

SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

PURPOSE

UoNSU is highly committed to promoting the welfare of all staff. This is central to our Values and to keeping our Union's performance and standards on track. We recognise the importance of health and wellbeing to individuals themselves and for us as a responsible employer. We also appreciate that accidents and illness do sometimes occur, and that managing these sensitively and effectively is important for us all.

This policy is designed to promote good practice in supporting health improvement, preventing ill health, and managing sickness absence fairly when it occurs. It also emphasises the rehabilitation of staff, including measures to support and retain people wherever possible, including those with disabilities.

POLICY

Context

We want staff to understand that attending work is important. We expect people to come to work and to perform to the best of their ability when they are fit to do so. We also understand that a certain amount of absence due to illness or accident is inevitable.

Sickness absence can vary from short, intermittent periods of ill-health to a continuous period of long-term absence. It may be physical or mental, and it may have a number of different causes, treatments and outcomes.

It's important that we manage sickness absence effectively as an organisation, both to support those affected and to minimise any detrimental impact on the delivery of our services and on other staff. Through this policy we aim to:

- Reduce the level of sickness absence wherever possible through early intervention and support.
- Minimise the likelihood of sickness absence by identifying causes of absence and recommending practical changes in working practices or environment, where possible.
- Ensure a fair and consistent approach to the management of sickness absence across UoNSU and without discrimination.
- Limit the consequences for other staff and our operation when absence occurs.
- Support staff through periods of ill-health, with the aim of securing their early and sustained return to work.
- Manage people's rehabilitation on their return to work, including any support mechanisms or reasonable adjustments.

- Ensure that we comply with Disability Discrimination legislation and other relevant statutory requirements.

This policy should be read alongside the others in the Wellbeing suite of policies, including our Wellbeing and Leave Policy, Health and Safety Policy and our Alcohol and Drugs Policy.

Disabilities

We are aware that sickness absence may result from a disability. At each stage of the sickness absence procedure, we will consider whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to the job or to other aspects of work arrangements which could provide support at work or assist a return to work.

If you consider that you are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects your ability to undertake your work, you should inform your line manager.

Monitoring and Assessment

Being aware of absence levels across the organisation is an important part both of reducing it and of identifying individual ill-health problems at an early stage. It also helps to alert us to any environmental or workplace issues that could be contributing to staff absence.

It is the line manager's responsibility to record staff absence from work and the reasons for it. We want to be clear that this is primarily with the intention of supporting staff including those with long-term health conditions or disabilities. This information will be collated and monitored by line managers and HR. We do this so that we're alerted early to any cause for concern, or to unexplained patterns or changes in people's attendance.

UoNSU has access to an Occupational Health Service. Staff may be requested by their line manager to consent to being examined by a registered medical practitioner, and to agree to the doctor providing us with a medical report. We will pay for any such examination. The terms of our contracts are that staff must give this consent when reasonably asked to do so by us.

Note that where we find repeated or unexplained absence, we will investigate. We will provide support, sensitivity and help where people need it. However, in circumstances where we believe the absence is not genuine, action will be taken under our Disciplinary Policy. Ultimately, this could result in dismissal.

Notifying Sickness Absence

The following applies to all absence that hasn't been agreed in advance with your line manager.

- You are asked to contact your line manager within 30 minutes of the start of your normal working time on the first day of sickness absence, wherever practicable. You should provide details of the nature of absence or illness and how long you expect to be absent.
- If you are due to work an evening shift, you should notify your line manager by 10am on the day you will be absent, or as soon as you know you will be unable to work.

- You should notify your line manager directly if you're unable to come to work. You should leave a message on an answer phone or pass a message via another member of staff only once you have attempted to contact your manager directly. If your manager is not at work you should inform the HR department.
- In exceptional circumstances, where you are unable to notify your manager personally, you may ask a friend or relative to do it on your behalf. However, it remains your responsibility to ensure that notification takes place as described and that you do it in person as soon as you're able.
- Whilst you're off sick, you should keep in contact with your line manager and advise them of the likely date of return. If you anticipated being absent for just one day, you must telephone on the following day if you're still absent. This will apply to any day that you said you expected to return.
- Note that it is your responsibility to notify your line manager of the date of return, especially where sickness is not covered by a medical certificate. This is particularly relevant for staff who work shifts so we can avoid duplication of shift cover. Failure to do so may result in you being sent home without pay.

Please note that failing to follow the above notification procedure may result in action under the terms of our Disciplinary Policy.

Certification

Absence for less than seven days

Immediately on return to work, you must complete a Self-Certification Form to account for all days of absence due to sickness or injury. The Self Certification Form can be found on the Forms website.

Absence for more than seven days

After the first seven days of continuous sickness absence (including non-working days), you must produce a doctor's 'Statement of Fitness to Work' certificate (also known as a 'Fit note') covering all days of absence. This should be sent to your manager without delay. Immediately on your return to work, you will also need to complete a Self-Certification Form to cover all days of absence due to sickness or injury.

If your doctor provides a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' you should inform your line manager immediately. We will discuss with you any additional measures that may be needed to support your return to work, taking account of your doctor's advice. This may take place at a 'return to work' interview. If appropriate measures cannot be taken, you will remain on sick leave and we will set a date to review the situation.

If you wish to return to work before the doctor's certificate has expired, you must obtain a doctor's 'Statement of Fitness to Resume Duties' before you return to work. Such a statement may also be required in other special cases if we request it.

Sickness during Annual Leave

If you are sick during annual leave, you should notify us on the first day of sickness and follow the reporting procedure set out above. On your return you must complete a Self-Certification Form. Where the absence is for more than seven days, a doctor's certificate must be provided. You will be regarded as being off sick rather than on annual leave for the dates declared, and you will be allowed to take the annual leave at a future date as agreed by us. Note that if you tell us you are sick but still continue to take pre-booked holiday, this will not apply.

Sick Pay

In order to claim sick pay allowance, it is essential that the notification and certification procedures set out above are followed. Failing to do so may affect your entitlement to receive statutory and UoNSU sickness benefit.

Within any span of 52 weeks, payment of Sick Pay Allowance is for the following periods based on length of continuous service:

<u>Service</u>	<u>Entitlement</u>	
	<u>Full Pay</u>	<u>Half Pay</u>
First three months	Nil	Nil
Fourth to twelfth month	8 weeks	8 weeks
Second and third year	13 weeks	13 weeks
Fourth and fifth year	21 weeks	21 weeks
After five years	26 weeks	26 weeks

Full Pay Allowance = Pay, which when added to any statutory benefits due under current legislation equals full pay.

Half Pay Allowance = Half Pay, plus any statutory benefits due under current legislation, however this will not exceed full pay.

Third Party Accident

If you are absent as a result of an accident, you are not entitled to sick pay if you receive damages from a third party that cover your loss of income. In this event we may advance you a sum no greater than the allowance provided under the scheme. However, this is subject to you agreeing to refund us all or part of the sum advanced you from any damages you receive.

Managing Sickness Absence

UoNSU has a clear intention to build a positive culture of support, trust and collaboration with staff. We have provided a broad set of flexible working, leave and support mechanisms to allow staff to manage their working lives responsibly and accountably. The following are mechanisms we will use, where necessary, to manage sickness absence at UoNSU.

'Return to Work' Meetings

If you have been absent due to sickness or injury your line manager will ask you to a 'return to work' meeting. This is an informal meeting, held in private, so we can confirm the details of your sickness, find out how you are and how things are going for you at the moment, and discuss whether any measures are required to support you at work or to prevent a recurrence of the illness.

If you were issued with a certificate saying you may be fit for work, we will hold a meeting with you to make sure that we accommodate any adjustments or measures that are needed for you to return, following your doctor's advice.

Managing Sickness Absence

In circumstances where a particular pattern of absence is noted, or where significant levels of absence occur over a 12 month rolling period, we will invite you to a formal meeting with your line manager. The emphasis here will be to discuss the issue with the intention of understanding what has caused it and how it might be mitigated in future. The meeting will be a genuine discussion to explore the situation and to offer any support needed.

No further action may be necessary following this meeting. In cases where improvements in attendance are needed, this will be discussed and clarified. It's also possible that the issue may go on to become a long-term absence which will be managed as such.

In determining whether absence levels are significant, one of the methods we may use is the Bradford Factor. This method looks at how many occasions you have been absent in the previous 12 months as well as how many days you have been absent for.

The calculation is based on the number of spells of absence, multiplied by the number of spells of absence, multiplied by the total number of days. This gives the absence point figure:

$S \times S \times D = \text{Bradford Factor points score}$
(S = number of spells of absence in the last 12 months)
(D = number of days absence in the last 12 months)

For example: If staff member A has been off 3 times between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018 with a total number of 10 days absent the calculation would be:

3 spells of absence x 3 spells of absence x 10 days = 90 points

The calculation is always based on the preceding 12 months, so points levels will expire the longer a period of no absences is registered. The Bradford Factor trigger should be pro-rata for staff members who do not work 35 hours a week (see table below).

If the Bradford Factor trigger is reached by an employee then it will indicate higher than average absence and trigger the formal meeting with the line manager mentioned above.

Hours staff member works:	35	28	21	14	7
Bradford Factor trigger	125	100	75	50	25

Medical Examination

If there is frequent or unexplained absence, we may request you to be examined by a medical practitioner to determine your fitness for work. If you are off work and you are medically assessed as being fit to return to work, your entitlement to sick pay will stop from that date.

Formal Action

Where short-term absences are continued or cannot be verified medically, we may instigate a formal sickness absence procedure. In this, staff will be asked to attend a formal meeting to discuss the absence and clear timeframes set for improvement. Reasonable help and support will be offered to staff in making these improvements.

As this is a formal procedure, staff may be accompanied during these meetings and may appeal following any decisions. However, if there is no satisfactory improvement over the agreed timeframes, the staff member may be ultimately be dismissed.

Long-Term Sickness Absence

It may happen from time to time that someone suffers long-term sickness or injury where they may be off work for many months or where the future outcome is uncertain. If you are off work with a long-term illness or injury considered to be of 4 weeks or more duration, we will do what we can to offer support to you as a valued member of staff, both during your illness and on your return to work. You will be treated fairly and reasonably throughout, and we will hope to welcome you back to work as the situation allows.

We will keep in touch with you periodically to discuss how you are and when you might be able to return to work, and you will continue to be paid any sick pay entitlement under the rules of the scheme. As part of this we may request to meet with you at an agreed location and we may ask for medical assessment of your condition or seek current advice from a doctor. Where the condition is defined as a disability, we will comply fully with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Return to Work

We will do all we can to support and rehabilitate you on your return to work from long-term sickness absence. The following are examples of the measures that will be considered, as necessary:

- Phased return
- Temporary or permanent reduction in hours or times of work
- Change of location such as the option to work from home
- Additional rest periods
- Help with transport
- Refresher training or work shadowing
- A workplace mentor
- Alternative duties or roles
- Reasonable physical adjustments
- Support under the Access to Work scheme.

Your line manager will continue to monitor, review and discuss how things are going with you on your return to work. We will do this to support you, and also to be open-minded and proactive should these adjustments need to be changed to facilitate your ongoing rehabilitation.

Termination of Employment

There may be circumstances where an employee has persistent levels of short term absences, a single period or a number of periods of long term absence where the impact on the running of the UoNSU is affected. In these instances a consideration of terminating the individual's employment would be made.

Termination of employment will be considered where there is no realistic expectation that you can return to work, even with reasonable adjustments or alternative arrangements, or when problematic absence levels continue.

If this happens we will write to you and arrange to discuss the matter with you. In certain circumstances you may be able to retire on the grounds of ill-health and take some or all of your pension benefits.

If the decision is made to terminate your employment, we will write to you again explaining the decision. You will have the right to appeal this decision, and that letter will contain details of how you might do so.

Terminal Illness

It is possible that a member of staff may develop a terminal illness. This may be quite sudden or following a period of long-term sickness. There are no set rules on how these situations will be managed as the circumstances will vary between people. Some people may wish to work as long as possible whereas others will want to leave work immediately if they're able to. However, the following are principles we will use to guide us in managing these difficult and sensitive situations:

- Our first priority will be to support the member of staff and we will be guided by them. We will make whatever adjustments we reasonably can to allow them to work if they want to. This may include physical adjustments and or referral to support agencies.
- There may be financial questions or concerns, so we will help to get quick responses to issues around pensions or other work benefits.
- We will comply with the Data Protection Act in relation to what people want or don't want colleagues to know about their condition.
- We will be mindful of the impact on the individual's colleagues and managers, and provide support, such as counselling and time off to attend the funeral.

In situations where a member of staff has a family member who is terminally ill, we will be mindful that additional time off and support is needed to help them manage during this very difficult time. Line managers should talk to the individual about the support they need and what they would like other people to know, referring to our Well-being and Leave Policy and to HR for guidance as necessary.

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