



University  
of Glasgow | People & Organisational  
Development

# Phased Return to Work Guidance

## Guidance – Phased Return to Work

### Introduction

In cases where an individual has been absent from work due to illness over a prolonged period of time, a phased return to work may benefit them as part of a rehabilitation programme. Typically this will be informed by medical advice (e.g. an individual's GP or Occupational Health) and in some cases a phased return may be agreeable directly between an individual and their line manager (with People & OD Support as required). The purpose of a phased return to work is to allow time for a colleague to be properly rehabilitated by gradually building back up to their full duties.

A phased return to work may be considered a reasonable adjustment and should be considered alongside a range of other potential adjustments (as dictated by available medical advice) to give the best chance of a successful and sustained return to work.

### Phased Return to Work Process

In terms of a rehabilitation programme the following process should be noted:

#### Occupational Health Advice

Occupational Health may recommend a phased return to work (potentially alongside other potential adjustments) in appropriate circumstances. This recommendation will be subject to agreement by the individual and their line manager subject to factors including the timescale, duties and other working arrangements.

As noted above, in some cases (e.g. less complex) a phased return may be agreeable directly between an individual and their line manager (with People & OD Support as required).

Phased returns will typically last (and be paid at full pay) for no longer than four weeks however it is recognised that in some cases a longer period may be advised at the outset. The circumstances in which an extended phased return may take place are outlined in more detail under 'Extended Phased Return to Work' below.

#### Discussion and Agreement

Discussion must take place between the manager and colleague before agreeing any phased return to work arrangement. This includes considering any available medical advice

where applicable. The sections below should also be referred to as required as part of any discussion/agreement. It is also important that possible salary implications are discussed and understood at the start of the process.

The phased return should then be planned, taking into account the need to progress over the period of time back up to full duties. It may also be advised that lighter duties or other adjustments are included/made during the phased return. All recommendations should be considered and further information can be found in Guidance – Considering Reasonable Adjustments.

In advance of any return to work, the colleague should be updated on any changes which have taken place in their absence.

It is recommended that the manager and colleague record the agreed plan for clarity and to refer back to during the phased return (e.g. when assessing progress or reviewing effectiveness of adjustments).

### Support During the Phased Return to Work

Support should be ongoing during any phased return to work, particularly in the early days to ensure that the period of rehabilitation is effective. Weekly progress reviews should take place to facilitate this, including assessing progress, identifying any problems or measuring the effectiveness of any implemented adjustments.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to seek a volunteer to act as a "buddy" for a limited period of time as a useful way of providing support in the very early stage of the return.

In circumstances where problems arise, where the phased return to work appears to be unsuccessful or where further absence occurs, further Occupational Health advice should be sought. Advice should also be sought if either party wishes to significantly amend the recommended or agreed phased return to work plan.

### Unsuccessful Phased Return

Where an individual is unable to return to full duties by the end of a planned phased return to work, further Occupational Health advice must be sought.

Depending on the circumstances and the Occupational Health advice, the following may be appropriate:

- Agreeing a further time-limited extension of the phased return, for shorter-term phased returns

- Agreeing a temporary reduction in contractual working hours to facilitate a longer-term phased return
- Agreeing the need for the member of staff to resume sick leave and to re-submit medical certificates.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to consider a permanent reduction in working hours or the possibility of redeployment. Further Human Resources advice should always be taken in such circumstances. Additional Occupational Health advice may also be appropriate.

For ongoing long-term absence where a phased return to work has failed (or repeatedly failed), the process outlined in the Managing Attendance policy (Managing Long-Term/Ongoing Absence) should continue to be followed.

### Extended Phased Return to Work

An extended phased return to work may arise on the back of an unsuccessful phased return to work (as above) or in some more exceptional cases a longer phased return may be advised (by Occupational Health) from the outset. I.e. not just as a time-limited extension as per above.

Where an extended phased return to work is advised from the outset (or where a further time-limited extension is advised on an initial phased return) this must be discussed and agreed with an appropriate senior manager and P&OD. Where this is agreed, colleagues will be paid at their normal rate of pay for up to 6 weeks.

If a prolonged phased return needs to be facilitated, a reduction in contractual working hours will require to be explored and agreed. This may be on a temporary basis as a reasonable adjustment, or in some cases it may be appropriate to consider a permanent reduction in working hours or the possibility of redeployment (as above). Further advice should be sought in such circumstances.

## **Medical certificates & Payment**

If Occupational Health have recommended that a phased return to work is appropriate and the manager has agreed to implement the recommendations, the individual will not be required to submit any further medical certificates beyond the start of their phased return as they will no longer be on sick leave and sick pay will not apply.

The manager will advise the colleague on the details of their salary during the phased return to work programme.

Colleagues will be paid at their normal rate of pay for up to the first 4 weeks of any phased return. Where a phased return arrangement extends beyond 4 weeks, payment will be made on a pro-rata basis, based on actual hours worked. An exception to this would be where a short extension of the phased return to work (e.g. 1 or 2 weeks) is envisaged. In this case, agreement to continue full pay will be subject to agreement between an appropriate senior manager and People & OD.