

Sickness absence procedures

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Some absence due to sickness is inevitable and sickness absence needs to be dealt with in a fair, understanding and sympathetic way. However, absence is costly and has an adverse effect upon colleagues and on the resources of the organisation. Effective monitoring of all forms of absence and a consistent approach are essential to ensure that absence levels are maintained at an acceptable level.
- 1.2. Employee sickness absence will be considered to be genuine unless there is evidence to the contrary. HEFCW would not expect any employee who is absent from work due to sickness or injury to participate in any activities which could aggravate the illness or injury, delay recovery, or are in any way inconsistent with their illness or injuries. Should evidence be provided to dispute the sickness absence then the conduct will be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary procedure.
- 1.3. Because of Statutory Sick Pay procedures, sickness absences are based on calendar days, which is inclusive of weekends.
- 1.4. Where an employee has declared a disability, all decisions made will take this into account and ensure that they are treated fairly, in line with the [Equality Act](#).
- 1.5. Where reference is made to employees having the right to be accompanied, this can be either by a colleague, trade union representative, trade union official or, in the case of longer term sickness, family members.
- 1.6. Where an occupational health review is required, the employee will always receive a copy of the report first, directly from the provider of the service to approve prior to this being sent to HR and the line manager.
- 1.7. Employees have the right to conduct the formal absence meetings in Welsh. Should this occur, sensitive documents would need to be translated by an external provider and a simultaneous translator may be required.

2. Notification of sickness absence

- 2.1. On the first day of absence the employee must telephone their line manager by 10:00 am to notify them of their absence, the reason, the likely duration and an expected date of return to work. Should the line manager not be available, the employee must notify either the Head of Section, another team member or HR of their absence.
- 2.2. If the employee is unable to make the initial call due to serious illness, a call from a next of kin is acceptable, however if the absence continues the line manager would need to make contact with the employee at some point, if the nature of the absence allowed it.
- 2.3. The line manager must begin the online self-certification process which will automatically inform HR of the absence. This should be done by 12 noon on the first day of the employee's absence and must be completed in all cases. Where the Head of Section/Team has been notified in the absence of the line manager, they can start

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the self-certification form. If a member of the team has received the notification, they should email HR.

- 2.4. Where a period of absence starts during the working day (e.g. morning or afternoon), the employee should notify their line manager who must follow the process above. A part day absence can occur if it is in the morning and the employee then returns to work in the afternoon, or if the employee is in attendance in the morning and is absent in the afternoon.
- 2.5. During all periods of absence, regular contact must be maintained between the line manager and employee to ensure HEFCW is aware of any changes, the reason for the continued absence and likely duration. With long term absences, the line manager and the employee should agree suitable dates and times for contact and both are responsible for ensuring this takes place.
- 2.6. Working from home is prohibited whilst on sickness absence unless supported by a reasonable adjustment arrangement stated on a medical note.

3. Self-certification

- 3.1. Absence for up to seven calendar days can be covered by a self-certification form via the electronic system.
- 3.2. On the first day of absence the line manager must complete part 1 of the electronic self-certification form. An automatic email is sent to the employee to inform them that they need to complete part 2 of the form on return to work and to HR to notify them of the employee's absence.
- 3.3. When the employee returns to work and completes part 2 of the form, an automatic email will go to the line manager to complete part 3.
- 3.4. If the absence is a result of an injury at work or work-related stress, the Head of IS and Facilities will be alerted to the absence but not of any personal details and will discuss any Health and Safety issues with HR.

4. Medical notes

- 4.1. Absences for more than seven calendar days require a medical certificate from the employee's GP/hospital stating the reason for absence. The first medical certificate must include the eighth calendar day of absence. Further certificates should be continuous to ensure that the duration of the absence is covered by a certificate.
- 4.2. The period of absence covered by a medical certificate will begin on either the date of the assessment or between particular start and end dates. The dates are inclusive and based on calendar days. For example, a medical certificate from 2 April to 10 April will no longer apply on 11 April. This would be the return to work date, or a further medical certificate would be required from this date.
- 4.3. An employee can return to work before the medical certificate has expired, however they should only do this if they are well enough. They do not need to be signed back to

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work by a GP however, they must notify their line manager or HR of their earlier return to work date.

5. Return to work discussion

- 5.1. On return to work, the line manager should have a discussion with the employee regarding the absence. This discussion should take place after each period of sickness absence regardless of the length of absence. Wherever possible this should take place in private on the day of return. The purpose of this discussion is to establish the reason for the absence, whether the employee is well enough to return to work, and if there are any aspects of their work they may not be able to carry out at present due to their illness. Where this is the case temporary adjustments to duties should be considered if reasonable. The adjustments will depend on the circumstance and should be discussed with HR. The details of the return to work discussion must be recorded on part 3 of the self-certification form by the line manager. This will be copied to the employee via the email notification.
- 5.2. If it is not possible to speak in person, it is acceptable to have this conversation by phone, in private, however, where short term absences become more frequent the discussions should be face to face and carefully documented. If the line manager is absent for more than a few days, the line manager's manager should have the discussion.

6. Absence management - Trigger points

- 6.1. In cases of short term frequent absence the following trigger points will apply, whichever occurs first:
 - 10 working days in a rolling 52 week period (pro rata for part time workers); or
 - 6 occasions within a rolling 52 week period; or
 - a noticeable pattern of absence.NB part days will count towards both working days total and occasions.
- 6.2. Trigger points will be highlighted when the first part of the self-certification form is completed by the line manager.
- 6.3. On return to work, the completed self-certification form will confirm whether a trigger point has been reached.
- 6.4. Where a noticeable pattern of absence has been identified by the line manager, they should raise the issue with the employee. If the pattern is spotted by HR, they will raise this with the line manager.
- 6.5. At each stage, notes should be taken and shared with the employee. Notes should be agreed as an accurate record of the conversation and amendments kept to a minimum.
- 6.6. Line managers should remember that each absence case will vary and individual circumstances should be taken into account. If the line manager has any doubt, they should contact HR.

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- 6.7. Where an employee has disclosed a disability, sickness absences related to this disability will be taken into account as part of the discussion. Taking individual circumstances into account and/or the supporting evidence of medical notes could mean that an improvement notice would not be issued as detailed below.
- 6.8. Line managers should read the additional guidance notes entitled “Line Manager Guidance for Short-Term Absence Management Meetings” (Annex A) to support them through this process.
- 6.9. Employees should read the additional guidance notes entitled “Employee Guidance for Short-Term Absence Management Meetings” (Annex B) to support them through this process.
- 6.10. During the process, an employee may be issued with an improvement notice if it is concluded by the line manager that an improvement is required. This notice would request an improvement in the individual’s absence within a certain time period. For example, the notice may be to decrease the frequency of absences over a six month period. The notice’s requirements would vary depending on individual circumstances.

Informal Absence Meeting

- 6.11. On the first occasion an absence trigger is reached the line manager should conduct an Informal Absence Meeting immediately following the Return to Work discussion. The reasons for the absences and any health issues should be discussed and support put into place if this is appropriate. The employee will be informed that improvement is required.
- 6.12. If the cause of absence is stress related and/or the line manager is linked to the cause the employee has the option of meeting with their Head of Team/ Director/ CEO as appropriate. In this instance, they should contact HR for arrangements to be made.
- 6.13. Where an employee has genuine health problems which result in persistent short-term absence, they should be encouraged to take medical advice and it is appropriate for a line manager to request that the employee goes to their GP.

First Formal Absence Meeting

- 6.14. If there is a further absence and this new absence also reaches an absence trigger, a First Formal Absence meeting will be arranged, giving the employee a minimum of five working days’ notice.
- 6.15. This meeting will be conducted by the line manager and the employee has the right to be accompanied. During this formal meeting the reasons for the absences will be discussed and expectations on improvements outlined. Depending on individual circumstances and what is considered reasonable, an improvement notice may be issued as an outcome of this meeting and will be confirmed in writing.
- 6.16. From information obtained at the first formal meeting, it may become apparent that an occupational health referral is appropriate. Where a line manager feels this is the

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case, they should speak to HR before making any commitments to the employee. If the referral goes ahead, the occupational health report should be received before making any decisions. The report will include reasons for the absence and provide recommendations to HR for potential adjustments.

- 6.17. Following this stage, if the employee is absent for a further three occasions the absences process will be escalated by moving to the next stage of formal absence meeting. This will occur unless the improvement notice has other trigger points or conditions written relating to this particular absence case; or unless the employee falls below the trigger points of 10 days/ six occasions.

Second Formal Absence Meeting

- 6.18. A Second Formal Absence meeting will be arranged if the subsequent trigger points are hit or the improvement notice hasn't improved the situation. The employee will be given a minimum of five working days' notice of the meeting. This meeting will be conducted by the line manager, with HR present and the employee has the right to be accompanied. The discussion would be of a similar nature to the First Formal Absence meeting and an occupational health referral arranged (if one wasn't requested following the first meeting). The outcome of this meeting will not be given until the report is received.
- 6.19. Once the report has been considered by HR and the line manager, the meeting will be reconvened with the employee and an improvement notice will be issued as an outcome of this meeting and will be confirmed in writing.
- 6.20. As part of the improvement notice, the employee will be informed that the absences process will be escalated, if they are absent for a further three occasions, unless the employee falls below the trigger points of 10 days/ six occasions. Reasonable adjustments will also be taken in to account as part of the improvement notice which may alter the trigger points further.

Third Formal Absence Meeting

- 6.21. A Third Formal Absence meeting will be arranged if the subsequent trigger points are hit or the improvement notice hasn't improved the situation. If previous occupational health information is considered out of date a further referral should be made via HR.
- 6.22. Once occupational health reports are up to date the third formal meeting can take place. This meeting should be held by the Director/ Head of team accompanied by HR. A full review of all of the information relating to this matter should take place in advance of the meeting. When meeting with the employee as part of this review, they have the right to be accompanied. The outcome of this meeting, which may include dismissal, will be conveyed in writing to the employee.

Possible actions to address absence issues

- 6.23. If there is no improvement in the level of absence, irrespective of whether the employee has taken medical advice or not, an employee may be asked to provide a

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medical certificate for all future absences. The cost of these medical certificates will be reimbursed to the employee.

- 6.24. The employee may also be referred to an occupational health advisor to investigate the issues. The report may provide recommendations for reasonable adjustments or changes to working arrangements, including such things as part time working, adjustment of duties or ill-health retirement.
- 6.25. Where levels of absence remain unacceptable and the above process has been exhausted and no further improvements have been made, ultimately the employee may be dismissed on grounds of poor performance which would be equivalent to disciplinary action. The employee would have the right to appeal in line with the Disciplinary procedures.

7. Long-term absence management

- 7.1. Where an employee is on long-term sickness absence (continual for 4 weeks or more), they should keep in regular contact with either their line manager or HR. Medical certificates must be provided to cover the absence and must be continuous, as detailed above.
- 7.2. During the absence it is likely that the employee will be referred to occupational health by HR. This will be dependent upon the nature of the absence and the arrangements will be discussed with both the individual and the line manager. A report will be produced by occupational health detailing reasons for the absence and provide recommendations to HR.
- 7.3. When the occupational health report is received it should be discussed with the employee at a Welfare meeting. This meeting would be between the employee, the line manager and HR and would be held at the employee's home, or at another mutually agreed location. During this meeting, any advice or recommendations should be discussed and where reasonable these should be put into place.
- 7.4. Where a long term absence continues, further Welfare meetings can be arranged to discuss future arrangements and return to work options, including any reasonable adjustment. During these meetings, the following should be considered:
 - likelihood of an improvement in attendance;
 - alternative working methods e.g. working from home, change in team;
 - alternative working hours or patterns;
 - performance;
 - availability of suitable alternative work;
 - possibility of ill-health retirement; and
 - the effect of past and future absences on business need.
- 7.5. Support will be provided when the employee returns to work and adjustments such as a phased return or change in duties may be arranged. This will enable an individual to effectively return to their position. These arrangements will be agreed between the individual, the line manager and HR. The Director/ Head of Team may be involved, where appropriate.

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- 7.6. Where an employee has declared a disability, all decisions made will take this into account and ensure that they are treated fairly, in line with the Equality Act.
- 7.7. Where adjustments are made, other colleagues and team members will be informed of the arrangements to ensure that business needs are met. Whilst working from home is not permitted, if someone is unable to come in to the office, e.g. due to a broken leg, it may be possible to receive a medical certificate from the doctor detailing that a return to work is possible but with adjustments, those being that they work from home. In this case, the employee would no longer be classified as absent due to sickness.
- 7.8. Where the absence continues and there is no indication of the staff member being able to return to work in the near future a Case Review meeting will be arranged. This will be chaired by the Director or Head of team. When meeting with the employee as part of this review, they have the right to be accompanied. The purpose of the Case Review meeting is to review all of the information relating to the employee's health over the whole period of the absence, including details of the meetings that have taken place and give consideration to:
- the employee's current condition
 - the progress that has been made
 - any advice they have received from their GP/specialist
 - the medical reports from occupational health and the employee's GP and/or specialist
 - the likelihood of the employee being able to return in the near future
 - if they are more likely to be able to return with adjustments and if so the timescales that would involve
 - whether any adjustments discussed are feasible and reasonable
- 7.9. A Case Review Meeting will not necessarily result in dismissal but will allow that option. If it is clear that the employee is not able to return to work in the near future and there is nothing practical that can be done in terms of adjustments that would help bring the absence to an end, it may be decided to bring the employee's contract to an end either through dismissal or ill-health retirement.
- 7.10. In line with ACAS guidance, dismissal can only be for misconduct or performance, therefore in these circumstance the dismissal would be on the grounds of poor performance as a result of their inability to attend work and perform the job. Any written notice would expand on the reason for dismissal, therefore clarifying that the dismissal is not down to actual role performance but that ill health is preventing them from performing the role.
- 7.11. In the case of ill-health retirement Cabinet Office procedures must be followed.
- 7.12. If an employee refuses to co-operate in providing medical evidence or attending a Welfare meeting or occupational health referral, HEFCW reserves the right to withhold sick pay and the employee will be informed in writing that the disciplinary procedures will be followed and decisions would be made based on the information already available, which could ultimately result in dismissal.

8. Protected characteristics

8.1. Pregnancy and maternity related sickness absence

- 8.1.1 Sickness absence which is related to pregnancy or after giving birth will be recorded separately from other kinds of absence and will not count towards trigger points or their total sickness record.
- 8.1.2 Contractual sick pay arrangements will still apply in pregnancy/ maternity related sickness absence, therefore the normal sickness absence process should still be followed and self-certifications must be completed.
- 8.1.3 Periods of sickness absence due to pregnancy/ maternity related illness will not be taken into account when making a decision about employment, for example, for disciplinary purposes or redundancy.

8.2 Religious observations

- 8.2.1 Any illnesses as a result of religious practices or observations, such as fasting, will be recorded separately from other kinds of absence and will not count towards trigger points or their total sickness record.
- 8.2.2 Contractual sick pay arrangements will still apply, therefore the normal sickness absence process should still be followed and self-certifications must be completed.
- 8.2.3 Periods of sickness absence due to religious practices or observations will not be taken into account when making a decision about employment, for example, for disciplinary purposes or redundancy.

8.3 Disability

- 8.3.1 Disability is a core protected characteristic reflected throughout the document. Due to the nature of the characteristics there is an increased possibility of sickness absence therefore in all cases the disability will be taken in to account.

9 Reporting of absence statistics

- 9.1 Sickness statistics will be produced on a quarterly basis. These will be anonymous, exclude any absences relating to declared disabilities or pregnancy related absence, and be based on 12 month and 4 year rolling periods. These statistics are shared with Management Board and with other WGSBs as a benchmarking exercise.
- 9.2 Employees' sickness absence will also be monitored on an individual basis by HR to establish any trends or areas of concern in line with the trigger points.
- 9.3 Quarterly reports will be issued to Directors/ Head of Teams on their team's sickness absence levels. This will be emailed by HR and may highlight trigger points or areas of concern.

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- 9.4 The categories for sickness absence reporting are as follows:
- Short term sickness absence (where trigger points have not been hit)
 - Medium term sickness absence (where trigger points have been hit)
 - Long term sickness absence (a non-continuous or continuous absence for 4 weeks or more, or where trigger points have been hit frequently)

10 Line Managers' responsibilities

- 10.1 It is a line manager's responsibility to handle absences in line with these procedures. Sickness has an impact on the line manager's ability to manage their team as it disrupts plans and can also place additional stress and pressures on the other team members.
- 10.2 Line managers must read Annex A "Line Manager Guidance for Short-Term Absence Management Meetings" and keep HR informed of ongoing sickness absences.
- 10.3 Line managers should follow up all sickness absences by:
- undertaking a 'return to work' discussion;
 - completing the electronic self-certification form;
 - cross referencing flexi sheets with any sickness during the period;
 - identifying any patterns;
 - discussing concerns with HR; and
 - attending Welfare meetings as appropriate.
- 10.4 Line managers must undertake informal discussions when notified by HR that a trigger point has occurred. The line manager should:
- Establish the reasons for the absence;
 - Inform them that the levels of absence have hit a trigger point and if absences continue it could become unacceptable;
 - Issue improvement notice as appropriate;
 - Encourage them to seek medical advice; and
 - Request that absence levels be improved within a timescale.
- 10.5 Where absence levels continue to hit trigger points and become unacceptable, the line manager must speak to HR for advice on the next stage of the process.
- 10.6 Line managers should inform the Director/ Head of team when an employee is escalated to an informal or formal absence stage.

11 Directors'/ Head of Team's responsibilities

- Analyse the sickness statistics and discuss any areas of concern with line managers;
- Discuss with Management Board the levels of sickness absence across the organisation from the anonymous statistics provided;
- Raise areas of concern with HR;
- Support line managers in any discussions that take place on unacceptable levels of absence;
- Conduct the Third Formal Absence meetings and Case Review meetings.

12 HR's responsibilities

- Notify line managers when a trigger point has been reached;
- Notify line managers where absences may require referral to occupational health;
- Discuss with line managers the requirement for disciplinary action where serious concerns remain;
- Keep line managers and Directors/ Head of Team updated on individual cases;
- Issue sickness statistics on quarterly basis; and
- Provide all staff with guidance on the procedures and discuss areas on non-compliance with individuals.

13 Occupational and Statutory Sick Pay

13.1 Payment of sickness absence is dependent upon the employee's length of employment:

Length of employment	Sick pay entitlement
Zero – three months' service	Statutory Sick Pay only
Three – 12 months' service	One month at full pay followed by one month at half pay
Over 12 months' service	Six months at full pay followed by six months at half pay in any four year rolling period

13.2 To ensure that payment is received, employees must ensure they inform HEFCW of their absence, keep in regular contact and provide the required evidence for the absence (self-certification form and/ or medical certificate). HEFCW reserves the right to withhold sick pay where an employee fails to comply with these requirements.

13.3 Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is paid for up to 28 weeks where an employee has been off work sick for 4 or more days in a row (including non-working days). For employees with more than three months' service, SSP forms part of their occupational sick pay.

13.4 Part days count towards occupational sick pay entitlement.

14 Bank Holiday occurring during sickness absence

14.1 If a bank holiday falls within a period of sickness absence, it will form part of the absence for certification purposes but will not be deducted from the sick pay entitlements and will be paid as a bank holiday. A bank holiday is treated the same as a weekend and does not cause a break in sickness absence.

15 Annual leave

15.1 If an employee is absent due to sickness and is unable to take their annual leave, they are entitled to be paid this leave in certain circumstances, or carry over the balance into the following leave year. Full details are available in the Annual Leave procedures.

16 Absence in relation to a third party

- 16.1 If an absence is caused by the negligence, nuisance or breach of any statutory duty by a third party, for which an individual can take action and seek compensation:
- all salary or sick pay made to the individual by HEFCW will constitute a loan to the individual by HEFCW, up to the amount awarded through compensation;
 - this loan, up to the amount awarded through compensation, will be repaid to HEFCW after the individual recovers the compensation from the third party for loss of earnings.
- 16.2 Under these circumstances, payments made to an individual by HEFCW will constitute a loan even if income tax has been deducted from an individual's salary or sick pay.

17 Employee Assistance Programme

- 17.1 HEFCW has in place a confidential 24 hour employee assistance programme that can provide advice, help and support to employees. This can be used whilst absent or during the return to work.

18 Other absences

- 18.1 Sickness absence should not be used to cover other reasons for time off work. Where an employee is experiencing temporary domestic problems they should discuss this with their line manager and make use of the other flexible working arrangements on offer, including special leave.

Version	Date	Description
0.1	N/A	Inherited policy
1.0	Aug 06	Policy amended for HEFCW
1.1	Feb 08	Policy amended to reflect OD, style guide and EIA. Guidance on managing absence due to ill health, absence procedure and payment of sickness absence incorporated into one policy.
1.2	June 08	Policy amended to take into account Audit recommendations.
2.0	March 09	Administrative amendments following Policy Changes group EIA review of policy undertaken
2.1	July 14	Revised in line with the policy review project
2.2	Oct 14	Amended following Management Board Sept 2014
2.3	Jan 15	Further amendments to clarify procedures
2.4	July 15	Further amendments and guidance written to support procedures
2.5	July 15	Further amendments for clarity following Management Board discussions
2.6	August 15	Amendments following discussion at Management Team meeting.
2.7	Dec 2015	Amendments following Works Council and all staff consultation
3.0	Jan 2016	Approved at Works Council
3.1	June 2016	Approved at HR Committee
3.2	Jan 2018	Amendments following legal advice on trigger points.

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3.3	Feb 2018	Amendments following equalities, Welsh language and Wellbeing of Future Generations impact assessment. Reviewed by Management Board and Management Team.
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1 Line Manager Guidance for Absence Management Meetings

- 1.1 At all stages of the meetings, you should ensure that the employee knows it is a supportive meeting that has been arranged as you are concerned about the number of absences they have had. Explain that you are there to work out if there are any specific issues that are contributing to the absences as, if you understand them, perhaps you will be able to arrange support that may help them to be able to attend work more regularly/miss less work.
- 1.2 This should be read in conjunction with the Sickness Absence procedures. If, at any point, you have any queries or are uncertain of any aspects of the procedures or these guidance notes please contact HR.

2 Informal Absence Meeting

- 2.1 Before the meeting, you should review the employee's levels of absence on the history screen of the sickness system on MySite.
- 2.2 Notes must be taken during the meeting which you must share with the employee.
- 2.3 You must inform the employee that:
 - Their levels of absence have hit a trigger point which raises a concern
 - They should read the sickness absence procedure so that they are clear of the process and potential outcomes.
- 2.4 Ask them:
 - What was the reason for the absence?
 - Have they been to the doctor?
 - Are there any health issues that need support with?
 - Are they happy for this to be discussed with HR to help put the support in place?
 - Establish whether the employee considers the health issue to be a disability?
- 2.5 You should close with:
 - Informing the employee that improvement in their levels of absence is required.
 - If it does not improve, they will be called in to a formal absence meeting.
 - If it is clear that the health condition means that further trigger points will be hit, let the employee know that HR will be informed and potentially a further meeting will be arranged as part of providing support.
 - Notes will be written up and shared with the employee.

3 First Formal Absence meeting

- 3.1 Five days' notice should be given when arranging this meeting.
- 3.2 The employee has the right to be accompanied (HR will inform them of this in their letter).
- 3.3 Notes must be taken during the meeting which you must share with the employee.

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3.4 Before the meeting, you should review the employee's levels of absence on the history screen of the sickness system on MySite.

3.5 NB. If it is clear from your conversation that an occupational health referral is appropriate or there is an ongoing health issue that is going to cause further absences, you should close the meeting, informing the employee that you will speak to HR about possible arrangements. Occupational health assessment reports will be issued to the employee first for approval and then shared with HR and the line manager.

3.6 You must inform the employee that:

- Their levels of absence have hit a further trigger point which raises a concern.
- The absence will be discussed with HR to establish what support can be put in place, such as occupational health referrals.

3.7 Ask them:

- What was the reason for the absence?
- Have they been to the doctor?
- Are there any health issues (possibly new or different from the previous meeting) that need support?
- Do they think they would benefit from an occupational health referral?
- Establish whether the employee considers the health issue to be a disability?

3.8 You should close with:

- Your expectations on improvements in their levels of absence
- A timeframe for these improvements (e.g. three or six months)
- An improvement notice may be issued to confirm these requirements in writing
- If no improvement notice, inform them that the absences process will be escalated if they are absent for a further three occasions, unless they fall below the trigger points of 10 days/ six occasions.
- Suggest that they visit their GP, if they have not done so
- If the employee feels occupational health would be beneficial, inform them that this will be discussed with HR
- Notes will be written up and shared with the employee.

4 Second Formal Absence meeting

4.1 Five days' notice should be given when arranging this meeting.

4.2 The employee has the right to be accompanied (HR will inform them of this in their letter).

4.3 HR will be present at this meeting.

4.4 Notes must be taken during the meeting which you must share with the employee.

4.5 You must inform the employee that:

- Their levels of absence have hit a further trigger point which raises a concern.

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4.6 Ask them:

- What was the reason for the continued absence?
- Have they been to the doctor? If not, what is the reason for not visiting the doctor?
- Are there any health issues or any changes that have occurred since the previous meeting that need support?
- Establish whether the employee considers the health issue to be a disability?

4.7 If an occupational health referral has not taken place, you should close by informing the employee that they will be referred to occupational health, and that another meeting will be arranged to conclude this meeting once the occupational health report has been received.

4.8 If an occupational health referral has taken place, or once you have received the report and you meet again, you should discuss:

- Any adjustments or recommendations made in the report
- Consider whether any allowances need to be made to account for anything identified in the report.

4.9 You should close with:

- Your expectations on improvements in their levels of absence
- A timeframe for these improvements (e.g. three or six months)
- That the absences process will be escalated to a Third Formal Absence Meeting if they are absent for a further three occasions, or do not follow the improvement notice.
- An improvement notice will be issued to confirm these requirements in writing
- That "I am required to let you know that if a third formal absence meeting is required, one of the outcomes could be dismissal".
- Notes will be written up and shared with the employee.

5 Third Formal Absence meeting

5.1 If the occupational health report is out of date, a further referral should be made before conducting this meeting.

5.2 Five days' notice should be given when arranging this meeting.

5.3 The employee has the right to be accompanied (HR will inform them of this in their letter)

5.4 The meeting will be conducted by the Director or Head of Team and HR. Prior to the meeting, the Director/ HoT and HR must review all of the information relating to the absence case and ensure they fully comprehend the sickness absence procedure.

5.5 The line manager will not be present, but will be met with as part of gathering the information relating to the absence.

5.6 Notes must be taken during the meeting which you must share with the employee.

5.7 You should summarise the absence case with the employee during the meeting.

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5.8 You must inform the employee that:

- Their levels of absence have hit a further trigger point and this is the third absence meeting they have attended.
- The outcome of this meeting could ultimately result in dismissal

5.9 Ask them:

- What was the reason for the continued absence?
- Have they been to the doctor? If not, what is the reason for not visiting the doctor?
- What are the reasons for not being able to improve on their absences?
- Are there any health issues or any changes that have occurred since the previous meeting that need to be taken in to account?
- Establish whether the employee considers the health issue to be a disability?

5.10 Discuss:

- Any adjustments or recommendations made in the occupational health report
- Consider whether any allowances need to be made to account for anything identified in the report.
- If adjustments have already been made, why these have not helped to improve the absence and are further adjustments required.

5.11 The meeting must be adjourned to allow the Director/ HoT to consider the appropriate outcome of this meeting.

5.12 A further meeting will be arranged to confirm the outcome. The outcome will be confirmed in writing.

5.13 If the outcome is that further adjustments are made, these need to be discussed with the line manager. The changes should be agreed and communicated to the employee, setting out the expectations and confirming what the next trigger points would be.

5.14 If the outcome is dismissal, as per the disciplinary procedures, dismissal decisions can normally only be taken by the Chief Executive, therefore the Director/ HoT and HR must meet with the CEO if dismissal is being considered.

1. Employee Guidance for Absence Management Meetings

- 1.1 The purpose of both the return to work and absence meetings is to give you support to help you to be able to attend work more regularly/ miss less work. If you are facing any personal issues or ill health it is best if you can let your line manager know as soon as possible, especially if you think it is going to cause an increase in your levels of absence. If your line manager is fully informed, they will be able to help and support you more easily.
- 1.2 During the meetings, notes will be taken and these will be shared with you after each meeting.
- 1.3 These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with the Sickness Absence procedures. If, at any point, you have any queries or are uncertain of any aspects of the procedures or these guidance notes please contact HR.

2. Informal Absence Meeting

- 2.1 Before the meeting, you should review your levels of absence on the history screen of the sickness system on MySite.
- 2.2 Your line manager will conduct this meeting.
- 2.3 You will be informed by your line manager that:
 - your levels of absence have hit a trigger point which has raised concerns
 - you should read the sickness absence procedure so that you are clear of the process and potential outcomes.
- 2.4 You will be asked:
 - What was the reason for the absence?
 - Have you been to the doctor?
 - Are there any health issues that need support?
 - Are you happy for this to be discussed with HR to help put the support in place?
 - Establish whether you consider the health issue to be a disability?
- 2.5 At this time it is helpful if you can give as much information to your line manager as possible.
- 2.6 If you haven't done so already, it would also be helpful if you could visit your GP to see what support they can give you, any recommendations they may have for HEFCW as your employer and share this information with your line manager.
- 2.7 At the end of the meeting you will be informed that:
 - If your levels of absence do not improve, and you hit another trigger point, you will be called in to a formal absence meeting

Sickness absence procedures

2.8 From your conversation, if it is clear that your health condition means that further trigger points will be hit, your line manager will speak to HR and potentially a further meeting will be arranged as part of providing support.

3. First Formal Absence meeting

3.1 Five days' notice of the meeting will be given.

3.2 You have the right to be accompanied.

3.3 Before the meeting, review your levels of absence on the history screen of the sickness system on MySite.

3.4 If you have any more information about your absence you should take it with you to the meeting.

3.5 NB. If it is clear at an early stage during the meeting that an occupational health referral is appropriate or there is an ongoing health issue that is going to cause further absences, your line manager will close the meeting, informing you that they will speak to HR about possible arrangements. Following an occupational health assessment, you will be issued with the report first and your approval will be required before it is shared with HR and your line manager.

3.6 You will be informed by your line manager that:

- your levels of absence have hit a further trigger point which has raised concerns
- The absence will be discussed with HR to establish what support can be put in place, such as occupational health referrals.

3.7 You will be asked:

- What was the reason for the absence?
- Have you been to the doctor?
- Are there any health issues (possibly new or different from the previous meeting) that need support?
- Do you think you would benefit from an occupational health referral?
- Establish whether you consider the health issue to be a disability?

3.8 It is helpful if you agree to an occupational health referral so HEFCW has as much information as possible to make the right decisions to support you.

3.9 At the end of the meeting you will be informed:

- an improvement in your levels of absence is required
- what you are expected to do to improve your levels of absence
- a timeframe for these improvements (e.g. three or six months)
- that an improvement notice may be issued to you in writing to confirm these expectations
- if you don't receive an improvement notice, that a further three occasions of absence will result in a second formal absence meeting

Sickness absence procedures

- If you've said that you think an occupational health referral would be beneficial, then your line manager will discuss this with HR to make arrangements.

3.10 If you haven't done so already, it is recommended at this stage that you visit your GP to see what support they can give you, any recommendations they may have for HEFCW as your employer and share this information with your line manager.

4. Second Formal Absence meeting

4.1 Five days' notice of the meeting will be given.

4.2 You have the right to be accompanied

4.3 Your line manager will conduct this meeting and HR will be present.

4.4 Your line manager will inform you that:

- your levels of absence have hit a further trigger point which has raised a concern.

4.5 You will be asked:

- What was the reason for the continued absence?
- Have you been to the doctor? If not, what is the reason for not visiting the doctor?
- Are there any health issues or any changes that have occurred since the previous meeting that you need support with?
- Establish whether you consider the health issue to be a disability?

4.6 If an occupational health referral has not taken place, your line manager should close the meeting by informing you that you will be referred to occupational health, and that a further meeting will be arranged to conclude this meeting once the occupational health report has been received.

4.7 It is important that you agree to meet with occupational health. Failure to do so will mean that decisions could be made without the benefit of medical advice and HEFCW will not be able to give you the level of support required.

4.8 If an occupational health referral has taken place, or once your line manager and HR have received the report and the meeting is re-convened, the line manager will discuss with you:

- Any adjustments or recommendations made in the report
- Consider whether any allowances need to be made to account for anything identified in the report.

4.9 You should cooperate with your line manager with regard to the possible implementation of any adjustments recommended in the report. These may include changes to job duties, hours or working conditions. These changes will be made to help you in your recovery or management of your ill health and attendance at work.

4.10 At the end of the meeting you will be informed:

- what you are expected to do to improve your levels of absence

Sickness absence procedures

- a timeframe for these improvements (e.g. three or six months)
- that the absences process will be escalated to a Third Formal Absence Meeting if you are absent for a further three occasions, or do not follow the improvement notice.
- an improvement notice will be issued to confirm these requirements in writing
- that at the third formal absence meeting one of the outcomes could be dismissal.

5. Third Formal Absence meeting

5.1 If your occupational health report is considered to be out of date, you will be asked to attend a further referral before this meeting takes place. This is to make sure that the most up to date information is available.

5.2 Five days' notice of the meeting will be given.

5.3 You have the right to be accompanied.

5.4 The meeting will be conducted by your Director or Head of Team and HR. Prior to the meeting, the Director/ HoT and HR will review all of the information relating to the absence case.

5.5 Your line manager will not be present at the meeting, but the Director/ Head of team will have met with your line manager as part of gathering the information relating to the absence.

5.6 The Director/ Head of team will summarise your absence case during the meeting.

5.7 You will be informed that:

- your levels of absence have hit a further trigger point and this is the third absence meeting you have attended.
- the outcome of this meeting could ultimately result in dismissal

5.8 You will be asked:

- What was the reason for the continued absence?
- Have you been to the doctor? If not, what is the reason for not visiting the doctor?
- What are the reasons for you not being able to improve your absences?
- Are there any health issues or any changes that have occurred since the previous meeting that need to be taken in to account?
- if you consider the health issue to be a disability?

5.9 You will have the opportunity to discuss

- Any adjustments or recommendations made in the occupational health report
- Consider whether any allowances need to be made to account for anything identified in the report.
- If adjustments have been already made, why these have not helped to improve your levels of absence and if there are any further adjustments required.

5.10 At this point, the meeting will be adjourned to allow the Director/ HoT to consider the appropriate outcome.

Sickness absence procedures

- 5.11 A further meeting will be arranged to confirm the outcome. The outcome will be confirmed to you in writing.
- 5.12 If the outcome is that further adjustments are made, these will need to be discussed with your line manager. The changes will be agreed and communicated to you at the meeting and in writing, setting out what you are expected to do and confirming what your next trigger point would be.
- 5.13 If the outcome is dismissal, as per the disciplinary procedures, dismissal decisions can normally only be taken by the Chief Executive, therefore the Director/ HoT and HR must meet with the CEO if dismissal is being considered. This would then be confirmed to you at the meeting and in writing.
- 5.14 In line with the Disciplinary procedures, you would have the right to appeal.