

Bermuda as a post-pandemic working model

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Bermuda's government and business leaders have been actively considering the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Bermuda's working population. Here, Carey Olsen's employment team set out some of the key issues and business decisions relating to employee engagement, business growth and the road to economic recovery.

Bermuda employers large and small have embraced the more flexible working approach thrust upon them during the pandemic and we understand many intend to continue to employ these practices long after the pandemic has passed. The Bermuda Insurance Institute recently hosted a discussion with local business leaders on how the pandemic has accelerated changes to Bermuda's future working environment.

Key area of focus include:

- the impact of legislative changes designed to protect employee health
- the freedom to design flexible and bespoke working policies in the absence of specific legislation
- the adoption of virtual business solutions
- community collaboration and engagement
- economic recovery in key industries supported by strong public health measures

Employee health: Bermuda has passed the Public Health (Covid-19 Emergency Powers) (No. 3) Regulations 2020

requiring businesses on the island to monitor physical distancing between staff, their clients and customers, and to follow official guidance on sanitation practices and PPE. As hygiene becomes front and centre in workplaces, capital investment in health and hygiene technology will allow businesses to future-proof against other communicable illnesses in addition to COVID-19.

Flexible working: Pre-COVID-19, businesses were taking tentative steps towards embracing more flexible workforces. In the absence of specific legislation in Bermuda relating to flexible working, employers and employees have freedom to create and refine their own unique working solutions. As many Bermuda businesses are now able to safely return to their offices, ensuring sufficient support is available for those working remotely to encourage frequent communication and social activity between peers and mentors together with an understanding of company culture is a key element of designing successful flexible working solutions which combine remote and office-based working.

Virtual business solutions: The relative efficiency and affordability of virtual conferences, video calls, webinars and e-signatures has led to the widespread adoption of virtual business solutions by both government and industry in Bermuda. This highlights the innovative and dynamic nature of Bermuda's business community in which international business activity remains strong even in the absence of direct physical contact between clients and their Bermuda-based advisors.

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Community engagement: Whilst the pandemic has posed many challenges for the island it has also led to innovation and has helped to foster a more collaborative approach with both local and international employers making significant contributions to the wider Bermuda community during these challenging times. Examples include providing remote learning technology to schools, creation of educational scholarships, and substantial charitable donations (the insurance industry alone contributed \$3.1 million in support for Bermuda charities during the first six months of 2020).

Economic recovery and tourism: Bermuda has been very fortunate in its ability to largely reopen its local economy and has even started to welcome back both business visitors and tourists to the island. The island's hospitality industry has been particularly quick to adapt and innovate to the "new normal" with outdoor socially distanced dining spaces being created along with kerb side pick-up options developed whilst local hoteliers have adapted their services to attract new clientele more than happy to indulge in staycations. Bermuda has also held three significant sporting events during October and November 2020 showcasing its ability to offer a world class destination for global sports:

- the **Bermuda Gold Cup** hosted an Open Match Racing World Championship Regatta for only the second time since 1991;
- the **Bermuda Championship** was the first PGA Tour event since the onset of the pandemic to welcome general admission spectators to a tournament venue; and
- the **Rugby World Tens Series** is the first-ever World Tens Series tournament for privately owned international professional rugby teams.

Public health measures: The fact that the local economy has been able to open up so quickly following the island's lockdown and at a time when much of the rest of the world is experiencing a COVID-19 resurgence is largely due the success of the public health policies adopted by Bermuda Government, including a rigorous testing regime for all island visitors, and strong community adherence to Government guidance and protocols. In addition, these policies have contributed to the success of remote working initiatives such as the "*Work from Bermuda – One Year Residency Certificate*" (currently circa 550 applications have been received) available to non-residents.

Bermuda has been widely recognised for the way in which it has managed the pandemic. Its achievements have enhanced its reputation as a leading business environment which is safe, innovative and pragmatic. The confidence which the international business community has in Bermuda is borne out by a number of international businesses with Bermuda operations, as well as global sporting bodies now choosing to test drive their desired post-pandemic working models here before implementing them in other jurisdictions.

If you have any questions please get in touch with our employment team or your usual Carey Olsen contact.