



North West SPF Joint Statement on the Management of Long Covid Absence

As colleagues will be aware, the special temporary workforce guidance on the management of COVID sickness absence, introduced during the pandemic in March 2020 to support NHS staff and organisations in providing an emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis, was withdrawn from 7th July 2022.

Since then, many staff on long term absence due to COVID-19 and related complications have been successfully supported back into the workplace. However, many of our NHS people still continue to struggle with the debilitating impact of Long COVID, and may require additional support and/or reasonable adjustments to facilitate a safe, effective and sustainable return to work.

The North West SPF would like to note and remind NHS employers in our region and trades union representatives that the guidance issued by the NHS Staff Council in July 2022 on 'Management of long-term COVID-19 sickness absences' is still current, and should be followed where staff continue to be absent or face difficulties in carrying out their full substantive role, due to Long COVID.

This guidance outlines a number of provisions and measures, such as the completion of adequate risk assessments, extending phased returns beyond standard policy durations, reducing or amending duties, amongst others, aimed at supporting staff back into the workplace. It has been agreed through the NHS staff council and should be applied in addition to the provisions of any local policies.

These 'key principles', agreed through the NHS Staff Council, should be deployed when managing circumstances related to long-covid absence, and we encourage employers and trade union representatives to approach any management of long-term absence and subsequent return to the workplace related to Long COVID in keeping with them. It may be helpful to incorporate the guidance, or a reference to it, into local sickness absence processes and documentation, or circulate information about the guidance to HR professionals, trade union representatives and managers who may be dealing with the management of sickness absence.



A copy of the nationally agreed guidance alongside links to further resources can be found at: [Supporting recovery after long COVID | NHS Employers](#)

Signed by Joint Chairs of the North West SPF, September 2023

James Bull, UNISON

Mike Gibney, The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust

