

# BACK TO WORK INITIATIVES - OVERVIEW

Title: Back to Work Initiatives - Overview

Abstract: This document describes the measures (including interviews) that you can take to reintroduce or rehabilitate employees back into the workplace after a longer period of sickness absence.

Author: [Author Name]

Business Approval: [Approver Name]

Date Issued: [Date Issued]

## AMENDMENT RECORD

Issue Number	Date Issued	Description and Author
001		Original Issue

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### What are back-to-work initiatives?

Back-to-work initiatives are measures that you can take to reintroduce or rehabilitate employees back into the workplace after a longer period of sickness absence. In an ideal world, someone who has been off sick following an operation or accident will be able to start from where they left off. In the real world, a period of re-adjustment is often necessary. This is likely to be due to an inability to immediately resume a full workload or the return to the physical or mental pressures of their previous job. So a back-to-work initiative is a form of compromise that may consist of a combination of the following:

- **Part-time or home working.** This is where an employee is eased back into their previous job by gradually taking on more tasks, as they feel able. The home-working option is ideal for those employees who feel able to work, but can't physically get to work.
- **Change of hours.** This would be useful for an employee who isn't able to cope with commuting in the rush hour, e.g. standing following an operation, or changes to fit in with hospital appointments.
- **Altering the job.** Another option is to make alterations to the job itself. This may be temporary or permanent depending on the circumstances.

### Would back-to-work interviews help reduce sickness absence?

As their name suggests, back-to-work interviews involve a meeting with a manager following an employee's return from sick leave. It normally involves a discussion for the reason for the absence and the employee's state of health on their return. So they have the potential to be a good deterrent to those whose absence isn't genuine.

### What do they involve?

A back to work interview does not need to be lengthy. For longer absences, back-to-work interviews are a good opportunity to discuss how an employee is going to be reintegrated back into the workplace. It can also serve as an update on what has been going on in their absence. Get this right and you can often get someone back to work, even on a part-time basis, far sooner than you might do otherwise. Introducing this practice is easy and involves the following steps:

#### Step 1 - Who will carry out the interviews?

Decide who is going to conduct the back-to-work interview. You could choose certain managers or share the load by making it a line management responsibility. This is probably easier as line managers will have more of an incentive to carry out effective interviews as they will be the ones feeling the effects of having absent staff.

#### Step 2 - Train the interviewers.

To ensure consistency, you should set down guidelines for interviewers on what should be covered with an employee. You should also warn them that their own conduct is important. Interviewers should be told to avoid being too intrusive, as some causes of sickness could be a genuine source of embarrassment to an employee. So the tone of the interview should be supportive rather than disciplinary – that can come later if necessary.

### Step 3 - Recording the interview.

Instruct interviewers to keep notes of the interview. These should include the reason for the absence and the symptoms that were experienced. Keep them on the employee's personnel file as it allows you to monitor them for a pattern. Equally, if genuine health issues were raised by the absence, documenting this information can help you make any alterations that may be necessary to an employee's job. For example they may not be able to stand for long periods or be able to lift as much.

### Step 4 - Cross-reference to your sickness policy.

If you have a sickness policy, add the introduction of back-to-work interviews to it. Also make your employees fully aware of this new development.