

**Greenhead College
Corporation**



**ABSENCE
POLICY**

GREENHEAD COLLEGE SICKNESS ABSENCE AND ILL HEALTH POLICY

Greenhead College values the contribution of its staff in the successful running of the college and the provision of education to its students. Whilst recognising that employees may be prevented from attending work through ill health, the college has a duty to maintain services and minimise disruption. The college is therefore committed to managing attendance and sickness absence and believes that it is the responsibility of the college's managers, trade union representatives and employees to work together to promote the management of sickness absence and ill health.

The college will achieve this through:

- Promoting the health, safety and well being of all employees, including use of risk assessments to identify and manage hazards impacting on health in the workplace
- Monitoring levels of sickness absence for individuals, teams and the college as a whole
- Implementing procedures to support and manage staff absences, whilst dealing with unjustified and/or high levels of sickness absence.

The following principles apply to the college's procedure for dealing with sickness absence:

- Good attendance is valued and all opportunities should be taken to acknowledge and recognise such attendance
- Matters raised relating to an employee's absence do not imply any distrust of staff or concerns regarding their conduct
- Sickness absence will be dealt with in a way that is non-discriminatory and in accordance with the college's Equal Opportunities policy
- Employees will be dealt with consistently and the sickness absence procedures will be applied fairly across the college
- The college will aim to promote a positive and preventative rather than punitive approach
- The college will be sensitive and supportive to those suffering the effects of ill health
- Sickness absence cases will be conducted with respect for confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection and Access to Medical Reports Acts
- Open communication between managers and staff will be encouraged and promoted
- The college will aim to distinguish between absence due to sickness and the abuse of the sickness absence system
- The sickness absence policy and procedure will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the college's aims and complies with these principles.

Employees are expected to:

- Attend work unless unfit to do so
- Raise concerns with their Head of Department, Line Manager or the HR Manager if they believe that their job is making them ill or contributing to illness
- Report sickness absence promptly, in accordance with the sickness absence procedure
- Ensure that the appropriate certifications are completed, in accordance with this procedure
- Maintain contact with their manager or a member of the admin team during periods of sickness absence
- Communicate effectively with their manager or the HR Manager about their sickness absence
- Co-operate fully with an occupational health doctor and/or other organisations that provide support to the college and its employees
- Ensure that medical advice and treatment, where appropriate, is received as quickly as possible in order to facilitate a return to work
- Not abuse the sickness absence procedures or sick pay scheme.

In order to support this policy, the following services are available to managers and employees:

- The college is willing to pay for an occupational health service opinion, if necessary, to provide advice and guidance on the impact of ill health on work and what steps the college and/or employee can take
- Counselling Service – to provide a confidential service to employees in order to discuss concerns related to work or personal circumstances
- The Admin Team together with the HR Manager – to provide support and guidance to managers and employees in dealing with sickness absence and ill health and in the use of the college's related policies and procedures.

Approved by the Policy committee May 2011

Approved by the Corporation June 2011

“This policy has been impact assessed to ensure it complies with all aspects of Equality and Diversity. Members are reassured that this policy is compliant with current equality legislation”.

Policy Owner: John Blake – College Business Manager

Procedure

The following procedure applies to all employees of Greenhead College, in accordance with the college's Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy.

1. Notifying Absence

In order for service delivery to be maintained, it is essential for the college to know when a member of staff is unable to attend work due to illness. Failure to inform the college office of absence may lead to the absence from work being considered as unauthorised, resulting in loss of pay and possibly disciplinary action.

The employee must contact Reception and their Line Manager, if necessary, on the first day of absence; before they are due to begin work. In the case of sudden serious illness or accident, then contact should be made as soon as possible by the employee or relative/friend.

The employee must provide details of their illness or injury, their anticipated length of absence and any work commitments that need rearranging.

If the employee believes that their absence may have been caused by something that happened at work they should mention this and arrange for an Accident Report Form to be completed.

Exceptionally, if the employee is unable to telephone in person, they must arrange for someone else to telephone on their behalf. The employee must make direct contact with the college as soon as possible thereafter.

The college must ensure that the Report of Absence Form is completed and information available for payroll.

Teaching staff are expected to attend the morning briefing, which highlights staff who are absent and follow up procedures can then be activated. Part-time staff should attend if part of their working time.

2. Certification

Every absence must be certified to ensure correct and prompt payment of contractual and statutory sick pay and to ensure that accurate records are maintained. Failure to comply with certification procedures may result in loss of sick pay. Misleading or false statements may be dealt with under the college's disciplinary procedure.

The employee must complete a Report of Absence Form from day one of any absence. If the absence is for less than seven days the form can be completed upon return to work.

If the employee is absent for more than seven consecutive days, (regardless of whether or not these are working days), they must consult a doctor and obtain a medical certificate, which must be forwarded immediately to the college.

Where there is continuing sickness absence the employee must submit to the college concurrent medical certificates to cover the whole period of absence.

Where the period of absence exceeds fourteen days the employee must submit, upon return to work, a medical certificate or statement of fitness to resume work from their doctor.

The HR Manager will ensure that timely and appropriate certificates are received from the employee and that they are shared with the Head of Payroll.

The HR Manager must ensure that certificates are recorded on the Report of Absence Form so that accurate records are kept on each employee.

Line Managers must check that Reception has been notified of the absence so that the information is recorded on the Sickness Absence System.

Exceptionally, if the manager is concerned at the frequency of an employee's absence, or their account of their reasons for absence, the employee may be required to submit doctor's medical certificates, rather than self-certificates, from their first day of absence. In such cases the college will meet the cost of any fee charged.

3. Maintaining Contact

When an employee is absent from work due to sickness it is important that contact is maintained between the college, manager and the employee. The manager needs to ensure that work is re-allocated and service delivery is maintained. The employee needs to ensure that they do not feel isolated, vulnerable or out of touch.

The employee and line manager should maintain contact during the early stages of sickness absence due to our duty of care and attention of employees.

If an employee is absent from work for more than three weeks, the line manager or appropriate representative of the college should arrange with the employee to visit them at home/hospital etc.

If absences become long-term, contact must be maintained.

4. Monitoring Sickness Absence Levels

All sickness absence should be recorded on the college's Sickness Absence System, which will be maintained and monitored by the Senior Finance Officer.

Each manager should monitor sickness absence levels within their teams and take further action where necessary when trigger points are reached and/or where there are concerns about an employee's absence levels.

5. Return to Work

Return to work meetings are usually carried out in an informal manner between the colleague and the immediate line manager.

For colleagues requiring additional support returning to the workplace (such as those returning following an accident, or long term absence), this is offered on an individual basis as part of the wellbeing package the College has in place; the HR Manager and College Business Manager work together informally on this, on a case by case basis.

If there are concerns surrounding a colleague's absence record, these are usually addressed verbally in the first instance with the immediate line manager or within the HR office.

6. Dealing with Frequent Short-term Absence

Where an employee's absence level meets one of the following trigger points, the manager will review the absence levels with the employee:

- Three or more separate instances of sickness absence in any three-month period
- Ten or more days' sickness absence in a three-month period
- Any other recurring recognisable patterns, such as frequent absenteeism on a Friday or Monday.

A review meeting will be held with the employee to discuss the absence record, explore the reasons for absence, identify areas for support, review/update the risk assessment, set targets for improvement and clarify what further action may be taken if improvement targets are not met.

The following outcomes may be agreed:

- The employee may be required to submit a medical certificate from their doctor for every instance of absence
- Advice may be sought from an occupational health doctor (see 12 below)
- Other support mechanisms may be identified and implemented
- Reasonable adjustments, such as changes to the workload, work practices or work pattern or the possibility of redeployment may be identified (subject to occupational health agreement)
- A further meeting may be arranged to review progress.
- Any other agreed action

The line manager will write to the employee within **5** days of the meeting confirming the points discussed and actions agreed. A copy of this letter will be placed on the personnel file.

If there is insufficient improvement in the employee's sickness absence record, a final review meeting will be held, by a member(s) of the Admin Team/ HR Manager. This review meeting will reaffirm the issues discussed at previous reviews, identify support provided to the employee and what further support may be appropriate, set targets for improvement and warn of the consequences if no improvement. A trade union or other representative may accompany the employee.

The Admin Team member/HR Manager will write to the employee within **5** days of the final review meeting, confirming the points discussed and actions agreed. A copy of this letter should be placed on the personnel file.

If there is insufficient improvement following the final review meeting, the matter will be referred to the Principal who will determine whether to hold a Case Review Hearing (see 8 below).

7. Dealing with Long-term Absence

Absences over **28** days' duration shall be considered long-term, this includes weekends.

The Line Manager, member of the Admin Team or HR Manager should arrange to meet with the employee on a regular basis, to be arranged at a mutually convenient venue, in order to keep up-to-date with progress, identify areas for support and determine whether any other actions should be taken. A trade union or other representative may accompany the employee.

Where it is evident that an absence is to continue for more than **two/three** months, advice should be sought from an occupational health practitioner, in accordance with the process for referral. This is a guide only and depending on the circumstances, occupational health referral may be earlier or later than the **two/three**-month period. The purpose of gaining an occupational health doctor's advice will be to provide an indication of the likely duration of the employee's absence and whether any steps can be taken to help the employee to return to work.

Depending upon the advice received from the occupational health doctor, one or more of the following actions may be taken:

- Review periods may be set, with further advice obtained from the occupational health doctor
- Reasonable adjustments, such as changes to the workload, work practices or work patterns may be identified and implemented, either as part of phasing the employee back to work or on a more permanent basis
- Other support mechanisms may be identified and implemented
- Decisions may be made about the employee's continued employment, leading to the decision to dismiss the employee due to their incapability to undertake their job due to ill health
- Any actions being contemplated will be discussed with the employee and their representative, if applicable, before any final decisions are made.

8. Case Review Hearings

Where there are continuing concerns regarding short-term absences and previous warnings have been given, or where a long-term period of absence is continuing and options to enable the employee to remain in employment have been unsuccessful, the employee may be asked to attend a Case Review Hearing.

The purpose of the Case Review Hearing will be to consider whether there are any further actions that the college can take to assist the employee in continuing their employment or whether employment should be terminated due to the employee's incapability to undertake their duties effectively because of ill health.

The Principal, accompanied by the HR Manager, will hear the Case Review Hearing.

A trade union or other representative may accompany the employee.

The employee will be given at least **10** days' written notice of the intention to hold a Case Review Hearing.

The employee will be given the opportunity to state their case.

Others involved in the case such as the line manager will also be asked to provide information on what actions have been taken.

When reaching a decision about whether or not to terminate employment, the Principal will consider issues such as:

- The need for the work to be undertaken
- The impact of the employee's absence and ill health on other colleagues and service delivery
- The employee's absence record
- Financial and cost implications
- Representations made by the employee
- What actions have been taken to attempt to enable the employee to continue in employment
- Medical advice received.

This list is not exhaustive and the weight attached to each will depend upon the circumstances of the case, whilst balancing the needs of the employee and of the college.

The employee will be informed of the decision and this decision will be confirmed in writing within **5** days. Where a decision to dismiss has been made, the letter will also inform the employee of notice of termination of employment.

Where decisions are made regarding termination of employment, the employee will have the right of appeal against the decision (see 9 below).

9. Right of Appeal Against Dismissal

Where decisions are made to terminate employment on the grounds of ill health the employee has the right of appeal.

The college will arrange for the appeal to be held within **10** working days.

The appeal will be heard by a panel of Governors.

A trade union or other representative may accompany the employee at the appeal hearing.

During the appeal hearing both the college and the employee will have the opportunity to state their case and provide any documentary evidence.

The appeal panel will communicate their decision in writing within **5** days of holding the appeal.

The decision of the appeal panel is final within the college's internal procedures.

10. Work-related Ill Health or Injury

If an employee or manager believes that ill health or injury has been caused by work, the employee should complete the college's Accident Report Form as soon as possible.

If an employee has not completed an Accident Report Form and subsequently believes that their ill health or injury is caused by work, they should report this in writing to their manager, setting out the reasons why they believe that work has contributed to or caused their ill health or injury.

Where an Accident Report Form has been completed, or where an employee subsequently claims that their ill health or injury is caused by work, the situation should be thoroughly investigated by an independent health and safety expert.

The investigation should consider all the relevant background information such as:

- The job description
- The previous sickness record
- Previous occupational health recommendations/advice
- Previous grievances or complaints
- Details that have emerged in return to work interviews following previous absences or during the normal management process
- Consequent management actions and any adjustments made as a result
- Training and development needs
- Appropriate witness statements
- External factors (for example, if an employee is alleging that they are suffering from Repetitive Strain Injury and is also a self-employed typist)
- Any other information pertinent to the situation.

Advice should be sought from an occupational health doctor, who may also suggest that specialist advice may be helpful. In such cases the college will pay any resulting fees.

Upon completion of the investigation, a report should be sent to the Principal, with a copy to the Chief Admin Officer.

The Principal will determine, based on the facts available and following consultation with the Admin Group, whether or not the employee has sustained an injury or illness as a result of what they were required to do at work, or the treatment they received at work. It must also be considered whether the root cause of the employee's ill health is due to the competent performance of the employee's duties and responsibilities.

Written confirmation of the decision will be sent to the employee within **5** working days of the decision. In the event of a decision that ill health or injury is attributed to work, the college does not accept liability.

The line manager must ensure that Payroll is informed of the decision, where it will affect payment of sick pay.

11. Ill Health Which Does Not Lead to Absence From Work

There may be occasions where an employee is suffering from ill health, but this does not lead to the employee being absent from work. If the employee believes that their ill health is having an impact on their ability to undertake their job they should raise this with their line manager. The line manager should discuss the matter confidentially with the employee, review the workplace risk assessment and discuss whether any additional support can be provided to the employee to support them at work. Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to seek advice and guidance from an occupational health doctor.

12. Occupational Health Referral

The role of occupational health is to provide advice and guidance to the college and its employees on the impact of an employee's ill health on their ability to undertake their duties and what measures can be put in place to support the employee, where appropriate. The following points should be noted:

- The HR Manager must complete the Medical Referral Form, in consultation with the employee
- The employee must be made aware of their rights under the Access to Medical Reports Act, in relation to the college's request for occupational health to seek a report from the employee's GP
- The manager and employee must ensure that as much information as possible is provided to the occupational health doctor
- The line manager and employee must be clear about the points on which they seek advice
- Where an employee does not give consent to the occupational health doctor seeking a report from their GP and/or the employee refuses to meet with the occupational health doctor, the implications of this should be discussed with the employee and confirmed in writing

CHECK LIST FOR SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

1st day of sickness

- All staff (teaching and support) should contact **Reception** on the first day of absence before they are due to begin work to let us know they cannot come in
- If they cannot ring in person, they must arrange for someone else to telephone on their behalf
- If well enough they can be put through to their department to organise work. If too ill, a message will be given to the department by Reception
- Reception staff will take a note of the details of their illness and the length of time they are expected to be away.

3 days or less absence

- On return to work fill in an absence report form
- This form is available from Reception, department or college intranet
- Return this form to the HR Manager.

4 – 7 days absence

- On return to work fill in an absence report form and hand in as above
- A copy is given to the employee and the original is given to the HR Manager

Over 7 days

- If Reception is aware that the employee is to be off for more than 7 days, then an absence report form will be posted to the employee
- A doctor's certificate is required, medical certificates must run concurrently for the period of the illness

For periods over 4 weeks

- Either the line manager or a member of the HR/Admin Team should arrange to go out and visit the employee.

PLEASE NOTE – WEEKENDS COUNT AS WELL!

CHECK LIST FOR ABSENCES FROM COLLEGE OTHER THAN SICKNESS

1. **Compassionate – Conditions of Service leave**

An employee is allowed to have **up to six days** paid compassionate leave per academic year.

Reasons for compassionate leave are:

- Bereavement of a close relative
- Accompanying close relative for hospital appointment
- Funeral
- Looking after sick relative/child until other arrangements can be made.

2. **Paternity**

An employee is entitled to 6 days paternity leave with regular pay, and four at statutory paternity rate

Additional Parental Leave can also be taken; further details available from the HR Manager.

3. **Maternity and Adoption**

As outlined in the maternity and adoption leave policy

4. **Other Reasons**

There are a variety of reasons why staff cannot get into work other than those listed above, for example, domestic emergencies, car trouble, child care problems. These should be reported to the **Reception** in the same way that sickness absence is recorded.

Paid leave (of one day) is also given for house moving, graduation ceremonies and for weddings (own or children's): adequate notice must be given to Reception and Line Managers. Where there is some distance to travel, this leave can be increased to two paid days