

Managing Sickness Absence

Why it matters...

Where someone is unwell, for a short or longer period, it is important to be supportive and sympathetic. People are often reluctant to take sick leave and may feel that they are letting down their colleagues.

Being attentive to the reasons for the absence and what support could be provided can help someone back into work and prevent future illness.

The University has a duty of care to ensure that people are not working when they are unwell. This duty also underpins why absences must be recorded. These records can provide insight into longer term problems, such as stress, which may require further supportive action.

What do I need to do?

- Provide support and guidance (see overleaf for links).
- Ensure there is regular communication, especially where sickness absence is for more than a few days or where there is uncertainty about a return date.
- For longer term or regular absence, seek advice from HR on how to manage this.
- If the absence is due to a work-related accident or illness, the health and safety advisory service must be informed.
- When someone returns from sick leave, check whether they are fit to be at work or if any adjustments need to be made (see return to work discussion overleaf).
- Review sickness absence records to check regular absences – is there an underlying problem that needs support or adjustments to be made?
- Keep People Manager up to date – for your records but it may also be something the individual relies on at a later date.
- Agree with the individual if and how their absence will be communicated.

How it works...



- When someone is too ill to work, they should contact you. You will need to record the absence on People Manager (You can find guidance [here](#)).
- You may get an idea of when they will be back to work. If not, agree how you will keep in contact.
- Discourage working from home if the individual is not fit to be working .
- Reassure the individual that they are right to be taking leave while unwell.
- Depending on the problem, encourage them to seek advice from their GP or other health services.
- If there is uncertainty about the ability to return to work or there is the prospect of long term sickness, there may need to be an [Occupational Health referral](#) (See quick guide on Occupational Health Referrals for more guidance).
- When the sickness is over 7 working days, they should be sending you 'fit-notes' to explain the status of their absence
- On return to work, ensure you check they are fit to be back in work. Are there any ongoing issues that they need support to manage?
- Review regular absences and check whether any action needs to be taken to address underlying issues.

Return to Work

When someone returns from sick leave, there should always be a return to work discussion. This is an informal discussion and does not need to be long.

It will normally be carried out on the first day back or as soon as possible after that. It will need to cover:

- Are you well enough to be in work?
- Is this a minor one-off illness or is there an underlying issue where you need support?

For a longer term absence or where there is an underlying issue, the discussion could include:

- Any 'reasonable' adjustments needed?
- Is a risk assessment appropriate?
- Outcome of Occupational Health Referral (if appropriate).
- If further help/guidance is needed from Occupational Health.
- Dealing with any work-related issues that may have caused or exacerbated the initial absence.

Return to work discussions can be recorded on People Manager as part of recording the absence. This is particularly useful for recurrent or long term absence.

Further Guidance

- You can find further information in the [Sickness Absence Management policy](#)
- For more information on Occupational Health referrals you can visit the university's [web page](#) or look at our quick guide
- When a person calls in sick you will need to update this on [People Manager](#). For full guidance on how to record and amend sickness absence on People manager click [here](#).
- For information on entitlements to occupational sick pay you can look at our [Sick Leave and Sick Pay Arrangements](#) document
- Where it is proving difficult to address recurrent or long term sickness absence, it may be necessary to use the [Capability Procedure](#) with support from HR.

Frequently asked questions

What should I do where there are frequent short term absences?

If you are concerned about frequent absences, raise this with the individual. Generally, if absence records show that over the previous 12 months there have been 10 working days or 4 occasions of absence, this may be a cause of concern. If absences are for the same reason, it is more likely that there is an underlying problem. The individual may not realise this – for example, stress may be causing a range of low level illnesses which in themselves may not be a cause of concern. Consider an occupational health referral or self-referral to a GP.

What do I need to do for longer term absences?

Where an individual has been unable to attend or is unlikely to be able to attend work due to sickness for a period of three months, they should be invited to attend an informal meeting with the Line Manager and HR. This meeting will explore the reasons for the absence, whether occupational health support is needed, what communication needs to be in place, and what arrangements are needed when the individual returns to work.

Having the conversation about sickness absence:

- Emphasise the intention to provide support. As the employer, the University has a duty of care to make sure that individuals are well enough to be at work.
- While respecting privacy so far as possible, you will need to know the reason for the absence, how long it is likely to continue and what can be done to provide support.
- HR can provide advice on return to work discussions and occupational health referrals.