fear and uncertainty.

Depending on their sector, the current crisis has hit organisations very differently. However, the single common factor for everyone is that life is extremely more stressful now than before the pandemic. Those working remotely face the stresses of lockdown, along with the mental and physical challenges of working from home with workspaces that may not be fit for purpose for everyday use, whilst possibly fighting their families for quiet space and battling home schooling, or looking after children who would normally be in nursery.

In mid May 2020, along with Doyle Clayton workplace law specialists, we decided to survey HR leaders in our business community to examine how businesses are adapting to manage their staff welfare and what preparations they are making to return to work. Just under 150 HR leaders took part in the survey. The following report is a summary of the results which we believe will be helpful to ensure that the return to the workplace is a smooth and successful one for all.

## STAFF WELFARE

The results of our survey suggest that businesses have attempted to look after the welfare of their staff during the pandemic. 59% of respondents said that they had pro-actively implemented a plan to for staff welfare, with a further 35% offering support on a more reactionary basis. Only 6% of respondents had no support in place.

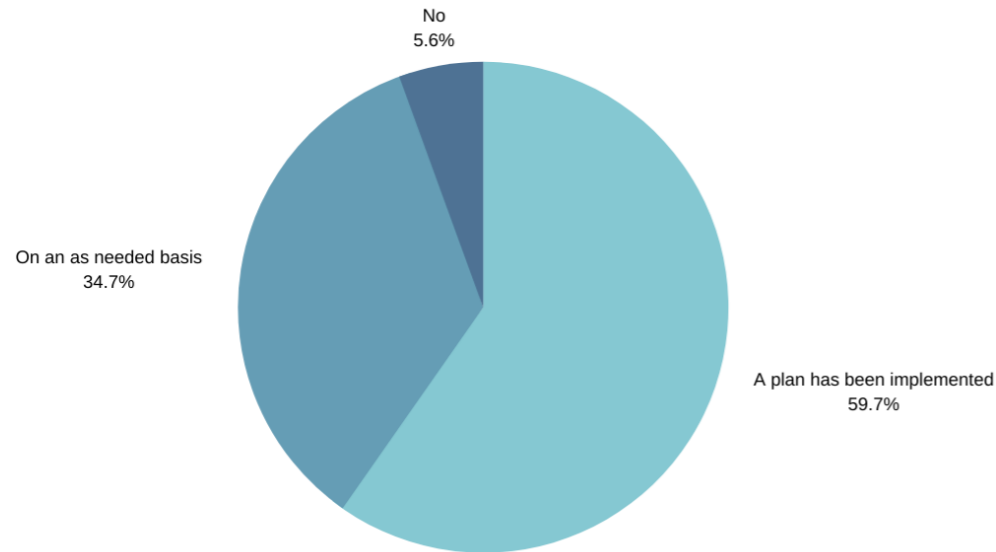


Figure 1: A graph showing whether a plan was set in place for staff welfare amongst respondents organisations.

There was a consistent approach from the businesses that responded. 81% provided access to an EAP, with 55% offering access to an online platform with self-service material. These platforms offering a wealth of information, often including fitness and dieting tips, along with ways to look after your mental wellbeing.

Just over a third of businesses gave their staff access to counselling services, with 16% providing a private doctor. 21% gave access to coaching. This highlights that employers have tried to address the needs of their employees during the pandemic and that they recognise the importance of people to their businesses.

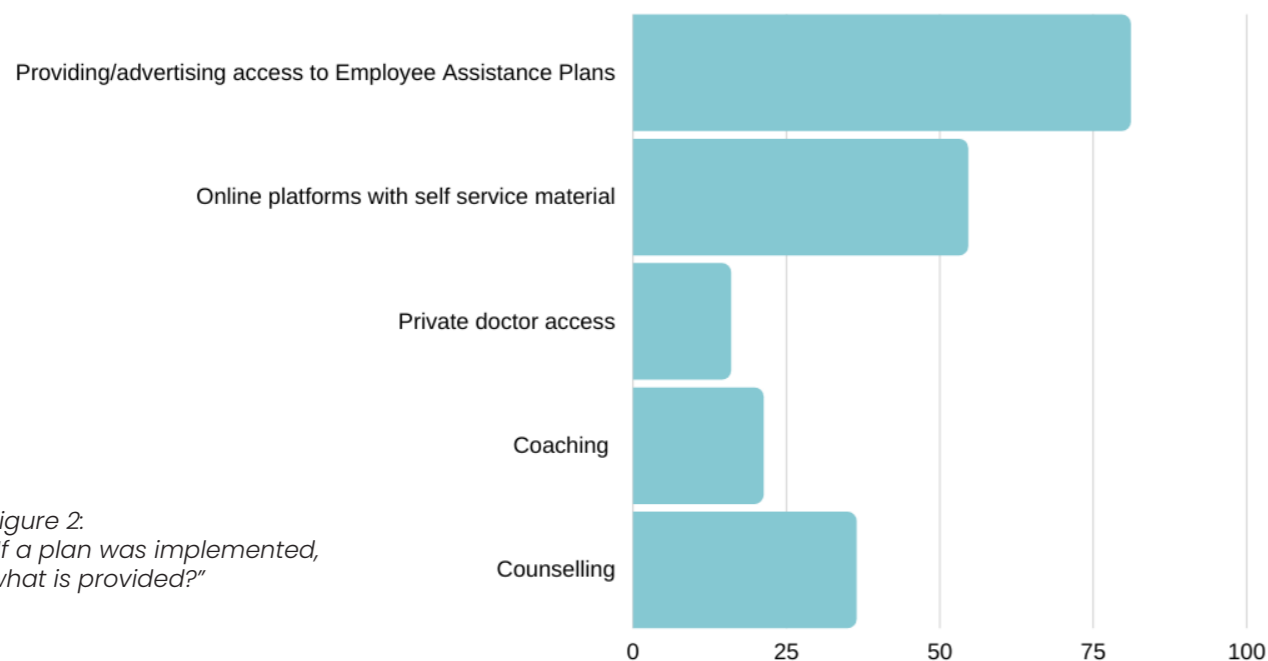


Figure 2: "If a plan was implemented, what is provided?"

## FURLOUGH

**YES** **NO**

60% 40%

Figure 3: "Have staff within your organisation been furloughed?"

The UK government have put together an unprecedented number of measures in order to try to protect businesses and to protect jobs. A scheme that has been accepted very positively by businesses has been the furlough scheme. It has been reported by the British Chamber of Commerce that 72% of British businesses have utilised the scheme so far. Of those that took part in our survey, 60% had taken advantage of the scheme to date.

We were keen to discover what provisions, if any, had been put in place to keep staff integrated with businesses whilst they were on furlough.

Again, the results shine a positive light on employers, with the majority trying to keep in contact with their staff through a multitude of ways. 83% said that they had regular contact. The most common ways of staying in contact were through telephone calls (54%), team video calls (41%) and company newsletters (39%). 32% have got on board with the lockdown phenomenon of having 'virtual social events' such as quizzes or drinks nights.

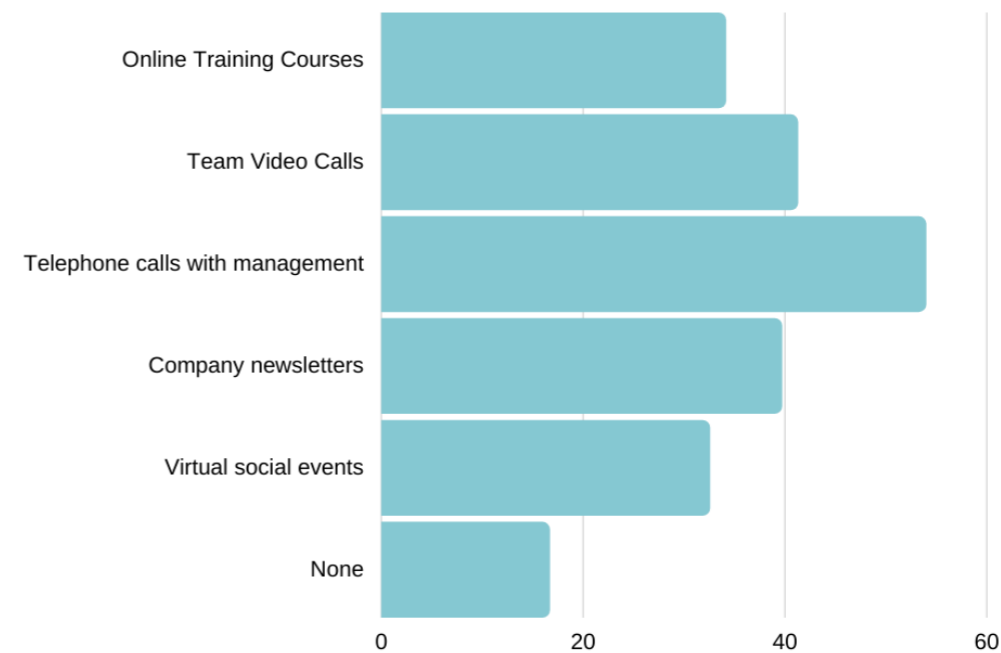


Figure 4: Provisions put in place by respondents employers to keep staff integrated with the business.

Although working for your employer is currently banned while you are on furlough, it was also positive to see that just over a third of businesses had taken advantage of the allowance to train their staff whilst they are off. This has been seen as a very positive use of time, allowing employees the opportunity to learn new skills that they may not have had the time to whilst in full time work and also keeping them engaged.

The efforts by businesses to support their furloughed staff is very encouraging and backs up the views of many leaders, who believe people are the most important asset in a successful business.

RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

**YES**  
31.7%

**NO**  
69.3%

Despite the continuing relaxation of lockdown rules, the vast majority of those that took part in the survey are not considering an imminent return to the workplace. As our graph shows, currently 68% of those that took part are not presently putting plans in place.

Figure 5: "Are their immediate plans to return staff to the workplace?"

Of the 32% of respondents that are considering a return to the workplace, 51% are doing so because there was a need to have staff on site to operate the business. A further 23% stating there is a need to have the workplace open in order to improve operational capability and 3% because they felt not being in the workplace was negatively affecting their staffs' productivity.

This question also highlighted to us that not all staff enjoy working from home. As was mentioned in the introduction many will be finding it more stressful being at home all the time and 19% of those businesses considering reopening the workplace was as a direct result of their staff asking to return. Many of the 4% who stated different reasons worked in schools and retail.

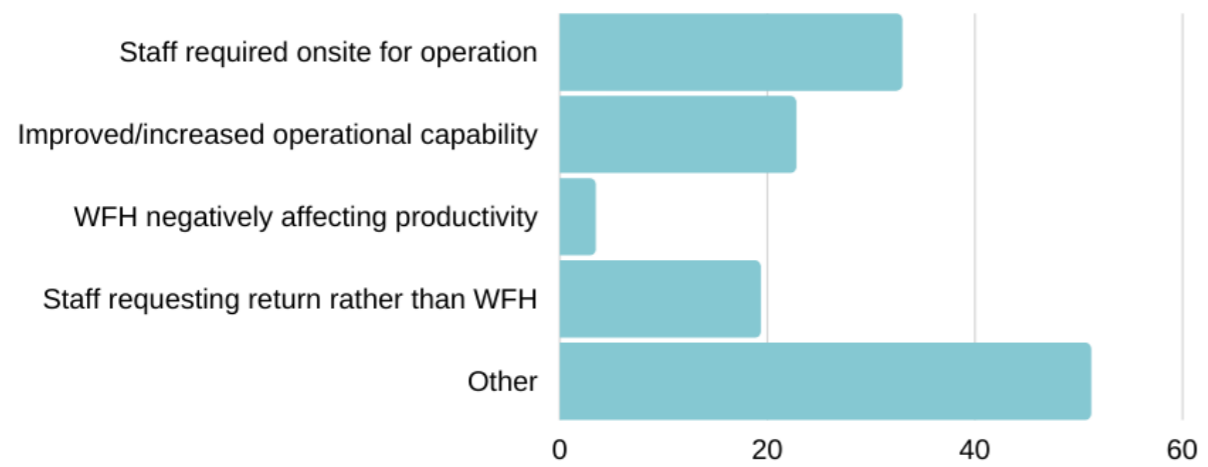


Figure 6: In relation to 'yes' as an answer to figure 5, the graph above shows what is driving that decision.

Next we asked what steps would need to be taken ahead of staff returning to work. The responses fall broadly into three categories; the physical working environment, policy review and actions with staff to ensure their safety.

Before allowing staff to return 74% will be conducting a deep clean of the premises to ensure that any residual traces of virus, however unlikely, are eliminated and, just as importantly, to give their staff peace of mind. 83% will complete a detailed risk assessment to ensure the working environment is as safe as possible. 87% will be re-organising office space with 59% intending to clearly mark out two-metre gaps on the floor. Some commented that they will also be putting screens up to split the spaces between desks.

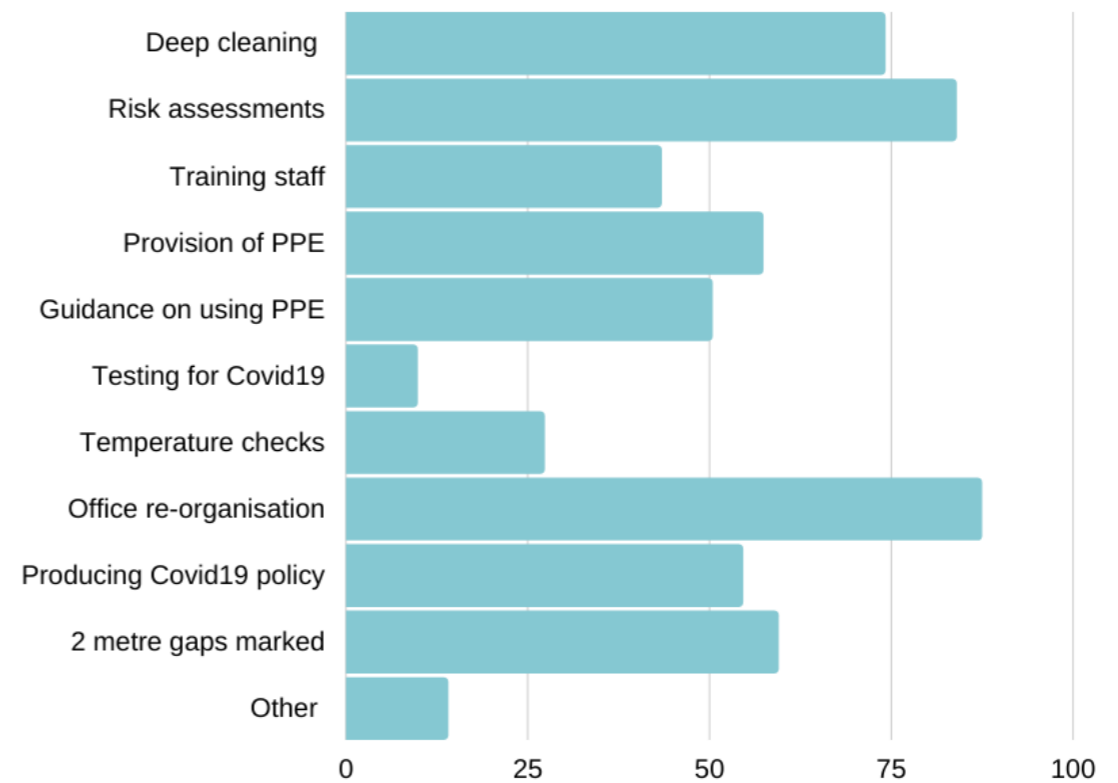


Figure 7: Steps taken ahead of staff returning to work.

Where respondents worked in shared offices with landlords, 71% expected that their landlords should offer support with the cleaning and safety of common areas, where, somewhat surprisingly, 29% did not. Where support was expected there was an expectation that landlords should mark out the floor with two metre gaps, implement a people flow system and supply hand sanitiser.

27% of respondents are intending to carry out regular temperature tests of their staff, with 10% saying they will be testing for Covid-19. Others pointed out they would refer to occupational health if required and that they would be bring their staff using new shift patterns and creating 'bubbles' of staff to minimise the risk of spreading the virus.

55% will be producing a Covid policy and 43% will provide training on the policy and how people should act to ensure safety. Others mentioned they would be updating health and safety policies rather than having a separate Covid policy.

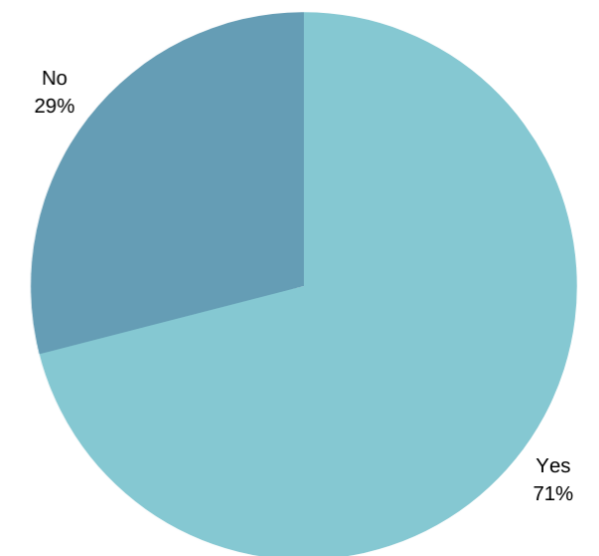


Figure 8: "Do you expect or have you already received assistance from your landlord in managing access and cleanliness of common parts."

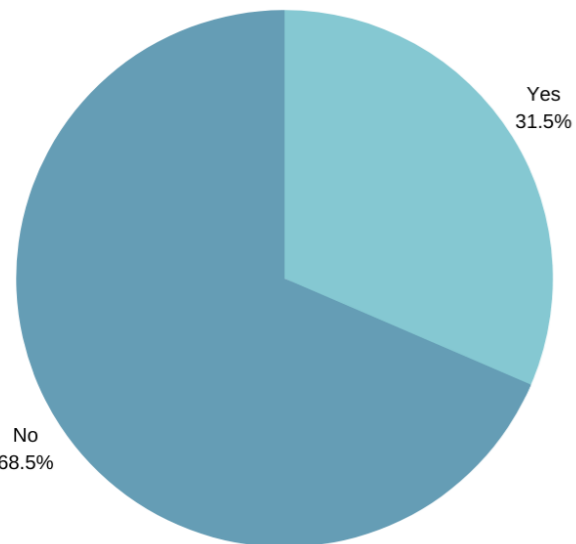


Figure 9: "Have you yet written a Covid-19 policy to be included in your employee handbook?"

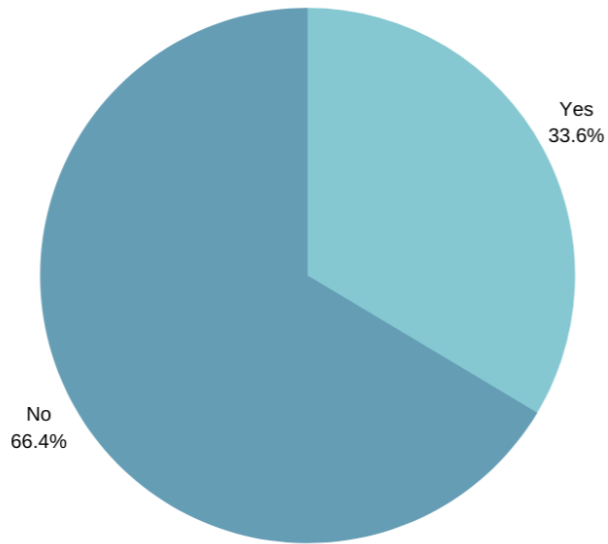


Figure 10: "Do you intend to appoint a Covid-19 officer to manage social distancing policies and ongoing disinfecting of the work space?"

When we consider that 32% are not yet considering a return to the workplace, it is perhaps unsurprising that only 31.5% of those that responded had written a Covid-19 policy so far and that only 33.6% had considered having a Covid-19 officer appointed to ensure that social distancing is adhered to and that spaces are correctly cleaned.

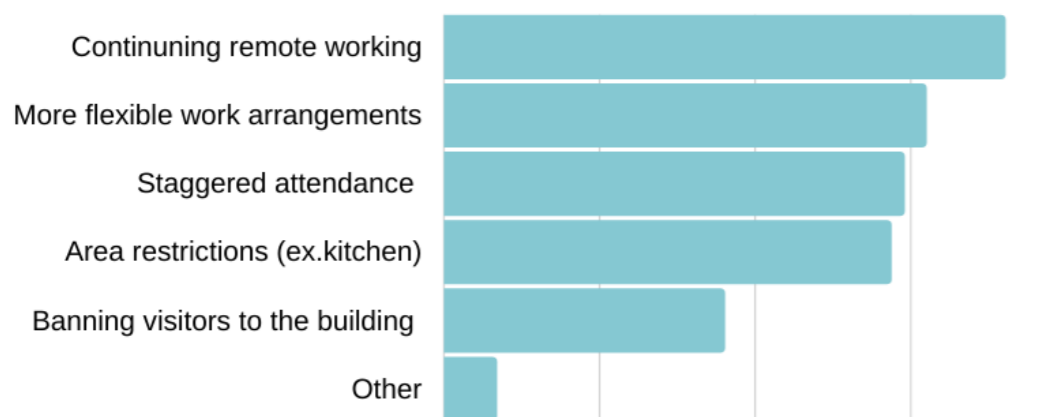


Figure 11: "What working practices are being considering as we transition out of lockdown?"

Whether the return to the physical workplace is imminent or further away, what was very clear from our survey is that working practices will be very different for a long time – if not forever.

90% said that remote working would continue, with 77% stating flexible working would be the norm and 74% expecting staggered attendance. 71% said that they will restrict access to common areas and 45% will ban any visitors to their buildings.

Others pointed to the fact that they will be restricting their staff's use of public transport, will be continuing to hold most meeting remotely and that people will only be able to make drinks for themselves moving forwards.

All of these results show that businesses are determined to stop the virus from reaching a second peak, fearing both the economic and health implications that this would bring.

## ONGOING WELFARE SUPPORT

76% of those that responded said that their business intended to continue offering welfare support moving into the future, which again proves that businesses understand how integral people are to their success.

82% of those that said they will continue welfare support said that the EAP will continue, 44% felt it would be important to continue their training with 29% saying that counselling services would be available on an ongoing basis. 15% will also continue to offer the private GP service.

Others pointed that occupational health would be more readily available, that they would continue with wellbeing and mindfulness support and that there would be an online Covid resource centre.

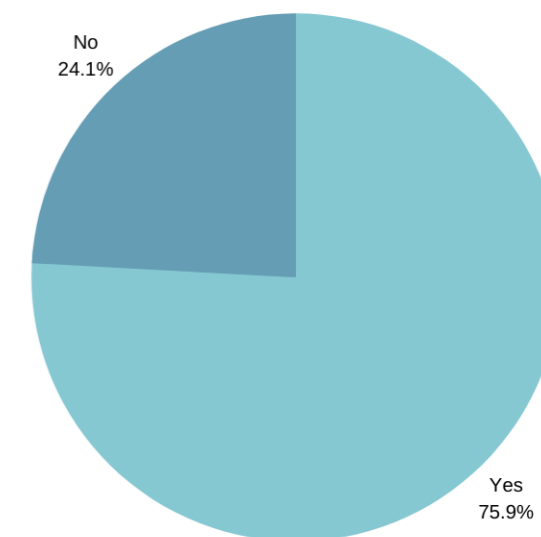


Figure 12: "Is your business considering providing ongoing welfare support to staff?"

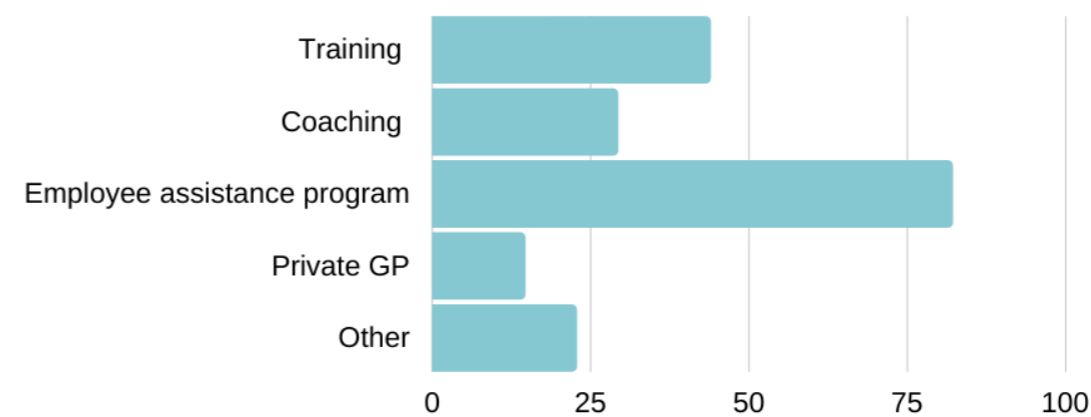
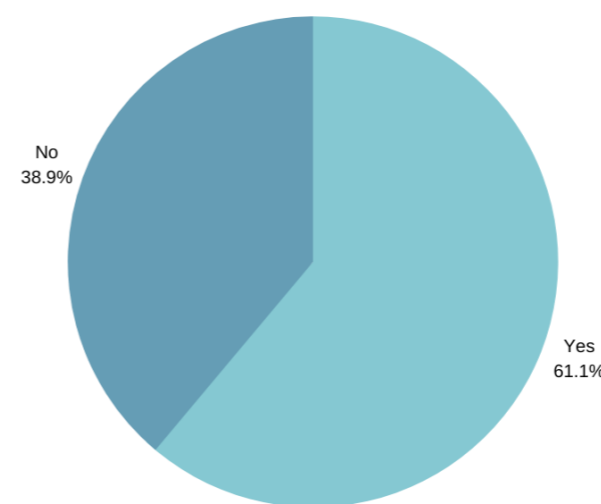


Figure 13: Considered ongoing welfare support.



62% of our respondents said they have had staff in their businesses that have suffered from mental health issues. Over the past decade, mental health issues have been on the rise and another sad consequence of the pandemic has been an increase in the issues that people are facing. It is very positive to see that employers recognise this and are willing to help.

Figure 14: "Have you experienced a negative impact in the mental well-being of any of your staff during lockdown?"

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our survey shows that the vast majority of businesses have attempted to protect their staff welfare during the pandemic. Whether this was proactively or reactively managed, it seems that there has been a 'human touch' to the way that employees have been treated. Both physical and mental welfare have been considered and employers have demonstrated flexibility in circumstances that would have been impossible to plan for.

As we move forwards, it appears that businesses will continue to put their staff's welfare at the forefront of any decisions they are making in an attempt to avoid putting them at risk and preventing a second peak to the virus.

Only time will tell how this flexibility will continue in the mid to longer term and much will be determined by the productivity levels of employers and businesses economic resolve. However, what is clear is that business has an appetite to implement a new 'norm' in both the flexibility and welfare that is offered to their employees in the future, which could revolutionise the way that we work. In our opinion this newfound flexibility is likely to benefit both businesses and employees in the longer term.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the report, please get in touch with us using the details below, or direct to our Managing Director, Chris Goulding on either:

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