

ACAS Self Help Guide – Attendance Management

This booklet takes you through a five stage process to help you to reduce levels of absence.



- 1: Find out your levels of absence by setting up a records system
- 2: Calculate your absence levels
- 3: Analyse your absence levels for example by section, or shift and compare to levels of absence with those in your industry and area
- 4: Set up policies to reduce absence levels
- 5: Manage absence

This should be a continuous process.

Step 4 Set up an absence policy

Set up an absence policy so that your managers know how to deal with absence and so that employees know where they stand. It is beneficial to involve managers, employees and their representatives when you are devising such a policy. A joint working group chaired by an ACAS adviser can help you to do this.

This policy may be included in a company handbook, contained in employees' written statements of employment particulars or posted on notice boards. The following pages give an example of an absence policy which outlines what you should do in the event of short-term and long-term absence.

This example absence policy is for guidance only and should be adapted to suit the needs of your organisation.

Example of an absence policy

	Comments/guidance notes
<p>Introduction</p>	<p>Set out here the purpose and principles of the policy, along with any definitions of terms. Use straightforward language and write directly to employees, using 'you' rather than 'the employee'.</p>
<p>1. Principles</p> <p>The purpose of this policy is to set out what treatment you can expect from the Company if you suffer sickness or injury or if you are absent from work for other reasons.</p> <p>Your attendance is important to the business and is monitored. This policy identifies points at which the Company will take action if your sickness absence reaches unacceptable levels.</p> <p>The overriding aim is to ensure a healthy, productive workforce, not to punish you for being unwell. However, the Company cannot ignore the effects on the services and on other employees of lateness or absence from duty, whatever the cause.</p>	<p>You should be aware of the health and safety implications in the event of an accident at work. For more information contact the Health and Safety Executive's Infoline on 0845 345 0055.</p> <p>More information on 'trigger points' is given in Section 6 of this policy.</p> <p>It is important to outline clearly the aims of the policy and to stress the effects on the business of high levels of absence.</p>
<p>3. Statutory Sick Pay</p> <p>You are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) when you are absent from work due to sickness.</p> <p>The main features of the scheme are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first three days of incapacity are unpaid (called 'waiting days') • Further sickness is paid at the rate of £72.55a week (2007 figure revised annually in April) for up to 28 weeks. • Once SSP is exhausted, an employee normally transfers onto benefits, paid directly by the DWP. • If two periods of sickness are 	<p>An employer must operate the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) scheme as a minimum. In order to qualify for SSP an employee must have done some work for the employer and be earning at least £87 a week (2007). More information on qualifying for SSP is available from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs http://www.hmrc.gov.uk or phone the employer's helpline on 08457 143 143.</p>

<p>separated by less than eight weeks (56 days) then they are linked and the employee need not serve the waiting days again.</p>	
<p>4. Sickness whilst on holiday</p> <p>If you are sick whilst on holiday the Company will consider any requests to change arrangements. However, the Company reserves the right to insist that you still take your previously-booked annual leave and to pay holiday pay accordingly. Sick pay will not be paid for periods where you are receiving holiday pay.</p> <p>If you wish to cancel any booked leave and use the entitlement at another time then you should inform your line manager as soon as possible. The Company will then decide whether to allow the change and will inform you as soon as possible.</p>	<p>If an employee is sick during a period of annual leave (or if a period of annual leave falls whilst an employee is off sick) he or she cannot receive both sick pay and holiday pay for the same period of time. It is prudent to outline a policy to ensure both employer and employee are aware of how such a situation will be handled. The Company could allow employees to cancel their leave and take it at another time.</p>
<p>5. Company sick pay scheme</p> <p>Some information on company sick pay schemes is given in Appendix 2.</p>	<p>Many employers pay sickness benefit over and above the SSP entitlement in order to attract and retain good staff.</p> <p>A company sick pay scheme that is funded through an insurance policy may require that medical information is sought in certain cases. If the Company chooses to exercise its discretion then it may have to fund sick pay directly if the insurance policy will not pay. It may be appropriate to refer to the insurance policy terms and conditions within this policy, attaching a copy of the relevant terms.</p>
<p>6. Short-term absence</p> <p>Your manager will formally review your absence record if in any three month period there are three separate periods of absence (whether these are certificated or not), or if there is an unacceptable pattern of absence, for example, regular time off on Mondays or Fridays.</p>	<p>Frequent spells of short term absence are troublesome and costly to employers because of their unpredictability. Tighter monitoring procedures which help to control such absences can also improve overall efficiency.</p> <p>The organisation has to decide at what stage absence levels become 'unacceptable'. Some organisations have set up systems where managers are alerted to an individual's absences through the use of 'trigger points'. Remember the trigger is for investigation not for automatic sanctions</p>

	such as a warning.
<p>7. Long-term absence</p> <p>'Long-term absence' is a period of sickness which lasts longer than two calendar weeks.</p> <p>The Company takes a sympathetic view about genuine ill-health problems and will provide a supportive approach to all employees in such circumstances.</p> <p>Your line manager will monitor your absence and will counsel you through a period of sickness absence. If, after discussion, it appears that you are likely to be away from work for more than four weeks, your manager will telephone you every fortnight and visit your home every month. These arrangements may be varied by agreement. Home visits will not be made without the employee's consent.</p> <p>(Home visits should always be made by the manager and another Company representative. Where the employee is female one of the Company representatives should also be female.)</p> <p>The Company will make contact to find out the reason for your sickness (including requesting medical information where appropriate), the likely duration of your sickness and if there are any steps that the Company or you can take to speed your return to work.</p> <p>Ultimately, if absence does reach problematic levels then the Company may have no choice but to dismiss you. The point at which this action may be taken will depend on the nature of your work and the difficulty caused to the company by your continued absence. Dismissal will be regarded as a last resort and the company will try to ensure that the following criteria are fulfilled:</p> <p>- Relevant medical information is sought and considered.</p>	<p>There is no universally accepted definition of 'long-term absence' but it is good practice for each organisation to have its own definition.</p> <p>If an employee is off sick for an extended period then action should be taken to ensure that the lines of communication remain open and that adequate steps are being taken to ensure the employee's prompt return to work. The example policy sets out actions that could be taken in such a situation, the definitions of long-term absence and of the actions to be taken.</p> <p>Possible options could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighter duties • Altered hours • Purchase of specialised equipment • Alternative work • Flexible working. <p>A dismissal in these circumstances should not come 'out of the blue', it should be the final step in a consultation process.</p> <p>For more information on the statutory Discipline and Dismissal Procedures see http://www.berr.gov.uk/</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Options for alternative duties or working arrangements are examined. - Your views will be taken into account. <p>Before any dismissal the company will comply with any applicable statutory dismissal procedure.</p>	
<p>6. Return to work interviews</p> <p>When you return to work from any absence (excluding holidays) your line manager will interview you on the first day you return or as soon as reasonably practicable after that. They will check that you are fit to return, update you on any important matters you have missed and may discuss your absence record if appropriate.</p>	<p>Return to work interviews help to ensure that employees are aware that their absence has been noticed and their attendance is valued. It also allows managers to discover any underlying problems that are causing the absence and try and solve them before absence reaches problematic levels.</p>
<p>7. Medical information</p> <p>If your absences reach excessive levels, the Company may require medical information about your condition from your GP and/or a specialist practitioner of the Company's choosing.</p> <p>If the Company requires information from a specialist practitioner, the Company will pay for the examination and for any expenses that you incur.</p> <p>If the Company needs a report from your GP, the Company will comply with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, which requires that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Company obtains your written consent before we contact your GP. - You are given prior access to the report and can refuse the Company access to it if you wish. - You can ask your GP to alter the contents of the report if you feel it is inaccurate. If your GP does not wish changes to be made, you can ask your GP to attach a statement of your views to the report. 	<p>Decisions about whether the employee is likely to return to work are far easier to make and will be more easily seen to be fair if they are made in the light of appropriate medical information. A doctor is the most qualified person to make judgments on medical issues and employers should refrain from making such judgments themselves wherever possible. An example of a letter to a GP requesting medical information about an employee is shown in Appendix 3.</p> <p>It is possible to get access to medical information with the appropriate consent from the individual employee.</p> <p>A copy of an employee consent form is shown in Appendix 4.</p> <p>It is often useful for an organisation to have a doctor (or occupational health specialist) who is familiar with the workplace and who can give an informed second opinion in any particular case. It may be a condition of medical insurance that such advice is sought regularly from company doctors.</p> <p>If advice is sought both from a doctor acting for the company and one acting for the employee then it is more likely that any accusations of bias can be avoided.</p>

<p>However, you should be aware that if you refuse to supply relevant medical information the Company may have no choice but to make decisions about your likely return to work based on the information that is available.</p> <p>Therefore, it is in your best interests to disclose medical information.</p>	
<p>8. Promoting a healthy workforce</p> <p>The Company will give you the opportunity to attend regular health screenings. This can help pinpoint medical conditions early on and encourage you to lead a healthy life style.</p> <p>The Company has also arranged for discounts for employees at local health clubs.</p>	<p>Health programmes can pay for themselves through, reduced sickness absence and higher morale.</p>

Unfair dismissal

If you decide to dismiss an employee, you must follow a minimum statutory disciplinary procedure:

- the problem must be set out in writing and given to the employee
- you must meet the employee at a pre-arranged time to discuss the problem
- you must allow an appeal if requested.

If you dismiss without complying with the procedure, it will be automatically unfair dismissal, with minimum compensation of four weeks' pay provided the normal qualification period of continuous employment, currently one year, has been completed.