

VOLUNTARY ACTION-LEEDS

SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Key Objectives

Voluntary Action – Leeds believes that management of sickness absence is very important both to enable us to achieve our aims and objectives and to facilitate the health and wellbeing of staff. Sickness absence incurs both direct and indirect costs for the organisation and can affect the morale and performance of other staff and impact upon management time. While VA-L's Statement of Written Employment Particulars summarises the basic requirements for staff to follow when reporting in sick and the steps managers may take to manage sick leave, we believe that this separate Policy is required to enable us to:

- reinforce management systems for reviewing individual sickness records
- review compliance with sickness reporting rules
- identify causes of sickness absence in order to try to prevent recurrence where possible
- promote a positive attendance culture and encourage tackling of work-related causes of sickness absence.

It is our intention that staff will be treated fairly and consistently and that cases of sickness absence will be treated on their own individual merits with respect for the individual concerned while still recognising that VA-L needs to minimise disruption in the wider organisation.

Definitions

Short-term sickness absence: is defined as absence through illness which is of a short-term duration (a day or a few days but less than two weeks)

Frequent sickness absence: is defined as absence through illness which is of short-term duration (a day or a few days) but happens

at regular intervals or with some apparent pattern. It is usually self-certified.

Longterm sickness absence: is defined as a protracted period of absence (more than two weeks) which is usually caused by a single health issue or a combination of health issues. It is particularly important for regular contact to be maintained when staff are on longterm sickness absence both to facilitate their return and to minimise impact on the organisation and its other staff.

Individual merit: a judgement of what constitutes “acceptable” and “unacceptable” amounts of sickness leave has to be made by managers in the light of each case, and consideration may be given to other aspects of the employee’s performance at work.

Cumulative sickness absence: VA-L counts sickness absence cumulatively throughout the year, as explained in the Statement of Written Employment Particulars.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Act makes it illegal to discriminate against disabled persons in employment through either less favourable treatment or by failure to make reasonable adjustments. Where VA-L employs a disabled person or an employee becomes disabled during their employment, VA-L will give prompt attention to reasonable adjustments to make sure that the employee can attend work and carry out their duties.

Sickness Absence Reporting

The procedure for reporting is laid out in the Statement of Written Employment Particulars and this must be adhered to by all staff at all times, including use of the required forms. Failure to follow reporting procedures may lead to disciplinary action.

Sickness Absence Monitoring

VA-L maintains records of all sickness absences. Line managers who receive sickness reports must inform the Administration Manager immediately, in order for the appropriate paperwork and procedures to be arranged. Line managers should ensure that they

keep track of any emerging patterns or repeat absences to enable these to be addressed at an early stage.

Absence Management Steps

Short-term sickness: provided the required reporting procedures have been followed by the employee and the line manager is satisfied with the information received, it will generally be sufficient for the line manager to ensure that the correct forms have been received and signed, that liaison is maintained with Administration and Payroll, and that any cover arrangements (where possible) are adequate. It is the employee's responsibility to follow reporting procedures, to provide the required forms, and to keep their line manager informed as to their likely return date. Where there are concerns about *frequent absences* or any patterns of absences, the line manager should address this informally via supervision in the first instance, discussing any possible causes or issues and agreeing how to improve the situation. While this should be recorded in supervision notes, it does not constitute a warning. If the employee's absence record does not improve following this discussion, the line manager should use VA-L's Capability or Disciplinary Procedures as appropriate. VA-L may also choose to refer an employee to an independent medical examiner following cumulative sickness absences totalling more than 21 days in a 12 month period, as set out in the Statement of Written Employment Particulars.

Longterm sickness: if an employee has been absent because of sickness for more than two weeks and looks likely to remain absent for at least another week, the line manager will (at their discretion*) write to the employee and offer to meet with them to discuss their condition if appropriate with a view towards facilitating their return to work. The employee does not have to agree to such a meeting if they feel unfit but if they remain absent for another two week period, or if the line manager feels it to be appropriate following the meeting, the line manager will write to them again to arrange for them to be seen by an independent medical examiner.

*These steps include some leeway for line management interpretation. There are cases (eg following certain operations) where the recovery period may well be prolonged but it would not be necessary to meet with the employee or obtain an independent medical opinion. There are also, however, other instances (eg

exhaustion, stress, etc) where these steps could be more appropriate to clarify the circumstances surrounding an absence or to offer support or information to an employee.

Following referral to an independent medical examiner, and depending on the result of this, various options may be considered; for example:

- (a) if a genuine health problem has been indicated, it may be necessary to look at the job and/or job content to ascertain whether any changes can be made to the work or to the method of working in order to facilitate an acceptable level of attendance and performance. The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act may also need to be considered. A review period should be agreed in order to monitor the situation.
- (b) if a genuine health problem does not exist, recourse to disciplinary procedures should be considered with the objective of securing an improvement in attendance and performance (where the latter is an issue). Again, a review period should be agreed.
- (c) if it becomes clear that there is an issue relating to Capability, VA-L's Capability Procedures will be used as appropriate; ultimately this may mean termination of employment on the grounds of incapacity, either due to ill health or inability to perform the duties of the post.

Contact at Home during Sickness Absence

It is very important for contact to be maintained while an employee is on sickness absence. While VA-L recognises the employee's right not to unreasonably be disturbed at such times, there may be occasions when it is necessary for a line manager or member of admin staff to telephone or write to the employee. To avoid undue disturbance, staff need to ensure that they follow the reporting procedures, and that line managers are kept fully informed of any work-related issues and the employee's likely return date.

Return to Work

Following a longterm sickness absence, staff will meet with their line manager for a "back to work" interview. The purpose of this is to ensure that staff are given any information they may need about how their work has been covered, and that managers are aware of

any support needs the employee may have in settling back into their work. If an employee wishes to return to work on a different basis following a longterm sickness absence (for example, on reduced hours) this can be discussed; where medical opinion recommends a return on a part-time basis, VA-L will endeavour to support such requests providing that the employee and line manager are able to devise a suitable approach. For example, an employee may request to take outstanding holidays as a means of gradual return to work, or may be able to suggest a pattern of building up hours gradually (usually over a period of up to four weeks). Where an employee requests a permanent reduction in hours, VA-L will try to accommodate this if it is possible to do so given the nature of the post and its funding and the feasibility of job-sharing or having two part-time posts.

Responsibilities of Managers

Managers are responsible for absence management of the staff members they line manage. Managers must ensure that staff induction processes include an explanation of the sickness reporting rules, that medical certificates are received on the due dates, and that liaison is maintained with Payroll and the Administration Manager for sick pay calculations and recording/monitoring purposes. Where managers have concerns about longterm or cumulative sickness and they wish to use the contact letter and referral procedures outlined above this should normally be discussed with the General Manager first.

Responsibilities of Staff

Staff are responsible for acknowledging and resolving problems underlying absences where these are within their control. They are responsible for following reporting procedures and for ensuring that their line manager is kept informed about their absence and likely return date, and that progress is reported regardless of certification. Where possible, it is helpful if staff can provide information about current/forthcoming work, which may be needed in order to cancel or cover events, meetings, deadlines, etc. Staff should also ensure that absences are attributed to illness only where a diagnosable medical condition exists, and that other policies and procedures for leave (eg compassionate leave, carer leave, etc) are used where these are appropriate. Line managers have discretion to deal with exceptional circumstances which may

not be covered by policy, so staff should discuss such matters rather than having resort to sickness absence. Staff are expected to comply with sickness procedures and to co-operate with referrals if these are used.

Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure adopted by the Trustee Board August 2005. Updated by the Personnel Committee on 5 September 2005.