

# Absence Management Policy & Procedure

March 2021

## Policy control

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## **ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **1. Purpose and Scope**

The Absence Management Policy and Procedure applies to all employees of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA).

GSA recognises that employees demonstrate a considerable amount of commitment to GSA on a daily basis and acknowledge the flexibility that staff demonstrate in relation to extra hours worked beyond their normal working hours. However, there may be times where employees are unable to attend work due to sickness absence or for other reasons not related to sickness, and need to be properly supported.

This policy aims to encourage a positive approach to attendance with particular emphasis on support, and free communication between employees and their line managers. It also aims to ensure that all employees are treated in a fair and consistent manner whilst enabling GSA to continue to run effectively.

This policy is intended to provide guidelines for line managers and employees to ensure that they clearly understand their responsibilities, and that there is a consistent application of GSA's attendance standards. It should be acknowledged that there may be deviation from consistent application of approach due to individual circumstances and line managers should refer to the HR Department for guidance.

The Director of Human Resources has overall responsibility for ensuring the consistent application of this Policy.

#### **1.1 Guiding principles**

Members of staff have an obligation to attend work unless prevented to do so by ill health or injury.

When absent from work due to sickness or an accident, members of staff must comply with the notification procedures outlined below. This is a requirement for entitlement to Company Sick Pay.

Personal information relating to sickness absences will be treated in a sensitive and confidential manner.

### **2. The Role of the Employee**

It is GSA policy that all employees adhere to these procedures when absent from work for any reason. This is to ensure that alternative staffing arrangements can be made where necessary, and to ensure that appropriate levels of service delivery can be maintained. Where an employee has on-going mitigating circumstances in regard to attending work, they should refer to the GSA's Flexible Working policy.

## **2.1 Sickness Absence Reporting - General Requirements**

- 2.1.1 Employees have a responsibility to ensure that they are physically and mentally fit to do the job for which they are employed. If they are in any doubt, they should discuss this with their line manager before undertaking work of any kind.
- 2.1.2 Employees have a responsibility to maintain and agree reasonable contact with their line manager throughout any period of absence in order to provide an update on progress and help their line manager plan workload reallocation.

## **2.2 Sickness Absence Reporting - Notification Times**

- 2.2.1 When an employee becomes aware of their inability to attend work for any reason, they should notify their line manager as soon as possible but no later than one hour after their normal start time. Employees must notify their line manager via telephone personally, stating the reason for absence and the anticipated date of return to work. If their line manager is not available, then an appropriate member of staff, for example Academic Support Manager or HR should be informed. A friend or relative may provide notification only if the employee is unable to do so personally. Text messages and e-mails are not considered to be appropriate means of notification unless an employee's line manager or appropriate colleague is not otherwise contactable.
- 2.2.2 Should an employee fail to make contact and their line manager has been unable to ascertain the reasons for no contact this may result in the employee being considered to be on unauthorised absence (please refer to section 7).
- 2.2.3 Any employee who has been absent for any period should notify their line manager of their expected date of return as soon as they feel fit to resume duty or are deemed fit to return by their GP.

## **2.3 Sickness Absence Reporting - Documentation**

- 2.3.1 If a sickness absence continues for more than seven calendar days, a GP Statement of Fitness for Work (i.e. a medical 'fit note') must be obtained from a GP and be forwarded to the line manager who will send the original to the Payroll Officer. The line manager will enter the absence details on the online self-service system (iTrent) which will act as a self-certificate under the National Health Insurance Arrangements.
- 2.3.2 The medical 'fit note' allows the GP to provide more information on how an employee's condition affects their ability to work. This will help line managers to understand how they might be able to assist an employee in their return to work.

The GP can:

- advise when an employee may be fit for work with some support;
- suggest common ways to help return to work;
- give information on how any condition will affect what an employee can do.

- 2.3.3 If an absence continues beyond the period of a medical 'fit note', employees should submit a further one to their line manager - preferably before the period covered by the previous one expires, and in any event no later than three calendar days after the previous medical 'fit note' expires. Employees who fail to submit a new medical 'fit note' may be considered to be on unauthorised absence.
- 2.3.4 Where a line manager is aware that an employee is certified as unfit for work by their doctor, the employee should not be allowed to undertake their duties and may be referred to Occupational Health as outlined in the Employee Support Procedure.
- 2.3.5 If there is reason to believe that an employee is not fit enough to be at work despite their determination to come back to work, the employee may be suspended from work on medical grounds. This will form part of the Employee Support Procedure.
- 2.3.6 On the first day of return from absence the line manager must end the absence on the online system, following the return to work meeting.

## **2.4 Company sick pay**

- 2.4.1 Employees should refer to their contract of employment for information regarding their entitlement to company sick pay.
- 2.4.2 When company sick pay ends, employees may be entitled to payments under the Government's statutory sick pay (SSP) scheme. Employees with queries regarding their entitlement to SSP should contact the Payroll Officer.
- 2.4.3 As outlined in the contract of employment, employees who fail to adhere to the procedures outlined in this policy without substantial reason may forfeit their right to company sick pay.

## **2.5 Annual Leave**

- 2.5.1 Should an employee become ill during a period of annual leave, those annual leave days used may be reclaimed following the submission of a medical 'fit note'. Employees will not be reimbursed for any sick days that fall on a public/statutory holiday.
- 2.5.2 During any periods of long term sickness absence, employees may request to use any annual leave days accrued. Any requests should be made in the normal way and upon authorisation from their line manager, days absent will be paid for at the rate of annual leave (i.e. full pay) as opposed to the applicable rate of company/statutory sick pay. Following the annual leave period, should an employee continue to be absent due to sickness, they will revert to their relevant sick pay entitlement.
- 2.5.3 Where employees are absent from work for a long period of time and this period falls into the new annual leave year, any outstanding annual leave entitlement should be used in the preceding month before the new leave year commences. If it is known

that an employee will remain on long term sickness absence from one leave year to the next, the line manager will give the employee notice that they will be required to take their statutory annual leave entitlement at the end of the leave year. Alternatively, under such circumstances an employee may agree with the line manager to carry forward any outstanding annual leave into the new leave year.

## **2.6 Punctuality**

- 2.6.1 It is expected that all employees will arrive at work at the time agreed with their line manager. It is accepted from time to time there will be occasions where employees will be late for work due to unforeseen circumstances. Should an employee's home circumstances regularly impact on their ability to attend work on time, employees may wish to refer to the GSA's Flexible Working policy.
- 2.6.2 In the event that an employee is expecting to be late for work, they must inform their line manager as soon as possible.
- 2.6.3 Where an employee's instances of lateness become operationally unacceptable, the employee may be referred to the Employee Support Procedure.

## **3. The Role of the Line Manager**

- 3.1 Line managers must ensure that their staff understand and follow the procedures for reporting absence. Line managers should agree and maintain reasonable contact with their staff during periods of absence by logging them on the Manager Self Service system (iTrent).
- 3.2 It is the line manager's responsibility to take reasonable steps to manage an absent employee's workload to ensure the continued running of the department and that the employee does not return to large volumes of work.
- 3.3 After any occasion of absence, line managers should conduct a brief return to work meeting with the employee. The purpose of such a meeting is to encourage communication between staff and line managers and to identify, and endeavour to provide, at an early stage any support that can be provided by GSA. The return to work meeting should cover any of the following:
- Assessment on whether the employee has returned to work too early;
  - A review of the employee's attendance record over the previous year with reference made to the applicable trigger point (see Section 5 below) and reinforcement, where appropriate, of the importance of good attendance;
  - Identification of any issues which may be affecting the employee's ability to attend work, e.g. underlying health problems, work related factors;
  - Where applicable, identification of support mechanisms identified from the Employee Support Procedure that may be beneficial in assisting the employee to improve their attendance;
  - Potential referral to the Occupational Health Service;

- An assessment of whether referral should be made to the Employee Support Procedure;
- An update on any work related events/issues that the employee may have missed due to their sickness absence.

3.4 Return to work meetings should be recorded using the Return to Work Meeting form (see Appendix I) and a copy forwarded to HR for monitoring purposes.

3.5 Meetings will normally occur on the day the employee returns to work or within three working days where this is not practicable.

#### **4. Relationship to the Employee Support Procedure**

4.1 The purpose of the Employee Support Procedure is for the line manager and employee to establish any on-going issues and to collaboratively put in place an action plan in order to support the employee either at work or back into the work place. Such measures that may be put in place may include but not limited to:

- Referral to Occupational Health (OH). OH identifies anything that may be contributing to ill health in the workplace and will determine any action required to minimise the impact, based on a well informed assessment of the risks and the suggested introduction of any suitable control measures that may help to prevent ill health. More information can be obtained online:  
<http://www.integraloh.com/>;
- Referral to a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist (CBT) or other alternative therapists as deemed necessary. More information on CBT can be found:  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cognitive-behavioural-therapy>;
- Reduction of/alteration to working hours on a temporary/permanent basis;
- Alterations to an employee's work space;
- Possible redeployment to alternative employment;
- Provision of training on certain aspects of the employee's role;
- Reallocation of work duties.

#### **4.2 Referral to the Employee Support Procedure should be made when the:**

- Return to work meeting has highlighted any potential on going health concerns and/or personal issues;
- Employee has met any of the triggers points highlighted in Section 5 below;
- Employee requests support from GSA.

#### **5. Sickness Absence – Trigger Points**

There are certain trigger points that will invoke referral to the Employee Support Procedure.

## **5.1 Persistent short term sickness absence**

Persistent short term absence is defined as individual periods of sickness absence, related or not, which may or may not require certification, and which cause operational difficulties for GSA i.e. if an employee:

- is absent from work on more than three occasions in any three month period;
- is absent from work more than six occasions within a rolling twelve-month period;
- has an attendance record that indicates a specific pattern of absences (e.g. particular days of the week/year, pre/post weekend, school holiday periods, post pay day, sporting events, birthdays etc.)

### **5.1.1 Medium term sickness absence**

An employee or line manager may utilise the Employee Support Procedure where they have continuous absence of less than four weeks. For example, an employee who is absent due to work-related stress may benefit from the procedure being utilised before the end of the four week period.

### **5.1.2 Long term sickness absence**

Long term sickness absence is defined as a continuous period of absence of four weeks or more, which is covered by one or more 'fit notes'. Where an employee has been absent from work on account of sickness for a continuous period of four weeks or more, the employee will be referred to the Employee Support Procedure, which may include being referred to Occupational Health.

## **6. Equality Act 2010**

- 6.1 All sickness absence cases, whether long term or persistent short term, may fall under the Equality Act 2010. This act covers all aspects of discrimination in the workplace, however the disability aspect of the legislation is the most relevant for the purposes of this policy. A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The Occupational Health Physician will advise whether an employee is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and will make recommendations on any necessary adjustments required in order to support the employee either at work or back to work.

## **7. Unauthorised Absence**

- 7.1 It is acknowledged that employees may not be able to attend work due to mitigating circumstances, and line managers will proactively discuss solutions with the employee. However, employees may be considered absent without permission if they, without good reason or the prior agreement of their line manager, fail to follow the absence reporting procedures.

## **7.2 Procedure**

- 7.2.1 On the first day of unauthorised absence, the line manager may attempt to contact the employee by telephone. If the employee does not answer, the line manager will (where possible) leave a message asking the employee to contact them personally as a matter of urgency. If the employee does not make contact, the designated emergency contact will be contacted.
- 7.2.2 If the line manager makes contact with the employee, or vice versa, the employee will be asked to explain their non-attendance and failure to contact GSA. Where there is no substantial reason, the absence may be treated as misconduct and will be referred to the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 7.2.3 If there is no personal contact, on the second day of unauthorised absence the line manager may regard the situation as misconduct and will invoke the procedures outlined in the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 7.2.4 If the employee does make contact with their line manager out with the specified timeframe, depending on the reason for unauthorised absence the employee may or may not be referred to the Employee Support Procedure or the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 7.2.5 Contact from a friend/relative of the employee will only be acceptable if the employee is unable to make contact personally. Sending a text message or email is not considered personal contact
- 7.2.6 Employees will not normally be paid for periods of unauthorised absence.

## **8. Severe Weather and Travel Disruption**

- 8.1 GSA recognises that severe weather conditions and disruption to travel can affect an employee's ability to attend work. Employees should make attempts to attend work by seeking alternative modes of transportation. However, attempts should not be made at the detriment of personal health and safety and employees are encouraged to follow guidance from the appropriate authorities.
- 8.2 Should an employee have difficulty attending work due to severe weather and/or travel disruption, they should contact their line manager as soon as possible. Employees should advise when they are likely to return to work.
- 8.3 Any employee who arrives at work late due to severe weather conditions/and or travel disruption will not normally suffer any loss of pay and are not expected to work back the lost time.
- 8.4 Should an employee's absence due to severe weather become prolonged, line managers can use discretion when considering the following:



- make up for lost time at another convenient time;
- take time off as paid holiday;
- take a proportion of the time off as paid holiday and the other proportion of the time as unpaid leave;
- take the time off unpaid;
- where practicable, to work from home.

## **9. Other types of absence/leave from work**

### **9.1 Medical/dental appointments**

Wherever possible, doctor's and dentist's appointments should be made at the start of the day or at the end of the day. Any appointment which lasts for half the working day or more will be recorded as sickness absence in the normal way.

An employee will be granted paid leave to attend out-patient hospital appointments. Evidence of such appointments (date/time/location) should be provided, upon request, to the line manager or designated nominee. In-patient hospital treatment involving absence of a half day or more will be recorded as sickness absence in the normal way.

### **9.2 Compassionate Leave**

GSA recognises that there may be occasions when staff need to be absent from work for reasons other than sickness. For instance:

- Family illness;
- Bereavement.

Staff should make a request to their line manager, who can authorise paid compassionate leave for a period of up to five days. A completed compassionate leave request should be made on the online self-service system under 'Other Absence'. This can be done retrospectively if required. Should an individual anticipate being off longer, then they should visit their GP to obtain a medical 'fit note', to cover a period of any further absence.

#### **9.2.1 Parental Bereavement Leave**

In the event of the death of a child or stepchild, up to 10 days' paid parental bereavement leave can be taken (pay is pro-rated for part-time staff). This entitlement applies to parents (including adoptive parents) and partners of parents. Should an individual anticipate being off longer, then they should visit their GP to obtain a medical 'fit note', to cover a period of any further absence.

### **9.3 Time off for dependents**

Where applicable, reasonable paid time off may be granted for:

- Sickness or injury of a dependant;
- making arrangements for the care of a sick or injured dependant or to deal with disruptions to normal care arrangements;
- dealing with an unexpected problem that has happened, for example, while your child is at school.

A dependant is defined as:

- spouse or partner;
- child;
- parent;
- a person living as part of the household other than as a lodger, tenant or employee.

What is reasonable will vary according to the circumstance of each case and line managers are expected to use their discretion. Further guidance can be sought from HR.

### **9.4 Trade Union Duties**

Officials of independent trade unions recognised by GSA (EIS, Unison, UCU and Unite) have the right to take reasonable paid time off to attend to appropriate employee relations duties and to undergo training for those duties. GSA has adopted the definition of “appropriate duties” as those set out in the ACAS Code of Practice.

### **9.5 Leave of absence**

GSA employees may request a leave of absence from work. Requests should be made to their line manager and it is the line manager’s discretion whether or not this is approved. For the duration of a leave of absence, the employee will not receive a salary from GSA or receive contractual benefits, i.e. accrue annual leave.

### **9.6 Jury Service**

Employees will be granted leave should they be summoned for jury service. Each case will be considered on its own merit but generally an individual will be granted paid time off for jury service. In cases where an individual is granted unpaid time off, employees can claim money back from the court to cover any financial losses.

## **10. Confidentiality**

- 10.1 So far as is reasonable, confidentiality will be maintained throughout the course of the procedures outlined in this policy. However, employees should be aware that it may be necessary to disclose certain information so that GSA can fully investigate the circumstances of any absence cases.
- 10.2 All records will be maintained in accordance with GSA's obligations in terms of data protection requirements and, as such, will be held for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which they were obtained.

## Appendix I

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### RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEW FORM

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The Return to Work Interview Form (RTW) is designed as a guide for line managers when meeting with employees on return from sickness absence. The RTW interview is designed to support staff and help to build and maintain a good manager-employee relationship. Two-way communication should therefore be open and honest during the interview. Employees should bring any outstanding medical 'fit notes' to this interview.

<b>NAME</b>	
<b>POSITION/JOB TITLE</b>	
<b>DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL</b>	
<b>RETURN TO WORK MEETING DATE</b>	

#### SECTION ONE: SICKNESS ABSENCE DETAILS

1. First day of absence:	
2. Last day of absence:	
3. Reason for absence:	
4. Is the absence related to work?	
5. If the absence is work related, please provide details.	
6. Self certification or Doctor's medical 'fit note' received:(If No, Why)?	
7. Did employee consult a doctor during sickness absence? If so please provide details.	
8. Is the employee fit to resume normal duties?	
9. Are there any reasonable adjustment or additional support recommended by a doctor? If so please provide details.	

**SECTION TWO: PREVIOUS SICKNESS ABSENCE DETAILS**

<p><b>TOTAL ABSENCE OVER LAST 12 MONTHS:</b> <i>(including this period of absence)</i></p> <p>Number of occasions:</p>	
<p>Dates of absence:</p>	
<p>Total days lost:</p>	
<p>Trigger Point Reached? <i>(please refer to Attendance Policy and Procedure, Section 5)</i></p>	

**SECTION THREE: NEXT STEPS**

<p>Summary of action points (if applicable) agreed and any other comments:</p>	
<p>Are there any support mechanisms identified from the Employee Support Procedure which may be beneficial in assisting the employee to improve their attendance?</p>	
<p>Is referral to Occupational Health recommended? <i>(If so please provide reasons why.)</i></p>	
<p>Is referral through the Employee Support Procedure recommended? <i>(If so please provide reasons why.)</i></p>	

Employee to be updated on any work related events or issues occurred during sickness absence.	
Review date for agreed actions	

Employee signature:	Date:
Line Manager signature:	Date: