# Return to Work / Staying at Work Policy (NAG 3)

## Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ

## Statement of Intent

The purpose of this policy is to provide a return to work plan for Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) employees who have been on leave for a period of time. Such reasons include but are not limited to - accident, hospitalisation or chronic physical or mental health needs, domestic violence, bereavement, relationship breakup or the requirement to care for someone else. This policy will assist such employees to return to work as soon as it is safe for them to do so.

In most circumstances employees returning to work are entitled to the same job they had before leaving, however this does depend on several factors including their ability to perform the role and the length of the extended leave.

If, as a result of medical incapacity, there is a need for termination of employment, this will follow due process and will be done in discussion with the employee and their support person, ACC if applicable, the appropriate Union if a union member, and the NZ School Trustees Association. Sick leave (paid or unpaid) must be allowed before any termination can be considered. Both parties must have had an opportunity to present evidence and give feedback and to ensure that all alternatives have been considered. This process can take a number of weeks, or months, to complete.

All staying at work / return to work plans and review discussions must be in writing and agreed upon by both the inline manager and the employee, in consultation with their Senior Manager.

This policy must not be used to keep an employee working – an employee does not have to stay at work while recovering from an illness or injury.

“BLENNZ” in this policy refers to an employee’s immediate line manager.

Nothing in this policy overwrites the conditions of the employee’s Collective Employment Agreement or Individual Employment Agreement, or New Zealand law.

## Policy Requirements

### BLENNZ responsibilities for supporting staff staying at work

To support employees staying at work rather than taking leave, BLENNZ will:

1. Liaise with the employee to ensure their health professional agrees they are able to work during their recovery. This must be in writing from the relevant health professional and speak to the range of duties being performed.

2. Where possible, adjust work schedules including reducing work hours then building them back up as the employee’s health improves

3. Allow time off work to go to medical appointments or counselling

4. Ensure leave provisions in respective employment agreements are understood by employees and offered if required.

### Employee responsibilities whilst staying at work

1. Maintain open and honest communication with your line manager to ensure both parties have a clear understanding of the stay at work plan.

2. If circumstances change and there is a need to make changes to the stay at work plan, ensure this is communicated with your line manager as soon as possible. With the agreement of both parties, update the work plan accordingly.

3. Ensure there continues to be regular review and monitoring of the plan.

### BLENNZ responsibilities for supporting staff returning to work

While each return to work plan will be considered independently, BLENNZ will at a minimum take the following measures:

1. Support the employee through the provision of all the information they need to help them return to work safely

2. Liaise with the employee, and with the employee’s approval their support team, to determine their needs and requirements

3. Construct and implement and monitor the plan with the employee, their line manager and any other parties involved

4. Adjust or provide alternative duties for the employee to undertake during the period of the return to work plan, with the understanding that, dependent upon the employee’s actual position and tasks involved, this may not always be possible

5. Liaise with the employee to ensure they understand and fulfil their role and obligations in the return to work process.

### Employee Responsibilities

1. Employees must maintain contact with their employer whilst on leave.

2. Understand that dependent upon the role held, and the impact staff leave or reduced hours can have on service delivery to ākonga, BLENNZ may have limits on how accommodating they can be.

## BLENNZ Process

1. Maintain communication with the employee as they become aware that time off work is required, or the need for flexibility in performance of duties is requested.

2. Come to an agreement on how much time the employee needs to take off and what they might need from BLENNZ during that time.

3. Be up front about what BLENNZ requires of the employee, and never assume what the employee is capable of. Ask them about their needs and abilities. Focus on what they say they can do, rather than on what they can’t.

4. Maintain contact with the employee who is on leave, but don’t over communicate to the point where the employee feels hassled or pressured into returning to work before they are fit to do so. In discussion with the employee, agree on the communication method e.g. phone, in person, email, text etc.

5. Agree on a return to work plan, following the template provided with this policy.

6. Regularly check in with the employee to make sure the plan is still working for both parties. Update the plan if required.

7. Be consistent in your approach to return to work plans. There should be no differentiation between plans in terms of medical leave, ACC, mental health etc.

8. Ensure a written record of the process is undertaken and copies of supporting documentation is filed appropriately.

## Supporting Documentation

[Website link to Mental Health NZ](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/)

[Employment NZ - Return to Work](http://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/parental-leave/returning-to-work)

[ACC - Getting Back to Work](http://www.acc.co.nz/im-injured/financial-support/return-to-work/)

Return to Work Plan Template (attached to this policy)



Approved:
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Next Review: 2026

# Return to Work Plan

## Pre-return to work meeting checklist

This checklist is for when someone has been off work for a significant amount of time, normally more than a fortnight, and their work contributions and patterns have been disrupted as a result.

### Manager Checklist

1. Have you organised a pre-return to work meeting in a relaxed, non stressful and private location?

2. Have you given an appropriate amount of notice to the employee so that they can prepare practically and emotionally for the meeting? Allow at least two days.

3. Do you have the information you need to update the employee on their sick leave entitlements during their time off, and their remaining leave balance?

4. Do you have someone in, or associated with, your workplace that you can talk to confidentially for advice and support if needed? If required, have you talked this through in confidence and sought advice and support from your line manager?

5. Has the Principal been kept up to date with the situation?

6. Have you reviewed your legal responsibilities and duty of care as a manager?

7. Have you let go of any biases or prejudices you may have about the employee and the reasons for why they are on leave?

### Employee Checklist

1. Do you have a recovery / wellness plan (this is not essential but can be very useful to share with your manager if you feel comfortable)?

2. Have you identified some support people you would feel comfortable with your manager contacting in an emergency?

3. Have you thought about any reasonable accommodations or changes that would help you to stay well and productive at work?

4. Do you have any worries or concerns about your ongoing employment that you want to seek assurance from your manager / BLENNZ about?

5. Do you want to bring a support person with you to the pre-return to work meeting?

## First week back checklist for Manager

1. Has the employee been welcomed back in an appropriate, supportive and low key way so they feel supported and comfortable returning?

2. Has the employee had an opportunity to tell the team about their absence and experience in their own words?

3. Have the rest of the team been informed of any changes in work patterns? Have they been involved in any decisions resulting in possible changes to their own work from putting these changes in place?

4. Are regular catch-ups scheduled with the employee so you can check in on how the return to work agreements are working and any adjustments that could be made?

5. Is the Principal being kept informed?

6. Is it clear what work is required by the employee and to what standard, and do you have a supportive process in place to monitor this?

7. Is the employee willing to share any difficulties (and successes) that they are experiencing relating to their work?

8. Have you identified any potential physical or mental safety concerns and covered them off in your Health and Safety plan?

# Template: Return to Work Plan between Manager and Employee

Manager: ……………………………………..

Employee: ……………………………………..

| **Issue** | **Agreed employee / employer solutions** |
| --- | --- |
| What is the employee’s recovery / wellness plan (if they have one) that’s relevant to the workplace? What are the practical steps that need to be agreed on? | e.g. plan for taking medication, checking in for support, strategies to stay well, early warning signs of distress and what to do when they arise. |
| Are there are recommendations from the employee’s health clinician / ACC that need to be taken into account? | Yes /NoRecommendations: |
| What reasonable workplace accommodations can be made to assist the employee’s recovery and meet their needs? | Changes to working area:Changes to working days or hours:If appropriate, restructuring jobs: |
| Is a phased approach to the level of work and/or working hours appropriate? | Increase challenge of tasks:Gradual increase in days or hours: |
| Are the employee’s energy levels likely to fluctuate throughout the day and can their work tasks be managed around this? | Yes / NoBreakdown of task flexibility: |
| What sort of flexibility will be needed for the employee to attend medical and/or counselling appointments? | Agreed process: |
| How will confidentiality be managed to protect the employee’s privacy and safety? | Agreed process: |
| What information will be shared with the rest of the team? How will the employee respond to questions about their health, their absence and any changes in work responsibilities, and how would they like their manager to communicate about them? | List responses: |
| Has the employee given permission to contact any support people? If so, who in the organisation can contact them, what are the contact details and in what circumstances should they be contacted? | e.g. friend, whaanau, mental health workerAgreed contact/support person:Agreed BLENNZ contact: |
| If the employee’s sick leave is running low or used up, how will any further time off be managed? | Agreed process: |
| How could the employee’s team and wider organisation increase their awareness and understanding around issues relating to returning to work. | e.g. talks from experts at staff meetings, health brochures available for staff to access in the lunch room (e.g. mental health information), checking in on wellbeing at team meetings.Agreed process: |

It is recommended this plan is reviewed and updated regularly until both the manager and employee agree the employee’s ability to work and maintain wellness has been achieved.

Signed: …………………………………………………… Date: ……………………

 (Returning Employee)

Manager: ……………………………………………………. Date: ……………………

Next check in date: ……………………………….