



INTRODUCTION

The success of the College depends upon the effective contribution of all its staff, and the College recognises that the vast majority of its staff meet or exceed the demands of their respective roles. However, the loss of working days through regular sickness absences can be a significant cost to the College, as work may not be completed, cover must be arranged, and additional pressure may consequently be placed on co-workers.

The primary aim of this document is therefore to provide a framework within which the College can manage short- and long-term absence from work due to ill-health in as consistent, fair and effective a way as possible, and to provide appropriate support to staff towards a full recovery.

This policy applies to all non-academic staff. It does not form part of the contract of employment between a member of staff and the College, and the College reserves the right to vary these procedures as appropriate.

DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Broadly speaking, there are two main types of sickness absence:

i. Long-Term Absence

For the purposes of this policy, any period of absence from work because of ill health lasting more than four consecutive weeks will normally be deemed as long-term sickness. Often, this absence will be the result of a single illness, condition (e.g. post-operative recovery) or disability; however, this will not always be the case.

ii. Short-Term Absence

Short-term absences will normally be between 1 day and 4 weeks in duration, and will often be due to minor illnesses that are not connected. Short-term absence can comprise:

- a relatively large number of single days of absence within a given time period;
- fewer occasions of absence but involving a loss of up to a week or more at a time; or
- a mixture of individual days and longer periods of absence.

High levels of short-term absence may indicate underlying medical or work-related problems which need to be explored and resolved.

SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURES

Members of staff are expected to report all sickness absence promptly, and should use the following procedure. Failure to do so, without good reason, will result in the absence being considered unauthorised, and as such may result in sick pay (including payment under the College's scheme) being withheld, and/ or disciplinary action being taken.

(a) Immediate notification of sickness

Unless they are unable to do so as a result of disability or serious injury, members of staff who are unable to attend work because of illness should inform their supervisor by telephone in person before the start of their shift on the first day of absence from work.

When reporting absence from work due to illness, employees should give details of the nature of their illness and should indicate when they believe they will be fit to return to work. They must inform their manager as soon as possible of any change in the date of their anticipated return to work.

They should also give details of any outstanding work that needs to be dealt with during their absence (as appropriate), and should confirm details of how they can be contacted during their absence.

(b) Illness whilst at work

Where a member of staff becomes ill whilst at work and feels too unwell to continue working, they should speak to their manager as soon as possible so that permission can be given for the individual to leave work (either temporarily or for the day). Such permission will not be unreasonably withheld. Under no circumstances should a member of staff leave their place of work without having first obtained permission.

(c) Sickness absence from work for up to seven days

For absences which are expected to last less than seven working days, and which are not covered by a medical certificate, employees are required to telephone their manager on a daily basis to provide updates on their progress towards recovery. Failure to do so may be treated as a disciplinary matter.

Employees will also be required to complete a self-certification form on their first day back at work. (False statements on this form could lead to prosecution by the DSS and/or disciplinary action by the College).

(d) Sickness absence from work for more than seven days

For absences which are expected to last more than seven days, employees are required to contact their manager by telephone on at least a weekly basis in order to provide an update on their illness or injury.

An original copy of a signed Statement of Fitness for Work ('fit note') from the member of staff's doctor should also be sent to the individual's line manager or to the Personnel Advisor as soon as possible.

Where a member of staff is assessed as "unfit for work" by their doctor and is signed off work, consecutive fit notes should be provided to cover the whole period of absence, until the doctor decides that the member of staff is fit to return to work.

Where their doctor considers that a member of staff "may be fit for work" with suitable adjustments to their work or workplace, the College will consult with the member of staff and will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments which may facilitate a return to work. However, there is no obligation on the College to take on board the doctor's suggestions if they are not workable, and where the College cannot facilitate the doctor's suggestions for workplace adjustments, the status of the fit note defaults to 'not fit for work'.

Please note that even though a doctor's certificate is not required for SSP purposes until a member of staff has been absent from work for more than seven days, a member of staff should nevertheless visit their doctor before that date if they feel sufficiently ill to require medical treatment. If the doctor provides a certificate at that stage, it should be forwarded to the Personnel Advisor immediately.

SICKNESS PAYMENTS

Entitlements to receive payments under the College sick pay scheme are outlined in the Conditions of Service document published on the College website.

While receiving sick pay (including Statutory Sick Pay) you are not allowed to undertake any form of paid alternative employment, self-employment, or voluntary work. Any breach of this rule will be regarded as misconduct, and will be addressed using the College's disciplinary procedures.

The College reserves the right to withhold payment under the College sick pay scheme in the event of an employee reaching unacceptable levels of sickness absence, or if it has good reason to believe that the sickness is not genuine, or if the employee has failed to follow the correct reporting procedures.

PREGNANCY-RELATED SICKNESS

Pregnancy-related sickness absence should be reported in the normal way, but will be recorded separately and will not be counted towards an individual's sickness absence record for monitoring purposes.

Members of staff suffering pregnancy-related illness during the four-week period prior to their due date may be required to start their period of maternity leave early, and will be entitled to maternity pay for such absence and not sick pay.

SICKNESS DURING ANNUAL HOLIDAY

If a member of staff is taken ill whilst on annual leave, arrangements will apply under which, provided they satisfy the Personnel Advisor by production of a doctor's certificate, they will normally be able to take the balance of their annual leave at a later date after return to work. In these circumstances, a supervisor shall not unreasonably withhold permission to allow a transfer of entitlement into the next leave year.

The normal reporting requirements for sickness still apply when a member of staff is taken ill whilst on annual leave; however, a medical certificate should be obtained from the doctor treating the case and provided to the College, even where the absence lasts less than seven days.

DOCTOR/ MEDICAL/ DENTAL APPOINTMENTS (EXCLUDING HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS)

Wherever possible, these should be arranged for out of work hours (e.g. before or after work, or during lunch time).

If it is necessary for a member of staff to arrange to visit - during the normal working day - their doctor or dentist attempts should be made to arrange the visit in such a way as to disrupt the work of their department as little as possible. Permission to attend will not unreasonably be withheld, provided that prior notification has been received. Such appointments will not normally be recorded as sickness absence if they are one-off in nature, and will normally be paid as normal.

On-going doctor or dental appointments for a single health issue or series of related issues will be treated as sickness absence. Linked appointments which provide a course of treatment will also be treated as sickness absence.

HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS

Where it is necessary for a member of staff to visit a hospital for a one-off consultation, and it is not possible to do so outside working hours, this may be authorised as time off with pay. Evidence of

your appointment may be required. If you are required to visit hospital for a course of treatment or therapy, this will normally be counted as sickness absence.

Where a stay in hospital is necessary, or where you need to attend hospital on a regular basis for on-going treatment, this will be recorded as sickness absence.

REFERRALS TO MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

When managing an individual's sickness absence, the College may at any point in the process request a medical report from the member of staff's GP or consultant, or may request that you visit an Occupational Health provider or other medical professional to undergo a medical examination. The cost of any such report of examination will be met by the College, and it is expected that a member of staff will cooperate in the obtaining and disclosing of all results and reports to the College.

When reports are requested from an individual's GP or consultant, the staff member has the right under the Access to Medical Reports Act to request to see the medical report before it is submitted to the College.

MANAGING SHORT-TERM ABSENCE

Supervisors have access to sickness absence details for their particular area, and (in conjunction with the Personnel Advisor) will monitor absence rates for staff within their teams. Where an individual's level of short-term sickness absence is felt to be unacceptably high, the following procedure will be followed (normally taking into account levels of sickness absence in the department and throughout the College more generally).

It is important to note that it will normally be the level of absence that will be of concern to the College, and not the genuineness of the reason(s) for the absence. The fact that an employee who is frequently absent with short-term illness is genuinely unwell does not mean that the College can allow the situation to continue indefinitely, as such absence can cause significant disruption to the normal day-to-day operation of a department.

If at any stage the College has reason to believe that a member of staff's absence is not genuine, or that the employee has been engaging in activities whilst absent on health grounds which may appear to be inconsistent with the reason(s) for the absence or which appear not to be conducive to recovery from the reason(s) for the absence, the matter may be dealt with as a disciplinary matter under the relevant College policy.

Stage 1: Informal

If levels of sickness absence cause concern, this will be brought to the member of staff's attention by the appropriate supervisor, who will ask the employee for cooperation in reducing the levels of sickness absence.

As part of this discussion, the manager should ask the member of staff whether there are any factors affecting their health which the College needs to be aware of, and/ or which can be addressed by the College. Such issues should be addressed sympathetically.

At this point, the manager may decide that a member of staff should no longer continue to be paid in line with the College's sick pay scheme, but that they should instead only receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) for any future absences. This will normally be communicated to the member of staff in writing.

In the case of a staff member normally requiring to undertake paid overtime, the supervisor may also decide that, as the commitment to overtime may be affecting the staff member's health, no overtime opportunities will be provided until the supervisor is satisfied that the health problem has been overcome.

What constitutes an 'unacceptable' level of absence will be determined on a case by case basis. However, the College will not normally expect a member of staff to be absent due to sickness for more than 10 working days (or more than 5 separate occasions of sickness absence, whichever is lower) in any rolling 12-month period. These arrangements will be applied on a pro-rata basis for part-time staff.

Should levels of sickness absence exceed those that the College considers to be acceptable, payments under the College sick pay scheme may be withheld from the individual concerned until such time as their levels of attendance return to an acceptable level and are maintained there.

In the event that the decision is taken to withhold College sick pay from an individual, it is not expected that that member of staff will be absent due to sickness for more than 3 days (or two occasions, whichever is the lower) within the following six months. Should an individual's sickness absence exceed these levels, the College will normally continue to withhold payment under its sick pay scheme and may address the matter using its formal disciplinary procedures.

Stage 2: Formal

If levels of attendance do not improve following the informal meeting, the matter will be addressed using the College's disciplinary procedures and the member of staff may be issued with a formal written warning.

If there is still no improvement after a reasonable time, and there is no good reason, the College may issue the member of staff with a final written warning that they may be dismissed unless the required standards of attendance are achieved and maintained.

If the requested improvement is not achieved and maintained after an agreed period of time, the College may dismiss the member of staff with appropriate notice.

MANAGING LONG-TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

Members of staff who are, or expect to be, absent from work for more than 4 consecutive weeks due to ill-health will be considered to be on long-term sick leave. Problems of persistent longer periods of absence owing to ill-health (whether long-term and continuous, or of a more intermittent nature) should not be dealt with as matters of discipline, but as matters of capability.

Where a member of staff is able to return to full duties (with or without reasonable workplace adjustments), this will be agreed as appropriate.

However, where medical opinion suggests that the employee will not be able to return to their full duties, or that it is not possible to give a timescale for a return to work, the College will investigate other options such as redeployment, or early retirement on the grounds of ill-health

If none of the above options are possible, the College may regretfully have to consider dismissing the individual on the grounds of incapability due to ill-health.

At all stages, the College will endeavour to consult with the employee to determine the best way to proceed. Where appropriate, the member of staff will have the right to be accompanied at formal meetings by a work colleague or a trade union representative.

APPEALS

- (i) An employee has the right to appeal against any formal action taken under this policy.
- (ii) If the employee wishes to appeal, s/he must inform the Home Bursar in writing (normally within 5 working days) and should state in writing the grounds for their appeal.

- (iii) If the employee informs the College of their wish to appeal, the College will invite them to attend a further meeting. At the start of the meeting, the Chair will agree with all parties the way in which matters will be dealt with, and the meeting should be conducted in such a manner as to allow all parties to explain their case.
- (iv) The individual may be accompanied at this meeting if they so wish.
- (v) In the case of appeal meetings which are not the first meeting, the College should (as far as is reasonably practical) be represented by a more senior manager than attended the first meeting (unless the most senior manager attended the first meeting).
- (vi) The employee must take all reasonable steps to attend the meeting.
- (vii) The appeal meeting need not take place before the dismissal or disciplinary action takes effect.

After the appeal meeting, the College must inform the member of staff of its final decision in writing. There will be no right of further appeal against this decision.

POLICY REVIEW

The College will review this policy regularly taking into account any developments in the law and practice, and will publish any amendments. The policy may be amended at any time at the College's sole discretion.

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