

## **Inefficiency Sickness Absence (Long-Term Sickness Absence)**

This user guide follows on from the 3.01, Sickness Absence user guide in this Handbook. When you have been absent for 20 consecutive working days or more your absence is considered to be long-term. The primary aim in managing long-term sickness absence is to help facilitate your return to work at the earliest reasonable point. This guide sets out the process that will be followed during your absence and it also sets out your role and the role of Line Management and Departmental HR in the process.

In all long-term sickness absence cases Departmental HR and line management will work closely with you, your Trade Union representative (should you request such involvement) and the Occupational Health Service (OHS) through appropriate and timely referrals to facilitate an early return to work, where possible. The Welfare Support Service also has a key role in managing sickness absence, both in terms of providing support and advice when you are ill and liaising with Departmental HR and line management as required.

It is a condition of your employment that you co-operate fully with the sickness absence procedures, including attendance at meetings with line management or Departmental HR and for occupational health assessment at OHS when required. Failure to co-operate could result in the withholding of Occupational Sick Pay in accordance with the Sickness Absence policy and / or other disciplinary action. Continuing failure to co-operate could lead to dismissal on the grounds of misconduct.

### ***In summary:***

#### ***When you have been absent for 20 consecutive working days or more you will:***

- Receive an Information letter ([Step 1 Receive an Information letter](#))
- Maintain regular contact with Line Management ([Step 2 Maintain regular contact with Line Management](#))
- Receive a visit from a Welfare Officer ([Step 3 Receive a visit from a Welfare Officer](#))
- Attend Occupational Health Service ([Step 4 Attend Occupational Health Service](#))
- Attend Review Meetings ([Step 5 Attend Review Meetings](#))

#### **Line Management will:**

- Record the continuing absence ([Step 1 Record the continuing absence](#))
- Maintain regular contact with member of staff and DHR ([Step 2 Maintain regular contact with member of staff and DHR](#))
- Conduct/ provide input to Review Meetings ([Step 3 Conduct/ provide input to Review Meetings](#))

#### **Departmental HR will:**

- Maintain regular contact with line manager / member of staff ([Step 1 Maintain regular contact with line manager / member of staff](#))
- Consider OHS and Welfare referral ([Step 2 Consider OHS and Welfare referral](#))
- Conduct Review Meetings ([Step 3 Conduct Review Meetings](#))
- Advise the member of staff of the outcome of the Review Meeting ([Step 4 Outcome of Review Meeting](#))

In addition to this guide you should also refer to the following, in this Handbook:

- [3.01, Sickness Absence policy](#)
- [6.06, Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy](#)

## **Inefficiency Sickness Absence (Long-Term Sickness Absence)**

### **User guide for Staff**

#### **Step 1 Receive an Information letter**

When you have been absent for 20 consecutive working days you will receive a letter that outlines the sources of help and support available, such as the Welfare Support Service (WSS) and the Employee Assistance Programme. In addition, this letter will provide details on how your case will be handled, including medical referrals and contact arrangements, and will serve to notify you of the process to be followed should your absence continue.

#### **Step 2 Maintain regular contact**

It is important that regular contact between you and your line management is maintained throughout your absence. The regularity and form of contact should be agreed between you and your line management (normally this would be every two weeks). This contact should be by the most appropriate means, including e-mail, letter, telephone or home visits.

You must arrange to update your line management regularly on any medical consultations that may provide further information on the progress you are making and a possible date of return to work, or if your health has not improved or has deteriorated further. This will help your line manager both to decide the most appropriate course of action to assist you and also to enable suitable planning/organisational arrangements in terms of the workload during your absence to be made.

#### **Step 3 Receive a visit from a Welfare Officer**

Departmental HR or line management may refer your case to the WSS who will then contact you to discuss your circumstances. Welfare will also remind you of the support services available and provide you with support and guidance to help facilitate your return to work.

#### **Step 4 Attend Occupational Health Service**

Referral to the OHS is an important intervention and can be made at any time where Departmental HR or line management considers it appropriate. You may be referred to OHS in order to obtain advice on the following:

- any medical condition affecting your performance or attendance at work;
- whether a definitive return to work date can be given (and if not, an indication of likely timescale for recovery and return to work);
- whether you are currently fit to carry out the duties of your grade;
- whether there are any adjustments to the work tasks or environment that would help facilitate your rehabilitation or an early return to work, and the likely duration of any adjustments;
- whether your health problem is likely to recur and/or affect future attendance;
- other issues specific to your individual case;
- where appropriate, whether the criteria for retirement on medical grounds are satisfied. See HR Handbook, Early Retirement on Medical Grounds (Section 2.04).

#### **Step 5 Attend Review Meetings**

Formal Review Meetings will be held from time to time, as determined by Departmental HR or line management. The meetings may be timed to coincide with the outcome of the OHS referral process and will be led by Departmental HR or line management. You have the right to be accompanied at any such meeting by a Trade Union representative or work colleague.

The purpose of the Review Meeting is to discuss your absence and to give you an opportunity to present any information that you think may be relevant to your case. The meeting will also be used to consider any OHS medical opinion that may be available on your fitness or otherwise for work and to explore any reasonable adjustments that might facilitate your return to work at the earliest reasonable point.

Departmental HR or line management will write to you and provide a summary of the Review Meeting, which will be copied to your Trade Union representative or work colleague, if you were accompanied. While every effort will be made to agree the summary of the meeting, should there remain a disagreement over the factual contents of the summary, your comments will be appended to the summary of the meeting.

Every effort should be made to attend all review meetings, however should you be unable to attend due to your illness, you can provide a written statement which will be considered by Departmental HR and/or line management in your absence.

It is important to note that while the formal warning process as set out at paragraph 5.2 – 5.10 of the Inefficiency Sickness Policy will not apply when you are on a period of long-term sickness absence, dismissal will remain an option should the Department decide that it can no longer sustain your absence.

## **Inefficiency Sickness Absence (Long-Term Sickness Absence)**

### **User guide for Line Management**

*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.. While these guides have been designed to accommodate these different approaches, Departmental HR will retain the key management / decision making role. It is therefore important to ensure regular communication is maintained between Line Management and Departmental HR in the management of individual sickness absence cases.*

Even if your DHR retains much of the responsibility for decision making, managing sickness absence remains a key part of your job and it is important that you maintain regular communication with Departmental HR in the management of individual sickness absence cases.

Long term sickness absence cases are often 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 all sickness absence effectively.

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.

In addition to this guide you should also refer to the following, in this Handbook:

- [3.01. Sickness Absence policy](#)
- [6.06. Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy](#)

### **Step 1 Record the continuing absence**

Every time a medical certificate is received you must update the member of staff's sickness record using the HRConnect Manager Self-Service "Medical Certificate Entry" screen.

You are 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.

**Please do not use the 'save for later' button when opening or updating a sickness absence.**

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

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.

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.

When a staff member's certification period expires, 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 you subsequently 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.**

If a 'Fit Note' received indicates that the jobholder "may be fit for work" you should contact the staff member to discuss. You must review the GP advice, in consultation with DHR, and consider any temporary workplace adjustments to enable the jobholder to return to work.


## **Step 2 Maintain regular contact with member of staff and DHR**

It is particularly important to keep in touch with those on long term sickness absence and such contact will need to be handled sensitively. People absent for a long time can find the prospect of returning to work daunting. Keeping in touch with your staff will show that you are concerned about their well-being and recovery and make them feel they are still part of the team.

The regularity and form of contact should be agreed between you and the member of staff (normally this would be every two weeks). This contact should be by the most appropriate means, including e-mail, letter, telephone or home visits.

When you contact someone you should usually ask about their current situation and what steps they are taking to enable an early return to work. You should also keep them informed as to what is going on in the office.

It is vitally important that you keep DHR updated on any progress or change to the member of staff's circumstances. This will ensure that the appropriate action is taken at all times.

Where phased return to work arrangements are considered appropriate, you should refer to the  [7.01, Referrals and Interventions - line manager user guide](#). DHR can also provide further assistance.

## **Step 3 Conduct/ provide input to Review Meetings**

Formal Review Meetings will be held from time to time, as determined by you or Departmental HR (depending on the responsibilities within your Department). The meetings may be timed to coincide with the outcome of the OHS referral process and will be led by you or Departmental HR (as above). The member of staff will have the right to be accompanied at any such meeting by a Trade Union representative or work colleague.

The purpose of the Review Meeting is to discuss the absence and to give the member of staff an opportunity to present any information that they think may be relevant to their case. The meeting will also be used to consider any OHS medical opinion that may be available on the individual's fitness or otherwise for work and to explore any reasonable adjustments that might facilitate their return to work at the earliest reasonable point. The member of staff will also be advised of the current status in the management of their case.

You / Departmental HR will write to the member of staff and provide a summary of the Review Meeting, which will be copied to their Trade Union representative or work colleague, if they were accompanied. While every effort will be made to agree the summary of the meeting, should there remain a disagreement over the factual contents of the summary the member of staff's comments will be appended to the summary of the meeting.

If the member of staff is unable to attend the Review Meeting due to illness, they can provide a written statement which will be considered by Departmental HR and/or you in their absence.

## **Inefficiency Sickness Absence (Long-Term Sickness Absence)**

### **User guide for Departmental HR**

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. While these guides have been designed to accommodate these different approaches, Departmental HR will retain the key management / decision making role. It is therefore important to ensure regular communication is maintained between Line Management and Departmental HR in the management of individual sickness absence cases.

#### **Step 1 Maintain regular contact with line manager / member of staff**

It is particularly important to keep in touch with those on long term sickness absence and such contact will need to be handled sensitively. People absent for a long time can find the prospect of returning to work daunting. You should ensure that Line Managers are keeping in touch with staff to show that they are concerned about their well-being and recovery and make them feel they are still part of the office.

It is vitally important that DHR and line management liaise on any progress or change to the member of staff's circumstances to ensure that the appropriate action is taken at all times.

#### **Step 2 Consider OHS and Welfare referral**

Early intervention is key to the successful management of sickness absence cases. The Welfare Support Service (WSS) has a key role in managing sickness absence, both in terms of providing support and advice to the individual when they are ill and liaising with Departmental HR and line management as required.

Referral to the OHS is also an important intervention and can be made at any time where Departmental HR or line management considers it appropriate. All absences of 20 working days or more must be reviewed with a view to referral. Earlier or more urgent referrals to the OHS may be made where Departmental HR or line management considers such an intervention to be helpful either to the officer or to the management of the case, eg stress related absences should be referred to OHS and WSS on the first day of notification.

You may decide to refer the officer to the OHS in order to obtain advice on the following:

- any medical condition affecting performance or attendance at work;
- whether a definitive return to work date can be given (and if not, an indication of likely timescale for recovery and return to work);
- whether they are currently fit to carry out the duties of their grade;
- whether there are any adjustments to the work tasks or environment that would help facilitate rehabilitation or an early return to work, and the likely duration of any adjustments;
- whether the health problem is likely to recur and/or affect future attendance;
- other issues specific to the individual case;
- where appropriate, whether the criteria for early retirement on medical grounds are satisfied. See HR Handbook, Early Retirement on Medical Grounds (Section 2.04).

Following the OHS appointment you must forward all papers to HRConnect to update the system, scan and retain.

### Step 3 Conduct Review Meetings

Formal Review Meetings will be held from time to time, as determined by you or the officer's line manager (depending on the responsibilities within your Department). The meetings may be timed to coincide with the outcome of the OHS referral process and will be led by you or the line manager (as above). The member of staff will have the right to be accompanied at any such meeting by a Trade Union representative or work colleague.

When you have determined that a Formal Review Meeting is appropriate, you should forward instruction to HRConnect (HR-SAB 1.39).

The purpose of the Review Meeting is to discuss the absence and to give the member of staff an opportunity to present any information that they think may be relevant to their case. The meeting will also be used to consider any OHS medical opinion that may be available on the individual's fitness or otherwise for work and to explore any reasonable adjustments that might facilitate their return to work at the earliest reasonable point. The member of staff will also be advised of the current status in the management of their case.

If the member of staff is unable to attend the Review Meeting due to illness, they can provide a written statement which will be considered by Departmental HR in their absence.

Departmental HR will write to the member of staff and provide a summary of the Review Meeting, which will be copied to their Trade Union representative or work colleague, if they were accompanied. While every effort will be made to agree the summary of the meeting, should there remain a disagreement over the factual contents of the summary the member of staff's comments will be appended to the summary of the meeting.

### Step 4 Outcome of Review meeting

Whilst the Written Warning and Final Written Warning process as set out at paragraph 5.2 – 5.10 of the Inefficiency Sickness Absence Policy do not apply when staff are absent on a period of long-term sickness absence, dismissal will remain an option should the Department decide that it can no longer sustain the absence. The officer will be made aware of this throughout their absence.

You should complete Meeting Outcome Form (HR-INSA 1.19) and forward to HRConnect to update the system and generate the relevant letter (if appropriate). The letter may confirm:

- that the Department is continuing to manage the case as at steps 1 to 3 above
- agreed phased return to work arrangements and/or any adjustments required [7.01, Referrals and Interventions - line manager user guide](#).
- Dismissal [6.06 Inefficiency Sickness Absence Policy \(paragraph 5.12\)](#)
- Medical Retirement [2.04 Early Retirement on Medical Grounds](#)

If the employee returns to work Departmental HR / line management will also review the officer's overall sickness absence record on their return to work and may consider that formal warning action is appropriate.

The terms of paragraph 4.5 – 4.11 of the Inefficiency Sickness Absence Policy must be followed before proceeding with formal warning action.