

Attendance Management FAQs for Trainees

Q1 Why did the Lead Employer introduce an Attendance Management Policy?

A1 As an employer within the NHS the Lead Employer has a duty to manage attendance, as sickness absence can have serious implications; for Trainees in terms of the continuity and quality of their training, for patients in terms of continuity and quality of care and Host Organisations as the cost of locum cover is very considerable.

Q2 What assistance do I receive under this policy?

A2 a) On return to work from sickness absence you should have a return to work interview with their clinical supervisor or deputy. This should highlight any concerns that need addressing e.g. assistance from the Lead Employer's Health, Work and Wellbeing service.

b) If you are on sickness absence for any length of time you should receive regular contact from your Host Organisation (see Host Process Agreement for details) and every month should be invited for a welfare visit.

c) If you go on sickness absence due to musculo-skeletal or mental health/stress related conditions you should receive a fast track referral to the Lead Employer's Health, Work and Welfare service so that an early intervention can be considered.

d) After four week sickness absence you should be considered for intervention by the Lead Employer Health, Work and Welfare service.

e) The Lead Employer Health, Work and Welfare service have engaged counselling, physiotherapy, psychiatric and occupational psychological expertise to assist you.

f) The Lead Employer has a confidential Employee Assistance Programme which can be accessed over the phone or on the web.

g) If your level of short term or intermittent absence is at an unacceptably high level due to an underlying condition you will receive assistance from the Lead Employer Health, Work and Wellbeing service as part of the 'Level Process' to bring your level of absence down.

Q3 Who is regarded as my manager for the purposes of Attendance Management?

A3 The Clinical Supervisor or nominated deputy fulfils this role under the policy but it is expected that they will be able to seek assistance from their colleagues within the Host Organisation. In each Host Organisation that assistance may take different forms as set out in the Host Process Agreement for that organisation.

Q4 Who should I contact when on sickness absence?

A4 This is different for each Host Organisation and laid down in the Host Process Agreement with each Host. If you are not sure of the contact details please ask within your organisation. Once you have returned to work it is equally critical that you make this person aware that you have returned otherwise this could adversely affect your sickness absence record and potentially affect your entitlement to occupational sick pay.

Q5 When should I make contact once I am aware that I am unable to attend work due to sickness?

A5 You should make contact by phone as soon as you are aware that you will not be able work. You should make daily contact thereafter unless otherwise agreed.

Q6 Why am I required to complete the Lead Employer's Self Certification Certificate rather than the standard government Self Certification Certificate?

A6 The Lead Employer's Self Certification Certificate ('self cert') includes a statement confirming that the information declared is accurate and confirming whether you have been working elsewhere while being on sickness absence. If we had continued to use the standard government self cert an additional form would have been required by Counter Fraud to cover this requirement.

Q7 Why do I need to make this declaration concerning any work undertaken elsewhere?

A7 Regretfully there have been a number of incidents nationally where doctors have been found to have worked elsewhere (e.g. undertaking locum work) while on sickness absence from their main employer. In many such cases this is fraud as sick pay has been paid.

Q8 What is the rationale for the frequency of completion of Self Certification Certificates laid down in policy?

A8 Self certs are legally required when a Trainee claims SSP without a doctor's fit note (i.e. three to seven calendar days absence). However given the impact that sickness absence has on a Host Organisation and its patients and the signed statement required by Counter Fraud you are required to complete a self cert from the first day of sickness absence even if you cannot claim SSP. For this latter reason also a second self cert is required to be completed on return to work for a period of absence in excess of week to cover the period for counter fraud purposes which was covered by the doctor's fit note for sick pay and SSP purposes.

Q9 Why am I required to attend a return-to-work interview?

A9 All the research into attendance management firmly indicates that one of the most successful tools in managing absence is the use of return-to-work interviews. Return-to-work interviews enable your Host Organisation to find out more about your absence, offer assistance or adjustment and consider a proactive response or a possible intervention. You are very important to the organisation and the return to work interview provides you with the opportunity to ask for help to prevent you having further time off work.

Q10 What will happen if I do not complete the appropriate Trust Self cert?

A10 The Lead Employer cannot legally pay Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) without the required Self Cert Form and our policy requires the same with regard to occupational sick pay. In addition we require you to confirm whether they have been working for another employer while on sickness absence.

Q11 Why will I be subject to the Staging Process if I hit a Trigger Point?

A11 Sickness absence is extremely costly for your Host Organisation (e.g. locum costs) and can have a detrimental affect on patients; it is therefore imperative that we set standards. Equally excessive absence can have a detrimental affect on your training as a doctor.

Q12 Why is my Host Organisation required to phone me if I am on protracted sickness absence every fortnight and see me on a welfare visit every four weeks?

A12 Thankfully very few Trainees have a protracted period of sickness absence. Regular contact however is a key part of our strategy to enable us to provide the right level of support and assistance to ensure that your absence from work and disruption to your training programmes is kept to the absolute minimum. For you maintaining contact with what is happening at work is also important psychologically and makes returning to work easier, particularly after a long illness.

Q13 What should I do if I feel that I am not receiving the appropriate level of support?

A13 In such situations please contact your Host Organisation and the Lead Employer HR department.