

WCT Absence policy

To be read in conjunction with WCT's pay & conditions policy

Policy statement

We are committed to improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all employees. We value the contribution our employees make to our success. So, when an employee is unable to be at work for any reason, we miss that contribution. This absence policy explains:

- What we expect from managers and employees when handling absence.
- How we will work to reduce levels of absence.

Key principles

WCT absence policy is based on the following principles:

1. As a responsible employer, we undertake to provide payments to employees who cannot attend work due to sickness. (See WCT Sick Pay scheme, as per contract)
2. Regular, punctual attendance is an essential aspect of everyone's employment. We ask each employee to take responsibility for achieving and maintaining good attendance.
3. At the discretion of WCT, we will endeavour to support employees who have genuine grounds for absence for whatever reason. This support includes:
 1. "Special leave" for necessary absences not caused by sickness (time off for dependants and compassionate leave is paid at WCT discretion.)
 2. a flexible approach to taking annual leave
 3. access to counsellors where necessary
 4. rehabilitation support in cases of long-term sickness absence
4. We will consider any employee's Doctor's advice on the 'Statement of Fitness for Work'. If the Doctor advises that an employee "may be fit for work", we will discuss with the employee how we can help them get back to work – for example, on flexible hours or altered duties.
5. We will use an occupational health adviser to advise the employee and their manager on improving the employee's health and wellbeing.
6. WCT's disciplinary procedures will be used if an explanation for absence is not forthcoming or is not thought to be satisfactory.
7. We respect the confidentiality of all information relating to an employee's sickness. This policy will be implemented in line with current data protection legislation and the Access to Medical records Act 1988.

Definitions

- **An unacceptable attendance record** is where performance could be deemed unsatisfactory due to an unacceptable attendance record owing to frequent or prolonged sickness or other reasons.

- **Frequent or persistent absence** is when an employee is off sick on 4 or more occasions in consecutive 12-month period.
- **Short term absence** is absence up to 20 days.
- **Long term absence** is absence which is 20 days or more.

Notification of absence

If an employee is going to be absent from work, they should inform their line manager as per their contract. They should also:

- Give a clear indication of the nature of the illness and
- A potential return date.

The manager will check with other employees if there is any information they need to cover their work during the period of absence. If the employee does not contact their manager by the required time, the manager will attempt to contact the employee.

An employee may not always feel able to discuss their medical problems with their line manager. Managers will be sensitive to individual concerns and make alternative arrangements, where appropriate. For example, an employee may prefer to discuss health problems with a person of the same sex.

Short Term Absence

WCT defines short absence as sickness absence which lasts up to 20 days. Provided that the employee follows the notification procedure they will receive payment for such absence in accordance with the sickness pay entitlement detailed in their contract of employment.

Where short term absence becomes frequent or persistent, e.g., 4 separate periods of absence in 12 consecutive months; attendance is unsatisfactory or there is a pattern to the employee's absence; the employee's manager will seek to resolve the issue informally and hold an attendance review meeting with the employee. The manager may seek advice from HR before speaking to the employee.

In cases where absence persists and attendance does not improve, the manager may invoke the formal Disciplinary Procedure.

Long Term Absence

Long term absence is defined as sickness absence of 20 days or more. The 20 days do not have to be continuous — periods can be linked if they last at least 4 days and are 8 weeks or less apart.

WCT endeavours to be supportive to employees who have been signed off by their doctor for a significant period of time. The following steps have been designed to assist on-going communication and to provide for a review of the situation:

- If an employee's absence continues for a long period, they may be contacted by their line manager or HR in order to make arrangements for a home visit if they cannot make it into the office to undertake an attendance review meeting. Normally a home visit would be completed by the employee's manager and HR Manager.

- WCT may request that the employee completes a Medical Consent letter, which gives WCT permission to request information from either the employee's Doctor or an independent Occupational Health Professional. This will assist the society in finding out if there is anything that can be done to assist the employee and how long the illness is likely to continue.

- If the absence continues, WCT may request a further home visit if the employee cannot attend the office and if not already done so, seek agreement from the employee to contact their doctor.

- If the absence persists, or it appears unlikely that the employee will be able to return to work within a reasonable period of time, it may be necessary to invoke the formal Disciplinary Procedure and review the employee's ability to continue in their present role. This may include considering whether alternative employment might be available and whether their employment can be continued.

- If the Disciplinary Procedure is invoked WCT reserves the right to move to any stage of the formal process depending on the severity of the issue and will:
 - i. advise the employee in writing as soon as it is established that termination of employment has become a possibility;
 - ii. meet with the employee to discuss the options and consider their views on continuing employment;
 - iii. review if there are any other jobs that the employee could do prior to taking any decision on whether or not to dismiss;
 - iv. allow a right of appeal against any decision to dismiss on grounds of long-term ill health; and
 - v. arrange a further meeting to determine any appeal,
 - vi. following this meeting the employee will be informed of WCT's final decision

A formal review may be triggered by:

- Absences that are disruptive to WCT's operations, e.g. frequent short-term absences or long-term absence.
- Any review will look at any further action required to improve the employee's attendance and wellbeing.

Evidence of incapacity

Employees must complete WCT's self-certification arrangements for the first seven days of absence. After that, a "Statement of Fitness for work" is required to cover every subsequent day. If the absence is likely to be long-term - more than four weeks continuously, there is a shared responsibility for the Society and the employee to maintain contact at agreed intervals.

Medical Certification

- If an employee is absent from work due to sickness or injury which continues for more than 7 days, including weekends, they must provide the company with a Medical Certificate by the 8th day of sickness or injury.
- If an employee is absent for more than 7 days their absence must be certified by a doctor/medical practitioner and a Medical Certificate must be provided to their manager or to HR.
- The employee needs to ensure that Medical Certificates are provided at regular intervals to cover any continued absence.
- Any period of absence that is not covered by a valid Medical Certificate may be treated as unauthorised absence and any payment due will be withheld until the correct certification has been submitted.

Depending on the circumstance's employees may be required to:

- Agree if requested, to an independent medical examination with Occupational Health or a Doctor's report.

Medical Report

Depending on the length of absence, WCT may request consent from the employee to obtain a medical report from their own Doctor or require the employee to undergo a medical examination with an independent Occupational Health Professional appointed by the society. Such a report would only be for the purpose of providing guidance to the society on the employee's capability to perform their duties. Such arrangements will be at WCT expense.

WCT may obtain and use the results of these examinations for any legitimate purpose relating to the employee's employment. Such arrangements will be subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018. Where applicable, such an arrangement will be subject to the provisions of the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988.

"May be fit for some work"

If the Doctor advises on the Statement of Fitness for Work that an employee "may be fit for work", we will discuss how to help them get back to work. This might mean talking about a phased return to work or amended duties. Employees are encouraged to cooperate with WCT in regard to the possible implementation of any adjustments to job duties, hours, resulting from recommendations made by the employee's Doctor or an Occupational Health Professional, notwithstanding the fact that the advice on a "fit note" is not binding on WCT.

If it is not possible to provide the support, an employee needs to return to work – for example, by making the necessary workplace adjustments – or an employee feels unable to return, then the Statement will be used in the same way as if the Doctor advised that the employee was "not fit for work".



Return to Work Interview

Managers should carry out a return to work interview with the employee following a period of sickness absence of more than 7 days, (however; a RTW may be applicable from day one of an absence if deemed necessary) this should be on their first day back at work, or as soon as practicable. These interviews should be documented on a return to work form, see Appendix 1 and given to HR once completed. The purpose of the interview is to check on how the employee is, their fitness for work, and any short-term reasonable adjustments that may be required.

Medical Appointments

WCT understands it can be difficult to attend medical appointments outside of normal working hours. Whilst every effort should be made by employees to make such appointments in their own time, e.g., dentist, doctor, optician, if this is not possible employees are expected to make such appointments at the beginning or end of their working day. Where every effort has been made to make an appointment as described and the employee is still unable to do so, they should discuss the appointment with their manager who may offer flexibility during their normal working hours. If there is a high level of time off to attend stated appointments, it may be treated as sickness absence and will be paid in accordance with the WCT sickness policy. Any payment for medical, dental or such appointments is at the discretion of WCT.

This policy is non-contractual and does not form part of the contract of employment, and may be subject to change at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

Policy Name: Absence
Updated by: Debbie Clarke
Dated: Amended, December 2023
Authorised by: Guy Padfield-Wilkins, CEO

Appendix 1

Return to Work Interview Record Form

This Return to Work Interview Form is designed as a guide for the line manager when meeting with employees on their return to work from sickness absence.

Employee Name:	
Post:	
Date of discussion:	
Person conducting interview	

Section 1: Absence Details

1. Date of absence	From:	To:
2. Date of return to work		
3. Did the employee follow the correct absence reporting procedure? (if no why not)		
4. If absence if more than 7 days has a Doctor's note been received	Yes:	No:
5. What was the reason for absence given in initial phone call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 2: The Interview

6. How are you now?

7. Are you able to carry out your normal hours and duties?

8. What was the cause of your absence?

9. Was the absence related to an accident at work?

10. Was an accident or incident report form completed (if not why not)

11. Did you consult a Doctor or other medical practitioner? (please give details of when)

12. Are you on any medication which may affect your performance?

13. If yes what effect could this have (positive or negatively)
14. Do you require any additional support?
15. Are there any issues which the employee wishes to raise following their recent absence?
16. Managers should give an update to employee on issues affecting department during absence e.g. change of work/staff positions

Section 3: Next steps

17. Is a follow up Doctor's/consultants appointment required if so, please give details	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Does a referral to Occupational Health need to be made? *	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Summary of action points agreed and any other comments

Review date for agreed action

Employee's signature		Date	
Manager's signature		Date	

Please return the completed form to HR.