

HUMAN RESOURCES GUIDANCE NOTE – ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL CHANGES

General changes

This document has not been amended as part of this revision.

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:

HR	Human Resources
SSP	Statutory Sick Pay
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
UPRs	University Policies and Regulations

“HR Guidance Note – Absence Management

Introduction

This guidance should be read alongside the University’s policies and procedures on sickness absence and particularly the policy on Managing Staff on Long Term and Short Term Ill Health Absence. These can be found on Staffnet.

A fair and supportive approach

The University recognises the need to manage staff absence sensitively and effectively so as to support the individual and meet its own operational requirements.

Line managers should ensure that they are aware if their direct reports are absent and the reason for that absence. In many cases their knowledge of the employee and the reason for the absence will lead them to conclude that no action other than a welcome back conversation is required. In some cases, however, both the number and pattern of the absences may be of concern and so a meeting would be appropriate. In this event, the meeting would be convened in line with the University’s Policy on Managing Staff on Long Term and Short Term Ill Health Absence.

In deciding whether an informal or a formal meeting is required line managers must consider the following:

- reason(s) for absence
- any underlying health problem or disability
- length of service and overall attendance pattern
- any mitigating circumstances (e.g. family situation)
- any formal warnings issued to date and the level of warning issued
- advice received from Occupational Health , the Equality Unit or Human Resources if the absence is due to a disability

The aim is that at every stage the line manager will consider any factors that an individual puts forward about their absence and take these into account. So for example, if an employee informs their line manager they have to take time off because of an injury, a formal meeting and warning are unlikely to be appropriate, while an informal meeting to discuss how they are and any support required would be far more appropriate.

When considering their course of action the line manager must also consider the following:

- A referral to Occupational Health
- Short or long term reasonable adjustments
- Contacting the Equality Unit for advice on disability-related adjustments, mental health issues and other equality matters.
- Making the employee aware of the confidential 24 hour Helpline
- Discussing the situation with their HR Business Partner

It must be remembered that any support provided is always based on the needs of the individual and that “one size” does not fit all.

Consistency across UH

In order that line managers act fairly and consistently some broad monitoring mechanisms are outlined in the Policy on Absence Management, and these should be used by managers as a starting point in considering whether any action or any further investigation is required. They enable managers to identify issues early, thus providing the appropriate support as soon as possible and enabling employees, through advice and guidance, to improve their pattern of attendance

Monitoring mechanisms may include a trigger for informal action when the employee has been away from work due to sickness for 6 or more days over a rolling 12 month period; or more formal action where the employee has been absent for 12 or more days and/or 4 or more occurrences over the same period.

Where an informal meeting takes place there should be a discussion in relation to the absences, any underlying health issues or other problems and whatever support can be provided. If formal action is required this should follow the process as outlined in the Policy on Managing staff long term and short term ill health absence.

Phased return to work

A phased return to work may be agreed where an employee has been absent from work due to sickness for an extended period of time. Normally this phased return would last a maximum of 8 weeks during which time the employee would remain on full pay. Normally the OHU will advise on such a plan and it is important that it is agreed by the line manager and employee in advance of their return. Should a longer period be required this would normally indicate a long term contractual change and a reduction/amendment to pay.

Disability and Reasonable adjustments

A disability is defined as ‘a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities’. Long term normally means 12 months or more. Special conditions apply to progressive illnesses such as cancer and HIV, and Multiple Sclerosis, as well as conditions that fluctuate such as ME and epilepsy. These illnesses would normally be defined as disabilities.

When an employee has a disability we have a duty to put reasonable adjustments in place to enable that employee to do their job. OHU will normally advise as to what these might be and they could include a reduction in working hours or an adjustment to working hours, a temporary or permanent move to an alternative post, or the reallocation of some duties to another employee. We are not obliged to implement adjustments, only those we consider reasonable; however should we refuse them we must be able to justify this. Additionally when making such changes it is important to consider the impact of the changes on the job required, as well as the impact upon the rest of the team.

Further Guidance

There are a number of guidance notes on StaffNet (HR/Support for Managers/Disability support) offering advice, guidance and links to further information in relation to most long term illness, both physical and mental, and including disability related illness. This guidance can be accessed by both managers and employees facing intermittent short term and long term absence, as well as those impacted by illness which is not effecting either their time at work or their performance whilst there.

Additional guidance: Return to work interviews

Notification and payment for sickness absence”

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