

## Faculty of Medicine and Health

### Guidance to support the return to work following long term absence

#### 1. Introduction

This document offers guidance for managers and colleagues on supporting staff within FoMH who are returning from maternity leave, long term sickness or other periods of long term absence. (NB for the purposes of this guidance “long term” is defined as over 3 months)

#### 2. Principles

- each individual’s circumstances are different and individual needs must be taken into consideration,
- individuals should be involved in making decisions about how their absence and return is managed wherever possible,
- it is recognised that circumstances and individual requirements may change in response to life events,
- it is recognised that return to work after any lengthy period of absence may be daunting,
- potential impact on colleagues should be considered, and support put in place as appropriate
- any changes to working patterns, duties etc. must be discussed with the individual
- on-going communication is essential and managers must take the lead in maintaining contact

#### 3. Planned absence

##### Prior to the start of the absence

Where absence is planned (e.g. maternity leave, planned sickness absence) arrangements for support during, and management of, the absence should be discussed between the manager and member of staff, and planned well in advance.

This will include;

- arrangements for handover prior to the period of absence

- arrangements for keeping in touch, (timing and method),
- cover for absence (if appropriate),
- initial discussion of options for return to work, for example reduced hours, flexible working arrangements etc, and how the application process works, including the timescales, bearing in mind that individual circumstances and requirements may change.

It is the manager's responsibility to maintain contact as agreed throughout the period of absence whilst being sensitive to unexpected or changing circumstances.

Managers should always confirm that contact arrangements remain, and be mindful of confidentiality.

#### **4. Unplanned absence**

This is likely to be as a result of serious illness, accident or bereavement, and initial contact may be through a family member. As far as possible the most appropriate way of keeping in touch in the short term should be discussed at the initial contact, bearing in mind the need for confidentiality.

We have a duty of care to the member of staff, and contact should be made directly with the individual if at all possible. A simple card, text or email may be enough to establish contact in the first instance.

#### **5. Guidance on planning the return to work**

This guidance is applicable to returning to work after both planned and unplanned absence.

When a return to work date is confirmed the manager and member of staff should discuss the practical arrangements. Return arrangements should be tailored to individual needs and could include:

- Seeking advice from occupational health. It is likely that occupational health will already have been involved in cases of long term sickness, and will be able to advise on arrangements for return. It may also be appropriate to postpone the return to work in order to ensure that up to date occupational health advice has been received; a judgement will need to be taken in conjunction with your HR Manager. Occupational Health referrals should be made through Faculty HR.
- Arrangements for handover of work

- Work priorities for first few weeks following return – for example a phased return to teaching or phased arrangements to pick up the full workload should be considered
- Any support requirements in the workplace both long and short term
- Time arranged for a formal briefing/catch up with manager, and/or colleagues as appropriate
- Any arrangements for a phased return and potential impact on salary
- Flexible working arrangements, either to assist a “settling back” period or as a longer term contractual change (managers should ensure that they are familiar with the various options for flexible working)
- Arrangements for reintegration into the team
- What information (if any) can be shared with the rest of the team
- Occupational health support as appropriate, including on-going appointments and opportunities to respond to on-going advice
- Opportunity for the individual to raise any remaining health or other issues, and reminder of support available in the university
- Briefing on what has been happening in the team/School/faculty during the absence

Keeping in touch days can be used to discuss the planned return to work from maternity leave.

In all cases absence the manager should arrange regular catch up meetings to ensure that the return to work plan is operating successfully. Occupational Health may also wish to see the individual on a regular basis and offer on-going advice and support to manage the return.

Your HR manager will be able to provide advice and support in applying these guidance in individual cases.

