Girls' Learning Trust

# Return to Work Meeting Guidance

**Owner:** HR
**Date**: January 2024
**Purpose:** To provide line managers with support to conduct return to work meetings.

## 1. REASONS FOR CONDUCTING A RETURN-TO-WORK MEETING

Conducting a return-to-work meeting is an essential part of the Trust's absence management programme.

Having a discussion with an employee who returns to work is shown to help reduce unnecessary sickness absence and helps the returning employee transition back into the workplace environment with greater ease.

Return to work meetings also offer line managers and HR staff members the opportunity to collate important information about the nature, length and frequency of staff absences, which will help with monitoring and reporting, which will ultimately lead to longer term preventative support measures.

The circumstances and issues discussed at return-to-work meetings will vary by case. As such, it is important to prepare well and be clear on the purpose of the meeting, the information you are looking to gather and what you need to do to provide the necessary support to ease the staff member's return to work.

While return-to-work meetings have been proven to discourage unnecessary sick days, we should in no way use these meetings to instil fear among staff members. Working while ill may see high attendance rates but risks impacting overall productivity ('presenteeism'). This requires a careful balance to be achieved, and through the return-to-work meetings we can gain an understanding into how colleagues can be supported to perform at their best.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RETURN-TO-WORK MEETING

Research has demonstrated that return to work meetings are extremely effective absence management tools, when used correctly – benefitting both the staff member and the Trust in equal measure.

The benefits to the staff member include:

- Being made to feel that their work is valued and their presence at work is appreciated.
- Being given the opportunity to express any concerns or anxiety they may have about returning to work.
- Being able to ask for reasonable adjustments to their working conditions if a disability or long-term health condition has contributed to their absence.
- If applicable, being brought up to speed on work that took place during their absence.

The benefits to the Trust include:

- Staff members are likely to be more productive when resuming their duties, as they feel valued and welcomed back to the workplace.
- We are ensuring a duty of care towards staff members by finding out if any reasonable adjustments for disability or illness need to be made.
- We can track reasons for sickness absence, which may allow for proactive and supportive changes being made to prevent and improve attendance in the future.
- Being able to track the frequency and duration of sickness absences among individual staff members, allowing us to take appropriate action in a timely manner.
- A reduction in unnecessary sickness days in future, as staff members know that there will be a face-to-face return to work meeting where their absence will be discussed.

## 3. WHEN TO CONDUCT A RETURN-TO-WORK MEETING

To ensure a standard and consistent approach across the Trust, and to ensure maximum awareness of the reasons for absence, and enable proactive measures to be taken, it is required that a return-to-work meeting is conducted after **every** instance of absence, irrespective of the length of time the staff member has been absent.

The return-to-work meeting should ideally be held on day one of the staff member's return to work. If this is not logistically possible, it should be conducted as soon as possible after their return.

If the line manager is not able to conduct the return-to-work meeting within the staff member's first week back from absence, they should request that their HR Advisor or a member of the extended senior leadership team conducts the meeting in their place.

## 4. HOW TO CONDUCT THE RETURN-TO-WORK MEETING

There is no strict back to work template but as a guide the following format and questions provide a helpful framework for the return-to-work meeting:

### A. Welcome

The overall tone of the return-to-work meeting should be positive. You should begin by welcoming the employee back to work.

You should explain the purpose of the return-to-work meeting, specifically that the Trust monitors all absence, and it takes a standard approach that all absences are followed up with a return-to-work meeting. It is an informal discussion, but the information provided is important and will be recorded on the staff member's Every record.

### B. Suggested Questions

The number of questions you ask will vary, depending on the circumstances of the absence. For example, if a staff member has had one day of absence and it has not been a regular occurrence, your meeting will inevitably be lighter touch and you will ask only a few of the first questions. However, if the staff member has had a longer period of absence, you may need to establish more detail. Similarly, if the staff member has had repeated absence, you will likely need to go into more depth regarding any wider health issues and the impact of their absence on colleagues, the wider operation and students.

- Ask about the reason for their absence and allow them plenty of time to explain.
- Ask how they are feeling now. If relevant, have they sought professional advice?

- If appropriate, ask if the reason is related to maternity, as maternity related absences should be recorded as such within Every.
- Is the staff member truly fit to return to work?
- Ask if they feel they need any support from the organisation with the return to work.
- Advise them of their absence record to date, noting if they are close to meeting any absence triggers.
- Discuss measures to prevent future absence, if relevant.
- Discuss any work-related issues that may have had an impact on their absence.
- Explain any consequences of the absence.
- Check if they have submitted a self-certification onto their Every record or sent a Fit Note to HR and remind them to do so if not.
- Ask if they have any questions.

**C. Update**

You should take the opportunity to update the staff member with anything they need to know about events that occurred during their absence. This will make the staff member feel included in the work environment and allow them to resume their normal duties effectively.

To ensure the meeting runs smoothly and is as productive as possible, managers should aim to:

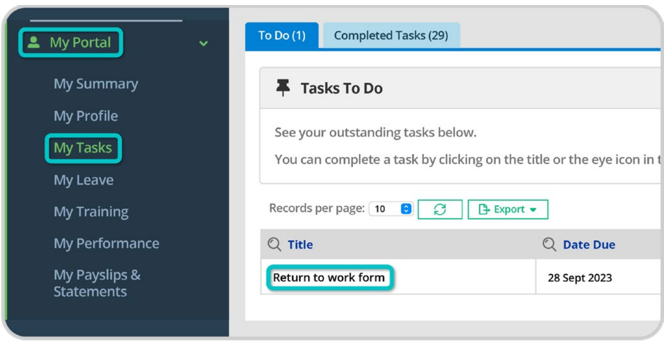
- Be objective. Personal feelings should not influence the tone or direction of the meeting.
- Ask open-ended questions. This will encourage the staff member to share more information about the reason for their absence and feelings about returning to work.
- Listen and show interest. Make sure the employee feels that their concerns have been heard and give them enough time to express themselves.

## 5. MEETING FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

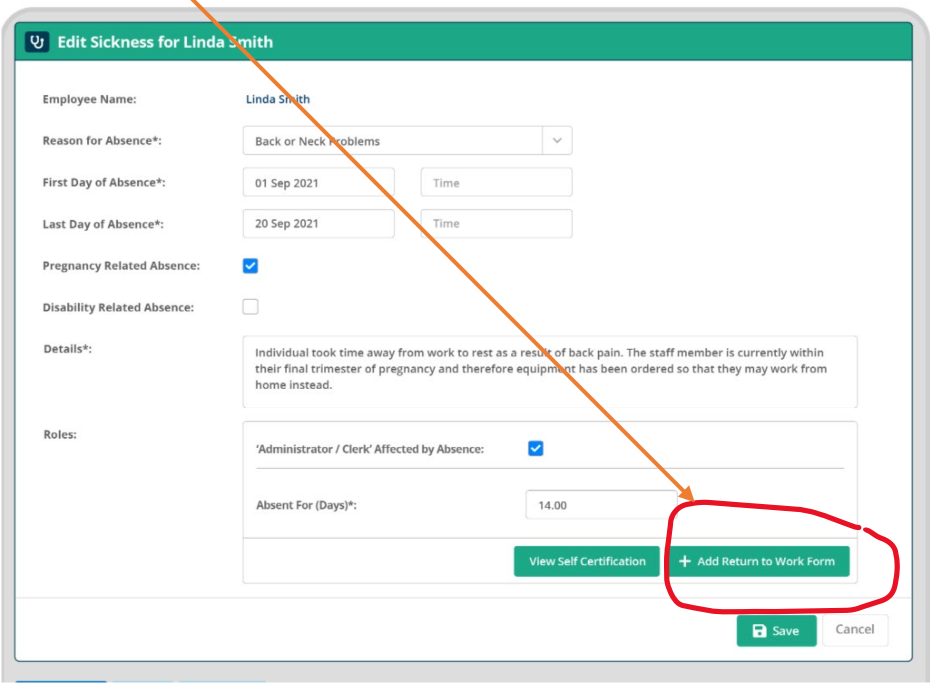
Following the return-to-work meeting, it is the line manager's responsibility to update the staff member's Every record to confirm that the meeting has taken place. This is a 2-minute job.

The process is as follows:

- The return-to-work form is automatically generated as soon as the absence is added to Every – either via SIMs or via a direct entry to Every.
- As the line manager, you will receive an email from Every asking you to complete a return-to-work from. If you click on the link in the email, it will take you to the relevant page on the Every system.
- Alternatively, you can see the return-to-work forms within the My Tasks page in My Portal.



- When you click on the Return-to-Work Form link you will be taken to the following page of the staff member's absence record. You should click on the green button called 'Add Return to Work Form'.




- The following page will appear, which you should populate with the details from your return-to-work meeting. Don't forget to click on the green 'save' button once you have added the details.