

SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURES

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University wishes to create a healthy working environment for staff that protects their physical and mental well-being. It is recognised, however that staff, on occasion, will be absent from work on the grounds of ill health and it is essential that the University has arrangements for the recording, monitoring and effective management of sickness absence. This policy establishes a common reporting procedure for all staff employed by the University, academic and non-academic, part-time and full-time, including those on fixed term contracts. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the University's *Ill Health Procedure*.
- 1.2 Effective management of sickness absence is not just about reporting the absence but open communication with the employee to understand their situation. The University has a duty of care to all its employees to ensure their health and safety whilst at work. We will encourage and facilitate practices and services that support employee well-being by providing advice and guidance

through Line Manager, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Occupational Health and Counselling.

- 1.3 "Sickness" is defined as incapacity to carry out duties and responsibilities which the employee is contractually obliged to do because of their own illness or accident.
- 1.4 The Sickness Absence Reporting Procedure provides information for all employees on how to report their sickness absence to their line managers. Failure to follow the sickness absence reporting procedure may lead to action under the University's *Disciplinary Procedure*.
- 1.5 Each School and Function should have a designated person to whom absence is reported for recording purposes and in the majority of instances this will be the line manager.

2. Reporting and Recording Sickness Absence

- 2.1 It is the responsibility of individual line managers to ensure that all of their staff understand and follow the absence reporting procedure.
- 2.2 The line manager will need to complete a Sickness form USP1 on day one of a member of staff informing them of their absence and send to Payroll (it can be emailed to payroll@reading.ac.uk), to ensure that the absence is recorded on the payroll system. When the member of staff has returned to work the line manager needs to complete another USP1 form with the return date stated.
- 2.3 Where a member of staff is unable to attend work due to unforeseen circumstances, the member of staff is required to contact his / her line manager or designated person to whom absence is reported for recording purposes on the first day of absence before or as close to his / her start time as possible, and certainly prior to any formal commitments for the day. This should not normally be later than one hour after their normal commencement time.
- 2.4 If a member of staff is in a customer facing role or they are required to start work early, then local arrangements may require a slightly different process for reporting the first day of sickness absence.
- 2.5 During the call the member of staff should explain:
 - a. Why they are unable to come to work;
 - b. How long they think the sickness absence might last;
 - c. What action they are taking to mitigate the effects of the illness, e.g. visiting the doctor;
 - d. Where they can be contacted during the day should their line manager need to get in touch with them;
 - e. Any outstanding or urgent work that needs to be dealt with.
- 2.6 It is expected that in the majority of cases contact will be made by telephone, however, it is recognised that on occasions this may not be possible. It is not acceptable to leave messages reporting absence with other members of staff who are not responsible for absence reporting.
- 2.7 Only in exceptional circumstances should a relative or friend telephone if the member of staff is not able to do so him/herself and should contact the member of staffs line manager. It is not acceptable to leave messages reporting absence with anyone else.
- 2.8 Where a situation occurs whilst a member of staff is at work, and the employee needs to leave work to deal with it, he/she should inform his/her line manager and seek permission to leave work. The manager should make a note of this period of absence and record as appropriate.
- 2.9 This procedure must be followed where an individual is scheduled to work from home or other locations, other than University premises, on a certain day, or they are due to attend an external training course.
- 2.10 Staff on secondment or sabbatical should also inform their line manager of any period of sickness in accordance with this procedure.

3. Contact during sickness absence

- 3.1 All members of staff are expected to maintain contact with their line manager during their sickness absence at an appropriate frequency, agreed with their manager, to update the line manager on the expected return to work date.
- 3.2 Where the absence is not covered by a fit note, the member of staff would be expected to be in contact their line manager on a regular basis, this will be discussed and understood by both parties.
- 3.3 Where the sickness absence is likely to be long-term, the line manager must ensure that they maintain contact with the member of staff during the period of sickness absence to show concern for their well-being and to encourage them to return to work as soon as they are fit.
- 3.4 Where the sickness occurs overseas, whether the employee is on leave and does not expect to return to work on the agreed date or whether the employee is away on business, they are still expected to keep in regular contact with their manager to keep them updated on their sickness absence and expected return to work.
- 3.5 Where it is likely that this sickness is to result in long term absence from work and the employee is unable to return to their normal place of residence they must provide an alternative telephone number or email address where they can be contacted.
- 3.6 Where time zones and the reason for absence allow, the employee must remain contactable during normal working hours and where possible follow the absence procedure.

4. Self-certification

- 4.1 In order to qualify for occupational sick pay, all staff are required to complete the relevant section of the USP1 form (self-certification) for any period of sickness absence. The USP1 form must then be returned to their line manager or the department's designated representative for submission to the Payroll Department.
- 4.2 Self-certification can be valid for up to 7 calendar days sickness absence (including any non-working days). For full guidance, please go to <https://www.gov.uk/taking-sick-leave>.

5. Providing a fit note

- 5.1 For absences exceeding the current self-certification rules, an employee must obtain a fit note (formerly known as medical certificates), usually issued by their GP, which should be submitted to their line manager or designated representative. The fit note should then be attached to a USP1 form, with the relevant section completed, and then forwarded to the Payroll Department (this can be emailed to payroll@reading.ac.uk).
- 5.2 From this point onwards, fit notes must be submitted in a timely manner to cover any further periods of absence. Sick pay may be withheld in the event of non-receipt of fit notes by Payroll.

6. Non-working day

- 6.1 In reporting sickness absence it is important to understand the relevance of the "non-working" day, particularly for those who do not work the standard week (i.e. Monday to Friday). For example, for a part time member of staff who normally works Monday to Wednesday each week, and who rings in sick on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, the eighth day of absence will be the following Monday, i.e. the eighth calendar day, when a fit note will be required. If the employee returns to work on the eighth day and it is her / his first day of fitness, only the normal working days (in this case Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) would be recorded as absences against the sickness record.

7. Unauthorised absence

- 7.1 Absence that has not been notified in accordance with this policy will be treated as unauthorised absence under the University's *Disciplinary Procedure*, unless a reason is subsequently given which the manager considers acceptable.
- 7.2 If a member of staff does not report for work and has not informed their immediate line manager or other senior member of staff why they have not attended for work, their line manager should make all reasonable efforts to contact them e.g. by telephone or in writing and should record any action taken.
- 7.3 Where the manager has been unable to make contact with the employee the manager should contact the relevant HR Partner/Adviser who will provide advice on the most suitable course of action to follow.
- 7.4 Failure to report sickness absence in accordance with this procedure may result in the loss of sick pay and may be dealt with under the University's *Disciplinary Procedure*.

8. Persistent short-term absences

- 8.1 These absences will generally be for relatively minor illness or injury e.g. for such common ailments as flu, stomach upset, back pain etc. The absences may be due to a variety of reasons, or due to a persistent medical condition.
- 8.2 Where there appears to be a problem of persistent short absences the line manager should explore with the member of staff whether there are any underlying problems that are causing the absence and may refer them to Occupational Health.
- 8.3 As a guideline the following will normally be regarded as persistent short term absences and will trigger action under the University's *Ill Health Procedure*:
- a. Three periods of sickness absence in a 3 month period;
 - b. Regular absence on certain days, e.g. Mondays or Fridays, long shift days, known busy days etc;
 - c. An employee may also be considered to have an unacceptable level of persistent short term absence where a combination of odd days, longer periods and patterns of absence cause the line manager concern.

9. Pregnancy related sickness

- 9.1 An employee who is absent due to a pregnancy-related illness during the four week period prior to their due date will be required to start their maternity leave on the date that they go off sick, and will be entitled to maternity pay and not sick pay. Days of pregnancy-related illness during this period may be disregarded if the employee wishes to defer the start of their maternity leave period, and a risk assessment does not indicate that carrying out work will endanger their pregnancy.
- 9.2 Pregnancy-related sickness absence should be recorded separately and will not be taken into account when looking at targets for absence levels.

10. Disability related sickness

- 10.1 Disability related sickness absence will be managed in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and guidance, and advice on specific cases can be sought from your HR Partners/Adviser.
- 10.2 As a general rule when assessing trigger points for staff with disabilities, the line manager should separate absence as a result of disability from other sickness absence.

11. Return to work – return to work interview

- 11.1 When a member of staff returns to work, their line manager should organise a return to work interview, this should happen for all periods of absence, regardless of whether the absence is for 1 day or 1 week. Where the employee is returning from long-term sickness absence, a meeting to discuss their return to work plan should have already taken place. However, it is still recommended that the line manager meet with the returning employee on their first day back to help ensure a successful rehabilitation to the work place.
- 11.2 These interviews should ideally be done on the employee's first day back at work.
- 11.3 In the interview the line manager will ask the member of staff about their illness and how well they have recovered. They will also complete with the member of staff a self-certificate (USP1) to cover the days of their illness.
- 11.4 The purpose of the return to work interview is:
- a. To give the manager the opportunity to check that the employee is fit enough to return to work
 - b. To give the member of staff an opportunity to discuss any concerns he or she may have, and to identify any domestic, welfare or work related problems in an appropriate forum
 - c. To establish the reasons for the absence and complete the necessary sickness certification form
 - d. To inform the employee of the Employee Assistance Programme for advice and support
 - e. To raise the option of the member of staff seeing Occupational Health via a management referral or seek advice for counselling support.
 - f. To make the employee aware of any changes that may have occurred during his/her absence
 - g. To discuss any return to work programme or action plan, as appropriate.
- 11.5 If the member of staff has been absent for more than the self-certification period, they should provide a fit note from their GP. This should explain the nature of their illness and confirm they are fit to return to work.
- 11.6 If they have mentioned they have a medical condition or their absence was a result of an accident at work then the employee may be referred to the University's Occupational Health provider for their advice before their return to work.
- 11.7 USP1 form is required by Payroll to advise that the employee has returned to work.
- 11.8 A return to work interview form is available as a guide to line managers on what should be covered in the interview.

12. Sickness during a period of paid holiday or unpaid leave

- 12.1 Occasionally, a member of staff may become ill whilst they are taking a period of paid holiday or unpaid leave, and wish to have this absence classed as sick leave.
- 12.2 This is possible as long as the member of staff self-certification and fit note requirements in line with the length of their absence, confirming that they would not have been fit enough to carry out their usual duties at that time. Staff who provide this documentation can claim back annual leave and bank holidays but not closure days, which fall during the absence period. These days can then be taken at another point in the annual leave year or within 3 months of the end of the leave year, depending on when the sickness absence occurs.
- 12.3 Members of staff who have fallen ill while abroad should also provide a doctor's certificate on their return to work.
- 12.4 Where a member of staff falls ill overseas during a period of planned annual leave the University may request to see evidence of when the employee's return flight to the UK was booked.

- 12.5 Where it is likely that this sickness is to result in long term absence from work and the employee is unable to return to their normal place of residence they must provide an alternative telephone number or email address where they can be contacted.
- 12.6 Where time zones and the reason for absence allow the employee must remain contactable during normal working hours and be able to participate in this sickness absence procedure.
- 12.7 If the employee's sickness abroad is for a prolonged period then the University will require a sickness certificate in the interim period. Please seek advice from the relevant HR Partner/Adviser if unsure on when to request a sick certificate.
- 12.8 Post-dated certificates, covering a period prior to the doctor's appointment will not be accepted.

13. Pay whilst off sick

- 13.1 Entitlement to occupational sick pay as detailed in the table below will be governed by the length of service (as determined by the date you start your continuous employment with the University) at the commencement of the period of absence.
- 13.2 During absence on full pay, you will receive your normal pay. Any payment received on your behalf under the SSP scheme will be deducted from the amount payable by the University to ensure you receive your normal full pay. During absence on half pay, you will receive half your normal salary. Half pay is inclusive of SSP. For further details on SSP please contact the Payroll department.
- 13.3 The allowances set out below are the maximum provision in any rolling 12 month period. The rate of pay you receive is calculated by adding together the total number of work days of sickness absence (on full or half pay) you have taken during the 12 months immediately preceding the first date of your current absence, and deducting this from your full/half pay allowance. In aggregating the periods of absence, no account shall be taken of any unpaid absence on sick leave.

Length of Service*	Contractual Sick Pay
1 month or less	-
more than 1 month, up to and including 6 months	4 weeks' full pay in any 12 month period
more than 6 months, up to and including 3 years	26 weeks' full pay in any 12 month period
More than 3 years	26 weeks' full pay and 26 weeks' half pay in any 12 month period

14. Doctor, dentist and hospital appointments

- 14.1 Routine appointments, wherever possible, should be arranged outside of normal working hours. If this is not possible, then the member of staff should try to make an appointment at the start or the end of the working day. They would be expected to agree any time out of the workplace with their line manager in advance of the appointment and also agree with their line manager how they will make up the time.
- 14.2 It is always necessary to apply some discretion when dealing with non-routine health related appointments. In these circumstances, a line manager can reserve the right to have sight of an appointment card.

15. Accidents, injuries and industrial diseases

- 15.1 An employee who has an accident, incident or near miss event (that could have resulted in injury or ill-health) that occurs whilst they are at work must report it to their immediate supervisor or Area Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

- 15.2 This is to ensure that the incident can be investigated to identify any action needed to prevent further injuries and ill-health and to ensure that the incident is recorded in the local Accident Book and reported as necessary.
- 15.3 Significant near misses, work related ill-health and injuries that result in time away from work or more than just first aid treatment must be notified to Health and Safety Services using a University Incident Report Form.
- 15.4 Cases of ill-health that are believed to be caused by an incident or accident within the workplace should also be reported to the Occupational Health Service.

Human Resources

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