



ABSENCE POLICY

Absence Procedures

1. Reporting and recording of sickness absence

1.1 On the first day of absence the employee must contact their manager by 10am (or within an hour of their usual start time, if that is earlier) to inform them of: the reason for their absence; expected date of return; and any urgent work matters to be dealt with in their absence. Members of staff who have an earlier start time than their manager should contact their manager as soon as the manager starts work.

1.2 Employees are expected to telephone their line manager in person unless:

- the employee is **unable** to make the call (either because they are too unwell or because they have no immediate access to a telephone), in which case they should request a family member or friend to inform their manager;
- the manager is unavailable, in which case the employee should leave a message with their managers manager or with Human Resources (but not with a colleague). If the employee has tried but is unable to speak to a manager or Human Resources, they may email their line manager and provide them with contact details so that the manager can speak to them, if necessary; and
- the nature of the illness is such that the employee is uncomfortable about speaking to their line manager (e.g. they would prefer to speak to someone of the same gender) then they may contact Human Resources instead.

1.3 All sickness absence of half a day or more must be reported and recorded.

2. Certification

2.1 All absences must be certified. Absences of 7 calendar days or less may be certified by the employee immediately on their return to work, self-certification forms are available from managers and Human Resources.

2.2 Absences of 8 calendar days or more must be supported by a doctor's Fit Note.

2.3 For certification purposes, an absence that starts and finishes either side of non-working days is assumed to include those non-work days (e.g. weekends, public holidays and, for part-time employees, days on which they would not usually work). For example, if an employee is absent on a Friday and Monday and they usually work both days their absence is continuous for 4 days.

3. Maintaining contact

3.1 It is important that the employee and the manager maintain regular contact during a period of absence. The employee must keep their manager informed as to the prognosis for their illness and the likely duration of the absence.

- 3.2 Additionally, the manager may also initiate contact to:
- enquire after the employee's health;
 - determine when the employee is likely to return, to facilitate work planning;
 - resolve any urgent work-related queries, if absolutely essential;
 - update the employee on work developments; and
 - discuss any temporary measures required to facilitate the employee's return to work (e.g. shorter working hours for a specified period).

4. Return to Work discussions

- 4.1 On an employee's return from sickness absence, the manager must **always** have a Return to Work (RTW) discussion with the employee, **irrespective of the length of absence**. This will usually be on the employee's first day back from absence.
- 4.2 On most occasions this is an informal discussion intended to ensure that the employee is fit to be back at work and to bring them up to date with anything they have missed while they were absent. However, if the employee's attendance record is poor and/or the latest absence has been a long one and/or the illness was a serious one, the following should be included:
- measures required to assist the return (this information may be assisted by comments on any Fit Note provided by a GP);
 - overall attendance record and the actions required to improve attendance;
 - any pattern of absence; and
 - whether there are any other underlying causes (personal or work-related) which may have contributed to the absence or poor health.
- 4.3 The Return to Work meeting is part of the informal management of absence as described in the Capability Policy and procedure. The line manager must make a note summarising the discussion and outcomes which should be kept with other informal 1-1 meeting notes, and a copy provided to the employee.

5. Triggers for attendance action

- 5.1 The triggers at which absence is of concern are set out below. Managers are required to consider what/whether further action under the **Capability Policy** and procedure is appropriate and should seek advice from Human Resources if these triggers are reached.
- 10 working days' absence in a rolling 12 month period;
 - 4 separate occasions of absence in a rolling 12 month period;
 - 2 continuous weeks of absence in any given period; and/or
 - a pattern of absence, for example, repeated absence on days before and/or after weekends or periods of annual leave.

The trigger points will be considered on a pro rata basis for part time employees.

- 5.2 Exceeding a trigger point will not necessarily lead to management action, the decision to initiate such action will depend on the nature of the absence/s.

- 5.3 Disabled employee's absence should be treated and monitored as sick leave in the usual way. However, if the absence relates to the disability further advice should be sought from Human Resources.
- 5.4 Pregnancy related sickness absence is disregarded for monitoring purposes.
- 5.5 Managers are responsible for monitoring and managing attendance within their teams and for taking action under the Capability Policy and procedure where appropriate. Advice on action will be provided by Human Resources.

6. Management of sickness absence

6.1 Short term sickness absence management

- 6.1.1 Where an employee's sickness absence reaches or exceeds the triggers, the manager should have a specific discussion with the employee about this. The discussion should determine whether there is any underlying cause; whether they require any additional support and whether a referral to Occupational Health is appropriate.
- 6.1.2 High levels of sick absence, in terms of episodes or duration cannot be sustained because of the impact on colleagues and overall performance. If an employee's sickness absence reaches an unacceptable level and the employee's attendance and/or performance does not improve following informal discussions this should be addressed in line with the Capability Policy and procedure.

6.2 Long term sickness absence management

- 6.2.1 Long-term absence is any period of 20 working days or more in one spell. Absence that looks likely to reach this level should be discussed formally with Human Resources, the College will consider making a referral to Occupational Health.
- 6.2.2 Employees should maintain regular contact with their manager throughout their absence, fully co-operate with the College's occupational health processes and work positively with the College to find solutions which will enable a return to work.
- 6.2.3 Reasonable adjustments will always be considered to assist a disabled employee to return to their role. However, it may not always be possible to make reasonable adjustments which will be effective in facilitating a return to work or in achieving improved attendance. In these circumstances, the case will move to the formal stages of the Capability procedure.

7. Returning to work on a phased basis

- 7.1 When an employee has had a period of long term absence, it may be appropriate for them to return to work on a phased basis, in order to build up to their normal contracted hours. Managers should discuss this with Human Resources.
- 7.2 A phased return should not be longer than 4 weeks, although in exceptional circumstances the period may be extended by another 2 weeks.

7.3 During the period of a phased return the employee will receive their usual full pay for the hours that they work. Normal working hours not worked for the period of the phased return are sick leave and will be covered by sick pay, providing the employee's enhanced or statutory sick pay has not been exhausted.

8. Occupational Health

8.1 A referral seeking advice on an employee's health may be made to Occupational Health at any time if it is thought that it will assist the employee and manager in managing a specific situation. However, when absence reaches 20 working days or more, a referral will usually be initiated.

8.2 In the event that an employee withholds their consent for an approach to their GP/specialist or declines to co-operate in other ways with the Occupational Health assessment procedure, the College may have to reach a decision about the employees continued employment based on incomplete information.

9. Disability within the Equality Act 2010

9.1 Managers should consider the possibility that an employee may have a disability even if the employee has not made this explicit. This is particularly important because an employee:

- can become disabled at any time during employment; and/or
- may be unaware or reluctant to recognise that their condition may be defined as a disability.

9.2 If the manager or employee believes that a condition covered by the Equality Act may be impacting on the employee's ability to attend work and carry out their job, they should discuss this with Human Resources.

10. Disciplinary action

10.1 The College assumes that all employees aim for 100% attendance and that any sickness absence is taken for genuine reasons. However, if it can be reasonably established on the balance of probabilities that an employee has abused the system, this will be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy.

10.2 Employees may be subject to disciplinary action and/or have sick pay withheld if:

- claim sick pay or sick leave when they are not ill;
- repeatedly fail to follow sickness absence procedures;

or, if during sickness absence they:

- undertake any form of employment, whether paid or unpaid, without seeking agreement from the College in advance;
- participate in activities that could aggravate the illness or injury or delay recovery.

11. Medical appointments

- 11.1 Employees are expected to make every attempt to arrange medical (including hospital and dental) appointments outside of working hours. Where this is not possible they should be at the start or end of the day to maximise their attendance.
- 11.2 Where the employee has no alternative but to attend a medical appointment during their usual working hours they must obtain approval from their manager in advance of the appointment. If the absence is short and infrequent (less than half a day) the employee will not usually be required to take annual or flexi-leave to cover the absence. However, if the employee is absent from work for half a day or more this should be recorded as sick absence, TOIL or annual leave.

12. Sickness and annual leave

- 12.1 Employees continue to accrue annual leave during sickness absence, at the statutory rate. In exceptional circumstances where accrued leave cannot be taken before the end of the annual leave year it may be carried over to the following leave year.
- 12.2 An employee may request annual leave during a period of long term sickness absence, although this cannot be used as a substitute for recording sickness absence.
- 12.3 If an employee is ill on days where they had previously booked annual leave they may claim back those annual leave days provided they:
- follow normal notification procedure (i.e. contact their manager on the first day of illness); and
 - provide a Fit Note or doctor's letter to support that sickness occurred for the period of their illness, regardless of its duration.
- 12.4 If an employee is unable to return to work from annual leave because they fell ill during their holiday, they are expected to provide a Fit Note or doctor's letter to support that sickness occurred during this period.
- 12.5 If sickness absence falls immediately before or after a period of annual leave a medical certification is required for the period of illness.
- 12.6 The College reserves the right to terminate an individual's employment prior to the expiry of an employee's paid sick leave.

Guidance - alcohol and substance misuse

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The College recognises that most employees are responsible and sensible in their intake of alcohol and substances such as prescribed medication. The College is also aware that alcohol and substance misuse can be an illness and a treatable condition and will make all reasonable attempts to assist an employee to deal with an addiction.

2. Overview

- 2.1 The College's expectations relating to alcohol consumption are that:

- consumption of alcohol during the working day must be in moderation and have no impact on the employee's performance or conduct;
- employees should consider whether it is necessary to take the afternoon as annual leave or TOIL following events such as Christmas lunch, subject to management authorisation;
- alcohol will only be consumed on College premises with management authorisation, usually at an official function, such as a leaving party;
- alcohol consumed outside working hours must not have an impact on the employee's performance or conduct or on the College's work and reputation.

- 2.2 The following will be dealt with under the Disciplinary policy:

- misconduct or misbehaviour at work or in work-related situations owing to inappropriate or excessive intake of alcohol or other substances;
- possession, use or sale of non-prescribed, illegal drugs on College premises or in any work-related situation; and
- drinking on College premises during work hours other than at authorised occasions.

3. Alcohol and substance misuse

- 3.1 An employee who misuses alcohol or other substances can be a hazard to others and to the reputation and work of the College. Managers dealing with such a situation must consider the welfare of the employee, operational requirements of the organisation and the duty of care owed to other employees.

- 3.2 A manager who has identified an employee who may have an alcohol or substance dependency problem should seek advice from Human Resources. Signs of an employee with a drink or drug related problem may include:

- decline in work performance;
- poor attendance record;
- unreliability;
- unexplained injuries;
- changes in behaviour such as irritability and lack of concentration; and
- smell of alcohol or other substances, particularly in the morning.