

Managing Absence Policy

Policy Statement

Health Services Laboratories (HSL) recognises that the effects of high levels of absence (for whatever reason) are wide ranging and affect everyone in the organisation, not least the individual who is absent.

Managers, employees and their representatives have an interest in ensuring that high levels of absence do not jeopardise the Company's performance or individuals' job satisfaction. HSL will provide support to employees who are unable to work through illness or injury.

The attached procedure sets out the process, which all HSL contracted Employees must follow. It is the Manager's responsibility to ensure that all members of their staff are aware of the standards for reporting absence and provide the appropriate documentation. Managers must treat all staff equitably, and sensitively, particularly in cases of long term sickness.

This policy covers both short and long term absences. All personal information must be kept in the strictest confidence. Inappropriate disclosure may result in the use of the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

The Company will provide support to Employees who become ill in order to assist them to return to work at the earliest opportunity. Managers will take an active part in helping Employees to return to work by maintaining regular contact and ensuring that the Occupational Health procedure and function is being utilised.

Managers must ensure that no employee is discriminated against, (on the grounds of ethnic origin, race, disability, gender, marital status, religion or belief or sexual orientation) when applying this policy.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Procedure for Managing Absence

Reporting Absence

1. Employees must normally ring in within 1 hour of their normal start time, or before their shift where possible, if they are unable to report for duty. The Employee must follow the agreed reporting procedure for their department and ring their Line Manager.
2. The Employee should take the responsibility to call his/her Manager to report their absence, and should explain the reason for non-attendance. In exceptional circumstances a partner, friend or relative may ring on the Employee's behalf. However the Employee will contact his/her Manager directly as soon as is practical.
3. An expected date of return should be discussed.
4. Employees shall keep the Company informed of such matters at intervals as specified by the Company. This will usually be daily (or, in the case of longer absences, weekly). Text messages, voicemail or email are not acceptable ways of informing the Company of your absence.

5. If the illness is likely to last longer than two weeks, the Line Manager and the Employee may agree a longer interval than one week for regular updates. However, for the interval to be lengthened there must be agreement between both parties.
6. In some circumstances, members of staff may not wish to discuss the reason for their absence with their Manager in depth. In such instances, staff must be referred immediately to Occupational Health, and this can be done via the Human Resource Department.
7. Employees have a responsibility to provide a contact telephone number or address whilst they are on sick leave.
8. The Employees must visit the doctor and obtain a certificate to cover absence over 7 days. The certificate is to be sent to his/her Manager without delay. If there is a delay in obtaining a GP appointment, Employees must inform his/her Manager of the date of the appointment.
9. All absences up to 7 days must be self-certificated (see Self Certification Form from Line Manager or Q-Pulse).
10. Failure to provide a certificate could lead to suspension of pay, and the issue dealt with through the disciplinary procedure. Employees are advised to keep a copy of the certificate and to inform the nominated person by what means the certificate is being sent to the Manager.
11. In some circumstances your Manager may require that a private medical certificate is required for absences for less than seven days and you will be notified if this is the case.

Return to Work Interview

1. When an Employee has been on sick leave, the Manager should arrange to see the Employee on their return to work and ask the Employee to complete a self-certificate if the absence is less than 8 days.
2. The return to work interview should be informal and the Manager should establish the reason for the illness (e.g. headache, food poisoning, stomach ache), and reassure themselves that the individual is now fit to return to work, on the day of return.
3. The Manager must update returning Employees with any information on the section including any changes to systems or procedures within the Department. They should also welcome them back, and make them feel welcomed.
4. The Manager should confirm with the individual their sickness record over the last rolling year and advise that further absences could lead to an Absence Review Meeting.

Triggers for Absence Review Meetings

1. This is usually defined as 3 separate occasions of absence in any 3 month period, or a total of 12 days in a rolling 12-month period.
2. Regular absence on certain days (e.g. Mondays, Fridays, weekends or busy days).
3. Where a pattern of absence emerges over a 3 month period.

4. Where sickness regularly begins before or after booked annual leave.
5. Where an Employees' absence pattern gives rise for concern for any reason, the Manager must arrange an Absence Review Meeting.
6. Where an Employee is continuously absent for more than 1 month.
7. Illnesses such as measles, chicken pox etc. are not persistent illnesses, but usually warrant a week or more absence. These types of illness do not trigger sickness absence meetings. However, long term illnesses and treatments for such illnesses could also trigger Sickness Absence Meetings

Absence Review Meeting Stage 1

An Absence Review Meeting will be held for any of the above reasons:

1. Before the meeting, the Manager/Human Resources will send the Employee a copy of the Policy Statement and this Procedure, unless the Company has been informed that the Employee has a terminal condition. The meeting should be informal between the Employee and the Manager, and is confidential. Human Resources will attend to assist the Line Manager in the meeting. The Manager should keep a note of the meeting, and place it on the Personnel file. Human Resources will send a copy of the letter to the Employee. For Employees with a terminal illness, Managers should contact Human Resources.
2. The aim of the meeting is to speak to the individual about their absence and signal that the Employee's absence is a cause of concern.
3. The meeting also gives the Employee the opportunity to share with the Manager any information that may have a bearing on their attendance, (e.g. domestic difficulties, drug or alcohol related problems).
4. The Manager will establish whether there is any action he/she can take to assist the Employee's attendance at work.
5. Where the Manager feels that further information is required, or the Employee does not wish to disclose the nature of their illness for personal reasons, a referral should be made to the Company's designated Occupational Health service.
6. At the meeting the individual should be informed if there is no improvement in their attendance an Absence Review Meeting (Stage 2) will be arranged. A target will be set for the employee to achieve.

The Manager should speak to their Human Resources Adviser before they arrange the Stage 2 Meeting in order to discuss the case and the way forward. Extra sensitivity will be required for Employees with terminal illness.

It may also be appropriate for a home visit to be arranged for those employees who are physically unable to make it into work. If this becomes necessary, the Human Resources department will liaise with the employee in relation to this.

Absence Review Meeting Stage 2

1. This meeting is held to discuss and review the individual's absence, which is still causing concern. Employees on long term "irrecoverable" sick leave and those whose periodic absence is cause for concern should have formal attendance meetings arranged by the Manager. The Manager may at this stage refer the Employee to the Occupational Health Doctor for an update on the individual's health.

The Employee should be given a minimum of 5 working days' notice of the meeting. The Employee has the right to be accompanied or represented by a Representative of a Trade Union or a Professional Organisation or by a Full-time Officer of a Trade Union or Professional Organisation, or by a friend or colleague who is employed within HSL. A member of Human Resources must be present at the meeting.

The main purpose of this stage is to:

2. To discuss the continuing periodic sickness absence and the reasons given. For long-term sickness Employees, the meeting will try to establish how much longer the Employee is likely to be sick.

3. Explore the option of redeployment for those individuals, where this will be a viable option (see Single Equality Policy). Such redeployment may be short term (e.g. whilst the Employee is awaiting treatment) or permanent, if the treatment has not been (totally) successful.

4. Impress upon the Employee that if there is not a significant improvement in their attendance (for periodic absence Employees), or where there does not appear to be any likelihood of a return to work within the medically foreseeable future, they will be invited to a Formal Absence Review Meeting Stage 3.

5. The Manager should agree a further period of close monitoring (usually 3 months, but can be longer) with the Employees. Other outcomes of this stage two meeting can include a First or Final Written Warning, and the Employee will be monitored under Stage 3 of the Managing Absence Procedure.

For those employees who have a condition which prevents them from attending the meeting, they may not be issued with a First or Final Written Warning. However, the employee may still be monitored under Stage 3 of the Managing Absence Policy as an outcome of this meeting.

The outcome of the meeting should be confirmed in writing to the Employee within 5 working days, with a copy being kept in the Personnel File.

Absence Review Meeting Stage 3

When an Employee reaches this stage of the process it is clear that despite meetings and/or warnings (for periodic absences) and the opportunity to improve their attendance to the standard required, the Company has a duty to consider termination of the contract. The termination would be on the grounds that the Employee is unable to meet their contractual obligations.

The decision to terminate a contract would be based on evidence of attendance records, medical evidence from Occupational Health, the impact on the service and colleagues.

The main purpose of the stage is:

1. To consider the medical advice received from Occupational Health.
2. If the employee fails to attend an Occupational Health appointment twice, the failure to attend may be investigated formally under the Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. If an employee is too unwell to attend the Occupational Health Department, with permission from the Employee, the HR Department may contact their G.P.
3. "Reasonable adjustments" (Equality Act 2010) should be discussed with the Occupational Health Service.
4. To consider the needs of the service.
5. The Employee should be given a minimum of 5 days' notice of the Meeting. The individual has the right to be accompanied or represented by a Representative of a Trade Union or a Professional Organisation or by a Full-time Officer of a Trade Union or Professional Organisation, or by a friend or colleague who is employed HSL.
6. The meeting in the case of the terminally (or very) ill can take place in their absence with their consent. The Employee may elect to be represented by their Trade Union Representative at the meeting. The letter sent should include the Employee's sickness record to date and the Occupational Health Doctor's report. The letter should also advise the Employee of the possible implications of a stage 3 meeting (i.e. dismissal).
7. If a decision is made to terminate the contract, the Employee should receive confirmation in writing within 5 working days. The termination will be in accordance with the individual's contractual entitlement. The letter should set out all the details in relation to paid notice period and the right of appeal against the decision to dismiss.
8. Only a dismissing officer can make the decision to dismiss or terminate an individual's employment. A Human Resources Representative must be present at the Formal Absence Review Meeting's Stage 3.

Right to Appeal

The Employee will be advised of the right to appeal. The appeal must be registered with the Human Resources within 10 working days of the date of the letter. The Appeal process will be in line with the Company's Appeal Procedure against Dismissal found in the Disciplinary and Grievance policy.

Review

This Procedure will be reviewed annually by Human Resources and the HSL Executive Board.