

HUMAN RESOURCES GUIDANCE NOTE – RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL CHANGES

General changes

This document has not been amended as part of this revision.

This document (previously archived as: Guidance on return to work interviews-ts 17.06.13) was incorporated within the UPR series on 5 October 2015.

The following abbreviations are used in this document:

HR	Human Resources
SSP	Statutory Sick Pay
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
UPRs	University Policies and Regulations

“HR Guidance Note – Absence Management

Return to work interviews

Introduction

This guidance document, alongside the University policies and procedures (see links at the bottom of this document), is designed to help line managers conduct a return to work interview with employees who have been absent from work due to ill health.

Wherever appropriate, the line manager should informally meet with the member of staff on the day they return to work, or as soon after as possible. The interview must be held in private and be handled in a sensitive and professional manner.

Whilst it may not be appropriate to hold an interview after every absence it is important for managers to be consistent in their approach to conducting return to work interviews across their team/department. Consistency provides fair and transparent treatment of staff as well as generating greater employee engagement in the process.

Purpose

The purpose of a return to work interview is to:

- Welcome the employee back to work;
- Ensure they are able to return to full duties. If not to identify any actions needed to support a full return to work;
- Identify and confirm the reason and length of the absence;
- Listen to any issues (work-related or otherwise) identified by the employee that may be causing or contributing to the absence and take appropriate action;
- To discuss and/or identify any adjustments to the workplace/hours/duties that may reduce/eliminate absences and support their return to work;
- Update them on what they may have missed whilst they have been absent from work.

Preparation

The line manager should:

- Ensure a private meeting space is available and that there will be no interruptions;
- Check the employees records for both current and previous absences and if appropriate take an up to date record with you to the meeting;
- Be prepared to discuss any trends or patterns of absence;
- Work out in advance what questions to ask and points to cover (see below);
- If appropriate seek initial advice from e.g. Occupational Health, HR or the Equality Office. In cases of long-term sickness absence it will normally be appropriate to ensure that the employee is referred to Occupational Health before their return to work so that any recommendations and support can be discussed and put in place immediately upon their return;
- Remember this is not a formal meeting – it is about trying to establish facts and ensure the necessary support is in place;
- Approach the meeting with an open mind and no prejudices;
- Be prepared to make notes of what is discussed and agreed, and to share these with the employee.

Content

The length and content of the return to work interview will depend upon the nature of the absence. However as guidance the manager will normally:

- Confirm the length of the absence and ask the employee to complete a sickness self-certification form, or if the absence is longer than 7 days ask them to produce a doctor's certificate, if not already provided;
- Let them know they were missed and acknowledge employees return to work;
- Ask about the employees illness to determine the cause of the absence;
- Ask whether the employees health problems are work related. If so discuss both the employees and managers concerns and agree on how these can be addressed;
- Provide an opportunity to discuss any concerns (work-related or otherwise);
- Be sensitive to employees feelings where personal problems and illnesses are involved;
- Where there is conflicting evidence/statements, ask for an explanation in order to establish the facts;
- Place current absence in the context of previous absences and consider whether there are any patterns or trends that need to be addressed;
- Determine whether any help or support, including reasonable adjustments, is needed that may help reduce/eliminate future absences (see below for further information on support available);
- Discuss the effect of the absence on the operational efficiency of the department;
- If appropriate refer to the University's policies and procedures on sickness absence and make the employee aware that high levels of sickness absence may lead to formal action being taken;
- Provide an update on any developments in the department;
- Make and keep on file an accurate written note of the meeting.

Formal Action

Having reviewed the employees' sickness absence record and discussed all the facts with them, if the line manager feels that more formal action should be taken then the University's Policy Managing Staff Long Term and Short term ill health absence should be followed. This should not be dealt with as part of the return to work interview, but at a separate meeting.

Do not use the return to work interview to deal with other issues such as misconduct or performance issues. If the line manager feels this is part of a general pattern of unacceptable behaviour this should be dealt with after the return to work interview and in line with the relevant policy.

If the line manager considers that formal action is appropriate they should contact the relevant HR Manager (Business Partnering) for advice and support.

Support

It may be appropriate to take action to support an employee to help reduce/eliminate absences, and these options may be discussed in the return to work interview. They include:

- A referral to Occupational Health;
- Short or long term reasonable adjustments;
- Contacting the Equality and/or Disability Unit for advice on disability related adjustments, mental health issues and other equality matters;
- Making the employee aware of the confidential 24 hour Helpline.

Even when staff are certain that they need no support, it is advisable that managers still involve Occupational Health as their professional expertise can often anticipate issues that neither the individual or manager are aware of. They may also be able to suggest particular support that would be appropriate. It must be remembered that any support needed is always based on the needs of the individual and that “one size” does not fit all.

Further guidance/references

<http://www.staffnet.herts.ac.uk/human-resources/hr-policies/absence.htm>

<http://staffnet.herts.ac.uk/human-resources/managers-support/disability-support.htm>

or contact your HR Manager (Business Partnering)”

Mrs S C Grant
Secretary and Registrar
Signed: **14 March 2016**