

3.01 Sickness Absence v9.0

It is recognised that staff will get sick from time to time and will require time off to recover from illness or injury. It is therefore important that we have policies and procedures in place to help and support those who are ill and to help facilitate a return to work as early as possible.

Improving the overall level of sickness absence is a high priority for Northern Ireland Departments and the Executive. The NICS has a primary duty to ensure the delivery of efficient good quality services to the people of Northern Ireland, while giving proper regard to the economical use of public money for these services. The high levels of sickness absence in the NICS has a direct impact on our ability to deliver these services through lost productivity, disruption to work and the additional pressure/stress on those left to cope with the extra work. The NICS is committed to identifying measures and interventions that will increase employee well-being and help reduce the need for staff to take sickness absence. [The NICS Approach to Managing Sickness Absence \(link to info below\)](#)

These User Guides have been designed to be a helpful and interactive 'quick reference' guide on sickness absence and to provide staff and managers with the information needed to help manage sickness absence. It also provides guidance on your role and responsibilities in the process at an individual level, line management level and at a Departmental HR level. The User Guides will compliment the various policies and procedures on sickness absence and includes links to the relevant policies and other useful information.

In summary:

When you are affected by illness there are certain things you must do:

- Notify your Line Manager of your sickness absence ([Step 1 Notify your Line Manager of your sickness absence](#))
- Submit Certification ([Step 2 Submit Certification](#))
- Attend a return to work interview ([Step 3 Return to work interview](#))

What next?

Line Management will:

- Identify sickness absence ([Step 1 Identify sickness absence](#))
- Open or update sickness record ([Step 2 Open or update sickness record](#))
- Receive notification of expiration of certification period ([Step 3 Receive notification of expiration of certification period](#))
- Identify need to initiate further action ([Step 4 Identify need to initiate further action](#))
- Update staff records ([Step 5 Update staff records](#))
- Validate sickness details ([Step 6 Validate sickness details](#))
- Close sickness record ([Step 7 Close sickness record](#))
- Conduct return to work interview ([Step 8 Conduct return to work interview](#))
- Review sickness absence record ([Step 9 Review sickness absence record](#))

For line managers of industrial staff

Departmental HR will:

- Review sickness absence reports ([Step 1 Review sickness absence reports](#))
- Review Service-wide sickness absence levels ([Step 2 Review Service-wide sickness absence levels](#))
- Authorise request from Line Management to override automatic process in relation to expiration of certification period ([Step 3 Authorise request from Line Management to override automatic process in relation to expiration of certification period](#))
- Review requests for extension of Occupational Sick Pay beyond a prescribed maxima ([Step 4 Review requests for extension of Occupational Sick Pay beyond a prescribed maxima](#))
- Consider OSP extension in successful Temporary Injury Awards ([Step 5 Consider OSP extension in successful Temporary Injury Awards](#))
- Consider applications for continuation of Temporary Injury Awards ([Step 6 Consider applications for continuation of Temporary Injury Award](#))
- Consider staff member's eligibility for Pension Rate of Pay ([Step 7 Consider staff member's eligibility for Pension Rate of Pay](#))
- Consider re-instatement of OSP/PROP at end of first six months of Final Written Warning (Step 8 Consider reinstatement of OSP/PROP during Final Written Warning).

- Consider re-instatement of OSP/PROP at end of first six months of Final Written Warning [\(Step 8 Consider reinstatement of OSP/PROP during Final Written Warning\)](#)

In addition to this guide, you may also wish to refer to the following HR policies in this Handbook:

[o 3.01, Sickness Absence](#)

[o 3.02, Maternity Leave](#)

[o 3.09, Injuries, Diseases and Assault](#)

[o 6.06, Inefficiency Sickness Absence](#)

[o 7. Health & Safety](#)

The following terms within this guide are defined in the glossary:

Occupational Sick Pay, Temporary Injury Allowance, Statutory Sick Pay, Occupational Health Service, Pension Rate of Pay, Self-Certification, Medical Certificate, Statement of Fitness for Work, Extension of Occupational Sick Pay beyond prescribed maxima, Return to Work form

The NICS Approach to Managing Sickness Absence

The NICS has a multi-faceted approach to managing sickness absence and this is based on 4 key themes:

- Prevention
- Support
- Rehabilitation and Return to Work
- Robust actions

1. Prevention

Strong focus on preventing staff from getting ill in the first instance through a range of activities.....

Promotion and encourage participation in a range of healthy lifestyle programmes, including the Civil Service Sports Association's Health Works Programme, which focuses on a number of aspects of individual health and wellbeing such as stress, nutrition, smoking and alcohol and general fitness and also the OHS 'Lifestyle and Physical Activity Assessment Programme' which is available to all staff.

2. Support

The NICS Terms & Conditions of employment provide excellent support for those absent due to sickness

- Occupational Sick Pay Scheme.
- Occupation Health Service.
- NICS Welfare Support Service.
- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which offers a 24 hour free, independent, confidential and professional counseling and support service for staff and immediate family members.
- Range of work life balance initiatives, including policies on term-time working, alternative working patterns and other dependant care provisions such as guidance on eldercare and special leave (paid and unpaid) arrangements.

3. Rehabilitation and Return to Work

Evidence would show that the longer you're off sick the harder it becomes to return to work...

- Early intervention is considered an important aspect of our approach and we do operate early or 'day 1' referrals to the OHS and to welfare.
- Actively consider any reasonable adjustments that might be required.
- Can also assist staff back to work through phased return arrangements.

4. Robust Actions

Unfortunately, when the level of sickness absence becomes unacceptable robust action is required...

- The NICS introduced corporate review points to ensure consistency across Departments and to prompt consideration of action under the inefficiency procedures.
- The review point for intermittent absence is 4 occasions or 10 working days in any 12 month period; and is 20 working days for long-term absence. Probationers, Fixed-Term and Temporary staff attendance is reviewed after each absence.
- Greater focus on early and pro-active case management.
- Procedures in place to deal with unacceptable levels of absence, such as written warnings and ultimately dismissal.

USER GUIDE FOR STAFF


Step 1 Notify your Line Manager of your sickness absence

- [What do I do if I'm ill? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [What if I'm too ill to ring the office? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [What if I, or a member of my family, have an infectious disease? \(link to below\)](#)
- [What if I have an injury at work? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [What next? \(link to info below\)](#)

What do I do if I'm ill?

To keep disruption in your office to a minimum you must notify your line manager or a more senior officer, by speaking to them in person where possible, within one hour of your normal starting time on the first day of absence. You should:

- State the nature of your illness and when you expect to return to work (including relevant information concerning an injury, or disease contracted at work if applicable)
- agree the next date of contact;
- say whether you intend to consult your doctor;
- mention any work-related issues i.e. Work pending

Further information can be found at  (2.1 Sickness Absence policy)

What if I'm too ill to ring the office?

In exceptional circumstances you can get someone reliable to contact your line manager or a more senior officer on your behalf.

Can I text or e-mail my manager?

No. It is important that you speak directly to your line manager or a more senior officer should your manager not be available.

What happens if I don't notify my manager of my illness?


Failure to contact your manager on the first day of your absence may result in your absence being recorded as unauthorised and possible disciplinary action. As well as contacting your line manager on your first day of absence you must also maintain regular contact throughout your absence.

What if I, or a member of my family, have an infectious disease?

There may be times when a member of your household has an infectious disease and you are concerned that you could inadvertently transmit the infection to colleagues at work. However, for general guidance, so long as you are in apparent good health, there is no reason why your normal work pattern should not be followed. In the case of Rubella (German measles) in a family member at home, it is advisable for you to avoid close contact with pregnant women in the workplace setting until the family member recovers.

What if I have an injury at work?

You must report the injury to your line manager and complete relevant section of self-certification form.

 [7.02, Reporting an Injury.](#) Further information can be found at [3.09 Industrial Injuries and Diseases policy](#)

Step 2 – Submit Certification

- [Do I need a certificate if I can not attend work due to sickness?](#)
- [What if my doctor's statement indicates I "may be fit for work"?](#)
- [Do I need a medical certificate signing me "Fit for work"?](#)
- [What if I'm in hospital?](#)

Do I need a certificate if I can not attend work due to sickness?

Less than 7 Calendar days

You must complete a Self-Certification form by accessing the HRConnect Employee Self-Service "Self Certification Form" screens. If you do not have access to HRConnect Employee Self-Service, your line manager will provide you with a Self-Certification form to complete on your return to work. You should complete and return this form to Line Management who will input these details onto HRConnect on your behalf. The completed form should be submitted to your line manager on the day your return to work.

More than 7 Calendar days


If you have been off work for a period of more than seven calendar days, you will have been sent a Self-Certification form by HRConnect to be completed whilst you were away from work. You must also submit a 'statement of fitness for work' from your doctor from the eighth day of your illness.

If you are eligible to claim Employment Support Allowance you must request, when submitting your medical evidence to your Line Manager that it is forwarded to the Social Security Agency, by HRConnect, for benefit purposes.

You should note:

- The use of self-certificates is monitored and you may be asked to submit a 'statement of fitness for work' in support of a self-certificate if there are any doubts about your self-certificate
- The self-certified facility can be withdrawn by your line manager/Departmental HR if it is thought you are abusing the facility
- Occupational Sick Pay may be withheld if medical evidence is not submitted within two weeks of it becoming due.

What if my doctor's statement indicates I "may be fit for work"?

Line Management must on all occasions review GP advice and consider any temporary workplace adaptations to enable your return to work.  [***Link to Fit Note information on portal.***](#)

What if my doctor or OHS recommend a phased return to work? (Long Term Sickness Absence)

Where a phased return to work has been recommended, you must contact your line manager, in advance of your return to work, to agree the phased return to work pattern. The purpose of this is to draw up an agreed phased return plan between you and your line manager and, if appropriate, the Welfare Officer and DHR. This plan should include;

- proposed duration of the reduced hours arrangement
- number of hours to be worked each week/each day of each week;
- the scope and range of duties involved;
- procedures for reviewing the phased return plan including agreement of any changes.

Once this has been agreed you will receive written confirmation of the details from HRConnect. Your phased return will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by Line Management.

Do I need a medical certificate signing me "Fit for work"?


No, the doctor's statement does not include the functionality for GP's to advise patients that they have become fit for work. You do not need to be 'signed back' to work by a doctor, and you do not need to be fully fit to return to most posts. However, employees returning to posts with heavy manual duties will need to discuss their ability to carry out their duties with line management before returning to work.


What if I'm in hospital?

If you are in hospital, a hospital note or statement will suffice but the reporting regulations still apply.

Step 3 Return to work interview

You will be requested to attend a return to work interview after each sickness absence, whether short or long-term, within two days of your return to work. At this meeting Line Management may discuss the following with you, where appropriate


- Your sickness absence record
- Any possibility of [inefficiency action](#) ( **6.06 INEFFICIENCY POLICY**) being taken
- Whether or not any workplace adjustments are required i.e. any Health & Safety issues, for example, the need for a risk assessment
- If a referral to the Occupational Health Service is necessary
- Other support bodies which are available to you, for example, the Welfare Support Services or the Employee Assistance Programme
- Any work related developments that have occurred during your absence

On completing the return to work interview, Line Management will ask you to countersign a completed Return to Work form [ [SAB 1.32b](#)] to confirm that the notes taken during the meeting accurately reflect the discussion that took place and will provide you with a copy of this completed form.

What next?

- [Will there be any further action as a result of my absence? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [What if my absence is Stress- Related? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [Am I eligible for an extension of Occupational sick pay? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [Am I entitled to any additional payment if I have had an injury at work? \(link to info below\)](#)
- [What if I have received compensation as a result of an injury involving a third party? \(link to info below\)](#)

Will there be any further action as a result of my absence?

Line Management and Departmental HR will review individual sickness absence records as and when pre-determined absence triggers are reached  [Inefficiency Policy 4.1- 4.3](#) This may result in your *Line Manager, or DHR deciding to take further action, for example, instigating the Inefficiency Sickness Absence process.

* In some Departments the line manager has responsibility for initiating the Inefficiency Process and will do so in consultation with DHR. In other Departments this responsibility rests with DHR. Your DHR will advise you on the correct process for your Department

What if my absence is Stress- Related?

HRConnect will issue you with a stress questionnaire, which you should complete and return to Departmental HR. If you indicate that difficulties at work are affecting your health, you will be contacted by a representative from Departmental HR. They will wish to discuss the matter in detail with you in order to explore a variety of remedies which might be used to assist you. You may also be referred immediately to OHS and Welfare Support Service.

Am I eligible for an extension of Occupational sick pay (OSP)?

You may be allowed an extension of OSP if you have exhausted entitlement to full pay and half pay through absence due to a long illness or injury and then become sick again after return to duty. Where you wish to apply for an extension of OSP beyond the prescribed maxima you must send a letter to HRConnect detailing your wish to be considered for an extension of OSP. In this letter you must detail the nature of your illness and the reasons for your request for an extension. In preparing this letter, you may wish to refer to [3.01 Sickness Absence](#) policy in this Handbook for further information.

In the case of an application for extension of OSP, Departmental HR will make the decision to accept or reject your application and HRConnect will write to you to inform you of their decision.

Am I entitled to any additional payment if I have had an injury at work?

You may be eligible for a Temporary Injury Award (TIA) if you have sustained an injury that is wholly or mainly attributable to the nature of your duty. Injury benefit is paid when a qualifying injury impairs your earning capacity and to bring your income up to a guaranteed level.

1. Application for Temporary Injury Award ([link to info below](#))
- 2 Application for continuation of Temporary Injury Award ([link to info below](#))

1.Application for Temporary Injury Award (TIA)

In most cases, you will automatically receive details of application for TIA where appropriate, but where this is not the case, you should request an application booklet from HRConnect or Civil Service Pensions. Further information can be found at http://www.civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk/injury_benefits_scheme.pdf

HRConnect will manage your application, liaising with Departmental HR, Welfare Support Services and the Occupational Health Service as required.

Civil Service Pensions will make the decision to accept or reject your application based on the evidence provided and the application of the scheme rules and inform HRConnect of their decision.

You will receive a decision in respect of your application from HRConnect. If your application is successful you will be requested to complete and return a Statement of Social Security Benefits form to HRConnect as soon as possible, as the amount of social security benefits you receive may impact on sickness related benefits that are payable and / or your tax or national insurance contributions.

2 Application for continuation of Temporary Injury Award

If you wish to apply for continuation of a Temporary Injury Award, you must contact Departmental HR, in writing, outlining the reasons why you feel that a continuation of the Award is appropriate.

If it is not clear from your application that this is, in fact, an absence attributable to an injury previously deemed to be a qualifying injury, or if further medical opinion is required, DHR will refer your case to OHS.

OHS will advise Civil Service Pensions on the outcome of the OHS examination. CSP will then make the decision to accept or reject your application and will inform HRConnect of their decision.

You will receive a decision in respect of your application from HRConnect. If your application is successful you will be requested to complete and return a Statement of Social Security Benefits form to HRConnect as soon as possible, as the amount of social security benefits you receive may impact on sickness related benefits that are payable and / or your tax or national insurance contributions.

What if I have received compensation as a result of an injury involving a third party?

If you have received compensation as a result of an injury involving a third party, any advance of salary paid to you during your absence must be refunded. You must alert your legal representative to this procedure by forwarding to them the relevant documents from the Third Party Claims information pack,

issued to you when you reported the third party injury. When a refund of the advance of salary, or a proportion of the advance, is made the period of sickness absence, or a proportion of it can be excused from reckoning against the maximum periods of paid sickness absence set out in the Sickness Absence section of the HR Handbook.

USER GUIDE FOR LINE MANAGERS


Managing sickness absence is a key part of your job. You will find that managing the vast majority of spells of sick absence present no difficulty, however from time to time you will come across situations that are complex or sensitive and draw extensively on your management skills. These can involve some of the most difficult aspects of management and may require assistance and advice from your Departmental HR, [OHS](#) and [Welfare Support Service](#). No matter how long or short an absence, as line manager you must manage the individual who is ill and ensure that the work continues to be done.

The following information provides detailed guidance on what you should do to manage the absence. But before moving on, it is important to highlight ways to help keep the work moving:

- Consider the most urgent areas of work
- Balance the extra work against what other members of the team are engaged in
- Recognise that additional work for other staff might have an adverse effect on them
- Consider whether you need an additional resource for the expected period of the sickness absence.

Step 1 Identify sickness absence

You should ensure that all members of your team are aware that if they are absent due to sickness they should contact you or a more senior officer in accordance with [Sickness Absence Policy](#) [3.01](#), [Sickness Absence policy](#).

 They must:

- Notify you or a more senior officer on the first day of absence as early as possible (within an hour of their normal starting time);
- State the nature of their illness and when they expect to return to work;
- agree the next date of contact;
- say whether they intend to consult their doctor;
- advise you of any work related issues.

In certain cases, for example stress related illnesses; the reason for the staff member's absence may require you to seek early intervention. You should contact DHR for advice on how to proceed in these cases. Further information can also be found at [7.01, Referrals & Interventions user guide](#) in this Handbook.

If the job holder does not contact you on the first day of absence by the arranged deadline, you should attempt to get in touch with them. If, on day two, contact has not been established, you should contact Departmental HR for advice on how the absence should be recorded.

Occasionally you may have a member of staff who is absent due to an infectious disease or an industrial injury; in these instances you should immediately notify HRConnect who will arrange for the appropriate procedures to be initiated. [Industrial Injuries and Diseases](#).

If an employee has notified you of an absence due to injury as a result of third party negligence you must notify HRConnect on the appropriate form. HRConnect will send out a pack to the employee containing information about third party claims, the relevant extract from the HR Handbook and a letter to be forwarded to their legal representative.

Step 2 Open or update sickness record

LINE MANAGER – NOTIFYING AND RECORDING THE CONTINUING ABSENCE

As soon as you become aware of or receive new information on a sickness absence case, you must open or update the member of staff's sickness record with the known dates and reason for their absence using the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Sick absence entry" screens.

HRConnect uses a standardised list of reasons from the Sickness Absence Recording Tool (SART) to record absences. Line managers are required to record sickness absences by selecting one of the reasons that are listed on the drop down menu on HRConnect. Before inputting the Sickness Reason you should familiarise yourself with the [SART list](#) to ensure you choose the appropriate category to which the illness type belongs. You should avoid selecting the 'Unknown causes/Not specified' codes unless specifically recorded as such on the Self Certificate or Statement of Fitness for Work.

All sickness absence should be certified, either by a self-certificate or a Statement of Fitness for Work (Fit Note) from a Doctor. However in most cases, at the time of opening the absence on HRConnect you will have received neither, in which case you will enter uncertified. However when you do receive the certificate the absence screen on HRConnect must be updated.

Opening an absence is only step 1 of 2; you are also required to input the dates of the Self-Certificate / Fit Note on the Medical Certificate Entry screen. You should note that the Absence screen and the Medical Certificate Entry screen are separate screens and one does not automatically update the other.


You are also reminded that an absence should not be created each time you receive a certificate. You only need to update the Medical Certificate Entry screen in the case of a continuing absence. The end date of absence should not be entered until the staff member returns to work.

If problems or error messages are encountered when entering backdated records/entries you should contact HR Connect, for guidance.

If the member of staff's absence is longer than originally expected, they should again contact you and indicate:

- the specific reason for absence;
- whether they have consulted their doctor;
- the likely date of return to work;
- the date of their next contact.

If their absence extends beyond seven calendar days, they must obtain a statement of Fitness for Work signed by their doctor. This must be forwarded to you as soon as possible.

If this indicates that the jobholder "may be fit for work" you must review the GP advice and consider any temporary workplace adjustments to enable the jobholder to return to work.  [Link to 'Fit Note' information](#). You should contact DHR if you need further assistance.

After entering any self-certification or medical statement on the system you must forward the original copies to HRConnect ensuring the officers payroll number is on the certificate. These will then be scanned and retained on record.

If you consider that the self-certification process is being abused it can be withdrawn and the member of staff will need to provide a statement of Fitness for Work signed by their doctor to support their absence. You should consult with DHR before taking any action.

Where an officer has notified you that they are eligible to claim Employment Support Allowance, you should alert HRConnect of this when forwarding medical certificates. HR Connect will then scan the Medical Certificates, and forward the original to the SSA for benefit purposes.

Step 3 Receive notification of expiration of certification period

When a staff member's certification period is due to expire, you will be notified by an email alert.

Notification will be sent to a Line Manager Level 2 or above. Seven days after expiry of medical

evidence a certification request will be issued by HRConnect to the member of staff. If, in the meantime you receive medical evidence, or feel it would not be appropriate for the letter to issue you may wish to override the alert. If this is the case, you should complete form HR SAB 1.17 and return to HRConnect immediately. ***This must be done at Line Manager Level 2 or above.***

Step 4 Identify need to initiate further action

On becoming aware of a staff member's absence from work you will be required to take the following action, where appropriate:

- Maintain regular contact with the absent staff member
- Where appropriate, initiate the [7.01, Referrals and Interventions user guide through DHR](#) where you identify a staff member's absence as being potentially long term, stress related, serious, or resulting from an accident at work. You may also consider whether or not early intervention by a Welfare Support Service would be beneficial
- Initiate the Reporting of an Injury process where the absence is the result of an injury at work [7.02, Reporting an Injury](#)
- Initiate the [6.03, Discipline process](#) where a member of staff does not provide appropriate medical evidence.

You will also receive notification if the member of staff is currently within a probation period, casual contract or has reached a trigger point within the inefficiency process.

Step 5 Agree phased return to work, if recommended (*Long Term Sickness Absence only*)

Where a phased return to work has been recommended you must contact the officer, if they have not already contacted you, in advance of their return to work. The purpose of this is to draw up an agreed phased return plan between you and the officer and, if appropriate, the Welfare Officer and DHR. This plan should include;

- proposed duration of the reduced hours arrangement
- number of hours to be worked each week/each day of each week;
- the scope and range of duties involved;
- procedures for reviewing the phased return plan including agreement of any changes.

Once this is agreed you must update the HRConnect system, using Line Manager self service, as follows:

- Select absence management
- select Phased Return
- select employee
- select add phased return
- enter start date, end date and review date.

This must be done prior to the employees return.

You will then receive an alert from HRConnect to complete the phased return instruction form. On completion, this form, which will include hours to be worked, adjusted duties etc, must be copied to DHR when you are returning it to HRConnect. The information you provide on this form will be used by HRConnect in the Phased Return Plan letter to the employee, you should therefore ensure the information you provide is accurate.

When the officer returns to work you must update the HRConnect Manager Self-Service screens with details of the staff member's actual days and hours worked on a weekly basis, following system alerts for you to do so. **You should ensure that any periods of approved annual leave are recorded as attendance on the time sheets. You should also record Public or Privilege Holidays as hours attended if they fall within the officer's normal work pattern.**

If the officer does not return on the agreed date but an alternative date is agreed immediately you should go into the employees phased return details and change the start date. This will then prompt

another alert and you should follow the instructions as above. If a new date is not agreed, you should delete the Phased Return details from the employee's record.

You should review the progress of the member of staff under the phased return to work arrangements on an ongoing basis. Should difficulties arise during the phased return period (e.g. the officer is unable to complete the agreed number of hours or fulfil the agreed duties), you should contact DHR and HR Connect immediately and if necessary the details of the phased return plan may be revised.

A phased return to work pattern must be agreed by a line manager level 2 or above and the instructions sent to HRConnect by a Line Manager Level 2 or above. A Line Manager Level 3 may *update* the weekly returns on the system but they must be *authorised* by a Line Manager Level 2 or above. If you are not a Line Manager Level 2 or above you must re-assign this task to an appropriate Line Manager.

Step 6 Update staff records

When a member of staff returns to work after a period of sickness or injury, they must complete a Self-Certificate of Sickness, using the HRConnect Employee Self-Service "Self Certification Form" screens for absences up to and including seven calendar days, or provide Statements of Fitness for Work for absences of more than seven calendar days.

If your member of staff does not have access to HRConnect Employee Self-Service you should provide them with a Self Certification Form on their return to work. On receiving the completed form you must update the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Self Certification Form" screens with the relevant details on their behalf. Where members of staff provide you with Statements of Fitness for Work, you should, after updating the medical evidence screen send the original copies of these certificates to HRConnect, ensuring the officers payroll number is on the certificate.

Step 7 Validate sickness details

You must compare and review original reasons for sickness with all validated submitted self-certificate sickness dates and Medical Statements and notify the member of staff verbally if there are any inconsistencies or issues arising from your review, for example, time gaps in between the issue of certificates.

You should also advise the officer that certificates must be forwarded to you promptly in order that their Occupational Sick Pay is not withheld.

Please ensure if you originally input sickness reason as unspecified, you must now update the record with the correct reason for absence.

Step 8 Close sickness record

You must close the staff member's sickness record using the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Sick absence entry" screens when the member of staff returns to work.

Please note after closing sickness record you will not be able to make any further changes. Therefore it is essential that the dates and reason for absence is recorded accurately before closing the record.

Links to E-learning

 [Lesson 3: Line Manager Reviews and Approves Self Certification and Closes Sickness Record](#)

 [Lesson 2: Line Manager Enters a Medical Certificate \(Hospital\) and Updates Sickness Record](#)


Step 9 Conduct return to work interview

Non-Industrial staff

When the member of staff completes the self cert form online the system sends an approval request to you. Your reminder to do the RTW interview will be in the body of the approval request.

Non-Industrial and Industrial staff


The return to work interview should be conducted within two days of the staff member's return to work. At the interview you will discuss, where appropriate;

- The staff members sickness absence record
- Any possibility of inefficiency absence being taken  [6.06 INEFFICIENCY POLICY](#)
- Consideration of any Health & Safety issues, for example, the need for a risk assessment or workplace adjustments
- Whether or not a referral to the Occupational Health Service is necessary
- Other support bodies which are available to the member of staff, for example, the Welfare Support Services, or Employee Assistance Programme
- Any work related developments that have occurred during the absence

Before conducting this interview you may wish to consider the following information:

- Any relevant Occupational Health Service report summaries
- Sickness absence record
- Inefficiency sickness absence policy

If there are any concerns in relation to a staff member's sickness absence, it is important that this is dealt with in line with the procedures taking account of previous sickness absence cases to ensure consistency in the way these cases are managed.

Following the interview you must update the staff member's sickness record with their return to work details using the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Return to Work Interview Form" screens. You are also required to sign a paper copy of the completed  [Return to Work form \[SAB 1.32b\]](#) along with the member of staff to confirm that the notes taken during the meeting accurately reflect the discussion that took place. This signed form must be sent to HRConnect to be scanned and retained on file. A copy of this form must also be given to the officer.

If you receive an alert from HR Connect in relation to a NICS sickness Absence review point breach by a member of staff which you have considered at the RTW stage, you should refer to step 10 below.

Step 10 Review sickness absence record

You will receive a system alert when a staff member's sickness absence levels reach a pre-determined review point ie 4 occasions, 10 days. When you receive this information you must consider whether any further action is required, for example, referring the case to the Inefficiency Sickness Absence process.

Once you have taken advice from *Departmental HR and decided on the appropriate course of action to deal with a staff member's levels of absence, you must update the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Sickness Trigger Decisions Form" screens with the details of the action to be taken.

*The role and responsibility of Departmental HR and Line Management in the management of sickness absence can vary with some Departments delegating much of the day-to-day management and decision making in sickness cases to line management, while others retain much of the responsibility within Departmental HR. Your Departmental HR will advise you on the correct process for your Department.

FOR LINE MANAGERS OF INDUSTRIAL STAFF

You must ensure that you follow the Line Management steps fully, this section only relates to forwarding relevant documentation to Admin staff to input. Admin actions are limited to only relevant admin steps.

You should complete the Time and Claimable Allowances form and forward, including the date the sickness commenced, the reason for absence* (using the HRConnect sickness absence reasons) along with any Medical Certificates, to Administration Staff, who will input the authorised form including any Medical Certificates on the system, print the review screen, and attach to the authorised form (this

is optional). Administration Staff will then submit the data on the system. Absences should be input before timesheet entry.

*You should familiarise yourself with the [SART list](#) to ensure you choose the appropriate category to which the illness type belongs. You should avoid selecting the 'Unknown causes/Not specified' codes unless specifically recorded as such on the Self Certificate or Statement of Fitness for Work.

All data entered by Administration Staff will be verified through a peer-to-peer check, where a different member of Administration Staff will validate the information recorded against the authorised form and any supporting documentation. This check can be conducted online or with a printout of the review screen offline. Where the data has been inputted correctly, the Administration Staff must sign to verify that the check has been performed. Where the data has been inputted incorrectly, Administration Staff will update the system with the correct data and resubmit. Where the data has been inputted incorrectly, and the absence date is in the past, Administration Staff will complete the Retrospective Recording of Absence form [LVE 2.3] and send to HRConnect, who will update the system with the correct data and resubmit. Where there are any queries, the Administration Staff should contact the line manager without any delay.

The Line Manager of the Administration Member of Staff must conduct a percentage check post pay day (please refer to your Department's management checking process). Where the data has been input incorrectly, and the absence date is in the past, Administration Staff should follow the procedures above.

Documentation should be retained locally by the Business Unit, except for original Medical Statements, which should be forwarded to HRConnect to be scanned and retained. Please ensure that the payroll number has been notified on the Medical Statement.

USER GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTAL HR

Step 1 Review sickness absence reports

As well as periodic departmental reports Departmental HR will also receive reports of individuals who have reached pre-determined absence review points.

The role and responsibility of Departmental HR and Line Management in the management of sickness absence can vary with some Departments delegating much of the day-to-day management and decision making in sickness cases to line management, while others retain much of the responsibility within Departmental HR. ***Please be aware of the correct process for your Department.***

Below is an example where the responsibility for the management of Industrial Staff sickness absence lies with line management but where DHR retain the responsibility for Non-Industrial Staff sickness absence management.

Example:

For industrial staff, Line Management will decide on the appropriate action to be taken, including referring this issue to another process, for example, the Inefficiency Sickness Absence process. Departmental HR will be consulted in this process.

For non-industrial staff Departmental HR will review departmental sickness reports, and identify which, if any, individual's sickness absence levels require further review. This process will include a review of absence records. Any individual staff member issues, and departmental/section absence records, should be discussed with Line Management and appropriate action decided. This may include referring the case to another process, for example, the Inefficiency Sickness Absence process. (For guidance on instigating the Inefficiency Sickness Absence process, please refer to that User Guidance)

Reference should be made to the following, where further information is required:

o [3.01 Sickness Absence](#) policy

o [6.06 Inefficiency Sickness Absence](#) policy

Once Line Management has been consulted and the appropriate course of action decided, Departmental HR will issue the appropriate correspondence via e-form.

Step 2 Review Service-wide sickness absence levels

Corporate HR will review and discuss Service wide absence reports with Departmental HR. Where appropriate, Corporate HR will forward recommended actions to be initiated by Departmental HR.

Step 3 Authorise request from Line Management to override automatic process in relation to expiration of certification period

When a staff member's certification period is due to expire, the line manager will be notified by an email alert. **Notification will be sent to a Line Manager Level 2 or above.** Seven days after expiry of medical evidence a certification request will be issued by HRConnect to the member of staff. If the line manager, in the meantime, receives medical evidence, or feels it would not be appropriate for the letter to issue they may wish to override the alert. If this is the case, they should complete form HR SAB 1.17 and return to HRConnect immediately. **This must be done at Line Manager Level 2 or above.** HRConnect will then send the form to you for approval, or otherwise.

Step 4 Review requests for extension of Occupational Sick Pay beyond a prescribed maxima

Where a member of staff has requested an extension of their Occupational Sick Pay beyond the prescribed maxima, HRConnect will forward a copy of the request and blank form to Departmental HR. Departmental HR should consider the application and instruct HRConnect on the action to be taken.

Step 5 Consider OSP extension on successful Temporary Injury Awards (TIA)

In most cases, a staff member will automatically be sent details of application for TIA by HRC where appropriate. If this is not the case, and where a staff member has requested an application for TIA, HRC will provide them with an application booklet for completion.

Civil Service Pensions (CSP) make the decision on award of Injury Benefit based on the completed TIA application booklet and the application of the Civil Service Injury Benefit Scheme rules.

The decision to pay extension of OSP is the responsibility of DHR. In most cases where CSP has confirmed that the injury meets the qualifying conditions of the Scheme, OSP should be extended for the length of the qualifying absence, up to a maximum of 6 months on full pay. However, DHR may decide that an extension of OSP is not appropriate in some cases.

You should inform HRConnect of your decision on the 'Instruction on OSP Extension' form HR SAB 3.6. HRConnect will then issue the appropriate letter to the employee.

Further information can be found at

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk/injury_benefits_scheme.pdf

.  [\(3.09 Industrial Injuries and Diseases policy para 5.3.3\)](#)

Step 6 Consider applications for continuation of Temporary Injury Award

If an employee wishes to apply for continuation of a Temporary Injury Award, they must contact Departmental HR, in writing, outlining the reasons why they feel that a continuation of the Award is appropriate.

If it is not clear from the application that this is an absence attributable to an injury previously deemed to be a qualifying injury, or if further medical opinion is required, you should refer the case to OHS.

OHS will advise Civil Service Pensions on the outcome of the OHS examination. CSP will then make the decision to accept or reject the application. The process as outlined above will then be followed.

Step 7 Consider staff member's eligibility for Pension Rate of Pay

In cases where a member of staff has exhausted their full and half pay entitlements to Occupational Sick Pay they may be entitled to Pension Rate of Pay. If DHR is satisfied that there is a reasonable prospect of recovery and return to work PROP can be paid for a maximum period of 12 months over a 4 year period. DHR must inform HRConnect of the appropriate action on the 'Nil Pay Decision' form HR SAB 1.66.

Step 8 Consider reinstatement of OSP/PROP during Final Written Warning.

OSP and PROP cease to be payable during the first 6 months of the warning period following the issue of a final written warning. Entitlement to sick pay should be reviewed after 6 months and only restored where the sickness absence record is considered to have been satisfactory during the first 6 months of the warning period.

You should note that the HRConnect system automatically restores OSP/PROP at the end of the 6 month period therefore if there are cases where DHR decide that OSP/PROP entitlement should not be restored after the first six months of a Final Written warning, you must inform HRConnect in a timely manner. Please see below the process to be followed.

- The report "Final Written Warning Sick Absence" which is available on Discoverer, should be run monthly to identify those staff nearing the end of the first 6 months of their final written warning period.
- If DHR decide that OSP should not be restored for a member of staff identified they should complete the form HR-SAB 3.5a 'Instruction to extend OSP exclusion' and forward to HRConnect.
- HRConnect will then produce the letter "continue to withhold OSP" for your signature. OSP will be withheld for a further 6 months in all cases.

For Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Chief Electoral Office (CEO) and for Departments with Pay-only personnel

Departmental HR should complete the relevant Absence Form and send to HRConnect by email or white mail. Absence Forms are defined as:

- Instruction on OSP Extension Form (SAB 3.5)
- Temporary Injury Award (DHR) Form (SAB 4.22)
- Record Absence Form (SAB 1.92)

HRConnect will update the system with the Absence details and will issue communication as appropriate (to the employee for Pay-only personnel within departments or directly to the NIAO and CEO) by email or white mail.