

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The University places a high value on the health and wellbeing of all our staff. We are keen to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to:

- Safeguard the welfare and wellbeing of staff,
- Mitigate the effects for staff and the University when absences due to sickness occur
- Support staff through periods of sickness absence and upon their return to work

1.2 It is recognised that information relating to health and absence from work is of a personal and sensitive nature and must be treated as confidential. These Procedures outline a fair and transparent approach to ensure (i) staff are always treated with fairness and sensitivity (ii) the effective management of sickness absence.

1.3 Appropriate advice, support and guidance on issues relating to ill health, disability and absence will be available to all members of staff and line managers and it is the normal expectation that appropriate timely interventions in respect of managing absence from work will be made. In line with the University's commitments, health promotion advice and guidance is also available to all members of staff and line managers. More information about health promotion as well as guidance materials for line managers and staff can be found at [Employee Wellbeing](#) and in the Sickness Absence Management Toolkit

1.4 Staff and managers should also make themselves aware of appropriate procedures to request/deal with time off work for reasons other than sickness, such as dealing with family or home responsibilities covered by other policies such as detailed [here](#). Please contact HR if you have queries.

2 SCOPE

2.1 The Sickness Absence Management Procedure aims to provide all members of staff and line managers with a clear framework for the appropriate management of absence due to ill health or other health related adjustments. It also aims to ensure that a positive and consistent approach to staff attendance and absence from work is adopted at all times across the University.

3 REPORTING OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

3.1 Should you be prevented by illness from attending work, you should contact your Line manager as early as possible on the first day of your absence, on or as soon as possible after your normal start time and ideally before. To ensure appropriate support is provided by managers to staff who are unwell, the University generally recommends that staff should contact their manager by phone call. However, it is recognised that there are circumstances where staff might prefer to make contact by other means, for example by text, email or message over Microsoft Teams.

3.2 N.B., local arrangements may be made, determined by business need and what is suitable, for staff to report if they are unable to attend work due to illness and where this is the case your line manager will advise you and you should follow that process.

3.3 In exceptional circumstances, if you are unable to make contact (e.g., due to hospitalisation) another person such as a relative or friend can contact your line manager on your behalf.

3.4 The reason for your absence should be given with an estimate of its probable duration, in order that alternative arrangements within the School/Section can be made where necessary. If you cannot give an indication of your estimated date of return to work initially, you should contact your line manager

within the timeframe noted above to advise them of your continuing absence every morning you are off **or** to agree future timescales for keeping in touch and provide a probable return date when you have a clearer view of when this might be.

3.5 Your line manager may contact you to find out how you are, or if you have not informed them of your absence or have not followed the agreed communication arrangements.

3.6 The procedure for reporting of absence must be followed in all events of sickness absence from the University. Failure to follow the procedure or submit medical certificates timeously may result in the cessation or suspension of your salary (including allowances), and sickness payments. Persistent failure to timeously report absence from work may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

3.7 If you are absent from work due to ill health, you must not undertake any work activities. You should not come to work if you are unfit to do so.

3.8 Sickness absence that begins part way through the day will count as one full day's sickness absence if you leave before completing 50% of your working day. Where sickness absence begins after you have completed 50% of your working day this will be recorded as a half day's absence.

3.9 If you are absent eight calendar days or longer you must get a fit note (form MED3) from your GP/healthcare professional (or form MED10 if you are in hospital). These must be submitted to your line manager as soon as possible who will send them on to the Payroll Office.

4 SICK PAY

4.1 In order to ensure that you receive the Sick Pay you are entitled to, you must comply with the procedures set out in Section 3 for the reporting of absence. During any 12 month period, you will be entitled to sick leave in accordance with the terms and conditions governing your employment, subject to the production of appropriate medical evidence. This entitlement takes account of any previous periods of sickness absence in the last 12 months, including self-certification.

4.2 It is the responsibility of the University to pay Statutory Sick Pay in accordance with current employment legislation. Where appropriate, the Payroll Office will arrange for Sickness Benefit Claim Forms and medical certificates submitted by you to be forwarded to the local Jobcentre Plus Office and make any necessary adjustments to salary to take into account entitlements to state benefits and University occupational sick pay.

5 SICKNESS DURING HOLIDAYS

5.1 In the event of a period of illness coinciding with a period of annual leave, for your absence to be recorded and processed as illness, you will be expected to provide certification in the normal manner as noted in sections 8.1 and 8.2 of this Procedure. You will be regarded as being on sick leave from the date provided on the certificate.

5.2 Any days of annual leave covered by a self-certificate/fit note will be reinstated to your annual leave entitlement, with the exception of 5.3 below and recorded/processing as sickness absence.

5.3 Should you be absent due to illness during the public holidays falling on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and 2nd January the closed period over the festive vacation, or on any ex-gratia holidays provided by the University, you will not receive an alternative day's holiday in lieu.¹

5.4 Where you have been absent through illness for a period exceeding three months in any 12 month period, you will accrue a proportionate amount of leave equal to the period of actual service which has

¹ Exception to this will include staff who are required to work on these days. In such circumstances usual arrangements for reporting absence and payment of sick pay will apply and staff will be entitled to take one day's leave at another time for each day of absence, noting that the enhanced arrangements for staff working on these days will not apply.

been given during the leave year (based on a proportion of a full leave entitlement of 41 days, pro rata for part time staff. Any ex-gratia leave days provided by the University are not included). Annual leave will cease to accrue when your entitlement to sick leave has expired, although in any annual leave year, a member of staff will be entitled to the statutory minimum annual leave on a pro rata basis.

6 SICKNESS DURING PREGNANCY

6.1 During your pregnancy, if you are unable to attend work due to illness, you should follow the normal procedures for sickness absence reporting. Periods of pregnancy related sickness absence shall be paid in the same manner as any other sickness absence. However, any period of pregnancy related sick leave beyond your 36th week of pregnancy may automatically trigger commencement of your maternity leave. The University may require confirmation from your GP that you are fit to return to work.

6.2 Further information is available within the Maternity Procedure:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/policies-procedures-plans-and-guidelines-399.php>

7 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

a. Role of the Service

7.1 Occupational Health is a specialised clinical discipline concerned with the relationship between health and work. The Occupational Health Service for the University is provided as part of the Employee Assistance Programme arrangements in place to provide independent advice, guidance and support to members of staff and line managers on wellbeing and health matters. The service is staffed by professional occupational health physicians and advisers and all consultations are carried out in strict medical confidence. Occupational Health will provide a brief report of their discussion with you to you and your line manager, the content of which they will discuss with you.

7.2 Your line manager will not have access to any other information about your condition and therefore any discussions with you about your condition and impact upon work will be based on this report and any other information you choose to share with your line manager.

b. University referrals to Occupational Health

7.3 The University may refer you to the Occupational Health Service or you may consider that a referral would be supportive. Any referral will be arranged through HR in consultation with your line manager. The reason for referral to Occupational Health for advice will generally be for one of the following reasons:

- At recruitment stage to ensure that you are fit for work and identify any recommended workplace adjustments to be considered
- If you have been absent from work due to illness for a period of time (refer to 7.4)
- If you have several shorter absences due to ill-health (refer to 7.4)
- If there are concerns about your fitness whilst you are at work
- You have had an accident or incident resulting in sick leave
- You have other health issues affecting your attendance, performance or behaviour at work that causes concern

7.4 An automatic referral to Occupational Health will occur if²:

² Different referral 'triggers' may be agreed for members of staff with an underlying medical condition or disability following consultation with the Occupational Health Service. Please note that these triggers are based on recommendations from Occupational Health Professionals.

1. You have been absent for a consecutive period of **21 calendar days** or
2. You have accrued **3 separate occurrences of sickness absence in a rolling 12 month period**
3. You have an aggregate of **21 days sickness absence in a 12 month period**.

7.5 Line managers may apply discretion, based on the circumstances of an individual case and in discussion with HR agree that a referral to Occupational Health is not appropriate. This will be recorded.

7.6 A member of staff may also request, via their line manager, a referral to Occupational Health if they believe this would be beneficial.

7.7 When a referral is made to the Occupational Health Service, the Occupational Health Physician will be asked to provide the University with a report giving an assessment of your health and, where appropriate, their prognosis. This report may indicate:

- the likely date of return to work (if applicable)
- any reasonable adjustments that may be required to support you
- the extent to which you will be fit to undertake the duties and responsibilities of your post in the near future or at all
- whether a period of rehabilitation or a phased return to work is required
- whether redeployment into another post should be considered
- whether retirement on the grounds of ill-health should be considered

7.8 This report will then be used as the basis on which your line manager, working closely with HR, will facilitate your return to work (or to assist in the appropriate management of ongoing sickness absence).

7.9 Please note that, in line with medical regulations, the nature of your condition will not be disclosed to the University without your permission. As part of the referral process you will be asked to indicate if you provide your permission for this disclosure.

c.Health-Related Adjustments

7.10 The University is committed to providing support to members of staff who are or who become disabled and/or are diagnosed with a chronic underlying health condition during their employment. In such circumstances, advice and guidance on appropriate reasonable adjustments will be sought from the Occupational Health Service to determine what is appropriate and to accommodate the individual's needs. The guidance and recommendations for support which are received will be considered by the individual's line manager or Head of School/Section (as appropriate), in consultation with HR and the member of staff, with a view to identifying how best to implement them.

7.11 Such adjustments may include (but are not restricted to):

- Reductions in working hours on a short-term or permanent basis
- Amendments to start/finish times
- Amendments to duties
- A period of homeworking

7.12 More detail about reasonable adjustments including the University's commitments and obligations can be found in the Guide to Reasonable Adjustments.

- Phased Return to Work

7.13 If you return to work on a phased return basis this will involve a gradual build up to returning to your normal working hours/pattern/activities. How long a phased return will last will be determined by individual circumstances and including the advice provided in a fit note and by Occupational Health. Your line manager, liaising with HR, will seek to agree the duration/pattern of a phased return with you, with an expectation that this will be for one to four weeks, and no longer than six weeks.

7.14 Your line manager will regularly review with you how the phased return is going and discuss any extension/changes to the phased return arrangements.

7.15 For a phased return lasting one to four weeks, up to a maximum of six weeks, you will be paid normal pay. If a phased return is extended beyond six weeks and involves working hours less than your normal contractual hours, options will be discussed with you (please refer to the guidance materials).

7.16 Reasonable adjustments which are made to provide ongoing support to disabled staff will be kept under regular review to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of both the individual and the University and will take account of advice and recommendations received from the Occupational Health Service.

d, Time off for medical appointments

7.17 Reasonable requests to attend medical appointments (including dental appointments and any ongoing medical rehabilitative treatment) will be granted wherever possible. While managers will try to accommodate such requests, staff should make every effort to organise their attendance at such appointments outside of their working hours where possible albeit it is acknowledged that this will be determined by appointment availability. Staff will not normally be required to make up the time taken for routine medical appointments / treatment.

7.18 The University acknowledges that staff with ongoing health conditions may require ongoing treatment and time off from work to attend medical appointments. Staff will be entitled to reasonable paid time off to attend such appointments in relation to treatment regimens e.g. counselling, physiotherapy. Such time off will be discussed and agreed with your line manager in advance.

8 SHORT TERM ABSENCES

8.1 Short term absences are deemed to be periods of unbroken absence of between 1 day and 4 weeks.

a. Absence of 1-7 days' duration (including non-working days).

8.2 For all periods of absence, including part days of absence, a University self-certification of sickness absence form must be completed and provided to your Line manager. This self-certificate is available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/sickness-814.php>.

8.3 Hard copies can be obtained from your School/Section Office or from the Payroll Office. It is your responsibility to obtain, complete and forward this form to your Line manager on the day you return to work. The self-certificate should state clearly the reason for your absence.

8.4 On your return to work following a period of absence lasting between 1 and 7 days, your Line manager will meet with you to update you on any developments in relation to ongoing activities which have taken place during your absence. This informal meeting is also to provide you with an opportunity to discuss any specific support required by you following your return to work and whether there are health related issues which may be likely to impact on your work.

b. Absences of 8 days' – 4 weeks' duration (including non-working days).

8.5 You are required to submit a fit note from your GP/healthcare professional to your line manager to cover the full period of your absence. Should your illness continue beyond the date originally stated in your fit note, you are required to contact your line manager as early as possible before the day you

were originally due to return to work to advise of your continuing absence. In addition, you must provide any further fit note(s) as soon as you receive it.

8.6 Further guidance about fit notes can be found in the Toolkit.

8.7 On your return to work following a period of absence lasting between 7 days and 4 weeks, your Line Manager will meet with you to advise you of any developments or changes in the workplace which have taken place during your absence. The advice and guidance received from the Occupational Health Service in relation to your absence will also be considered and discussed at this meeting.

9 LONG TERM ABSENCES

9.1 Longer term absences are deemed to be periods of unbroken absence of 4 weeks or more.

a. Contact

9.2 When it becomes apparent that your absence will last for a significant period of time, you should agree appropriate communication mechanisms with your line manager to keep her/him updated of your progress and to provide information in relation to your anticipated return to work.

9.3 Support and guidance will also be available to you from the Occupational Health Service during your absence and, therefore, you are expected to attend appointments as agreed with the Occupational Health physician.

b. Return to Work

9.4 When your fit note from your GP/healthcare professional indicates that you are ready (or are likely to be ready soon) to return to work following a period of absence which has lasted more than 4 weeks, you should notify your line manager. It is recognised that where a prolonged period of absence has occurred, you may require additional support to aid your re-integration to the workplace. In such cases, your line manager will ask HR to facilitate a referral to the Occupational Health Service to identify any support needs you may have before you return to work. The outcome of this referral may be the development of an agreed rehabilitation programme and/or phased return to support you upon your return.

c. Absence Review

9.6 The expectation is that if you have been absent for an unbroken period of 3 months, you will be invited to meet with your line manager to discuss your ongoing absence, recognising that there may be circumstances where this meeting may not be suitable (e.g., in instances where staff have an expected return date shortly after the three month period and there have already been discussions about this) and where discretion will be applied by your manager in discussion with HR.

9.7 If you are unable to travel to your normal place of work for this meeting to take place, appropriate alternative arrangements will be agreed to enable the discussion to take place. HR will be in attendance at this discussion. The advice and guidance received from the Occupational Health Service in relation to your absence will also be considered and discussed.

9.8 During this discussion, it is the normal expectation that the following issues would be considered (please note that this is not an exhaustive list as the meeting will be tailored to your specific personal circumstances):

- Your progress and current state of health
- The likely duration of your continued absence from work
- Your expectations about your future fitness to return to work
- Reasonable adjustments/adaptations that could be made to your role/workplace to facilitate your return to work
- Identification of any additional support mechanisms that could be beneficial for you

9.9 It is the normal expectation that such informal review discussions would be scheduled to take place monthly during the period of your continued absence.

10 RETURN TO WORK

10.1 If you have submitted a fit note from your GP/healthcare professional, you can return to work when it expires. You should let your line manager know the date you expect to return so that appropriate arrangements can be made for your return. In such circumstances you are not normally required to see your GP/healthcare professional to be signed back to work (unless they have indicated on the fit note that they wish to assess you before your return to work).

10.2 If you have submitted a fit note from your GP/healthcare professional, you should not normally return to work before the date indicated on your last fit note. If you do wish to return to work early the following steps will be taken:

- There will be a discussion with you to establish why you wish to return before the end of the fit note and if you feel fully fit to return.
- A risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that any potential risks that could cause harm are mitigated.
- Consideration will be given to any short-term adjustments that need to be made for you to safely return.
- A referral to Occupational Health may be made to seek their advice.
- Progress will be monitored regularly until the official period of the fit note has expired or later if there is concern about your recovery/fitness to work.

10.3 If your fit note indicates that you may be fit to return to work on a phased basis, reduced hours or amended duties for a temporary period, appropriate advice will be sought from the Occupational Health Service in relation to reasonable adjustments which can be put in place to support you.

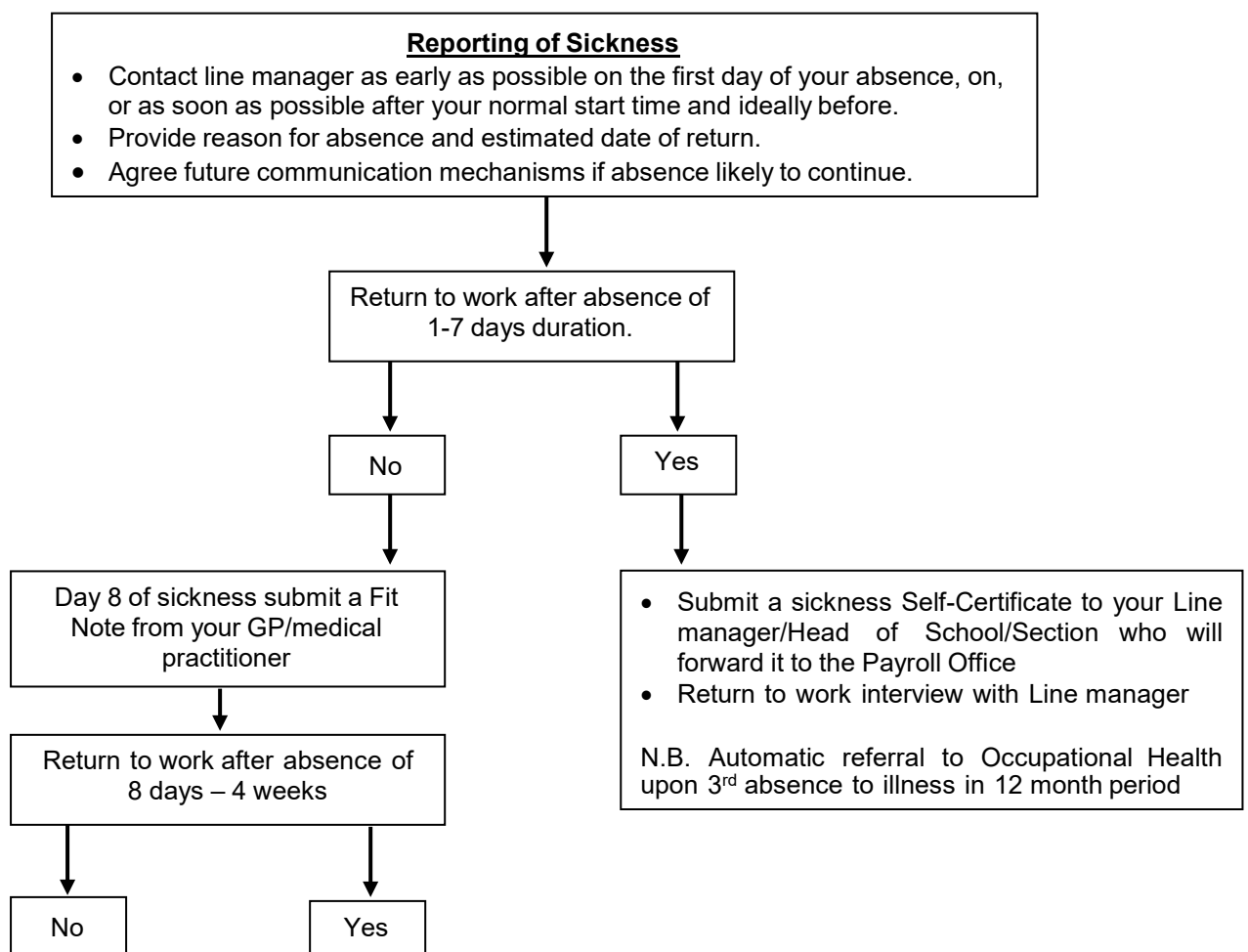
11 SICKNESS ABSENCE DATA

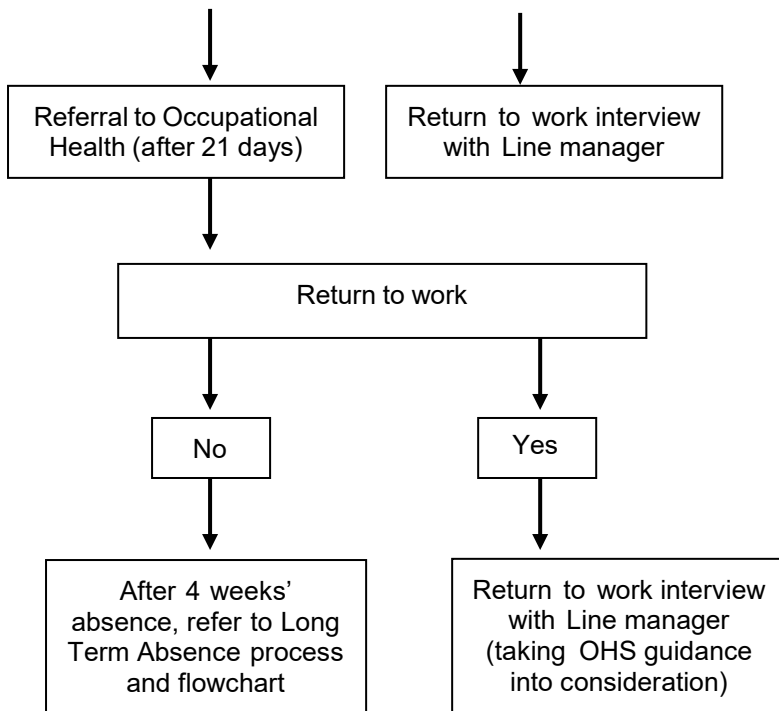
11.1 Sickness absence within the University is recorded and management information on sickness absence will be produced on a regular basis with the purpose of:

- identifying patterns and causes for short or long term sickness absences;
- identifying organisational interventions to support staff;
- planning cover for staff absences; and
- identifying the cost of such absence

Updated May 2025

Flowchart - Short Term Absences (up to 4 weeks)





Flowchart – Long Term Absences (4 weeks or more)

