

Managing Attendance Procedure

Approved by Executive Committee July 2022

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The University of Limerick is committed to safeguarding employees' health, safety and wellbeing of all staff to ensure they are fully able to contribute to the University's success. The University aims to achieve this through the provision of a safe and healthy working environment, supportive policies and procedures and the implementation of supportive measures when appropriate. The University recognises that employees may be absent from work due to ill-health from time to time and acknowledges that absence not only has an effect on employees suffering from ill-health, but also on the overall performance of the University. It is therefore important that absence is managed effectively and that clear and supportive procedures are in place to support both employees and managers when required.

This procedure has been designed to provide a consistent framework for the management of attendance and promotes open communication as the most effective tool to ensure that the working environment supports, as far as possible, attendance at work. It provides procedural guidance for managing attendance. Notwithstanding this, the University recognises that sometimes, due to the nature of an individual absence case, the procedures as outlined may need to be adapted to the individual circumstances. In such cases it is expected that this will be done in a sensible manner and a pragmatic approach taken to ensure the appropriate management of the case.

2.0 SCOPE

This procedure is applicable to all employees of the University.

3.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to;

- Ensure prompt, consistent and fair treatment for all staff, and to enable both the individual and the University to be clear about the expectations of each other in cases involving absence.
- Provide practical guidance to Heads of School/Units/Line Managers on promoting a positive culture of attendance in the workplace and managing sickness absence
- Provide employees and managers with a consistent framework for reporting, recording and managing absence
- Encourage communication and dialogue around wellbeing and ill-health, in particular where this is either impacting on work, or being impacted by work
- Help prevent absences from occurring and/or help to facilitate a sustained return to work
- To clarify the role and function of staff members, Heads of School/Units/Line Managers and Human Resources in the effective implementation of this procedure.

- To clarify the role and functions of the Occupational Health Provider and the Employee Assistance Programme

4.0 DEFINITIONS

4.1 Absenteeism

Absenteeism is defined as all absence from work other than annual leave, public holidays, statutory and other entitlements including maternity, paternity, parental, jury, study, force majeure, compassionate and carers leave. Unscheduled absence can be defined as certified and uncertified sick leave and any other unscheduled / unauthorised absence.

4.2 Uncertified Sick Leave

Sick leave of up to and including two consecutive working days which is not certified by a GP/Consultant.

4.3 Certified Sick Leave

A period of sick leave which has been certified by a GP/Consultant. All absences in excess of two consecutive working days must be covered by a medical certificate.

4.4 Persistent Short Term Absence

Persistent short-term absence shall be defined as absences of 1-2 days at a time, on five or more occasions in a 12 month period.

4.5 Long Term Absence

Long-term absence shall be defined as any absence greater than twenty (20) working days.

4.4 Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absence is defined as a period of absence without pre-approval/explanation/contact by the employee in accordance with section 7.1 below.

5.0 KEY PRINCIPLES

This procedure:

- 5.1 Acknowledges that regular attendance and good time-keeping are an essential part of the smooth and effective running of the University. It is therefore vital that employees and management ensure high standards of attendance at work. The University will manage employee absence in a fair, consistent and sensitive manner in line with the outlined procedure. Training and support will be offered to line managers to support the application of this procedure.

- 5.2 Recognises that Heads of School/Units & Line Managers have a key role in managing attendance. An employee's immediate Supervisor/Line Manager will monitor attendance and time-keeping. This procedure supports early intervention in order to successfully address issues with employees to reduce the possibility of absence from work.
- 5.3 Recognises the need for early intervention in cases where attendance falls below acceptable levels and the necessity for the employee and line manager to take appropriate action.
- 5.4 Employees are required to account for absences from work. All absences from work must be authorised by the University, any unauthorised absence may result in Statute No.4 – Statute on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment being invoked.
- 5.5 Acknowledges that all absences from work due to ill-health must be reported and recorded in accordance with the University Sick Pay Scheme and Sick Leave Scheme Directive DoES 2014. Continued access to the sick leave scheme is conditional on staff complying with the Sick Leave Policy and measures to facilitate their return to work.
- 5.6 Sets out the roles and responsibilities of Employees, Line Managers, Human Resources, Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Support in relation to attendance management.

6.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Responsibilities of Employees

- To render efficient and productive service by way of regular and uninterrupted attendance at work as per the contract of employment
- To take responsibility for their own health, safety and welfare, and that of others
- To advise their line manager of any matter that may affect their attendance
- To maintain weekly contact during periods of absence to keep the Line Manager advised of progress and likely date of return (see section 7.1 below)
- To comply with the notification and certification procedure in accordance with the University's Sick Leave Scheme
- To participate in a return to work follow up with their Line Manager following each episode of sick leave absence.
- To avail of appropriate support services
- To cooperate fully with reasonable rehabilitative measures to facilitate a return-to-work as quickly as possible

- To minimise absences arising from accidents or ill-health by complying with health & safety requirements
- To comply with the provisions of the University's Managing Attendance Procedure (i.e. this procedure)

6.2 Responsibilities of Line Managers

- To promote and encourage high levels of attendance
- To communicate University policies and procedures that support attendance at work, such as the University Sick Pay Scheme and Sick Leave Scheme Directive DoES 2014, Managing Attendance Procedure, Procedures for Workplace Dignity and Respect, Policy & Procedures on Employee Protection – Intoxicant Misuse, and Statute No.4 – Statute on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment
- To advise employees of the Employee Support Service and promote its uptake
- To ensure compliance with the notification and certification procedure in accordance with the University's Sick Leave Scheme
 - Must forward all medical certificates to HR as they receive them, together with a completed Sick Leave Form, for timely processing of sick leave
 - Must immediately inform HR of any unauthorised leave or uncertified sick leave
 - Should maintain regular contact with employees during illness absence
- To manage health & safety in the workplace in accordance with the University's Safety Statement
- To hold and keep a record of return-to-work meetings after each absence
- To seek support and advice from HR in relation to the management of attendance
- To advise employees when their attendance record is a cause for concern (e.g. frequent or persistent short-term absence, frequent uncertified leave, etc.) and of the necessary improvements required.
- To identify patterns and trends of sickness absence, particularly frequent and persistent short term absences which may or may not be related to health reasons
- To take all reasonably practicable steps to accommodate an employee's return to work in line with any recommendations from HR or the University's Occupational Health Service
- To make reasonably practicable adjustments to employment arrangements or accommodation for employees with a disability
- To maintain confidentiality in relation to employees' attendance record

6.3 Role of the Human Resources Division

- To provide information, guidance, training and support for line managers and employees in relation to the University's Managing Attendance Procedure (i.e. this procedure) and the Sick Leave Scheme.

- To provide advice and support to Heads of School/Unit/Line Managers in monitoring and managing illness absence; in particular, specific guidance can be sought from HR if required.
- To monitor levels of absence and maintain accurate absence records
- To maintain appropriate and accurate records of interventions taken regarding absence
- To liaise with the Occupational Health Provider and Heads of School/Unit/Line Managers in the case of referrals to Occupational Health and advise on the implementation of recommendations arising from medical assessment
- To advise employees on the availability of the Employee Support Service
- To refer employees, where appropriate, to the University's Occupational Health Service

6.4 Role of the Employee Support Service

- To provide a free confidential counselling and advice service to University employees who are experiencing personal or work-related difficulties that could pose a threat to their health, well-being, relationships or jobs.
- To refer employees to sources of specialist advice or support where appropriate.

6.5 Role of Occupational Health Service

- Provides an independent advisory service on all matters relating to the effect of health on work, and work on health. It is essentially a pro-active and preventative service rather than a treatment service, and its function should be distinguished from that of a General Practitioner. Occupational health cannot provide a diagnosis or treatment for an employee's medical condition.
- Referrals to Occupational Health are made by the Human Resource Department.
- The Occupational Health Provider is governed by strict ethical standards and must maintain confidentiality in relation to medical information. The Occupational Health Provider will not disclose the details of the employee's medical condition without the employee's consent unless it is necessary to do so in order to advise on the extent to which the employee's health will affect his/her ability to perform his/her duties or where the employee's condition places the health and safety of others at risk.
- The functions of the Occupational Health Service include:
 - Providing an independent advisory service on any health-related matter which is affecting the employee's ability to undertake work or the impact of work on the employee's health, taking into account the illness prompting the referral and medical opinion where available.
 - Advising University HR on the employee's fitness to undertake their full range of contracted duties and to make recommendations on measures to assist the employee return to work following illness absence as quickly and safely as possible.

- When further medical information is required to liaise with the employee's own medical practitioner or consultant (with consent).
- Advise in relation to the likely length of ongoing absence
- Advise, as required, on reasonable accommodation to facilitate the employee's return to work
- To advise managers and individuals about any areas of support for health-related problems which may be affecting employment
- In the event that Occupational Health Provider disagree in respect of the medical condition of an employee with the employee's own doctor, the employee will be asked to give permission for the Occupational Health Provider to make contact and speak with the employee's doctor. If there is still a conflict between the OHP and the employee's doctor then the matter will be referred to an independent third party doctor following consultation with the employee concerned.

7.0 GENERAL PROVISIONS & PROCEDURES

7.1 Procedure for Employees Reporting Absence

An employee is required to inform their line manager if they are unable to attend work due to illness in accordance with the University's Sick Leave Scheme.

An employee absent from work must notify the line manager as to the cause and likely duration of absence before or within one hour of their scheduled starting time on the first day of absence. This notification should indicate whether or not a certificate will be furnished and the likely return to work date.

The employee supervisor or manager must be contacted directly and spoken too by the employee. Voice messages or text messages are not acceptable, nor is leaving a message with another employee.

In cases of absence due to illness, absences of more than two days must be supported by medical certification. Certificates should be sent to the line manager, no later than the third day of absence.

If the illness persists, additional medical certificates must be submitted on a regular and timely basis, prior to the expiration of the last medical certificate, in accordance with the Sick Leave Scheme. Failure to adhere to this procedure will result in Social Welfare Illness Benefit deduction arrears.

Medical certificates must include the following details:

- name and address of doctor;
- name and address of employee;
- Be signed by a duly qualified medical practitioner registered with the Irish/UK Medical Council/Dental Council of Ireland. In exceptional circumstances medical certificates may be accepted from overseas medical practitioners, such as where an employee becomes ill abroad or is receiving a recognised medical

treatment unavailable in Ireland. The advice of an OHP must be sought in such circumstances.

- Normally cover a period of or no more than one week. However, certification for periods of up to one month may be permitted at the discretion of the University.
- State fitness to work or otherwise and while it is not obligatory to state the nature of the illness on a medical certificate, a failure to include this information may lead to difficulties if seeking to have the absence discounted, e.g. discounting of a closure period.
- dates of issue and doctor's signature.

7.2 Unauthorised Absence

Employees who do not attend work due to illness, or any other reason, and who have not notified their Line Manager as to the reason for their absence will be deemed to be on unauthorised absence from work, which may result in the cessation of pay and the matter being dealt with under the terms of Statute No.4 – Statute on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment.

7.3 Persistent Short-Term Absences

- 7.3.1 The procedure for managing short-term absence is designed to be supportive and aims to help employees achieve regular attendance at work.
- 7.3.2 Absence should be dealt with promptly and consistently. Line managers shall discuss all absences with employees.
- 7.3.3 Persistent short-term absence shall be defined as absences of 1-2 days at a time, on five or more occasions in a 12 month period.
- 7.3.4 Where persistent or frequent short-term absences occur (whether certified or uncertified), the University may make referrals to an appropriate support service.
- 7.3.5 Where there is no underlying medical reason, the employee should be advised that his/her attendance is unsatisfactory. Line managers should advise such employees that improvement is required and of the consequences if their attendance does not improve.
- 7.3.6 If there is no satisfactory improvement in attendance over time, the University may invoke Statute No.4 – Statute on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment.

7.4 Long-Term Absence

- 7.4.1 Long-term absence shall be defined as any absence greater than twenty (20) working days.

- 7.4.2 Where appropriate, regular contact should be maintained between the line manager and employee during extended periods of sick leave. Weekly/monthly medical certificates should be sent by the employee to their line manager. The employee is responsible for keeping their line manager informed of their progress and likely return date.
- 7.4.3 Employees on long term sick leave will be required to attend an Occupational Health Assessment with the Company's Occupational Health Physician.
- 7.4.4 Employees may not return to work unless they are medically fit to do so. The University's Occupational Health Service or the employee's own doctor must certify that the employee is fit to resume duties.
- 7.4.5 Be signed by a duly qualified medical practitioner registered with the Irish/UK Medical Council/Dental Council of Ireland. In exceptional circumstances medical certificates may be accepted from overseas medical practitioners, such as where an employee becomes ill abroad or is receiving a recognised medical treatment unavailable in Ireland. The advice of an OHP must be sought in such circumstances.
- 7.4.6 Normally cover a period of or no more than one week. However, certification for periods of up to one month may be permitted at the discretion of the employer.
- 7.4.7 State fitness to work or otherwise and while it is not obligatory to state the nature of the illness on a medical certificate, a failure to include this information may lead to difficulties if seeking to have the absence discounted, e.g. discounting of a closure period.

7.5 Maintaining Contact During Absence

Employees should maintain regular contact with their manager during periods of absence and similarly managers should ensure that they maintain reasonable contact with absent employees, particularly in longer-term cases. The frequency and method of contact (phone call, text, email, other) should be jointly agreed during the early stages of absence and reviewed periodically as appropriate.

There may be occasions when it is not appropriate for the line manager to contact the absent employee. In such instances, if requested by the employee, HR may contact the employee. Where this is the case, HR will liaise with the employee's line manager as appropriate.

In all cases, contact should be approached sensitively and should be clearly focused on the employee's health and wellbeing and their return to work. Advice or support may be sought from HR where required.

7.6 Procedures for Managing Stress-Related Absence

In situations where the nature of the absence is certified as work-related stress absence, regardless of the duration of the absence, a referral to Occupational

Health will be required prior to any return to work to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure a safe working environment.

7.7 Return to Work

On the employee's return to work the line manager will conduct a return-to-work meeting. This should be done following each period of absence due to illness. This shall be done informally, in private, on the day of the employee's return to work or as soon as possible thereafter. The aim of this discussion is to:

- Welcome the employee back to work
- Demonstrate concern for the employee's health
- Offer support as required
- Advise the employee, as appropriate, of the Employee Support Service
- Update the employee on relevant work-related matters
- Identify any health & safety or environmental issues in the workplace affecting the employee's attendance

A record of these discussions should be held by the line manager.

7.8 Phased Return to Work following Sick Leave Absence

A phased return to work may be recommended for employees who have been absent due to a long-term illness or following surgery. Any such recommendations by a treating specialist/GP will be assessed and confirmed by the University Occupational Health Physician. A phased return to work is not suitable in every situation and is assessed on a case by case basis.

7.9 Employee Support

It is the aim of the University to ensure that any employee who requires ongoing medical attention will be supported by the University. Employees are encouraged to access UL's independent and confidential Employee Support Service, <https://www.ul.ie/hr/current-staff/employee-relations/employee-support-service>, SilverCloud, the free to use online self-help well-being programmes [SilverCloud](#) | [UL - University of Limerick](#) or to talk to their line manager or the HR department in this regard.

7.10 Medical Appointments

Wherever possible, medical appointments should be arranged outside working hours. Alternatively, and with minimum disruption to the working day, your line manager may agree with you that the hours are made up at another time. Where this is not possible, you should notify your line manager of an appointment at the earliest opportunity. Your line manager may request a medical certificate confirming the appointment.

7.11 Falling Ill at Work

If an employee falls ill at work they must advise their line manager before leaving work. If an employee leaves work before mid-day this will be treated as a day's sick leave and recorded accordingly.

7.12 Annual Leave During Sickness Absence

Where an employee falls ill whilst on annual leave, they must follow the same process of notification and submit medical certification as if they were due to attend work for that period. Provided that the correct reporting procedures have been followed, managers / HR will cancel those days of annual leave on which the employee was ill, and classify those days as sick leave absence.

7.13 Time Keeping

Each employee has a responsibility to ensure they are at their workplace ready to start work at the appointed start time. Employees are also required to make a prompt start following lunch and breaks. Having reported to work, an employee may not leave the premises without prior permission of the supervisor or line manager where appropriate.

7.14 Related Documentation

The University Managing Attendance Procedure should be read in conjunction with the following relevant documentation, provisions and regulation, which together determine the terms, conditions and procedures for all absences due to illness.

University of Limerick Sick Leave Scheme, which can be found [Here](#)

2014: Revised Sick Leave Arrangements from 1st September 2014 for all Staff of Universities and other Third Level Colleges under the remit of the HEA, which can be found [Here](#)

Public Service Management (Sick Leave) Regulations, SI 124 of 2014, which can be found [Here](#)

Public Service Management (Sick Leave) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 SI 384 of 2015, which can be found [Here](#)

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