

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER
SICKNESS ABSENCE
POLICY

01/06/2010

INTRODUCTION

The University wishes to promote the health, safety and welfare of its staff within the workplace. The University is committed to supporting and assisting individual members of staff who may have health difficulties and as a caring employer, does not expect its employees to attend for work when they are medically unfit to do so. The University does, however, require employees to account for absences. It is important therefore that a consistent approach is adopted, providing support to the employee, recognising individual circumstances whilst ultimately securing their return to work. It is recognised that good, consistent management practice can contribute to a reduction in absence levels.

The University has a range of policies in place relating to health and well being. In applying the Sickness Absence Policy, cognisance should be given as appropriate to these policies, details of which are available at the web site addresses listed in *Appendix 7*.

The main objectives of this policy are therefore to:

- Provide a fair and consistent approach in dealing with the absence of members of staff due either to periods of short-term sickness or long-term sickness.
- Manage absence owing to sickness in a manner that enables the University to maintain staff effectiveness and efficiency, while at the same time providing assistance where possible, to staff to overcome or cope with their ill-health.
- Ensure that all staff and line managers are aware of their respective responsibilities and that any problems and instances of working practices or environments which may be contributing to sickness absence are dealt with at an early stage.

The policy is not designed to deal with unauthorised absence or failure to provide appropriate certification; these are separate disciplinary matters and should be dealt with accordingly.

The provisions of this policy will apply to all categories of staff.

This Policy is effective from 1 June 2010.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 The University aims to balance the sensitive nature of genuine individual sickness and invalidity against its need to be publicly accountable for its resource allocation. It is essential that the following procedures be carried out with tact and sensitivity and a realisation that the management of sickness absence is the joint responsibility of the manager and the individual member of staff to ensure the best possible outcome for all parties.
- 1.2 Managers need to allow for open and frank discussion with staff in a non-threatening atmosphere
- 1.3 Employees are expected to attend for work regularly at the times required and, as far as is reasonably practicable, to minimise absence from work and to keep in reasonable contact with the University throughout any period of sickness absence as per section 3.
- 1.4 The University recognises the potential relationship between disability and sickness and the Policy therefore takes into account the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. (DDA). It recognises that disability may not be accompanied by sickness, but that sickness absences may be caused by disability. Where an employee has a disability, any reasonable adjustment to accommodate this person for example, adjustments to premises, alteration of working hours, acquiring modified equipment, provision of training, will be made to facilitate regular attendance at work. In this case advice should be sought from and/or the individual should be referred to Equality and Diversity Services.
- 1.5 Managers will continuously monitor staff attendance levels and carry out reviews of absence levels on a regular basis including absences for which medical certificates or statements have been provided. Human Resources will ensure consistency of treatment of staff across the University and will produce a set of guidelines on monitoring staff attendance for management.
- 1.6 The manager should seek advice from Human Resources as soon as a member of staff's attendance gives cause for concern. It may be appropriate for the manager to consider referring the member of staff to Occupational Health, either as part of the process of reviewing absence records or where concerns about health or ability to undertake duties exist. Human Resources will be able to provide further advice and support
- 1.7 If an employee's attendance pattern is such that it can be reasonably considered that there is deliberate abuse or manipulation of the University's absence procedure or sickness payment entitlements then that matter may also be treated as misconduct and will be investigated appropriately.

For example:

- a pattern of sickness absence that maximises pay or enhancement entitlements;
 - a regular pattern of absence immediately following public or recognised holidays or weekends;
 - a pattern of absence that coincides with certain events;
 - a pattern of absence that is designed to frustrate the University's threshold levels/warning systems (see section 6 below).
- 1.8 If a member of staff indicates that their absence is due to a disability they should be referred to Occupational Health and advice should be sought from and/or the individual should be referred to Equality and Diversity Services.

2. ROLE IDENTIFICATION

2.1 Role of Deans/PVC's/Directors/Heads of Department

- Have overall responsibility and be accountable for sickness absence management for members of staff within their faculty/school/department or other areas of responsibility
- Ensure that employees within their area are aware of the sickness absence reporting procedures
- Have specific responsibility as the manager of staff within the faculty/school/department and to undertake the identified responsibilities under the relevant procedures
- If appropriate, to provide advice and support to managers in their area of responsibility in dealing with all aspects of absence management.

2.2 Role of Manager/Supervisor

The Manager/Supervisor should:

- Have specific responsibility for managing absence within their defined area
- Ensure contact procedures are followed by all members of staff
- Ensure reason(s) for absence is (are) recorded (except in instances where the reason for absence is of a sensitive or personal nature) NB: No copies of sickness forms should be retained within faculty/school/department
- Discuss sickness absence with members of staff after periods of absence, provide opportunities for staff to disclose a disability or long term health condition, and encourage staff to contact Equality and Diversity Services accordingly (staff may refer to the University's Disability Disclosure Guidelines for All Line Managers for further information and advice)
- Draw the attention of his/her Dean/Head of School/Department to a potential problem and take appropriate action in conjunction with Human Resources in accordance with the provisions of the policy
- Analyse absences, paying particular attention to the frequency and patterns of absence
- Depending on the health issue in question, individual staff members may wish to discuss the issue with a male or female manager or Human Resources.

2.3 Role of Human Resources

- Responsible for the application of all aspects of the policy ensuring Deans/Heads of School/ Departments/Managers/Supervisors fulfil their obligations in relation to the policy
- Ensuring Deans/Heads of Department/Managers/Supervisors receive appropriate training in discharging their responsibilities in relation to the Policy
- Provision of advice and support in the application of the Policy in individual cases
- Ensuring all staff are advised on the Policy in relation to their rights and responsibilities.
- Maintaining records of all absence
- Provision of appropriate statistical management information to assist in monitoring
- On a regular basis, review absence levels both of individuals and within sections to ensure consistency of treatment
- Review and development of the Policy, in conjunction with the trade unions
- Meet with Heads of Schools/Departments/Faculty Administration on a regular basis to review attendance levels.

2.4 Role of Occupational Health

Occupational Health provide the University with specialist advice about an individual's fitness for work (both prior to employment and during sickness absence), as well as health issues within the workplace. They will liaise with other medical staff as necessary (eg GPs and hospital consultants), and the University's Head of Equality and Diversity Services where sickness absence may relate to a disability or long-term health condition under the Disability Discrimination Act.

With regard to sickness absence the Occupational Health service can provide considerable support to both the manager and the individual. Although the role of Occupational Health is advisory it is important that due consideration is given to the advice offered and should normally be acted upon.

Occupational Health may carry out workplace visits to help with their assessments.

2.4.1 *Case Management*

Occupational Health may recommend Case Management. Case Management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy for options to enable the staff member to return to work. This process will be facilitated by Occupational Health and will include the staff member, line manager and Human Resources.

2.4.2 *Rehabilitation*

Occupational Health may recommend that a member of staff is fit to attend work despite ill health on a rehabilitation programme. This programme may recommend adaptations to work, working practices, changes in duties or alterations to working hours but will focus on maximising the employees independent functioning. In the case of a disabled member of staff this would constitute reasonable adjustment as defined by the DDA. It is acknowledged that return to work goals must be achieved within a specified time frame.

2.4.3 *Referral*

An employee may be referred to Occupational Health if there is a concern about the length, frequency or pattern of sickness absences, or if there is a concern about their health or ability to carry out their duties even though they are at work (individual members of staff may also, where appropriate, self refer to Occupational Health). The purpose of the referral will usually be to establish one or more of the following:

- Whether or not the individual concerned is suffering from a health problem which will have an impact upon their fitness to work
- The likely duration of any absence or the minimum period for which they are likely to be absent
- Upon return to work ascertain if they can carry out all duties or whether limitations will apply. If limitations will apply, whether these limitations are likely to be temporary or permanent
- What steps could be taken by the University to assist with an individual's return to work
- The likelihood of ongoing episodes of sickness absence, whether such absences will be of long or short duration, the time period during which these absences are likely to occur and whether or not they are predictable
- Whether the employee's health problem may in any way be related to their work and recommendations as to actions which may prevent further problems

- If appropriate, whether the condition is likely to constitute a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Whether there are any long-term concerns regarding the individual's fitness to work which would indicate the need for further action to be considered which may include variation of contract, redeployment, or ill-health retirement.

The line manager will liaise directly with the employee to explain the reasons for their referral to the University's Occupational Health service and will provide Occupational Health with relevant details through completion of a Referral Form. A copy of the Management Request for Advice Form is attached as *Appendix 2*.

Occupational Health will maintain confidentiality in relation to medical information. Maintenance of this is also crucial in retaining the trust and confidence of the employee concerned. This does not however impact upon the quality of advice that can be offered since it is the implications of any diagnosis in relation to fitness to work, not the diagnosis itself, which the manager requires to be advised of.

The report from Occupational Health will contain only as much information as is necessary in order to make any necessary management decisions. Medical information, including disability, will only be disclosed with the employee's consent and if it is relevant to the individual's health and safety at work.

In the event of a referral by a manager the report will be forwarded to the line manager in confidence and will be copied to Human Resources. The line manager will treat the report in strict confidence. A copy will also be retained on the employee's personal file held in Human Resources and Occupational Health. The employee will also receive a copy of the report from Occupational Health.

In the case of self referrals reports will only be forwarded to line management (copied to Human Resources) with the consent of the individual. Occupational Health do not write reports to a line manager or Human Resources when staff self refer to Occupational Health. However, if the member of staff's illness is likely to have an impact on the work environment Occupational Health staff will seek the consent of the staff member to write to the line manager and Human Resources. It is the line manager's responsibility as part of the process of reviewing absence records or where a concern about health, well being or ability to undertake their duties is of concern to complete a management referral.

Employees are required to attend any appointment made for them to see Occupational Health. If the employee is unable to attend an appointment, they should let Occupational Health know as soon as possible (giving a minimum of 24 hours notice except in exceptional circumstances) and an alternative date and time will be arranged. Occupational Health will in turn inform their line manager. It is viewed as unacceptable to re-arrange appointments on more than two occasions unless in exceptional circumstances. In particular circumstances and at the employee's request, it may be appropriate for the Occupational Health specialist to undertake a home visit.

Employees should be aware that if they refuse to see the Occupational Health, or fail to attend for appointments, Occupational Health would be unable to obtain an appropriate medical opinion (GPs will usually only provide advice when approached by an Occupational Health specialist). In such a situation, Occupational Health will make a decision about the appropriate course of action based on the information which it has available (employees should also be warned that a refusal to meet with Occupational Health for assessment may be regarded as a failure to carry out a reasonable instruction, which may result in disciplinary action). In instances in which a

GP's advice is sought, employees should not be penalised through the failure of GPs to provide timely information.

2.5 Role of Equality and Diversity Services

Equality and Diversity Services will liaise with a disabled member of staff and their line manager where necessary to ensure that reasonable adjustments are addressed. They will also act as the point of contact with the Disablement Advisory Service, where appropriate.

3. REPORTING OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

3.1 Reporting Arrangements

Faculties/Schools/Departments should follow the agreed procedure for reporting absence and should specify an individual to contact and also identify an alternative (who should normally be of an equivalent or higher grade).

PVCs/Deans/Directors will ensure that employees are aware of the sickness absence reporting procedures. The following reporting arrangements should be adhered to:

At the earliest possible opportunity on the first day of absence employees are required to report sickness absence to their line manager. This should normally be within the first hour of their usual start time or for shift workers an hour before their shift is due to start. If the line manager or nominated deputy is not available, the employee should as a last resort, report their absence to Human Resources, leaving a contact number if possible so that their manager may make contact in exceptional circumstances if there is a significant operational necessity (such contact should not include a request for the employee to return to work). Only in exceptional circumstances should a friend or colleague call on behalf of the employee. Specific arrangements may need to be made for an employee who may live alone and/or does not have access to a telephone. Failure to make contact will be recorded as absent (not sick) and not paid. However, if it is subsequently established that a genuine reason exists for not reporting absence in accordance with the arrangements, payments will be restored.

In all cases, individuals who report their absence must:

- (i) Give information regarding the reason for their absence, 'sick' or 'unwell' is not an acceptable explanation for absence from work, more specific information should normally be given for example, back pain, flu symptoms etc except in instances where the reason for absence is of a sensitive or personal nature.
- (ii) State whether they anticipate attending a doctor before they can give any more details.
- (iii) Give an indication of likely duration of absence and when they will contact their manager again.

There is a management responsibility for reporting the sickness absence to the Faculty/School/Department Absence Data Co-ordinator – a list of the Faculty/School/Departmental monitoring officers is available at www.ulster.ac.uk/ [to be inserted] on the first day of reported absence in order to initiate sick pay calculations, giving the following details:

- (i) the employee's full name
- (ii) job title or designation
- (iii) an employee number, if known
- (iv) the first day sickness occurred
- (v) the likely duration of sickness

The relevant detail should be conveyed to the Absence Data Co-ordinator through completion of a sickness notification form. A copy of this form is attached as *Appendix 3*.

If the absence continues to the fourth day, the employee should contact their line manager or if not available, the nominated deputy again to indicate the absence as continuing and to provide further information as to the probable duration of their illness. If the fourth day should fall on a Saturday, Sunday, Public Holiday or a day designated as a holiday by the University (and is not a normal working day for the member of staff concerned); the employee should contact the line manager or nominated deputy on the next working day.

During absences of eight days or more (including weekends and public holidays), the employee is required, as far as reasonably practicable, to keep their line manager or nominated deputy, advised as to their progress at regular intervals. Depending on individual circumstances, the interval between contact should be agreed between the employee and their line manager (normally at least weekly except in cases of hospitalisation).

Where the employee does not want to let their line manager or nominated deputy know the reason for their absence because it is of a sensitive or personal nature, they should follow the reporting procedures above, but explain to their line manager or in his/her absence, the nominated deputy, that they wish to talk to another member of staff about the reason (this would normally be a member of the Human Resources department). Alternatively, the employee may provide a Doctor's certificate/statement from the first day of absence (the employee may send this directly to Human Resources, and must also let their line manager know that they have done this).

3.2 Sickness Certificates

If an employee returns to work before the eighth consecutive calendar day he/she must self-certify the absence by completing a Return to Work pro-forma (*Appendix 3*). The form will normally be completed during the return to work meeting. For any period of absence in excess of seven consecutive days, an employee must furnish a medical certificate but must also, on return from sick leave, provide a SC2 form, available from the Doctor's surgery to self-certify the first seven days of absence if not covered by the medical certificate.

The form, when signed, and medical certificates, when received, should be immediately sent to the Faculty/School/Department's Absence Data Co-ordinator, who will immediately forward them to Human Resources to avoid any delay in payment. (Alternatively if the reason for the absence is of a sensitive or personal nature, the employee may send this directly to Human Resources, and must also let their line manager know that they have done this.)

For staff located at Coleraine or Magee, the details may be faxed or emailed to Human Resources at Coleraine. For staff located at Jordanstown or Belfast, the details may be faxed or emailed to Human Resources in Jordanstown. Contact details may be found in *Appendix 7*.

The Faculty/School/Department's Absence Data Co-ordinator will enter the sickness absence on the University's on-line attendance management recording system.

The medical certificate must be from the employee's usual doctor or group practice or from the hospital at which the employee is receiving treatment. A certificate from any other source will only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances (for example illness occurring whilst in a different jurisdiction). If an employee is unwilling to obtain a medical certificate from their normal doctor or group practice, they may be required to attend Occupational Health.

The University has the right to request the employee to obtain a medical certificate/statement with effect from the first day of absence (if there are particular concerns regarding an individual's absence) but this should be discussed with Human Resources and not enforced as a matter of routine. If necessary, this request will come from Human Resources. The University will meet the NHS charge for any additional certificate required of the employee for this reason only. If necessary the University will write to the employee's GP confirming that it will meet the NHS charge.

Staff who are employed as food handlers and have been absent from work with vomiting and/or diarrhoea, which has persisted for more than twenty-four hours, will be subject to specific procedures under the Food Hygiene Regulations. Separate guidance will be provided to staff in these categories.

Failure by an employee to follow the reporting and certification procedures could lead to disciplinary action under the relevant disciplinary procedures (although on a first occasion, a manager should remind a member of staff of the requirements) and may result in non-payment.

In the event of absence resulting from an injury or disease attributable to University employment, employees must report this to their line manager who will, if appropriate, arrange an appointment with the University's Occupational Health Physician and ensure all necessary reports are completed for example Health & Safety Services Accident Reports.

3.3 Initiating and Maintaining Contact During Sickness Absence (where reporting procedures have not been followed)

If an employee does not attend work and makes no contact in accordance with the reporting procedure or fails to maintain regular communication throughout the period of absence, management should liaise with the Human Resources department in order to agree an appropriate mechanism for making and maintaining contact.

3.4 Home Visits

Home visits will be undertaken after prior agreement with the member of staff. Such visits will normally be undertaken by Occupational Health and where appropriate by line management and/or Human Resources. Staff have the right to have a colleague or trade union representative present during a home visit.

4. MONITORING AND RECORDING SICKNESS ABSENCE

To ensure that this policy on managing sickness absence is applied effectively, thereby developing a fair and consistent managerial approach to work attendance, it is essential that sound monitoring procedures exist. Managers will continuously monitor staff attendance levels including absences for which medical certificates or statements have been provided.

The Human Resources department maintains a computerised record of sickness absences based both on self-certification forms and Doctor's certificates sent through from Faculties/ Schools/ Departments. These are kept in order to calculate sick pay entitlements, for absence monitoring purposes and in order that Occupational Health has as much information as possible in the case of employee referrals. Human Resources will provide sickness absence reports to management on a monthly basis. These reports will contain the following information:

- the number of absences in a rolling 12 month period
- the reason for each absence
- the length of each absence in working days only
- whether the absence is self-certified or authorised by a Doctor's certificate
- the cumulative number of working days absence in the year

Recording absences for monitoring purposes is in addition to the existing arrangements for the reporting of absence described in Section 4.

Monitoring absence in a systematic fashion also facilitates an early identification of an employee's health problems and instances of working practices or environments which may be contributing to sickness absence.

Absences in excess of 0.5 of an individual's working day will be recorded. However, if there are regular instances of a member of staff coming in late or leaving early due to illness, a record must be kept within the Faculty/School/Department and in the event of a review being required, considered alongside other sickness records. If a member of staff takes a holiday during a period of sickness absence this will be recorded as sick leave as long as the employee provides a letter from their Doctor prior to departure, confirming that they are still unable to work and confirming that the holiday will be beneficial to recovery. This is a legal requirement.

In normal circumstances an employee cannot commence a period of holiday leave immediately following a period of sickness absence unless previously booked.

If an employee is sick during a period of holiday leave, they will be regarded as being on sick leave from the date specified on any medical certificate. They may take the balance of their leave at a later date, on return to work, in accordance with the accrual and carry over of holidays and other leave.

Employees have the right to confidentiality regarding illness or disability. Considerable care should, therefore be given to the security of records. Those responsible for maintaining sickness records must ensure that absence records are held in a secure place and made available only to authorised staff. Employees should be permitted to see a copy of their own sickness record on request to Human Resources.

5. SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURES

The policy is designed, to give the employee guidance and support and facilitate sustained improvement in attendance. However the existing Conditions of Service outline both the University's and the employee's contractual commitments in relation to employment, including entitlements. Steps may be taken under this policy if an employee's sickness absence record is such that they are unable to fulfill their contractual commitments, even if the absences are due to genuine health problems.

It is essential that all sickness absence is notified in accordance with Section 4 and is reported, in a timely manner, by the staff member in accordance with the procedure below and recorded by the line manager (or nominee) for monitoring purposes.

5.1 The 'Return to Work' Meeting

As a matter of good practice, the line manager will hold a return to work meeting with the employee after a period of sickness or disability-related absence normally on the day of return to work and complete a Sickness Absence Form – a copy of this form is attached as *Appendix 3*.

The purpose of the return to work meeting is to provide an opportunity to discuss the reason(s) for absence and for the member of staff to raise particular concerns or additional reasonable adjustments that they may have. Concerns regarding an individual's attendance record may be brought to the employee's attention and ways discussed to help the employee to improve their attendance. Personal information provided during these discussions should be handled in confidence. The return to work meeting should also provide the member of staff with the opportunity to disclose a disability which may be affecting their attendance. If a member of staff does disclose a disability they should be encouraged to contact Equality and Diversity Services so that consideration can be given to reasonable adjustments. Line managers and employees may wish to refer to the guidance contained in the University's Disability Disclosure guidelines for all line managers.

At a return to work meeting an employee may be advised that a referral will be made to Occupational Health.

5.2 Short-Term Absence

Management should be able to demonstrate that all staff within their areas of responsibility are being treated consistently. In determining action in every instance, individual circumstances must be taken into account. In exceptional circumstances where the illness has previously been notified as being sensitive or personal in nature, there is no obligation on the employee to discuss the nature of their illness with the line manager during the interview. If the line manager is not satisfied with this, they may refer the matter to Occupational Health.

Short-term absences are defined as those which cumulatively last for less than 20 working days within a rolling 12 month period. In considering an employee's record of absence, account will be taken of the reason and pattern as well as the total amount of sickness absence.

The manager shall review absence levels on a more formal basis when, in any 12 month rolling period, a threshold index of 45 is exceeded. Examples of how the threshold index is calculated are provided below:

Example 1

5 days + 5 days + 5 days = 15 days x 3 occasions of absence = 45 (on threshold)

Example 2

1 day + 1 day + 1 day + 1 day + 1 day + 1 day + 1 day = 7 days x 7 occasions of absence = 49 (above threshold of 45)

Example 3

3. days + 2 days + 3 days = 8 days x 3 occasions = 24 (below threshold of 45)

In such circumstances the line manager will meet with the employee (first sickness absence review meeting) as soon as possible on his/her return to work in the context of encouraging the employee to outline the reasons for absence, any medical help being provided and identifying if the University can assist in any way. The purpose of this meeting is to encourage the staff member to improve their attendance.

5.2.1 *Stage 1 – First Sickness Absence Review Meeting*

The purpose of the first review meeting will be as follows:

- To review the member of staff's attendance record during the relevant period
- To give the member of staff the opportunity to discuss any problems or raise any concerns
- To decide whether any further action is required such as a referral to Occupational Health
- To set a target for improvement and a period over which absence levels will be monitored
- To arrange for support or work adjustments as recommended by Occupational Health
- To inform the member of staff that if attendance does not improve within the time period being monitored, a second Sickness Absence Review meeting will be held
- To give the member of staff an opportunity to disclose a disability (refer to the University's Disability Disclosure Guidelines for All Line Managers for further information and advice).

5.2.2 The employee may choose to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague. A representative from Human Resources may also be present.

5.2.3 When setting targets for improvement, managers will, in consultation with their contact in the Human Resources consultancy team, need to take into account the individual circumstances of the case, any advice received from Occupational Health, the impact of any underlying medical condition or disability, and any reasonable work place adjustments that need to be put in place to enable the employee to improve their attendance.

5.2.4 Following this meeting the Action Taken pro-forma (*Appendix 4*) must be completed and lodged with Human Resources. This will list the main points covered and will also provide details of any assistance offered and any period over which a reasonable improvement may be expected. The employee's attendance record will be kept under review. The outcome of this meeting may be one of the following:

- No further action
- Monitoring, follow up meeting
- Referral to Human Resources
- Referral to Occupational Health (via Human Resources)
- Referral to Equality and Diversity Services
- An agreed target for improvement and a period over which absence levels will be monitored
- Other

5.3 **Stage 2 – Second Sickness Absence Review Meeting**

5.3.1 If during the specified monitoring period following the first sickness absence review meeting, absence exceeds the improvement target set this will trigger a second sickness absence review meeting with the line manager and a representative from Human Resources.

5.3.2 The purpose of the second review meeting will be as follows:

- To review the member of staff's attendance record during the relevant period

- To review the steps that have been taken to support him/her in achieving the required level of attendance
- To give the member of staff the opportunity to discuss any problems or raise any concerns
- To discuss any Occupational Health advice that has been received
- To decide whether any new information requires further referral to Occupational Health
- To set a target for improvement and a period over which absence levels will be monitored
- To inform the member of staff that if attendance does not improve a third sickness absence review meeting will be held
- To give the member of staff an opportunity to disclose a disability (refer to the University's Disability Disclosure Guidelines for All Line Managers for further information and advice).

5.3.3 The employee may choose to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague.

5.3.4 Following this meeting the Action Taken pro-forma (*Appendix 4*) must be completed and lodged with the Human Resources department. This will list the main points covered and will also provide details of any assistance offered and any period over which a reasonable improvement may be expected. The employee's attendance record will be kept under review.

The outcome of this meeting may be one of the following:

- No further action
- Monitoring, follow up meeting
- Referral to Human Resources
- Referral to Occupational Health (via Human Resources)
- Referral to Equality and Diversity Services
- An agreed target for improvement and a period over which absence levels will be monitored
- Other

5.3.5 If, after a period of satisfactory improvement based on the targets set, the individual's absence levels reach those defined in 5.2 above, within a 12 month rolling period (repeated short term absence), Stage 2 of the Sickness Absence Policy will be repeated.

5.4 Stage 3 – Third Sickness Absence Review Meeting

5.4.1 If during the specified monitoring period following the second sickness absence review meeting, absence exceeds the improvement target this will trigger a third sickness absence review meeting. The meeting will be with the Head of School/Department (or person deputed by him/her) and a representative from Human Resources.

5.4.2 The purpose of the third review meeting will be as follows:

- To review the member of staff's attendance record during the relevant period
- To review the steps that have been taken to support him/her in achieving the required level of attendance

- To give the member of staff the opportunity to discuss any problems or raise any concerns, or to highlight any mitigating circumstances that they wish to be taken into account
- To discuss any Occupational Health advice that has been received
- To decide whether any new information requires further referral to Occupational Health
- To inform the member of staff that his/her job may therefore be at risk if their attendance levels do not improve
- To issue a final caution, set a target for improvement and a period over which absence levels will be monitored, if appropriate
- To give the member of staff a further opportunity to disclose a disability (refer to the University's Disability Disclosure Guidelines for All Line Managers for further information and advice)

5.4.3 The employee may choose to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague.

5.4.4 A **Final Caution** may be given for unsatisfactory attendance and this will be confirmed to the individual in writing within 10 working days.

- If it has been decided not to issue a final caution, but to extend the monitoring period, the individual's sickness absence pattern will be monitored over an appropriate, specified period.

5.4.5 If, after a period of satisfactory improvement based on the targets set, the individual's absence levels reach those defined in 6.2 above, within a 12 month rolling period (repeated short term absence), Stage 3 of the Sickness Absence Policy will be repeated.

5.5 Stage 4 – Final Absence Review Meeting:

5.5.1 If during the specified monitoring period following the issue of a final caution, absence exceeds the improvement target this will trigger a final sickness absence review meeting. The meeting will be held in accordance with the relevant disciplinary policy for the staff category under consideration which may result in disciplinary action being taken up to and including dismissal.

6. LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

6.1 Definition and Procedures

The term 'long-term absence' is usually used to define any absence owing to ill-health or related to a disability and is for a period in excess of four weeks, where a GP or hospital consultant has issued a certificate declaring the employee unfit for work. The employee's manager will consider the case with Occupational Health and the relevant HR Business Partner to discuss whether there is likely to be an immediate prospect of a return to work or to seek an opinion as to the likely duration of the absence.

Where the length of absence and return date can be predicted with some certainty for example where the employee needs a routine operation, it may still be necessary to arrange a referral to Occupational Health. If referral is necessary, the timing of this will depend on individual

circumstances. Where there is uncertainty about the likely length of absence or return date, the member of staff should generally be referred if his/her sickness absence continues beyond four weeks.

It is the responsibility of the employee to maintain contact with the University during the period of absence as set out in section 3.1. Procedures for dealing with circumstances where this does not occur are outlined in section 3.3. Where the employee is not capable of maintaining such contact, Human Resources will endeavor to contact a next of kin/partner instead. Human Resources will liaise with the line manager at regular intervals.

Following the medical examination, the line manager, or nominee, will consider what subsequent action is necessary, based on the medical report(s) and the totality of the absence record. This may include progression in stages (first stage, second stage, third stage and non-improvement/final review) as previously outlined under short-term absences depending on the nature of the illness. Alternatively, if the member of staff is deemed to have a disability he/she should be encouraged to contact Equality and Diversity Services for advice in relation to reasonable adjustment.

6.2 Alternative Employment/Termination of Employment/Retirement on ill-health grounds

The Human Resources Department will initiate consultation with the employee on alternative employment/termination of employment/retirement on ill-health grounds if the medical evidence confirms that:

- (i) The employee will be able to return to work in their current post if reasonable adjustments are made.
- (ii) The employee will not be able to return to their current post but could possibly work in an alternative post.
- (iii) The employee will be unable to return to work in the foreseeable future or within an acceptable time-scale.
- (iv) The employee will be unable to sustain a normal pattern of attendance in the future.

The relevant HR Business Partner will arrange a meeting with the employee and the appropriate manager, advising the employee in writing of the reason for the decision to consult. The employee will be advised of their right to be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or colleague. A home visit will be arranged by mutual agreement if necessary. The purpose of the meeting will be:

In the case of prognosis (i) above to explore the adjustments required. The University will undertake, as far as is practicable and appropriate in law and in accordance with the guidance contained within the Code of Practice for the Elimination of Discrimination in the Field of Employment against Person or Persons who have a Disability, to accommodate an employee in his/her current post if he/she becomes disabled. Accommodation may involve restructuring the individual's job, adapting or relocating the working environment, the provision of specialist equipment or altering the individual's working hours. Where accommodation is possible, an action plan to implement the changes will be drawn up. Where this is not practicable, the University will consider other forms of action including redeployment. Where reasonable adjustments cannot be made and alternative posts are not available, consideration will be given to ill-health early retirement. Where this does not prove feasible termination of the individual's employment on grounds of capability will be the only option. No decision to pursue these options will be taken without receiving the medical evidence and consulting personally with the employee.

In the case of prognosis (ii), (iii) or (iv) above, to focus initially on any alternative posts that are consistent with the recommendations of Occupational Health which the member of staff would be prepared to consider. If after consultation, no alternative is found, consideration will be given to ill-health early retirement. Where this does not prove feasible, termination of the individual's employment on grounds of capability will be the only option. No decision to pursue these options will be taken without receiving the medical evidence and consulting personally with the employee.

An employee will have the right to appeal a decision to terminate his/her employment on grounds of capability. Appeals will be heard by a Provost and an independent qualified medical person. The arrangements for academic and academic-related staff are governed by Charter and Statutes.

In all cases, the Human Resources Department/Pensions Officer will endeavor to assist the employee in discussions with the relevant occupational pension body (USS, TSS, NILGOSC) if they are a member, have sufficient service and are considered (by the pension body) to be permanently unfit for work.

Where an employee is not capable of acting on their own behalf, Human Resources will make every effort to consult with a next of kin/partner instead. In such circumstances, it may also be appropriate for the trade union to have an involvement.

6.3 Return to Work

For those returning to work after long-term sickness absence a return to work interview will be held between the employee and his/her line manager. This interview will be recorded using the Sickness Absence form (*Appendix 3*) and will be used to welcome the employee back to work. The interview should cover any changes within the employee's work area since his/her absence commenced.

The return to work meeting should also provide the member of staff with the opportunity to disclose a disability which may be affecting their attendance. If a member of staff does disclose a disability they should be encouraged to contact Equality and Diversity Services so that consideration can be given to reasonable adjustments (refer to the University's Disability Disclosure Guidelines for All Line Managers for further information and advice)

An employee who has been on half or nil sick pay will be reinstated on to their normal full-pay with effect from the date they return to work, assuming they return to their existing post and hours of work.

Employees who have been absent due to illness may, subject to the agreement of Occupational Health and/or their GP, phase their return to work on a reduced hours basis. During this period, the employee will be entitled to receive full pay (even if they have been on half or nil sick pay). This entitlement will apply only once to each individual in any 12 month period.

Where a member of staff is redeployed to a lower graded post on health grounds, every effort will be made to redeploy the individual back to a suitable post at their original grade at such times as one becomes available.

7. MEDICAL AND DENTAL APPOINTMENTS

Where possible, employees should arrange routine medical and dental appointments outside their normal working hours. Where this is not possible, appointments should be made towards the beginning or end of their normal working hours, requiring minimal time-off. Where there are a series of medical (directly linked to remedial action resulting from illness) or dental appointments that last half a day or more on a long term basis, a record must be kept within the Faculty/School/ Department and in the event of a review being required, considered alongside other sickness records. The employee will be required to provide an appointment and or other appropriate medical statement if requested.

8. FURTHER GUIDANCE

Further guidance on the application of this Policy is available from the Human Resources Department.

9. UNIVERSITY SICK PAY ENTITLEMENTS

Sickness pay entitlements* is based on length of continuous service as follows:

Length of Service	Full Pay	Half Pay
During the first 3 months' service	2 weeks	2 weeks
During the remaining 9 months of the first year of service	2 months	2 months
Second and third year of service	3 months	3 months
Fourth and fifth year of service	5 months	5 months
After fifth year of service	6 months	6 months

*Allowance standardised with effect from 1st April 2008

The rate of sickness allowance and the period for which it shall be paid will be ascertained by deducting from the period of benefit on the first day of absence the aggregate of the periods of absence during the 12 months immediately preceding the first day of absence.

Staff who are absent through sickness or injury resulting from an accident unconnected with their employment are not entitled to an allowance if damages may be receivable from a third party.

The University may, having regard to the circumstances of the case, advance a sum not exceeding the allowance provided under the scheme. Such an advance will be inclusive of any entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay for the same period.

Sick pay shall not be paid in case of accident due to active participation in sport as a profession, unless the University by resolution decides otherwise, though Statutory Sick Pay may be payable.

10. REVIEW

This Policy will be subject to review to ensure that it remains appropriate in the light of any relevant legislative changes and/or Government recommended guidelines.