



# GRIFFITH COLLEGE

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## HR ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

### 1 PURPOSE

Absenteeism is the unscheduled disruption of the work process due to days lost as a result of sickness or any other cause not excused through statutory entitlements or College approval.

The aim of this Absence Management policy is to minimise absence levels across the College, while also providing reasonable support to those absent for legitimate reasons, with the aim of assisting their return to work at the earliest opportunity. The policy also aims to ensure that all staff members are treated fairly and consistently.

As an equal opportunities and inclusive employer, Griffith College also complies with all relevant legislation in this area, including the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015.

The Human Resources Department is responsible for monitoring overall absence levels and supporting Management in ensuring consistency in dealing with absences and any related issues.

Line Managers are responsible for monitoring and managing absence levels in their own areas, and for ensuring that potential problems are recognised and resolved at an early stage.

### 2 REPORTING ABSENCES

Staff members are required to contact their immediate Line Manager as early as possible on their first day of absence, and no later than two hours after the normal time of starting work. If the immediate Line Manager is unavailable, they should contact the HR Department. Texts/e-mails etc. will not be accepted. Failure to follow Absence Management Policy will result in disciplinary proceedings.

The following information should be provided:

- An assessment of the nature of the illness
- The date on which they expect to return to work



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- How they can be contacted if necessary

The absent staff member should later contact their line manager if the sickness is likely to last longer than first expected. A medical certificate must be submitted to HR for absences greater than two days of absence i.e. on the third day (inclusive of weekends) and every fortnight thereafter. Failure to provide medical certificates will be regarded as unauthorised absences and dealt with as outlined below.

### 3 UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

An absence that has not been notified according to the above procedure should be treated as unauthorised absence, unless a reason is subsequently given which is considered acceptable.

If a staff member does not report for work and has not informed their immediate Line Manager or HR as to why they have not attended, their Line Manager should make all reasonable efforts to contact them. If the Line Manager cannot contact the staff member, they will then notify HR who will attempt to contact the absent staff member. If HR still cannot contact the absent staff member, they will attempt to contact the staff member's next of kin to ensure the safety health and welfare of the staff member.

If the reason why the staff member has not made contact is unacceptable the disciplinary procedure will be followed. For more information, please refer to the HR Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

### 4 SHORT TERM/SPORADIC ABSENCES

Short term/Sporadic absences should be monitored and investigated promptly by the Line Manager, giving the staff member an opportunity to explain their absence. The below procedure in section 4.1 should be used in the following situation:

- Where the absence of a staff member gives cause for concern in terms of either reason, pattern or number of days (more than 10 days in a rolling 12-month period).
- Where at any time the Line Manager is not satisfied with the reasons for absence as notified.
- Where the absence reporting procedure have not been followed.

#### 4.1 PROCEDURE



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- Staff members should be made aware that their attendance levels will be monitored throughout their employment. When a staff member returns to work after a period of absence their Line Manager should arrange a return-to-work meeting with the absent employee. Prior to the meeting the Line Manager should consider the following:

a) Is there any discernible pattern to the absences i.e Mondays or Fridays?

b) Are absences sporadic (occurring at irregular intervals - scattered or isolated)?

c) What proportion of the absence is certified or uncertified?

d) What reasons have been given for previous absence? Are the causes varied or does there appear to be linkage between the various absences?

e) What anecdotal or other evidence might be available about possible underlying causes of absence?

- In cases where absence levels exceed 10 days in a rolling 12-month period, Line Managers are required to take formal action. The Line Manager should conduct a return-to-work discussion as outlined below in section. Records of all absences must be sent to HR to ensure consistency and fairness. This does not mean that Line Managers should wait until 10 days have been reached to discuss the absences, each period of absence should be discussed as it occurs.

- If the staff member has been absent from work for 10 days in a rolling 12-month period, the College reserves the right to require the staff member to be examined by the Medical Doctor nominated by the College in certain circumstances (e.g. where absence from work shows an unacceptable pattern, an absence from work due to illness or injury, frequent short absences from work, a work issue that is affecting your health, a health issue which maybe affecting your ability to do your job) the College reserves the right to require the staff member to be examined by the Medical Doctor nominated by the College In either case, consent from the staff member will be sought for full medical reports resulting from the examination to be given to HR and made available to the staff member's Line Manager.

## 5 RETURN TO WORK DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Stage 1



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The Line Manager should arrange a meeting with the staff member. It should be assumed that the staff member has been absent for a genuine medical reason unless there is specific evidence to the contrary. The staff member should be made aware that an attempt to discipline him or her regarding their absence is not being made at this stage. The staff member will be invited to discuss the reasons for the absences. The employee should be helped wherever possible to reduce future absences and will be invited to state how long absences are likely to continue.

Where there is genuine doubt about the grounds for absences the Line Manager should contact the HR Manager to discuss.

### 5.2 Stage 2

Where short-term absences continue to be frequent and after consultation with HR, the staff member may be referred to the Medical Doctor nominated by the College. Where there are underlying proven medical reasons for absence, these should be viewed sympathetically, where possible offering every assistance.

If the Line Manager considers that a continuation of the pattern or number of absences is unacceptable, following consultation with HR and where appropriate, the employee must be warned at an absence follow up review meeting that a continuation of the absences may lead to disciplinary action and a copy of the disciplinary procedure given to them.

The Line Manager should specify a period of time, within which the employee would be expected to show improvement i.e fewer/no absences from work over the next three months. A record of the meeting should be written, and a copy given to HR and the employee.

### 5.3 Stage 3

If an employee's record of absences in the review period exceeds the agreed amount, following consultation with HR and where appropriate, a disciplinary meeting will be held in line with the disciplinary procedure. At this meeting, the employee should be asked to explain the continued absences and the assessment of the likelihood of absence in the future. If the explanation is unsatisfactory, the employee will be subject to the disciplinary procedures up to and including dismissal. In making the decision to terminate employment, the following factors may be considered:

- The length of service and health record up until the present illness.
- The exact nature of their illness and their prospects for recovery



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- The position that they hold and the impact of their absence on the effective functioning of the Department.
- The effect on other employees in the Department.
- The likelihood of the current level of absence reoccurring in the future following a return to work.

### 6 LONG TERM ABSENCE

Long term absence is described as absences of more than two consecutive weeks duration where the return-to-work date is not known. Employees must continue to provide HR with a medical certificate every fortnight.

The College is committed to facilitating the employee's return to work at the earliest opportunity through fair and proper procedure at all stages.

These include:

- Consulting dully with the employee at all stages
- Maintaining contact
- Seeking appropriate independent medical advice
- Reviewing all reasonable options for alternative employment with the College
- Any other means of potentially facilitating a return to work

### 7 RETURN TO WORK FOLLOWING LONG TERM ABSENCE

Any employee who is absent on long term sick leave and ready to return to work, must ensure that they contact HR to notify that they are medically fit to return to work. They must also provide a medical certificate stating that they are "fit to return to work on full duties" or if the employee is fit to return on restricted duties these must be specified e.g. phased return to work. HR will then contact the employee's Line Manager to confirm their return. Where there is any doubt about whether the employee is fit to be back at work, the advice of the Medical Doctor nominated by the College will be sought.



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### 8 RETURN TO WORK MEETING

When the employee returns to work after long term absence, their immediate Line Manager should arrange a Return-to-Work Meeting with them on their first day back, or as soon as possible thereafter.

The purpose of the return-to-work meeting is:

- a) To give the Line Manager the opportunity to check that the employee is fit enough to return to work.
- b) To ensure that all necessary forms are submitted.
- c) To give the employee an opportunity to voice any concerns they may have.
- d) To allow the Line Manager to update the employee on events that may have occurred during their absence.

Where a staff member is unable to provide a reasonable return to work date (full or phased) for a long-term absence, after consultation with HR, the Line Manager should proceed to the Disciplinary process.

### 9 ANNUAL LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS

If an employee is sick while they are on annual leave, this time should be regarded as sick leave provided that they could provide a doctor's certificate. Post-dated certificates, i.e. covering a period prior to the doctor's appointment, will not be accepted.

If an employee is on long-term sick leave and cannot take their annual leave due to illness, they can carry it over for up to 15 months, (subject to their Line Manager approval) after the end of the year it was earned. If an employee leaves their job within these 15 months, they should receive payment instead of the leave they did not take due to illness.

### 10 SICK LEAVE PAY

The College will pay sick pay in accordance with the Sick Leave Act 2022.



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In order to qualify for sick pay under that Act you must be working for the College for at least 13 weeks and you will need to be certified by a general medical practitioner as unfit to work.

Initially, you will be paid for a maximum of three (3) sick leave days per year. This will increase over time in accordance with the Act. The amount of sick pay that will be paid is provided for in the Act. At present, it is 70% of normal pay up to a maximum of €110 per day. Should you receive both sick pay from the College and the State's Illness or Disability Benefits, the College reserves the right to require you to pay over to the College the amount of such Benefits up to the amount of the sick pay being paid to you.

The Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is the legal minimum sick pay.

The entitlement to paid sick leave is being phased in:

2024 - 5 days covered

2025 - 7 days covered

2026 - 10 days covered

Sick days can be taken as consecutive days or non-consecutive days.

In exceptional cases, employees may apply for an additional payment above the rate and duration of pay for statutory sick leave. The decision on whether to make an additional payment and the duration of any such payment will be made on an individual, case by case basis in the light of the particular circumstances and will be entirely at the sole discretion of the Management Board of the College. The Management Board may impose conditions on such additional payments and may require the employee to provide regular medical updates from their medical practitioner and/or the College's Medical Practitioner including prognosis and return to work date. The College is not required to provide any explanation for why it has agreed, or refused, to make an additional payment to an employee.

The College requires staff to complete a 'request for payment form' in respect of all sick leave.

For applications for sick pay, the Management Board reserves the right to treat each application on an individual basis in the light of the particular circumstances that apply. The Management Board also reserves the right to (i) require medical evidence in support of any further application for payment of sick leave over and above the rate and duration of pay for statutory sick leave and (ii) refer the employee/staff member, if it considers it appropriate, to a College nominated medical practitioner for an independent medical assessment.





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## 11 APPOINTMENTS (Doctor, Dentist, and Hospital)

These should, wherever possible, take place outside of normal working hours. If this is not possible, employees should be given reasonable time off to attend medical/ dental appointments. The employee's Line Manager may request to see an appointment card. If the appointment keeps the employee away from work for more than one day, this should be recorded as sickness absence.



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### 12 APPENDICES

#### Guidance for Managers Return to Work Interview Form

1. Employees who return to work following sickness or unauthorised absence should have a return-to-work Interview completed.
2. Take the Returning Employee to an appropriate private place to conduct the interview, where risk of interruption / intervention is minimal.
3. Having ensured that the Employee has fully completed and signed Part 1 of the Return to Work? Interview Form, begin to complete Part 2 of Return-to-work Interview form, considering the following guidance:

You are trying to ascertain through this question if the employee is:

- a) Is the Employee fully recovered?
- b) fully fit to undertake their job in full
- c) needs to be rehabilitated into their job or
- d) is not fit for work.
- e) Is the Employee on any medication that may affect their performance at work?
- f) Is the Employee aware of any reasons why they may have further absence in the near future?

Self-explanatory – employees should not be returning to work with medication that would make them drowsy.

An opportunity to check if there is anything that may spin out of recent absence reason or anything else on the horizon. Clearly if there is nothing, then we should expect to see an improvement in attendance!



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Sometimes a GP might suggest a phased return to work when employee returns on a part time for a specific period of time on a restricted duties basis. The College will consider these arrangements until the employee is fit to resume their normal duties.

If their GP has issued a Written Statement of Fitness for Work and it suggests adjustments are made to their role, can these adjustments be made? (N.B. If not, explain Why not?)

Consider any suggested adjustments carefully and their potential impact on other Staff; Cost implications; likely duration.

Are there any actions that the Employee considers the College should take to assist their condition / improve their attendance?

General comments on the Employee's overall absence record with the College. Your response will depend on their individual record:

- 1) If there have been **10 periods of absence within a rolling 12month period**, a Formal Disciplinary process may be instigated. It may be that at the hearing, the circumstances will not justify a warning, but we need to set up the expectation that 10 periods will lead to a disciplinary hearing taking place.
- 2) If a current warning is in force, then refer for a disciplinary hearing.
- 3) If the person has had nine periods of absence in the past 12 months (rolling) remind them that a 10th period could result in disciplinary action.

Level of improvement required (if appropriate)

If 3) above, record need to have good attendance going forward.

Any further comments?

If referred for disciplinary action – record here

Plus, any other general comments over and above points recorded in previous sections

Finally, ensure that the signatures of both the Employee and the Line Manager are entered at the end of Part 2 of the form.

### **Return to Work Interview Form – To Be Completed by Employee**



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Employee Name:

Department:

Job Title:

Date of first day of absence

Date of final day of absence

Date of Return to Work

Total Days Absent from Work:

Reason for Absence:

Was Medical Advice sought? Yes No

If so, has your GP issued a Written Statement of Fitness for work? Yes No

If so, does it suggest any adjustments to your role? Yes No

If so, what are these?

Is Absence due to an Injury / Accident at Work? Yes No

If so, has an Accident Form been completed? Yes No

I declare that I was absent between the dates stated above and that the reason given is correct. I am aware that giving false or misleading information could lead to disciplinary action.

Signature:

Date:

### **Part 2 – To be completed by the Employee's Line Manager at the start of their first day back at work**

Is the Employee fully recovered?



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Is the Employee on any medication that may affect their performance at work?

Is the Employee aware of any reasons why they may have further absence in the near future?

Are there any actions that the Employee needs to take to assist their condition / improve their attendance?

If their GP has issued a Written Statement of Fitness for Work and it suggests adjustments be made to their role, can these adjustments be made? (N.B. If not, explain Why not?)

Are there any actions that the Employee considers the College should take to assist their condition / improve their attendance?

Have there been any changes / updates to the employee's role and / or the College procedures and policies whilst they have been absent due to illness? If so, have these been fully explained to the employee?

General comments on the Employee's overall absence record with the College.

Level of improvement required (if appropriate)

### **Griffith College Request for payment for sick leave**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I have been absent due to illness on the following dates:



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and in accordance with the College Absence and Sick Leave policy I am now submitting this form as a request for payment.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please submit this form to your Head of Faculty/Department for comment and signature

Comment:

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Head of Faculty/Department

**This form must be forwarded to the HR Department**

Comments:

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Note: