

Staff Absence Policy

Policy statement

We are committed to improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all employees. We value the contribution our employees make to our success. So, when any employee is unable to be at work for any reason, we miss that contribution. This absence policy explains:

- What we expect from managers and employees when handling absence.
- How we will work to reduce levels of absence.

This policy has been written in line with ACAS guidelines, and we welcome contributions from employees in developing and implementing this policy.

Key principles

The organisation's absence policy is based on the following principles:

1. As a responsible employer we undertake to provide payments to employees who are unable to attend work due to sickness. (See the Company Sick Pay scheme.)
2. Regular, punctual attendance is an important aspect of everyone's employment. We ask each employee to take responsibility for achieving and maintaining good attendance.
3. We will support employees who have genuine grounds for absence for whatever reason. This support includes:
 - a. 'special leave' for necessary absences not caused by sickness
 - b. a flexible approach to taking annual leave
 - c. access to counsellors where necessary
 - d. rehabilitation support in cases of long-term sickness absence.
4. We will consider any advice given by an employee's GP on the 'Statement of Fitness for Work'. If the GP advises that an employee 'may be fit for work' we will discuss with the employee how we can help them get back to work – for example, on flexible hours, or altered duties.

5. Where appropriate we will use an occupational health adviser, to help advise the employee and their manager on the best way to improve the employee's health and wellbeing.
6. The company's disciplinary procedures will be used if an explanation for absence is not forthcoming or is not thought to be satisfactory.
7. We respect the confidentiality of all information relating to an employee's sickness. This policy will be implemented in line with current data protection legislation and the Access to Medical records Act 1988.

Notification of absence

If an employee is going to be absent from work they should speak to their manager or deputy within **specify time period e.g. one hour** of their normal start time. They should also:

- Give a clear indication of the nature of the illness and
- A likely return date.

The manager will check with other employees if there is any information they need to cover their work during the period of absence. If the employee does not contact their manager by the required time the manager will attempt to contact the employee.

An employee may not always feel able to discuss their medical problems with their line manager. Managers will be sensitive to individual concerns and make alternative arrangements, where appropriate. For example, an employee may prefer to discuss health problems with a person of the same sex.

Evidence of incapacity

Employees can use the company self-certification arrangements for the first seven days absence. Thereafter a 'Statement of Fitness for Work' is required to cover every subsequent day.

If absence is likely to be long-term - more than four weeks continuously, there is a shared responsibility for the Company and the employee to maintain contact at agreed intervals.

‘May be fit for some work’

If the GP advises on the Statement of Fitness for Work that an employee ‘may be fit for work’ we will discuss with the employee ways of helping them get back to work. This might mean talking about a phased return to work or amended duties.

If it is not possible to provide the support an employee needs to return to work – for example, by making the necessary workplace adjustments – or an employee feels unable to return then the Statement will be used in the same way as if the GP advised that the employee was ‘not fit for work’.

Return to work discussions

Managers will discuss absences with employees when they return to work to establish:

- The reason for absence
- What the manager or the company can do to help
- That the employee is fit to return to work.

If an employee’s GP has advised that they ‘may be fit for work’ the return to work discussion can also be used to agree in detail how their return to work might work best in practice.

A more formal review may be triggered by:

Absences that are disruptive to the company’s operations e.g. frequent short-term absences or long-term absence.

This review will look at any further action required to improve the employee’s attendance and wellbeing.