

Revised Sickness Absence Guidelines

Members will be aware that in recent Newsletters I have highlighted examples of inappropriate management behaviour regarding Sickness Absence, where agreed policies and procedures were being routinely ignored and abused by Managers.

In my newsletter to Members in October I reported that as a result of LTU action, Group Operations was in the process of reviewing its Sickness Absence practices. This review sought to address the sort of issues highlighted by LTU such as: staff off ill having to ring in on a daily basis; staff being told to produce a Doctor's Certificate on the first day of sickness and Managers ringing staff back to ensure that they remained at home.

This work has now been completed and Group Operations will later this week provide revised Guidelines to Managers.

These Guidelines are fully consistent with the Bank's main Policy on Sickness Absence agreed with LTU three years ago to ensure the proper and consistent treatment of staff but recognise the different working environment in which

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Group Operations staff work, compared to other areas in the Bank.

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. However we want also to stop the equally small minority of Managers who go too far in their efforts to reduce absences. Accordingly we have given our backing to these new guidelines.

Nevertheless, the advice I provided previously remains valid and is reiterated within this Newsletter, together with some other key safeguards that are to be spelled out to Line Managers in Group Operations.

Sickness Absence - Your Rights

Below are some of the most common instances of unacceptable Management practices we have had to deal with and our advice to Members.

- **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 behaviour and is nothing short of harassment.

I am pleased to report that the revised Group Operations Guidelines spell out that this information must not be requested or discussed.

- **The requirement for staff off sick to telephone their Managers 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, they should phone their Line Managers within 30 minutes of their normal start times 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 should be made. It is then unnecessary for the member of staff to be in contact with work again before that agreed time.

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

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 a full recovery from illness.

- **Staff being required to provide Doctors' Certificates on their first day of sickness.**

The revised Group Operations 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 absence 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 has generally agreed 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 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 members of staff are obliged to stay at home in bed.

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

In some areas of Group Operations, 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 contact members of staff to ascertain when they are likely to return to work is also almost certain to be unacceptable and, according to the Bank's own guidance, "..... will rarely be appropriate."

There is no provision in the Guidelines for a Line Manager to telephone a member of staff at home, provided the member of staff has;

fulfilled the requirement to, where possible, phone their Line Managers within 30 minutes of their normal start time to report their absence and

established with their Managers their expected length of absence and when the next contact should be made.

It is then unnecessary for the member of staff to contact, or be contacted by, a Manager again before that agreed time.

- **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 interviews should not degenerate into a detailed question and answer session over the medical condition from which they were suffering.

The revised guidelines re-affirm that Line Managers should not attempt to make any sort of medical diagnoses or counsel staff and that they 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 catalogue of inappropriate behaviour is by no means 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.

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