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UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN**

# Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure



<b>Approved by</b>	The Executive		
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<b>Policy Owner</b>	HR Manager	<b>Impact assessed</b>	Yes
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1		August 2015
4.1	Policy has been updated into new standard template and Policy owner has been updated from Director of HR to HR Manager.	August 2022

# SICKNESS ABSENCE

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In accordance with the University's Mission, Vision and Values, it is acknowledged that staff wellbeing is of paramount importance.
- 1.2 The aim of the Sickness Absence Policy is to minimise absence levels across the university while also supporting employees with health difficulties and assisting them back to work at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.3 The University recognises that illness is inevitable from time to time and that it is not in the interests of staff, or the University, for staff to come to work whilst ill, particularly when they are suffering from an infectious illness, or to return to work before they are fit to do so.
- 1.4 The University's Sickness Absence Policy outlines the employee's responsibilities during sick leave and the support employees can expect to receive from the University.
- 1.5 The guidelines have been developed to ensure the continued smooth running of the University and provide optimum support for staff.

## 2. Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the policy are to:
  - 2.1.1 Provide staff and managers with clear guidelines on the absence reporting procedure and the processes to be followed in relation to sickness absence
  - 2.1.2 Minimise absence and help facilitate employees back to work at the earliest opportunity
  - 2.1.3 Outline the consequences of taking unauthorised leave or failing to follow absence reporting procedures

2.1.4 Ensure long term absence is managed in a fair and consistent manner

2.1.5 Ensure the University acts in a fair and reasonable manner when dealing with absence issues

### **3. Scope Of Policy**

3.1 The policy applies to all employees of the University who are in full or part-time employment, on permanent, fixed term or temporary contracts of employment.

3.2 This policy does not apply to any employee of a company wholly or partly owned by the University as a subsidiary, unless that company specifically adopts it.

3.3 The University reserves the right to apply modified procedures during any probationary period in accordance with any probationary scheme which the University may adopt from time to time.

### **4. Absence Reporting Procedure**

4.1 The University understands that from time to time employees may become unwell and unable to attend work.

4.2 If an employee is absent from work due to sickness it is important they follow the absence reporting procedure below.

#### **4.2.1 Notification Procedure on 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Absence**

4.2.1.1 On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of sickness absence, an employee must report their absence by telephone to their line manager prior to the start of their normal working day. If this is not possible absence must be reported within one hour of the employee's start time. The employee must explain the reason for their absence, the likely duration of their absence and expected return date.

- 4.2.2 Where the line manager is not available, absence should be reported to the line manager's deputy, or to the relevant designated person as per local arrangements within the School/Department. Where the employee leaves a message they should expect their line manager to contact them on receipt of the message.
- 4.2.3 Only in exceptional circumstances should someone else report the employee's absence i.e. where the employee cannot speak due to the nature of their condition, or where the employee has been admitted to hospital.
- 4.2.4 If the employee is unable to provide a return to work date, they must contact their manager by telephone on each day of absence until a probable return date can be ascertained.
- 4.2.5 If absence continues beyond the expected return date the employee should inform their manager of this, and what the new expected return to work date is.

#### 4.3 **Failure to Notify**

- 4.3.1 If an employee fails to notify their manager of their absence, the line manager must make attempts to contact the employee to ascertain the reasons for absence.
- 4.3.2 Failure to follow reporting procedure or to provide medical certificates in a timely manner may result in the cessation or suspension of the employee's sickness payments and / or disciplinary action being taken if it contributes to a pattern of behaviour.

#### 4.4 **Self-Certified Absence**

- 4.4.1 Absence lasting up to 7 days (including weekends), can be self-certified by an employee. This is classified as short term absence.
- 4.4.2 A [Self Declaration of Absence Form](#) must be completed by the employee and sent to HR immediately on return to work. Failure to submit this form in a timely manner may result in a delayed sickness payment.



## **4.5 Medically Certificated Absence**

- 4.5.1 Absence over 7 days (including weekends) must be medically certified by a doctor. The employee must submit the medical certificate to their line manager or to the HR Department as soon as possible.
- 4.5.2 If the employee's absence continues beyond the dates covered by the first certificate the employee must submit a new medical certificate to their line manager, or the HR department, to cover their absence. The employee must inform their line manager of their continued absence as soon as they become aware that they will be issued with a new medical certificate.
- 4.5.3 Employees should not return to work before their medical certificate expires.
- 4.5.4 Employees will be required to complete a Self-Declaration of Absence Form for all periods of absence including those covered by a medical certificate.
- 4.5.5 If a medical certificate indicates the employee may be fit for work, any temporary arrangements suggested by the doctor will be considered. Where the suggestions are unfeasible the employee will remain on sick leave until the medical note expires.

## **4.6 Return to Work Interview**

- 4.6.1 On the employee's first day back from absence, regardless of the duration of the absence or whether or not the period of absence has been covered by a medical certificate, employees will be required to meet with their line manager for a return to work interview.

- 4.6.2 The purpose of the interview is to welcome the employee back and to ensure they are fit for work. The discussion will identify the cause of the absence and whether any support or reasonable adjustments are required to assist the employee. The manager will be required to sign the employee's Self Declaration of Absence Form to confirm that the interview has taken place. The employee must then send the completed Self Declaration of Absence Form to the HR department.
- 4.6.3 It is accepted that frequent absences may be symptomatic of larger issues. The University offers a free and confidential [Employee Support Helpline](#) through the Independent Counselling and Advisory Services (ICAS). The Helpline offers support and counselling to employees.

## **5. Sickness & Annual Leave**

- 5.1 If an employee becomes unwell during a period of annual leave, on a Public Holiday, or one of the other leave days fixed by the University, their leave entitlement will only be reinstated if the employee informs their line manager on the first day of absence, or as soon as practicable thereafter, and submits a medical certificate.
- 5.2 Leave entitlement will not be reinstated to employees without medical certification.
- 5.3 If an employee is absent through sickness for a period exceeding three months during a leave year, the University will normally limit their annual leave accrual so that it is in line with their statutory leave entitlement.

## **6. Unauthorised Leave**

6.1 Sickness absence may be treated as unauthorised leave if:

- 6.1.1 An employee fails to notify their manager of their sickness absence as per absence reporting procedure
- 6.1.2 An employee fails to provide medical certification for absence over 7 days
- 6.1.3 There are patterns of absence or other evidence to suggest sickness absence is not genuine.

## **7. Potential Disciplinary Offences**

7.1 Disciplinary action may be taken under the University's Disciplinary Policy if an employee:

- 7.1.1 Takes unauthorised sickness leave
- 7.1.2 Fails to follow sickness absence reporting procedures
- 7.1.3 Fails to provide medical certificates in a timely manner.

## **8. Sick Pay**

- 8.1 Employees are entitled to sick pay in accordance with the appropriate RGU Occupational Sick Pay Scheme. Employees are entitled to sick pay in accordance with the appropriate [RGU Occupational Sick Pay Scheme](#).
- 8.2 To qualify for occupational sick pay, the employee must adhere to the University's Absence Reporting Procedure.



- 8.3 Where employees do not receive occupational sick pay, they may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for which conditions apply. Once SSP is exhausted, an employee normally transfers onto benefits, paid directly by the Department of Work and Pensions. Full details of sick pay entitlements are contained in each contract of employment. For further assistance details of the Payroll Team can be found on the [Payroll webpage](#).

## 9. Absence Review Process

- 9.1 To ensure the wellbeing of the organisation and its staff, sickness absence will be monitored by line managers with the support of HR.

- 9.2 Depending on the circumstances surrounding an employee's absence, the following approaches may be adopted to manage absence:

- 9.2.1 Informal Attendance Targets – set by line manager
- 9.2.2 Formal Attendance Targets via the Disciplinary Procedure
- 9.2.3 The Capability Procedure

### 9.3 Trigger Levels for Informal Absence Review

- 9.3.1 If an employee's absence reaches the University's absence trigger level of **20 working days or 5 separate occasions of sickness absence in any rolling 12-month period**, an informal absence review meeting will be held between the employee and their line manager.
- 9.3.2 The trigger point will be calculated based on the 12-month period immediately preceding the most recent absence i.e. a rolling 12-month period.
- 9.3.3 During the informal absence review meeting a decision may be taken to refer the staff member to the University's Occupational Health provider for assessment, in order to determine whether or not there are any underlying health problems causing the absence.

- 9.3.4 Following the outcome of the occupational health report and/or the informal review meeting, if the line manager is satisfied that there are no issues to be addressed there will be no further action.
- 9.3.5 If OH indicate that there is an ongoing underlying health problem causing the absence, appropriate adjustments will be discussed and/or implemented after consultation with HR. Any further issues would then normally be dealt with using the Ill-Health Capability Policy.
- 9.3.6 In all other cases, the manager will set a target for improvement and will inform the member of staff that if this target is not achieved the formal review process will be applied under the University's Disciplinary Policy.
- 9.3.7 Where an employee has successfully achieved the target for improvement, but is subsequently absent again, the absence review process will begin again, as per the trigger points outlined above.

#### 9.4 **Formal Absence Review Process**

- 9.4.1 If frequent short-term absence persists beyond the informal stage, the employee will be referred to the University's Occupational Health Providers for assessment.
- 9.4.2 Where the Occupational Health assessment shows the employee's absence is a result of an ongoing and/or serious health problem, the Ill Health Capability process will be adopted.
- 9.4.3 Where the employee's absences are unrelated and not symptomatic of an ongoing and/or serious health problem the absence problem will be managed using formal absence targets through the University's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

9.4.4 If the employee fails to meet formal attendance targets a disciplinary sanction may be placed on their record in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedures. In exceptional circumstances, the review may be extended before disciplinary action is considered.

9.4.5 Subsequent absence review meetings will be held until the employee reaches the desired attendance level. If after being issued with a final written warning the employee's attendance does not improve and medical evidence suggests the employee is fit to be at work, the employee will be dismissed.

## **10. Long Term Absence**

10.1 If an employee has sickness absence for more than 4 weeks, this will be regarded as long term absence. This type of absence would be medically certificated.

### **10.2 Keeping in Contact**

10.2.1 The employee's line manager will keep in touch with the employee whilst they are on long term sick leave.

10.2.2 This will normally mean a fortnightly phone call although arrangements may vary.

10.2.3 The purpose of the contact will be to keep up to date with the employee's state of health, determine the likely duration of absence, discuss what further assistance the University can give to speed up the employee's return to work, and discuss whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made, either temporarily to facilitate a return to work, or in the longer term.

### 10.3 **Home Visits**

- 10.3.1 If absence is for a prolonged period, home visits may also take place.
- 10.3.2 Such visits are intended to keep in touch with the member of staff and their progress and also to establish the likely length of time before they are able to resume normal duties.
- 10.3.3 A home visit will occur only with the employee's consent and the employee will receive at least 5 working days' notice of the proposed visit, the time and date must be acceptable for the employee.
- 10.3.4 The visit will be conducted by the line manager and another University representative, at least one of these representatives will be of the same sex as the employee.
- 10.3.5 The employee has the right to have a witness present.
- 10.3.6 As an alternative to a home visit, the employee may prefer for the meeting to be held at the University or in a neutral location, arrangements for this would be agreed with the employee.

### 10.4 **Occupational Health**

- 10.4.1 In most cases, employees with an absence of 4 weeks will be referred to the University's Occupational Health provider for review.
- 10.4.2 In some instances, the employee will be referred before 4 weeks dependant on the nature of the illness. For example, all employees with a medically certified mental health related illness will be referred to Occupational Health.
- 10.4.3 The referral will be used to assess the nature of the illness, the likely duration of absence, and whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made in order to facilitate a return to work.

- 10.5 A GP report and/or Consultant report may also be sought if further medical information is required, or if the employee's absence continues.
- 10.6 To comply with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, the University will obtain the employee's written consent before Occupational Health contacts the employee's GP.
- 10.7 The employee has the right to be given a copy of the report prior to the report reaching the University, the right to request amendments to be made to the report, and/or for a statement of the employee's views to be attached to the report.
- 10.8 The employee has the right to withhold consent for the GP/Consultant to be approached.
- 10.9 The employee has the right to withhold the report from the University also. However this limits the information available to the University to make decisions about the employee's ability to return to work.

## **11. Return To Work From Long Term Absence**

- 11.1 When the employee is declared fit to return to work, the manager will make contact with the employee to discuss the arrangements for their return.
- 11.2 This will include: planning hours and workload for the initial return or a phased return plan if hours are to be built up gradually; making arrangements for any reasonable adjustments; providing training on any new processes; and updating the employee on any news or changes in the department.
- 11.3 The employee will receive full support from their line manager during their return to work.

## **12. Ill Health Capability Process**

- 12.1 Where medical evidence suggests a return to work will not be possible or not be possible in the near future, or where the duration of absence is unknown, the Ill Health Capability process may be instigated as detailed in the Ill Health Capability Policy.
- 12.2 If there is evidence to show that the employee is unlikely to resume work and maintain a sufficient level of attendance, the employee's employment may be terminated on the grounds of ill-health.
- 12.3 This route will be regarded as a last resort and only progressed after all other options have been explored and exhausted i.e. redeployment to alternative role, reduced hours, ill-health retiral.

## **13. Confidentiality**

- 13.1 Sickness information and documents pertaining to an employee will be kept confidential with access permitted only to the line manager and HR.
- 13.2 For further information on managing absence Managers should refer to the [Manager's Guidance Notes](#) on the HR web pages.





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