**Sickness Absence - FAQ**

*Can I seek information from a member of staff about their health?*

Yes. A member of staff should tell you the reason that they are absent from work and relevant information about when they may return to work, as well as any adjustments that they need to support that return. There may be occasions where a member of staff does not wish to discuss a sensitive health issue with their manager. In this case, they may contact HR for a confidential discussion.

*Do I need to do a Return to Work meeting after every absence?*

Yes. Where absence is brief, for example one day, and is irregular, this may amount to a short meeting to check that they are fit to return to work and ensure the self-certification form is completed. Where absence has been longer in duration, forms a pattern or where trigger points have been reached, a more detailed conversation may be required.

*If a member of staff advises me that their absence from work relates to a disability, what should I do?*

This will depend on the nature of the disability and the needs of the member of staff. Where support or adjustments are required it may be necessary to make a referral to Occupational Health for specific advice. Advice is also available from HR. Discuss the needs of the individual with them, and make an appropriate record of any agreements made / actions. See our additional guidance on reasonable adjustments.

*Can I request a member of staff supplies a Fit Note, even if the absence period is less than eight days?*

Although this is not normal practice, where absence is high or being monitored under the Sickness Absence procedure, you may do so. You should however be aware that some GP’s have a policy of not providing notes in these circumstances or will make a charge for doing so.

*If a member of staff wants to return to work before the end of the Fit Note, can they do so?*

Yes. There is no need for them to return to their GP. Ensure that a Return to Work meeting is undertaken promptly on their return.

*What should I do if I do not understand the advice on a ‘may be fit for work’ note?*

In the first instance, discuss it with the member of staff. If necessary, consult Occupational Health, who can if necessary contact the GP for more information.

*Before a member of staff returns to work, should they get a note to confirm that they are fit to do so?*

No. There is no need for an additional note – the individual is able to return to work should they feel fit to do so.

*What should I do if a member of staff reaches a trigger point?*

Reaching a trigger is an indication that the absence record should be reviewed, a decision should be made if any management action is required. See our separate guidance on managing through absence triggers.

*What should I do if I believe there is a pattern to an individual’s absence?*

In the first instance, this can be addressed through return to work interviews or an informal discussion. Ensure that a note is made of the conversation.

*What is a phased return?*

A phased return is a supported return to work on an incremental basis. Usually, it means returning to work on a reduced / part time basis and increasing to normal hours over a period of several weeks. Other aspects of support may also be part of the return.

*When is a phased return appropriate?*

Phased returns can take place in a variety of situations, but they can be most useful when a member of staff has been away from work after a serious or lengthy period of ill-health as part of an overall supported return. Phased returns are often recommended by GPs or Occupational Health. OH can provide specific advice on how a return can be structured.

*What should be covered in a Return to Work meeting?*

A Return to Work meetings should ascertain whether the member of staff is fit to return, address any relevant paperwork and discuss any issues that arise from the absence. This may include discussion of absence levels or patterns, support required or provision of general updates. Return to Work meetings should be documented and retained by the manager.

*When should absence be referred to formal processes?*

This will depend on the circumstances including the reasons for the absence. As a general rule, where trigger points have been reached, informal discussions have taken place and targets set, but where absence continues to be problematic, formal management may be required. Discuss the relevant circumstances with HR.

*What happens if recommendations are made via a Fit Note, but they cannot be accommodated?*

This can occur as a GP will not necessarily have a detailed understanding of the role and the working environment. Have an open dialogue with the member of staff and explain why it cannot be accommodated. Normally a Fit Note will refer to a member of staff being fit to return to work if certain changes can be made. If they cannot be, the individual will remain unfit for work. Note – this is separate from reasonable adjustments made for a disability. Take advice from HR where required.

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