

# Guidance Notes for Employers: Return to Work Interviews and Risk Assessments.

In certain cases, a return-to-work interview can be beneficial for both the employer and the employee when an employee returns after a period of sickness or absence. These meetings provide an opportunity for the employer to welcome the employee back and confirm their record of absence while also offering a suitable forum to discuss any patterns or concerns.

The employer can also ensure that the employee is well enough to return to work and allow them to raise any health or personal issues that may have contributed to their absence. Additionally, the meeting enables the employer to offer support to ease the employee's transition back into the workplace. If there has been a significant change in the employee's health or if they have an injury or disability, the discussion may prompt a risk assessment to ensure their safety.

Furthermore, any necessary adjustments to facilitate the employee's return can be considered, with the employer having a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments if the employee has or develops a disability.



# 1.Preparing for the Interview

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The employer should review the employee's record of absence and be prepared to discuss the employee's absence in detail.



The employer should give consideration to the type of questions that they should ask the employee. Open questions may be the most appropriate as they encourage more open answers.



The employer should try to anticipate and prepare for likely concerns that the employee may have, for example a request for flexible working.



The employer should create a structured plan to ensure all necessary areas for discussion are covered.



# 2.Conducting the Interview

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At the interview the employer should be aware of the employee's feelings and use encouraging body language. The interview should be treated as an informal meeting, and the employer should avoid rigorous questioning.



The employer should begin by welcoming the employee back to work and enquiring about their general health. The purpose and structure of the interview should be explained as well as the fact that it is a routine interview.



The employer should ensure that the employee is fit to resume their duties, that any relevant preventative measures have been taken to reduce the risk of the sickness recurring, and that any necessary arrangements to facilitate their return to work are discussed.



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If an employee's absence is persistent, they should be reminded of the importance of full attendance. Additionally, at the end of the interview, a **Return to Work Form** should be completed.



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### 3. After interview

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The employer should consider using a mediator if it is apparent from the interview that the absences are due to work-based relationship problems.



Any necessary adjustments should be put in place, for example reduced hours, phased return to work, rehabilitative care, temporary redeployment to another department, home working etc.



## 4. RETURN TO WORK RISK ASSESSMENTS

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When an employee returns to work after a long period of illness, it may be appropriate to carry out a risk assessment specific to the illness suffered by them.

For example, an employee with a back injury may have to reduce certain activities like manual lifting or work on a lower floor of the building for fire safety reasons. Below are some general points employers should consider when an employee returns to work after a long period of illness:

The employer should consider any concerns the employee has regarding their working environment in relation to their illness, which can be discussed during the Return to Work Interview.

Additionally, the employer should assess whether the work to be undertaken by the employee could pose a risk of harm or danger based on their illness or condition.

If the role involves a specific risk to the returning employee, the employer should evaluate the level of risk and determine whether any precautions can be taken to eliminate or reduce it.

