

Managing Short Term or Frequent Absence

Guidance

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Introduction

While the University wishes to be supportive in addressing frequent short-term absence, it should be noted that absences of this nature can be particularly disruptive and it is important that they are managed and supported effectively.

Attendance concerns can often be resolved at an early stage by making an employee aware that their attendance levels are having an impact and working with them to support the required improvement.

The [Attendance Improvement Process](#) provides a framework to support improved attendance, and escalates accordingly where an improvement does not occur.

Identifying an Attendance Concern

Managers are responsible for deciding if supportive intervention is needed when a series of absences occur and/or where a review point is reached following a period of absence.

An employee's attendance history should be assessed against the review points following any period of absence.

The Review Points, as outlined in the [Managing Attendance policy](#), are any one (or combination) of the following:

- 4 occasions of absence within the last 6 months
- 6 occasions of absence within the last 12 months
- 12 or more days sickness absence, accrued over more than 1 period of absence, within the last 12 months (*Pro-rated for part-time employees*)
- Any other recurring, recognisable pattern (e.g. frequent absenteeism on a Monday)

Discussing an Attendance Concern

It is good practice in all cases of absence, regardless of whether or not any concern has been identified, to ensure that a Return to Work Discussion takes place following a period of absence. The extent of this discussion will be influenced by the circumstances of the absence(s), including whether or not a review point has been met.

Frequent short-term absence can in some cases be a sign of an underlying medical condition, therefore it is important that supportive steps are taken to discuss any frequent pattern of absence in order to explore the cause, its impact and how an improvement may be achieved (with support if required). Such absences may also be a sign of another

problem of difficulty and discussion gives employee's the chance to raise or share any concerns or difficulties they may have.

For absences where no review point has been reached or where the manager has no other concerns, a short verbal discussion is appropriate with no need to complete a return to work form.

For absences which meet a review point or where the manager has any concerns, a more detailed discussion should take place and be recorded using the Form - Return to Work Discussion. Where a review point is reached, this discussion is typically the start of the Attendance Improvement Process and the reverse of the return to work form also contains the Attendance Improvement Plan required at the start of this process.

Further details on holding the return to work discussion are available in [Guidance – Carrying Out a Return to Work Discussion](#), but key considerations are:

- Alerting the employee to the fact that their attendance levels are giving cause for concern
- Exploring the reasons for absence and establishing whether or not there is an underlying medical condition or reason affecting an employee's attendance, taking advice from Occupational Health if required. Where an underlying medical condition or disability is identified, discussion should take place around the impact this may have on their role
- If the employee believes they are suffering from work-related stress, the guidance under the Stress At Work section should typically be followed in the first instance
- Considering any possible adjustments to support employees and taking appropriate advice or guidance from P&OD and/or Occupational Health, particularly in cases where an underlying medical condition is identified
- Ensuring that the employee understands the Managing Attendance Policy, the review points, the [Attendance Improvement Process](#) and any potential next steps in the process should their attendance fail to improve. In appropriate cases, this will include advising the employee that their attendance will now be monitored for a period of time or that they will be required to attend a formal hearing.

Monitoring an Attendance Concern

Attendance levels should continue to be observed during any monitoring periods implemented during the Attendance Improvement Process (and detailed in the employees Attendance Improvement Plan).

Equally important is the monitoring of the impact of any adjustments put in place to ensure that they are working effectively or to identify if they need to be reviewed or adapted.

Where the desired improvement is achieved, the Attendance Improvement Process concludes and the employee's attendance can then be managed as per normal arrangements.

Where there is no improvement, or where further review points are triggered, the matter should be escalated through the Attendance Improvement Process accordingly.

Progressing an Attendance Issue

Where attendance issues remain, the Attendance Improvement Process outlines the process to be followed. The general principles of section 3 are repeated throughout, with a potential escalation of letters of concern issued at formal reviews throughout the process.

It is important, before progressing any case, to consider the root cause of absence and to take further advice from People & OD in cases where an underlying medical condition is identified.