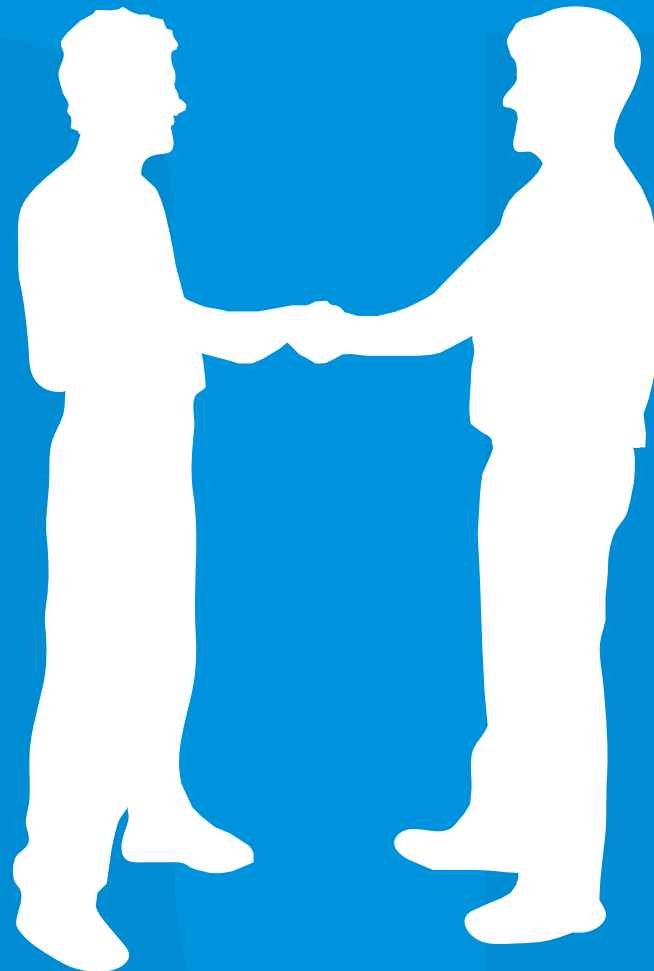


HOW

TO



**Conduct
a return
to work
interview**

HOW to.....

*Conduct a return
to work interview*

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About the author

I am the Managing Director of The HR Booth, a Human Resources Consultancy helping business owners and managers throughout Scotland manage their people more effectively.

I have over 20 years HR experience, having worked for several companies as an HR Manager and I have significant experience in helping businesses tackle absence, whether it be short-term, persistent or long-term absence. Absence has a detrimental impact on businesses, particularly SMEs where the impact is greater as other colleagues are left to pick up the work, which in turn effects the customer. I see this first hand with existing clients and other business owners I speak to.

I agree with various research which confirms the return to work interview process is the most effective way to combat short-term absence. I've put this into practice in the organisations I have worked for and supported, and have seen tangible results.

This E-book provides business owners and managers with a framework

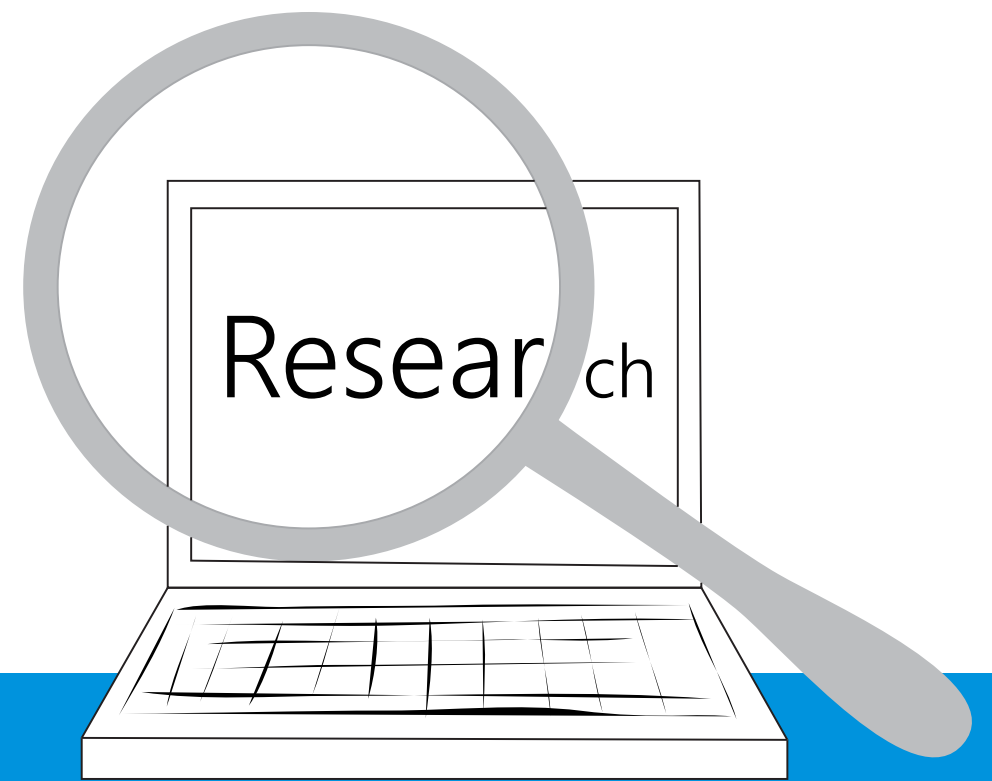


and structure to hold return to work interviews with employees, and there's also an example form which can be used to document the conversation.

I appreciate there's a lot more to managing absence than I've provided in this E-Book, and if you would like to discuss any particular challenge further, whether it's absence or another HR matter, please get in touch. You can email me at alistair.booth@thehrbooth.co.uk or call me on 0844 842 7730.

I hope you enjoy the E-book and I'd welcome your feedback.

Research
has shown.....



“A return to work interview is an effective tool in reducing absences and aiding the early return to work for employees.”

The return to work interview is the RESPONSIBILITY of the LINE MANAGER for the employee and should be considered a normal day to day part of managing their team's attendance.

Our Aim



“Ensure we provide the right environment and support for our employees to keep absence to a minimum.”

It is however a fact of life that people are occasionally absent from work.

The return to work interview provides an opportunity for you as a manager to discuss any absence with your employees on their return to work, to ensure both we and they are doing all they can to keep any future absences to a minimum.

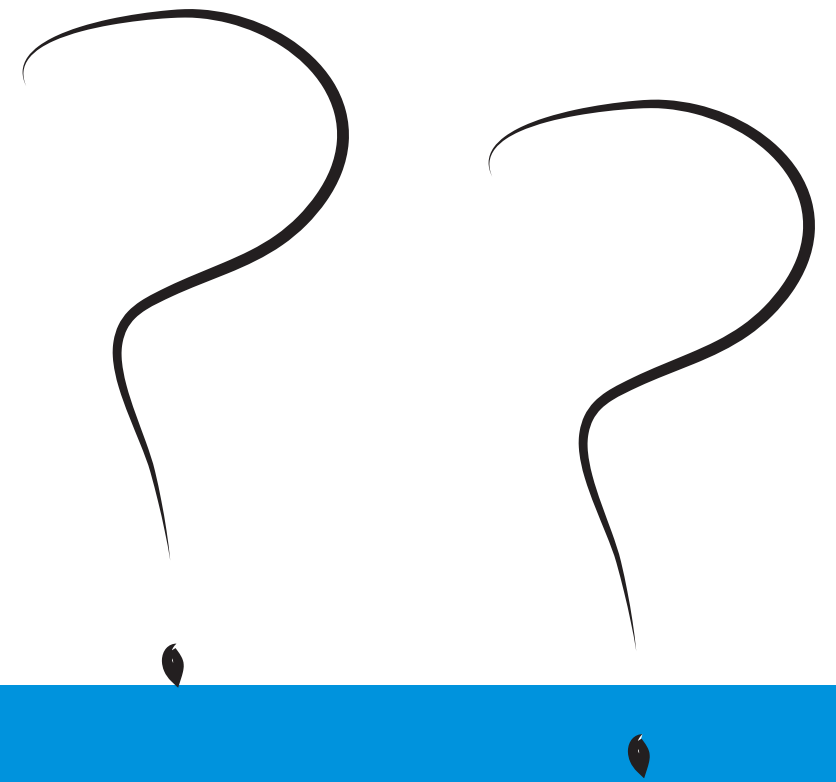
All employees who have been absent from work for whatever reason, have a right to be welcomed back.



Basic responsibilities:-

- Hold a return to work interview as soon as is practicably possible after every absence, no matter if it is only one day
- Hold the return to work interview in private and listen to what the employee is saying
- If you are not available, please ask another Line Manager to conduct it in your absence

Purpose of the interview:-



- To establish the reason for the employees absence and to ensure that they are fit for work. Employees may feel uncomfortable discussing the medical details of their illness so do not press them too strongly on this but keep discussion to how it affected their ability to attend work
- To confirm the employee notified and certified correctly as detailed in the procedure, and have the self-certificate completed
- To advise the employee, where appropriate, that their attendance has fallen to an unacceptable level
- To advise the employee how their absence may have impacted on the team/company
- To discuss the attendance record and determine if any further support or alternative role/hours would help
- To advise the employee what may happen if their attendance does not improve
- To check the attendance record in conjunction with the employee to confirm it is correct

“...you must advise them that they will be called to a further meeting...”

- Absence review meeting
- Formal stage 1
- Formal stage 2

In instances where the employee breaches the triggers for further action, then you must advise them that they will be called to a further meeting to discuss their absences.

They may be asked to attend an Absence Review Meeting, which is an

informal meeting, or a formal stage 1 or 2 attendance meeting, depending on the situation.

Initially the informal Absence Review Meeting will be the next step, but continued breaching of the triggers will lead to a formal stage 1 or stage 2 attendance meeting. Any formal meeting will be notified to the employee in writing.

For further guidance, please contact your HR Representative or The HR Booth

How do I conduct the meeting?

What do I need to do?

Discuss the reasons for absence and any underlying causes that may lead to a recurrence of the absence

IMPORTANT:

If the reason for absence is related to a reoccurring illness or pregnancy related refer to your HR Representative

Check ☒

- Remember we aim to get employees back to work and productive as soon as possible following any absence.
- If there are any underlying reasons causing persistent and repeated short absence we need to try and establish what these are, and support the employee to deal with them.
- Sometimes employees would prefer to speak to a member of the HR team if you have one. This may be due to the personal nature of any illness, or it could be that they have an issue with you, or a member of the team which has contributed to their absence and they are unwilling to discuss this.
- Always offer the option of having a discussion with a member of HR, if they feel uncomfortable having the discussion with you.

What do I need to do?

Ensure the employee is fit to return to work following any period of illness

Check ☒

- Does the employee have a 'fit note'? If it states may be fit for work taking account of the 'following advice', you will need to discuss the advice with your employee and agree on specific ways to support them, including timescales for full recovery.
- Guidance on Fit Notes for managers is contained within this document
- If they have self-certificated do they appear to be fit enough to be back in work?

What do I need to do?

Advise the employee of any support and assistance available should it be required

Check ☒

- Discuss advice highlighted on the fit note and any additional support available e.g. Employee Assistance programme
- Occupational Health
- Agree review meetings to ensure the employee still feels supported and is making suitable progress to return to 'full fitness'

What do I need to do?

Highlight any patterns in absence and discuss how attendance could be improved in the future (if appropriate)

Check ☒

- If there is a history of persistent short term absence (1 or 2 days) there may be a pattern e.g. before or after a holiday, weekend or non-working days; certain days in the month or even year. Highlight this to the employee and discuss any reasons there may be for this. Ensure the employee is aware of any impact on the department and business of their absence.

What do I need to do?

Provide the employee with the opportunity to make you aware of any issues they are having which led or contributed to their absence

Check ☒

- You will need to use effective feedback, questioning and listening skills. There are short courses and hints and tips guides available to assist you - contact The HR Booth for further information.

What do I need to do?

Complete the RTW form (copy enclosed) and return to HR or relevant department. Agree any action points or follow up required

Ensure the self-certification form is completed, signed and dated

Check ☒

- Use the RTW form as a guided discussion document.
- Make sure that any review dates are diarised and both you and the employee are agreed on the outcome of any action points.

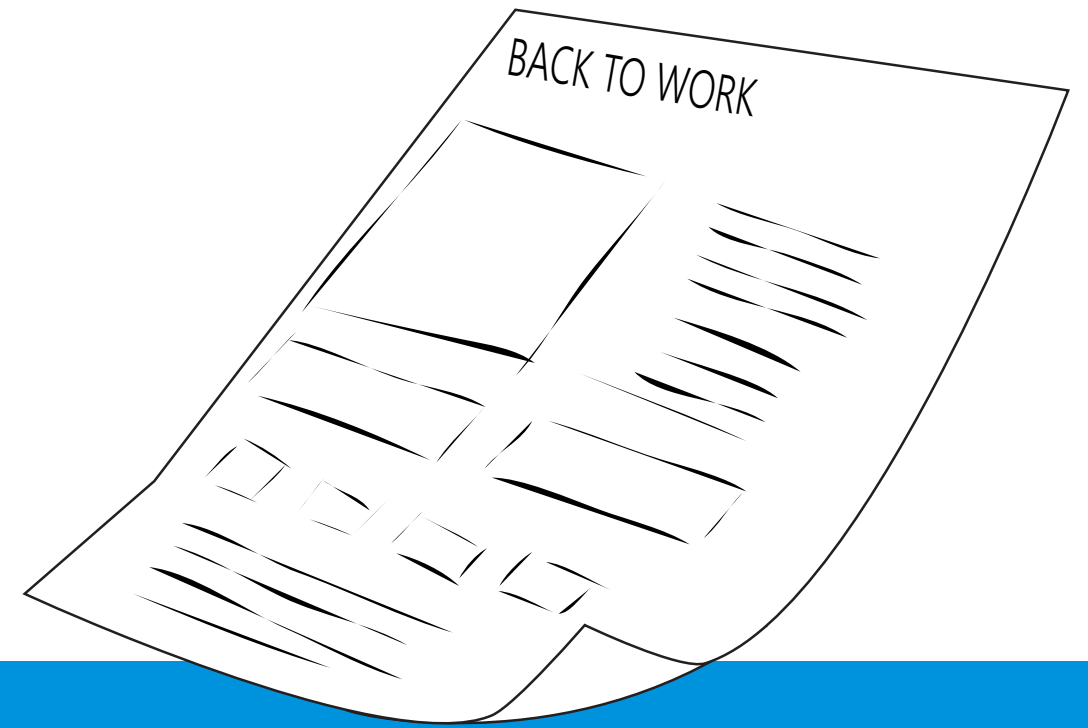
What do I need to do?

Confirm if payment for the absence will or will not be made.

Check ☒

- Refer to your HR Representative before the RTW interview

The return to work form



The return to work form must be completed upon an individual's immediate return. The form is a critical record of your conversation and it is essential that it is completed and signed by managers and individuals.

The layout does prompt managers to ask specific questions to guide you through the process, familiarise yourself with this prior to the meeting so that it feels like a conversation not an interrogation!

Hint: If an individual has been off sick, remember to book time in your diary the next day to complete a return to work

Return to work form:

Absence information

Employee Name:	Date:
Department:	Line Manager:

Current Period of Absence

1st day of absence:	
Last day of absence:	
No. of days absent in period:	

Recent Absence History

Last 26 wks (inc. current absence):	
No. of occasions:	
Pregnancy related?	
Absence percentage:	
Reason for absence:	

Within a 26 week rolling period, calculate the absence percentage and look at the number of instances of this period.

The following points should be covered during the meeting:

- Discuss how the employee is feeling upon their return to work.
- Establish if the absence reporting procedure was followed or not. If it wasn't explain the consequences which could be non payment of sickness benefit and/or formal disciplinary action.
- Ensure that they are well enough to return to work and discuss if any additional support is required.
- Establish if there is any underlying work, health or personal issues and explore these as appropriate.
- Take the opportunity to review the employee's absence history (detailed above).
- For a period of absence that is self certified or where there has been accident at work, ensure that the appropriate information is captured as this is a legal requirement.

Return to work form:

Does the employee need to be signed back into work by your doctor?

Has a fit note been received for all absence over 1 week?
(if yes to previous question)

If the absence related to an injury at work, capture details of the accident at work, e.g. date, time, how it happened and First Aider involved. (Bullet points are fine if the accident book has been completed).

Capture any key points discussed below:

Detail any action/next steps required by you or the employee:

Payment?

Please give reason for decision

Employee signature:

Print name:

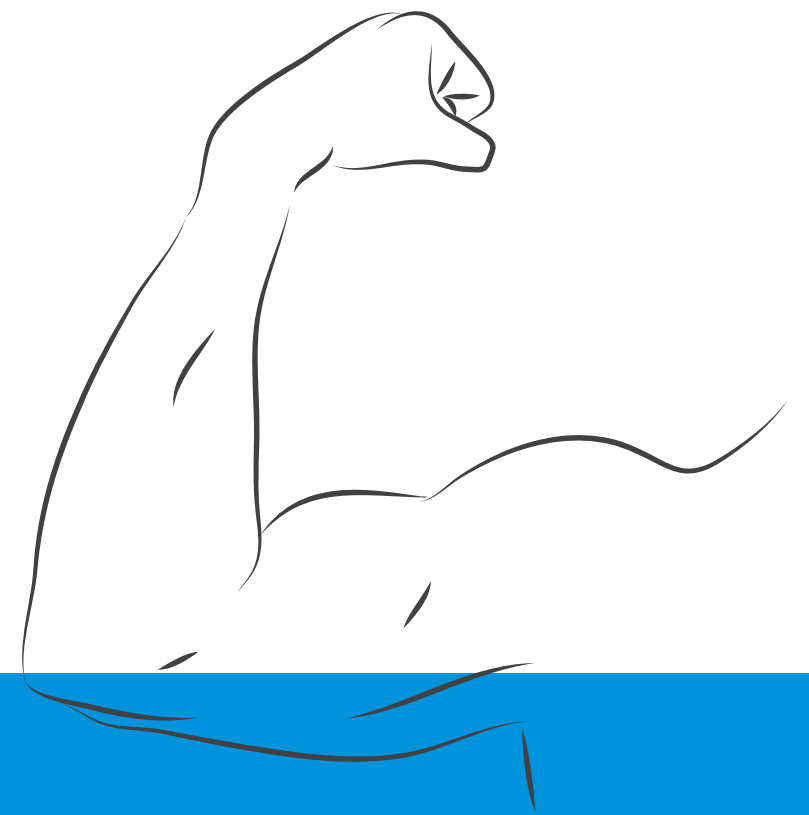
Line Manager signature:

Print name:

General hints and tips for the discussion meeting

- Make the employee feel at ease. Ensure the discussion takes place in private, and preferably not across a desk, which will create a barrier. Schedule sufficient time for the discussion so it does not feel rushed or unimportant.
- Use open and probing questions to get the employee talking e.g. 'What was the reason for your absence?', 'How are you feeling now?', 'Have you experienced this/these problems before?', 'Is there anything we can do to ease you back into work more easily/support you?' Make sure you use pauses to enable the employee to speak, and don't jump in to fill silences.
- Be sensitive to employees needs. If you feel there is something stopping the employee from talking openly to you offer them a chat with a member of the HR team.
- If you suspect the employee is not being entirely honest, do not confront them. Always stick to factual information, highlighting the number of occasions of absence, the impact on the team, and the implications should it continue. Remember the disciplinary procedure is there to support you, should you need to use it, for cases of persistent absence.
- Apply the rule of 80:20 ensure that you give the individual time to speak and actively listen to their responses.
- Refer to the HR Representative if you require any support or are unsure about next steps
- Preparation is key, always ensure that all the history and facts have been reviewed prior to the meeting should you be concerned that this may be a misconduct issue.
- Ensure you use the meeting to give the employee a department/ Business Update

A note about 'Fit Notes'



Sick notes, medical certificates or as they are now referred to as 'fit' notes arise when employees are ill or injured. General practitioners (GPs) provide these as proof to the employer that the employees are genuinely sick.

From 6 April 2010 'fit notes' (or fitness for work statements) were introduced to replace the old sick notes. The old sick note system had been in operation since 1948 and was seen to be in need of modernisation to help address the vast number of

employees on long-term sickness absence or incapacity benefits. It is hoped that the new system will encourage employees back to work more quickly and ultimately will reduce the numbers receiving incapacity benefit.

As well as a change of name, there are several practical differences in the approach to be taken over the provision of these notes. However, it is fair to say that the most important change is a conceptual shift focusing on the work employees

can do, rather than what they cannot do.

It is important to emphasise that employers' duties to pay statutory sick pay and make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act remain unaffected. Managers should be wary of contravening the Equality Act if the employee's health problems qualify as a disability or are pregnancy related. If in any doubt please consult the HR Representative.

The 'fit note' explained

When your doctor provides you with a fit note they will advise you on one of two options. Either you will be 'not fit for work' or you 'may be fit for work'.

'Not fit for work'

Your doctor will choose this option when they believe that your health condition will prevent you from working for a stated period of time.

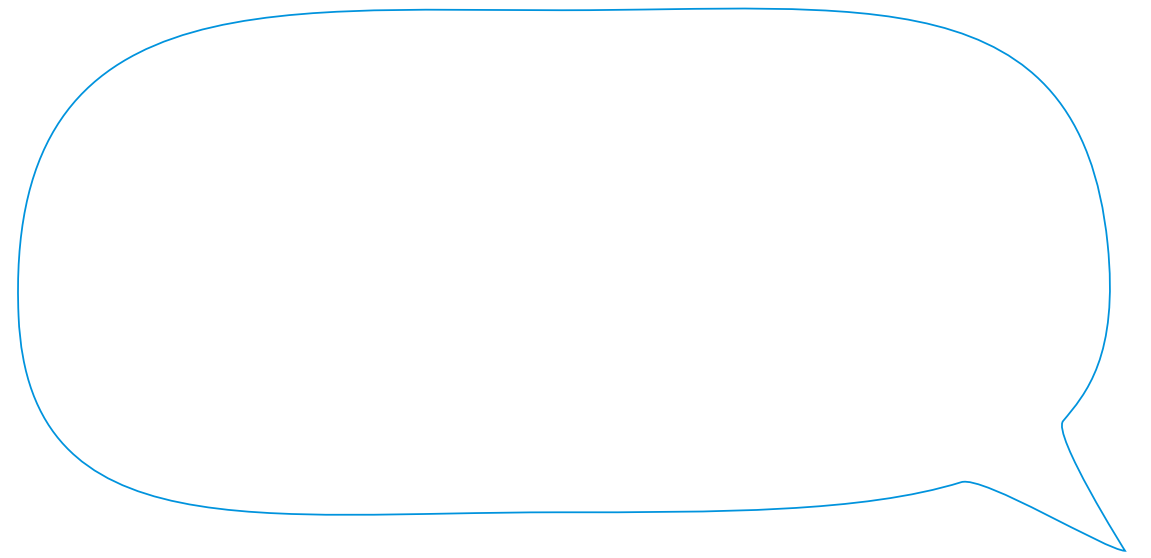
'May be fit for work'

A doctor will choose this option when they believe that the employee may be able to return to work while they recover with some help from the employer. A doctor may include some comments which will help us understand how we are affected by their condition. If appropriate, they can also suggest one or more common ways to help an employee return to work.

This could include:

- a phased return to work - where the individual may benefit from a gradual increase in your work duties or working hours, for example after an operation or after injury
- altered hours - allowing the employee the flexibility to start or leave later, for example if they struggle travelling in the 'rush hour'
- amended duties - to take into account the employee's condition, for example looking at a role that does not involve driving for a short period if a large part of the employee's role involves driving
- Changes to workplace - to take into account the employee's condition, for example allowing them to work on the ground floor or from home if they have problems going up and down stairs and there is no lift.

What others have said



“Alistair has provided us with very specific advice and guidance to help us feel more confident in dealing with issues around attendance management. His input has given us reassurance that we’re doing everything correctly and balancing the needs of individual staff members with the needs of the organisation.”

Duncan Mitchell, General Manager, Fife Employment Access Trust

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