

SICKNESS RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS GUIDANCE NOTES FOR MANAGERS

Note: this guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Statement of Fitness for Work Guidance Notes](#) as employees with a doctor's statement indicating 'may be fit for work' will be required to discuss arrangements prior to their actual return to work.

1. Line Managers should make contact with an employee returning to work after each spell of sickness absence.

2. Contact should always be made on the day or as near as possible to the day the employee returns. As the nature of the discussion is confidential and potentially sensitive, conversations should always be carried out in private, managers should invite the employee to meet in their office or take them aside.

3. Managers should meet with staff face-to-face, however, in some cases it may be appropriate to hold a conversation by telephone. This will depend on the length of sickness absence and the nature of their illness. For example:

- After a couple of days absence with a cold, the manager may have a brief discussion by phone or in passing to confirm the employee is better.
- After two or three separate days off with a cold within a short period of time, the manager should meet with the employee in private to discuss any ongoing problems or emerging patterns of absence.
- After any period of absence (even one day) for stress or any illness which may have an underlying cause, the manager should meet with the employee in private to discuss any problems and actions required to alleviate them.
- After a few weeks off for an operation, the manager should meet the employee in private to welcome them back, confirm they are fit to work and update them on work related issues.

4. The aim of the discussion is to show concern for their situation and to offer support to the employee, but also to ensure the situation is being managed to reduce further absences.

5. Discussions should follow the format set out below:

- Welcome back, show genuine concern for the employee's well being.
- Establish cause of absence and the likelihood of the illness recurring.
- Establish whether the employee is better and if he/she is fit to work.
- Update on work issues if appropriate.

This may be all that is necessary.

However, in the following circumstances a more in depth discussion will be required.

5.1 Where there are ongoing health problems:

- Establish what help/support /treatment the employee is receiving. Have they been to see their GP? Refer to Occupational Health if appropriate, through Human Resources.
- Establish if any adjustments are required to their job or workplace to minimise further problems/absence. Occupational Health may be able to help assess the situation. Managers may also refer to the Disability Advisory and Support Service for advice on adjustments.
- Establish if there are any other causes eg. personal problems, if so, identify any actions the employee or the manager can take to alleviate them.
- If absences relate to a disability, pregnancy or a work place accident, always ensure a risk assessment is carried out.

5.2 Where a pattern of absence is developing:

- Establish if there is an underlying problem. Refer to Occupational Health and/or the Disability Advisory and Support Service if appropriate.
- Identify any actions the employee or the manager can take which may minimise further absences.
- In a non threatening way, discuss the next steps within the policy should an absence trigger be reached.

5.3 Where a trigger point is reached:

- Follow the steps outlined in the Procedures for Dealing with Short Term or Long Term Absence as appropriate.

6. Employees may, in some circumstances, feel that their reasons for absence are too personal or sensitive to discuss with their manager, or they may wish to discuss their health with a member of staff of the same gender. In these circumstances a member of the Human Resources team may be asked to conduct the meeting.

7. Managers must keep a record of their conversation by completing either:

- the Self Certification & Return to Work Form, or
- the Return to Work Form for absences covered by Fit Notes.

Where appropriate the employee may be asked to sign to confirm any actions agreed, and given a copy of the completed form.

Forms should be kept in a secure, confidential file by the manager, alongside the employee's Absence and Annual Leave Record.