

Recent surveys indicate that the adverse impact of absence on business profitability today is significant, with thousands of man hours lost every day. Recent statistics show that the average annual cost to employers is £13.4bn (£544 per employee) and businesses lose 33 million working days during the year.

Within this factsheet, **abacus** has prepared an absence and sickness policy for the use of our clients. Attached to the factsheet as an appendix are a self certification form and a return to work interview form.

Good absence management procedures

The majority of businesses surveyed confirm that tightening of policies to review attendance has a major influence on controlling levels of absence, particularly when three fifths of all absence is for minor illness of less than five days duration.

The difference between short and long-term absence

When managing sickness absence issues, employers need to distinguish between short-term and long-term absences. Where the absence consists of short but persistent and apparently unconnected absences then, after suitable investigation, disciplinary action may be appropriate. However, this is not a suitable course of action in relation to longer-term sickness absence management.

Introduction to absence and sickness policy

All absences from work must be notified to the company and accounted for.

Absences from work during contracted hours, for whatever reason, can be classified in to two categories:

- authorised and
- unauthorised.

Authorised Absence

Authorised absence is absence for which the Company has given the employee permission, in advance, to take time away from work. Authorised absence can take the following forms:

a) Holiday

See holiday policy document.

b) Maternity Leave

See Maternity Leave policy document.

c) Bereavement Leave

See Bereavement Leave policy document.

d) Parental Leave and Time Off for Dependants

See Parental Leave policy document.

e) Sickness

Details of this policy are given below.

Sickness absence may be self-certified or medically certified. Payment for sickness absence will be in accordance with the Company Sick Pay Scheme – providing that the correct notification procedures have been followed and that the employee is not currently in receipt of disciplinary action for Sickness Absence.

f) Medical Appointments

Appointments at Hospital will be paid on production of an appointment card in advance of the appointment. Payment will be made for up to two hours for appointments within the local area. All other appointments, e.g. doctors, dentist, etc. will be unpaid.

g) Family Emergency

If an employee has to leave work because of a family emergency, leave will be granted at the discretion of the employee's immediate manager. The absence will be unpaid.

h) Time Off for Public Duties

The Company will provide employees with reasonable time off to enable employees to undertake public duties as defined by statute. Reasonable leave will be granted at the discretion of the employees' immediate manager. The absence will be unpaid.

i) Accident at Work

If an employee is involved in an accident at work which results in a visit to a hospital or results in time away from work, the employee will be paid to the end of his or her shift at his or her normal rate without the Company admitting liability.

Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absence is when an employee is away from work without having received advance permission from the Company to take the absence. Unauthorised absence will always be without pay and cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Unauthorised absence is, in its simplest form: absence from work during contracted hours in any form and for any reason (other than business) without having followed the correct notification procedure.

Procedure for Notification of Absence

- a) In the event that an employee requires time away from work, they must seek permission of their immediate manager in advance of the absence by completing the relevant documentation. This is specifically stipulated for the following:
 - i. Holiday request
 - ii. Maternity leave notification
 - iii. Parental leave
 - iv. Time off for dependants
 - v. Medical appointments (where possible)
 - vi. Time off for public duties

The request should be made to the employee's immediate manager providing reasonable notice. Reasonable notice is defined as 24 hours unless this is overridden by a specific policy document as is the case in (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv) above.

- b) In the following cases it is not always possible for the employee to notify the Company in advance:
 - i. Bereavement leave
 - ii. Sickness
 - iii. Family emergency
 - iv. Accident at work

It is important that the employee contacts the Company in accordance with the rules in order for the above not to be classed automatically as unauthorised absence without pay.

- c) In the event of absence, sickness absence, or injury, the employee must inform their immediate manager of the reason for their absence by no later than 10.00am on the first morning of absence and each day thereafter unless informed by the Company.
- d) The employee must establish direct contact with their immediate manager to inform the Company of the absence. In the event that the absent employee is physically unable to notify the Company of their absence, then it will be acceptable for someone else to notify the Company on behalf of the employee.

- e) The following information must be provided to the Company when an employee telephones to inform of absence:
 - i. the employee's name and department
 - ii. the reason for the absence
 - iii. whether or not the employee intends to consult a Doctor about the absence
 - iv. the employee's expected date of return
- f) in respect of sickness absence or injury lasting five working days or less, the employee will be required to complete a self-certification of sickness absence form on their return to work, see Appendix I. This must be requested and completed immediately on returning to work and promptly passed to the employee's immediate manager.
- g) In respect of sickness absence or injury lasting more than five working days the employee must, on the sixth day of absence, provide the Company with a medical certificate stating the reason for the absence and to cover any subsequent period of absence.
- h) The Company reserves the right to ask the employee at any stage of absence to produce a medical certificate and to undergo a medical examination with a doctor of the Company's choosing, and/or to require the employee to provide the Company with permission to contact the employee's doctor to obtain a medical report on the employee's current state of health.

Failure to follow the instructions given above will result in the absence classed as unauthorised and will be without pay. Unauthorised absence is a disciplinary offence and the Company may withhold statutory sick pay or company sick pay if the absence is unauthorised.

Company Sick Pay Scheme

- a) Employees with less than one years service will not be entitled to company sick pay unless this is specified in their written terms and conditions.
- b) Employees will be entitled to full contractual pay in respect of absence due to sickness or injury in accordance with the terms of this policy with the following scale:

Length of Service	Full Pay Entitlement
Less than 1 year	no entitlement
Over 1 and less than 2 years	7 weeks
2 completed years	9 weeks
3 completed years	14 weeks
4 completed years	17 weeks
5 completed years	20 weeks
6 completed years	23 weeks
7 completed years	26 weeks
8 completed years	29 weeks
9 completed years	33 weeks
10 or more completed years	38 weeks

The appropriate period of entitlement will be the maximum in any rolling 52 weeks period provided that the employee complies in full with all the relevant notification provisions.

- c) If the employee receives any payment from a third party in respect of damages for absence from employment due to sickness or injury, then any sum paid by the Company to the employee in respect

- of the same period of absence shall be recoverable by the Company out of such damages as money due to the company.
- d) The Company reserves the right not to pay company sick pay in the event of injuries being sustained by the employee whilst participating in any sports, hobbies or social activities, if participation in such activities aggravates an existing illness or injury, or if the employee continues to engage in an activity which is inconsistent with the alleged illness or medical condition.
 - e) The Company reserves the right not to pay company sick pay where in the opinion of the Company:
 - i. the employee knowingly provides the Company with false information
 - ii. the employee fails to follow any aspects of the absence procedure
 - iii. the employee is absent on a regular basis following an identified pattern
 - iv. the absence is caused by negligence, recklessness, carelessness, or where the employee has failed to observe standard health and safety practices or ignored advice from the Company
 - v. the employee's absence is caused through injury or illness related to work or activities outside their employment with the Company
 - vi. the employee continues to work for another employer (paid or unpaid) while off sick (even with certified absence).
 - f) Should illness occur on a public holiday or during annual leave the Company will not pay company sick pay as this will be recorded as holiday.

Monitoring & Review of Absence

Levels of absence need to be contained at a minimum level because everybody's work is important in the team environment. The Company has adopted the Bradford Points system in order to effectively monitor and manage absence in the workplace. This system is recognised as a model of best practice by several trade unions. The Bradford Points system of absence is a recognised method of identifying individuals with serious absence and patterns of absence worthy of further investigation by the company.

a) The Bradford Points Calculation:

$$S \times S \times D = \text{Bradford points score}$$

Where:

- **S** is the number of occasions of absence in the last 52 weeks
- **D** is the total number of days' absence in the last 52 weeks.

For employees with a total of 14 days' absence, for example, in one rolling 52 week period, the Bradford score can vary enormously, depending on the number of occasions involved.

Examples	Points	Calculation
one absence of 14 days	14 points	1 x 1 x 14
seven absences of two days each	686 points	7 x 7 x 14
14 absences of one day each	2,744 points	14 x 14 x 14

b) Short Term Absence

It is often easier for the Company to make arrangements to cover staff who are going to be off for long periods, and which are more likely to be caused by genuine illness. However, employees taking odd days off here and there have an immediate impact on the business operation and, if repeated, are likely to arouse suspicions over their reasons for absence, particularly among their colleagues.

If not unchecked, this type of absence can send out the wrong signals to colleagues who, in some jobs, are likely to have to cover for those absent. Frequent short-term absence has serious

repercussions on the production line and therefore the Bradford Points System is weighted against frequent short term absences.

c) A System Of Triggers For Action

The Bradford formula is set out in the box above. The number of Bradford points that trigger action by the company is as follows:

Points	Action
27	absence counselling by the Line Manager
64	disciplinary meeting – Warning (verbal)
125	absence counselling
216	absence counselling/investigation leading to further disciplinary meeting – Warning (written)
343	disciplinary meeting – Warning (Final written)
512	absence counselling/disciplinary meeting leading to dismissal at Directors discretion

Once included in the system, employees will be expected to have a clean absence record of 13 weeks. Any further absence will move them up via the points system.

The Company will review the Bradford Points system on a regular basis and may make changes to the points system after consulting with the workforce and giving them one month's notice of the changes.

d) Taking Account of Legitimate Absence

Sometimes concerns are expressed that many cases of short-term, frequent absence are legitimate and employees are wrongly being put under suspicion. In order to avoid this, the company excludes certain types of absence from the calculations including: pregnancy, a disability or terminal illness. This will be done at the discretion of the Company so that the employee's absence can be quickly eliminated from the points total. The investigation into the causes of the absence may in fact lead to changes to work arrangements that can help alleviate or remedy the situation.

e) Maintaining Regular Contact With The Company

It is the responsibility of any employees who are off sick to maintain regular contact with their immediate manager. The following minimum contact must be made by the employee. Failure to do so will be a disciplinary offence.

- **One day absence**

The employee must ring their immediate manager in accordance with the policy outlined in Procedure for Notification of Absence: point c

- **More than one day less than one week**

The employee must ring the employee's immediate manager daily

- **Certificated absences**

The employee must ring the employee's immediate manager a minimum of once a week or as agreed by the Company.

Return to Work Interviews

All employees returning to work will be subject to a return to work interview with their immediate manager (see Appendix II)

Such an interview, where the record warrants it, may result in a further review over a given period over which a substantial improvement may be sought. A medical examination may be sought to assist in the return to good health of the employee. Failure to attain and sustain the standard could result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with the Company's Disciplinary Procedure.

Staff with health problems may be referred by their immediate manager to the Company's nominated medical practitioner who will advise management on the current state of their health and make the necessary recommendations regarding it. The Company's medical practitioner will also offer advice to the employee and will, if necessary, liaise with the employee's own doctor.

Staff may be visited at home when the absence has exceeded three days or when the employee has been admitted to hospital. Earlier home visits may be made if the circumstances warrant it.

Long Term Absence

It is possible for the Company to fairly dismiss an employee who has been, or will be, absent for a long time due to ill-health. In order for us to do so, we will act reasonably, fairly, sympathetically and follow the following procedure:

- Step 1:** The Company will set out in writing the employee's incapacity problems which lead us to contemplate dismissing the employee and the reasons why we have put forward this proposal. The statement will be sent to the employee and he/she will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the matter.
- Step 2:** The meeting must not take place until the employee has had a reasonable opportunity to consider their response. The employee has the right to be accompanied at the meeting by either a work colleague or a trade union representative. After the meeting the Company will inform the employee of its decision and of their right to appeal against it if they are not satisfied with it.
- Step 3:** If the employee wishes to appeal, they must inform the Company in writing within 5 working days. The company will then invite the employee to attend an appeal meeting. Again, the employee has the right to be accompanied. After the appeal meeting the Company will inform the employee of its final decision.

Each step and action under this procedure must be taken without unreasonable delay. The timing and location of meetings must be entirely reasonable and the employee must take all reasonable steps to attend the meetings otherwise the decision may be taken in the absence of the employee. The meetings must be conducted in such a manner that enables both the Company and employee to explain their cases. Finally, in the case of appeal meetings, the company representative will be a Director.

Definition of disability

The definition of what constitutes a disability can be split into three parts:

- the employee must be suffering from a physical or mental impairment
- the impairment must have a substantial adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Substantial means more than minor or trivial
- the effect must be long-term, in other words have already lasted for at least 12 months or be likely to last that long.

Reasonable adjustments

If a medical report identifies a disability, in accordance with the DDA an employer has a duty to make reasonable adjustments. This is quite broad and may mean physical adjustments to premises or the provision of equipment to assist the employee in carrying out their duties. It can also mean adjustments to the role itself by removing certain duties and reallocating them, changes in hours or place of work, or the provision of further training and supervision. It may also include transferring to any other vacant post subject to suitability.

In other words quite a number of steps are required of an employer if they are to establish a fair dismissal for capability in relation to an employee who has been absent for a long term of sickness.

How abacus can help

We will be more than happy to provide you with assistance in implementing your absence and sickness policy or provide you with any additional information you require.

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Appendix I - SELF CERTIFICATE OF SICKNESS

ABSENCE

DETAILS OF ABSENCE:

Name:

Total Number of Days Sick (including weekends):

My Absence: From: To:

Reason for Absence:

I **have / have not*** consulted my Doctor
** Delete as appropriate*

Name and address of Doctor:

Telephone Number:

I reported my absence:
 To: On:
(name & position) (date)

I agree that where required I can be referred to the Company's Medical Adviser in connection with this illness. **YES / NO***
** Delete as appropriate*

Signed: Date:

AUTHORISATION:

** Manager to delete as appropriate*

* I have no reason to believe that the information stated above is incorrect or that Company Procedures were not correctly followed with regard to the reporting of absence.

* I am unable to countersign this statement to the reasons given in the attached Return to Work Interview form.

Signed: Date:
(Manager)

Appendix 2 - RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEW FORM

TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERVIEWER (SUPERVISOR/MANAGER)

Employee's Name:			
Reason for absence:	First notification: (date, time, to whom)		
Dates of absence:			
From:		To:	
Was a GP consulted? If yes, provide details	YES / NO	Is there an ongoing health problem? If yes, provide details	YES / NO
Can the company assist? If yes, provide details	YES / NO	Is there an external problem? If yes, provide details	YES / NO
What is the employee's absenteeism record for last 12 months?			
No. of occasions			
Date	Reasons		
Is there an obvious pattern to the absenteeism record?			YES / NO

Was the employee's loss to the department discussed? If yes, provide details of comments made	YES / NO
Is it recommended that the employee is referred to the Company's Health Adviser? If yes, for what reasons?	YES / NO
Is the employee to receive a caution in relation to this absenteeism? If yes, provide details	YES / NO
Employee's signature: Print Name: Date:	Interviewer's signature: Print Name: Date: