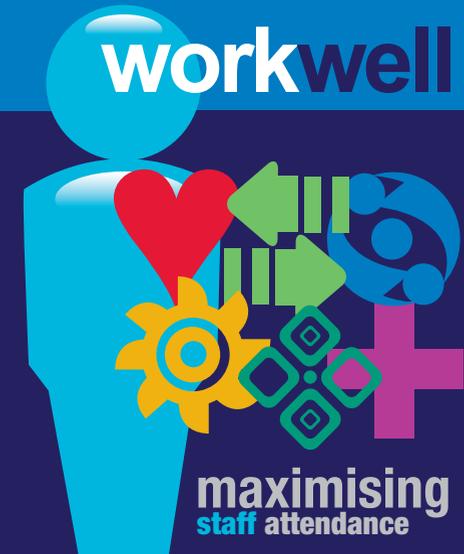


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Managing Attendance

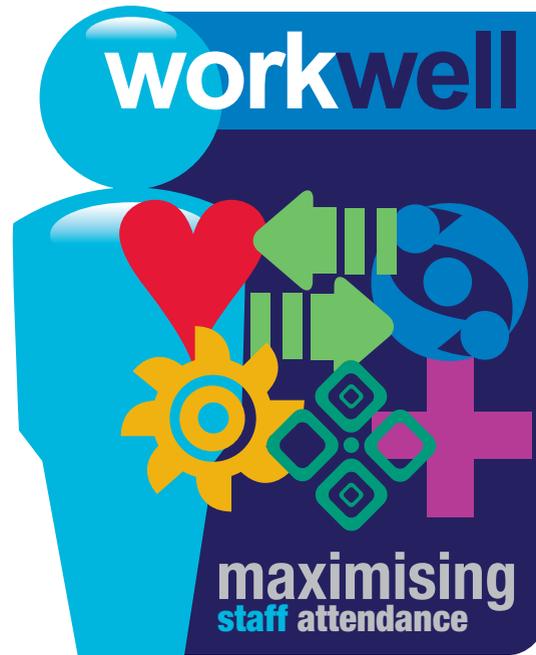
A Guide for all Managers and Employees



Returning to Work Guide



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
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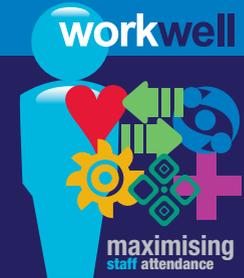


Human Resources,
The Pavilions, Clydach Vale, CF40 2XX

RCT Source: rct.learningpool.com

Email: human-resources@rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk

Telephone: 01443 424108



Managing Attendance

A Guide for all Managers and Employees

RETURNING TO WORK

Returning to Work is one of several guides that have been designed to provide practical advice and guidance to managers and employees around Managing Attendance. Each guide supports the Council's Absence Management Policy by answering the most common questions that both managers and employees have about their own sickness absence, and managing the absence of others.

Current research on the subject of managing absence has identified that a good return to work interview is the most effective way of helping to reduce sickness absence levels and are critical to the successful return of an employee following an absence. This is Stage 1 in the managing absence process and encourages an open and honest conversation between the manager and the employee. Further details about why this stage is important and what is included are detailed in the guide below.

Employee Responsibilities		Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities	
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1. What do I need to do when I am fit enough to return to work following an illness?

When the time comes when you, your GP, or the Council's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit decides that you are fit enough to return to work, the first thing you must do is let your manager know the date you intend to return. Notification would usually be made by telephone calls however alternative methods may be agreed with your manager if there are particular circumstances that necessitate alternative methods of communication, these must be agreed with your line manager in advance.

On rare occasions there may be a difference of opinion about your fitness to return to work. For example, you may have a GP 'fit note' stating you can return to work, but the manager has concerns about your fitness to return to your duties based on the advice received during your absence. In such cases your manager will refer you for an urgent assessment at the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. Once an updated position has been received a further discussion will take place between all parties to agree a way forward.

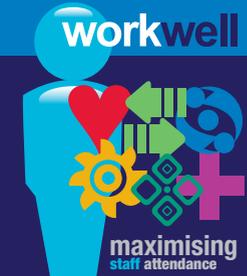
Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

1. What do I need to do when an employee notifies me that they are returning to work following a period of sickness absence?

When an employee is absent from work due to ill health it is important to maintain contact with that employee, initially ensuring the employee is aware of their responsibilities and timeframes for keeping you up to date with the details of their absence and their intended return to work. If the absence goes into long term sickness, weekly contact should then be advised.

As soon as an employee is ready to return to work they need to notify you and inform you of their planned return date. Being informed of this date will allow you to make arrangements to ensure their return to work happens as smoothly as possible, for example, making sure their work space is ready for them, notifying team members, and booking in the Return to Work interview for their first day of return (if possible), but if not within the first 7 days following their return.

On rare occasions there may be a difference of opinion about the employee's fitness to return to work. For example, the employee may have a GP 'fit note' stating they can return to work, but you have concerns about their fitness to return to their duties. In such cases you will urgently refer the employee for an assessment at the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. Once an updated position has been received a further discussion will take place between all parties to agree a way forward.



RETURNING TO WORK

Employee Responsibilities

2. What do I need to do when I return to work?

When you return to your workplace you will need to have a 'Return To Work' interview with your manager. Ideally this should take place on the day you return, but if that is not possible it must be done within the first 7 days of your return. This is referred to as Stage 1.

Current findings show that a good return to work interview is the most effective way of helping to reduce sickness absence levels as it allows you, and your manager, to talk about the reasons behind any absence and support that may be required.

3. What paperwork do I need to fill in?

When you return to work after an absence of 7 calendar days or less, you will need to complete a self-certification form (SA3). You can get this from your manager.

If you have been absent for over 7 days, you will need to provide your manager with a 'fit note' from your doctor to cover the period you were away from work.

e.g. If you have been off work for a total of 10 calendar days, you will need to complete the SA3 to cover the first 7 days, and provide a 'fit note' to cover the remaining 3 days.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

2. What do I need to do on the employee's first day back in work?

When the employee returns to work following a sickness absence it is good practice to arrange to meet with them to welcome them back. Ideally you should arrange the Return to Work interview on the first day of their return – this is especially important if the employee has been on long term sick leave or requires additional support upon their return. If it is not possible to hold the Return to Work interview on the first day you must ensure you hold it within 7 days, keeping the employee notified of when and where the meeting will take place.

When arranging the Return to Work interview make sure you dedicate enough time for the conversation to take place and hold the meeting in a comfortable environment where you will not be disturbed.

3. What do I have to complete on the Vision system / or paperwork if I have no access to Vision?

When the employee returns to work you will need to update the Vision system to show that the period of sickness has ended.

If the employee has been on ill-health absence for 7 days or less they will need to complete a self-certification form (SA3) – you will be able to provide them with this.

If they have been absent for over 7 days, they will also need to provide you with a 'fit note' from their GP that covers the additional absence.

During, or immediately after the Return to Work interview you will need to complete the SA4 Form on the Vision system.

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4. What is my role in a 'Return to Work' interview?

A Return to Work interview is a meeting between you, and your manager, following a period of sickness, to discuss the reasons you have been off work, to discuss whether there are any underlying causes for the absence, to go through and complete the necessary paperwork and to identify the correct support that you may need to make your return to work as smooth as possible. This may include discussions about referrals to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit, reasonable adjustments, or anything else that may be identified to help you stay well and in work. It is your responsibility to take an active role in this meeting, to be open and honest when answering any questions your manager may have, and to work with your manager to make your return to work successful.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

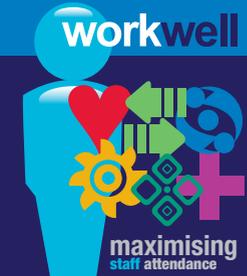
4. What is my role in a 'Return to Work' interview?

Return to Work interviews are one of the main tools used to effectively manage sickness absence and benefit both you and your employee. The purpose is to encourage a conversation between you and your employee to discuss the reasons they have been off work, to go through and complete the necessary paperwork and to explore any support that they may need to make their return to work as smooth as possible. This may include you raising subjects such as the role of the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit and possible referral for assessment, reasonable adjustments, or anything else that may help them stay well and in work. You should take an active role in the meeting, deal with the absence in a sympathetic manner, be open and honest when asking or answering any questions your employee may have, and work with them to make their return to work successful.

Before carrying out the Return to Work interview you should check Vision for any absences in the past 12 months that may need to be discussed, for example, has the employee reached a trigger point, are there patterns to the absences, are the absences disability related etc.

 For further information on Disability Related Sickness Absence, please refer to the Disability Related Sickness Guide.

If you have any concerns about conducting the Return to Work interview, it is recommended that you seek advice from your HR representative in the first instance.



RETURNING TO WORK

Employee Responsibilities

5. What type of questions will I need to answer in my Return to Work interview?

Return to Work interviews are not in place to 'catch you out', they are carried out to ensure the Council has the correct details about why you have been off work, to identify any work related issues that may be impacting upon your health and wellbeing, to discuss and identify support available and to identify any actions that may be needed to help you make a successful return whilst keeping well at work.

Your manager will need to complete a SA4 form with you and this contains questions including:

- What was the reason for the absence?
- Was this absence related to a previous absence?
- Is there the likelihood of a recurrence?
- Did you seek medical advice and if so what advice was given?
- Is there any further treatment required?
- Did the doctor give any advice with regards to your role or work pattern?
- Are there any underlying problem relating to the absence?
- Can the manager, department, Occupational Health Unit offer you any support or guidance?

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

5. What type of questions will I need to ask and how will I need to approach the Return to Work interview?

Return to Work interviews are not in place to catch anyone out, they are carried out to ensure the Council has the correct details about why an employee has been off work, to identify any work related issues that may be impacting upon health and wellbeing, to discuss and identify the type of support available and to identify any actions that may be needed to help the employee make a successful return whilst keeping well at work.

You will need to complete a SA4 form with the employee and this contains questions including:

- What was the reason for the absence?
- Was this absence related to a previous absence?
- Is there the likelihood of a recurrence?
- Did they seek medical advice and if so what advice was given?
- Is there any further treatment required?
- Did the doctor give any advice with regards to their role or work pattern?
- Are there any underlying problem relating to the absence?
- Can the manager, department, Occupational Health & Wellbeing Unit offer them any support or guidance?

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Although the questions on the SA4 form may sound formal, the return to work interview provides an opportunity for you and your manager to have a conversation about how you have recovered from your illness, how you are feeling about returning to work, identify any barriers you feel may impact on you returning to work successfully, explore ways of minimising any barriers, including identifying any support or temporary adjustments that may be needed, and putting actions in place to help you keep well in work.

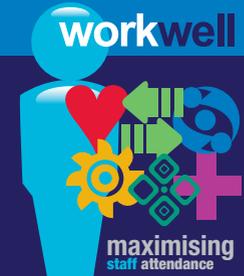
Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

The questions on the SA4 form are necessary and may sound formal, but the return to work interview also provides you with an opportunity to have a conversation with the employee about how they are feeling about returning to work, to explore with them whether there are any barriers they feel may impact upon returning to work successfully (which could include barriers at work, at home or elsewhere), identify ways of minimising any barriers, including identifying any support or temporary adjustments that may be needed, and putting actions in place to help them keep well in work.

It is important to approach each Return to Work interview sensitively, consistently and promptly. A poorly conducted Return to Work interview has the potential to turn motivated employees who have been genuinely sick into disgruntled employees. It is also important for you to treat each case individually, and the interview should be a two-way, constructive and supportive conversation to ensure all the required facts are gathered.

When carrying out the interview you should:

- Listen to the employee
- Concentrate on fact finding
- Use open questions to encourage the employee to talk and engage with the process
- Remain open minded (don't assume you know the reasons or causes of the absence or why people are behaving in a certain way)



RETURNING TO WORK

Employee Responsibilities

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

- Ensure that the boundaries for confidentiality are set out and understood by the employee, for example, that the information gathered will be stored on the Vision system and on file, but will not be passed on or discussed with the individual's colleagues.

There may be occasions when you feel you have reasonable grounds to believe that the employee's absence was not for the reason given. It may be that the employee has an issue at home, for example having to care for a relative, which resulted in them being absent and claiming that they were sick. It is important to approach such conversations sensitively. The employee might be understandably concerned about divulging such information but, once the information is shared you will then have the opportunity to look into ways of supporting the individual via mechanisms such as possible adjustments or flexible working. Again it is advisable to speak to your HR representative before engaging in this type of sensitive discussion.

Managing Attendance

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6. What if I have had a few instances of short term sickness absence over the past few months?

Return to work interviews are one of the main tools used to effectively manage sickness absence and benefit both you and your manager. The purpose is to encourage a conversation between you and your manager, so if there have been a number of instances of short term sickness absence your manager will need to discuss this with you.

In this conversation your manager will need to explore the reasons for the absences, to ask if there are any underlying reasons that you may need to discuss, or need support with, and to inform you if you have hit any 'trigger points' that may require actions such as a referral to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit for further investigation or assessment, or referral for a 2nd stage interview.

Your manager is also responsible for identifying any 'patterns' in short term sickness absence, for example, they may notice that each sickness absence occurs on a Monday. This may be entirely coincidental but it is your manager's role to explore this with you, and your role to engage in the conversation with your manager.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

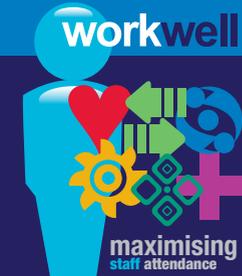
6. What do I need to do if the employee has had a few instances of short term sickness absence over the past few months?

As well as providing an opportunity to identify the reasons for absence and what support may be required to sustain attendance, the Return to Work interview also provides an opportunity to review patterns of absence and to explore any underpinning issues or trends in the employee's absence.

If there have been a few instances of short term sickness absence over the past few months you must inform the employee of this – especially as they may have hit triggers and you will have to take action in line with hitting those triggers, e.g. a referral to the Occupational Health & Wellbeing Unit, or referral for a 2nd stage interview.

You also have a responsibility for identifying any 'patterns' in short term sickness absence. For example, you may notice that each sickness absence occurs on a Monday. This may be entirely coincidental but it is your role to explore this with the employee and determine if there are any underlying issues that have resulted in this pattern of absence.

 For further information on "Trigger Points" please refer to the Short Term Sickness Absence and Frequent Absence Guide



RETURNING TO WORK

Employee Responsibilities

7. What if I am returning from a long-term sickness absence?

When returning to work following a long period of sickness absence the return to work interview is more important than ever, and needs to happen as soon as possible, especially if there are any adjustments or support mechanisms to be put into place to support you in your return. Ideally the interview should take place on your first day back – however, if this is not possible it must happen within the first 7 days of your return.

There may be occasions where other Council policies will apply that need to be discussed, e.g. reasonable adjustments, leave of absence and you can find more detail on this in the Long Term Sickness Guide.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

7. What do I need to do if the employee is returning to work following a period of long-term sickness absence?

When an employee returns to work following a long period of sickness absence the return to work interview is more important than ever, and needs to happen as soon as possible, especially if there are any adjustments or support mechanisms to be put into place to support the employee. Ideally the Return to Work interview should take place on the employee's first day back – however, if this is not possible it must happen within the first 7 days of their return.

There may be occasions where other Council policies will apply that need to be discussed, e.g. reasonable adjustments, leave of absence, domestic violence and you can find more detail on this in the Long Term Sickness Guide.

There is always the possibility that changes may have occurred in the workplace whilst an employee is on Long Term Sick leave and it is your role to ensure that the employee is fully informed of any such changes, and aware of any impact this may have upon the way they work.

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8. I have never had a return to work interview – what can I do about this?

It is your manager's role to arrange the Return to Work interview, but if you have not received any communication about this please ask your manager when it is going to take place.

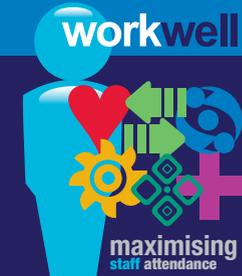
If the return to work interview still does not happen, please contact Human Resources.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

8. An employee is refusing to engage in the 'Return to Work' interview – what can I do about this?

All employees of the Council have a responsibility to engage in the Return to Work interview as stated in the Attendance Management Policy. A refusal to engage in this process could result in disciplinary action.

Please contact your HR representative if you have any concerns in this area.



RETURNING TO WORK

Employee Responsibilities

9. What happens after the Return to Work interview?

Once the Return to Work interview has been completed your manager will need to decide whether any action needs to be taken. For example, if the interview reveals you have an acute or chronic condition you may need support from other departments such as the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. If trigger points have been reached actions may include:

- A referral to a 2nd stage interview
- A referral to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit
- Ongoing managerial support
- Ongoing managerial monitoring
- Workplace adjustments

It is important to maintain contact with your manager following the Return to Work interview to ensure your manager is aware of your health and wellbeing or any support you may need.

Manager / Supervisor Responsibilities

9. What happens after the Return to Work interview?

Once the Return to Work interview has been completed you will need to decide whether any action needs to be taken. For example, if the interview reveals an acute or chronic condition the employee may need the support of other departments such as the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit. If trigger points have been reached actions may include:

- A referral to a 2nd stage interview
- A referral to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit
- Ongoing managerial support
- Ongoing managerial monitoring
- Workplace adjustments

It is your role to pursue any actions required, calling upon other departments as necessary.

For advice and guidance please contact your Human Resources representative.



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