EMPLOYER GUIDANCE

## Return to Work Guidance Notes

Return-to-work interviews are one of the most effective methods of demonstrating to your staff that you care and also managing sickness absence. Conducting return to work interviews on a consistent basis gives you an opportunity to identify possible underlying causes of frequent absence at an early stage.

**Before the interview**

Prior to the interview check the employee’s individual attendance records for the following:

* Actual number of days off
* Common patterns (e.g. regular absence following holidays/days off/ weekends)
* Unacceptably frequent short term sickness absence
* Reasons given for any previous absence

**At the interview**

The following points will help to conduct an effective meeting:-

* Discuss the reasons for the recent absence, referring to the Self-Certification Form or medical certificate if applicable.

* Fully discuss any issues which may affect ongoing performance and ensure that an action plan is agreed if necessary.

* Show how the employee’s absence levels compare with departmental absence percentage levels, taking care if it may be deemed a disability.

* Ask the employee if there is anything they would like to discuss that is affecting their attendance at work e.g. are they struggling with their job role? Bear in mind as the employer you are required to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ based on the employees responses.

* Remind them that prolonged absence, or persistent short term absence, is a potential breach of their contract and may put their long term employment at risk.

* Discuss any potential patterns to their absence.

* Make notes during the discussion and ask the employee to sign them. Provide the employee with a copy and place a copy on their personnel file.

* Discuss their sickness and whether it or any medication may affect work and again consider making reasonable adjustments if required.

**After the return to work discussion**

* Store all documentation in the employee’s personal file.
* Stick to the actions and timescales agreed in the attendance improvement plan, if you have set one.
* Keep the documentation secure whilst in your possession, so that it is not accidentally seen by others.
* Keep your discussions with the employee private and confidential.

**Issues raised during the interview**

**Unauthorised Absence**

If the employee’s absence was unauthorised and/or un-notified refer to the Disciplinary Procedure. Ensure you obtain full details of their absence and the reasons for their lack of contact before calling.

## Patterns in sickness records

When common patterns and/or unacceptably frequent short term sickness absences have occurred, you may need to agree actions to improve attendance. Bear in mind certain conditions can have frequent short term affects. Discuss any planned actions with a senior manager.

**Health or prolonged absences**

If there is an underlying health problem causing frequent short term absence or prolonged absence, you may need to obtain medical advice, particularly if the problems are caused or aggravated in the workplace. Contact Occupational Health Care providers for advice.

**Pregnancy and Disability related Absence**

Absences linked to pregnancy must not be counted for absence monitoring purposes and potentially disability related illnesses too. Absences linked to a disability must be discussed with qualified Occupational Health Care professionals before you proceed, as you may need to request a medical report and make reasonable adjustments.

**Personal Circumstances**

If the problems that are causing absence are due to personal circumstances outside work, it may be possible to arrange support. i.e *a change in hours, or holidays* may be able to help the employee have the time out they need to resolve problems outside work, if this can be accommodated. This would also be considered as ‘reasonable adjustments’.