

Attendance Management: Policy guidance for managers

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Introduction

The aim of this guidance is to support managers implement the Attendance Management Policy and provide information on good practice. You should read it in conjunction with the policy document.

Reporting sickness absence

Employees are required to contact their manager personally by telephone as soon as reasonably practicable (and no later than one hour after their expected start time) on the first day of their absence from work. If a member of your team does not arrive at work or you do not receive notification of their absence, you should attempt to make contact with them to ensure their wellbeing.

When you speak with the employee show concern and establish the following:

- ✔ The nature of their illness or injury and whether the absence may be due to an injury at work or perceived to be related to work;
- ✔ If appropriate, the approximate expected duration of their absence;
- ✔ If the absence is likely to continue beyond one day, agree the appropriate ongoing method and frequency of future contact and confirm their contact details;
- ✔ Any outstanding or urgent work that requires attention.

If you are unable to contact the employee, you should inform HR for advice who will establish if any other contact details are held for them, get in touch with an emergency contact, or send them a letter.

Recording sickness absence

When a member of your team informs you that they are absent due to sickness, you should record their absence on HR Connect as soon as possible.

It is important to record all periods of sickness absence to ensure that any concerns or patterns do not go unnoticed or unsupported and to prompt conversations with employees to support the early identification of any intervention that may help them to address any risks or issues.

✔ This [link](#) will take you to a video that explains how to record an absence on HR Connect

Records regarding employees' health are classified as a special category of personal data under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). You should ensure that:

- ✔ Sickness absence information provided by the employee is recorded accurately on HR Connect;
- ✔ Information disclosed by the employee is kept confidential and only shared with those directly involved in the management of the sickness absence;
- ✔ You retain any notes from return to work meetings or informal discussions in a secure and confidential location in accordance with the regulations.

When you record the absence and the reason is due to pregnancy, stress, mental health or an infectious disease, you will receive an automatic email from HR that outlines further steps that you are required to undertake. If the absence is due to an injury or accident at work, an automatic email will notify Health & Safety of the incident.

Maintaining contact

Maintaining regular contact can help to reduce the natural anxieties that employees may have about being absent or returning to work. It also allows you to offer support and keep informed of changes in their circumstances, enabling you to plan work and manage cover during their absence and prepare for their subsequent return to work. The method and frequency of contact will be dependent upon the duration and nature of the absence.

Each time you are in contact with the employee, you should:

- ✔ Jointly agree how and when to next make contact.
- ✔ Ensure that the discussion focuses on the employee's health, wellbeing, and their return to work, including any measures to facilitate a return.
- ✔ Discuss work that requires attention in their absence, but keep this to a minimum if possible.

In the event that you are unable to maintain contact with an employee, you should contact HR for advice.

✔ Tips for contacting an employee who is absent from work are contained in the **Appendix**

Certification

Self-certification

Employees can 'self-certify' any periods of sickness absence up to and including seven calendar days on HR Connect. When the employee returns to work, you should ensure that they update their HR Connect record to 'close' the absence. Failure to do this could affect their pay.

Statements of Fitness for Work (Fit Note)

Upon receipt of a fit note, employees are required to contact their manager by telephone to discuss the contents of the fit note. They should retain the original and send a copy of the fit note to HR who will input the details onto HR Connect.

You should ask the employee to provide the following information from their fit note:

- ✓ Date they were assessed and whether they may be fit/unfit to attend work;
- ✓ If unfit, the date/duration that they should refrain from attending work;
- ✓ Diagnosis of the condition that is causing the absence from work;
- ✓ Any recommendations that the doctor has made.

The fit note can state either that an employee 'may be fit for work' taking into account the doctor's opinion and advice stated on the note, or that the employee is 'not fit for work'. The fit note gives a doctor the opportunity to provide recommendations that may be appropriate and help facilitate a return to work for the employee, for example a phased return, amended job duties, altered hours of work or workplace adaptations. Whilst there is no legal obligation to comply with any recommendations made on a fit note, you should carefully consider whether it is possible to accommodate any of the recommendations.

Where a fit note contains recommendations by a doctor, you should always contact HR for advice. It is important to note that recommendations are based on the information that is provided to them by the employee about their role or workplace. Therefore, where adjustments or extra support are recommended, and in cases of long-term absence, further advice should normally be sought from Occupational Health. If it is not possible to facilitate the change(s) that the doctor recommends, you should explain this to the employee and treat them as being unfit to carry out their role.

Employees do not need to be signed back to work and can return to work before the expiry of their fit note with the agreement of their manager. Depending on the nature of the illness, you may wish to seek advice from Occupational Health if you are concerned that the employee may not be well enough to return to work. Employees should return to work once their fit note expires or they will require a new fit note from their doctor.

Returning to work

When a member of your team returns to work and 'closes' their absence on HR Connect you will receive an automatic task email prompting you to hold a return to work meeting with them..

You should acknowledge and discuss every period of sickness absence, ideally on their first day back or as soon as reasonably practicable. In many cases, this is likely to need only a “light touch” discussion with a brief note to record that this has taken place.

The purpose of a return to work meeting is to provide an opportunity to:

- ✔ Welcome the employee back to work and seek confirmation that they are fit to be back at work;
- ✔ Ensure that the employee has/will confirm the details of the absence and record their return to work on HR Connect;
- ✔ Seek the cause(s) of the absence, giving the employee the opportunity to highlight any relevant concerns;
- ✔ If the employee raises any issues, discuss potential solutions and if appropriate refer to available employee support mechanisms;
- ✔ Discuss any additional support that would help to facilitate a successful return to work, this may include recommendations provided by their doctor in the fit note;
- ✔ If appropriate, agree a review period and/or any actions required, e.g. reasonable adjustments such as a phased return to work, workplace assessment or an OH referral;
- ✔ Share anything that has happened at work during the period of their absence.

If the employee has a disability and you agree any reasonable adjustments to support them, you should refer to the Disability Guidance for Employees and Managers and complete a **Disability Reasonable Adjustments Agreement** together.

✔ A template to structure a return to work meeting is available in the **Appendix**

Phased returns

The premise of a phased return is that employees are well enough to undertake some work, and are likely, given time, to recover sufficiently to return to their role (or previous role with some adaptations). Where the employee is not capable of any work, a phased return will not be appropriate

A phased return to work should be based on medical advice, either in a fit note from the employee’s doctor or in an OH assessment. If a fit note recommends a phased return, further advice should be sought from OH. Phased returns are on full pay for up to four weeks. Whilst specific arrangements will be dependent upon individual circumstances, it not expected that a phased return would last longer than four weeks.

Where a phased return has been supported by OH, you should agree the following with the employee:

- ✓ The duration of the phased return and when it will start;
- ✓ Initial working pattern and what is expected in terms of progressive build-up of hours and/or resumption of normal duties;
- ✓ Work that will be undertaken during the phased return;
- ✓ The arrangements to monitor progress and identify any difficulties.

You should document the phased return agreement and regularly review the situation with the employee to ensure that the arrangements are supporting their return to work and that they are managing the gradual increase effectively. If their recuperation is faster than expected, change the arrangements to reflect this.

At the end of a phased return, if the employee considers that they are fit for work but still unable to resume their normal working pattern/duties, you can consider the following options:

- ✓ Temporary reduction in contractual working hours with associated reduced pay;
- ✓ Use of accrued annual leave either in one block or staggered over a period.

Whilst every effort will be made to support employees, there is no guarantee that a request of this nature will be granted and decisions will be dependent upon University needs at the time.

Managing frequent short term absence

Absence review points

You will receive an automatic email from HR Connect when a member of your team has had three or more occurrences of sickness absence (irrespective of length) in any six-month rolling period and this should prompt you to have a discussion with the employee. You should also review an employee's attendance record if you have concerns about their level of attendance, where an absence pattern appears to be present or there has been a frequency of partial day absences.

Understanding possible causes

There may be a variety of reasons for employees having frequent short-term absence, including:

- ✓ Disability or an underlying medical condition;
- ✓ Unusually high, but genuine, vulnerability to colds, flu etc.
- ✓ Excessive tiredness due for example to having additional responsibilities outside of work such as caring responsibilities or a second job;

- ✔ Personal or domestic problems;
- ✔ Specific problems in the workplace.

Return to work meetings are an opportunity to establish if there are any factors contributing to the absence and what, if any, support can be provided.

Possible impact of workplace factors

Factors in the workplace may cause or exacerbate frequent short-term absence. For example:

- ✔ Stress due to workload or pressure of work deadlines;
- ✔ Difficult working relationships or conflict with colleagues;
- ✔ Bullying, harassment, discrimination or victimisation;
- ✔ Anxiety relating to change initiatives, lack of clear goals, direction etc.

Where such issues are evident, you should complete a [Stress Risk Assessment](#) with the employee at the earliest opportunity and consider what support might be appropriate to resolve the issue. There is no strict format for completing the assessment and in most situations, it will structure a conversation with the employee to help identify appropriate actions to mitigate any sources of stress and address any areas of concern.

You should send a copy of the stress risk assessment to HR to retain on the employee's file. You should implement any agreed actions and review progress on a regular basis.

Identifying patterns

When reviewing an attendance record it is important to identify and discuss any patterns, which cause concern, for example, repeated absence on a particular day of the week or absence that tends to occur at a particular time in the month. Discussions about a potential pattern of sickness absence are best carried out by stating the facts and asking open questions, for example, saying that you have noticed that all of the absences have been on a Monday and inviting the employee to comment on that apparent pattern.

Informal support

In most cases, an early informal discussion between you and the employee will help to understand if there are any underlying issues and if so, establish appropriate support. It is important to handle discussions sensitively with the emphasis being on finding ways to support the employee and improve their attendance, wherever possible.

Where it is appropriate to review an employee's attendance record with them, you should prepare in advance of the informal meeting.

- ✔ Gather all of the facts before the meeting – collate/review the employee's absence record; notes of any return to work meetings; previous meeting notes/correspondence etc.
- ✔ Check if any agreed actions, improvement, reasonable adjustments (if any) have been achieved, implemented and if not, establish why not;
- ✔ Establish the issues of concern to be explored;
- ✔ Find a private location and a suitable date/time to discuss/explore the issues;
- ✔ Notify the employee of the arrangements for the informal meeting, explaining what you wish to discuss at the meeting.

✔ An example script for conducting informal meetings is contained in the **Appendix**

Setting an improvement target

If the employee has been absent on a number of occasions, it may be appropriate to set an improvement target over a specific period of time (review period) and hold regular reviews during this period.

If employees do not have a disability or underlying health condition, we expect them to have less than three occurrences of absence in any six-month rolling period. This should be the starting point when setting an improvement target for an employee. Improvement targets should be fair and realistic. Where the employee has a disability or underlying health condition, you should discuss with them what is reasonable in the circumstances, taking into account any relevant medical information.

You should contact HR for advice when determining an appropriate improvement target and review period for an employee.

Regular monitoring is important and you should meet with the employee to review their attendance, providing feedback on an ongoing basis and addressing any new concerns as they arise. No further action will be required where an improvement target has been set and the required improvement is achieved. You should advise the employee that if the improved levels of attendance deteriorate, it might be necessary for further action.

If a sufficient and sustained improvement is not attained during the review period, you should advise the employee that you will have to consider the situation further to determine next steps, which could include progressing to the formal procedure. In some cases, further exploration of the facts may be required. You should seek guidance as appropriate from HR.

Formal attendance review procedure

If you continue to be concerned about an employee's level of attendance and informal support is no longer appropriate, or has not succeeded in improving attendance to an acceptable level, you should consider whether it is appropriate to progress to the first stage of the formal attendance review procedure. You should contact HR for advice before holding a formal attendance review meeting.

There are three formal stages and the aim is always to resolve issues at stage 1, wherever possible. Timescales for each stage will depend upon individual circumstances and sickness absence issues will be dealt with over different periods. The point at which you may decide to move an employee to the next stage of the formal procedure will vary from case to case. Factors to take into account are:

- ✔ What the issues causing the absence are;
- ✔ What additional support could be given; and
- ✔ Whether attendance has improved as a result of the support;
- ✔ The effect that the absence is having on colleagues/service delivery.

The focus of the formal procedure is to support employees to achieve the required attendance level. Where an improvement target is set, regular review meetings should be held and at the end of the review period (or before if the employee's sickness absence exceeds the acceptable level), progress will be reviewed to assess if any further action and/or support is required. If the employee's attendance levels have not improved to an acceptable standard, you should move to the next stage of the formal procedure.

Formal stage 1 and 2 attendance review meetings

You should prepare in advance of holding a formal stage 1 or 2 attendance review meeting with the employee as follows

- ✔ Contact HR for support to notify the employee of the arrangements of the meeting in writing, ensuring the employee receives five working days' notice of the meeting.
- ✔ Agree with HR a private location and a suitable date/time to hold the meeting.
- ✔ Collate and review all of the facts before the meeting – the employee's attendance record; notes of return to work meetings; notes/correspondence of informal and formal discussions; OH reports and medical information;
- ✔ Check if the agreed actions, improvement, reasonable adjustments (if any) have been achieved, implemented and if not, establish why not;
- ✔ Identify the issues of concern to explore.

Conducting formal stage 1 and 2 attendance review meetings

At a formal attendance review meeting you will be expected to outline the sickness absence concerns that have led to the meeting and review the circumstances of the case and actions that have been taken to date. The employee has the opportunity to state their case and raise any factors that they wish to be considered. You should identify if there are any support measures, such as an OH referral, which may be beneficial, discuss any improvement targets, and review periods.

- ☑ An example script for conducting formal stage 1 and 2 attendance review meetings is contained in the **Appendix**

Possible outcomes of formal stage 1 and 2 attendance review meetings

When determining the outcome, you should consider:

- ☑ Any representations made by the employee;
- ☑ The nature of their illness/condition and prognosis based on the information available;
- ☑ Whether further medical input is necessary;
- ☑ If the employee has a disability, whether there are any adjustments that can reasonably be made;
- ☑ The likelihood of the employee achieving the required level of attendance in a reasonable timeframe and the impact that their continued absence is having on the University.

Possible outcomes of the meeting may include:

- ☑ Adjourn the meeting to obtain medical advice, or investigate matters further, and reconvene the meeting at a later stage;
- ☑ Decide that no further formal action is required at this stage and revert to informal support;
- ☑ Consider other options such as redeployment to an alternative role;
- ☑ Set an improvement target over a specified period.

You should communicate the outcome to the employee verbally wherever possible, and confirm in writing within five working days of the meeting.

If an improvement target is set, the timescale for improvement along with any support will be set out in the letter. It will also state the consequences of not meeting the improvement target within the review period. You should monitor the employee's attendance during the review period. At the end of the review period, or during it if the employee has further sickness absence that exceeds the required level, you should meet with the employee to confirm the outcome.

Stage 3 – capability hearing

If the employee does not achieve or sustain the required level of improvement in attendance during the stage 2 review period and the level of absence remains a concern, it may be appropriate to arrange a capability hearing.

You will be required to attend the capability hearing to present the management case and to answer questions.

Possible outcomes of a formal stage 3 capability hearing

When determining the outcome, the panel should consider the following:

- ✓ Any matters or mitigating factors that the employee raised;
- ✓ The nature of any illness and prognosis based on the information available and whether further medical information is required;
- ✓ If the employee has a disability, whether there any adjustments that can reasonably be made;
- ✓ The likelihood of the employee achieving the required level of attendance in a reasonable timeframe;
- ✓ Alternative options, such as ill-health retirement;
- ✓ The impact of the employee's continued absence on the University;
- ✓ The possible termination of employment after all other options have been fully considered and discussed with the employee, and after all possible adjustments have been made to support the employee's continuing employment.

Managing long-term absence

It is important that long-term absence (four continuous weeks or more) is managed proactively to support employees whilst they are absent, and to facilitate their return to work as soon as possible. Long-term absence may be attributable to an injury, operation, convalescence, diagnosis of a long-term disability, mental ill health; terminal illness etc. and any action taken will vary according to individual circumstances.

Keeping in touch

Employees who are absent for a long period may feel isolated and miss the social contact with colleagues. It is important that employees know that, even though they are absent from work, support continues to be available from the University, so you should keep in regular contact with them. This will also allow you to keep abreast of the employee's state of health, progress and readiness to return to work.

The method for keeping in touch should be appropriate to the situation and will be dependent upon the duration and reason for the absence. It is expected that generally contact will be at least every two weeks.

✔ Tips for contacting an employee who is absent from work are contained in the **Appendix**

Obtaining medical input

As soon as it becomes clear that an employee's absence will be long-term, you should speak with the employee about a referral to OH. The purpose is to obtain an assessment of the effects of their condition, the likely duration of the illness or condition and any recommended actions that could facilitate their return to work.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to meet an employee in their own home. You can only undertake a home visit with the agreement of the employee and by prior arrangement.

You will receive an automatic email from HR Connect when a member of your team has been absent for a continuous period of four weeks or more. If an early OH referral has not been made for the employee, you should discuss an OH referral with them at this stage.

✔ A script for discussing an OH referral with an employee is contained in the **Appendix**

Formal long term attendance review meeting

The purpose of a formal long-term attendance review meeting is to ensure the provision of appropriate support for an employee whilst they are absent, and to help facilitate their return to work. Upon receipt of an OH report, HR will contact you to discuss the report and arrangements for the meeting.

In advance of conducting a formal long-term attendance review meeting you should review the relevant medical information and status of any agreed actions or reasonable adjustments.

✔ A script for conducting a formal long term attendance review meeting is contained in the **Appendix**

When determining the outcome, you should consider:

- ✔ Any representations made by the employee;
- ✔ The nature of their illness/condition and prognosis based on the information available;
- ✔ Whether further medical input is necessary;
- ✔ If the employee has a disability, whether there any adjustments that can reasonably be made;

- ✓ The likelihood of the employee returning to work in a reasonable timeframe;
- ✓ The impact that their continued absence is having on the University.

Possible outcomes may include:

- ✓ Adjourning the meeting to obtain further medical advice, or investigate matters further, reconvening the meeting at a later stage;
- ✓ Agreeing a return to work programme, possibly with a phased return (where the employee has been absent for a long period);
- ✓ Continuing to provide ongoing support to allow a longer period of rehabilitation where there is a prospect of recovery within a reasonable timeframe;
- ✓ Considering other options such as redeployment to an alternative role or retirement on ill-health grounds.

You should communicate the outcome to the employee verbally wherever possible, and confirmed in writing within five working days' of the meeting.

As time goes on if the employee continues to be absent over a long period, or where a return to work programme has been unsuccessful, you should seek to obtain further medical advice about the employee's fitness to return to work. Further formal long-term attendance review meetings should be held at regular intervals.

Returning to work

Once Occupational Health or the employee's doctor/specialist has indicated that the employee may soon be ready to return to work, you should consider reasonable steps to help the employee return to work. You should take into account any advice provided by Occupational Health and/or their doctor/specialist.

Examples of appropriate steps might include:

- ✓ Meeting with the employee before they return to work to bring them up to date on work matters;
- ✓ Facilitating a phased return to work;
- ✓ Agreeing any support that will be available during the first few weeks/months and how progress will be monitored;
- ✓ Ensuring the employee is not faced with a mountainous backlog;
- ✓ Actively monitoring the situation for a period to ensure that the employee is coping being back at work.

Employees often feel very anxious about returning to work after a long period of absence. They may feel worried about how colleagues will perceive/treat them, particularly if their absence was due to mental ill health. If you take positive steps to make the employee feel welcome, it will help to integrate them back to work and make their return easier.

Ill-health retirement

It is always our aim to support an employee back to work after a long period of sickness absence. However, there will be rare occasions where there is no prospect of a return to work in a reasonable time and in those occasions you should explore the possibility of ill-health retirement with the employee. Ill health retirement is only a possible option if the employee is a member of one of the University's pension schemes and meets the eligibility criteria set out by the relevant pension provider.

If OH consider that there is no prospect of a return before retirement they may recommend early retirement on the grounds of ill health, following information received from the employee's doctor and/or specialist. The final decision on whether to grant ill-health retirement or not rests with the appropriate pension scheme provider.

Capability hearing

A capability hearing may be convened when an employee has been absent for an extended period, but not necessarily on a continuous basis and there is no reasonable prospect of returning to work in a reasonable timeframe, or sustaining a regular and acceptable attendance level at work.

You will be required to attend the capability hearing to present the management case and to answer questions.

Possible outcomes of a capability hearing

When determining the outcome, the panel will consider the following:

- ☑ Any matters or mitigating factors that the employee raised;
- ☑ The nature of any illness and prognosis based on the information available and whether further medical information is required;
- ☑ If the employee has a disability, whether there are any adjustments that can reasonably be made;
- ☑ The likelihood of the employee returning to work in a reasonable timeframe;
- ☑ Whether there have been any changes since the last meeting, either in relation to a possible return to work, permanently reduced working hours or redeployment to an alternative role;
- ☑ Alternative options, such as ill-health retirement;

- ✓ The impact of the employee's continued absence on the University;
- ✓ The possible termination of employment after all other options have been fully considered and discussed with the employee, and after all possible adjustments have been made to support the employee's continuing employment.

Occupational Health (OH)

Occupational Health referral

The policy outlines circumstances where you should always seek to refer an employee to OH. You may also seek to make an OH referral in the following situations:

- ✓ Where an employee has met the short term absence review point of three absences in a six month period and/or there is continued concern regarding short-term frequent absence despite informal discussions;
- ✓ Where an employee declares that they have an underlying health condition, or disability, or requests an OH referral themselves;
- ✓ To obtain preventative advice where you have concerns about an employee's health.

HR can provide you with support when making an OH referral.

Occupational Health assessment and report

You should discuss the reasons for the OH referral with an employee before completing a management referral form. Following an assessment, OH will provide a report that advises on fitness for work and the impact of any health conditions on the employee's ability to perform their role, including any reasonable adjustments or work modifications to consider.

Employee consent is required to progress an OH assessment. If the employee refuses, you should explain that decisions may be taken based on the information that is available, and without the benefit of medical input, which may be to their detriment.

Following an OH assessment, the employee has the opportunity to review the report and comment on any factual inaccuracies. Once the employee has given their consent to release the report, OH will send a copy to HR who will share the report with you.

Once you receive an OH report, you should arrange to meet the employee to discuss its contents including any recommendations. This meeting may be held under the informal or formal stages of the Attendance Review Procedure.

🔗 You can access further information about Occupational Health [here](#)

Alcohol and substance misuse

The inappropriate use of alcohol and substance misuse can create health, safety, attendance and welfare problems in the workplace. These situations should always be handled in a sensitive manner. We will support staff who may have become dependent on alcohol or drugs at the earliest opportunity, but will require them to commit to help themselves and follow treatment and professional advice. If an employee discloses to you that they have misused alcohol or substances, you should seek an OH referral to support them.

If an employee commits any disciplinary offence and alcohol and/or substances are found to be a factor, this may be considered but will not exempt the member of staff from the consequences of disciplinary action, poor performance or other considerations. Each case will be considered on its individual merits and support given wherever it is reasonable and appropriate to do so.

Trade Union Representatives

The attendance review procedure will apply for employees who are trade union representatives, although no formal improvement target will be set, or notification of their dismissal made, until HR has notified a full time trade union official.

Tips for maintaining contact

It is the responsibility of both you and the employee to maintain contact during a period of sickness absence. The tips below are a guide only – they may not be relevant/appropriate for every case.

Preparation

Even a good working relationship may feel a little strained after a period of absence, particularly for the employee who may feel isolated from the workplace, even after a short spell away. A few tips:

- ✔ Familiarise yourself with any information that has already provided by the employee, including the reason for the absence and the date that it began. Check if any specific contact arrangements are already in place.
- ✔ Make a note in advance of any specific issues that you want to cover.
- ✔ If contact is via a meeting at the University, ensure that a suitable meeting room is available, considering privacy and accessibility.
- ✔ If you are meeting the employee at their home, it is sensible to make another colleague aware of your plans, in case of any unforeseen issues or delays.
- ✔ If contact is via telephone make sure you are relaxed and free of pressure yourself. Remember the employee may well be anxious in anticipation of your call.
- ✔ It is important to keep communication channels open, friendly and positive

During contact

- ✔ The first few seconds of a call are crucial in determining a successful outcome. Build trust, empathise, and have an understanding approach.
- ✔ Decide if it is appropriate to provide a brief update on key events/changes that have happened in the school/service or wider University.
- ✔ Establish whether the employee considers their absence is attributable to a disability or is work-related but do not put pressure on them to discuss their condition if they are not forthcoming.
- ✔ If you believe that a referral to OH is required, explain why and obtain the employee's consent to progress this.
- ✔ If an OH assessment has already been undertaken, discuss any recommendations made by the OH Adviser/Physician.
- ✔ Establish whether the employee has received an indication from their doctor or consultant when they might be able to return to work and if so establish if any support/adjustments are required to facilitate an effective return to work.
- ✔ Ensure the employee is aware of additional sources of advice/support and signpost them as appropriate.

- ✓ If the employee has been absent for a long period, establish whether a phased return to work would be beneficial and if so, start to consider options.
- ✓ Agree future contact arrangements to review/discuss the situation further.

After contact

- ✓ Make a record of the discussion and deal with any action points agreed during the discussion.

Relationship difficulties

Where relationship difficulties are a factor in the sickness absence, consider methods of resolution such as workplace mediation and facilitated discussions. The Dignity at Work Policy contains information about informal and formal options for resolving issues between staff.

Conducting a return to work meeting

Employee details			
Full name:		Manager:	
School/Service:		Date:	
Suggested points to cover			
<p>Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ The aim of a return to work meeting is to support the employee and reduce future absences. ☑ Return to work meetings should be informal, handled consistently and sensitively and held in a private space, out of earshot of colleagues or students. They should be factual and carried out in a supportive and positive manner. ☑ In advance, you should collate and review the employee's attendance record, any OH reports and notes/action points arising from previous RTW meetings. ☑ Ideally you should meet with the employee on their first day back to work, or as soon as possible afterwards. ☑ You should keep a note of the return to work meeting. <p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Welcome the employee back to work, explain that the purpose of this informal meeting is to support to them with their return to work. ☑ Seek confirmation that the employee is fit to be back at work – if there is any doubt, seek advice from HR. <p>Where there are ongoing health issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Review with the employee their attendance record, notes from previous return to work meetings and establish what help, support or treatment the employee is currently receiving (from their doctor etc.) If appropriate, discuss seeking a referral to OH. ☑ Establish whether there are any underlying personal or work-related concerns. If there are personal issues, discuss whether there are any support mechanisms/actions that the employee or manager may reasonably take to seek to address the problems, e.g. access the employee counselling service. If the problems are work-related, see below for further considerations. ☑ Establish if any reasonable adjustments are required to their role, working arrangement or work environment. If so, ensure a Disability Reasonable Adjustments Agreement is completed. ☑ If appropriate, agree a review period and/or any actions required. 			

- ☑ If the absence relates to a disability, pregnancy or workplace accident, ensure you complete an appropriate risk assessment with the employee.

Where there is frequent short-term absence or a pattern of absence is developing

- ☑ Discuss the cause(s) of absence and the likelihood of the illness or condition recurring giving the employee the opportunity to highlight any relevant issues.
- ☑ If appropriate, explore any appropriate support mechanisms, for example the Employee Assistance Programme or OH referral.
- ☑ Inform the employee that whilst we appreciate that there will be some level of absence due to illness, regular attendance by staff is important to ensure that the University runs smoothly.
- ☑ Explain we monitor attendance levels and review an employee's attendance record whenever there has been three or more occurrences of sickness absence in any six-month rolling period; or where there is a concern regarding absence, patterns or partial day absences.
- ☑ Confirm the next steps within the attendance review procedure (referring to, and sharing the Attendance Management Policy) should there be further absence.

Where the employee considers that the absence is work-related

- ☑ Discuss the cause(s) of absence and likelihood of the illness/condition recurring and give the employee the opportunity to highlight any relevant issues.
- ☑ Depending upon the issues, consider appropriate options/next steps. You may wish to reflect on the matter and seek advice from HR after the meeting.
- ☑ If the employee raises concerns about work-related pressures, or discloses that they are suffering from work-related stress, you should arrange to complete a stress risk assessment with them to help identify the potential sources of stress and ways to address the areas of concern.
- ☑ If the absence is due to an accident at work, an accident form should be completed and sent to Health & Safety.
- ☑ Agree any appropriate action/review periods, if appropriate.

After the meeting

- ☑ Ensure that you 'complete' the Return to Work Meeting task on HR Connect assigned to you.
- ☑ Advise the employee that you will capture the key points of the discussion (including any agreed actions) and if appropriate will follow this up by email to support the process and ensure clarity.
- ☑ Follow up on any actions that you are responsible for, e.g. completing an OH referral form, arranging any other help or appropriate support, ensuring any reasonable adjustments are actioned and reviewed after an agreed period.
- ☑ Be available to meet with the employee, should they have any concerns or questions following the meeting.



Summary of conversation / any agreed actions

Conducting an informal meeting to discuss frequent absence

Employee details			
Full name:		Manager:	
School/Service:		Date:	
Suggested points to cover			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Thank the employee for attending and emphasise that this is an informal meeting aimed at supporting them to reach and maintain a sufficient attendance level and where relevant, to address any other related concerns. ☑ Inform the employee that whilst we appreciate that there will be some level of absence due to illness, regular attendance by staff is important to ensure that the University runs smoothly. We monitor attendance levels and review an employee's attendance record whenever there has been three or more occurrences of sickness absence in any six-month rolling period; or where there is a concern regarding absence, patterns or partial day absences. ☑ Explain the concerns (referring to the relevant review point if appropriate), provide examples of the absences and outline the impact that these concerns are having. Explain that the purpose of this meeting is therefore to establish if there are any underlying issues or factors contributing to the absence. If so, we can provide appropriate support to help the employee improve their attendance level going forward. ☑ Together explore any possible reasons, specific problems or underlying issues preventing the employee from attaining or maintaining a sufficient attendance level, e.g. work related or personal issues. ☑ Explore how to address the issues and discuss any support mechanisms that may be appropriate to help them. Consider any suggestions they offer to address the concerns. ☑ Identify if there is anything else that you can reasonably do to help the employee attain an acceptable attendance level. Consider the need for external support, for example Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme etc. ☑ Where relevant, confirm the improvement in attendance that is expected over a specified review period (always seek advice from HR before setting an improvement target). Ensure that the employee is fully aware of the expectations and the need for sustained improvement. Explain that if they do not achieve the required improvement, it may be necessary to progress to the formal stage of the attendance review procedure. 			



- ☑ Confirm that the monitoring of their attendance will continue and there will be regular review meetings.
- ☑ Advise the employee that you will capture the key points of the discussion (including any agreed actions and timescales for improvement etc.) and will follow this up by email to support the process and ensure clarity.

Summary of discussion / any agreed actions

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Next review meeting:

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Conducting a formal stage 1 or 2 attendance review meeting

Employee details			
Full name:		Manager:	
School/Service:		Date:	
Suggested points to cover			
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Thank the employee for attending and confirm with them that they understand that this is a formal stage 1 or 2 attendance review meeting conducted in line with the University's Attendance Management Policy. ☑ Note that the employee was given the opportunity to be accompanied and that they have chosen to be accompanied; or have chosen not to be accompanied. ☑ Explain to the employee why you have taken the decision to progress to this stage of the attendance review procedure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This may be due to their absence level remaining a concern and informal support has not succeeded in improving it to an acceptable level or is no longer appropriate; or - If the required level of improvement in attendance has not been achieved or sustained during the stage 1 review period. ☑ Explain that the aim of this meeting is to support the employee to reach and maintain a sufficient attendance level and where relevant, to address any other related concerns. <p><i>The specific points to discuss with the employee will depend upon individual circumstances but may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ The reasons for and impact of the absence giving the employee the opportunity to explain their absence and raise any mitigating circumstances. Discuss any specific problems or underlying issues that are preventing the employee from attaining or maintaining a sufficient level of attendance. ☑ Explore how to address the issues and discuss any support mechanisms that may be appropriate to help the employee improve their attendance level going forward. Consider any suggestions they offer to address the concerns. ☑ Where the employee has been absent on a number of occasions, establish the likelihood of further absences. 			

- ✔ Establish if the employee has a disability that may necessitate reasonable adjustments.
- ✔ Determine if further medical advice is required.
- ✔ Establish what, if any, other support measures might help to improve the employee's health and/or attendance. Consider the need for external support.
- ✔ Check if the employee has any further information that they wish to provide or have any final questions.

Closing the meeting

- ✔ Advise the employee that you will consider all of the information provided during the meeting in order to reach a decision.
- ✔ Confirm with the employee that they will receive the outcome in writing within five working days'. If there is to be a delay to this timescale, you will notify the employee of this and the reasons for it.
- ✔ Explain to the employee if they are unhappy with the outcome, they have the right of appeal. Any appeal must be lodged within ten working days' of being notified of the decision.
- ✔ Close the meeting and thank all parties for attending.

Discussing an OH referral – Long term absence

- ✔ Emphasis that this is an informal discussion/meeting. The purpose is to support the employee whilst they are absent from work and help facilitate their return. It also provides an opportunity to address any other related concerns.
- ✔ Discuss the nature of the illness or medical condition with the employee. If appropriate, ask how long they anticipate the absence lasting.
- ✔ Inform the employee that you now wish to refer them to the University's OH provider because they are likely to be/have been absent from work for a continuous period of four weeks.
- ✔ Explain that the purpose of an OH referral is to obtain information about the impact of their medical condition on their ability to perform their role and any reasonable adjustments to facilitate their return to work and/or support them when they are back at work.
- ✔ Inform the employee that after the OH assessment, they will have the opportunity to review the OH report and comment on it before it is sent to the University. You will then contact the employee to arrange a meeting to discuss the report and agree next steps with them.
- ✔ If appropriate, explore together any specific problems or underlying issues relating to the absence, e.g. work related or personal issues. Discuss how to address any issues and discuss any support mechanisms that may be appropriate to help the employee. Consider any suggestions they offer to address the concerns.
- ✔ Advise the employee that you will capture the key points of the discussion and will follow this up by email to support the process and ensure clarity.

Conducting a formal long term attendance review meeting

Employee details			
Full name:		Manager:	
School/Service:		Date:	
Suggested points to cover			
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Thank the employee for attending and confirm with them that they understand that this is a formal long-term attendance review meeting conducted in line with the University's Attendance Management Policy. ☑ Note that the employee was given the opportunity to be accompanied and that they have chosen to be accompanied; or have chosen not to be accompanied. ☑ Explain to the employee that this meeting is being held because they are absent from work on a long-term basis, or where a return to work programme has been unsuccessful. ☑ Explain that the aim of this meeting is to ensure the provision of appropriate support for the employee whilst they are absent and to help facilitate their return to work. It also provides an opportunity to discuss any other related issues and where relevant, address any other concerns. <p><i>The specific points to discuss with the employee will depend upon the individual circumstances but may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Establish how the employee is and the likely duration of their absence, taking into account any medical advice. ☑ If you have received an OH report, review that together discussing any recommendations. ☑ Discuss any support mechanisms that may be appropriate to improve the employee's health or facilitate their return to work. Consider any suggestions they offer. ☑ Establish if the employee has a disability that may necessitate reasonable adjustments. ☑ Determine if further medical advice is required. 			



- ☑ Check if the employee has any further information that they wish to provide or have any final questions.
- ☑ Ensure that the employee has a copy of the Attendance Management Policy and is aware of their entitlement to sick pay.
- ☑ Agree the arrangements for future contact.
- ☑ Confirm with the employee that you will follow up in writing confirming any agreed actions and next steps.
- ☑ Close the meeting and thank all parties for attending.

Summary of discussion / any agreed actions

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Next review meeting:

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