

Guidance on Conducting a Return to Work Interview

1. What is a Return to Work Interview?

A return to work interview is an informal meeting that should take place when someone returns to work after a period of sickness absence. The meeting should be in a private location and between the employee and their line manager (or an appointed supervisor). This should be done as quickly as possible after returning to work, preferably within the first working day.

The objectives of the meeting are to:

- Discuss the most recent period of absence (including checking the dates of the absence are correct).
- Make sure the employee is fit to return to work.
- Welcome the person back into the workplace.
- Consider any appropriate temporary or permanent adjustments needed to the workplace to support the employee (including a phased return to work).

2. Why are Return to Work Interviews important?

There are several reasons why return to work interviews are worthwhile. These being:

- They create a stronger working relationship between the employee and their line manager.
- They are an opportunity to check the absence details, recorded by the Trust are correct.
- They allow for a discussion regarding any potential issues or barriers to returning to work along with the resolutions to these, including reasonable adjustments.
- They can uncover underlying issues that the employee may not have felt comfortable speaking about at other times.
- They allow time to discuss any external advice regarding the employee's health (i.e. an occupational health report).

- They contribute to establishing a culture of staff being aware of and accountable for their absence levels.

3. What should be covered in a Return to Work Interview?

All return to work meetings will be different, however there will be some commonalities and some aspects of the conversation will need to be recorded on to our sickness absence recording platform, ESR and the Trust's Return to Work form.

Prior to the meeting the manager should prepare by:

- Considering the best place for the interview to take place – this would ideally be in a private office or room but it needs to be in a confidential environment.
- Gathering details of the employee's previous absences – these can be found on ESR Manager Self-Service. Guidance on accessing this can be found on the ESR Manager Dashboard and ESR self-service page on the Knowledge Hub.
- Considering and preparing questions to ask.
- Considering if any support may be needed and how this can be accessed.
- If the employee is already in the formal stages of the Short Term Sickness Absence Procedure, prepare a letter to invite them to an Attendance Support Review Meeting (template letter available on the intranet)

When conducting the interview, managers should be empathetic and sensitive to the employee's situation. One example of how an interview could be conducted is:

3.1 Introduction

- Welcome the employee and ensure they understand the purpose of the meeting.
- Ask how the employee is feeling, telling them that you are glad they are back.

3.2 Absence Details

- Check with the employee that their absence dates and reasons are correct on ESR, specifically confirming the last day of sickness versus the first day back into the office.
- Clarify the number of calendar days that the employee has been absent from work, explaining that sickness is calculated in calendar days.

- Discuss the reasons for the absence, whether it is a one off illness or an ongoing condition, establishing if it could be a long term health condition or disability.
- Confirm that the employee is fit to return to their full duties.
- If adjusted duties had been previously agreed, make sure these are still appropriate.
- Discuss whether a referral to our Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service (OHWbS) would be beneficial or go through the most recent report if applicable.
- Explore reasonable adjustments and, if appropriate, referral to the Reasonable Adjustment Guidance.
- Check that the employee feels safe at home. This question is relating to the rising concerns over the increase in domestic abuse. If the employee discloses anything to you or you are concerned regarding their behaviour, refer to the Domestic Abuse guidance and support (available on the intranet).
- Discuss the employee's previous absence record (usually for the last 12 months), pointing out any concerns as per the Sickness Absence Support Policy.

3.3 Looking Forward

- Explain if there is a concern with the level of absence
- Explore if there is any support that can be given to improve attendance, such as
 - Referral to OHWbS,
 - A Reasonable Adjustment Agreement,
 - Discussion about our in house counselling service.
- Discuss whether it is appropriate to refer into the Sickness Absence Support Policy or to escalate accordingly.
- Confirm previously agreed phased return to work programme, if applicable.
- Agree any information that will be shared with the wider team, so the employee understands their confidentiality has not been breached.
- Give updates on the workplace as appropriate.
- Summarise everything discussed, pointing out any outstanding actions (and who is responsible for these).
- Close the meeting on a positive note.

4. Recording the Interview

Whilst conducting the interview, the manager should record a summary of the discussion on the Return to Work Interview Form and ask the employee to also sign to confirm their agreement that this is an accurate account of the discussion.

If the employee declines to sign the form the manager should record this on the relevant field. Once completed, the manager should copy the form, giving a copy to the employee and keep one copy for the employee's personal file. The manager should also enter the absence end and return to work meeting dates on ESR.