

## **UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

### **SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

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 absence and upon their return to work

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 that (i) staff are treated with fairness and sensitivity at all times (ii) the effective management of sickness absence.

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 commitment to the principles of [Healthy Working Lives](#), health promotion advice and guidance is also available to all members of staff and Line Managers.

#### **2 SCOPE**

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**

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. 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 communication arrangements and provide a probable return date when you have a clearer view of when this might be.

Your 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.

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 and sickness payments. Persistent failure to timeously report absence from work may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

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.

#### **4 SICK PAY**

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.

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**

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.

Any days of annual leave covered by a medical certificate will be reinstated to your annual leave entitlement.

Should you be absent due to illness during the University's designated public holidays or closed period over the festive vacation, you will not receive an alternative day's holiday in lieu.<sup>1</sup>

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 been given during the leave year. 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**

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.

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**

The Occupational Health Service for the University is provided by NHS Grampian Occupational Health Service. This service is contracted to provide independent advice, guidance and support to members of staff and Line Managers on employee 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 your Line Manager, the content of which they will discuss with you.

<sup>1</sup> 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

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.

You are encouraged to discuss any health problems relating to your work in the first instance with your Line Manager. However, you may wish to consult the Occupational Health Service for medical advice and assistance if you are concerned that you cannot perform at work to the best of your ability because of a health problem.

If you choose to self-refer to the service then details of discussions will not be supplied to the University or to any other person without your consent. However, where the circumstances are of a serious nature or require workplace adjustments, Occupational Health may be obliged to inform the University to ensure that it can meet its duty of care to you.

Your Occupational Health Physician/Adviser can host a Joint Meeting with you, your Line Manager, and an HR Adviser if it is felt that this would be beneficial. Joint Meetings are intended to provide an open forum where issues of concern may be raised and addressed and any adjustments to support you in either returning to or continuing in your role may be agreed.

#### **b. Referrals to Occupational Health**

The University reserves the right to refer you to the Occupational Health Service. Such referrals will be arranged through the Human Resources Office in consultation with your Line Manager as a result of concerns raised about your health and/or level of sickness absence.

An automatic referral to Occupational Health will occur if <sup>2</sup>:

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.

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, her/his 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

This report will then be used as the basis on which your Line Manager, working closely with your Human Resources Adviser, will facilitate your return to work (or retirement on the grounds of ill health if appropriate).

Please note that, in line with medical regulations, the nature of your condition will not be disclosed to the University without your permission.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

### **c. Health-Related Adjustments**

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<sup>3</sup> during their employment. In such circumstances, advice and guidance on appropriate reasonable adjustments will be sought from the Occupational Health Service 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 an HR Adviser and the member of staff, with a view to identifying how best to implement them.

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

In addition, members of staff who are disabled or have been diagnosed with a chronic underlying health condition will be entitled to reasonable paid time off to attend appointments in relation to treatment regimens e.g. counselling, physiotherapy. Such time off will be discussed and agreed with your Line Manager in advance.

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.

## **8 SHORT TERM ABSENCES**

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).**

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>.

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.

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 7 days' – 4 weeks' duration (including non-working days).**

You are required to submit Medical Certificate(s) from your General Practitioner/Consultant to your Line Manager to cover the full period of your absence. Should your illness continue beyond the date originally stated in your Medical Certificate, 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 Medical Certificate(s) as soon as you receive it.

<sup>3</sup> For example, HIV, MS, cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, asthma

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**

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

### **a. Contact**

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.

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**

When your GP has agreed that you are ready (or are likely to be ready in the near future) to return to work following a period of absence which has lasted more than 4 weeks, you should notify your Line Manager immediately. 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 the Human Resources Office 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 to support you upon your return.

On your return to work, 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.

### **c. Absence Review**

If you have been absent for an unbroken period of 4 months, you will be invited to meet with your Line Manager to discuss your ongoing absence. 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. A Human Resources Adviser 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.

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

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

## **10     RETURN TO WORK**

If you have submitted a medical certificate from your GP, you must not return to work before the date indicated on your last medical certificate unless your GP has provided separate written consent.

If your GP has indicated that you may be fit to return to undertake some duties, 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**

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

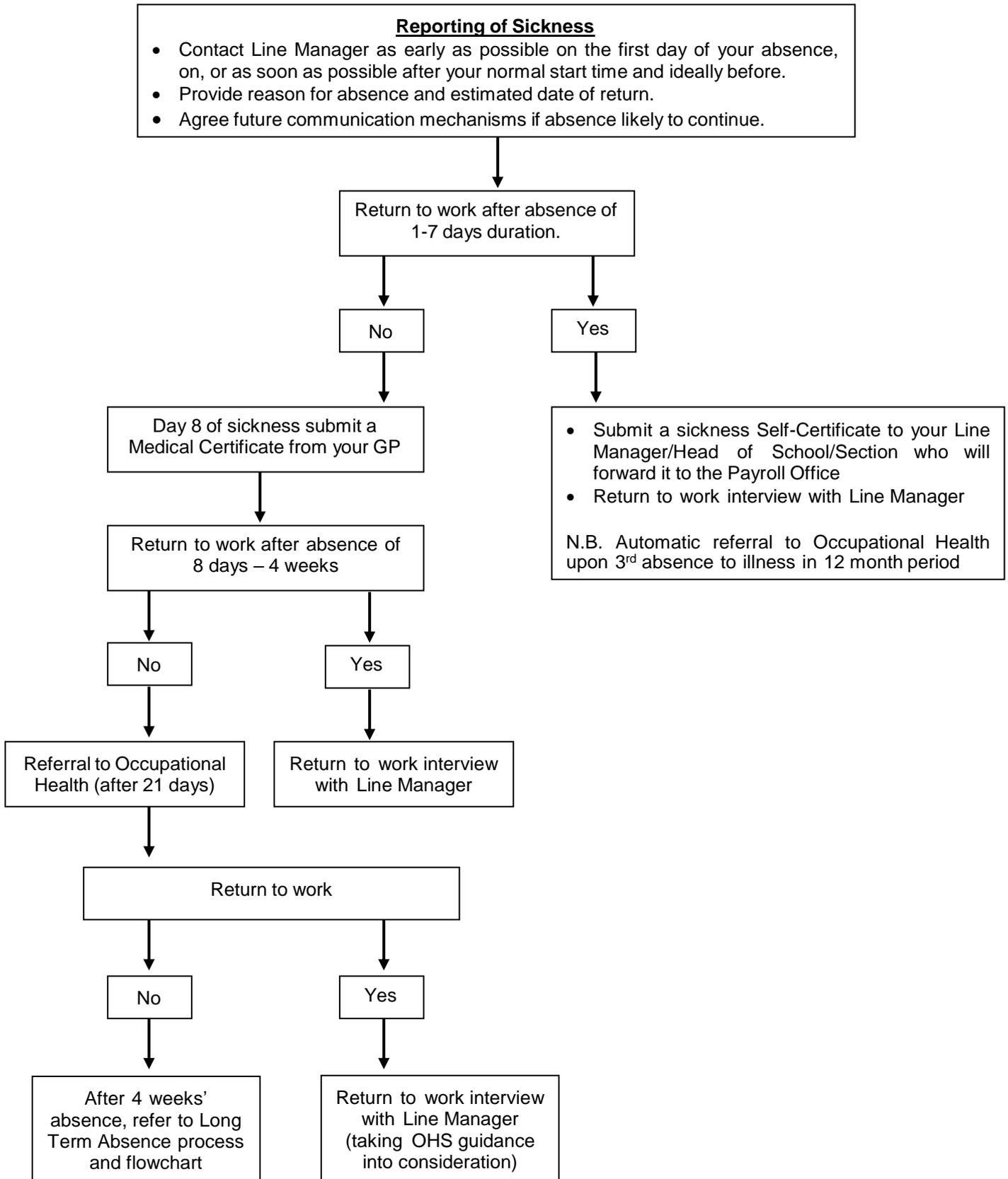
- identifying patterns and causes for short or long term sickness absences.
- identifying organisational interventions to support staff;
- planning cover for staff absences; and
- identifying the cost of such absence

**Approved by University Court 5 February 2008, 3 October 2013**

**Current version – 24 February 2016**

**Approved by the University Court 22 March 2016**

**Flowchart - Short Term Absences (up to 4 weeks)**



**Flowchart – Long Term Absences (4 weeks or more)**

