

Sickness Absence Procedure	
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Approval History

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1.0	Migration to POPP template Full procedural review	Operations Committee	14.10.25
1.1	Amends to definition of statutory sick pay in Section 3 in response to Employment Rights Act 2025	Operations Committee – Chair’s Approval	01.04.26

1. Purpose

This procedure ensures sickness absence is managed consistently and fairly across the University. It outlines clear processes for reporting and recording absence, with guidance for both managers and staff.

While recognising that illness is sometimes unavoidable, the University must also consider operational needs and the impact on colleagues. We are committed to supporting staff health, wellbeing, and attendance, and value the contributions of all employees.

This procedure aims to balance employee support with organisational requirements. It provides a framework for managing absence, facilitating return to work, exploring redeployment where appropriate, and, when necessary, supporting ill-health retirement or fair termination on health grounds.

2. Scope and Exceptions to the Procedure

This procedure applies to all employees from the University of Surrey and its subsidiaries, with the exception of Cervus+ which has its own procedure.

It should be noted that the [Ordinances 11.5 Sickness Absence Procedure](#) also applies to Academic Staff¹, so should be consulted when an academic member of staff is concerned.

Time off work to care for dependents is covered by the Leave Procedure.

The responsibility for monitoring and managing sickness absence lies with the line manager and those to whom day-to-day supervision of staff is delegated. Full guidance on these responsibilities can be found in Section 4.6.2. Where applicable, Line Managers should seek advice from Occupational Health via Human Resources.

An employee who fails to follow the sickness absence process set out in this procedure in terms of reporting and certifying sickness absence will be considered to have taken unauthorised absence and may be subject to action under the Disciplinary Procedure. Full guidance on the responsibilities of the employee can be found in Section 4.6.1.

Please note that this procedure is not part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended periodically, following appropriate consultation with recognised trade union representatives.

3. Definitions and Terminology

The following definitions are used in this procedure:

Self-certificate – A form which must be completed and submitted by the employee for any sickness absence lasting between 1-7 consecutive calendar days. This is done via Quick Links on Surreynet: 'Report Sickness Absence'

Statement of Fitness for Work (Fit Note) – A medical certificate which must be provided for any sickness absence lasting more than 7 consecutive calendar days. It can be used by GPs to confirm that someone is 'not fit for work', or 'may be fit for work' subject to certain suggested adjustments such as a phased return to work or lighter duties for a specified period.

Short-term sickness absence – means any period of sickness lasting less than 4 weeks consecutively (inclusive of non-work days).

Long-term sickness absence – means any period of sickness lasting 4 weeks consecutively or more (inclusive

¹ Those covered by Lecturer A & B, Senior Lecturer, Reader, Professor, Teaching Fellow, Senior Teaching Fellow and Professorial Teaching Fellow Role Profiles

of non-work days).

Phased return – an initial, temporary, adjustment to hours of work, duties or environment immediately following a period of (usually long-term) sickness absence, to help the employee back into their normal work or an amended work role, if this is an agreed adjustment.

Review period – means a defined period during which an employee is required to show an improvement in their sickness absence levels under the University's Sickness Absence Procedure.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) – A statutory weekly amount of sick pay, determined by the Government, which becomes payable from the first day of sickness. Employees will receive 80% of their average weekly earnings or the SSP weekly rate determined by Government, whichever is the lower rate, pro-rated on a daily basis.

Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) – An enhanced amount of sick pay, decided by the University, which is paid from the first day of an absence, provided notification and certification requirements are met and the maximum amount payable has not been exceeded. Details of OSP entitlement are outlined in Appendix A.

Trigger point – this represents the stage at which consideration should be made for referral to the formal procedure. The formal procedures will be triggered if an individual reaches 10 or more working days in any rolling 12 month period, 4 episodes of sickness (of whatever length) in a consecutive 4-month period, or a single period of 4 weeks consecutively or more (long-term sickness absence). Formal procedures can also be triggered for anyone whose pattern of sickness absence or cause of absence otherwise reasonably causes concern.

Disability - Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (Equality Act 2010).

Tailored Adjustment Plan - acts as a living record of workplace adjustments relating to supporting an individual with a disability and/or long-term health condition. It is agreed between an employee and their line manager.

4. Procedural Principles

4.1 Absence Reporting

- 4.1.1 An employee who is unwell and cannot attend work must inform their manager of the reason for their absence and provide additional information such as the anticipated length of absence. In addition, details of any important or urgent work of which they are aware, which may need to be completed or progressed in their absence, should be provided if reasonably practicable.
- 4.1.2 Reporting must be on the first day of absence in accordance with the specific requirements of the Faculty or Professional Services area, but no later than one hour after their expected start time, this would normally be via a phone call, but where agreed locally this could also be Teams or email, normally to the line manager or a senior colleague in the team.
- 4.1.3 Leaving a message with anyone at random is not usually an acceptable form of reporting absence. There may be exceptional circumstances, where alternative methods of notification would be acceptable, for example, where strict application of this procedure would result in substantial unfairness to the employee, or the employee may in some way be at risk because of health or disability. Such cases will be rare, and each will be treated on their own merits.
- 4.1.4 When an employee knows in advance that they are likely to be absent e.g. for routine surgery and recovery, they should inform their manager and provide any additional useful information such as the anticipated length of their absence including letters from the doctor/hospital (translated if

necessary) where relevant and available. Where absence is planned (for example, when undergoing elective surgery) or if sick pay has expired it may be appropriate to consider using other forms of leave (incl. annual leave, unpaid leave) to cover the absence. If a member of staff is not well enough to attend work, then sick leave would be used. The local HR representative can provide further advice and guidance if required. Occupational Health may also be able to provide advice for more complex absence cases, such as those related to long-term conditions.

- 4.1.5 Line managers are required to record all periods of sickness absence and share these with HR Operations. Any part days of absence should be recorded locally, particularly if there is a pattern or trend of this. It is the line manager/senior leadership team's responsibility to ensure that arrangements are made, where necessary, to cover work and to inform colleagues of the absence. It is appreciated that this responsibility may fall across several teams, for example to cover teaching duties, and as such the appropriate level of confidentiality should be maintained.
- 4.1.6 The University will maintain accurate records of all sickness absences taken by staff and report this as a requirement under HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) rules.
- 4.1.7 Information on individual sickness absence is held within the HR System, which is accessed by HR personnel. Some authorised departmental administrators may also keep a confidential record of staff absences, for the purpose of supporting line managers with informing HR of the absences in the team.
- 4.1.8 If sickness absence is for a reason related to disability, this should be recorded separately at a local level to ensure that any subsequent decisions take account of any potential reasonable adjustments. If employees consider that they are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects their ability to undertake their work, they should inform their line manager/HR. Any information provided will be handled in a confidential manner and in accordance with the Data Protection Policy.
- 4.1.9 If an employee believes that their sickness may be related to an activity or incident at work, this must be reported to their line manager, who should inform their Faculty/Professional Services Health & Safety Manager immediately. An Incident Report, based on the information given, must be completed and the incident investigated.

Similarly, if an employee has been exposed to a communicable disease (e.g. diarrhea and vomiting, chicken pox, or sickness that could be passed on to colleagues in the workplace environment), they must inform their line manager and HR representative, who may seek advice from Occupational Health and/or the Director of Health and Safety.

4.2 Returning to Work

When an employee returns to work, they should complete a University Self Certificate via Quick Links on SurreyNet (where the period of absence ranges from 1-7 calendar days). For any period of absence of more than 7 calendar days, a Fit Note/s covering the entire period of the absence must be provided as soon as possible and normally within 1 week of the start date of the certifiable absence. Please note that for Statutory Sick Pay purposes every day of the absence must be covered including weekends, bank holidays and University closure days. Multiple Fit Notes must run sequentially with no gaps.

Fit Notes should be provided promptly (normally no later than a week after the start of the certifiable absence) and at regular intervals thereafter. Late submission of Fit Notes may result in sick pay entitlement being stopped.

Employees who are temporarily abroad and become unwell must follow the same process of notification and submit equivalent medical certification. Where possible, we require the medical certification to be translated.

It is good practice for managers to ensure that on each occasion an employee returns from a period of sickness absence (of any length), a brief and informal return to work meeting is held with them, ideally on their first day back. More detailed meetings will be appropriate following a period of long-term sickness absence.

When an employee indicates they will be returning to work following a period of long-term absence, or where advised in a Fit Note, it may help them to be offered a phased return (see Section 4.4). Ideally this should be discussed in advance of the planned return date. Advice on adjustments or other additional support required during this period should be sought from Occupational Health in conjunction with an HR representative.

Similarly, if an employee wishes to return to work before the expiry date of their Fit Note, advice should be sought from Occupational Health before they are allowed to do so. This may involve a formal referral, as it is unlikely that any earlier than scheduled return to work will be permitted without up-to-date medical evidence to confirm the employee's fitness to work.

4.2.1. Guidance on conducting a return-to-work meeting

To support a smooth transition back to work, it is good practice for the line manager to hold a return-to-work meeting with the employee as soon as possible, ideally on the day they return from sickness absence.

Every case should be approached individually and with sensitivity. The purpose of this conversation is to understand the employee's situation, offer support where needed, and ensure all relevant information is captured. It may be helpful to gently explore some or all of the following areas during the discussion:

- Check to see how the employee is feeling and whether they feel well enough to be at work and if any temporary adjustments might help ease the transition back.
- Whether the employee saw a GP, attended hospital, or received any medical advice that we might need to be aware of in order to facilitate the return to work.
- Whether any support can be offered, such as counselling, Occupational Health, a Wellness Action Plan, or an Individual Stress Risk Assessment.
- Any work-related factors that may have contributed to the absence and how the organisation can provide support, such as a Stress Risk Assessment.
- Consider the need for a review of any other relevant risk assessments, where the individual's health condition makes them or others more vulnerable to workplace risks.
- If the employee has a disability, whether the absence was related and whether a Tailored Adjustment Plan might be helpful.
- If the absence relates to an ongoing health condition, what care or treatment plan is in place.
- Confirm the duration of the absence and the employee's return date for HR records.
- Confirm the reason for the absence. If there is a difference between the reason given during the meeting and the initial notification, the manager should explore this respectfully and give the employee the opportunity to explain.
- If the absence was not notified appropriately, confirm any reasons why and remind the employee of the standard process.
- Check that you have any relevant documentation related to the absence, such as a fit note or self-certification form.
- Updates on any relevant team or work matters the employee may have missed during their time away.
- Whether the absence appears to be part of a broader pattern.

Where there are reasonable concerns that the absence may not have been genuine, the manager should raise this carefully and give the employee a chance to respond and explain. It's important that this conversation remains constructive, balanced, and supportive, with the aim of understanding the facts and offering appropriate support.

When holding a return-to-work meeting, managers should:

- Listen actively and with empathy.
- Focus on understanding the facts.
- Use open questions to encourage conversation.
- Remain objective and open-minded.
- Balance the need for information with respect for the employee's privacy.
- Clearly explain how information will be recorded, stored, and kept confidential (e.g., that details will be documented and held on file but not shared with colleagues).

A copy of the return-to-work meeting notes should be provided to the employee.

Once the meeting is complete, the manager should consider whether any follow-up action is needed. For example, if a health condition is identified, referral to Occupational Health or a discussion with HR may be appropriate. If there are concerns about the legitimacy of the absence, and sufficient evidence to support those concerns, further investigation may be needed, which could lead to disciplinary procedures.

The form in *Appendix B* can be used to record the return-to-work discussion.

4.3 Occupational Health Service

The University is committed to supporting employees in their return-to-work following absence due to ill health. There is good evidence that prolonged sickness absence can lead to poor health outcomes for individuals and their families.

Occupational Health (OH) provides a professional, objective opinion on an individual's ability to work and/or the requirement for adjustments.

OH can provide advice regarding:

- the identification of a health problem that may impact on an individual's performance at work;
- the potential effects of a health problem on current and future performance and attendance;
- consideration of temporary or permanent adjustments to the workplace or tasks that would assist in reducing the adverse effects of the health problem on attendance and performance;
- timescales for expected improvement (and return to work if currently absent);
- whether an employee may be fit to return to work in some capacity, even though the Fit Note states 'unfit for work' for SSP purposes;
- the suggested workplace adjustments on a Fit-Note or Fit for Work return-to-work Plan;
- whether the provisions for disability equality under the Equality Act 2010 may apply and relevant disability related adjustments;
- proposals for case management or a rehabilitation programme where appropriate;
- an opinion on suitability for medical redeployment;
- an opinion on consideration for ill-health/incapacity early retirement (subject to pension scheme rules);

A timely referral to Occupational Health can help reduce the likelihood of long-term absence. Early intervention and support play a crucial role in facilitating a structured return to work, even if the employee is signed off for an extended period.

If an employee is, or is expected to be, absent for four weeks or more, their manager should make a referral to Occupational Health. Additionally, for cases of recurring short-term absences, referrals are recommended to assess whether an underlying health condition is impacting attendance.

If a manager has concerns regarding the impact of work on an employee's health, or the effect of a health condition on their attendance or performance, a management referral to Occupational Health should be strongly considered.

Occupational Health referrals should also be considered during any stage of the Formal Procedures for Managing Sickness Absence (Section 4.8)

Managers should discuss the referral with the employee, giving reasons for the referral, and encourage the open exchange of information. OH consultations will not usually be offered without confirmation that this discussion has taken place. Similarly, if an employee believes that their condition may be related to an activity at work, they should inform their manager.

If an individual does not attend their OH appointment, a further appointment will be made. If an appointment is missed for a second time, the manager will arrange a review meeting with the individual at which an HR representative may be present. Any decisions made at this meeting regarding the on-going management of the individual's absence will be based on the information available at that time and in the absence of advice that would have been available had the employee attended the OH appointment as requested.

4.4 Phased return to work

When an employee indicates they will be returning to work following an extended period of sickness absence, further advice may be sought from OH on adjustments/other support required to facilitate this return.

Whether or not an OH referral is made, a return-to-work meeting should be held with the individual and the line manager to discuss whether any reasonable adjustments or additional support is required to help them return to work. The meeting should be held before the date they are due to return to work, or on their first day back if possible. It may be appropriate for a member of Human Resources to attend this meeting.

Reasonable adjustments may include the phased increase of working hours to full-time or phased increase of working duties or responsibilities (to full duties) for a limited period of time; advice from OH may be sought to help support this.

A phased-return will normally be on full-pay and for a total period not exceeding 6 weeks. An employee whose phased return to work extends beyond the 6 week period will receive pay pro rata to the hours actually worked.

The University usually limits the number of periods of phased returns to 1 in a rolling 12 month period. During and at the end of an agreed phased-return to work, review meetings should be held to discuss any concerns the individual may still have and ensure they have in fact resumed their full hours and the agreed duties and responsibilities of their role.

4.5 Specific Absence Reasons

4.5.1 Pregnancy-related sickness

Pregnancy-related sickness absence will not be taken into account when assessing whether the formal procedures for managing sickness absence have been triggered.

If an employee is absent from work due to a pregnancy-related reason, even for one day, within 4 weeks before the expected week of childbirth, the maternity leave will commence automatically the day after the first day of such absence. Further information can be found in the Maternity Procedure.

4.5.2 Disability-related sickness

If an employee with a disability is appropriately supported in the workplace, it is often the case that they will be able to continue working whilst managing their disability. This includes employees with physical, cognitive and mental health conditions and incorporates situations where disabilities have a variable impact.

Where it is known that the sickness absence of an employee is related directly to a disability, this must be recorded on the HR System using the most relevant of the categories in 'sickness absence reasons'.

The University has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments in respect of staff whom it is aware (or ought reasonably to be aware) have a disability. Broadly speaking this duty is to take such steps as are reasonable to avoid a substantial disadvantage which the disabled employee is placed at compared to employees who are not disabled. A flexible and proactive approach should be adopted by managers, which supports staff needing to take leave for reasons relating to their disability, such as assessment, treatment, or servicing of necessary equipment or disability aids. Such absence, which is specifically linked to an individual's management of their disability, as distinct from sickness absence caused by or arising from their disability, may be discounted for purposes of monitoring sickness absence, recognising that this might be a reasonable adjustment that the employer could make in seeking to mitigate disadvantage for a disabled employee in the workplace.

It is not possible to prescribe all of the circumstances in which disability-related leave may be appropriate, as the judgment by the University on what is reasonable will be made in the context of each individual employee's situation and local circumstances. This needs to consider recent OH advice on adjustments that can be considered.

We are committed to ensuring that members of the University community with disabilities, long-term conditions and neurodivergence have access to facilities that is, wherever reasonably possible, equal to that of their non-disabled peers. Staff can refer to the University's Disability and Neurodivergence Procedure in addition to this procedure and can request a Tailored Adjustments Plan (TAP), which acts as a living record of workplace adjustments relating to supporting an individual with a disability and/or long-term health condition. It is agreed between an employee and their line manager and can be reviewed and amended as necessary with the agreement of both the employee and line manager.

An employee who is disabled, or who becomes disabled during the course of their employment, can request a referral to Occupational Health and/or [Access to Work](#) for additional support and advice.

Additional guidance concerning disability can be sought from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team.

4.5.3 Stress-related sickness

The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as *'the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them'*. This makes a distinction between 'pressure', which can be a positive state if managed correctly and 'stress' which can be detrimental to health.

The University has a duty of care towards its employees and a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment. The University Mental Wellbeing Procedure aims to outline the University's commitment and the responsibilities of managers and employees on the prevention of work-related stress and provide information on sources of support available to staff.

An individual may be more susceptible to the impact of work pressure perhaps due to a recognised impairment/condition, or other circumstances. This should be acknowledged openly by managers, discussed with the employee concerned and advice sought from OH to ensure appropriate support is put in place.

4.5.4 Drug and Alcohol misuse

It is unacceptable to attend work under the influence of alcohol or drugs and dealing with the aftereffects of

consuming alcohol or drugs is not a permissible reason to require time off work under the Sickness Absence Procedure.

Employees who are suffering from alcohol dependence or substance addiction are encouraged to seek help, either independently or through the OH department, and to consult the Substance Misuse Procedure.

4.5.5 Prescription Medication

If an individual is required to take prescription medication which may affect their ability to undertake any part of their work (for example driving University vehicles or operating heavy machinery), they should speak to their line manager about how this can be managed to ensure their own (and colleagues) safety and continuity of the employee's work.

If an individual is required to take prescription medication which may affect their ability to drive to work as part of their commute, then every effort should be made to use public transport if working from home is not appropriate.

4.5.6 Medical Appointments

Time off for medical and dental appointments is covered by the Leave Procedure.

Staff are expected to make every effort to ensure that routine appointments are made before or after the working day. Where this is not possible it is expected that appointments will be arranged to minimise disruption to an individual's work. Therefore, appointments should be made at the beginning or end of the normal working day (i.e. within the first or last working hour), or possibly around a lunchtime period (with agreement).

It is recognised that there may be circumstances in which employees have limited or no control over the timing of appointments, for example, those scheduled by a hospital or clinic following a waiting list process. In such cases, the number of appointments will be considered in light of the individual's circumstances, with a focus on fairness, medical necessity, and operational impact. Any decisions will be guided by consistency and reasonable expectations, ensuring equitable treatment for all employees.

4.6 Employee and Manager Responsibilities

4.6.1 Employee responsibilities

It is expected that all employees will attend work unless genuinely unfit to do so and should an absence be required for any other reason, the appropriate alternative procedure will be used, e.g. Leave Procedure.

In the event that an employee becomes ill, and unable to carry out their duties whilst at work, they will notify their line manager and/or Departmental Administrator, following local reporting arrangements, before leaving for home or to seek medical attention.

If an employee believes that their condition may be related to an activity or incident at work they should inform their manager, so that this can be recorded on the Health & Safety Incident Management System promptly.

An employee who is unwell and cannot attend work must inform their manager of this and provide additional information, including:

- the nature of the sickness;

- the anticipated length of absence;
- If the absence is expected to last 7 calendar days or more, any steps they are taking in relation to it (i.e. details of any doctor's appointments arranged)
- details of any outstanding important or urgent work that needs to be covered during their absence;
- details of how they can be contacted, if necessary, especially where the employee is staying at a different address during their absence.

This information must be provided on the first day of absence in accordance with the specific requirements of the Faculty or Professional Service Department.

Employees should agree with their manager to make suitable arrangements for maintaining regular contact throughout the period of absence. It is recommended that contact should be at least fortnightly in the case of longer-term absence, particularly for mental health problems including stress, depression and anxiety. Employees should provide updates if anything in their circumstances changes, e.g. if they have seen a GP and been told they are unfit for work for a specified period of time.

Employees are responsible for ensuring that they follow the correct certification procedures as outlined in section 4.2.

If an employee becomes ill while abroad, for example during a holiday, the same reporting procedures apply, and the employee will be expected to provide an equivalent medical certificate. It may be necessary in some circumstances to ask the employee to obtain a certified translation of any medical certification provided in a foreign language.

Employees will be expected to attend any wellbeing meetings, formal sickness absence management meetings or OH appointments that are arranged. If for any reason an employee cannot attend a meeting or appointment, they should give no less than 2 days' notice and expect that the meeting or appointment will be rearranged for the earliest possible opportunity, if the first instance.

4.6.2 Manager responsibilities

Managers must apply this Managing Sickness Absence Procedure consistently and fairly to all employees. Some actions, especially the recording of absence, may be delegated to Department Administrators or other designated staff.

Where Faculties/Professional Services departments have specific arrangements for the reporting of absence, this should be regularly communicated to and observed by all employees. Managers should ensure that any new employees are informed of this procedure.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that sickness absence within their team is recorded, kept confidential and monitored on a regular basis in accordance with this Procedure. Hard copy Fit Notes should be forwarded to HR Operations.

In some situations, it may be appropriate for an employee to be permitted to work from home, rather than take sickness absence, for example where sickness prohibits travel, but the employee is otherwise fit to work. Any arrangements must be made on an individual basis and in consultation with the employee.

It is good practice to ensure that on each occasion an employee returns from a period of sickness absence (of any length), a brief and informal return to work meeting is held with them ideally on their first day back. This provides the opportunity to check that they are fit to be back at work, they have completed a University Self Certificate (completed via Quick Links on SurreyNet) or provided any necessary Fit-Note/s. It is also an opportunity for the employee to raise any concerns they may have and for the manager to discuss whether any additional support could be given or a referral to OH arranged. These meetings also provide a good

opportunity to let an employee know if they are close to triggering the formal procedures for managing sickness absence and to remind them of this procedure.

Before a staff member returns to work, managers must confirm that a worker's health condition does not make them or others more vulnerable to workplace risks. Where this is the case, a review of the relevant risk assessment(s) will be undertaken and, where necessary, additional controls measures implemented. Advice and assistance on the risk assessment process can be obtained from their Professional Services/Faculty Health and Safety Manager. Managers will also ensure that any incident at work (including near miss) is recorded on the Health & Safety Incident Management System.

Line managers should regularly review sickness absence for their team and can request sickness absence reports from the relevant HR representative. Line Managers should ensure that meetings are arranged as per the 'Formal Procedures for Managing Sickness Absence' when absence days are triggered and that suitable support is planned. Checks should also be made for any patterns that may indicate the possibility of health problems being exacerbated by the working environment.

Where work may be impacting on an employee's health, or where health problems may be affecting an employee's attendance or performance, managers should obtain advice from the Occupational Health Department, in consultation with the relevant HR representative.

4.7 Annual Leave and Sick Leave

Annual leave continues to accrue whilst an employee is on sick leave and may be reclaimed for the days the employee is sick whilst on annual leave provided that a medical certificate is supplied to cover these days.

Staff on long-term sick leave are entitled to take booked annual leave and be paid accordingly during their sick period.

University days will be treated the same as bank holidays, therefore where public holidays are referenced, this includes both University days and bank holidays.

Employees are entitled to 5.6 weeks (pro rata for part time staff) under the Working Time Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/1833), therefore as the University offers in excess of statutory leave entitlement (made up of basic annual leave entitlement and public holidays), in the majority of cases the employee will have the opportunity to take the statutory minimum of 28 days leave (pro rata for part time staff). However, if an employee has not had the opportunity to take their statutory entitlement within the leave year for reason of sickness absence, a reconciliation process at the end of the period will be undertaken to establish how much leave can be carried forward into the new annual leave year. In all cases statutory leave entitlement will be considered to be used before additional annual leave provision.

4.8 Formal Procedures for Managing Sickness Absence

4.8.1 Managing Short term Intermittent Absence

Academic staff will follow the procedures as set up in [Ordinances 11.5 Sickness Absence Procedure](#)

The formal procedures for managing sickness absence will be triggered if an individual has:

- 10 or more working days in any rolling 12-month period
- 4 episodes of sickness (of whatever length) in a consecutive 4-month period
- A pattern of sickness absence or cause of absence that reasonably causes concern
- a single period of 4 weeks or more (long-term sickness absence, see Section 4.9).

In these cases, the Line Manager should consult with HR, who may recommend OH.

Prior to the formal procedures being triggered, the line manager should normally provide **informal indication** to the employee that this may happen, and when the trigger might be reached, for example during a previous return-to-work meeting. If, as part of this process, matters come to light which indicate that a member of staff might have a disability which is directly relevant to the sickness absence, the manager should first seek advice from OH.

A 3-stage formal process for managing short-term absence is outlined below. It should be noted that assessment will be made on a case-by-case basis and therefore some flexibility within the procedures may be required.

Where an employee has had a single period of long-term sickness absence, e.g. following an operation, it may be sufficient to hold a return-to-work interview, to support and facilitate a return to work and not proceed to a Stage 1 Sickness Absence meeting.

Where there are repeated patterns of long-term sickness or a combination of short and long-term sickness the sickness absence procedure stages 1 – 3 for short term absence should be followed. For circumstances where, following OH advice, an employee is unable to return to work consideration should be given to ill health retirement, see Section 4.12 for circumstances where OH advises that an employee is unable to return to work and consideration should be given to ill health retirement.

At every stage, the University will aim to provide as much support to the individual as is reasonably possible for them to achieve and maintain a satisfactory level of attendance.

If a target is set at any stage and has been met, another Sickness Absence Meeting is then triggered within 12 months, this procedure can be restarted from the next stage. Where appropriate, [Ordinances 11.5 Sickness Absence Procedure](#) will apply.

If, with support, a satisfactory level of attendance has not been achieved or maintained it may become necessary to issue a formal warning, to inform the employee that their job may be at risk if attendance levels do not improve.

If, with support, and following a formal warning, a satisfactory level of attendance has not been achieved or maintained, it may become necessary to dismiss the employee on the grounds of ill health capability. This would only be considered as a last resort after alternatives have been considered.

4.8.2 Setting up Formal Managing Attendance Meetings

An employee who reaches an absence trigger should be provided with a copy of this Procedure at the point they are notified of the requirement to attend a Stage 1 Formal Managing Attendance Meeting. Employees will receive a minimum of 48 hours' notice prior to any Managing Attendance Meeting. They are entitled to be accompanied by a work colleague or an official trade union representative. Where an employee is unable to arrange representation within the initial notice period, a reasonable extension will be granted to facilitate this.

For Stage 2 and Stage 3 meetings, employees will be given 10 calendar days' notice and will have the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a workplace colleague. The employee must tell their line manager whom, if anyone, they have chosen to act as their representative in good time before the meeting. They may be required to choose an alternative if the chosen representative is unavailable for the scheduled hearing and will not be available for more than 5 working days after the scheduled date of the meeting.

The representative may make representations, and sum up the employee's position, but is not allowed to

answer questions on the employee's behalf.

There is no requirement for a work colleague to accept a request to accompany an employee.

If the employee or their representative cannot attend at the time specified for a meeting, the employee must inform their line manager and/or HR representative immediately and an alternative time will be arranged. The employee must make every effort to attend a meeting and failure to attend without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If the employee fails to attend without good reason, or persistently is unable to attend, the meeting may be heard in their absence on the available evidence.

4.8.3 Setting and Monitoring Attendance Targets

As part of Managing Attendance meetings, line managers will set minimum targets for improved attendance in consultation with Human Resources. They will need to take into account the individual circumstances of the case, any advice received from OH, the impact of any underlying condition/s and any reasonable workplace adjustments that need to be put in place to enable the employee to improve their attendance.

When a target is set, the employee's level of sickness absence will be monitored over an appropriate, specified period, for example; 'no more than 2 days' absence in the next 3 months'. Guidance on reasonable targets can be obtained through discussions with the relevant HR representative.

The outcome of any Managing Attendance meeting must be confirmed to the individual in writing, by the manager who held the meeting, normally within 10 working days, and a copy sent to Human Resources.

4.8.4 Review meetings

If an attendance target set has been met, a review meeting should be held at the end of the specified monitoring period. The employee should be told that their attendance has improved and that it is expected that their improved attendance will continue. They should also be informed that should another sickness absence meeting be triggered, further action will be taken and if the trigger occurs within the next 12 months, action could be taken at the next stage of the procedure.

If the attendance target set has been exceeded, the procedure will move to the next stage and the review meeting can be arranged before the end of the specified monitoring period. This meeting will provide the opportunity to review the employees' attendance, give them an opportunity to discuss any problems they have encountered, discuss the need for any further OH advice and ensure that any reasonable adjustments have been put in place, where possible, and that they are receiving the support needed to improve their attendance at work.

4.8.5 Stage 1 Formal Managing Attendance Meeting

This is the start of the Formal stage of the Sickness Absence process. The purpose of the Stage 1 Formal Meeting will be to consider matters including the following:

- To review the employee's attendance record during the relevant period, confirming the accuracy of information held;
- To give the employee the opportunity to discuss any problems or raise any concerns;
- To remind the employee about expectations as to levels of attendance;
- To decide whether any further action is required, such as a referral to OH;
- To consider whether any reasonable adjustments may be required;
- To set a target for improved attendance and a specified period over which absence levels will be monitored;
- To set a review date at the end of the monitoring period;

- Whether it is appropriate to issue an informal warning to the individual, explaining the further stages of this procedure and possible consequences if attendance does not reach a satisfactory level with support;
- To inform the employee that if the target set is exceeded, a Stage 2 Sickness Absence Review meeting will be held, and this may be arranged before the end of the monitoring period.

The meeting will be held with the employee and the line manager; HR and trade union representation may also be present.

4.8.6 Stage 2 Formal Managing Attendance Meeting

The purpose of the Stage 2 Formal Meeting will be as follows:

- To review the employee's attendance record during the relevant period, confirming the accuracy of information held;
- To review the steps which have already been taken to support the employee in achieving the required level of attendance;
- To give the employee the opportunity to discuss any problems, raise any concerns or to highlight any mitigating circumstances that they wish to be taken into account;
- To decide whether any new information requires a further referral to OH;
- To consider any further reasonable adjustments that may be required;
- To set a target for improved attendance and a period over which absence levels will be monitored;
- To set a review date at the end of the monitoring period;
- Whether it is appropriate to issue a formal warning to the individual; explaining that their job may be at risk if their attendance levels do not improve;
- To inform the employee that if the target set is exceeded, a Stage 3 Sickness Absence Review meeting will be held and this may be arranged before the end of the monitoring period;
- If a formal warning is issued, provide details of the Appeals Procedure (see Section 4.11).

The meeting will be held with the employee and the line manager and an HR representative and a trade union representative if requested by the employee.

4.8.7 Stage 3 Formal Managing Attendance Meeting

The purpose of the Stage 3 Formal Meeting will be as follows:

- To review the employee's attendance record during the relevant period, confirming the accuracy of information held;
- To review the steps already taken to support the employee in achieving the required level of attendance;
- To give the employee the opportunity to discuss any problems, raise any concerns or to highlight any mitigating circumstances that they wish to be taken into account;
- To discuss any OH advice that has been received previously and how it has been applied e.g. adjustments made;
- To decide whether any new information requires a further referral to OH;
- To inform the employee that either:
 - any formal warning will be extended to allow further time for sustained improvement; or
 - they will be dismissed on the grounds of ill health capability.
- If a formal warning is extended; to set a target for improvement, a period over which absence levels will be monitored and a review date;
- If the employee is to be dismissed; to provide details of the Appeals Procedure.

The option of extending the formal warning to allow further time for improved attendance should only be considered if some signs of improvement have already been shown and it is expected that allowing further time will lead to an acceptable, sustained improvement in attendance.

If, following an extension of the formal warning and after a period of satisfactory improvement based on the target set, the individual's absence levels deteriorate and a further review is triggered, Stage 3 of the Sickness Absence Procedure will be repeated. This may result in a decision to dismiss the employee on the grounds of ill health capability. At this stage, the provisions under [Ordinance 11.4](#) will apply for Academic Staff.

The panel for non-academic staff (in cases where the outcome could be dismissal) should normally comprise:

- As Chair, a senior manager independent from the case;
- One other manager independent from the case.
- An HR Advisor

The Line Manager who has been supporting the sickness absence process may also be in attendance, as well as trade union representation if requested by the employee.

4.9 Managing Long Term Absence

Academic staff will follow the procedures as set up in [Ordinances 11.5 Sickness Absence Procedure](#).

Once an absence has been continuing for a period of 4 weeks or more, the University will usually arrange a Welfare Meeting with the member of staff. This is an informal meeting at which we can discuss the reason for the absence and any help or assistance that we may be able to provide.

The University will maintain regular contact with the member of staff throughout any period of long-term absence. The University will discuss the best way to do this, bearing in mind the reason for absence, and will be sensitive to the staff members' needs.

The University may, at any point during the absence, seek to obtain a medical opinion from OH and/or the individual's GP regarding the condition and likely timescale for recovery. Any request to seek medical information will be made only with prior consent from the staff member, who will be entitled to see any information in this regard. This request may be made at the first informal meeting with the member of staff or at any time during the absence from work.

The University will seek to hold regular informal Welfare Meetings with the member of staff during their long-term absence to keep up to date with their prognosis, any adjustments which the University may be able to make to enable a return to work, the impact that the absence is having on the University and any support that can be provided.

4.9.1 Welfare Meeting

The purpose of a Welfare Meeting will be to discuss the reasons for any absence, how long it is likely to continue, whether it is likely to recur, whether to obtain an OH referral and/or a medical report, and whether there are any measures that could improve the staff members' health and/or attendance. Such a meeting will usually be arranged after a continuous period of 4 or more weeks' absence; however, it can be arranged sooner if either party considers it beneficial to do so.

The University will discuss with the staff member:

- The reason for the absence.
- The anticipated duration of their absence.
- The treatment and care the member of staff is receiving.

- Whether it is necessary for the University to consider taking reasonable measures to facilitate their return to work.
- Whether medical evidence is required to assess their fitness to return to work and if any changes are necessary to assist them, having regard to any Return-to-Work plan prepared by the line manager.
- If their continued absence may lead to a formal absence review; and
- timescale for review.

The aim of this meeting will be to seek to agree a return-to-work programme, possibly on a phased basis and consideration will be given to the above discussions to determine whether such a programme can be agreed, and if so, the various aspects of that programme, for example, a return-to-work date, the support measures that the line manager can put in place on a temporary or permanent basis, and any dates for review which may be appropriate.

4.9.2 Formal Absence Review Meeting

If the absence continues and the University believes (whether based on medical evidence obtained or otherwise) that the member of staff is unlikely to return to work for some time or is permanently or substantially unfit to perform their duties, then the individual will be invited to a Formal Absence Review Meeting with 10 calendar days notice. The member of staff is entitled to be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague. In the letter inviting them to this meeting.

The Absence Review meeting will normally cover the following:

- A review of the Welfare Meetings that have taken place and matters discussed.
- Whether there have been any changes since the last meeting, regarding either the member of staff's possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.
- Review of medical evidence acquired and whether further advice is required
- Whether there are any reasonable adjustments, or further reasonable adjustments, which could be made to allow a return to work or redeployment opportunities
- The impact that the absence is having on the University and any further matters that the staff member wishes to raise.
- Whether there is a reasonable likelihood of the staff member returning to work in a reasonable time.
- Whether the University needs to notify the member of staff that they may be at risk of dismissal if they are unable to return to work within a reasonable timeframe;
- Action that will be taken and a timescale for review and/or a further meeting.

The number of Formal Absence Review meetings required for this process will largely be determined by the content of any medical evidence obtained, and the staff members personal circumstances. However, if it becomes clear that the member of staff will either be unable to return to work within a reasonable timeframe, or if they are no longer able to carry out their contracted duties and consideration has been given to any adjustments, job redesign and possible redeployment opportunities without success, the University will arrange a Consideration of Dismissal meeting. Ahead of this the University will consider early retirement on the grounds of ill health in accordance with the arrangements of the relevant Pension Scheme.

In the case of academic staff who are deemed to be permanently unfit for work, [Ordinance 11.5.10](#) will apply.

If an employee is considered by OH to be fit for work, this will be discussed with the individual and a return to work date will be set. In exceptional circumstances, if the individual does not return to work on the date advised, entitlement to Occupational Sick Pay may be withdrawn and disciplinary action may be taken. Entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay will not be affected if the continued absence is covered by a fit note.

4.9.3 Consideration of Dismissal Meeting

Where the staff member has been notified that they are at risk of dismissal, and the situation has not changed significantly, a Consideration of Dismissal meeting will be arranged to consider the possible termination of the member of staff's employment. 10 calendar days' notice will be provided to attend the meeting and the member of staff is entitled to be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague. In the letter inviting them to this meeting, the University will advise them that dismissal may be a possible outcome.

The purpose of the meeting will be:

- To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed with the member of staff.
- To consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under this procedure with regards to the possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment;
- To consider the most up to date medical evidence.
- To consider any further matters that the member of staff wishes to raise.
- To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of the staff member returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time;
- To consider any reasonable options for redeployment on medical grounds before making any recommendation for dismissal (where redeployment is an option identified by OH);
- To consider any reasonable options for ill health retirement before making any recommendation for dismissal.
- To consider the possible termination of the staff members' employment under the grounds of ill health capability

The Line Manager will be asked to attend the meeting and present a report of the case to date.

Prior to any decision made the staff member will be provided with the opportunity to discuss and review their situation and respond to any clarifications required.

The panel for non-academic staff (in cases where the outcome could be dismissal) should normally comprise:

- As Chair, a senior manager independent from the case;
- One other manager independent from the case.
- An HR Advisor

The grounds for consideration of dismissal will be that the member of staff is incapable of fulfilling their duties by reason of ill health capability.

Any dismissal will be on notice or payment in lieu of notice.

The final decision to dismiss must be taken by the HR Director, on behalf of the University.

The member of staff will have the right to appeal against any decision to terminate their employment. This is detailed below.

4.10 Appeals

There is no right of appeal against the outcome of the informal stage of this procedure. However, an employee has the right to appeal against a formal warning or dismissal for ill health capability, including for one or more of the following reasons:

- The procedure - a failure to follow procedure had a material effect on the decision;

- The decision - the evidence did not support the conclusion reached or is inconsistent with other decisions within the University;
- New evidence - which has genuinely come to light since the last meeting. Where new evidence is raised, further investigations may need to be carried out which may require the Appeal Hearing to be delayed pending the outcome of these investigations and to give the employee an opportunity to consider any new information obtained.

An employee wishing to appeal should do so to the HR Director in writing, within 10 working days of receiving the written decision, stating the grounds for appeal.

The HR Director, or their designated representative, will arrange a meeting of the Appeals Committee at the earliest convenient date. This should normally be within one month after the matter has been formally raised with the HR Director.

The HR Director, or designated representative, will establish the Appeals Committee, which should comprise:

Appeals against Stage 1 of the process:

- As Chair, a senior manager independent from the case;
- An HR representative.

Appeals against Stage 2 or Stage 3 of the process:

- As Chair, a senior manager independent from the case;
- One other senior manager independent from the case;
- An HR representative.

4.11 Appeals against dismissal (academic staff only)

The process for appealing against dismissal for academic staff is set out in [Ordinance 11.5.11](#) and is set out below:

- As Chair, an Executive Dean of another Faculty or a member of Executive Board;
- An HR representative.

The employee raising the appeal will be informed of the composition of the Appeal Committee. Should they have any concerns these should be raised with the HR Director who will consider the employee's concerns and may reconstitute an agreed panel.

The Appeals Committee will invite the employee in writing to attend an appeal meeting, informing the employee of the entitlement to be accompanied by a colleague or recognised trade union representative.

The decision of the Appeals Committee shall:

- Confirm the original decision;
- Revoke the original decision;
- Substitute a different decision.

The decision of the Appeals Committee shall be final and there shall be no further right of appeal.

4.12 Ill health retirement

If an employee becomes incapable of carrying out the duties of their post, due to ill health or incapacity and is a member of a Pension Scheme provided by the University, they may be able to retire early. In all cases this would be subject to a medical assessment by OH and the submission of satisfactory medical evidence to

the scheme should the eligibility conditions of the appropriate scheme be met.

If a line manager is concerned about an employee's ill health or incapacity, a referral should be made to OH for advice in the first instance.

4.12.1 Process

Applications for ill-health, incapacity, or early retirement need to be made to the pensions@surrey.ac.uk if the individual is still a University employee and an active member of one of the University's pension schemes.

It should be noted that, because there are third parties involved in the process, it can take approximately 3 months or more from the point of application to the time approval is provided and benefits are eventually put into payment. Timeframes may differ where there is a short life expectancy.

The Pensions team will initiate the claims process and co-ordinate with OH for the gathering of the information required in order to submit the application to the appropriate scheme.

4.12.3 Pension Scheme Requirements

Each Pension Scheme has its own individual requirements relating to:

- eligibility conditions
- benefit entitlements
- the application process
- medical evidence required
- forms that need to be completed
- criteria to be met following the payment of benefits (in accordance with the scheme rules)

Please visit the individual scheme websites for more information.

5. Governance Requirements

5.1 Implementation: Communication Plan

The procedure was communicated with colleagues when first published. The procedure is currently referenced within the Staff Handbook and shared through the University intranet.

5.2 Implementation: Training Plan

The procedure is managed by the HR department and guidance is given on the procedure when required.

5.3 Review

This procedure will be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if required by a change in relevant legislation or practice.

5.4 Legislative Context and Higher Education Sector Guidance or Requirements

N/A

5.5 Sustainability

This procedure supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals by promoting employee health and well-being (SDG 3) and ensuring fair, supportive workplace practices (SDG 8). By managing absence responsibly, the University contributes to a healthy, inclusive, and productive working environment.

6. Stakeholder Engagement and Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed on 07 October 2025 and is held by the Authorised Co-ordinator.

6.2 Procedure communicated to all subsidiaries on 21 October 2025

a. Stakeholder Consultation was completed, as follows:

Stakeholder	Nature of Engagement	Request EB Approval (Y/N)	Date	Name of Contact
Governance	Review of V1.0	N	06/10/2025	Kelley Padley, Governance Officer
H&S	Review of V1.0	N	26/09/2025	Matt Purcell, Director of Health and Safety
Sustainability	Review of V1.0	N		
Academic Freedom of Speech	Review of V1.0	N	7/10/2025	Joshua Andresen, AFFE Committee representative
Trade Unions	Review of V1.0	N	10/09/2025	Alison Cottell, UCU
Legal	Review of V1.0	N	27/05/2025	Alyssa Yap Young

Appendix A: Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) Entitlement

Within any span of 52 weeks, staff who are employed on **University of Surrey** terms and conditions will have sick pay allowances vary according to the length of continuous service as follows:

Length of Service	Full Pay	Half Pay
First three months' service	2 weeks	2 weeks
First Year (after three months' service)	8 weeks	8 weeks
Second and third years	13 weeks	13 weeks
Fourth and fifth years	21 weeks	21 weeks
After five years' service	26 weeks	26 weeks

Within any span of 52 weeks, staff who are employed on **Operate Surrey** terms and conditions will have sick pay allowances that vary according to the length of continuous service as follows:

Length of Service	Full Pay	Half Pay
First three months' service	2 weeks	2 weeks
First Year (after three months' service)	4 weeks	4 weeks
Second and third years	6 weeks	6 weeks
Fourth and fifth years	8 weeks	8 weeks
After five years' service	10 weeks	10 weeks

Within any span of 52 weeks, staff who are employed on **Surrey Sports Park** terms and conditions will have sick pay allowances that vary according to the length of continuous service as follows:

Length of Service	Full Pay	Half Pay
After 1 month	2 days	0 days
2 months to 6 months	5 days	0 days
7 months to 12 months	10 days	5 days
After 1 year	15 days	10 days

Notes:

- C.1 One week is defined as 5 working days for the purpose of this scheme (pro-rata for part time).
- C.2 Any OSP paid is inclusive of SSP entitlement. In the unusual circumstances of an employee's SSP being more than their OSP, they will not receive any OSP in addition to SSP payments.
- C.3 For information on SSP entitlements, which may extend for a longer period than OSP, please refer to <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>.
- C.4 Pension contributions may be maintained during a period of sickness absence, this will be dependent on the pension scheme rules. For further information please contact the Pensions Department.

Appendix B: Return to Work Form

University of Surrey – Return to Work (RTW) Interview Record		
Name: Click here to enter text.	Dept/Faculty: Click here to enter text.	
Line Click here to enter text. Manager:		
Date of RTW Click here to enter text. Interview:		
Date & time of start Click here to enter text. Of absence:		
Date & time of end of Click here to enter text. Absence:		
Date of return to Click here to enter text. Work:		
Total number of working days or hours Click here to absent from work: enter text.		
Reason(s) employee gave for absence (please give a brief description): Click here to enter text.		
Did the employee properly notify the manager of their absence? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Did the employee consult their GP? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Did the GP make any recommendations on a 'fit note' as to a phased return to work or potential changes to the employee's hours, duties or to the working environment? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
If so, please state what these recommendations were whether or not they are thought to be practicable Click here to enter text.		
Did the GP recommend on a 'fit note' that the employee should be seen by an Occupational Health specialist? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
If so, please explain action to be taken: Click here to enter text.		

<p>Did the employee indicate that factors at work may have caused or contributed to the absence? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>If so, please explain: Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>If so, what action is to be taken to support the employee? Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>Is this absence part of an overall pattern? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>If so, please explain: Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p>Does the employee have any type of Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> disability?</p>	
<p>Any further comments from the manager? Click here to enter text.</p>	
<p><i>To be completed by the manager:</i> Sign & Date:</p>	