



MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCEDURE & GUIDELINES

DOCUMENT VERSION CONTROL

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INTRODUCTION

SESTRAN aims to maximise attendance and minimise ill health amongst its employees and to promote health at work

It is recognised that attendance of employees at work is crucial for the effective operation of SESTRAN. SESTRAN is therefore committed to implementing a fair and proper means of monitoring sickness absence in accordance with the Equal Opportunities and Dignity at Work Policy, to ensure that appropriate action is taken in order to manage sickness absence in a fair and consistent manner whilst remaining responsive to the needs of individual employees.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers are expected to:

- promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees, including use of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on both physical and mental health in the workplace;
- ensure employees are aware of their responsibilities with regard to the Managing Sickness Absence Procedure, and the consequences of not complying with these;
- monitor levels of sickness absence for individuals and groups of employees;
- fairly and consistently apply procedures to support and manage staff absences, whilst dealing with unjustified and/or high levels of sickness absence;
- maintain a positive and preventive rather than a punitive approach;
- be sensitive and supportive to those suffering the effects of ill health;
- maintain regular communication with employees who are absent on long term sick leave;
- ensure that all recording of sickness absence is maintained with respect for confidentiality, and that relevant certificates are passed promptly to Payroll to enable the payment of sickness allowance and Statutory Sick Pay.

Employees are expected to:

- attend work unless unfit to do so;
- advise their manager of any illness which affects their ability to attend for work or to undertake the duties of their post to a satisfactory level;
- raise concerns with their manager if they believe that their job is making them ill or contributing to their illness;
- report sickness absences promptly to their manager and ensure that the appropriate certification is provided in accordance with the procedure noted below;
- maintain contact with their manager during periods of sickness absence and communicate effectively about their sickness absence in accordance with the procedure noted below;
- co-operate fully with SESTRAN's occupational health provider and any other organisations which may provide support to SESTRAN and its employees;

- ensure that medical advice and treatment, where appropriate, is received and followed as quickly as possible in order to facilitate a return to work;
- not participate in any extra-mural activity which may be detrimental to their recovery;
- not abuse the sickness absence procedures or sick pay scheme

PROCEDURE FOR CALLING IN SICK

During all sickness absences the following procedure must be followed:

- On the first day of sickness the employee must inform their manager, or in their absence the PA/Business Manager, by telephone of the reason for the absence and the anticipated date of return.
- If the absence continues the employee must keep their manager informed, for example, if they suggested they might be off for 2 days, and on the third day are still unfit then they should call.
- If the sickness continues for more than three days the employee must phone in on the fourth day.
- A self-certification form will be issued to the employee on the fourth day of absence which should be completed and returned as quickly as possible.
- If the absence is for eight calendar days or more the employee must provide SESTRAN with a medical certificate for all days absent from then onwards. They must also maintain contact with their manager during the absence.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

SESTRAN retains the services of an occupational health provider. Employees may be requested by SESTRAN to consent to attend for an occupational health consultation and to agree to allow a medical report to be forwarded to their manager. The terms of all employees' contracts are that they must give such consent when reasonably asked to do so by SESTRAN.

The decision as to whether occupational health advice will be sought in respect of any particular employee's situation will be made by their manager, in consultation with the SESTRAN Human Resources Adviser as required.

Employees can be referred to the occupational health service for a variety of reasons, including long term absence and short term persistent absence, fitness for duties after an accident or illness. Where an employee is absent due to depression/anxiety or any stress-related illness an immediate referral is required as occupational health can provide help and advice to the employee which can help with the recovery process. In other cases where an absence is lasting longer than expected or is causing concern in other ways, a referral is appropriate. It is not necessary for an employee to be absent from work for an occupational health referral to be made. Guidance on the occupational health referral process is available from the SESTRAN Human Resources Adviser.

EQUALITY ACT 2010

When dealing with cases where there are disability issues, it is essential to bear in mind that the employer has a duty of care to make reasonable adjustments. This duty requires an employer to be flexible, to look at what needs to be done and accept that it may be possible to achieve the right end by a different means. Managers are not expected to know all the answers for the best solution for any case, but they are expected to make every effort to find out. The occupational health service and SESTRAN's Human Resources Adviser can be contacted for advice and guidance.

GUIDELINES ON MANAGING SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

SESTRAN aims to encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work whilst recognising that employees will, from time to time, be unable to come to work for short periods due to sickness. Short-term sickness absences from work are defined as those lasting up to one working week.

Whilst it is understood that there will inevitably be some short-term sickness absence amongst employees, due regard must also be paid to 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 guidance, SESTRAN aims to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of its business needs and the genuine needs of employees to take occasional short periods of time off work because of sickness.

The key to managing short term sickness absence is ensuring that employees are aware of the standards expected of them and applying procedures consistently.

1 General management of short term sickness absence

The following actions should be taken each time an employee has been absent from work for a short period (ie, a period of up to one working week):

- Create a record whenever an employee phones in to report that he/she is 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.
- Conduct routine 'return to work interviews' each time an employee returns to work following a short-term absence. The 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. The manager should be supportive towards the employee and, where appropriate, seek to identify ways in which to assist the employee to improve his/her attendance in the future. If not previously completed the self-certification form should be completed at this time, with a copy being passed to payroll and another being retained in the

personal file together with a record of the discussion signed by the employee and manager.

- Be alert to patterns of absence, for example the persistent Monday or Friday absentee. If a pattern is identified, the manager should put his/her observations to the employee directly so that they have the opportunity to provide an explanation. The manager should, however, remain open-minded and not jump to any hasty conclusions about the employee's absences.

2 Frequent short term sickness absence

Absences from work will be regarded as frequent if, during any period of 12 consecutive months, an employee is absent from work on three separate occasions totalling 10 or more working days.

Where an employee exhibits this pattern of absence, or where there is another pattern of absence which raises concerns, the following procedure should be followed:

- 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.
- Check whether absences are, in part, because of personal or family problems. If this is the case, a reasonable degree of tolerance and sympathy should be shown towards the employee, as the problems may be unavoidable. The manager should be supportive, whilst at the same time explaining clearly to the employee that continuing frequent absences from work are unacceptable.
- Check whether the employee's absences are in any way work related, for example, as a result of workplace stress. If the problem is work related, the manager should take reasonable steps to remove or reduce the factor that is causing the employee's problem, ie, the issues raised should be discussed with the employee and investigated. The outcome of the investigation should then be discussed with the employee and an action plan agreed. The outcome of action undertaken should be reviewed in order to ensure it has been effective. In cases where the individual is indicating they are suffering from workplace stress advice from the SESTRAN Human Resources Adviser should be sought regarding the implementation of a stress risk assessment.
- Seek occupational health advice, if appropriate, to determine whether there is any underlying medical cause for the employee's frequent absences.
- Set reasonable targets and time-limits for improvement in attendance and ensure that the employee is committed to achieving them.
- Warn the employee of the consequences of continuing unsatisfactory attendance, ie, that he/she may eventually be dismissed.
- Keep confidential records of all absences, discussions and medical certificates and make sure that the records clearly identify the reasons for an employee's various absences.

- Schedule a follow-up meeting at an agreed time to monitor the ongoing situation.

If there is no improvement in an employee's frequent short term absence record, advice should be sought from SESTRAN's Human Resources Adviser as to whether the individual's case should be progressed in accordance with the Capability Procedure.

GUIDELINES ON MANAGING LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

Long term sickness absence in this context is defined as any period of sickness absence lasting more than approximately four weeks.

It is SESTRAN's policy to support employees who are genuinely sick and unable to come to work, to actively manage their sickness absence and, where applicable, their subsequent return to work.

SESTRAN will regularly review an employee's absence and state of health or fitness to see whether there is any improvement and if anything can be done to facilitate the employee's recovery and return to work.

This will require the employee's manager (or alternative nominated contact) to keep in touch with them. The employee will be consulted about how contact will be maintained, for example by telephone, e-mail and meetings in the work place/ at employee's home or at other appropriate locations as agreed.

1. Return to work

When an absent employee is well enough to return to work, the manager will meet with the employee to discuss the terms of his/her return. The discussions will include:

- the employee's opinion about his/her capabilities, for example whether the employee is confident that he/she is capable of full job performance or only partial performance;
- any occupational health advice received;
- whether the employee's return should be to full-time duties or whether a phased return would be beneficial;
- any special arrangements, additional support or adjustments to the employee's duties, working conditions or environment that would help them to reintegrate into the workplace, bearing in mind SESTRAN's obligations in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 as noted previously; and

After the employee's return, the manager will:

- monitor the employee's progress over the first few weeks to ensure that he/she is coping ;

- make sure that the employee is not 'thrown in the deep end', for example is not required to deal with a significant backlog of work caused by the period of absence; and
- take all reasonable steps to facilitate the employee's reintegration into the workplace.

2. Continued Absence

An employee's long term sickness absence will be continually reviewed by the manager, in conjunction with advice from the occupational health service and the SESTRAN Human Resources Adviser as appropriate. Where the occupational health adviser has reported that an employee's absence is likely to continue for the foreseeable future or if they are no longer capable of carrying out the duties of their post reference should be made to the Capability Procedure.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually, to take account of developments within SESTRAN and legislative requirements.