

POLICY ON ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL CHANGES

General changes

This document has not been amended as part of this revision.
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This document (previously archived as: X:\Human Resources\Policy and guides\Sickness absence\HR guidance - Absence Management - ts 18 06 13.doc) was incorporated within the UPR series on 5 October 2015.

The following abbreviations are used in this document:

OHU	Occupational Health Unit
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
UPRs	University Policies and Regulations

“POLICY ON ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

The University is committed to treating staff fairly and consistently and in line with good employment practice, to promoting the health and well-being of staff and supporting them through periods of ill health. However, the University also needs to operate efficiently and effectively and be able to meet operational requirements.

The policy is designed to ensure through effective management that:

- A.** staff absence is kept to a minimum through health promotion, flexible working practices and work design;
- B.** staff with health problems receive appropriate support through their managers, the Occupational Health Department and Human Resources;
- C.** staff are assisted to return to work, wherever and whenever practical and appropriate, through agreed rehabilitation programmes or workplace adjustments.

A. PREVENTION OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

1. Health promotion and prevention

- (i) The University carries out a pre-employment risk assessment to ensure that the employee will work within a safe environment. The manager completes a questionnaire that provides occupational health information about the job and the successful candidate. The Occupational Health Department analyses this information and gives appropriate advice.
- (ii) Preventative measures can be taken in terms of training where relevant on manual handling, strain injuries (such as upper limb disorder), correct posture, ergonomics, and eye tests. Advice is available from the Occupational Health Department at any time.
- (iii) The University carries out an annual health promotion campaign, which includes:
 - a healthcare forum where staff can find out about health topics such as coronary risk, alcohol, smoking, diet and cancer and can get sound advice about healthy lifestyles;
 - lifestyle screening through which staff can have access to medical checks and health advice from a nurse;
 - highlighting healthy food options on the menu in the staff restaurants;

- advice on fitness through the sports centre and "get fit" campaigns;
- *access to counselling through the confidential 24 hour Helpline;*
- promotion of and access to sports facilities;

(iv) Access to the confidential Legal and Health Helpline.

2. Flexible working practices

The University believes that flexible working practices may help to reduce staff sickness absences by enabling staff to balance work and home responsibilities. The University has a range of flexible working practices which include:

- a range of employment contracts including standard full time to fractional (ie part time, job share, and term time only);
- a degree of integration in organising normal working hours and working at home;
- policies on maternity, paternity and parental leave, and a policy of time off for emergency care of a dependent.

3. Work Design

The University seeks to design work processes that enable staff to make the most effective use of their skills. The University has a legal duty to create a safe working environment for all staff. It has particular regard for legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and seeks, where practicable, to design work processes and provide aids to meet the needs of staff who have a disability.

4. Training

The People Development Unit offers access to a range of courses that can help, indirectly, to reduce staff absence. These include, time management, manual handling, assertiveness and how to cope with pressure.

B. SUPPORT FOR STAFF WHO ARE SICK

1. Financial

The University offers generous sick pay schemes, determined by length of continuity of service and type of employment. This ensures that staff receive both Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) during these periods.

2. Absence reporting procedures

It is important that staff and managers understand their individual obligations with respect to the absence reporting procedures so that there is no misunderstanding of what is required. Any member of staff who is unable to attend work because of ill health must (wherever practical) inform her/his manager immediately.

3. Keeping in touch

Managers, the Occupational Health Department and Human Resources (as appropriate) will keep in regular contact with anyone who is off on long-term sick leave. What form this contact takes will need to be determined on a case by case basis.

4. Referral to Occupational Health Unit (OHU)

Where a member of staff, or her/his manager, has concerns about the type of sickness or level of sickness, referral will be made to the Occupational Health Unit (OHU). This will normally be arranged through Human Resources, with the Manager providing a brief outline of the job/role and her/his concerns to OHU. The OHU offers the professional support of a

nurse and/or a medical practitioner. It is a confidential service for all staff. Managers will not be informed of the confidential discussion with staff. They will, however, be informed of the likely duration of the illness, the expectation of whether an individual will be able to return to work, advice as to how to reduce the level of absence and whether there is any underlying medical reason why an individual cannot attend work regularly. The OHU may also need to write to the individual's medical adviser (eg GP or Consultant), with the employee's consent, to obtain information.

5. Sickness monitoring and trigger mechanisms

All sickness is monitored. A key reason for keeping sickness statistics is to identify patterns/trends, eg whether there are particularly high areas or levels of sickness, or type of sickness.

The University also needs to be able to assess what level of sickness absence is usual for comparable organisations in the public/private sector so as to benchmark the University of Hertfordshire position and thus the effectiveness of absence policies. The University will gather information on the number of working days absence, number of absences and types of absences and will use these statistics as a trigger for further possible investigation. Some examples of such triggers are:

For groups:

- a higher level of sickness absence than the average for a local area e.g. department, compared with the University average.

For individuals:

- a higher level of sickness than the average for that department or for the University
- a specified number of absences in a set period e.g. three separate periods in three months

Such triggers will ensure that a consistent approach is taken across the University. If the level of absence gives cause for concern the manager will investigate the nature of these absences and will meet with the individual to discuss the level of absences. The approach taken by the manager will depend on the nature of the absence. Absence because of a disability will be separately identified and managed.

If the manager believes the level of sickness absence will not reoccur then no action will be taken.

However, if the manager believes that there is a level of frequent intermittent (short term) absence that is not likely to improve, or there will be long term absence because of ill health with no likelihood of return to work in the foreseeable future, then reference will be made to the Procedures with Respect to Staff Capability Owing to Ill Health (see UPR PER/D/1¹ and the Human Resources website).

C. RETURN TO WORK

1. Return to work interview

Wherever appropriate, when the member of staff returns to work following a period of illness she/he will meet with her/his manager informally to discuss the absence and any support necessary.

¹ UPR PER/D/1 was superseded by UPR HR02 'Staff Disciplinary Policy'

2. Short term adjustments

Where appropriate, to enable an employee who has had an illness for a significant period of time to return to work successfully, it may be possible for a phased return to be agreed, e.g.

- working half days rather than full days
- carrying out part of the normal duties
- carrying out other duties

A decision by the manager, following consultation with the employee, Human Resources and the Occupational Health Department, will need to be reached on the length of time these arrangements should be sustained.

3. Longer term adjustment

Where appropriate, it may be possible to make particular work adjustments to enable an employee to carry out the full requirements of the job.

4. Review

It is important for both the manager and employee to review progress to ensure that the working arrangements support the recovery of the employee and meet the needs of the University. This will help ensure that the return to work is successful. Reviews will take place on a regular basis and the outcomes will be recorded.

5. Staff with disabilities

If a member of staff has a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010, then the University has a legal duty to offer reasonable help. This may include adjustments to the workplace or reference to outside agencies which can offer advice and financial support.

6. Entitlements

Staff shall be entitled to receive sick pay in accordance with the following scales:

During the first year of service	Full pay for 1 month and after completing four calendar months' service, half pay for 2 months
During the second year of service	Full pay for 3 months and half pay for 3 months
During the third year of service	Full pay for 4 months and half pay for 4 months
During the fourth and successive years	Full pay for 6 months and half pay for 6 months"

Mrs S C Grant
Secretary and Registrar
Signed: **14 March 2016**