

Sickness Absence Procedures

1. Introduction

This Guidance applies to all staff and supports the Sickness Absence Policy.

These sickness procedures should be read in conjunction with other relevant health and attendance-related policies (see Useful references section).

For absences relating to other reasons, please refer to the relevant policies (e.g. Parental Leave Policy, Contingency Leave Policy etc.).

2. Sickness absence procedures

Each individual is responsible for fulfilling their contractual obligations and attending work. If unwell and unable to attend work, employees must:

- Notify their absence to their line manager or other agreed manager and record their absence in the system, where possible
- Comply with the University Sickness Absence Policy and Sickness Absence Procedures
- Maintain contact with their line manager or other agreed manager within the Unit on a regular basis throughout the period of absence
- Provide certificates in the system or to their line manager in a timely manner
- Complete the certificate notifications in the system for the appropriate sickness absence periods (see below)
- Co-operate with their manager in actions taken in supporting them back to work, including attending Occupational Health appointments, where required.

Staff are responsible for reporting accidents at work and informing their line manager of any resulting sickness absence, so that this can be reported to the Health and Safety Executive promptly.

Sickness during working hours

If an office-based employee becomes unwell at work and they or their line manager feel they are not fit to continue at work, they should agree with their manager to go home and contact their health care provider as necessary. Home-based employees that become unwell whilst working should contact their line manager and agree to stop working and contact their health care provider, if necessary. This could be recorded as a full day sick, dependant on the time worked e.g. if the absence starts before noon, or if less than 4 hours of a shift have been completed (pro-rata for staff who work less than 7.5 hours per day or 7 hours on Friday).

The People Hub must be contacted immediately on 01908 (5) 41111 if an employee is working remotely and identified, during a Teams call or similar, to need help which they cannot arrange for themselves. The caller should provide the People Hub with

the individual's name, where they are understood to be working from and some detail about what has happened. People Services will determine what action to take and liaise with emergency services and the individual's emergency contact as appropriate.

Employees who work alone and/or outside of standard working hours are encouraged to download the SafeZone app to ensure help will be alerted promptly if required. Further information about the app and [lone working arrangements](#) can be found on the Health and Safety intranet.

If an employee on the premises at Walton Hall requires urgent medical care, this should be obtained from the nearest First Aider, or if necessary, an ambulance should be called via Security (extension 53333). If an employee is on site in a Region or Nation, the emergency services should be called directly via 999 (112 in the ROI).

Sickness absence reporting procedures

Notifying absence/first day of absence

In the event of sickness or injury, an employee must notify their line manager as soon as possible and record their absence in the system. For most staff, this means within one hour of their normal start time, where possible. The same notification procedures apply for employees working from home.

Employees working flexible working hours should contact their line manager as soon as possible so that the work can be reallocated or rescheduled, if required.

When notifying absence, all employees must inform their line manager of:

- The date they first became ill
- How long they are likely to be absent from work
- Wherever possible, some indication as to the nature of their illness
- Whether they intend to visit their health care provider
- A contact number they can be reached on should exceptional circumstances arise.

Staff are expected to make the telephone call themselves rather than ask a relative or friend to call on their behalf. However, in cases where an employee is unable to make contact personally (e.g. where they are in hospital), then they should arrange for initial contact to be made on their behalf. In these exceptional cases, the employee must then make contact and speak to their line manager as soon as they are able to.

Texting or emailing are not suitable forms of communication.

Associate Lecturers should inform their line manager of any informal cover arrangements made with their peers using agreed faculty processes. In cases where an AL needs to make an arrangement with a peer quickly to ensure the quality of student support is maintained, the line manager can be notified of the arrangement afterwards.

Where circumstances exist, which mean it might be inappropriate or difficult for an employee to raise matters directly with their line manager (e.g. where there have been difficulties in the working relationship), then the employee should contact another manager within their Unit or the People Hub, providing details of their absence (as above).

It is essential that the University receives prompt personal notification of all periods of sickness (including sickness on Saturdays, Sundays, closure days, Public Holidays and during annual leave or any other contractual non-working days) on the first working day of sickness absence in accordance with Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) regulations, to ensure the correct amount of SSP is paid to employees.

Maintaining contact with the University while on sick leave

It is expected that employees maintain regular contact with their line manager (appropriate to the context and circumstances of their health issue). The purpose of maintaining contact is to provide the line manager with updates on progress and an indication of when the individual expects to be well enough to return to work.

Contact should be via telephone and the frequency of contact should be agreed and will depend on circumstances, but must be on a regular basis.

If an individual is unable to return to work on the expected date, they must notify their line manager as soon as possible in accordance with the notifying absence section above.

Certification requirements

Absence of three working days or less

No self-certificate declarations are required. However, the line manager should be notified of the dates of all periods of sickness (including non-working days) so that the required records of periods of incapacity for work can be maintained.

Absences of between four days and seven days

A self-certificate declaration must be made in the system on the first day of return to work, for absences of four working days or more, but not more than seven calendar days (including Saturdays and Sundays) from the first working day of absence. This self-certificate declaration form provides the necessary evidence of incapacity for work.

Exceptional provision is made for staff to inform the People Hub of the reason for absence if, on grounds of confidentiality, the illness is of a particularly sensitive nature. Staff can choose to select “confidential” as the reason for their sickness absence in the system and upload the self-certificate declaration. In exceptional circumstances, staff can choose to raise an Ask People Services ticket attaching the certificate and the People Hub will contact them.

Absence lasting eight calendar days or more

Including Saturdays and Sundays, from the first working day of absence, a medical certificate (Statement of Fitness for Work) must be uploaded to the system or provided to the individual’s line manager who will upload to the system on the staff member’s behalf. Subsequent certificates should be uploaded by the staff member or line manager at the time of issue, but at intervals not exceeding one month.

If a Doctor decides to issue a certificate prior to the eighth calendar day of absence (because the absence will clearly exceed one week) then this certificate should be uploaded to the system by the staff member or line manager. An OU self-certificate declaration will be required in the system for any days of absence from the fourth working day not covered by the certificate.

Exceptional provision is made for staff to inform the People Hub of the reason for absence if, on grounds of confidentiality, the illness is of a particularly sensitive nature. Staff can choose to select “confidential” as the reason for their sickness absence in the system and upload the Statement of Fitness for Work. In exceptional circumstances, staff can choose to raise an Ask People Services ticket attaching the certificate and the People Hub will contact them.

Subsequent certificates

Any subsequent medical certificate must be uploaded to the system or submitted, so far as is reasonably practicable, by the member of staff or their line manager within three days of the expiry date of the previous one.

Confidentiality and records

All self-certificate declarations and Fitness for Work certificates will be treated as strictly confidential. Records will be kept no longer than necessary in accordance with Data Protection principles.

Failure to report health-related absence

Deliberate failure to observe these rules for notification and provision of appropriate certificates may lead to formal disciplinary proceedings and/or loss of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and OU sick pay (where applicable). If a member of staff is dissatisfied with a decision by the University to withhold SSP and/or OU sick pay, they should seek clarification in the first instance from the Staff Payments Office. Failing satisfaction, the issue would then be considered under the relevant grievance procedure.

3. Contractual sick pay

Entitlement to contractual sick pay will be as determined in the appropriate Terms and Conditions of Service.

When the entitlement to either full or half pay is due to expire, the Staff Payments Office will notify the People Hub, who will in turn, notify the individual and the appropriate Head of Unit. In appropriate circumstances, an application can be made to the Head of Unit for an extension of the entitlement. Advice on particular cases should be sought from the People Hub and qualifying criteria will apply.

4. Staff absence returns

Employees may be required to complete and submit an OU self-certificate declaration (see Certification requirements above). Employees should also expect to meet with their line manager on their return to work after sickness absence for a “back to work discussion”. This meeting is an opportunity to make sure that the employee is well enough to be attending work and for on-going health-related issues to be raised. The meeting does not have to take place face-to-face and can be conducted remotely, for example via Skype, Teams or telephone call.

5. Monitoring at unit level

Line managers are expected to monitor the absence levels of their employees and, where appropriate, take pre-emptive and any appropriate supportive action to prevent or reduce unacceptable levels of absence. This includes taking informal and

formal action such as having further discussions e.g. back to work discussions, identifying additional actions and support for the employee e.g. sickness support plans, and if necessary, capability or disciplinary action.

6. Referral to Occupational Health

The aim of the Occupational Health (OH) referral system is to provide managers with clear and prompt guidance on health issues affecting attendance and/or the performance/capability of an employee and provide appropriate support to the individual.

The procedure for referring staff to Occupational Health and the form that managers should complete are available on the People Services Intranet or via Ask People Services.

Further guidance on Occupational Health referrals is available in Sickness Absence Management – A guide for managers.

7. Stress

If there appears to be a problem with stress, advice should be sought from the People Hub. It may also be useful to refer to the [Stress Management Policy](#). It may also be appropriate for the manager to conduct a [Stress Risk Assessment](#) with the individual concerned.

8. Redeployment of staff on grounds of ill health

Each case for the transfer of a member of Support staff on grounds of ill health should be considered individually and on its merits by joint consultation between UNISON and the University subject to the following conditions:

- That in the event of the transfer of a member of Support staff to a lower graded job on grounds of ill health, the salary of the individual concerned be protected, but that their incremental progression and pay increases be frozen until, as a result of annual pay settlements, the top incremental point of the grade of the job to which the member of staff has been transferred, has reached the level of the individual's salary.
- When a woman on maternity leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave is at risk of redundancy, she is entitled in law to be offered any suitable alternative role without a competitive selection process.

Redeployment of other categories of staff on grounds of ill health will be considered on an individual basis by joint consultation between the University, managers and the appropriate Union.

9. Medical appointments

Employees are allowed reasonable paid time off for medical appointments where these cannot be arranged in their own time. Appointments should be made at the beginning or end of the day or on non-working days where possible.

All time off for medical appointments must be requested in the system and approved by the line manager. Time off for appointments should be approved in advance where this is feasible.

The University has the right to request evidence of medical appointments (card or letter) and staff must provide these if requested to do so by their line manager.

Medical appointments will not be included in the Bradford Factor scores.

10. Substance abuse: University policy

The University's policy on alcoholism and drink related problems within the Open University and drug abuse in the workplace is available on the People Services Intranet or via Ask People Services.

11. Accrual, taking and carrying forward of annual leave whilst on sick leave

Annual leave continues to accrue at the normal rate throughout any period of sickness absence. Employees on long-term sickness absence have the right to take this annual leave whilst off sick.

The People Hub will notify individuals of this right when their entitlement to full or half sick pay is due to expire. However, managers are encouraged to discuss leave with the individual at an early stage, as soon as it is apparent that the absence is likely to become long term.

When discussing the timing of leave with an employee, managers should encourage leave to be taken in blocks of at least one week upwards where possible. This will make the calculations required by Staff Payments less complex and therefore help them to make timely payments.

Once a period of holiday is agreed, the manager should raise a service request in Ask People Services. Notification is required by pay close (preferably in advance) for payment in the same month. The People Hub will ensure the total number of hours is deducted from the individuals annual leave record.

For the period of leave, the employee will receive the equivalent of their full salary (if the individual is in receipt of sick pay which amounts to less than their full salary, this will be 'topped up') and will continue to be recorded as sick leave. Individuals will not be entitled to an additional period of sick leave or sick pay equivalent to the length of the period of holiday.

The People Hub will ensure that where an employee is taking holiday while on sick leave, the relevant period is recorded as both holiday (on their annual leave record) and sickness absence. This is in line with recent case law. When an individual chooses to do this, they are recorded as taking annual leave and sickness absence at the same time therefore Bradford Factor scores are calculated in the same way as during any other period of sickness absence.

Where an employee on long-term sick leave has not taken their annual leave entitlement by the end of the leave year, this leave is normally lost, except for entitlement for Associate Lecturers to carry over up to seven working days (pro-rata)

and other staff to carry over 10 working days (pro-rata) for 'personal reasons' as specified in the Terms and Conditions of Service. As specified under the Working Time Directive, this may be increased up to 20 working days (4 weeks), which must be used within 18 months from the date it is carried over.

Further queries on individual cases should be discussed with the People Hub.

12. Useful references

Sickness Absence Policy

Sickness Absence Management – A Guide for Managers

Sickness Support Plan

Stress Management Policy

Smoking Policy

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Policy

Management referral for Occupational Health Advice

Occupational Health Referral Form

Capability Procedures for Associate Lecturers

Capability Procedures for Support Staff