

Returning to work after absence

1 . Return to work meetings

When someone returns to work after an absence, they should talk with their employer. This is to make sure they're ready to return and have any support they need.

An employer should have a process they follow when someone returns to work. This should be in the organisation's absence policy, if they have one.

A return to work meeting is often just an informal chat between an employee and their line manager. These meetings are sometimes called return to work interviews.

What a return to work meeting is for

It's not a legal requirement to have a return to work meeting. But a chat as soon as possible after an employee has returned is a good opportunity to:

- make sure the employee is ready to return to work
- talk about any work updates that happened while they were off
- see if they need any support
- agree on a plan for returning to work, if appropriate, for example a [phased return to work](#)
- talk about what they would like other employees to know about their absence and what they would like to keep confidential

If the employee has been off sick

If the employee has been off sick, their employer might also:

- look at any recommendations from the employee's doctor
- consider a referral to a medical service such as occupational health

If the employee is disabled, their employer should discuss whether there are any [reasonable adjustments](#) they can make to support the return to work.

[Use our return to work meeting template for when an employee has been off sick](#)

Looking out for causes of absence

An employer should also look out for signs of underlying problems causing an employee's absence. For example:

- work-related stress
- a disability

The employer should be sensitive and understanding if they're talking to someone about this. An employee does not have to tell them anything. But talking openly can help the employer put the right support in place.

Find out more about:

- [managing work-related stress](#)
- [supporting disabled people at work](#)

How to prepare for a return to work meeting

Before a return to work meeting, an employer should:

- make sure the chat will be private and confidential, whether it is face to face or online
- gather any relevant employee records – for example, records of previous conversations about the employee's absence
- prepare questions to ask
- make sure they know what support they can offer

They should also think about how they might respond to any requests from the employee. For example:

- [flexible working](#)
- [phased return to work](#)
- [reasonable adjustments](#) – if the employee is disabled

If the employee has been off sick, an employer should read any recommendations from the employee's doctor in a:

- [fit note](#)
- [report about their health](#)

Before the return to work meeting, an employee should speak to their employer to:

- find out more about the meeting and what to expect
- check if there's anything they need to bring

They should also think about:

- any changes or adjustments they might need
- what support might help in the future

If an employee is unhappy with how their return was handled

If an employee is unhappy with how their return to work has been handled they should [raise it with their employer](#).

2. Phased returns

A phased return to work is when someone who's been absent gradually builds up to returning to work. For example:

- starting on reduced hours
- doing work that is different to their usual job
- having a lighter workload

A phased return to work might be appropriate after a:

- long-term illness
- serious injury
- bereavement

For example, Bo works on a farm and has been off work with a leg injury. Bo agrees with their employer to return but only operate certain machinery and take regular rest breaks.

If an employee is disabled, their employer must also make [reasonable adjustments](#) to support them.

How long a phased return should be

How long a phased return will last depends on the employee's individual circumstances. The employer and the employee should agree how long it will be for.

If an employee has a [fit note](#), this will usually give advice on how long their phased return should be. However, the employer and their employee should still discuss and agree this together.

The employer and employee should regularly review how the phased return is going.

The employer should be flexible and make sure they're supporting their employee's health and wellbeing. For example, they might need to:

- extend the phased return to work
- agree to new changes to the employee's responsibilities or work pattern

Pay during a phased return

An employee's pay will depend on what kind of phased return to work they have agreed with their employer.

If the employee returns to their usual work on reduced hours

If the employee returns to their usual work but on reduced hours, they should get their usual rate of pay for the hours they work.

For the time they're not able to work, an employee's pay will depend on whether:

- they've agreed anything with their employer
- their employer has a policy that covers this

They might get:

- full pay if the employer has agreed to it or it's written in the organisation's policy
- company sick pay, if their employer offers this
- [statutory sick pay \(SSP\)](#), if they're eligible – this is only if the employer does not offer full pay or company sick pay

If the employee has a lighter workload

If the employee has a lighter workload, it's up to the employer and employee to agree on a rate of pay. The employer should put this agreement in writing, for example in a letter or email.

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about phased returns, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).