

Procedures on: ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

At PMR, we understand that from time to time staff may need to be absent from work due to illness. The length of time lost by employees through illness must however be monitored so that each member of staff is able to do their job effectively and without putting themselves or others at risk. It's not PMR's intention to penalise the genuinely sick, but we recognise that an employee who is medically unfit to carry out their contractual duties may not be able to continue in that employment.

Managers will consider cases of sickness absence on an individual basis and ensure the provision of appropriate support, advice and medical input where appropriate. In some cases, however, patterns or levels of absence will be unacceptable and formal management action will be required.

Employees who become aware that they have an illness problem are encouraged to inform their manager at the earliest opportunity. All such requests will be dealt with as speedily and compassionately as possible.

1. OVERVIEW OF STAGES

Stage 1

On returning from absence, all employees must be interviewed by their PMR Manager. At this interview, the employee and the manager must complete a Return to Work Discussion Form agreeing the reason for the absence, the period of absence and, where appropriate, what course of action is required as a result of the absence. This form should be signed by both parties before being stored in the employee's personnel file

In situations where an employee's sickness record is giving some cause for concern, then the employee's PMR Manager will discuss those concerns with the employee, providing support and counselling where appropriate. This can be done at the same time as a return to work interview or in a separate meeting. It is essential that any message conveyed in this manner is clear and unambiguous.

Stage 2

If there is no obvious improvement in the health of an employee, or there are any signs of patterns emerging in an employee's absence, then the PMR Manager should arrange for the employee to meet the next-in-line manager who will review the employee's case. At this stage, the employee must be offered the opportunity for appropriate representation by a work colleague or trade union official.

The employee must be given the outcome of this meeting in writing and where appropriate they must be given notice that their level of absence is unacceptable and given a period of time to improve.

Stage 3

If the employee fails to improve in the given time scale then a formal Second Review should be undertaken. If possible, a more senior manager should chair this meeting. The employee must be offered the opportunity for appropriate representation at this time.

Prior to the Second Review, it will often be appropriate for the employee to be seen by a PMR Approved Doctor who will give his opinion on the employee's health. The employee should be given the results of this meeting in writing. Where appropriate, they should be given notice that their level of absence is unacceptable and that they are given a period of time during which to reduce their level of absence. The employee should also be informed at this stage if any further absences may result in their employment being terminated due to incapacity.

Stage 4

If there is still no improvement within the laid-down timescale, a Final Review will be held, with a PMR Director or senior manager in the chair. The employee should be offered the opportunity for appropriate representation at this meeting. The Director or senior manager will review all the available evidence including any doctor's reports.

If there are no special circumstances, the employee will be dismissed on the grounds of incapacity and their inability to meet the acceptable standards of attendance required by PMR.

2. APPEALS

Every PMR employee has the right to appeal against the outcome of any formal review stage of the absence procedure. The basis of an appeal should normally relate to one of the following areas:

- that the Procedures were not followed correctly.
- that the resulting action was inappropriate.
- that the need for action was not warranted.

- 1) If the employee does wish to appeal, he must inform the company in writing within 5 working days of the date of the review meeting, and on doing so PMR will invite him to attend a further meeting.
- 2) The appeal meeting will be arranged within a reasonable period of time.
- 3) An appeal cannot be used to re-open a case unless there is new material that was not available previously or was overlooked when making the original decision.
- 4) The appeal will be dealt with by a more senior manager than at the previous meeting and who has not been involved in the initial decision. Where this is not practicable, the company will hear the appeal and decide the case as impartially as possible.
- 5) The employee has the right to be accompanied at this meeting by a fellow employee or an employed official of an independent trade union.
- 6) After the appeal meeting, the company will inform the employee of its final decision.

3. GUIDANCE ON LENGTH OF ABSENCE

Short-term persistent absence

PMR does not have fixed rules on what is an unacceptable period of absence, but the following will normally trigger a review, unless there are special circumstances:

- Self-certificated absences in any 12 month period that exceed 14 days in total.
- Absences exceeding 7 days in a 6 month period or less, although a single absence of 7 days may not require action.
- Absences which fall regularly on specific days, such as on a Monday or a Friday.
- Six or more periods of sickness absence in a 12 month period, or three or more in a 6 month period, however long the absences are.
- Absences for frequent and unrelated non-specific illnesses (such as headache, stomach ache, back trouble), particularly when these have been self-certificated.

Part-time employees

For part-time employees, the above guidance figures should be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

4. PROCEDURES CHECK LIST

Stage 1

Return to Work Interview

This is an informal part of the Procedures, however in order to give the process credibility the following rules should be followed:

- Every employee should complete a Return to Work Discussion Form with their PMR Manager.
- Interviews should be carried out in an area where there will be no interruptions and where both parties can feel at ease.
- The employee should always be informed of the reason for the meeting.
- The meeting should be prefaced by an indication of concern for the employee as well as the need for the PMR Manager to be aware of the health of their employees.
- The employee should be encouraged to discuss any problems they may be having with their health and to actively contribute to the solution to the problem.
- Any apparent problem or patterns of absence should be brought to the employee's attention.
- All relevant absence documentation **must** be recorded in the employee's personnel file.

Counselling

- If the counselling is to be done in a separate meeting to a return to work interview, the employee should be made aware of the date and location of the meeting and the reasons for it.
- Prior to a separate counselling meeting, full details of the employee's absence record along with reasons should be made available to both participants.
- The employee should be given the opportunity to explain absence records and present any evidence required.
- If there are medical problems it may be necessary to adjourn the meeting for medical advice.
- It is vital that the message conveyed is clear and unambiguous.
- The PMR Manager will advise the employee of the outcome of the meeting and where appropriate of the need for improvement of their current absence level. Written confirmation of the outcome of the meeting will be given to the employee and a copy recorded on their personnel files.

Stage 2

- Prior to calling a meeting, full details of absence record along with reasons should be made available to all participants.
- The employee should be made aware of the date and location of the review and the reasons for it.
- In addition they should be informed of the right to be represented at the review.
- The employee should be given the opportunity to explain absence records and present any evidence required.
- If there are medical problems, it may be necessary to adjourn the meeting for medical advice.
- The manager should set out clearly the improvements expected and the time scale

over which these improvements must be achieved.

- The employee should be informed in writing of the requirements and the time scale and advised if the warning is to be recorded on his record.
- Any warning letter should be copied to the trade union representative if present at the meeting. The employee must be informed of their right to appeal against this decision.
- Any warnings issued will remain on the record for 12 months.

Stage 3

- If there has been no improvement in the absence record in the period set at the first review or there has been a further breach of policy during the lifetime of a written warning then the employee must be informed and asked to attend a Second Review. In addition they should be informed of the right to be represented at the Second Review.
- Medical reports should usually be sought prior to the date of the meeting and results made available to both parties.
- The employee should be given the right to present any evidence in mitigation.
- The employee should be informed of the need to improve their record and the possibility of dismissal if they do not do so. The employee must be informed of their right to appeal against this decision. This should be confirmed in writing to the employee and held on their personnel file for 18 months.

Stage 4

- The employee must be given full details of the case and the possible consequences prior to attendance. The employee must also be informed of their right to representation at this meeting.
- All medical evidence should be taken and considered before a final decision is taken.
- If the decision is taken to dismiss the employee then this should be done by giving full entitlement to notice (even if sick pay is exhausted).
- The employee must be informed of their right to appeal against this decision.