

ULSTER UNIVERSITY POLICY SCREENING PRO-FORMA
Part 1

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Sickness Absence Policy

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Revised

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

The policy aims to provide a compliant framework designed to proactively manage absence and support staff who are absent due to illness in a sensitive, caring manner which respects the employee's dignity and individual circumstances.

This policy has been designed to ensure that all staff 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.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

If so, explain how.

All Section 75 categories should benefit from the revisions to this policy as it provides a more proactive, supportive mechanism to facilitate sickness absence management and attendance at medical appointments.

Given that with increased age comes the potential for an increase in potential for acquiring various health issues; people with a disability may need more time off work to attend medical appointments and higher sickness absences within the female population, it is expected that this policy will have a particularly positive impact for staff in these categories.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The Chief People Officer initiated the review and update of the policy.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing owns this policy; all staff implement this policy.

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Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision? (Please select one answer)

Yes

No

If yes, are they

Financial (Please specify _____)

Legislative: Changes to legislation

Other: University policies, as below

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

Staff

Students

Other service users (e.g. prospective students, conference delegates)

Other public sector organisations

Voluntary/community/trade unions

Other, please specify _____

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

Policy Name	Policy Owner
Five & 50 Strategic Plan	Vice Chancellor
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy	Chief People Officer
Disability Action Plan	Chief People Officer
Stress Management Procedure	Chief People Officer
Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy	Chief People Officer
Disciplinary Procedure	Chief People Officer
Grievance Procedure	Chief People Officer
Data Protection Policy	University Secretary

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Available evidence

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? (Please specify details for each of the Section 75 categories)

Note: evidence can come from many sources. Examples include the University's management information systems, internal or external research, surveys or consultation exercises. Anecdotal evidence such as feedback from service users may also be used.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2019, our staff profile was 50.9% Protestant, 49.1% Catholic.
Political opinion	The University does not collect information on Political Opinion, or make assumptions regarding Political Opinion based on Community Background.
Racial group	The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2019, our staff profile was 94.6% White, 5.4% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). Our BME profile suggests that we are three times as diverse as the local population. The Northern Ireland Census (2011) suggests that 1.8% of the NI population is BME.
Age	The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2019, over one third (34.4%) of our staff were in the '46-55' age band. 26.9% of staff were in the '36-45' age band and 22.5% of staff were aged '56 and above'. University data held on the CoreHR system which is used to record and monitor sickness absence reveals that older members of staff generally take longer periods of sickness absence than younger members of staff. The data shows that as a member of staff ages, the number of days lost due to sickness absence increases, particularly with respect to short-term absences.
Marital status	The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2019, 62% of staff were 'Married or in a Civil Partnership'.
Sexual orientation	Although we collect staff data on sexual orientation, this is not considered to be reliable.

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Men and women generally	The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2019, 56% of staff were 'Female'. Qualitative data collected from a Women's Network focus group during the review of the sickness absence policy and process reveal that gender specific illnesses can often be treated in a dismissive manner by line managers and colleagues. Similar findings were generated at the HSW 'Campus Conversations'.
Disability	<p>The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2019, 4.8% of staff declared a disability.</p> <p>Our disability declaration rate is lower than expected, compared with the local population. The Northern Ireland Census (2011) found that 20.6% of the NI population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a long-standing health problem or disability. Qualitative data suggests that some employees with a disability take time off work to attend medical appointments using their annual leave while some return to work following a period of sickness absence when they are not fit to do so because they are afraid of breaching a trigger point in their sickness absence record.</p>
Dependants	The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2019, 47.7% of staff had dependants.

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Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision? (Please specify details for each of the Section 75 categories)

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	None identified.
Political opinion	None identified.
Racial group	None identified.
Age	<p>Staff of all age groups will potentially avail of this policy.</p> <p>However, older people are more likely to acquire disability and, as a result, attend more medical appointments and in some cases take more time off work.</p> <p>University data show that as employees get older, short term sickness absence increases in the number of days lost which is in line with UK-wide statistics, suggesting that the recovery time for older employees when absent due to a short term illness is likely to be longer than that of a younger colleague.</p> <p>The frequency of short-term absences and the total number of days lost also increases, suggesting that as employees age they are more likely to experience ill-health. This data corresponds with UK-wide statistics.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics www.ons.gov.uk</p> <p>The trigger system which is currently in place should be removed to ensure that older members of staff are not treated unfairly in comparison with younger employees. The trigger system does not take into account factors such as age in its implementation.</p>
Marital status	None identified.

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Sexual orientation	None identified.
Men and women generally	<p>According to the Office of National Statistics, a Labour Force Survey found that sickness absence rates have fallen for both sexes over the past decade and have been consistently lower for men than women.</p> <p>Women lost 2.3% of their working hours in 2020 as a result of sickness or injury, in comparison with 1.5% for men. Over the decade the sickness absence rate for women has been falling at a faster rate than men, 0.5 percentage points compared with 0.3 percentage points for men.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics www.ons.gov.uk</p> <p>Research was conducted at the University's Wo/men's Network on attitudes and experience in relation to gender-specific sickness which revealed that gender-specific conditions are sometimes dealt with in a dismissive and insensitive manner.</p> <p>Greater sensitivity, understanding and flexibility is required when managing sickness absence due to gender-specific illnesses throughout the ages and stages of an employees working life.</p>
Disability	<p>People with a disability are more likely to need time off to attend medical appointments. Anecdotally, staff have used annual leave to attend appointments.</p> <p>Staff with a disability return to work before they have fully recovered from an illness, for fear of breaching a trigger in their sickness absence records. As such, an alternative process to the current trigger system should be introduced to avoid pressuring those with a disability to return to work earlier than necessary.</p> <p>Also, the new policy should clearly state that employees can attend medical appointments without the requirement to take annual leave.</p>
Dependants	None identified in relation to the sickness absence policy.

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Consultation

Consultation with relevant groups, organisations or individuals about the policy can provide useful information about issues/opportunities which are specifically related to them (i.e. evidence to inform the policy). Please indicate whether you carried out (or intend to carry out) any consultation exercises prior to equality screening?

The document was developed iteratively with input and perspective from individuals and groups including:

- Employee Wellbeing Advisors
- Line Managers who have implemented the policy
- Staff who have availed of the Sickness Absence Policy
- The Statutory Health & Safety Committee, which includes the recognised Trade Unions
- JUCNC
- The University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee which includes the recognised Trade Unions
- Ulster University Wo/men's Network
- The Senior Leadership Team

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Screening

Introduction

The answers to the following screening questions will assist the University in making a decision whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment on the policy. The following information is provided to help you to identify and comment on the level of likely impact of the policy in questions 1-4:

Select 'major' impact if:

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there are insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

Select 'minor' impact if:

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations;
- e) Differential impact observed and opportunities exist to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

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Select 'none' if:

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented in Part 1, please complete the screening questions (Questions 1-4).

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Screening questions

1 What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (Please provide details)		
Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? (minor/major/none)
Religious belief	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual's religious belief.	None
Political opinion	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual's political opinion.	None
Racial group	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual's racial group.	None
Age	This policy is likely to have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for this group given that with increased age comes the potential for an increase in potential for acquiring various health issues.	Minor (+)
Marital status	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual's marital status.	None
Sexual orientation	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group.	None

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	There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual's sexual orientation.	
Men and women generally	This policy is likely to have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for this group given that women have a higher rate of sickness absence than men.	Minor (+)
Disability	This policy is likely to have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for this group given that people with a disability are more likely to need time off to attend medical appointments.	Minor (+)
Dependants	This policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. There is no data that has been considered or identified that would demonstrate differential impact based on an individual with dependants.	None

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2 Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?		
Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Political opinion		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Racial group		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Age		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Marital status		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Sexual orientation		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Men and women generally		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Disability		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.
Dependants		No, this policy applies to all staff irrespective of their section 75 category.

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3 To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (Please provide details)		
Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact (minor/major/none)
Religious belief	This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this category. The policy has no relevance to good relations.	None
Political opinion	This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this category. The policy has no relevance to good relations.	None
Racial group	This policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this category. The policy has no relevance to good relations.	None

4 Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?		
Good relations category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief		The policy has no relevance to good relations.
Political opinion		The policy has no relevance to good relations.
Racial group		The policy has no relevance to good relations.

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Additional considerations

Multiple identity

<p>5 Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, please provide details of any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities? (<i>For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people</i>). Please include details of any data which you have used to determine/identify this impact</p>	
<p>Section 75 categories (please specify)</p>	<p>Details of policy impact and details of data which describes the policy impact</p>
<p>Age, men and women generally, and disability.</p>	<p>The policy provides a framework for Sickness Absence Leave, which is likely to have a positive impact across multiple Section 75 categories.</p> <p>Sickness absence will be managed in a supportive and caring manner with consideration for the employees age and disability and in recognition that older staff are more likely to take time off work due to illness or for medical appointments. In addition, the policy will make it clear that consideration for reasonable adjustments should be made to help and support staff in the workplace.</p>

Disability Duties

<p>6. Does the policy provide an opportunity to encourage disabled people to participate in University life?</p>	
<p>If Yes, provide details</p>	<p>If No, provide reasons</p>
	<p>The policy applies to all staff irrespective of section 75 category / background. Although those with disabilities may avail of the provisions of the policy potentially more than staff who do not have a disability, the policy does not provide opportunities to encourage disabled people to participate more in university life.</p>

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7. Does the policy provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?	
If Yes, provide details	If No, provide reasons
	No – the policy is aimed at all staff in the University and as such applies irrespective of disability. Approval of applications made will be applied equally to all staff.

Screening decision

Based on the evidence considered and outlined in Part 1 and the responses to the screening questions (Part 2), please indicate the screening decision for this policy:

Note: The University should take particular care not to screen out policies that have a procurement aspect if there is potential to promote equality of opportunity through the procurement of services.

Screen in the policy (subject the policy to an Equality Impact Assessment)
i.e. the likely impact is 'major' in respect of one, or more of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories

Screen out the policy without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted (no Equality Impact Assessment)
i.e. the likely impact is 'none' in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories

Screen out the policy and **mitigate the impacts on equality** by **amending or changing the policy**, or by **developing an alternative policy or action** (no Equality Impact Assessment)
i.e. the likely impact is 'minor' in respect of one, or more of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories

Part 3

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment (i.e. 'screen in' the policy), please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (i.e. 'screen out' the policy), please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

Part 3

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (i.e. 'screen out' the policy) and mitigate the impacts on equality by amending or changing the policy, or by developing an alternative policy or action, please provide reasons to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy:

The likely impact is '**minor**' in respect of one, or more of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories.

This policy aims to provide a compliant framework designed to proactively manage absence and support staff who are absent due to illness in a sensitive, caring manner which respects the employee's dignity and individual circumstances.

The policy has been designed to ensure that all staff 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.

In line with University policy, the policy will be reviewed two years after it has been implemented, and if necessary amended.

Timetabling and prioritising

If the policy has been ‘**screened in**’ for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	
Social need	
Effect on people’s daily lives	
Relevance to the University’s functions	

Note: The Total Rating Score will be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the University in timetabling. Details of the University’s Equality Impact Assessment Timetable will be included in its quarterly Screening Reports.



Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide details:

Approval and authorisation

	Position/Job Title	Date
Screened by: 	Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing	29.05.2019
Approved by: 	Chief People Officer	29/06/21

Note: Following approval by the Senior Leadership Team/Senate, the policy owner must inform the University Secretary that the policy has been approved. Once the Council of the University has been informed of the policy (either directly or through an appropriate Committee), the policy owner can then promulgate the policy and develop appropriate training or awareness raising material in relation to the policy.

A copy of the screening pro-forma will be made available on the University's website and be made available on request.

Review

Note: Policies must be reviewed at least every two years, but sooner if changes in legislation or other variables require review.

This policy is due for review (in terms of its impact on equality of opportunity and good relations) by the policy owner on:

29/06/23