

# DURHAM SU ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY & PROCEDURE

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## ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY & PROCEDURE STATEMENT

Durham SU aims to maximise the attendance of all its employees, whilst recognising that, from time to time, individuals will not be able to attend work due to sickness. We value the contribution our employees make to our success and are committed to promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees and supporting them in returning to work as soon as possible. This policy provides information on how sickness and ill health should be reported and managed, with an emphasis on being proactive about managing sickness absence, whilst also supporting employees.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to set down the Durham SUs absence management arrangements.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees of Durham SU.

## **1 PRINCIPLES**

- 1.1 Durham SU aims to encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work while recognising that employees will, from time to time, be unable to come to work due to sickness. Having a strong culture of employee wellbeing in conjunction with good absence management practices is integral to the future success of the organisation.
- 1.2 While Durham SU understands that there will inevitably be some sickness absence among employees, it must also pay due regard to its business needs. If an employee is frequently and persistently absent from work, this can damage efficiency and productivity, and place an additional burden of work on the employee's colleagues. By implementing this policy, Durham SU aims to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of its business needs and the genuine needs of employees to take occasional periods of time off work because of sickness.
- 1.3 This policy sets out the steps taken by Durham SU to ensure a fair and consistent approach to absence management. This Absence Management Policy sets out procedures for reporting sickness absence and for the management of sickness absence in a fair and consistent way. It also provides information in relation to an employees' entitlement to sick pay.

## **2 DEFINITIONS**

- 2.1 Sickness absence can vary from short term intermittent periods of ill-health to a continuous period of long-term absence and have a number of different causes. Durham SU wishes to ensure that the reasons for sickness absence are understood in each case and investigated where necessary. In addition, where needed and reasonably practicable, measures will be taken to assist those who have been absent by reason of sickness to return to work.
- 2.2 This policy does not form part of the employee contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. We may also vary the procedures set out in this policy, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.

## **3 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURE**

- 3.1 Employees must notify reception by telephone if they are ill or unable to attend work for any other reason, who will pass the information on to the line manager or a team member should the line manager be unavailable. Notification should be as early as possible, and no later than one hour after the employee's usual start time. The employee should be prepared to state the reason why they cannot attend work, and how long they think the absence will last. Employees will also:
  - 3.1.1 Attend a meeting with their line manager on return to work to discuss their absence and the reason for it. One of the purposes for this interview will be to establish whether or not the line manager can provide any support to the employee that could facilitate attendance at work in the future (for example, if the employee's absence was in any way work related).
  - 3.1.2 Complete and submit a self-certification form on return to work for all periods of sickness absence not exceeding seven days.
  - 3.1.3 Provide a doctor's certificate or "fit note" for a period of sickness absence exceeding seven days.
  - 3.1.4 Agree on request to be interviewed and/or examined by an occupational doctor nominated by Durham SU and to authorise the release of any medical report from the

doctor to the organisation. Durham SU will meet all costs associated with any such examination and/or medical report.

- 3.1.5 Durham SU will consider advice from a doctor regarding a fit note, and may make reasonable adjustments to job duties, hours or working conditions.

3.2 Managers responsible for staff are expected to manage their employees' attendance and absence. They should, as a matter of routine, take the following actions each time an employee has been absent from work for a short period (i.e. a period of up to one working week).

- 3.2.1 Add a file note to BreatheHR whenever an employee phones in to report that they are unable to come to work due to sickness. This includes recording when the call was made, the stated reason for the absence and how long the employee expects to be absent.
- 3.2.2 Conduct a routine "return-to-work meeting". Each time an employee returns to work following a short-term absence, their manager should speak to the employee about the absence and the reason for it in a fair and factual way. This approach will alert the employee to the fact that the situation is being monitored and will potentially deter casual absences.
- 3.2.3 The manager should be supportive towards the employee and, where appropriate, seek to identify ways in which to assist the employee to improve their attendance in the future.
- 3.2.4 Require the employee (on return to work) to complete a self-certification form. This should be signed and uploaded to BreatheHR.
- 3.2.5 Be alert to patterns, for example the persistent Monday or Friday absentee. If a pattern is identified, the manager should put their observations to the employee directly so that the employee has the opportunity to provide an explanation. The manager should, however, remain open minded about the employee's absences.
- 3.2.6 Try to establish, through investigation and discussion with the employee, the underlying reasons for frequent absences. Until the underlying cause is identified, an appropriate and effective remedy will be impossible to identify.
- 3.2.7 Check whether or not absences are in part because of personal or family problems. If this is the case, tolerance and sympathy should be shown towards the employee, as the problems may be unavoidable. The manager should be supportive, while at the same time explaining clearly to the employee that continuing frequent absences from work are unacceptable.
- 3.2.8 The manager should consider any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary to avoid further absence, and implement any adjustments promptly
- 3.2.9 Set reasonable targets and time-limits for improvement in attendance and ensure that the employee is committed to achieving them. Advice is available from line managers.
- 3.2.10 Check the employee's absence record to gain an accurate assessment of the number of days' absence that they have had and the number of separate occasions that they have been absent.

3.3 Durham SU will keep in regular contact with employees about their health, any ongoing concerns and updates on their expected return date. It may also be necessary for employees to be contacted regarding an element of their work that requires attention but such contact will be kept to a reasonable minimum.

## 4 HOMEWORKING

- 4.1 An employee who is absent from work due to sickness should not work from home, and the expectation of Durham SU is that employees that are not well enough to work should take time off to recover. However, Durham SU understands that sometimes an employee may feel well enough to work, but not well enough to attend their normal place of work and would prefer to fulfil their duties from home. Requests to work from home should be discussed with the employee's line manager and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## 5 EVIDENCE OF INCAPACITY

- 5.1 For absence of more than 7 days employees must obtain a certificate from their doctor stating that they are not fit for work and the medical condition that prevents them from attending work. This should be forwarded to their manager as soon as possible. If the absence continues, further medical certificates must be provided to cover the whole period of the absence.

- 5.2 If a doctor provides a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' employees must inform their manager immediately. This will then be discussed to determine if any additional measures are needed to facilitate an employee's return to work, taking into account the doctor's advice. If appropriate measures cannot be taken, employees may be required to remain on sick leave and a date to review the situation will be arranged.

## 6 SICK PAY ENTITLEMENT

- 6.1 Except where there is an insurance claim due to an injury, the Employee's entitlement to sick pay is as follows:

	Full Pay	Half Pay
During Probation Period	1 week	1 week
After Probation/Under 1 years' service	2 weeks	2 weeks
After 1 years' service	1 month	1 month
After 2 years' service	2 months	2 months
After 3 years' service	3 months	3 months

### For Elected Officers:

Under 1 years' service	2 weeks	2 weeks
After 1 years' service	1 month	1 month

- 6.2 Payment of salary during periods of sickness absence will be made on the assumption that the employee is receiving either SSP or DSS benefit and be such that the combined total will not exceed the contracted salary.

- 6.3 There is no Company sick pay entitlement for student/casual staff. Such staff may, if their earnings level hit the statutory lower parameters, accrue an entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay, and if this is the case, then this will be paid in the normal way through payroll.

## 7 MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

- 7.1 Durham SU may, at any time in operating this policy, ask employees to consent to a medical examination by an occupational health professional and/or doctor nominated by Durham SU. Employees will be asked to agree that any report produced in connection with any such examination may be disclosed to Durham SU and discussed with advisers and doctors accordingly.

## 8 UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

8.1 Cases of unauthorised absence may be dealt with under Durham SU's disciplinary procedure.

8.2 Absence that has not been notified according to the sickness absence reporting procedure will be treated as unauthorised absence.

## 9 RETURNING TO WORK FROM LONG-TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

9.1 Durham SU is committed to helping employees return to work from long-term sickness absence. It will support employees by:

9.1.1 Agreeing a return to work programme with those affected.

9.1.2 Obtaining medical advice.

9.1.3 Making reasonable adjustments to the workplace, working practices and working hours.

9.1.4 Considering redeployment.

## 10 SICKNESS ABSENCE THRESHOLDS

10.1 The Bradford Factor is a simple formula which helps Durham SU to manage short term sick absences and determine when these have become excessive.

10.2 The Bradford Factor calculates a score based on the number of times an employee is absent and the number of days they are absent in a rolling 12 month period although other periods could be used, depending on the circumstances.

10.3 The Bradford Factor deals effectively with minor non-recurring absences – the headache, upset stomach, etc. type of illnesses that employees will usually self-certify for.

10.4 The formula used to calculate an employee's Bradford Factor score is:

**Number of times absent x number of times absent x total number of days absent =  
Bradford Factor Score**

For example in the 12 month period an employee is absent on two separate occasions; one occasion for one day, and the other occasion for two days. The score will be worked out as:

2 (no. of times they are off)  
x 2 (no. of times they are off)  
x 3 (total days off)  
= 12 (BF score)

The below table shows the Bradford Factor scoring thresholds and potential actions at each score. They are provided for guidance in order to ensure consistency but consideration should be given to the particular circumstances of the individual in each case. The process can be triggered at any level within the table where there is good reason to do so, using the disciplinary process.

Bradford Score	Potential Action
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0-49	Return to work conversation carried out
50-124	Consider a recommendation to issue a Verbal Warning
125-399	Consider a recommendation to issue a First Written Warning
400-649	Consider a recommendation to issue a Final Written Warning
650+	Consider a recommendation of Dismissal

## 11 SICKNESS ABSENCE MEETINGS

11.1 We may apply this procedure whenever we consider it necessary, including, for example, if you:

- 11.1.1 Have been absent due to illness resulting in a high Bradford score;
- 11.1.2 Have discussed matters at a return to work interview that require investigation; and/or
- 11.1.3 Have been absent for more than 10 consecutive working days.

11.2 Unless it is impractical to do so, Durham SU will give reasonable written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. It will put any concerns about the employee's sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing or otherwise advise why the meeting is being called. A reasonable opportunity to consider this information before a meeting will be provided. Durham SU is happy to consider a request to be accompanied to the meeting.