

## RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In most cases it will be the employer's responsibility to have a return to work interview with the employee after a period of sickness or absence. The purpose of the interview is to be helpful so that:
  - 1.1.1 The employer can help the employee back to work, the employee's return to work is confirmed and, if appropriate, the interview provides an opportunity to discuss the employee's record of absence.
  - 1.1.2 The employer can ensure the employee is well enough to be back at work;
  - 1.1.3 It allows the employer to discuss the employee's health or other issues, and identify any risks to the employee's return to work.
  - 1.1.4 The employer can help the employee to ease their return to work;
  - 1.1.5 The meeting can provide an opportunity for the employer to discuss any significant changes in the employee's health or if there is an injury or illness that could create additional risks; and
  - 1.1.6 Any potential risks to the employee's return to work can be discussed. The employer has a legal obligation to make sure the employee is safe when they become disabled.

### 2. Preparing for the Interview

- 2.1 The employer should check the employee's record of absence and be prepared to discuss this in detail. The employer should be alert to the possibility of frequent absences on a Friday and Monday or immediately after a holiday.
- 2.2 The employer should prepare a list of the type of questions that they should ask the employee.
- 2.3 The employer should prepare for likely concerns or questions that the employee may have, for example a request for flexible working.
- 2.4 The employer should ensure that all necessary areas for discussion are covered.

### 3. Conducting the Interview

- 3.1 At the interview, the employer should discuss the employee's feelings and

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- use encouraging body language and open questions.
- 3.2 The interview should be held in a private meeting, and the employer should avoid rigorous questioning.
- 3.3 The employer should not pressure the employee back to work and should not enquire about their reasons for absence.
- 3.4 The purpose and structure of the interview should be explained as well as the fact that it is a routine process. The employer should ensure that the employee has not been singled out. The employer should explain that the purpose of the interview is to manage and monitor absence and attendance in order to identify any problems and take appropriate and manage appropriate action.
- 3.5 The employer should discuss the employee's absence and ask if the employee has visited a General Practitioner. The employer should ask the employee if they have been absent for longer than seven days. The employer should ask for the employee's Fit Note and review any records.
- 3.6 If the employee has a Fit Note, the Occupational Health report should be reviewed.
- 3.7 The employer should discuss the employee's absence with the employee and ensure that the employee understands the consequences of their absence.
- 3.7.1 that the employee understands their duties;
- 3.7.2 that, where relevant, measures have been taken to ensure that the employee can return to work again; and
- 3.7.3 that any arrangements for the employee to return to work are discussed.
- 3.8 The employer should discuss any relevant changes that have occurred while the employee was absent, for example new employees etc.
- 3.9 The employer should discuss the employee and explore any problems that the employee raises.
- 3.10 The employer should discuss the employee's attendance with the employee, to identify ways in which the employee can improve their attendance.
- 3.11 The employer should discuss the employee's attendance improvement targets and time limits for improvement in attendance with the employee. The employer should ensure that the employee is committed to achieving them.
- 3.12 Where possible, the employer should agree a shared action plan without making input from the employee.
- 3.13 Where the employee is persistent, the employee should be reminded of the importance of attendance. The employer should warn the employee of the consequences of unsatisfactory attendance, i.e. that he/she may eventually be dismissed.
- 3.14 At the end of the interview, the employer should ensure that the Form should be completed. See [Absence and Return to Work](#).

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## 4. After interview

- 4.1 The employer should consider if it is apparent from the interview that the absence is related to relationship problems.
- 4.2 Any necessary adjustments should be made in the workplace, for example reduced hours, phased return to work, temporary redeployment to another department,

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## 5. RETURN TO WORK RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 When an employee has been absent for a long period of illness, it may be appropriate to carry out a risk assessment specific to the illness suffered by them. For example, an employee with a back injury may have to reduce their duties to a lower floor of the building for fire safety reasons. The following points employers should consider when an employee returns after a long period of illness:

- The employee's concerns regarding the work they will be undertaking should be discussed with them. See [Guidance Notes for Employers on Return to Work Interview and Risk Assessments](#).
- The employer should consider whether the work to be undertaken by the employee could involve risk of harm or danger to the employee because of their illness or condition.
- Where the work involves a risk to the employee, the employer should identify the risks and the precautions can be taken to eliminate or reduce the risk.

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