

What is a workplace intervention?

Workplace interventions are a proactive approach to dealing with health and disability related difficulties in the workplace. They are based on the principle of early intervention, but can be used at any time, following the absence or anticipated absence of an employee from the workplace. They can also be used following the diagnosis of a condition, illness or disability that may impact upon an employee's future ability to carry out their job.

Workplace interventions involve an independent assessment of the employee's functional capacity (ability to carry out key aspects of their job and activities of daily living) by a specialist work accredited occupational therapist. This provides the basis for a constructive discussion between the employer and employee with the assistance of that assessor to agree a way forward in the workplace or a planned return when appropriate. This can take the form of a vocational rehabilitation plan.

What does a workplace intervention achieve?

It provides the means for dialogue between the employer and employee to address the issues together. The aim is to enable employees to return to the workplace at the earliest opportunity, or even to prevent absence. Where it becomes apparent that an employee is no longer capable of carrying out their job, despite any appropriate adjustments, then parties have the benefit of knowing that all reasonable steps have been taken to enable the employee to continue in employment. Employees feel supported and employers are enabled to make good management decisions.

Where there has been any dispute or difficulties arising out of the conflicting needs of the employee and the employer, around the management of health and disability, a workplace intervention can be an effective means to resolve these matters quickly and cost effectively.

What's different about a workplace intervention?

Proactively addressing mental and physical health issues in the workplace is the most successful way of returning an employee to work or determining work capabilities. It reduces sickness absence, and associated costs, while increasing productivity and performance. Making decisions about health and disability requires careful assessment, thoughtful evaluation and a response that is both expert and practical. Our specialist occupational therapy input together with our knowledge of employment and discrimination law enables us to fully understand all the complexities involved in determining and managing an employee's functional capacity. Our approach draws on the use of mediation skills. The impartiality and independence of the assessor is key to building trust and confidence with both the



employer and the employee. This brings everyone's concerns to the table and encourages solution focused dialogue, moving to an agreed outcome and actions.

The workplace intervention may assist to break down barriers and misperceptions about work readiness, skills, capabilities and motivation. Where the employee may have a disability in terms of the Equality Act 2010 (previously, the Disability Discrimination Act), we work with both parties to determine any possible disability and to assess and review any reasonable adjustments that might be made.

Levels of service

The service required will vary depending on the complexity of the case, the nature of the health issues, or the length of absence from the workplace. In some cases an opportunity to speak to the employer and the employee separately, including a basic assessment of the employee's functional capacity, provides the necessary understanding of everyone's needs as well as the specifics of the job. A further joint meeting, facilitated by ourselves may be all that is necessary to arrive at an agreed solution. In more complex cases it may be necessary to carry out a full and detailed independent assessment of the employee's functional capacity before determining their capabilities, and fitness to undertake their job. A visit to the workplace may also be required.

Benefits of a workplace intervention

Employees return to or remain in the workplace, having been helped to overcome physical, behavioural or environmental barriers, and gain a clear knowledge of their capabilities as matched against job demands. Employers receive assurance that the employee is competent to perform the essential functions of the job and has the necessary work readiness skills. Both parties are assisted with modifications and / or reasonable adjustments when appropriate. Disputes in the form of grievances, complaints of disability discrimination, and disciplinary capability proceedings may be avoided or resolved as part of the process. Instructing a workplace intervention can be a valuable and cost effective investment.

“Deciding when and whether an employee retains the ability to engage in key work duties and activities of daily living that surround the work role and at what level, can be a crucial determination in employment situations”

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