

Policy on short term sickness absence

The Company aims to encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work whilst recognising that employees will, from time to time, be unable to come to work for short periods due to sickness. This policy relates to short-term sickness absences from work, which are defined as those lasting up to one working week. Other policies are in place dealing with time off work for personal reasons/family reasons/special leave/compassionate leave.

Whilst the Company understands that there will inevitably be some short-term sickness absence amongst employees, it must also pay due regard to its business needs. If an employee is frequently and persistently absent from work, this can damage efficiency and productivity, and place an additional burden of work on the employee's colleagues. By implementing this policy, the Company aims to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of its business needs and the genuine needs of employees to take occasional short periods of time off work because of sickness.

It is the Company's policy to pay only statutory sick pay during periods of sickness absence.

Guidelines for managers/supervisors

Heads of school and supervisors responsible for staff are expected to manage and control their employees' attendance and absence. They should, as a matter of routine, take the following actions each time an employee has been absent from work for a short period (ie a period of up to one working week):

- Create a record whenever an employee phones in to report that he/she is unable to come to work due to sickness. This includes recording when the call was made, the stated reason for the absence and how long the employee expects to be absent.
- Conduct routine 'return to work interviews'. Each time an employee returns to work following a short-term absence, his/her manager should speak to the employee about the absence and the reason for it in a fair and factual way. This approach will alert the employee to the fact that the situation is being monitored and will potentially deter casual absences. The manager should be supportive towards the employee and, where appropriate, seek to identify ways in which to assist the employee to improve his/her attendance in the future.
- Require the employee (on return to work) to complete a self-certification form. This should be signed in front of the manager, who should then countersign it and pass it to the human resources officer so that it may be placed in the employee's personal file.
- Be alert to patterns, for example the persistent Monday or Friday absentee. If a pattern is identified, the manager should put his/her observations to the employee directly so that the employee has the opportunity to provide an explanation. The

manager should, however, remain open-minded and not jump to any hasty conclusions about the employee's absences.

- Try to establish, through investigation and discussion with the employee, the underlying reasons for frequent absences. Until the underlying cause is identified, an appropriate and effective remedy will be impossible to identify.
- Check whether absences are in part because of personal or family problems. If this is the case, a reasonable degree of tolerance and sympathy should be shown towards the employee, as the problems may be unavoidable. The manager should be supportive, whilst at the same time explaining clearly to the employee that continuing frequent absences from work are unacceptable.
- Check whether the employee's absences are in any way work related, for example as a result of workplace stress. If the problem is work related, the manager should take prompt steps to remove or reduce the factor that is causing the employee's problem.
- Seek medical advice, if appropriate, to determine whether there is any underlying medical cause for the employee's frequent absences. Details of relevant procedures are available from the human resources officer.
- Set reasonable targets and time-limits for improvement in attendance and ensure that the employee is committed to achieving them. Advice is available from the human resources officers.
- Warn the employee of the consequences of continuing unsatisfactory attendance, ie that he/she may eventually be dismissed.
- Keep confidential records of all absences, discussions and medical certificates and make sure that the records clearly identify the reasons for an employee's various absences.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting at an agreed time to monitor the ongoing situation.

Before taking any formal action in respect of an employee who has had frequent absences from work, the manager/supervisor should take the following action:

- Check the employee's absence record to gain an accurate assessment of the number of days' absence he/she has had, the number of separate occasions he/she has been absent and whether his/her record is tangibly worse than that of other employees in the Company.
- Check with the human resources department, which will advise on the appropriate action to take in line with the Company's procedures.

Absences from work will be regarded as frequent if, during any period of 12 consecutive months, an employee is absent from work for eight or more working days, or on three separate occasions.

Guidelines for employees

An employee who needs to be absent from work due to sickness must comply with the following Company rules:

- Notify his/her line manager by telephone if he/she is ill or unable to attend work for any other reason. Notification should be as early as possible and in any event no later than one hour after the employee's start time. The employee should be prepared to state the reason why he/she cannot attend work, and how long he/she thinks the absence will last.
- Attend an interview with his/her line manager on return to work to discuss the absence and the reason for it. One of the purposes of this interview will be to establish whether the line manager can provide any support to the employee which could facilitate attendance at work in the future (for example if the employee's absence was in any way work related).
- Complete and submit a self-certification form on return to work for all periods of sickness absence of up to one working week.
- Provide a doctor's certificate for a period of sickness absence of less than seven days if the Company specifically requests it. In these circumstances the Company will reimburse the employee for the cost of obtaining a certificate if it has to be obtained privately.
- Agree on request to be interviewed and/or examined by an occupational doctor nominated by the Company and to authorise the release of any medical report from the doctor to the Company. The Company will meet all costs associated with any such examination and/or medical report.