



Athlone Institute of Technology

SICK LEAVE ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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1. Introduction

Athlone Institute of Technology, is committed to safeguarding employee's health, safety and welfare at work and seeks to provide employees with appropriate support and advice at all times.

The Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of employees, managers / supervisors and the Human Resources Department in managing sick leave absence.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff of AIT with the exception of hourly paid part-time academic staff and research staff. Its provisions and arrangements are in line with the Public Sector Sick Leave Scheme based on those set out in Circular Letter 0062/2015 and appropriate circulars and documents as issued by sectoral management across the public service.

3. Purpose

The purpose of the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy is to promote and facilitate improved attendance levels amongst Institute employees by managing sick leave absence in a fair, reasonable and consistent manner.

4. Policy Details

Whilst employees have a responsibility to the Institute as their employer and to their colleagues to attend work and fulfil their contract of employment, the Institute recognises that employees may suffer ill-health, on occasion, throughout their employment.

The Institute is committed to meeting its responsibilities to support employees who experience ill-health. The Institute provides a number of mechanisms to support employees during times of ill-health, such as the provision of a Sick Leave Absence Management Policy, the Employee Assistance Programme and where necessary, the Institute's Occupational Health Service.

5. Definitions

- **Uncertified Sick Leave** is defined as sick leave of up to and including two consecutive working days which is not certified by a doctor.
- **Certified Sick Leave** is defined as a period of sick leave which has been certified by a doctor. All absences in excess of two consecutive working days must be covered by a doctor's medical certificate.
- **Frequent short-term absence** is defined as absences of five or more occasions in a 12 month period.
- **Long-term absence** is defined as any absence lasting more than four consecutive weeks.

- **Unauthorised absence** occurs when a staff members' absence:
 1. Is not supported by a doctor's medical certificate by due date where applicable ie by the third day of absence.
 2. Has not been notified to and approved by the appropriate manager.
- **Occupational Health Physician (OHP)** is defined as a provider of independent medical assessment and advice.

6. Employees

6.1 Responsibilities of Employees

- To attend work as per their contract of employment.
- To take responsibility for their own health, safety and welfare.
- To advise their Manager / Supervisor of any circumstance that may affect their attendance.
- To comply with the notification and certification procedure in accordance with the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy (i.e. this policy).
- To ensure that they are fully aware who to contact, by phone, to advise of a sick leave absence.
- Where eligible, to apply for illness benefit payments from the Department of Social Protection.
- To maintain frequent (weekly) contact with their Manager / Supervisor, whilst absent on sick leave. Employees on long term sick leave absence should maintain regular contact with their Manager to keep them updated on their progress.
- To attend any occupational health appointment that is arranged by the Institute and to adhere to any recommendations/outcomes arising from that assessment.
- To familiarise themselves with the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy and relevant Circular letters and the sick pay benefits outlined therein and adhere to same.
- To avail of appropriate support services, as necessary and be fully aware of EAP provided by the Institute and avail of this service, as necessary.
- To cooperate fully with reasonable rehabilitative measures to facilitate a return-to-work as quickly as possible.
- To minimise absences arising from accidents or ill-health by complying with health & safety requirements.

6.2 Procedure for Employees for Reporting Sick Leave Absence and Returning to Work

All employees are required to inform their Manager/Supervisor if they are unable to attend work due to illness in accordance with the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy, as follows:

- They must notify their Manager / Supervisor, by phone, at the earliest opportunity on the first day of absence. This notification should indicate whether or not a certificate will be furnished and the likely return to work date. If the employee attempts to phone their Manager and are unable to get through, employees must make contact with the Institute Reception, by phone. Communication by text message or email is not acceptable.
- A medical certificate is required from the third day of absence and must be submitted to the HR Dept as soon as possible thereafter. A medical certificate is also required if uncertified sick leave entitlement has been exhausted.

To be acceptable, a medical certificate must:

- ✓ State the name and address of the employee
 - ✓ State fitness to work or otherwise
 - ✓ State the dates for which the employee are absent through illness, which is normally for a period of no more than one week
 - ✓ Be signed by a duly qualified medical practitioner
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- If the sick leave period spans a weekend, in that it includes a Friday and the following Monday, such absence will be counted as four days as it includes Saturday and Sunday.
 - If the illness persists, additional medical certificates must be submitted on a weekly basis, prior to the expiration of the last medical certificate, in accordance with the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy.
 - Employees are expected to cooperate with interventions to assist them to return to work e.g. Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health Service etc.

6.3 Unauthorised Absence

Employees who do not attend work due to illness, or any other reason, and who have not notified their Manager / Supervisor as to the reason for their absence will be deemed to be on unauthorised absence from work, which may result in loss of pay and the matter being dealt with under disciplinary procedures.

6.4 Claiming Illness Benefit

- Staff who pay category **A1 PRSI** and are absent for more than three consecutive days (including Saturday and Sunday) are required to submit a completed Disability/Injury Benefit

form (IB1) to the Department of Social Protection, as they may be entitled to Illness benefit. IB1 forms are available from your doctor.

- Payment **is not made** by the Department of Social Protection for the first 3 days (waiting period) of illness/injury.
- When completing illness/injury benefit form (IB1), ensure to request payment to be made to **you directly** and not the Institute.
- Athlone I.T. operates on the basis that Illness/injury benefit is received by the employee unless the HR Department is notified in writing to the contrary by the relevant employee or the Department of Social Protection.
- Deductions from salary are made from 1st day of the second month, following the commencement of your illness/injury, unless the employee requests deductions to be made at an earlier date. Employees will be notified in writing from HR Department in advance of the deduction amount.
- Where applications for Illness Benefit are not made or where a late application results in non-payment by the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection, AIT reserves the right to deduct the Social Welfare Benefit from the staff member's salary following consultations with the employee.
- Staff who pay category B PRSI do not need to apply for illness benefit from the Department of Social Protection.
- Further information on Illness Benefit is available at www.welfare.ie

7. Managers

7.1 Responsibilities of Managers

- To promote and encourage high levels of attendance.
- To keep accurate and up-to-date sick leave records for all employees for whom they are responsible.
- To ensure compliance with notification and certification procedures in accordance with the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy.
- To notify the Human Resource Department of an employee's sick leave absence immediately.
- To inform the Human Resource department of an employee's anticipated and actual return to work from sick leave.
- To seek support and advice from the Human Resource Department regarding the management of sick leave absence.
- To ensure that employees are aware who they should contact, by phone, in the event that they are absent due to illness or injury and that all employees have the necessary contact details.

- To advise employees when their sick leave record is a cause for concern (e.g. frequent or persistent short-term sick leave absence, frequent uncertified sick leave etc.) and of the necessary improvements required.
- To take all reasonably practicable steps to accommodate an employee's return to work from sick leave in line with any recommendations from Human Resources and/or the Institute's Occupational Health Physician.
- To make reasonably practicable adjustments to employment arrangements or accommodations for employees with a disability in line with any reasonable accommodation recommendations.
- To advise employees of the Employee Assistance Programme and promote its uptake.
- To manage health and safety in the workplace in accordance with the Institute's and Departmental Safety Statements.
- To maintain confidentiality in relation to employees' sick leave records.
- To discuss each sick leave absence with employees' at the earliest opportunity on their return to work.

7.2 Procedure for Managers

Managers play a key role in ensuring all employees are treated equally during their sick leave absence. They:

- Must ensure that they report all employees sick leave to the Human Resources Department.
- Must forward all medical certificates as they receive them to the Human Resources Department for timely processing of sick pay benefits.
- Should have a discussion with employees following each absence from work due to illness. This should be done informally, in private, on the day of the employee's return to work or as soon as possible thereafter. The aim of this discussion is to:
 - ✓ Welcome the employee back to work
 - ✓ Offer support as required
 - ✓ Advise of the Employee Assistance Programme, as appropriate
 - ✓ Update the employee on any relevant work-related matters
 - ✓ Identify any possible health & safety issues in the workplace which may be affecting the employee's attendance
 - ✓ Discuss any trends in relation to an employee's absence from work due to sickness or illness

8. Partial Absence

If a staff member becomes ill or feels unwell while at work, they should advise their line manager/supervisor as soon as possible. This may be recorded as a part day sickness absence at the

discretion of the line manager and will not normally be counted as a sick day for the purposes of calculation of sick pay.

9. Persistent Short-Term Sick Leave Absence

Short term absence is defined as any period less than 4 week duration.

The procedure for managing frequent short-term sick leave absence is designed to be supportive and aims to help employees achieve regular attendance at work.

- Sick Leave absence should be dealt with promptly and consistently. Managers must discuss all absences with employees as they occur.
- Where frequent short-term sick leave absences occur (whether certified, uncertified, partial sick leave or medical appointments or a combination of absences), employees may be referred to the Institute's Occupational Health Service and/or Employee Assistance Programme, even if at work.
- Where there is no underlying medical reason, the employee should be advised that their sick leave absence levels are unsatisfactory. Managers must advise such employees that improvement is required and of the consequences if their attendance does not improve.
- If there is no satisfactory improvement in attendance over time, the matter may be dealt with under disciplinary procedures.

10. Long Term Sick Absence

- Long-term sick leave absence shall be defined as any absence of 4 weeks or more.
- Where practical regular contact should be maintained between the Manager and the employee during extended periods of sick leave. Weekly medical certificates should be sent by the employee to their Manager. The employee is responsible for keeping their Manager (or HR department) informed of their progress and likely return to work date.
- During long-term sick leave absence, the employee may be advised of the Employee Assistance Programme and/or be referred to the Institute's Occupational Health Service.
- A fitness to return to work certificate is required after four weeks' continuous absence or greater.
- Employees may not return to work unless they are medically fit to do so. In cases of long-term sick leave absence, the employee's own treating medical specialist or General Practitioner (GP) must certify that the employee is fit to return to work.

11. Phased Return to Work following Sick Leave Absence

- A phased return to work may be recommended for employees who have been absent due to a long-term illness, an injury or following surgery. Any such recommendations by

a treating specialist/GP will be assessed and confirmed by the Institute's Occupational Health Physician.

- A phased return to work is considered a reasonable accommodation under the Disability and Equality Acts. A phased return to work is not suitable in every situation and is assessed on a case by case basis.
- In the event that a phased return to work is recommended, before the employee returns to work, the Manager should meet with them to discuss:
 - a) When the phased return to work is to start;
 - b) What attendance pattern the employee will work in terms of days/hours (if not advised by the Institute's Occupational Health Physician);
 - c) Location of where the employee will work;
 - d) If there are any other changes to working arrangements required (e.g. if a special chair was needed or computer equipment).
- The Manager should liaise with and notify the Human Resource Department of the final agreed arrangements.
- Employees on a phased return to work are considered to be on certified sick leave for the duration of time they are not fit to work. They will receive salary for the time that they are at work and sick pay for the time that they are unfit for work, in accordance with their sick pay benefits.

12. Role of Human Resources

The Human Resource Department advises Managers and staff on the operation of the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management policy. The role of the Human Resource Department is:

- To provide information to employees in relation to the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy.
- To provide information, guidance, training and support for Managers in relation to the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy.
- To provide advice and support to Managers in monitoring and managing sick leave absence and to ensure that the Institute's Sick Leave Absence Management Policy is consistently applied.
- To refer employees to the Institute's Occupational Health Physician, as appropriate.
- To notify employees in writing of occupational health appointments, discuss outcomes, recommendations and sick pay benefits
- To liaise with Managers, as required, on the implementation of recommendations arising from occupational health assessments.
- To advise employees on the availability of the Employee Assistance Programme.
- To ensure that any salary adjustments arising from a reduction of sick pay benefits are processed in a timely manner.
- To update Employee Sick Leave & Absence Management Policy and communicate to all employees as required.

13. Medical Appointments

Medical appointments must be arranged outside of working hours in the first instance unless in emergency circumstances.

In the event that the employee must attend a medical appointment during the working day, the following procedure applies:

- a) The employee must apply via the ESS system for the relevant absence i.e. full day/less than full day medical appointment.
- b) The employee must submit evidence of attendance from the relevant hospital, clinic, medical practitioner etc. and must forward same to their line manager and the HR Department by email to hrmedical@ait.ie

To be acceptable, evidence of medical appointment must:

- ✓ State the name and address of the employee
- ✓ State time & date of appointment
- ✓ Be signed by a duly qualified medical practitioner

Where appointment confirmation is received by the employee by way of text message, acceptable evidence of medical appointment must be requested at the appointment and submitted to HR on return to work.

13.1 Morning Appointments

If an employee is due to attend a medical appointment in the morning, a reasonable period of attendance in advance and after the appointment is required. (e.g. no medical appointment to begin for one hour after their official start time and employee must return to work after the appointment). This can be requested as less than a full day appointment. If a morning appointment continues through the official lunch break from 1.00 – 2.00p.m. time off is not granted during this period.

13.2 Afternoon Appointments

If an employee must attend an appointment in the afternoon they must be in attendance until at least 12 noon. Time off will not be granted during the official lunch break from 1.00 – 2.00p.m.

13.3 Full Day Appointments

These absences will be deducted from an employee's overall sick leave balance in accordance with CL 0062/2015.

14. Sick Leave Entitlement

An employee who is absent from duty because of illness or injury, may avail of a maximum of 7 uncertified sick days within a 24 month rolling period (calculated from first day of uncertified sick leave taken).

For employee sick leave balances please refer to CL 0062/2015. A copy of your current sick leave balance can be requested from HR by email to hrmedical@ait.ie

15. Other Types of Sick Leave

Critical Illness Provisions (CIP) – means that an employee who becomes incapacitated as a result of a critical illness or serious physical injury may be granted extended paid sick leave in exceptional circumstances.

Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR) – means the remuneration an employee may be awarded if he or she has exhausted his/her access to paid sick leave.

Unpaid Sick Leave - An employee who, on having exhausted the maximum period of paid sick leave (and does not qualify for TRR) is still medically unfit to resume duty and wishes to retain their position in the employment must notify HR of their intention to avail of a period of unpaid sick leave within which they may resume working if certified as fit to do so. This period of unpaid sick leave shall not normally exceed the TRR limits. For more information please refer to Circular 0062/2015.

Queries in relation to this policy can be emailed to hrmedical@ait.ie