

## Conducting a Return to Work Interview: Managers' Guide

Return-to-work interviews have been shown to be one of the most effective interventions in managing sickness absence.

A key advantage of conducting return-to-work interviews on a regular and consistent basis is that they give line managers an opportunity to identify the possible underlying cause(s) of frequent absences at an early stage.

### Return-to-work interviews

- Provide a forum for frank, open discussions about any relevant issues that may be contributing to the employee's absences;
- Help to pinpoint any underlying pattern of absence or cause of absence, which can then be discussed and tackled;
- Allow managers to establish as accurately as possible the reasons for absences;
- Demonstrate to employees that their employer notices their absences and consistently implements a policy of monitoring and recording all absences;

Return-to-work interviews should be held in private. At the interview, managers should:

- Explain to the employee that the purpose of return-to-work interviewing is to manage and monitor employees' absences so that any problem areas can be identified and support offered where appropriate;
- Ask the employee about the reason(s) for his or her absence, ensuring that the question is asked in a supportive way;
- Ask the employee whether or not he or she consulted a doctor or attended hospital;
- Avoid asking intrusive medical questions of the employee, while at the same time seeking to establish the basic underlying cause of the absence;
- Check that the employee is well enough to attend work;
- If there is any discrepancy between the employee's stated reason for the absence and the information given when notification of absence was originally provided, ask the employee to explain the discrepancy; and
- Review and check the employee's self-certification form, make sure the employee has signed it, and countersign the form.

If a manager has any grounds on which reasonably to conclude that the employee's absence was not genuinely for the reason given, the manager should put the evidence to the employee directly so that he or she has the opportunity to respond and provide an explanation.

It is useful to have a standard form for your managers to use as guidance for the return to work interview and to ensure that they record the correct information. The manager should make a record of each return-to-work interview. The record should show:

- The name of the person who conducted the interview;

- The employee's name
- The employee's job title;
- The date and time of the interview;
- The length of the absence;
- The date of the employee's return to work;
- The reason given for the absence;
- Whether or not the employee gave proper notification of absence and, if not, why not;
- Whether or not the employee consulted a doctor or attended hospital;
- Whether or not there is any suggestion that factors at work may have caused or contributed to the absence and, if there is, what these factors were and what action has been agreed to support the employee;
- Whether or not the absence is part of an overall pattern; and
- Whether or not the employee has any type of disability.

The form should be completed at the conclusion of each return-to-work interview and a copy provided to the employee. It should be borne in mind that each employee will, under the Data Protection Act 1998, have the right of access to the record once it is placed in his or her file.