A Guide to Sickness Absence

Contents

Introduction

This guidance document has been written to support the end to end business process for recording and managing sickness absence.

The guidance has been written by stage in the process with the key roles in mind. The responsibilities of a Line Manager and School or Department Administrator may vary between Colleges, Schools and Professional Service Group Departments. Line Managers should contact their local support team to understand the process and responsibilities within their own area.

For example a School or Department Administrator could be performing tasks in the process of a Line Manager.

Glossary

P&M	People and Money
Fit Note	A statement of fitness for work provided by a doctor which must be submitted for any absences lasting eight calendar days or longer.
Self-Certification	A declaration from an employee that they were off work due to illness or injury. An employee can self-certify for any absence up to seven calendar days.
RTW	Return to work
OHS	Occupational Health Service
SDAS	Staff Disability Advice Service Staff Disability Advice Service | The University of Edinburgh

End to End Process Map

Click here to view the end to end process map

Key Roles

Role	Description
University of Edinburgh Employee	All university members of staff will have access to request time off for medical appointments and will be able to view periods of sickness absence within the Time and Absences app of P&M.
Line Manager	All members of staff that have direct or matrix style management responsibilities for other members of university staff. Only direct line managers can record leave and not "dotted" line managers.
School/Department Administrator (SDA)	Some areas will appoint a designated person within the School or Department to which absence can be reported to and recorded by.
Payroll	Will have various responsibilities related to the administration of sickness pay and documentation.
HR Advisor/Partner	HR Advisor/Partners and Heads of HR support managers with employee relations issues.
Occupational Health (OH) professionals	The University's Occupational Health Service professionals provide an independent, impartial and confidential service to benefit University employees and managers with regard to health concerns or issues. They assess referrals for ill health retirement according to the requirements for ill health retiral as indicated by the pension provider. They decide if support for ill health retirement can be given.

Before you start

Policies

Please read the University's [Absence Management Policy](), which applies to all employees of the University. The policy includes information regarding requesting time off for medical appointments, reporting sickness absence and keeping in touch, part-day absences, certification requirements, sickness absence and annual leave, returning to work, unsatisfactory attendance levels and the formal attendance review process.

Subsidiaries

Employees of subsidiary companies should refer to their own Absence Management policy. Leave entitlement plans for colleagues in subsidiaries (Edinburgh Innovation, Edinburgh University Press and UoE Accomodation Ltd) have been built in the system therefore there is no difference to how the system is used by employess of subsidiaires. Leave entitlement plans for employees with legacy or alternative terms and conditions have been built into the system. This includes employees in clinical grades, ECA, BBS Research council and Medical Research council schemes.

Occupational Sick Pay entitlement

Entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) can be found in the [Conditions of Employment]().

Sickness Absence Recording

All sickness absence of at least half a day and medical appointments must be recorded in People and Money. This can be recorded by the line manager or SDA.

Overlapping absences

Most absence types cannot overlap with each other. If this occurs, an error message will display on screen when the absence is submitted in People & Money. This will prevent the absence from being processed until the overlap has been resolved.

The exception to this is when a sickness absence is entered without an end date, any already approved leave dates in the future would not need to be deleted.

Work Schedules

It is critical that work schedules in People and Money are correct as they underpin the operation of other functions, such as the annual leave requesting and recording process as well as many payroll calculations. Every assignment must have a work schedule and these are normally discussed and agreed on appointment or when there is a change in working hours/pattern or a flexible working request has been made.

It is vital that the work schedule is maintained and is correct prior to periods of absence. Further information is available within the Guidance to Work Schedules. SDAs cannot see employee's work schedules but the employee and the line manager can see the work schedule using the Team Schedule app.

Absences added in error

If a sickness absence entry has been added in error, this can be withdrawn from the employee record. A manager will be notified if this happens, but the withdrawal is not required to be approved.

Request Time off for Medical Appointments

Employees must try to make medical appointments outside of work time. If this is not possible, they should try to arrange appointments for the start or end of the working day so that disruption is minimised. If an employee has an appointment during work time, they must ask their manager for time off, giving as much notice as possible.

Role\Process	Employee	Line Manager/SDA
Requesting a Personal Health and Welfare appointment	Employees must try to arrange appointments outside of work time. However, as this is not always possible, they can request time off to attend medical appointments. This time off can be requested through P&M. Evidence can be uploaded to the request e.g. appointment card. Employee Guide to Special, Other & Unpaid Leave (If you need regular and/or ongoing time off to attend appointments in relation to a disability or underlying health condition, your manager will decide how this can be reasonably accommodated)	Managers should make every effort to approve the request for time off, particularly if the appointment is with a Specialist or Consultant or is the result of having been placed on a waiting list for medical treatment. Managers may request evidence of the appointment e.g. an appointment card, text, email or a letter from the hospital, which the employee can upload to their request. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information
Cancelling/Amending	If the employee wishes to change or cancel the dates then this must be actioned in People and Money.	The line manager will receive an email notification as well as a notification bell in their task list in People and Money

| | Employee Guide to Special, Other & Unpaid Leave | | alerting them to the request. Further guidance on how to approve these requests in P&M can be found in the Line Manager Guide to Absence and Leave. |

Reporting Sickness Absence and Keeping in Touch

If an employee is unable to come to work due to illness or injury, they must contact their manager by telephone. They must do this no later than their normal start time. Managers will make employees aware if alternative local arrangements are in place for reporting and recording absence e.g. by text or email or by contacting a designated person for their School/Department.

Role\Process	Employee	Line Manager/SDA	School/Department Administrator (SDA)
Reporting Sickness Absence	Employee telephones line manager or designated person, in line with local practice.	The line manager must record all absences of at least half the employee's working day or more in People and Money. Absences may be recorded in the system without an end/return date if you're unsure how long someone might be off. The absence end date must be added to the employee's absence record in People and Money when the employee returns to work. If the absence has been logged as open ended managers must untick the open ended box when adding the end date. P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence Once a sickness absence has been recorded for an employee, by either the manager or SDA, the line	If a line manager is on planned leave, recording can be delegated to an appropriate person. User guide – How to Set Up a Delegation for a Planned or Unplanned Absence Local arrangements may also be in place for employees to contact an SDA as their designated person.

		manager will receive a confirmation email including a short checklist of actions they should take to complete the process. These are as follows: '{Employee Name} has a new sickness absence recorded. Please now follow these actions: 1. Refer to the Absence Management policy and Absence Management guidance – Line Manager 2. Check whether a fit note is required for this absence 3. Check the employee's absence record in relation to review points/pattern of absence. If you have any concerns, refer to the Absence Management policy 4. Familiarise yourself with the rules around return to work (RTW) check-ins and in-depth RTW discussions. Please arrange as appropriate on employee's return.'	
Medical Certification - Fit Note or Hospital documentation	If an absence lasts eight or more calendar days, a fit note or hospital documentation must be submitted, as appropriate. Employees must send their manager a copy of this medical certificate as soon as they receive it, by post, in person or electronically e.g. by email.	On receipt of a fit note, it must be uploaded to the employee's record in People & Money by the manager or the designated SDA. It should be uploaded to Document Records, not as an attachment on the absence entry. P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence If the original hard copy was received, once it has been scanned and uploaded, the original must be returned to the employee. The manager should contact the employee if they haven't received a fit note when it is due, or if one has	

		‘run out'/expired and a further fit note has not been received. A report is available for managers to run to show if any employee has exceeded the expiry date of their Fit Note and has not yet returned to work. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information on handling fit notes.	
Reclaiming Annual Leave	If an employee is ill or injured while on annual leave or a public holiday, whether abroad or in the UK, they may be able to reclaim the annual leave or public holiday (pro-rated for part-time staff) for use at another time. See Absence Management Policy	Line manager must cancel the Annual Leave request and record the period as sickness absence. P&M User Guide – Line Manager Guide to Absence and Leave P&M User Guide – SDA Guide to Leave P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence	
Keeping in Touch	If an employee's absence lasts more than a few days, they must keep in regular contact with their manager, or designated person. The method and frequency of contact will be mutually agreed and will take into account the reason for your absence	If an employee advises they will be off for more than a few days, the manager should make appropriate arrangements in a timely manner for how and when they'll keep in touch during their absence. This should be agreed through discussion with the employee and take account of the nature of their illness/injury and likely duration of their absence. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information	
Supporting Information People and Money User Guides Human Resources A-Z of Policies Absence Management Guidance Documents			

During Sickness Absence

Role\Process	Line Manager	HR Partner	Occupational Health
Medical Certification - Fit Note	Remember to keep uploading sick notes, as you receive them, to the employee's record in People and Money. They should be uploaded to Document Records, not as an attachment on the absence entry. P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence If the original hard copy was received, once it has been scanned and uploaded, the original must be returned to the employee. The manager should contact the employee if they haven't received a fit note when it is due, or if one has 'run out'/expired and a further fit note has not been received. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information on handling fit notes.		
Keep the Sickness record in P&M up to date	If an end date was added at the time of processing the absence, and the sick leave now has to be extended, please refer to the section 'Editing an Absence for a Direct Report' within P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence **This must not be added on as an additional absence**		
Formal attendance review process	If there has been no improvement or further deterioration in attendance or a review point has been reached the manager must contact their HR Partner if they are considering proceeding to a formal attendance review. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information	When a manager contacts an HR Partner they will confirm the appropriateness of proceeding to the formal attendance review process. They	

		will discuss and agree how it will be taken forward. See [Absence Management Guidance – Head of HR_HR Partner](#)	
Managing prolonged absence	An employee who is off for **substantially longer than four weeks** is deemed to be on a period of prolonged absence. They are likely to require more support than usual during their absence and in returning to work. As soon as it becomes clear that an absence is likely to be for a **prolonged period**, the manager must seek advice from their **HR Partner** and the **OHS**. The earlier they engage OHS in a potential long-term ill-health matter, the better informed they will be in supporting the employee. See [Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager](#) for further information The use of accrued annual leave during a prolonged period of absence should be discussed with your HR Partner before any adjustments are made. The period of sickness absence should remain in People and Money.	Manager may seek advice from HR See [Absence Management Guidance – Head of HR_HR Partner](#)	Manager may refer the employee to OHS

Supporting Information
[People and Money User Guides](#)
[Human Resources A-Z of Policies](#)
[Absence Management Guidance Documents](#)

Ending Sickness Absence and Return to Work

Role\Process	Employee	Line Manager/SDA	HR Partner	Occupational Health
Ending Sickness Absence	Employee must let their manager know that they have returned to work.	Manager must end the sickness absence on P&M by populating the end date on the absence entry and unticking the 'open ended' box P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence Failure to end an absence in a timely manner may result in the employee moving to half pay or nil pay if their sickness entitlement reduces in error.		
Return to Work for short absences (less than 4 days)	Employees must let their manager know when they anticipate returning to work. This will allow them and their manager to plan for their return, if such a plan is necessary.	The manager should check in with all employees when they return to work. For absences lasting less than four days, this should be an informal catch up. The date the conversation took place can be recorded in P&M, guidance on how to do this can be found in the P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence / P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information on return to work.		

| Return to Work for absences of 4+ days | Employees must let their manager know when they anticipate returning to work. This will allow them and their manager to plan for their return, if such a plan is necessary.

Employees are required to provide a **self-certificate** if their absence lasts between four and seven calendar days. They can do this by completing and signing the self-certification section of the Return To Work form | For absences which have lasted **four days or more**, or in cases where a manager feels a more in-depth discussion is necessary, they should hold an **in-depth return to work discussion** with the employee (see section 7 of the Absence Management policy). It is important to make sure the manager attends the return-to-work meeting properly prepared. See Absence Management Guidance – Line Manager for further information on preparing for a return to work.

The discussion must be recorded on a Return To Work form. A copy of the completed RTW form must be shared with the employee for their records once completed, and uploaded to the employee's record in P&M. This should be uploaded to Document Records, not as an attachment to the absence entry.

P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence
P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence

If it is agreed that information is required from OHS, complete a management referral form, informing the employee of its purpose and content before submitting it to OHS.

For considerations for disabled staff see Guidance on Supporting Disabled Staff and the | | OHS may provide professional advice on a case-by-case basis to the manager on receipt of a referral. |

		Staff Disability Advice Service [Staff Disability Advice Service | The University of Edinburgh](#)		
Phased Return to Work e.g. returning to work on a gradual basis	Depending on the nature and duration of the absence, it may be appropriate to discuss and agree a phased return to work, i.e. returning to work on a gradual basis. A phased return can help the employee return to work on a gradual basis during recovery from or after a long-term illness/injury or absence due to a medical condition/disability. Although they may work part weeks or part days the absent time will not be classed as sickness absence. When the employee returns to work on a phased basis they will receive their normal contractual pay.	Seek advice or guidance from HR and/or OHS, if necessary. Further guidance can be found in the [Absence Management policy](#). Manager should end the sickness absence entry and log the phased return as a new entry in P&M. [P&M User Guide - Line Manager Guide to Sickness Absence](#) [P&M User Guide - SDA Guide to Sickness Absence](#) **The work schedule does NOT need to be amended for the period of the phased return**	Manager may seek advice from HR	OHS may provide professional advice on a case-by-case basis to the manager on receipt of a referral.
Annual Leave Accrual and Long Term Sickness Absence	Employees continue to accrue annual leave whilst on any period of sickness absence. Where it has not been possible to take annual leave as a result of long term sickness absence employees can carry forward annual leave for a maximum of 18	Seek advice or guidance from HR if necessary. If the employee is returning after a period of long term sickness absence you may need to adjust the annual leave balance for the employee If an employee is returning from long term sickness absence has accrued leave that they	Manager may seek advice from HR	

	months from the end of the holiday year in which the leave accrued. Please refer to the Annual Leave Policy for further information.	have not been able to take and need to carry over into the following year, their leave balance will require to be manually adjusted. Guidance on how to do this can be found in the P&M User Guide – How to adjust absence balances. In areas where there is no SDA available to help with this, line managers can raise a service request to HR Helpline who can do this. Carried forward leave must be taken within 18 months of the end of the holiday year in which it accrued. Any annual leave not taken by the end of the 18 months will be lost.		
Changing working pattern/work schedule	If an employee wishes to request a different pattern of work for their return to work following sickness absence (and after a phased return), they have the right to make a flexible working request. Flexible Working Policy	Consider the flexible working request and follow the procedure in the Flexible Working Policy. Update the employee's work schedule if necessary Guide to Work Schedules		
Changing to working hours		Should the employee and line manager wish to contractually change the employee's working hours following a phased return, they should process a contract amendment – Change to Working Hours.		
Supporting Information People and Money User Guides Human Resources A-Z of Policies Human Resources A-Z of Forms Absence Management Guidance Documents				

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