

Guide

Return to Work Interviews

All employees returning to work following unauthorised or sickness absence must be interviewed by their line manager, prior to them commencing work.

Return to work interviews can be challenging for managers and this guide is intended as a quick reference document to help prepare for, and conduct, the meeting.

1. Purpose

The purpose of the meeting is to ascertain the facts directly related to the absence, establish the pattern of absence if applicable, and to provide the employee with an understanding of the consequences if they continue to take time off for unrelated sickness absence.

2. Preparing for the Interview

Prior to the interview, the line manager should review the employee's absenteeism record:

- Is there a pattern to the absences, for example, do they always occur on a certain day or is there any correlation between absences?
- How does their absence record compare with other employees?

It must be remembered that if an employee is ultimately dismissed for attendance issues, the employee may claim that the dismissal was unfair if the organization has been inconsistent.

3. Conducting the Interview

There are four main elements to be considered during the interview. These can be easily remembered using the acronym WARM

W	Welcome
A	Absence
R	Responsibility
M	Move on

The points below should be considered and discussed as appropriate. These points cover both short-term and long-term sickness absence scenarios. You are advised to ignore points that are not applicable to the individual circumstances.

3.1 Welcome

- Enquire about the employee's health now that they have returned to work.
- Set the scene for the interview and explain that the employee will be given an opportunity to discuss any concerns that they may have in relation to their return to work.
- Ask for any outstanding medical certificates or self-certification forms.
- Ensure that the employee's most recent fit note has expired.

3.2 Absence

- Focus on this last period of absence. Challenge unacceptable levels of absence if appropriate. This is the time to introduce sickness absence records and compare to the organisational norms.
- Ask the employee if they sought medical advice and, if not, why not.
- What was the exact reason for the absence and how did this prevent them attending work.
- If they have been prescribed medication, will this affect their ability to carry out normal duties.
- Discuss any ongoing medical condition. Is the employee receiving medical treatment and what is the likely prognosis.
- Consider and discuss any apparent pattern of absences.
- Consider and discuss whether an occupational health referral would be appropriate.
- Ascertain whether the employee is fit to return to work in their usual job.
- Consider whether or not disciplinary action is appropriate. If so, the employee should be forewarned. **Any such action must be dealt with separately and under the Disciplinary Procedure.**

Warning: Where absenteeism is related to pregnancy, no further action should be taken. A risk assessment must be carried out.

3.3 Responsibility

- Discuss the employee's responsibility to follow the organisation's sickness / absence reporting procedure.
- If the employee has not followed procedure, establish why.
- Discuss how the employee has a responsibility to maintain fitness and attend on normal working days.
- The organisation has a responsibility to consider and implement any reasonable adjustments identified.

3.4 Move On

- Discuss how the employee feels now that they have returned to work.
- Establish an action plan if the employee has a high absence record which is unacceptable to the organisation.
- Highlight the potential consequences of continued unacceptable attendance.
- Discuss what has changed in working practices, policies, objectives, etc during their absence.
- Discuss, if appropriate, a phased return to work, restricted / light duties and the agreed timescales and review periods.
- Diarise a review meeting to discuss with the individual positive interventions or future actions.
- End the meeting on a positive note.

If the line manager has any concerns or doubts prior to, or during, the interview, they should consult with the HR Department.

An Absence Reporting Record form (THCIC/HR/052) must be completed and signed by both the line manager and the employee. The completed form must be handed to the HR Department to be filed on the employee's record.