

Sickness Absence Management

with further time off may be granted using a mix of:

- further paid leave,
- unpaid leave,
- annual holiday or
- additional Parental Leave (only in cases involving dependant children).

Decisions over how much further paid leave is appropriate will be at the discretion of the manager involved.

Only in cases of long-term illness requiring regular and frequent time off (the Bank suggests periods over six months) will it be appropriate to look at any change to an individual's contracted work pattern.

Time Off For Personal Appointments

The Bank's policy covering time off for personal appointments is separate from other policies covering ordinary holidays or other leave for compassionate, emergency or other purposes. It can be best summarised as follows, which is a paraphrasing of what is set out in the staff manual.

- **As far as practicable, doctors', dentists' and other appointments of a personal nature should be made outside the normal working day. If a staff member has to attend an appointment during the working day then time off may be granted by your line manager. Provided these occasions are kept to a minimum, they will normally be paid.**

On that basis time off for normal check-ups with Doctors, Dentists, Opticians or the like should be allowed as paid time off.

In circumstances where an employee is going through a long period of treatment where regular and frequent appointments are required, such as chemotherapy or physiotherapy, the Sickness Absence Policy should apply instead.

LTU Advice

Members requiring advice or assistance on these or any other issues should contact the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 to speak to a full-time official for independent, professional advice and guidance.

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Assistant General Secretary

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LTU is offering members the opportunity to receive newsletters by Email.

We will send all newsletters for your area direct to you on the day they are sent to members by post giving you authoritative, immediate information on the issues that matter.

To subscribe to the service all you need do is email us at 24hours@ltu.co.uk with the subject line "Newsletters and your membership number (your file or payroll number)" or phone on 01234 262868. We'll do the rest.

Members will be aware that in recent years LTU has sought to address a culture of unacceptable management practices and behaviours in some parts of the Bank. Whilst progress has been made there are still too many instances of agreed policies and procedures being ignored and abused. Central among these is the inappropriate treatment of staff absent from work through sickness.

Following a long campaign by LTU new Sickness Absence Management Guidelines were agreed several years ago. These were designed to ensure the proper and consistent treatment of staff. However, it is clear from the growing number of cases the Union's Advice Team have had to deal with that these are being increasingly ignored.

Examples of the types of abuse of agreed procedures which LTU's Advice Team has had to deal with include:

- **Staff off work sick having to ring their Manager or Team Leader on a daily basis.**
- **Staff being told to produce a Doctor's Certificate on the first day of sickness.**
- **Managers asking for details of the medication prescribed by the Doctor.**
- **Managers ringing staff back to ensure that they have remained at home.**

LTU does not support the small minority of staff who abuse sick leave entitlements, and therefore their colleagues, and we understand the need for reasonable control and monitoring of absence.

INSIDE

Emergency & Compassionate Leave & Time Off For Personal Reasons

Your Rights Explained

However, performance pressures have led an equally small minority of Managers to go too far in their efforts to reduce absences.

LTU Advice

It is important that members understand their rights when off work due to sickness. Set out below therefore are some of the most common instances of unacceptable management practices we have had to deal with, and our advice to members.

- **The requirement for staff to telephone their Manager on a daily basis.**

Such action has never been acceptable or justifiable and this is reflected appropriately in the Guidelines agreed between LTU and the Bank.

What is required of staff is that, where possible, on the first day of absence they should phone their Line Managers within 30 minutes of their

normal start time to report their absence. During those conversations they should establish with their Managers their expected length of absence and, if necessary, when the next contact will be made. It is then unnecessary for the member of staff to be in contact with work again before that agreed time.

- **Staff being required to provide a Doctor's Certificate on their first day sickness.**

The Bank's Policy quite clearly states that staff who are off work for less than a week can Self-Certify themselves up to a period of seven days. Only where the period of illness is likely to exceed a week must staff consult a Doctor and obtain a Doctor's Certificate.

Many Doctors faced with such requests have been refusing to issue a Certificate unless the member of staff pays for it. That the Bank generally agrees to reimburse this cost is irrelevant. Clearly Doctors have more important issues to deal with, and have patients in greater need of their time.

Simple common sense tells us that the inconvenience caused to the member of staff having to make a special journey to the Surgery is hardly likely to aid their recovery.

- **Staff being asked for details of the specific medication prescribed by their Doctors.**

This practice has been on the increase in recent months, although there was never any provision in the Guidelines for it. Such behaviour is wholly inappropriate and is nothing short of harassment. Staff categorically do not have to give the Bank details of any medication prescribed by a Doctor.

- **Staff being criticised for being seen outside their home whilst off work.**

Clearly some activities are inappropriate for staff who have been signed off sick, but normal day to day activities such as shopping and taking reasonable exercise would not normally fall into that category. Being signed off work by the

Doctor means that staff have been certified as being medically unfit for work. It does not mean that staff are obliged to stay at home in bed.

- **Telephone calls from Managers to the Member of staff at home.**

In some areas of the Bank it appears to have become standard practice for the Manager to ring the member of staff back to ensure that they are at home. There is no provision for this in the Guidelines and it is tantamount to harassment.

For Managers to be contacting the member of staff to ascertain when they are likely to return to work is also unacceptable and, according to the Bank's own guidance, "..... will rarely be appropriate."

- **Staff being called into work in spite of having been signed off by their Doctor.**

Staff who are signed off sick by their Doctors have been certified as unfit for work. They should not therefore attend work in any capacity until their sick notes expire or they are otherwise medically certified as fit to return. To do so could run the risk of passing on any infections to other staff and of jeopardising their own full recovery from illness.

- **Staff being 'grilled' on their return to work.**

The purpose of 'return to work interviews' is to establish that individuals are indeed fit and well enough to return to work. In addition staff should be updated on anything they may have missed whilst they were off. Such meetings should not degenerate into a detailed question and answer session over the medical condition from which they were suffering.

Line Managers should not attempt to make any sort of medical diagnosis or counsel staff and should balance their concern for the business with concern for the wellbeing of the member of staff.

LTU's 24 Hour Advice Line

Of course, this list of inappropriate behaviour by no means represents a definitive list of the problems encountered by members. For further advice or assistance on this, or any matter, members should phone the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 to speak to a full time Official for independent, professional advice and assistance.

Compassionate & Emergency Leave

The Emergency & Compassionate Leave Policy LTU negotiated with the Bank has been the subject of discussions recently because it is clear that the policy is still inconsistently understood and applied. It is worth reiterating therefore the Bank's policy and providing some practical examples of how it should be applied.

As well as Compassionate and Emergency Leave I will also look at the separate rules governing time off for what the Bank describes as "doctors', dentists' and other appointments of a personal nature".

UK legislation requires employers to give time to their staff to look after their dependants. The Bank's Compassionate and Emergency Leave policy, which is designed to meet the requirements of legislation but which goes much further than the legislation demands, also fits in with the Bank's aim of helping staff maintain a sensible work / life balance.

When is time off allowed?

In general the Bank allows paid (and unpaid) time off for compassionate or emergency situations which arise in relation to either dependants or family members. Examples of what the Bank itself believes should be included as reasons for granting time off under this rule include;

- **Your child is too ill to go nursery and alternative childcare arrangements cannot be made until the next day**
- **An elderly neighbour who lives alone breaks his leg and you are closest on hand at the time**
- **A family bereavement occurs and you need to attend the funeral or help with funeral arrangements**
- **Your elderly mother is rushed to hospital after injuring herself and you need to go and discuss treatment with the hospital staff.**

Clearly this list is not exhaustive and other similar situations will arise which will require time off at short notice. The policy also provides wide scope for interpretation of what the Bank views both as dependants as well as family members.

- **Dependants include not only close family members but also other people who may rely on you in an emergency situation.**
- **Family members are stated as including wider family such as cousins, aunts and uncles.**

Bank policy, therefore, is wide ranging and should cover most situations where time off is required at short notice or for compassionate reasons.

What time off is allowed?

Bank policy goes further than is required by legislation by allowing paid time off for compassionate and emergency leave. General guidance is that the first day or two should be paid. It is also important to understand that this is the first day or two on each occasion and is not added up during the year or the quarter or whatever. The Bank is also clear that if further time off is required in relation to the same event then this too should be allowed. For example, time off may be needed at the time of the death of a close relative; further time off will then normally be appropriate to arrange and/or attend the funeral.

Time off after the first day or two should be allowed when needed but may or may not be paid. After the initial emergency has been dealt