Individual

Reporting

1. **Q.** How do I report my sickness absence?
   **A.** You should contact your line manager or designated person in your department by telephone to inform them of your sickness at the start of the University day within one hour of your normal starting time.

2. **Q.** Do I need to notify my supervisor/manager if I am sick on a day I would not normally work, e.g. if I work three days a week or term-time only?
   **A.** Yes, you must inform your line manager or the designated contact for your department as statutory and occupational sick pay are both paid on the basis of calendar days and not working days. As you receive 12 equal monthly payments we need to know when you are sick so that your statutory sick pay can be assessed correctly.

3. **Q.** The policy states that employees are expected to personally telephone their Supervisor/Manager or designated person in their Department. Is it acceptable for me to text or e-mail to report my absence?
   **A.** All employees are expected to notify their absence by telephone. It provides an opportunity for managers to establish the expected duration of absence in order to ensure operational requirements are covered and also to establish whether it is appropriate to offer any support to an employee to assist them back to work. Text and e-mail will not be acceptable unless there is an exceptional reason as to why you were unable to telephone.

4. **Q.** Previously my partner has called in to report my absence when I have been ill, will this no longer be acceptable?
   **A.** Unless there is a very good reason for you not contacting your manager or designated person directly yourself, asking a relative, friend or partner to report your absence will not be acceptable. The requirement of the policy is for you as an employee to report your absence.

5. **Q.** Who do I send my fit note (previously known as medical certificate) to?
   **A.** Send them directly to your manager. The manager will then forward the fit note to Occupational Health for inputting onto the HR information system and for storage.

6. **Q.** If I don’t work five days a week do I have to provide a fit note for days I would not normally work?
   **A.** Yes, statutory and occupational sick pay are both paid on the basis of calendar days and not working days. Therefore, it is important that you obtain a fit note to follow on immediately after your self-certification period even if your sickness falls within a non-working period, or your pay may be affected. Your doctor will provide you with a fit note for a period of time. It may state that you should refrain from work and return on a specific date but if it states a number of days
7. Q. If I work term-time only or less than 52.143 weeks per year do I have to self certify and provide a fit note if I am sick when I am not required to work?

A. Yes, because statutory and occupational sick pay entitlement is calculated on the basis of calendar days. If you are contracted to work less than 52.143 weeks per year, you remain contracted with the University during your non-working period and therefore you are required to provide evidence to the University if you are sick during your non-working period. As you receive 12 equal monthly payments we need to know when you are sick so that your statutory sick pay can be assessed correctly.

8. Q. If I become unwell during the working day and I need to leave work, do I have to tell anyone?

A. Yes you must inform your line manager or the designated contact for your department.

9. Q. What is a fit note?

A. On 6 April 2010, the ‘sick note’ (medical certificate) has been replaced with a ‘fit note’ (statement of fitness for work). On the new form, doctors will be able to advise one of two options: ‘Not fit for work’ or ‘May be fit for work’. The advice provided by the doctor will be general and non-job specific. It will be the manager’s responsibility to ensure that an appropriate risk assessment takes place before the employee returns to work.

10. Q. How many days can I be off work due to sickness before being required to provide a fit note?

A. You are required to provide a fit note on your eighth day of sickness (weekends are included in these 8 days)

11. Q. Are weekends counted in my sickness absence?

A. Yes, weekends count when you are away from work due to sickness

12. Q. If I have a gap between fit notes, am I required to get the missing days covered?

A. Yes you would need to go back to your GP to request a fit note to cover any missing days (it is always helpful for you to note the last date covered by the fit note)

13. Q. When do I return to work when I have a fit note?

A. Your fit note states that you should refrain from work for a specified period of time or until a specified date e.g. if you are signed off work until 14 May, you should return to work on 15 May. If the day for return to work falls on a day that would not normally be a work day for you e.g. Sunday, then you will return to work on your next normal scheduled working day e.g. Monday.
14. **Q.** Do I have to return to work when my fit note stating ‘Not fit for Work’ has expired?
   **A.** Yes unless you continue to be unwell and therefore you would be required to get another fit note from your GP.

15. **Q.** Why does my manager need to know, or why does the University need to know why I am absent?
   **A.** It is important for your manager or the University to know why you are ill to ensure that you are offered support where appropriate. There may be occasions where an employee will require adjustments to be made on their return to work and the University needs to know why an employee is absent in order to appropriately assess the adjustments that may be required. It is also important for the University to identify any areas of concern where it appears an employee is regularly absent for the same reason.

**Contact**

16. **Q.** Is my department allowed to contact me whilst I am away from work due to sickness, whether this is covered by a fit note or not?
   **A.** Yes, your Manager or nominated university contact is able to contact you when you are off sick to see how you are and keep you updated with anything you need to know. You will be expected to provide contact details.

17. **Q.** What is a nominated contact?
   **A.** In certain circumstances it may not be appropriate for the manager to contact the individual. In such circumstances an individual can indicate they prefer to be contacted by someone other than the manager. This arrangement should be made in consultation with the HR Business Partner/HR Adviser.

**Sick Pay Entitlement**

18. **Q.** As a casual employee am I entitled to sick pay?
   **A.** This will be dependent on your terms and conditions, please seek advice from Human Resources. Contact details can be found at the following url:

   [http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/contactus/employeelist/](http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/contactus/employeelist/)

   T: 023 9284 3141

19. **Q.** As a Part Time Hourly Paid employee am I entitled to sick pay?
   **A.** This will be dependent on your terms and conditions, please seek advice from Human Resources. Contact details can be found at the following url:

   [http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/contactus/employeelist/](http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/contactus/employeelist/)

   T: 023 9284 3141

20. **Q.** What is my sick pay entitlement?
   **A.** This will be dependent on your service with the University, please seek advice from
Managing Sickness Absence FAQs

Travel

21. Q. Can I travel abroad if I have a fit note and I am unable to go to work?
A. If your fit note specifically advises you are 'not fit for work' advice should be sought from your GP. If you are intending to travel abroad then you must inform your manager or nominated university contact.

Please note if you travel abroad whilst remaining an employee of the University and covered by a fit note, your entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay can continue provided you are still eligible to receive it.

22. Q. Can I travel on business whilst I have a fit note?
A. No

23. Q. What happens if I need to go off sick during a phased return?
A. That is fine. Just phone in to your manager as usual and keep them updated.

24. Q. Can I take annual leave whilst on a phased return?
A. Yes, with your manager’s permission as usual.

25. Q. Why must I keep in touch with my manager if I am on long term sickness absence?
A. The University believes that it is a reasonable requirement for an employee to have dialogue with their manager if they are absent for a long period. Long term absence in the policy is defined as absence of 4 weeks or more. It is important for you to keep your manager updated with how you are progressing and the general prognosis so that any support can be offered to try and assist you back to work where appropriate and to ensure that the operational needs continue to be met in your absence. Your manager will be concerned for your health and wellbeing and, in the majority of cases; employees appreciate the contact from their manager to keep them abreast of work developments.

Procedures

26. Q. If I fail to follow the requirements of the policy for notifying or reporting my absence, can my manager stop my sick pay?
A. Yes, both Occupational Sick Pay and Statutory Sick Pay may be stopped if the procedures are not followed.

27. Q. Will I be interviewed on my return to work from a period of absence?
A. Your manager may wish to have a brief chat with you, called a Return to Work discussion. In the majority of cases this will be an informal chat welcoming you back to
work and bringing you up to date with events at work during your absence and ensuring you are fit enough to return to work.

28. Q. Will notes be kept of the Return to Work discussion and who will see them?
   A. A return to work form may need to be completed by both the individual and their manager that will include a brief note of the facts of the discussion. Your manager will keep return to work discussion forms in a confidential secure filing cabinet within the department.

29. Q. Can my manager send me home if I return to work still feeling ill?
   A. Yes, if your manager is genuinely concerned about you or the possibility of the team becoming ill as a result of you returning not having fully recovered then they may insist that you go home until you have recovered sufficiently. In cases where you may pose a health and safety risk at work to yourself or others it is compulsory for the manager to send you home. Advice should be sought from Occupational Health.

Occupational Health

30. Q. Why does Occupational Health need to be involved if I am off sick? My own doctor is the one who looks after me.
   A. Occupational Health employees are specialists in looking at health in relation to work. Your GP is primarily concerned with your care from a clinical perspective and may not consider your work apart from issuing a fit note.

31. Q. My health information is confidential. Why would Occupational Health want to tell my manager what is wrong with me?
   A. The Occupational Health employees are bound by their Codes of Conduct regarding confidentiality and can only give details of your health problems with your permission. They can, though, advise management about what you can and cannot do at work in general terms without necessarily going into exactly what your diagnosis may be.

32. Q. Why is Occupational Health mentioned in the Absence Policy?
   A. Occupational Health is an invaluable service to assist the University to effectively manage the health of its workforce. It is necessary to refer to Occupational Health in the policy as it is a service that provides support to both employees and managers in the management of sickness absence.

General

33. Q. What if my absence is due to a reason other than sickness e.g. childcare, compassionate reasons?
   A. This should be addressed using the University’s Family Friendly procedures or other procedures as appropriate. Such absence should not be recorded as sickness absence.
Line Manager

34. Q. Should employees provide a fit note as soon as they are off sick?
   A. GPs are not required to provide fit notes for the first seven days of sickness absence. If you are concerned that an employee’s sickness absence is not genuine then you should refer the member of staff to Occupational Health using the Management Referral Form.

35. Q. I am concerned about the same employees going off sick at busy times of the year. What should I do?
   A. If you have any concerns about patterns of sickness absence you should refer the individual to Occupational Health using the Management Referral Form so that any underlying health issues can be investigated.

36. Q. Will the Sickness Absence Procedures apply to all groups of employees?
   A. Yes, the Sickness Absence Procedures will apply to all groups of employees and all employees and managers will be expected to follow the requirements of the procedures.

37. Q. What happens if an employee needs to leave work due to sickness during the working day?
   A. The employee must inform their manager at the time. The manager must keep a note of this absence.

38. Q. What do I do when I receive a fit note from one of my employees?
   A. Once you have received the fit note you should check to see if any adjustments have been identified, (if they are able to be in work), date stamp to show when received and then forward the fit note to Occupational Health for inputting onto the HR information system and for storage. Do not take any copy for your own retention as this information is confidential and should only be retained by Occupational Health if the employee returns before the end of the fit note expiring please update OH so as to amend the employee’s absence record, please also update OH if they subsequently go off sick after returning. If necessary you should seek advice from OH.

Fit Note – Guidance for Managers

39. Q. What should I do as a manager if the doctor has indicated the employee ‘may be fit for work’?
   A. The ‘fit note’ has been designed to give you the information needed to begin a discussion with an employee on whether they can return to work in spite of their illness or injury. You should consider the doctor’s comments and discuss these with your employee. If a return to work is possible you should agree any temporary changes to their job or hours and what support you will provide to them and for how long. If you are unsure of things, please contact Occupational Health. In order to help you identify changes which may be made, it is advisable to undertake a risk assessment. Please update OH with the date of
their return to work and the agreed adjustments in place. If the employee subsequently goes off sick please also update OH to ensure the employee’s absence record is updated.

40. Q. **What is a risk assessment?**
   
   A. A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful consideration of what, in your workplace, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. More information on how to complete a risk assessment can be found at [http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/healthandsafety/Riskassessment/](http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/healthandsafety/Riskassessment/)

41. Q. **Is the advice on the ‘fit note’ binding?**
   
   A. No. This is about giving you greater flexibility and better information to manage sickness absence. It is your choice after discussing the ‘fit note’ with your employee, how to act on the doctor’s advice. When considering the doctor’s advice, you should always consider if the advice is consistent with specific University safety guidelines or regulations that the doctor may not be aware of.

   If the doctor has advised that your employee ‘may be fit for work’, and you cannot make the adaptations or adjustments to help a return to work, you should explain the reasons for this to your employee and then use the ‘fit note’ as if the doctor had advised ‘not fit for work’. Your employee does not need to go back to their doctor for a new Statement to confirm this. If this occurs, at the end of the period of the certificate, the employee is deemed fit for normal duties. You must update OH that the employee is not returning to work so that the fit note reverts to the ‘not fit for work’ status. If the employee returns to work prior to the fit note period ending please also update OH so that the employee’s absence record is updated.

   Further advice and guidance may be sought from Occupational Health.

42. Q. **Will the University still be covered by its Employers’ Liability Compulsory Insurance?**
   
   A. The liability insurance should not prevent employees who ‘may be fit for work’, from returning or remaining in work. You do not need a Medical Statement stating fitness for work for an employee to return to work. An employee does not necessarily need to be 100% fit to return to work. However, you will need to continue to manage your employees appropriately and carry out a risk assessment – based on the evidence from the doctor, your knowledge of the work and workplace and further support where necessary. If you have any concerns about insurance coverage, you should discuss this with your HR Adviser and/or Insurance Officer.

43. Q. **How long do any amended duties or workplace adaptations have to last for?**
   
   A. On the ‘fit note’ a doctor will state the period of time their advice is for. When agreeing a return to work plan you should always be clear on the length of time any amended duties or support is for. In most cases this will be about temporary measures. If the employee cannot then return to their normal duties, you may need to discuss further or alternative temporary measures or, if needed, have a discussion on the long-term effect
of their health condition on their job, taking into account your responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. In these circumstances, please discuss with your HR Adviser and Occupational Health.

44. Q. **How does the ‘may be fit for work’ affect Occupational and/or Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?**
   
   A. Where a GP has advised that an employee may be fit for work, and the advice is either that their hours should be reduced on a temporary basis or that a phased return to work is recommended in order to support the employee back to work, it is unlikely that the University will reduce their salary accordingly. There may be situations when pay could be affected, e.g., should adjustments need to be considered on a more permanent basis. You should contact Occupational Health and your HR Adviser for advice in these situations.

   The University's responsibilities to pay SSP have not changed. SSP will still be payable under the current rules for any sickness absence of 4 days or more where the employee meets the qualifying conditions.

45. Q. **Can I request a Medical Statement advising that my employee is ‘fit for work’?**
   
   A. Unlike the ‘sick note’, the ‘fit note’ does not include the option for doctors to advise someone that they are fully fit for work. You do not need to be fully fit to return to work and it is a myth that an employee needs to be ‘signed back’ to work by a doctor. In some cases, there are existing procedures to ensure someone is fit to carry out their role safely and these should be followed (e.g., DVLA rules for certain classes of drivers).

   If you feel you need a medical opinion stating that your employee is fit for work you should discuss this with Occupational Health.

46. Q. **What should I do if an employee wants to return to work before the end of a ‘not fit for work’ note?**
   
   A. Sometimes your employee will be able to return to work before the end of the ‘fit note’ period where a doctor has advised that they are not fit for work. This may be because the employee has recovered faster than the doctor expected, or the doctor did not know of ways in which you could support your employee to return to work.

   If you agree with your employee that it is appropriate for them to return to work, you do not need to wait until the end of the ‘fit note’ period for them to do so. If the employee returns to work prior to the fit note period ending please update OH so that the employee’s absence record is updated.

   Further advice and guidance may be sought from Occupational Health.

47. Q. **What should I do if I offer support to an employee to aid them to return to work and they disagree?**
   
   A. If you believe on the basis of the advice from the doctor and your knowledge of the workplace, you can support your employee to return to work and they disagree with your proposal, your first option should always be to discuss the issues with your
employee to find out why they believe they cannot return to work. There may be an aspect of their condition or the workplace that you have not considered.

If no agreement on your employee’s fitness for work can be reached, you should consult Occupational Health and your HR Adviser, the latter as you may need to consider the University’s policy on absence disputes. Your aim should be to ensure that both you and your employee are comfortable with the support that is being offered. If there is disagreement you may wish to suggest that the employee seeks advice from their trade union.

48. Q. What should I do if I do not understand the advice on the ‘fit note’?
   A. If you do not understand or are unsure on how to act on the advice on the ‘fit note’ your first option is always to discuss the advice with your employee. They may be able to provide more information on the context of the advice. If you are still unsure you should seek advice from Occupational Health.

49. Q. What do I need to do if the doctor has recommended an occupational health referral for my employee?
   A. A doctor will recommend an occupational health assessment where they feel your employee’s condition is complex and/or work may be a contributory factor. Usually you will be able to provide simple and practical support to your employee without needing additional expertise but where the GP has made this recommendation support from Occupational Health should be sought.

If you require further advice please contact Human Resources. Contact details can be found at the following url:-

http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/contactus/employeelist/

Or telephone: 023 92843141