

PHASED RETURN TO WORK PROCEDURE

This document is subject to the policy statement included in the Employee Handbook

This document is subject to the standard policy statements

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<i>Date agreed & Implemented:</i>	
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Denbighshire County Council is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for its staff. It recognises that staff who have experienced a prolonged period of absence from work due to illness or injury may require particular support in returning to their normal hours and duties of work. It aims to assist staff in such circumstances to return to work in an effective and productive way which does not compromise their recovery or long-term health by facilitating appropriate measures to support rehabilitation.

This may involve a phased return to work programme.

Denbighshire County Council recognises that the circumstances of each case of long-term absence will differ and will deal with rehabilitation arrangements in a sensitive and flexible manner. This procedure sets out the broad parameters in which a phased return to work programme will be supported and managed. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the Attendance at Work Procedure.

In accordance with the Equality Framework, Denbighshire County Council will not discriminate in the application of these procedures in respect of age, disability, gender, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, trade union membership or lack thereof. Reasonable adjustments will be put in place, as appropriate, to support staff with a disability.

What is a phased return to work programme?

A phased return to work is a supportive arrangement which may be put in place to assist rehabilitation following a period of long-term absence from work as a result of illness or injury. Long-term absence is defined as a period of 4 or more week's continuous absence. The purpose of a phased return to work is to rehabilitate to full duties and to enable gradually progress to undertake full normal working hours and duties within an agreed timescale. A phased return to work would not normally apply to short term absences.

In what circumstances will a phased return to work programme be supported?

The appropriateness of a phased return to work will depend on the nature of illness/injury and the stage of recovery. Denbighshire County Council will facilitate a phased return to work programme where this is supported by medical advice, for example, from the Occupational Health and Attendance Advisor or a Medical Specialist/Consultant.

What are the timescales involved in a phased return to work programme?

Any agreed phased return to work programme will be time-limited and will normally be between 2-4 weeks not exceeding 4 weeks. In exceptional circumstances, this timeframe may be extended, for example, where medical advice suggests this is appropriate to support whilst undergoing invasive medical treatment.

How will the particular arrangements of each phased return to work programme be agreed?

To ensure a successful outcome, all elements of an agreed phased return to work programme require prior assessment and appropriate planning. This includes timescales, attendance patterns and duties. Management and the employee will work together to establish a plan which supports a full recovery and return to normal duties and hours on a sustainable basis. The following process will normally apply:

a) Medical Advice

Long-term absence will be managed in accordance with Attendance at Work Procedure. Prior to an employee's anticipated return to work, a report from the Occupational Health Adviser should be requested following a management referral to Occupational Health. The report will outline recommendations as to potential measures Denbighshire County Council could adopt to support a rehabilitation into the workplace. This might include, for example, temporary reallocation of duties within the service area, adjustments to the working environment and/or a phased return of hours. Specific advice will be provided as to the most effective application of such support measures in relation to individual employee circumstances.

b) Meeting

Line management and if appropriate Human Resources will arrange to meet with the employee to discuss the OH report and agree arrangements for a return. The return to work programme will be planned with reference to this procedure and the specific advice or recommendations from the Occupational Health Adviser.

c) Return to Work Plan

The agreed arrangements for a phased return to work programme will be detailed in a Return to Work Plan. This will include:

- The start and end date of the phased return to work programme;
- The attendance pattern (hours of work should increase incrementally over the period of the phased return to work programme).
- It is advisable for the manager to undertake a short risk assessment with the individual upon their return in order to identify any concerns the individual may have. This discussion should also look at the tasks that the individual has to undertake during their working week taking into account what the tasks involve, the environment and the load whilst bearing in mind the individual's medical condition
- It may also be advisable to complete a workstation assessment form if the individual is a Display Screen Equipment user (as

roughly defined by the regulations as someone who works most their working day with visual display screens) in order to identify any potential problem areas within the workstation. There is a good things to consider section which will help the individual/manager to rectify some identified concerns.

- The duties expected to be undertaken during the return to work programme;
- Any additional support which Denbighshire County Council can provide to assist with a rehabilitation, for example, the allocation of a short term 'buddy' within the workplace to help the employee re-familiarise themselves within the working environment and practices, the date for a formal review of the employees return to work arrangements and contact details for reporting any concerns raised during phased return programme.

Medical Certification

General Practitioners may issue a Fit Note which indicates that an individual "may be fit for work", subject to his or her recommendations. Consideration will be given to the suitability of implementing any such recommendations which, for example, may relate to temporary adjustments to working conditions. Where appropriate, the Return to Work Plan will be adjusted to reflect any recommendations which are accepted.

Further medical certificates will not be required relative to the phased return to work programme as an individual will no longer be classified as being on sick leave and sick pay will not apply.

Return to Work Discussion

Line management will have a Return to Work discussion on the first day of a return. This is an opportunity for line management to understand the employee's state of wellbeing, bring the employee up-to-date with developments within the service area and determine if there is any training or other support that might be appropriate as a result of any changes that may have been implemented during the employee's absence. At this meeting, line management will also confirm the details of the employees Return to Work Plan. Employees may seek support and guidance at any stage through, the Confidential Counselling Service, the Occupational Health Service, the Human Resources Department or a trade union representative.

What impact will a phased return to work have on my pay?

Employees will be paid at the rate of their normal contractual salary with an agreed phased return to work programme based on the recommendation of the Occupational Health Adviser.

How will non-attendance associated with a phased return to work programme be recorded?

Days of non-attendance for which employees are eligible to receive full contractual salary in relation to their phased return to work will be recorded as a correction in Vision Time with reason posted in comments box.

If absent due to illness during a phased return to work, this will be classified as sick leave.

What happens if an employee is experiencing difficulties following a Phased Return to Work Plan?

During the period of a phased return to work, line management will regularly discuss the employee's progress on an informal basis to ensure wellbeing and to identify any possible problems. If employees are experiencing any difficulty in undertaking the phased return to work, this should be brought to the attention of their line management at the earliest opportunity in order that adjustments to the programme can be agreed. In circumstances where major adjustments are being considered, line manager will consult with Human Resources which may seek further advice from the Occupational Health Service.

Line management will hold a formal review meeting at the mid-point of the agreed period of rehabilitation and a note of this meeting will be taken and shared with Human Resources. If at this stage an employee is experiencing difficulties relating to their recovery which impacts on the Return to Work plan, further advice from the Occupational Health Advisor will be sought. This may result in a further time-limited extension of the phased return. If it is unlikely that an employee will be able to return to full normal working hours and duties at the end of the agreed return to work programme, consideration will be given to a temporary contractual reduction in working hours.

What happens if an employee is not fit to return to full working hours and/or duties after the agreed period of the phased return to work programme?

In these circumstances, Management in conjunction with Human Resources will seek further advice from the Occupational Health Adviser. A meeting will be arranged with the employee and a representative from Human Resources to discuss potential options. Employees may be accompanied by their Trade Union representative if they wish. Options to be considered may include a further time-limited extension of the phased return programme based on medical advice or a temporary contractual reduction in working hours.

Ultimately, if an employee's health difficulties mean that they are unable to resume their normal working hours and duties within a reasonable timescale despite the support measures put in place, the council will need to consider options which may include a permanent variation to contractual hours or redeployment. Where none of these measures are appropriate due to the severity of the employee's illness, consideration may have to be given to an application for early retirement on the grounds of ill-health provided this is supported by the Occupational Health Adviser.

What if the employee does not want to reduce their contractual working hours?

If the employee is not fit to return to their full working hours and duties despite measures to support their rehabilitation and they do not wish to reduce their contractual working hours, they will be considered unfit for work and sick leave will resume. Their absence will be managed in accordance with the Attendance Management Procedure and poor attendance procedures will be invoked should the levels of absence reach the relevant triggers.

