

Sickness Absence Management

1. The Purpose

This policy sets out the Forestry Commission's approach to managing sickness absence where this has reached a level that is considered unacceptable or otherwise gives cause for concern.

Information on reporting and recording sickness absence and your entitlement to sick pay is provided in [HR Policy and HR Procedure – Sick Leave and Sick Pay](#).

This policy applies to Forestry Commission staff on permanent or fixed term contracts. It does not apply to short-term temporary staff, agency workers or to new staff who are completing a probation period.

2. The Principles

The principles of the policy are:

- managers will apply consistent standards and will monitor sickness absence levels on an ongoing basis;
- defined absence trigger points will be used to identify individuals with frequent or lengthy periods of sickness absences and trigger appropriate actions to support the individual;
- decisions relating to the management of sickness absence will be based on up-to-date medical advice, where possible;
- reasonable adjustments will be made to help staff to remain at work or to return from a period of sickness absence, if required and appropriate;
- sufficient support and time will be given for improvement before warnings are issued or dismissal is considered;
- compliance with the ACAS Code of Practice, equality legislation and all statutory requirements in relation to dismissals for reason of capability;
- medical information and records of discussions about health will be marked "Protect Medical" and will be managed in accordance with data protection legislation; and
- management actions will be objective, non-discriminatory and in line with the FC's commitment to equal opportunities.

3. The Policy

The policy encourages managers and staff to discuss any health, personal or work-related issues that are contributing to sickness absence or are likely to do so. Where appropriate, Occupational Health advice will be obtained and consideration will be given to reasonable adjustments that would assist the individual to attend work.

The FC has separate procedures for managing short-term intermittent absence and long-term absence and applies the following standards (trigger points):

Short-term Sickness absence will be managed as short-term intermittent if you have had 10 or more working days of absence in the past 12 months or if a pattern of intermittent absence has developed that gives cause for concern.

Long-term Sickness absence will be managed as long-term if you have been absent for 28 consecutive days (4 weeks) in the past 12 months. If you have had consecutive absences for the same reason which were separated by a short return to work but together would have lasted 28 days or more then this will also be managed as long-term absence.

Staff will always be given time and support to reduce their sickness absences. Dismissal will only be considered as a last resort, after warnings have been given and/or all alternative options have been explored.

This policy and the associated procedure have been developed in consultation with the Forestry Commission Trade Unions (FCTU).

3.1 Your responsibilities as an employee

You are expected to:

- familiarise yourself with this policy and the associated procedure and understand the potential consequences of continued sickness absence;
- make a reasonable effort to take care of your own health, in order to minimise your sickness absence;
- inform your manager of any underlying issues that might cause you to be absent due to ill health;
- keep in touch with your manager during any periods of sickness absence;
- participate in any meetings with your managers to review your sickness absence; and
- cooperate fully with the FC's Occupational Health Adviser.

3.2 Your responsibilities as a manager

You are expected to:

- clearly communicate the level of sickness absence that is considered unacceptable and the consequences of continued sickness absence;
- meet with individuals whose sickness absences have reached one of the FC's absence trigger points or otherwise give cause for concern;
- discuss and try to address any health, personal or work-related issues that may be contributing to sickness absence;
- ensure that individuals are promptly referred to the FC's Occupational Health Adviser or directed to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) as required;
- if appropriate, make reasonable adjustments to assist individuals in carrying out their duties or returning to work;
- ensure that all records relating to the management of sickness absence are marked "Protect Medical" and are managed accordingly; and
- conduct formal meetings with the individual issuing warning letters as appropriate.

3.3 Human Resources responsibilities

Human Resources have responsibility for:

- providing guidance and support to managers who are dealing with sickness absence issues;
- helping managers to obtain Occupational Health advice and implement reasonable adjustments to help individuals carry out their duties or return to work;
- liaising with the FC's Occupational Health Adviser and the Pension Scheme Medical Adviser, as required;
- attending hearings in an advisory capacity, where appropriate; and
- monitoring and reviewing this policy and the associated procedure, in consultation with the FCTU.