

Phased Return to work

Guidance

Guidance – Phased Return to Work

Introduction

In cases where an employee has been absent from work due to illness over a prolonged period of time, the medical advice (e.g. an employee's GP or Occupational Health) may recommend a phased return to work as part of a rehabilitation programme. The purpose of a phased return to work is to allow time for an employee to be properly rehabilitated by gradually building back up to their full duties.

Phased Return to Work Process

In terms of a rehabilitation programme the following process should be noted:

Occupational Health Advice

Occupational Health will recommend a phased return to work in appropriate circumstances. This recommendation will be subject to agreement by the employee and line manager subject to factors including the timescale, duties and other working arrangements.

Discussion and Agreement

Discussion must take place between the manager and employee to consider the Occupational Health advice, before agreeing any phased return to work arrangement.

The phased return should then be planned, taking into account the need to progress over the period of time back up to full duties. It may also be advised that lighter duties or other adjustments are included/made during the phased return. All recommendations should be considered and further information can be found in Guidance – Considering Reasonable Adjustments.

In advance of any return to work, the employee should be updated on any changes which have taken place in their absence.

Phased Return Timescales

Occupational Health will recommend a phased return to work timescale relative to the individual circumstances of the absence, but this will not last more than a four-week period.

Support During the Phased Return to Work

Support should be ongoing during any phased return to work, particularly in the early days to ensure that the period of rehabilitation is effective. Weekly progress reviews should take place to facilitate this, including assessing progress, identifying any problems or measuring the effectiveness of any implemented adjustments.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to seek a volunteer to act as a "buddy" for a limited period of time as a useful way of providing support in the very early stage of the return.

In circumstances where problems arise, where the phased return to work appears to be unsuccessful or where further absence occurs, further Occupational Health advice should be sought. Advice should also be sought if either party wishes to significantly amend the recommended or agreed phased return to work plan.

Extension of a Phased Return to Work

Where an employee is unable to return to full duties by the end of a planned phased return to work, further Occupational Health advice must be sought.

Depending on the circumstances and the Occupational Health advice, the following may be appropriate:

- Agreeing a further time-limited extension of the phased return, for shorter-term phased returns
- Agreeing a temporary reduction in contractual working hours to facilitate a longer-term phased return
- Agreeing the need for the member of staff to resume sick leave and to re-submit medical certificates.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to consider a permanent reduction in working hours or the possibility of redeployment. Further Human Resources advice should always be taken in such circumstances. Additional Occupational Health advice may also be appropriate.

For ongoing long-term absence where a phased return to work has failed (or repeatedly failed), the process outlined in the Managing Attendance policy (Managing Long-Term/Ongoing Absence) should continue to be followed.

Medical certificates & Payment

If Occupational Health have recommended that a phased return to work is appropriate and the manager has agreed to implement the recommendations, the employee will not be

required to submit any further medical certificates beyond the start of their phased return as they will no longer be on sick leave and sick pay will not apply.

The manager will advise the employee on the details of their salary during the phased return to work programme.

Employees will be paid at their normal rate of pay for up to the first 4 weeks of any phased return. Where a phased return arrangement extends beyond 4 weeks, payment will be made on a pro-rata basis, based on actual hours worked. An exception to this would be where a short extension of the phased return to work (e.g. 1 or 2 weeks) is envisaged. In this case, agreement to continue full pay will be subject to agreement between an appropriate senior manager and Human Resources.