

12 MARCH 2004

Registrars

RRP - Formal (Paid) Rest Breaks Agreed

In November I outlined a number of issues that needed to be addressed as part of the introduction of RRP. Among them was the need for a formal system of rest breaks once staff were working totally with screen based information.

The case for paid rest breaks was strong;

- Elsewhere in the Bank, the Bank's own research had shown that such Formal Rest Break arrangements actually increase - not decrease - productivity since staff are less tired and jaded late into their work session.
- Sickness absence rates had been seen to fall.
- Working without proper breaks can lead to a range of health problems.

LTU has now agreed rest break standards with the Bank that will apply to staff as they move onto Workflow. The Registrars Rest Break Policy will initially involve two variations both of which will ensure that staff have regular and sufficient breaks away from the screen and keyboard to rest their eyes and hands. Once feedback has been received a preferred method will be chosen.

The two options to be piloted will be:

- **two paid 15 minute breaks per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon (adjusted pro-rata for reduced hours staff and staff working a compressed working week).** These breaks will be staggered, and cannot be taken within an hour of starting work or less than one and a quarter hours

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before either the lunch hour or the end of the normal working day.

- **one paid 5 minute break each hour.** These breaks, also staggered, cannot be taken within an hour of starting or finishing work.

Members should note that, whilst staff are encouraged to visit the toilet or collect drinks during these breaks, they are not restricted to doing so during these breaks and are allowed to visit the toilet and must have regular access to drinks at other times.

Registrars will be creating new easily accessible Rest Break areas, such as on the 1st Floor at The Causeway. Informal meetings in these areas should be avoided and are to be discouraged.

We welcome the Bank's constructive response on this issue, and to seek the views of staff on the sort of arrangements they prefer. I will keep members informed of developments.

Sickness Absence Management

Members will be aware that in recent years LTU has sought to address a culture of unacceptable management practices and behaviours across 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.**

Obviously we do not support the small minority of staff who abuse. Equally we understand the need for reasonable control and monitoring of absence but the rights of the vast majority of staff need proper protection. However, performance pressures have led an equally small minority of Managers to go too far in their efforts to reduce absences from work.

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 appropriately 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 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 Registrars, 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 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 sessions 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.

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