

Sickness Absence Policy and Guidelines

1. Introduction

The University of Suffolk is committed to ensuring the health and wellbeing of its staff and seeks to promote a healthy working environment through its policies, procedures and working practices. The University recognises the importance of a positive approach to managing sickness absence. These guidelines set out the principles which may be applied to the management of sickness absence and are intended for the information and guidance of staff and managers.

High levels of attendance are vital to the planning and successful operation of any business. Therefore, the following arrangements have been established for the reporting, monitoring and management of sickness absence, which are based on the principles of fairness and support, whilst ensuring operational efficiency.

Staff have a duty to attend work unless they are unable to do so through sickness or injury, or their absence has been approved. During periods of absences due to sickness, University of Suffolk operates both statutory sick pay and occupational sick pay provisions.

2. Staff Responsibilities

2.1 Reporting Sickness Absence

Staff who are unable to come to work due to ill health must inform their line manager by telephone as soon as possible on the first day of sickness. This should normally be their normal starting time but no later than 1 hour after this time. In the absence of the Line Manager, staff are requested to leave a message with a suitably responsible person within their work area. In the event of not being able to make contact by telephone, staff may send a text or an email to their line manager to ensure their absence is noted and the necessary cover arrangements are promptly put into place, as appropriate. Only in exceptional circumstances will it be appropriate for another person to notify University of a staff member's absence. Failure to give timely notification of absence may result in sick pay being withheld.

When informing the line manager of their absence, staff are required to give an indication of the reasons for their absence and the length of time they expect to be absent. If it becomes clear that they will be unable to return after the time estimated, they should contact their Line Manager again as soon as possible to update them accordingly. It is reasonable for managers to contact the staff member if this information has not been provided or in the event of enquiry. Please read Section 3.1 Maintain Contact with Absent Employee for more guidance.

Absences should be reported to Human Resources on the first day of absence using the online Sickness Absence Notification System (See Section 3.3 for further details) for pay and monitoring purposes.

It is imperative that, during a period of sickness absence, staff members keep their Line Manager informed with regard to their progress and their intention to return to work.

Staff who are taking annual leave when they become unwell or injured must still tell their manager as soon as is practicable. Staff may be able to reclaim leave providing they have contacted their manager immediately regarding them becoming unwell during their holiday and have submitted a medical certificate as supporting evidence.

2.2 Certification

The University of Suffolk policy with respect to certification is as follows:

Self-Certification

First 7 calendar days of absence	Staff may self-certify their sickness absence for the first 7 calendar days. Self-certification should be confirmed using the Sickness Absence Notification Form – see section 3 for further guidance.
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Doctors Certification

8 calendar days or longer	<p>Absences which continue to 8 calendar days or longer will be required to be covered by a Statement of Fitness for work certificate. Staff should be obtained such a certificate from their doctor and send it to their Line Manager as soon as possible.</p> <p>The doctor's statement will confirm that the staff member is either not fit for work or that they may be fit for work taking account of specific advice relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A phased return to work; • Altered work; • Amended duties; • Workplace adaptations; and/or • Any other information, including functional effects of their condition. <p>If the latter option: staff member may be fit to work, they must contact their line manager as soon as possible, but in any event before returning to work to ensure timely consideration of the doctor's recommendations. The line manager with support by a HR Officer will determine whether the recommendations are reasonable or practical in the circumstances and, if appropriate, may arrange a referral to Occupational Health for further advice. The University of Suffolk reserves the right to defer a return to work pending an occupational health assessment. Section 2 and 3 of the online absence notification form should be completed when staff member returns to record the full period of absence – see Section 3 for further guidance. Statements of Fitness for Work should be forwarded to the Human Resources Team without delay to ensure the necessary arrangements to the staff member's sick pay have been made.</p>
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Failure to submit a Statement of Fitness for work certificate to cover any absence from work from the eighth day, coupled with no communication from the staff member concerned confirming that their absence shall be continuing will be treated as unauthorised absence (unpaid leave).

Staff who become ill and begin their sickness absence during a working day, should count the next day as the first day of sickness absence, whether this is a normal working day or not. They should take reasonable steps to ensure their Line Manager is informed of their departure before leaving the workplace.

The Online Absence Notification Form includes a self-certification section for this purpose (please refer to Appendix 1).

3. Management Responsibilities

Managers have a duty to ensure safe working conditions and not to expose employees to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury (including psychological injury).

3.1 Maintain Contact with Absent Staff Members

Managers should maintain contact with staff who are absent due to ill health. The purpose of maintaining contact is a supportive approach to focus on the individual's health and wellbeing, planning their return to work agreeing any support arrangements as and when appropriate.

The frequency of the contact will depend on individual circumstances. Contact may be by telephone, through home visits upon agreement with the staff member or by post. Some staff welcome contact while they are absent, others may find it difficult. It is important to create a climate of trust by agreeing beforehand the method, frequency and reasons for keeping in contact. Managers should be sensitive to the needs of individuals when making contact and agreeing a 'keeping in touch' plan...

Best practice suggests that managers making contact without delay enables a supportive and earlier return to work.

3.2 Monitor Sickness Absence Levels and Patterns

The HR Department will provide managers with monthly sickness absence reports. Managers should use these to identify patterns of absence that may be unacceptable and require further investigation.

The HR Department will bring to the attention of managers staff who have reached the absence trigger levels prompting more formal action. Trigger levels are described in more detail in the Frequent Absence Framework attached at Appendix 3 and in the Long Term Absence Framework at Appendix 4.

3.3 Notify HR of All Sickness Absences

Managers must ensure the HR department is notified of all sickness absences, preferable on the first day of absence but no later than 3 days after the start of the absence, via Step 1 of the Online Sickness Absence Reporting

system (See Appendix 1). This may be completed by an administrator in accordance with local arrangements but it is the manager's responsibility to ensure this process is completed. As a result of Step 1, automated e-mails will be sent to Human Resources, the absent staff member and their manager to confirm the absence has been reported with details and to provide guidance regarding the next steps associated with the reporting process. In the case of ongoing absence, managers must forward Statement of Fitness to work forms to HR for payroll and absence monitoring purposes, as they are received. Full guidance on using the Online Reporting System can be found on MySuffolk/Forms/Absence Reporting.

3.4 Return to Work - Interview and Notification to HR

The immediate line manager will conduct a return to work interview as soon as reasonably possible after a staff member returns to work; usually this will occur on the day the staff member returns to work. This is important and beneficial to ensure the staff member is well supported upon their return

The purpose of the interview is to welcome the member of staff back, confirm fitness to undertake full duties, confirm sickness record is correct, raise any remaining health or other issues, in particular any underlying issues if this sort of absence happens often, and to discuss any appropriate adjustments to the job or work environment agreeing any other support arrangements, as required. This is an opportunity to discuss any emerging issues such as attendance record, matters relating to disability, and possible stress-related conditions, see Appendix 5 for further guidance.

The staff member upon their return to work should check that they have received an e-mail from Hr-enquiries titled 'Online Sickness Absence Submission' which will confirm that their absence has been recorded, and follow the guidance within to record their return to work (Step 2 of the Reporting Procedure). If they have not received this e-mail the staff member is responsible to ensure that their absence is recorded and should complete Section 1 and Section 2 of the online notification form accordingly via MySuffolk/forms/Absence Reporting Staff members should record any support they require to assist their return to work within Section 2, if applicable.

Managers will receive confirmation that Section 2 has been completed via email from Hr-enquiries. If the member of staff has returned to work and managers have not received notification that Step 2 has been completed, it is the manager's responsibility to ensure the staff member completes this step. Following this confirmation, managers must then complete Step 3 to finalise the record confirming that the return to work procedures and any follow up actions have been completed. As mentioned above, full guidance on using the Online Reporting System can be found on My Suffolk under Forms and Absence Reporting

Managers may ask the HR department for advice if they are uncertain about a staff member's fitness for work.

3.5 Individual risk assessments

Managers are responsible to ensure an appropriate risk assessment is conducted with their staff to identify support arrangements including reasonable adjustments to their job or work environment and arrangements on a temporary or permanent basis to support them particularly with certain health issues, this might include:-

- i) pregnancy related – refer to Maternity Leave Policy
- ii) disability - refer to Personal Emergency Evacuation Procedures, and section 7 below.
- iii) musculoskeletal - Display Screen Equipment
- iv) Stress related – refer to Stress Policy

3.6 Reasonable adjustments

In the event of a request for a reasonable adjustment from a staff member or as recommended through occupational health or other specialist, managers should consider the adjustment seriously and accommodate unless there is a genuine reason why this is not possible. This might be due to cost implications and the availability of resources (finance, equipment and people).

Examples of adjustments to working arrangements include:

- supporting a phased return to work;
- changing individual's working hours;
- arranging home working, providing a safe environment can be maintained;
- allowing a staff member to be absent from work for rehabilitation treatment.

Examples of adjustments to premises include:

- moving tasks to more accessible areas;
- making alterations to premises.

Examples of adjustments to a job include:

- providing new or modifying existing equipment and tools;
- modifying work furniture;
- providing additional training;
- modifying instructions or reference manuals;
- modifying work patterns and management systems;
- arranging telephone conferences to reduce travel;
- providing a buddy or mentor;
- providing supervision;
- reallocating work within the staff member's team;
- providing alternative work.

Adjustments can be on a temporary or permanent basis.

Advice and guidance is available from the HR team to support the consideration and implementation of any adjustments requested or recommended.

4. Pay During Sickness

There are two main types of sick pay: statutory sick pay (SSP); and occupational sick pay (OSP). These are described in more detail at Appendix 2.

4.1 Occupational Sick Pay Allowances

During the first year of service	1 month's full pay and, after 4 months' service, 2 months half pay
During the second year of service	2 months' full pay and 2 months' half pay
During the third year of service	4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay
During the fourth and fifth years of service	5 months' full pay and 5 months' half pay
After five years' service	6 months' full pay and 6 months' half pay

The Director of Human Resources shall have discretion in individual cases to extend the above mentioned periods of sick pay provided for under these arrangements.

In the event of a long term sickness absence leading to dismissal, the University of Suffolk reserves the right to cease employment prior to the occupational sick pay allowance being exhausted.

Staff members whose absences are being monitored in accordance with the Framework for Managing Frequent Periods of Absences (Appendix 3) may not qualify for OSP in the event of any absences not being covered by a 'Statement of Fitness for Work'. The HR department must advise the staff member of certification requirements and the impact on their pay during associated process with this Framework. See Framework (Appendix 3) for further details.

5. Pension Contributions during Sickness Absences

For staff in membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme, benefits will continue to accrue during sickness absences as if they were working normally on full pay (even during periods of nil pay entitlement). If you are on unpaid sick leave you do not pay any contributions, but continue to accrue benefits.

For staff in the Universities Superannuation Scheme, the University of Suffolk will maintain full employer's and the balance of employee's superannuation contributions during any period when an employee receives sick pay less than his/her full pay. However, employees are able to accrue benefits if they make up the employee and employer contributions for the full period of unpaid sick leave.

Staff are advised to check their pension scheme rules for further information about absence and the effects on pension contributions/entitlements.

6. Taking Holiday during Sickness Absences

Staff members during sickness leave are able to take holiday to assist their recovery. Often this is recommended by the medical profession for this reason which the University would encourage. Bookings for leave should be made via their line manager in accordance with existing arrangements. Staff are reminded that any carried over leave must be taken by the end of the carry over period, before 31 December of each leave year. Staff will lose any leave over the statutory entitlement of 28 days including bank holidays after this date.

7. People with Disabilities

As part of our commitment to provide reasonable adjustments to staff who have declared themselves disabled, we offer up to 10 days' disability leave per academic year which may be taken for reasons related to their disability in place of uncertified sick leave. Staff declaring a disability may be referred to our Occupational Health provider (see Appendix 4) for confirmation of disability and for advice and guidance regarding appropriate adjustments that might be made to the workplace and/or job to support the staff member.

For all instances of disability leave, staff must complete the online notification process in the same way as for sickness absence as outlined above but indicating that it is Disability leave where prompted.

Disability leave shall not be recorded against sickness absence and will not count against entitlement to occupational sick pay. However, disability leave will be reviewed in accordance with normal monitoring procedures. Disability leave may be used on a planned basis (for rest, rehabilitation, specialist appointments or other purposes related to the staff member's disability) or on an unplanned basis. Staff taking unplanned disability leave must 'notify their manager of their absence in the same way as they would for an uncertified sickness absence.

The University of Suffolk is committed to supporting people with disabilities to remain at work. University management will work with staff members to identify reasonable adjustments that may be made to the work place or to the job in order to achieve this aim. To this end, we may seek professional advice from other agencies, such as the Employment Service or the Occupational Health Adviser (see Appendix 4 for further details about referrals to Occupational Health).

8. People with additional needs

We recognise that not all impairments and difficulties staff may encounter are classed as a disability under the Equality Act. But staff may require additional support to assist them with a temporary or longer term arrangement.

Staff members are encouraged to approach their manager about any support they may require to assist them. Advice and guidance is available from HR, if required.

9. Absences due to injuries caused by accidents

A member of staff who is absent as the result of an accident will not be eligible to receive occupational sick pay if damages might be receivable from a third party.

University of Suffolk will lend the member of staff an advance payment, the amount of which will not exceed any entitlement to occupational sick pay, subject to the individual signing an undertaking that the loan will be refunded from the damages received in respect of loss of earnings. Where such an advance is refunded in full, the absence will not count in aggregating periods of sickness absence. Please note that this period of absence from work will remain on file for reasons of fact. Where only part of the loan is refunded, the University will, at its discretion, determine the length of the period of absence which will count in aggregating periods of sickness absence.

10. Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse

Copies of the Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy are published on our website and are available from Human Resources Department.

11. Resilience at Work

Whilst it is recognised that illnesses can be unavoidable, staff are expected to take adequate steps to ensure their fitness for work.

As part of our commitment to staff wellbeing we offer access to the following which provide opportunities for staff to improve their physical, mental and social wellbeing to support rehabilitation following illness or generally:

- Confidential Counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) programmes
- Free 24 hour confidential counselling helpline service on 011 7934 2121 (this service is provided free of charge to our staff and their families through our insurers)
- Return to work programmes
- Flexible Working
- Low cost Massages and other therapies
- Physiotherapy Support
- A number of clubs and societies including exercise classes, singing, opportunities for social interaction
- Ergonomic assessments
- Occupational Health services
- Other professional health services as required
- Signposting to a number of online resources via the Wellbeing page

Further details about the above are available on MySuffolk/Wellbeing. Alternatively, please contact a member of the HR Team for guidance.

We also have a range of policies which support employee wellbeing and work/life balance including:

- [Special Leave Policy](#)
- [Flexible Working Policy](#)
- [Flexible Retirement Policy](#)
- [Flexi-time Scheme \(Grades 1 - 6\)](#)
- [Family Friendly Policy - Adoption Leave](#)
- [Family Friendly Policy - Childcare Voucher Scheme](#)
- [Family Friendly Policy - Maternity: Leave and Benefits](#)

- [Family Friendly Policy - Parental Leave](#)
- [Family Friendly Policy - Paternity Leave](#)
- [Family Friendly Policy - Time off for Dependants](#)
- [Shared Parental Leave Policy](#)
- [Stress Management Policy](#)
- [Eyecare Policy](#)

The Online Sickness Absence Notification Form Sections 1 and 2

Step 1: Reporting a sickness absence (Section 1 of the form)

HR Absence Form – Section 1


Absence Form

* = Required Field

Your Details

* Your full name :

Absence Details

Absentees Name : David Mullett

Absentees Managers Name : Thompson Zulu

Department : Academic Development

Post Held : Multi Media Content Author

* Date Last Worked :

* Time Finished : Hr Min

* First Full Day's Absence :

* Doctors Certificate : Yes No

* Description of symptoms or Nature of Injury :

The reporting person's name

Click on the windows provided to select the appropriate date

Add description of illness

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**Step 2: Confirming the return to work date
(Part 1 – copy of Section 1)**

Date Last Worked	Date Resumed	Return to Work	Manager Approval
31/08/2009	N/A		

After reviewing the details in section one, you will need to then fill in the fields in **section two** as below.

* = Required Field

Absentees Details – Return to Work

* What the cause of the absence?:

* Was the absence related to a disability or pregnancy?: Yes No

* Does the member of staff feel that their absence was contributed by work related issues?: Yes No

* Further action required?:

Please note: If the absence is stress related, a stress risk assessment should be performed in liason with an HR Representative.

* Last Day of Sickness prior to returning to work:

* Date resumed work:

* Todays Date : 03/11/2009

* Full/Part Time : Full Time Part Time

Hours Lost : Not Selected

By ticking the Approval box below I hereby certify that the above information is correct. I understand that it may be used to establish my right to sick pay and that to deliberately give a false statement (or to fail to give a statement) could lead to disciplinary action. I understand also that in certain circumstances I may be requested to authorise an approach to my doctor by the University Campus Suffolk Occupational Health Consultant.

* Approval : Yes No

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If absence subsequently covered by a doctor's certificate please confirm here, i.e. Flu (covered by a Dr cert)

Answer the questions within this sub-section

If you work part time, please click the button to reflect this. An 'hours lost' box will appear – please record the total working hours lost during the absence period.

This is to help HR monitor the overall true working time lost due to staff absences to enhance statistical reporting (KPI's) i.e. under the current paper version system a person who is off for one day is recorded as a full day in terms of statistics but actually the true time lost may only be 4 hours as that is the person's normal working hours that particular day.

You may have agreed some actions with your line manager during your return to work interview or catch up meeting, please record any relevant actions here

Click in this box to certify information provided is correct

TYPES OF SICK PAY

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

An employer pays this to a member of staff who is away from work because they are sick. SSP is a Social Security benefit paid by employers. It is not the same as occupational sick pay from University of Suffolk. SSP is normally paid for a maximum of 28 weeks.

Nearly all staff are covered by SSP if they are sick for four or more days in a row (including weekends and Bank Holidays). People who do not get SSP include those who:

- Have a contract of employment for less than three months;
- Do not pay any National Insurance;
- Go off sick within specified periods of a previous claim for certain state benefits (e.g. sickness benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, maternity allowance etc.);
- Have done no work under the contract of employment;
- Go sick due to stoppage of work associated to a trade dispute;
- Are off sick due to a pregnancy related illness starting or continuing in the 4th week before her expected week of confinement;
- Are sick whilst abroad outside the European Union (EU). You can get it if you are in the EU;
- Are in legal custody.

If you are not entitled to SSP or you have received your full entitlement to SSP Payroll will send you form SSP1 which you send to the DWP to claim Employment and Support Allowance. This applies after you have been absent from work for more than 28 weeks within a specified period.

Occupational Sick Pay

While you are absent from work, due to sickness we will continue to pay you in accordance with the Occupational Sick Pay Scheme providing you are conforming with the Sickness Policy. The length of time that you receive pay, and the amount of pay you receive, will depend upon your length of service. During the period you are entitled to full pay and Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) you will receive your SSP entitlement plus an allowance bringing your earnings up to their usual level. In practice, your earnings will be unchanged.

Access to occupational sick pay for a specific period of sickness absence is calculated as follows:

- By calculating the provision appropriate to your length of service on the first day of any period of sickness absence, and
- By deducting from that provision the aggregate of periods of sickness absence during the twelve months immediately preceding the first day of absence i.e. a rolling period of twelve months.

If you are entitled to receive SSP, or you are in receipt of any other allowances or benefits, these will be offset against any occupational provision to full pay.

Where the member of staff is entitled to receive half pay, the total sum of half pay plus SSP, if appropriate, and any other benefits or allowances, must not exceed full pay. If necessary, the half pay allowance will be reduced.

If a public holiday occurs during a period of sick leave, the member of staff will continue to receive occupational sick pay. However, no payment will be made for a public holiday which occurs during a period of unpaid sick leave.

In determining your normal pay for the purposes of this scheme, Payroll will include any regular paid overtime which is an express, contractual requirement of your terms of employment.

Entitlement to paid sick leave for a term-time only employee applies only during periods when the employee would normally be at work.

Exceptional provisions apply to any member of staff who is injured as a result of a crime of violence in the course of their work for the University.

Where a period of absence is due to injury sustained by the member of staff in the actual discharge of his/her duties, and which is not attributable to any fault of his/her own, the member of staff will be able to access occupational sick pay but the receipt of such occupational sick pay will not count in aggregating periods of sickness absence.

Staff whose attendance at work is being formally monitored in accordance with the Framework for Managing Frequent Periods of Absence may be required to submit doctor certificates for any sickness absences, regardless of duration, during the monitoring period. Staff should note that they may be charged by their Medical Practice for such a certificate. Human Resources will inform staff in writing that this is a requirement as part of the formal monitoring process, see Stage 2 of the Framework for further details. Failure to submit a doctor's certificate to cover any absences, as required, will mean that the staff member will only receive SSP for the relevant period.

Industrial Injury

If you have an injury during work time or you have contracted certain types of disease through work, you may be entitled to Industrial Injury Benefit. This is paid on top of benefits and pay.

If you have an accident while you are working, you must complete an accident report form, available from your place of work.

Framework for Managing Frequent Periods of Absence

Introduction

This framework sets out the approach to staff who have frequent self-certified sickness absences from work or whose pattern of absence appears unacceptable and requires investigation.

Nothing in this framework shall prevent University of Suffolk from applying disciplinary procedures in the event of an employee's misconduct. For example, repeated failure to follow the reasonable requirements in reporting sickness absences or falsifying self-certificates are actions likely to result in disciplinary action being taken.

Absences recorded as disability leave shall be discounted when assessing sickness absence levels. Similarly, sickness that arises from (or is related to) pregnancy shall be disregarded for these purposes.

Trigger Levels

Managers, assisted by the Human Resources Department, will monitor the frequency and timing of absences among their staff groups. University of Suffolk has identified frequent-absence triggers that will prompt action. These triggers are as follows:

- Three self-certified absences in a six month period, or absences equating to six days or more in a rolling 12 month period;
- A pattern of absence judged unacceptable by management (e.g. frequent Friday or Monday absences).

Stage 1 Informal

An employee whose absence rate has reached or exceeded the trigger levels will be interviewed by their line manager; line managers may be accompanied by a member of the HR department at such a meeting. The purpose of this interview is as follows:

- To alert the employee to the level of their absences and understand any underlying causes;
- To determine whether an occupational health referral is appropriate; any employee who has reached or exceeded the trigger levels twice or more in a six month period will be referred to Occupational Health
- To identify any other sources of help or support that may be appropriate (this may include counseling services, alcohol or drug support, work station assessment, stress risk assessment, temporary variation in working hours or working practices);
- To identify a level of absence that would be acceptable and to set a review date (usually 3-4 months hence).
- If absence levels continue to be of a concern further absences could be dealt with under stage 2.

Representation – an interview of this kind is part of day to day management. There is no formal entitlement to representation at such a meeting. However, if a staff member wishes to be accompanied, agreeing to this arrangement may help them to feel at ease.

Stage 2 Formal Warning

If, at the review stage, an employee's level of absence continues at an unacceptable level, a formal written warning may be issued by the HR Department. This warning letter shall specify the duration of the warning (usually 3-6 months).

Attendance levels will continue to be monitored during the period of the warning. At the end of the warning period, and during this period if appropriate, the manager will meet with the employee to review attendance levels. The staff member should demonstrate that they are taking proactive steps to maintain their fitness for work.

Staff subject to this process may be required to submit Statement for Fitness for work certificates for any sickness absences, regardless of duration, during the warning period. Staff should note that they may be charged by their Medical Practice for the production of such a certificate. Human Resources will inform staff within the formal warning letter of this requirement. Failure to submit the above mentioned certificate to cover any absences, as required, will mean that the staff member will only receive SSP for the relevant period.

In the event of a satisfactory level of attendance having been achieved and maintained, this will be confirmed to the member of staff in writing. Where an acceptable level of attendance has not been reached and sustained, a further formal written warning may be issued, or the matter may progress to Stage 3 of these procedures.

Managers should seek advice from the HR Department before any formal warnings are given.

Staff members do have a right to appeal against warnings and appeals should be made in writing to the Director of Human Resources within 10 working days of the date of the warning letter.

Stage 3 Dismissal

In the event of a continuing unacceptable attendance level, the employee concerned may be dismissed with notice. The Director of HR must be consulted and must expressly approve any proposed dismissal.

If a manager is contemplating a dismissal in these circumstances, the following arrangements must be observed:

- Write to the employee to invite them to attend a meeting about their attendance level, indicating that dismissal with notice is a possible outcome. A member of the HR department shall attend the meeting to assist the manager. Inform the employee they are entitled to be accompanied at that meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague.
- Usually, Occupational Advice should be sought, including advice from an OH Physician (if not already available) in advance of the meeting.
- At the meeting review attendance levels and actions taken to date.
- The manager may ask the employee to withdraw while to allow time to reflect on the discussion and to decide the way forward.

- If dismissal is the outcome, a letter confirming the arrangements will be issued by the HR department. Such a letter will notify the employee of their appeal rights.

Stage 4 Appeal

Employees dismissed in such circumstances shall have a right of appeal. Appeals should be made in writing to the Director of Human Resources within 10 working days. Such appeals will be heard by three senior staff of the University.

Framework for Managing Long Term Sickness Absences

Introduction

This framework sets out the approach to managing long term absences due to sickness.

Generally, these arrangements may be applied to absences of 10+ days' duration.

Managers may seek advice and guidance prior to or during any of the stages referred to below.

Referral to Occupational Health

If a member of staff is absent from work for 10 days or more, or in the event of frequent absences, the University of Suffolk may seek to refer that staff member to the Occupational Health Adviser and may seek to refer earlier any staff who are absent with mental health related conditions, in line with national guidance. This guidance encourages early intervention to support a speedy recovery. The Occupational Health Adviser is a specialist service contracted by the University. Further details of the current providers of the OH Service may be obtained from the HR Department. The OH Service is provided by professionally qualified doctors/advisers who are suitably qualified in occupational health medicine.

A referral to the Occupational Health Service may be made for one or more of the following reasons:

- ;
- To understand the nature of the absence, likely prognosis and to establish the likely duration of the absence;
- To obtain advice following diagnosis of a short or long term condition;
- To identify what, if any, adjustments we might need to consider making in order to facilitate an early return to work, which may include redeployment;
- To assist us in planning a phased return to work;
- To provide information for occupational pension purposes, in the event that ill-health retirement is the appropriate way forward.

The OH Adviser may seek a staff member's consent to approach their GP for medical records. These may be used by the OH Adviser to understand better a staff member's state of health and to develop advice for the employer. However, details about a staff member's medical records will not be shared with the employer, unless that is with the express consent of the individual.

Referrals to the OH service are voluntary. Staff will be asked but strongly encouraged to attend for a medical assessment and the University will reimburse reasonable costs incurred by the member of staff. In the event of an individual refusing to attend for a medical assessment, University management may be obliged to make decisions about future employment, as lay people, based on the information available to them.

The interface between the University and the Occupational Health Adviser is managed by the HR Department. Letters of referral shall be prepared by the HR Department, who will manage the referral process. The OH Adviser will report their opinion in the form of a letter to the HR lead officer for the case, a copy of which shall

be sent to the employee concerned. Such letters will usually be shared with line manager(s).

Following receipt of this report, the staff member is encouraged to meet with their manager and HR lead Officer to discuss the report and agree any support arrangements, as appropriate, to assist an early return to work or alternative pathway.

In some cases, a case conference involving the staff member, Line manager, HR Lead Officer and the OH Adviser may be appropriate. The staff member may be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or a work colleague if they wish.

Return to Work

Line managers will undertake a return to work interview with all staff returning to work after ill health following a long term absence (10+ days) managers will undertake a more comprehensive return to work interview with staff. A checklist to assist in this process is included at Appendix 5. This checklist is intended to provide a broad framework for the discussion. A HR lead Officer may also attend, particularly where occupational health services have been used to seek advice and guidance to support a staff member's return to work.

Phased Return to Work

In order to assist some staff returning to work, it may be necessary to phase a return gradually. Usually, this process should be over a period of no more than 4 weeks. However, in exceptional circumstances extended arrangements may be supported where staff can use accrued holiday and disability leave, if applicable, to such a longer reintroduction to work programme. Consideration should also be made to a temporary reduction in hours (pay adjustments would apply) permanent change to contracted working hours or work pattern. Other possibilities may include agreement to reasonable periods of unpaid leave to support a member of staff's recovery.

The pattern and duties of a phased return should be consistent with the advice of the Occupational Health Adviser and be agreeable to the manager concerned.

Other Reasonable Adjustments

The University will work with staff to make reasonable adjustments to the work place and/or their job in order to assist staff in making a sustained return to work. Managers may wish to record adjustments agreed using the 'Reasonable Adjustments' Agreement' which is available on MySuffolk with this policy.

Where funds for such adjustments are available externally, University of Suffolk will expect staff seeking these adjustments to participate fully in accessing such funds.

Annual reviews with occupational health to appraise existing adjustments in place, review their wellbeing at that time and to seek any recommendations, may be a reasonable action to continuously support a member of staff with a long term condition.

If member of staff is not likely to become fit for their present employment, we will work with them to explore opportunities for redeployment in another area of work. This may mean a reduction in salary and this will be discussed fully before any action is taken.

Termination of Employment on Grounds of Ill Health

Sadly, there are occasions where a member of staff will not become well enough to return to work within a reasonable timescale and, in these circumstances, their employment may be terminated (with notice). Such dismissals may only take place with the prior agreement of the Director of HR and a member of the HR Department shall assist managers in conducting any such procedures.

In such circumstances, the staff member may be entitled to receive enhanced pension benefits, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant pension scheme. These will be explained to the staff member. The relevant pension scheme guides contain further information and these can be obtained from the HR Department.

A member of staff whose employment is terminated due to ongoing ill health shall have a right of appeal to a panel of three senior staff. Appeals should be made in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the termination letter.

Manager's Framework for Return to Work Interviews

A) Preparation

Arrange a private location

Check the reason given for the absence

Check out the absence history

Are there any concerns about the staff member's attitude to work?

Consider seeking advice and guidance from the HR Department

B) Conducting the Interview

Welcome the staff member back to work

Be sensitive and courteous – this could be a stressful or embarrassing event for the staff member

Discuss the staff member's absence record and confirm accuracy

Explain the purpose of the interview – this could be to confirm fitness for work, to support their reintroduction to work or it could be to improve attendance

Bring the staff member up to speed with work developments

Ask open questions

Ask the staff member were there any work related matters that they feel contributed to them being absent from work? If so, seek reasonable resolution to the issues

If you know the staff member's account is not genuine, say so as diplomatically as possible

Listen!

Is there any remaining health or other issues, in particular underlying health issues if this sort of absence happens often, that need addressing with your support?

Ask probing questions

Find joint solutions – agree an action plan and timescales

Be clear about the improvements needed

Consider whether the staff member might have a disability

Consider whether the staff member is showing signs of stress. Would a stress risk assessment be appropriate?

Consider and discuss any reasonable adjustments that could be made to the work place or job

If the staff member is pregnant, check a risk assessment has been conducted

Set a date for a further meeting

Write up any notes promptly and let the staff member have a copy of your meeting notes.

Send a copy of your notes to HR to be filed in the personal files if linked to supporting long term sickness or linked to those subject to formal monitoring procedures

Further action agreed from return to work interviews can be recorded within section 2 of the online sickness absence form. Contact HR for help and guidance about next steps.

Representation – an interview of this kind is part of day to day management. There is no formal entitlement to representation at such a meeting. However, if a staff member wishes to be accompanied, agreeing to this arrangement may help them to feel at ease.