



# QUANTOCK

## EDUCATION TRUST

### Sickness Absence Policy

DATE: May 2023

POSTHOLDER RESPONSIBLE: HR Director

TRUSTEES/GOVERNORS COMMITTEE: People & Performance

AUDIENCE: All schools, and employees within the Quantock Education Trust

STATUS: Ratified

DATE RATIFIED: 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW: This Policy will be reviewed every two years

## **Summary of Changes**

| <b>Version</b> | <b>Section</b> | <b>Description of Changes</b>   |
|----------------|----------------|---|
| May 23         | All            | Baseline document   |
| August 24      | Section 2      | Note added to say this policy does not apply to contractors, consultants, agency workers or any self-employed individuals working for us. |
|                | Section 5      | Details of sickness absence during pregnancy added  |
|                | Section 9      | Details of how to maintain contact during sickness absence added  |
|                | Section 13     | Terminal Illness added  |
|                |                |   |

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out our procedures for reporting sickness absence and for the management of sickness absence in a fair and consistent way.
- 1.2 Sickness absence can vary from short intermittent periods of ill-health to a continuous period of long-term absence and have a number of different causes (for example, injuries, recurring conditions, or a serious illness requiring lengthy treatment).
- 1.3 We wish to ensure that the reasons for sickness absence are understood in each case and investigated where necessary. In addition, where needed and reasonably practicable, measures will be taken to assist those who have been absent by reason of sickness to return to work.
- 1.4 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. We may also vary the procedures set out in this policy, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.
- 1.5 As part of the application of this policy, Quantock Education Trust will collect, process and store personal data and special categories of data in accordance with our data protection policy. We will comply with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation (being the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018) and any implementing laws, regulations and secondary legislation, as amended or updated from time to time, in relation to how we collect, hold and share special category personal data. Records will be kept in accordance with our Workforce Privacy Notice, our Retention and Destruction Policy and in line with the requirements of Data Protection Legislation.

## 2. Scope and purpose of this policy

- 2.1 This policy has been ratified in consultation with the recognised trade unions and covers all employees at all levels and grades regardless of status including those employees who are in their probationary period. This policy does not apply to contractors, consultants, agency workers or any self-employed individuals working for us.
- 2.2 The purpose of the policy is to ensure that staff understand the expectations of the Trust in terms of attendance at work. In applying this policy, we aim to ensure that attendance is managed appropriately and consistently and that employees receive relevant support.

## 3. Definitions

- 3.1 Short-term sickness absence - any absence that lasts between half and 20 days (four working weeks).
- 3.2 Long term sickness absence - any absence that lasts for a continuous period of longer than 21 days (four working weeks).

## 4. Disabilities

- 4.1 We are aware that sickness absence may result from a disability. At each stage of the sickness absence meetings procedure (set out in paragraph 15 of this policy), particular consideration

will be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to the requirements of a job or other aspects of working arrangements that will provide support at work and/or assist a return to work.

- 4.2 If you consider that you are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects your ability to undertake your work, you should inform the Headteacher.

## 5. Sickness absence reporting procedure

- 5.1 All employees are required to follow their individual school reporting procedures.
- 5.2 If you are taken ill or injured while at work, you should report this to your line manager or Headteacher. Managers should contact the Headteacher's PA or Office Manager to make arrangements for anyone who is unwell to be accompanied home and/or to receive medical treatment where necessary.
- 5.3 If you cannot attend work because you are ill or injured, you must follow the normal reporting procedures in place in your school. As a minimum, you must inform your line manager, ideally by telephone.
- 5.4 The following details should be provided:
- 5.4.1 The nature of your illness or injury.
  - 5.4.2 The expected length of your absence from work.
  - 5.4.3 Any outstanding or urgent work that requires attention, including information in relation to student work that needs covering.
- 5.5 Contact by text message, WhatsApp, Direct Message via social media is not acceptable.
- 5.6 Managers should ensure that:
- 5.6.1 Any sickness absence that is notified to them is recorded and reported to the Cover Manager or Office Manager.
  - 5.6.2 Arrangements are made, where necessary, to cover work and to inform colleagues (while maintaining confidentiality).
- 5.7 You may be contacted during your absence by your manager/Headteacher or a member of the HR Department who will want to enquire after your wellbeing and be advised, if possible, as to your expected return date.
- 5.8 If you are ill or injured during a period of pre-arranged annual leave you may elect to treat the days of incapacity as sickness absence instead of annual leave. You must inform your manager of your incapacity and its likely duration as soon as possible even if you are abroad. The usual requirements for self-certification and medical certificates in this policy will apply.
- 5.9 To ensure we are doing all we can to support pregnant employees, a pregnant employee will be asked to attend a return-to-work interview when returning to work after any period of absence. However, any sickness absence by a pregnant employee for a pregnancy-related reason will not be considered when checking if the need for formal action under our sickness absence management procedure has been triggered.

## 6. Evidence of incapacity

- 6.1 For sickness absence of up to seven calendar days you must complete a self-certification form which is available from the HR department.
- 6.2 For absence of more than a week you must obtain a certificate from an eligible healthcare professional (a 'Statement of Fitness for Work') stating that you are not fit for work and the reason(s) why. This should be forwarded to your line manager and the HR Department as soon as possible. If your absence continues, further medical certificates must be provided to cover the whole period of absence.
- 6.3 If your healthcare professional provides a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' you should inform your line manager or Headteacher immediately. We will discuss with you any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your healthcare professional's advice. This may take place at a return-to-work interview (see paragraph 10.1). If appropriate measures cannot be taken, you will remain on sick leave and we will set a date to review the situation.
- 6.4 Where we are concerned about the reason for absence, or frequent short-term absence, we may require a medical certificate for each absence regardless of duration. In such circumstances, we will cover any costs incurred in obtaining such medical certificates, for absences of a week or less, on production of a doctor's invoice.
- 6.5 Where an employee is absent immediately prior to a Trust closure period, they will continue to be deemed as being absent for the purposes of recording sickness and statutory and/or contractual sick pay during the Trust closure period, unless they provide a fit note indicating they are fit to return to work. The cost of a fit note will be covered by the Trust if applicable.
- 6.6 If you are undergoing an elective or cosmetic surgery or procedure for which you will be absent from work, then any entitlement to Occupational sick pay (as set out in paragraph 8) will be subject to receipt of satisfactory medical evidence. This medical evidence will need to be in the form of a report from your doctor or a specialist confirming that you are undergoing the procedure on medical advice.
- 6.7 Where absence appears to be as a result of an infectious disease the Trust reserves the right to obtain medical evidence to ascertain whether the infection was directly attributable to the workplace.

## 7. Unauthorised absence

- 7.1 Cases of unauthorised absence will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2 Absence that has not been notified according to the sickness absence reporting procedure may be treated as unauthorised absence except where there are extenuating circumstances.
- 7.3 If you do not report for work and have not telephoned your school's absence line or Headteacher to explain the reason for your absence, your line manager or Headteacher will try to contact you, by telephone and in writing if necessary. This should not be treated as a substitute for reporting sickness absence.

## 8. Sick pay

- 8.1 You should refer to your contract of employment for details of the sick pay to which you are entitled.
- 8.2 Failure to properly report your absence or to provide medical or self-certification could lead to your pay being suspended.

## 9. Keeping in contact during sickness absence

- 9.1 If you are absent on sick leave you should expect to be contacted from time to time by your line manager, Headteacher or a member of the HR Department order to discuss your wellbeing, expected length of continued absence from work and any of your work that requires attention. Such contact is intended to provide reassurance and will be kept to a reasonable minimum. It is the joint responsibility of both the line manager and the employee to maintain contact.
- 9.2 If you have any concerns while absent on sick leave, whether about the reason for your absence or your ability to return to work, you should feel free to contact your line manager or Headteacher at any time.
- 9.3 We offer access to confidential counselling, with our Employee Assistance Programme, Health Assured. This is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year by calling 0800 028 0199
- 9.4 Medical examinations
  - 9.4.1 We may, at any time in operating this policy, ask you to attend a medical examination by our Occupational Health Advisers.
  - 9.4.2 You will be asked to agree that any report produced in connection with any such examination may be disclosed to us and that we may discuss the contents of the report with our advisers.
  - 9.4.3 Failure to agree to a reasonable request may result in decisions being made in the absence of any medical information. In some circumstances disciplinary action may be taken where you do not cooperate with the sickness absence process.
  - 9.4.4 In the event of a difference of opinion between an employee's GP or other healthcare professional and the Trust's occupational health advisors, regarding an employee's fitness for work, functional capacity or the existence of an underlying medical condition contributing towards persistent absences, the OH advisor's advice will normally take precedence. In some cases, an independent medical advisor may be asked to give a second opinion.
  - 9.4.5 This process is in line with our Workforce Privacy Notice which sets out how we will gather, process and hold special category personal data of individuals during employment.

## 10. Return to work interviews

- 10.1 If you have been absent on sick leave for more than 3 days, we will arrange for you to have a return-to-work interview with your line manager or Headteacher.
- 10.2 A return-to-work interview enables us to confirm the details of your absence. It also gives you the opportunity to raise any concerns or questions you may have, and to bring any relevant matters to our attention.
- 10.3 Where your doctor has provided a certificate stating that you 'may be fit for work' we will usually hold a return-to-work interview to discuss any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your healthcare professional's advice.

## 11. Returning to work from long-term sickness absence

- 11.1 We are committed to helping employees return to work from long-term sickness absence. As part of our sickness absence meetings procedure (see section 13), we will, where appropriate and possible, support returns to work by:

- 11.1.1 Obtaining medical advice;

- 11.1.2 Making reasonable adjustments to the workplace, working practices and working hours, including a time-limited phased return to work.

A phased return to work will often be a recommendation of an occupational health advisor or the employees GP.

Employees will receive their full pay on the phased return. Phased returns to work should be for a maximum of 4 weeks. In the event an employee requests that the phased return is extended beyond 4 weeks, a dialogue should be held with the employee in regards to a temporary contractual change being made to their working hours to accommodate the request and their pay adjusted accordingly.

- 11.1.3 Considering redeployment; and/or

- 11.1.4 Agreeing a return-to-work programme with everyone affected.

- 11.2 If you are unable to return to work in the longer term, we will consider whether you are entitled to any benefits under your contract and/or any insurance schemes we operate.

## 12. Sick leave and Annual Leave

- 12.1 If you become sick or injured while on annual leave such that you would be unfit for work you may ask us to treat the period of incapacity as sick leave and reclaim the annual leave.
- 12.2 To be able to claim occupational sick pay you must notify your line manager or Headteacher of your incapacity immediately, and the usual requirements for medical evidence in this policy will also apply, even if you are abroad.



- 12.3 If you are on sick leave you may choose to cancel any pre-arranged annual leave that would otherwise coincide with your sick leave. You should notify your line manager or Headteacher soon as possible that you wish to do this.
- 12.4 If your period of sick leave extends into the next holiday year, or if there is not enough time left in the current holiday year to make it practicable to take your remaining holiday entitlement, you can carry any unused holiday entitlement over to the following leave year up to a maximum of 20 days to be used within three months of your return to work.

## 13. Terminal illness

- 13.1 Where an employee is suffering from a terminal illness, we will endeavour as far as possible to accommodate their wishes and to provide additional support where feasible. This includes discussion of the possibility of ill-health retirement or facilitating conversations with the relevant pension scheme.
- 13.2 While we will support employees who wish to continue working, employees with a terminal illness should bear in mind that there may come a time when they will be unable to continue working. In this case, the employee's line manager will discuss the options with the employee, with the support of the Headteacher and HR department.
- 13.3 The employee's line manager will talk to the employee about whether to inform their colleagues, and if so, when and how to do so with the employee's permission.
- 13.4 The organisation provides an Employee Assistance Programme via Health Assured with access to counselling services to assist during this difficult time.

## 14. Sickness absence meetings procedure

- 14.1 We may apply this procedure whenever we consider it necessary, including, for example, if you:
- 14.1.1 Have been absent due to illness on a number of occasions in line with the following triggers for action;
- Three or more occasions in any rolling three month period
  - 6 or more days in any rolling 12 months
  - Have been absent for more than 21 days
- 14.1.2 The policy may still be applied where there is any other pattern that causes concern.
- 14.1.3 These triggers will be pro-rated for part time employees and consideration will be given to adjusting triggers for employees with a disability. Pregnancy related absences will be discounted when calculating triggers;
- 14.2 Unless it is impractical to do so, we will give you ten days written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. We will put any concerns about your sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing or otherwise advise why the meeting is being

called. A reasonable opportunity for you to consider this information before a meeting will be provided.

- 14.3 The meeting will be conducted by your line manager or Headteacher and will normally be attended by a member of the HR Department. You may bring a companion with you to the meeting (see paragraph 14).
- 14.4 You must take all reasonable steps to attend a meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If you or your companion are unable to attend at the time specified you should immediately inform your line manager or Headteacher who will seek to agree an alternative time.
- 14.5 A meeting may be adjourned if your line manager or Headteacher is awaiting receipt of information, needs to gather any further information or consider matters discussed at a previous meeting. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the meeting is reconvened.
- 14.6 Confirmation of any decision made at a meeting, the reasons for it, and of the right of appeal will be given to you in writing within five days of a sickness absence meeting (unless this time scale is not practicable, in which case it will be provided as soon as is practicable).
- 14.7 Formal warnings issued for sickness will remain live for a period of 12 months from the date of issue, during which time further absences beyond the review period would be dealt with either at the next stage of the procedure or by an extension of the current live warning. If further absences occur shortly after the end of the 12-month period (or any extended warning), we reserve the right to deal with the matter at the same stage of the procedure and not return to earlier stage.
- 14.8 If, at any time, your line manager or Headteacher considers that you have taken or are taking sickness absence when you are not unwell, they may refer matters to be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

## 15. Right to be accompanied at meetings

- 15.1 You may bring a companion to any meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure.
- 15.2 Your companion may be either a trade union representative or a work colleague. You should provide their details to your line manager or Headteacher conducting the meeting, in good time before it takes place.
- 15.3 Employees are allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay to act as a companion. However, they are not obliged to act as a companion and may decline a request if they so wish.
- 15.4 We may at our discretion permit other companions (for example family members) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability or difficulty understanding English.
- 15.5 Some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting.

- 15.6 A companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up your position, but will not be allowed to answer questions on your behalf. You may confer privately with your companion at any time during a meeting.

## 16. Stage 1: first sickness absence meeting

- 16.1 This will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- 16.2 The purposes of a first sickness absence meeting may include:
- 16.2.1 Discussing the reasons for absence.
  - 16.2.2 Where you are on long-term sickness absence, determining how long the absence is likely to last.
  - 16.2.3 Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, determining the likelihood of further absences.
  - 16.2.4 Considering whether medical advice is required or, if already obtained, what that advice is.
  - 16.2.5 Considering what, if any, measures might improve your health and/or attendance.
  - 16.2.6 Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review, and/or a further meeting under the sickness absence procedure.

## 17. Stage 2: further sickness absence meeting(s)

- 17.1 Depending on the matters discussed at the first stage of the sickness absence procedure, a further meeting or meetings may be necessary. Arrangements for meetings under the second stage of the sickness absence procedure will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- 17.2 The purposes of further meeting(s) may include:
- 17.2.1 Discussing the reasons for and impact of your ongoing absence(s).
  - 17.2.2 Where you are on long-term sickness absence, discussing how long your absence is likely to last.
  - 17.2.3 Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, discussing the likelihood of further absences.
  - 17.2.4 If it has not been obtained, considering whether medical advice is required. If it has been obtained, considering the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required.
  - 17.2.5 Considering your ability to return to/remain in your job in view both of your capabilities and the needs of the Trust and any adjustments that can reasonably be made to your job to enable you to do so.

- 17.2.6 Considering possible redeployment opportunities and whether any adjustments can reasonably be made to assist in redeploying you.
- 17.2.7 Where you are able to return from long-term sick leave, whether to your job or a redeployed job, agreeing a phased return to work programme.
- 17.2.8 If it is considered that you are unlikely to be able to return to work from long-term absence, whether there are any benefits for which you should be considered.
- 17.2.9 Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting(s). This may, depending on steps we have already taken, include warning you that you are at risk of dismissal.
- 17.2.10 Issuing a final written warning that your employment may be at risk if your attendance does not improve or you do not return to work.

## 18. Stage 3: final sickness absence meeting

- 18.1 Where you have been warned that you are at risk of dismissal and the improvement has not been made, we may invite you to a meeting under the third stage of the sickness absence procedure. Arrangements for this meeting will follow the procedure set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.
- 18.2 The purposes of the meeting will be:
  - 18.2.1 To review the meetings that have taken place, the matters discussed and warnings issued.
  - 18.2.2 Where you remain on long-term sickness absence, to consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under stage two of the procedure, either as regards your possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.
  - 18.2.3 To consider any further matters that you wish to raise.
  - 18.2.4 To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time.
  - 18.2.5 To consider if ill health retirement is a possibility where medical advice is clear it is unlikely that an employee will be fit to return to their role in the near future.
  - 18.2.6 To consider the possible termination of your employment which will only be considered where all other options have been exhausted.
  - 18.2.7 Termination will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice.

## 19. Appeals

- 19.1 You may appeal against the outcome of any stage of this procedure and you may bring a companion to an appeal meeting (see paragraph 15).

- 19.2 An appeal should be made in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, to the Headteacher within five working days of the date on which the decision was sent to you.
- 19.3 Unless it is not practicable, you will be given at least five working days written notice of an appeal meeting. In cases of dismissal the appeal will be held as soon as possible. Any new matters raised in an appeal may delay an appeal meeting if further investigation is required.
- 19.4 You will be provided with written details of any new information which comes to light before an appeal meeting. You will also be given a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the meeting.
- 19.5 Where practicable, an appeal meeting will be conducted by a manager or relevant senior to the individual who conducted the sickness absence meeting.
- 19.6 Depending on the grounds of appeal, an appeal meeting may be a complete rehearing of the matter or a review of the original decision.
- 19.7 Following an appeal, the original decision may be confirmed, revoked or replaced with a different decision. The final decision will be confirmed in writing, if possible, within five working days of the appeal meeting. There will be no further right of appeal.
- 19.8 The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

## 20. Review of policy

This policy is reviewed every two years by Quantock Education Trust in consultation with the recognised trade unions. We will monitor the application and outcomes of this policy to ensure it is working effectively.