Phased Return to Work
Guidance

Human Resources Department

Lead Director:  Director of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Student Support

Policy issue date:

Policy to be reviewed every 2 years.
Date of next review:
Phased Returns to Work following Sickness Absence – New Procedure and Form

What is a Phased Return to Work and why might staff need one?

When a member of staff has been absent from work due to sickness for a period of 20 working days (4 calendar weeks) or more, this is regarded as Long Term Sickness Absence.

Staff who have been off ‘long term’ may require a phased return to work to ease them back in to work gradually, to avoid exacerbation of their symptoms and fatigue, or to help them re-adjust to work duties and hours, depending on their condition or illness.

Staff may also require a phased return to work following an operation or injury for example, even if they have not been off sick ‘long term’.

A phased return might consist of shorter days; a shorter working week than their normal contracted hours, and decreased duties – all of which may start off minimally, increasing to more hours and days as the phased return period progresses. Whilst hours may be reduced, other adjustments may also need to be considered for the member of staff - please contact your Link HR representative for advice regarding this.

What has changed?

Following the introduction of the ‘Fit Note’ in 2010, which replaced the former ‘Sick Note’, Human Resources have updated their procedure for managing and reporting phased returns to work.

Phased returns to work, are commonly referred to as ‘Rehabilitation Programmes’ by GPs, owing to the fact that on signing someone fit to return to work, they may recommend a number of weeks’ rehabilitation in the work place, which may extend beyond the original four week phased return period that many employers offered. GPs recommended rehabilitation programmes may stretch to six or even eight weeks of gradually increasing hours, days and tasks.

In light of this, the University has changed the way that phased returns / rehabilitation programmes are managed, which has given rise to an important change in reporting procedure.

Payment during phased returns

Staff will receive pay for the hours they are actually present at work, during their phased return / rehabilitation programme. Employees will be required to obtain a
Fit Note from their GP, to certify that they are well enough to return to work, which may be with or without restrictions.

Once the Fit Note is received by the employee’s line manager, a meeting can be held to plan the phased return / rehabilitation programme.

The employee will receive full (normal) pay for the hours/days that they attend work, but will receive Occupational Sick Pay, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), or nil pay, whichever is applicable to the individual, for the time that they are not at work. Staff may wish to discuss with their line manager, the option of using annual leave as a substitute for sick pay or nil pay periods, to enable them to receive normal (full) pay during these hours/days also.

On returning to work to the employee’s contracted hours, pay will return to normal. *Please contact your HR link representative with any queries regarding pay during phased return periods.*

**Agreeing and managing the Phased Return to Work**

Having followed the Staff Sickness and Incapability policy and procedure for staff on Long Term Sickness Absence (Annex C), Managers should arrange to meet with their employee, together with their Link HR Representative, to discuss and agree a return to work on a phased, gradual basis.

Managers will complete the new Phased Return To Work form (attached to this document) with the member of staff, and both parties will sign to say that they agree to the temporary working arrangements.

Managers may prefer to agree the pattern of the phased return / rehabilitation programme, on a week by week basis, with the employee, so that both parties can assess the employee’s progress and capability as time goes on, rather than agree a number of weeks upfront, which may then change.

In these circumstances, Managers must meet with the employee each week to agree the working pattern for the following week, and to record it on the Phased Return To Work form, which both parties should have a copy of.

The Manager (or the designated person responsible for entering sickness absence for the School or Department) must then report the phased return details and working pattern on the on-line reporting system, as they would sickness absence, one week in arrears, following the guidance below.

Managers are not required to forward a hard copy of the Phased Return To Work form to Human Resources or to Payroll, but it is their responsibility to ensure that information has been entered electronically. They should store the paper copy of the form in a safe, confidential file.
Entering a phased return to work via the online sickness absence system

Please note:
All phased returns to work should be entered in arrears and on a weekly basis at the same time as entering the standard sickness absence return. Staff on a phased return to work also require an entry on the standard sickness absence return to record the time classed as sickness.

- Enter the URN or double click in the URN field to generate the pick list and select. Once entered, this will populate the staff name and pay point fields.

- Enter the name of the line manager who has authorised the phased return to work pattern

- Was the first day of absence a part day? If so enter Y (yes), otherwise enter N (no)

- Enter the date returned to work and the first and last dates that the employee was unfit for work. The return to work date and last date should correspond to the beginning of the phased return period.

- Set up the employees working week pattern by entering the number of hours worked for each of the relevant days. Please note a full day is 7.4 hours or 7 hours for academic and research staff.

Example for full time member of academic staff

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Example for part time member of support staff, working half days Monday to Wednesday

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- Enter a week commencing date if the employee works shifts

- If all recommended adjustments have been made please enter Y (yes), otherwise enter N (no)

- The “Created”, “Created by”, “Last Updated” and “Updated by” fields will populate automatically when saving the record. These fields are in grey to emphasise this

- A free text field is available for any notes you wish to add for your own records or for the benefit of HR and payroll
• Enter a Y (yes) or N (no) to the questions to establish if the reason for the phased return relates to absence following sickness or an accident. If the absence was due to an accident please enter whether this was at work (A) our outside work (O)

• Enter a reason for sickness absence or double click on the reason field to generate the pick list and select

• Save all data entered so far

• Enter the sickness absence week commencing date. Please note this should always be a Sunday

• Complete the actual hours worked for the employee during the particular week of the phased return.

• Enter how the remaining working hours should be paid, either as sick pay (SP) or as annual leave (AL)

• Check all information entered and save

• In the case of any problems or queries, please contact your link HR team, details can be found at http://www.keele.ac.uk/hr/linkteams/

Should you have any queries regarding the new process, form or data entry, please contact a member of Human Resources. For pay enquiries, please contact the Payroll department.