

HSE - Example of what a written absence policy might contain

There is no legal requirement to provide a policy statement on return to work. This offers suggestions directly to you as an employer.

What should a written policy look like?

There is no one size fits all, the format needs to be one that suits your circumstances, e.g. a statement or a set of guidelines, ranging from half a page of short points for a small company to a longer, more detailed document for large companies with expert resources.

It is useful to:

- consider whether the written policy should stand alone or form part of other company or organisational policy documents e.g. equal opportunities guidelines or staff handbooks
- make sure the messages and information given by linked documents are consistent with one another
- draw a clear distinction between information on disciplinary procedures and guidance for helping employees back to work
- avoid confusion by not including the policy in statements that you are legally required to provide e.g. the health and safety policy statement, which you must provide under the HSWA

What do I need to include in a written policy?

Information that is useful to put into a policy statement, includes:

- your or your organisation's commitment to helping employees return to work;
- confirmation that your employees can expect you will:
 - work with trade union representatives and other employee representatives on developing and reviewing the operation of the return to work policy;
 - make reasonable adjustments to retain an employee who has become disabled or whose disability has worsened so they are not put at a substantial disadvantage in their job;
 - support returns to work e.g. in the form of adjustments to the workplace or changes to systems or hours of work wherever possible and redeployment where this is necessary;
 - agree return to work plans with everyone affected;
 - ensure that employees that have suffered ill health, injury or disability will be treated fairly, equally and consistently.
- your arrangements for recording sickness absence, as appropriate
- provision of leave and time off to help return to work or to attend medical appointments
- procedures for keeping in contact with staff on sick leave and what is expected from the employee
- arrangements for return to work interviews

- how the policy links in with other key policies, such as personnel, health and safety, equal opportunities etc, and company employee benefit schemes

If your organisation has a line management structure and access to human resource or occupational health support you may also wish to consider including:

- what action line managers should take and when and how the action will be supported
- responsibilities for putting the return to work plan into action and reviewing its progress
- sources of advice within the organisation on what can be done to help an employee's return to work and continued employment
- help that can be given to employees by government agencies, charitable bodies and other industry and specialist organisations
- the information that needs to be provided and requested when making occupational health or other medical referrals

Key actions for a successful policy statement

- Discuss and agree the content with trade union representatives
- Get the practice right – consider piloting it before committing it to a statement
- Write the content in plain language, making sure it is clear who is responsible and accountable for carrying out any actions or procedures
- Make sure everyone understands their responsibilities and has the skills and knowledge to put them into practice and provide training if necessary
- Check that procedures are put into operation and they are carried out consistently for all employees affected
- Invite feedback from employees and from trade union representatives and review the content regularly
- Keep factual information up to date