

Purpose

This Policy sets out the Company's Policy and procedure on absence reporting and absence management.

The aims of this Policy are:

- To encourage all its employees to maximise their attendance at work, while recognising from time to time that employees may be absent from work.
- To ensure that all employees understand their responsibilities and follow the absence reporting arrangements.
- To ensure that employees are aware of the trigger points and absence review procedure that may be enforced if their absence falls outside of the Company Policy.

The Policy also reviews all other absences that an employee may need to take from work.

Scope

This Policy applies to all employees of ABCA including those employees who are at work, but are unable to fulfil their duties and responsibilities of their current job role in a satisfactory manner and/or fulfil their contracted working hours due to an underlying medical condition.

Key Principles

All employees will be treated fairly and consistently during times of illness.

This Policy covers both short-term and long-term sickness absence from work. Short-term is defined where employees are absent for short periods of time; long-term is defined as a continuous period of absence from work over 4 weeks.

Regular, punctual attendance is an implied term of every employee's contract of employment – we ask each employee to take responsibility for achieving and maintaining good attendance.

Return to work interviews will be conducted following every period of absence. Employee's absence levels will be monitored in line with the company's set trigger points. These trigger points may be reviewed annually to reflect ABCA's sickness absence target.

The procedure aims to support an employee's return to work. Where employees are absent from work for a considerable amount of time or are no longer able to carry out the duties of their role, they will be supported during this time and made aware that the outcome of this procedure could be dismissal.

ABCA do not pay Company sick pay. The requirements and eligibility for SSP are detailed in this procedure.

Bradford Factor

The Bradford Factor provides a score based on frequency and duration of absences. Your current Bradford Factor score is displayed on your home page when logged in to Activ Absence. This is calculated automatically, however the formula for this is as follows:

$S \times S \times D = \text{Bradford Factor}$

S is the number of spells of absence of an individual over a 12-month rolling period; and

D is the total number of days of absence of the individual over the same period.

It's easier to illustrate through some examples:

Four employees (a, b, c and d) have the same absence duration of 10 days. However, their pattern of absence is very different – as is their Bradford Factor. The Bradford Factor calculator is designed to give more weight to frequent short-term absence.

(a) One absence of 10 days

Bradford Factor = $1 \times 1 \times 10 = 10$ points

(b) Three absences of one day, three days and then six days

Bradford Factor = $3 \times 3 \times 10 = 90$ points

(c) Five absences of two days each

Bradford Factor = $5 \times 5 \times 10 = 250$ points

(d) Ten absences of one day each

Bradford Factor = $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$ points

Procedure

Reporting of Absence

If you are going to be absent from work, you must contact your line manager on the first day of absence. This should be as early as possible, but, no later than half an hour before your normal start time.

This contact should be made personally (not a spouse/family member/friend) by telephone, not text or e-mail. It is recognised that there may be some instances where you are unable to contact your line manager personally (e.g. admittance to hospital), but this should only be in exceptional circumstances and the person who contacts your line manager must leave a contact name and number.

When ringing to inform of your absence from work you must provide the following information:

- When you became ill
- The broad nature of your illness (e.g. migraine, flu etc.)
- Whether the illness is due to an accident from work
- Whether you are seeking medical attention
- The likely date of return

This information will be logged by your line Manager onto Activ Absence, where this information will then be stored and used to calculate your Bradford Factor score.

If your line manager is not available to speak with, then you should leave a message and attempt to contact another manager, supervisor or team leader in your office. If they are also unavailable, you should contact HR. Any message left should include a contact number so that your line manager can then ring you back to discuss your absence.

You should then contact your line manager every day that you are absent for the first 5 working days, unless your line manager agrees anything different with you. If your absence continues beyond 7 calendar days and you receive a medical certificate you should contact your line manager on a weekly basis, unless your line manager agrees anything different with you.

Self-Certification and Medical Certificates

This will start from the first day that you should have been available for work.

Eligible employees are entitled to SSP for any period of absence of 4 days or more. SSP entitlement in a rolling year is 28 weeks. If you have used all of your entitlement or you are not eligible for SSP, the company will issue you with an SSP1 form for you to take to your local job centre.

SSP payments are treated the same as wages and are subject to income tax and national insurance deductions.

Once your absence is logged on Activ Absence you will receive an email asking you to complete a self-certification form for this absence. You must complete this otherwise you may not be paid any SSP you are entitled to.

If your absence is 7 days or longer (calendar days, not working days) then you will require a Doctors medical certificate (also known as a Fit Note/Sick Note).

If you fail to supply the company with a valid up to date medical certificate, then SSP cannot be paid. Medical certificates should not be backdated and there should be no gaps in the continuation of dates from one note to the next.

A medical certificate may comment that you are 'fit for some work' which may involve adjustments to your job role or hours of work for a specified period of time. If this is the case, these adjustments will be discussed. If the company can accommodate these adjustments, then arrangements will be made for you to return to work. However, there may be some instances where these adjustments cannot be accommodated. If this is the case, then the medical certificate will be used in the same way as if the GP advised that you were not fit for work.

Employees Responsibilities

During any period of absence you should remain contactable and available to attend any review meetings to discuss your absence.

It is important that you raise with your line manager any concerns with your job which you feel are making you ill or contributing to your illness/absence.

You may request to take accrued annual leave whilst on long term sick to go on holiday, however, this must be supported by your GP and we will require a letter from them confirming that this holiday will not adversely affect your ability to return to work.

It is expected that when you are absent from work due to sickness that you should not undertake activities that would prevent your recovery. It is found that you have been doing so this will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Policy.

It is your responsibility to manage your sickness and take the advice of health professionals to aid the quickest recovery and prevent/minimise any re-occurrence of the sickness.

Medical Information

If we are concerned by your absence record, we may request a medical report from your GP and/or a medical examination by an Occupational Health Provider of the Company's choice, to gain further information on your absence. If you do not agree to this we will make a decision about your continued employment based on the information available.

Return to work Interviews

After every period of sickness absence a return to work interview will be carried out.

The form should be completed by the line manager, and where possible they should carry this out on the day the employee returns (or as soon as practicable). This does not necessarily have to take place on a face to face basis and can be conducted by telephone where Manager/Employees cover a wide geographical area, or where face to face meetings are not possible within a reasonable timeframe.

The aim of the return to work interview is to ultimately confirm that the employee is fit enough be back at work and able to carry out their role fully. It is also to ensure that they are not on any medication, which could affect their ability to carry out the role safely. However, the return to work interview will also confirm the reasons for the absence, whether the employee requires any follow up treatment and is the reason for the absence likely to re-occur. It can also help identify short and long term absence problems at an early stage. They also provide a manager with the opportunity to start a dialogue with staff about underlying issues which may be causing the absence and allow them to make changes to support the employee.

This will also be an opportunity to have an informal discussion with the employee regarding their levels of absence. If the employee isn't currently on any level of absence review for their absence, during the meeting the line manager should highlight to the employee if they are near hitting the trigger points and that their absence may need to be reviewed if they hit the trigger.

Sickness Absence Management

Trigger Points

Under the absence management system, Activ Absence, absences will be calculated in points using the Bradford Factor. The following trigger points are considered to be a cause for concern and can result in the following levels of disciplinary action:

- 35 Points – Verbal Warning
- 200 Points – First Written Warning
- 400 Points – Final Written Warning
- 600 Points - Dismissal

As well as trigger points, patterns of absence which are causing concern, for example, regular Friday or Monday absences, or absences regularly occurring on a particular day/week, pre or post annual leave, school holidays, public holidays, pay day, will be reviewed and disciplinary action may be taken.

The above should be applied irrespective of the number of hours worked in a day. Once these trigger points are reached an employee will move onto the formal review process detailed below. ABCA reserve the right to modify the process in any way should the circumstances require.

Managers Discretion on Trigger Points

When reviewing absences against the trigger points it may be necessary in exceptional circumstances for managers to use their discretion on what the trigger points are. This particularly applies when an employee has an underlying condition that is covered under the Equality Act 2010.

Stage 1: Absence Review Meeting

If the trigger points are reached, as previously detailed, the employee will be requested in writing to attend a stage 1 absence review meeting with their line manager, using the appropriate template letter.

Employees have the right to be accompanied to this review meeting by a Trade Union representative or fellow ABCA work colleague. During this meeting their previous absences will be reviewed and they will be advised that their attendance levels have reached the trigger points within the absence policy.

As the employee has now been put onto the formal absence review policy a possible outcome of the meeting could be that they receive a disciplinary warning. At a stage 1 absence review meeting this would normally be a verbal warning.

The nature of the illnesses will be discussed and reviewed as to whether the absences are related or if there any underlying causes of absences and if any support can be provided in light of this. It should be considered if it will be worthwhile contacting the employee's GP for further details on their medical condition/ongoing attendance issue.

Also during this meeting it will be considered if any reasonable adjustments can be made to the employees role or working hours and conditions, however these changes must be in line with business needs and requirements.

Once all areas detailed above have been reviewed the line manager will decide if the employee should receive a disciplinary warning. The meeting will be adjourned to consider the decision and the employee will be informed of the outcome and targets for absence will be set. The employee will leave the meeting aware that if their absence

continues to be above the accepted target discussed in the meeting, then a further absence review will be arranged and further disciplinary action may be taken.

Stage 2: Absence Review Meeting

If the targets of the Stage 1 absence review have not been met, or the level of absence and resulting Bradford Factor score merits, then the employee will be invited to a stage 2 absence review meeting, using the appropriate template letter.

A stage 2 meeting will follow the same format as stage 1 meeting, but may also discuss the reasons for failing to achieve the agreed targets set at the stage 1 meeting. Once the line manager is satisfied that they have all the required information the meeting will be adjourned and the line manager will consider all of the information.

If it is felt that there is unsatisfactory improvements or unacceptable absence levels than the decision may be taken to put the employee on the next stage of disciplinary which will be a first written warning, this will remain on the employees file for a period of 12 months.

An agreed target and timescale for improvement will then be set.

Stage 3: Absence Review Meeting

If the targets of the Stage 2 absence review have not been met, or the level of absence and resulting Bradford Factor score merits, then the employee will be invited to a stage 3 absence review meeting, using the appropriate template letter. Again the format will be the same as the previous review meetings.

The manager conducting the review will decide if sufficient improvement has been made or not. If it is felt that absence levels haven't improved in line with expectations or the level of absence is unsatisfactory, in line with the Bradford Factor score, then the employee may be issued with a final written warning. This will remain on the employee's file for a period of 12 months.

At this stage the employee will be informed that failure to improve at this stage may result in their dismissal from the company.

Stage 4: Absence Review Meeting

Following a stage 3 absence review meeting, if the targets for improvement have not been reached, within the agreed timescales, then an employee will be invited to a Stage 4 absence review meeting, using the appropriate template letter. Again the format will be the same as the previous review meetings, however, this meeting will be held by a Director of the business.

At this meeting they will review the stage 3 warning and ensure that there is nothing further that the company can do to support the employee in improving their absence levels.

Once they are satisfied that the process has been fair and consistent and the employee has failed to improve their absence levels, then the Director may take the decision to dismiss the employee on the grounds on unacceptable absence levels.

If an improvement has been made, but there are still concerns over absence levels, then a final written warning may be re-issued, with further targets and timescales set.

If these are not met, then the stage 4 absence review meeting will be repeated.

Appeals

At each stage of the review process, if a disciplinary warning is issued the employee will have right to appeal against the decision, in line with the company disciplinary policy and procedure

Long Term Sick

Any employee off work continuously for 4 weeks or more will be classed as Long Term Sick.

Whilst on long term sickness an employee should continually make themselves available for sickness meetings, such as home visits or meetings at their local office. These meetings will be an opportunity to provide ABCA with an update on the continued absence and discuss any reasonable adjustments to allow the employee to return to work. During this time the company may request a report from the employees' GP or specialist to gain further information on their condition and the expected length of time that the absence may continue for. At the company's discretion the employee may be asked to attend a medical appointment with an occupational health professional of the Company's choice.

If the employee continues to be absent for more than 6 months, then the company may look at the long term prospects of the employee returning to work.

After seeking medical advice and a series of meetings' with the employee the company may decide to terminate the employee's contract on the grounds of ill health.

Absences that are not sickness related

Unauthorised Absence

Where an employee fails to follow the absent reporting procedure and is absent from work they will be classed as AWOL (absent without leave). This will also be the case if an employee is already absent from work and has been following the absence reporting procedure, then suddenly fails to contact and provide in date sick notes.

Where an employee is classed as AWOL, in the first instance the company will try and contact them by telephone. If they are unable to contact the employee, a letter (AWOL 1) will be sent to the employee's home address or via email, informing them that they must contact on receipt of the letter.

If they fail to make contact after AWOL 1 letter is sent, then the AWOL 2 letter will be sent. This will invite the employee to a disciplinary meeting for failure to follow absence reporting procedures.

If they fail to attend this meeting and there has been no contact, then AWOL 3 letter will be sent inviting them again to a disciplinary hearing. This letter will state that if they fail to attend then the meeting will take place in their absence and a decision will be taken based on the information that the company has. AWOL can be classed as gross misconduct and therefore may result in the employee's summary dismissal.

Compassionate Leave

Employees will be granted a reasonable amount of time off in cases of serious illness or bereavement in your immediate family. For short periods of leave this will normally be paid. Each request will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Parental Bereavement Leave

Employees who have parental responsibilities are entitled to two weeks' parental bereavement leave following the loss of a child under the age of 18 or a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Parental bereavement leave can be taken as:

- a single block of two weeks; or
- two separate blocks of one week at different times.

Leave cannot be taken in single days and must be taken within 56 weeks of the date of death of the employee's child.

Employees will be eligible to receive statutory parental bereavement pay if:

- they have at least 26 weeks' continuous employment by the week before the week in which their child passes away; and

- they have normal weekly earnings in the eight weeks up to the week before the child's death of no less than the lower earnings limit for national insurance contribution purposes.

An employee should inform their line manager or HR of their intention to begin leave before they would have been due to start work or, if this is not feasible, as soon as is reasonable practicable. Notification in the form of a telephone call is acceptable as the leave may need to be taken at short notice. Where possible, when leave is required more than 56 days after the death of a child the Company should be given one week's notice of the intention to take the leave.

Time off for Dependants

In the case of an emergency and unforeseen matters regarding a dependant then employees are entitled to a reasonable amount of time off depending on the individuals' circumstances.

Time off for dependants will be unpaid. A dependant can be a spouse, partner, child or someone who is dependent on an employee for care. The leave can be taken for example, to deal with a breakdown in childcare, to put longer term care in place for children or elderly relatives or if a dependant falls ill or is taken to hospital.

Where employees are continually absent for time off for dependants the Company may require supporting evidence and a review will be set up with the employee to discuss the ongoing reasons for absence.

Holidays

Holidays will be booked on a first come first served basis and will be approved in line with the needs of the business. Therefore, before a holiday is booked you must ensure that you have that period of time approved as holiday.

No more than 10 consecutive days' holidays can be booked at any one time. If you require more than 10 days then this must be put in writing as to the reasons for this extended time off. This must then be approved by a Director of the business before the holiday will be granted. All annual leave accrued must be used in the same holiday year, remaining leave will only be carried over in exceptional circumstances.

In order to request a holiday, you must complete the leave request form on Activ Absence, once completed this form will be submitted to your line manager for approval. You will then receive an email to say whether this holiday has been approved or declined. If approved these holidays will show on your Activ Absence dashboard and these days will be deducted from your annual entitlement. Only once you have received an email confirming that this holiday request has been approved is the holiday request accepted.

Medical Appointments

Wherever possible, Doctors and Dentist appointments should be made outside of working hours. If this is not possible the reasons should be discussed with the employee's line manager and appointments made at the beginning or end of the working day. It is then at the discretion of the line manager if the time off can be allowed.

This time off will be unpaid, but again at the discretion of the line manager, you may be able to make this time back.

This time off must be requested through Activ Absence, using the 'Request Leave' button and changing 'Annual Leave' to 'Planned medical appointment'. You can then submit the time off required and gain approval from your line manager. Evidence of the appointment confirmation should be sent to the employee's line manager, and or HR, to be saved into the employee's personnel folder.

For hospital appointments, as soon as the employee is made aware of the appointment they must bring their appointment letter in to show their line manager. This again should be requested through Activ Absence. The line manager will then make arrangements for the employee to attend the appointment. If, once at the appointment, it becomes clear that the employee cannot make it back to work for the agreed time, they must ring their line manager to inform them of the delay.

Jury Service

If you are required to attend Jury Service, please inform your line manager of the required dates as soon as possible. You will be paid by the courts during this time, not ABCA. If whilst on Jury Service, you are released back to work for half a day you will be expected to return to work. You will be paid for any hours you work. If you are required to give evidence as a witness on behalf of ABCA you will be paid in full.