

Introducing the new Attendance Agreement



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Foreword

We are pleased to be jointly launching the new Attendance Agreement across the Royal Mail Group.

The Attendance Agreement aims to support employees in achieving and maintaining consistently good levels of attendance.

Managing attendance is and always will be important. We have to meet demanding customer expectations of a regular, reliable service and we want to do this in a way that treats each and every employee as we ourselves would like to be treated. We therefore have a policy that applies across the whole company and a clear set of guidelines on how best to manage the new approach in a fair and consistent way.

These guidelines have been developed jointly by Royal Mail, CWU and Unite and can be found alongside the agreements and policy in this booklet as well as on the Policy & Information pages of the PSP website. You will also find some Q&As at the back of the booklet.

We hope you find this booklet helpful as you jointly deploy the new approach to managing attendance; we are convinced that it will bring significant benefits for both the business and those who work in it.



Peter Walls

Director Employee/
Industrial Relations
Royal Mail Group



Brian Scott

Unite/CMA Officer



Ray Ellis

Assistant Secretary
CWU

National Attendance Agreement between Royal Mail Group and CWU

Purpose

This Agreement sets out a new approach to managing attendance in the Royal Mail Group. Its aim is to support employees in achieving and maintaining a consistently good level of attendance by using Welcome Back meetings, informal and formal reviews and by outlining and encouraging understanding of clear standards. This Agreement has been jointly developed as part of a review of procedures with the objective of making Royal Mail Group a better place to work.

Scope

This Agreement applies to all employees in CWU represented grades working for Royal Mail Group Ltd, with the exception of employees working for Post Office Limited, who should refer to their own agreement. This Agreement does not apply to agency staff, contractors or self-employed workers.

This Agreement supersedes the former attendance agreements in Royal Mail Letters, Parcelforce, Customer Management and Logistics.

General points

- Employees should make every effort to meet the attendance standards
- Employees will be treated with dignity and respect and their attendance record considered on an individual basis, taking into account previous attendance history and any mitigating factors
- Employees will be provided with advice and support to help them meet the standards
- All sickness absences are assumed to be genuine and should be discussed between the employee and the manager on return to work
- Where an employee's attendance is becoming a cause of concern, an informal discussion should normally take place to identify and address any issues
- Where there has been no improvement following informal discussion the manager will consider whether to arrange an interview under the formal procedure
- The formal procedure has three stages: two reviews and, in the absence of an improvement, consideration of dismissal
- Employees will receive sick pay in line with the provisions set out in the Sick Pay Policy
- Where an employee's capability is affected by their health to the extent they can no longer undertake their normal role, Royal Mail will work with the employee to identify a suitable alternative role wherever possible
- Managers will consider whether job modifications are possible and appropriate in order to secure an earlier return to work
- Absences which result from accidents on duty will normally be discounted when deciding whether the attendance standards have been reached or maintained. Such absences will still be reviewed on return to work
- Absences arising from disability will normally be discounted when deciding whether the standards have been met
- Absences arising from maternity including miscarriage will also be discounted when assessing against the standards
- Part day absences will not normally be considered. If the number of part day absences has become excessive, the matter will be discussed with the employee in line with the principles of this procedure. Further part day absences may be counted against the attendance standards, following written notice in advance
- A request by an employee for an interview with a manager of the same sex at informal or formal review meetings will be treated sympathetically
- Occupational health advice will be sought as appropriate to assist managers in making decisions
- The importance of maintaining confidentiality is reaffirmed in this Agreement. Personal information will only be shared with the consent of the employee concerned and on a strictly need to know basis.

Notifying absence and maintaining contact

- Employees will advise of their absence before the commencement of the shift in accordance with the arrangements set out for their office
- Discussion will cover the reason for absence, likely duration and anticipated return date and any support which Royal Mail may be able to offer
- The employee and manager should seek to agree an appropriate time and date for reviewing together all but very short absences

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- Employees need to provide a self certificate for the first seven days of absence and a medical certificate for any absence over seven days
- The aim of maintaining contact during an absence is to encourage an early return to work wherever possible
- In the rare event that contact is not maintained following the expiry of a 'Fit Note', the manager should make reasonable efforts to make contact including sending contact letters by Special Delivery and First Class post. If the employee does not make contact, he or she will be given two days' written notice before any suspension of sick pay.

Welcome back meeting

- Following any period of absence, an informal Welcome Back meeting will be held between the employee and their manager, ideally on the first day back
- The purpose of the meeting is to:
 - Acknowledge the employee's return and show that his or her attendance is valued
 - Enable the employee to air any concerns and to see if help can be given to encourage regular attendance
 - Discuss the reason for the absence
 - Offer any support Royal Mail can provide
 - Ensure that the employee is fit for work
 - Ensure that the absence is properly certificated
 - Discuss if appropriate whether re-occurrence of absence is likely
- This discussion should be sympathetic and supportive
- If it is felt that there is an underlying health issue which has not been previously identified, the manager should consider a referral to the Occupational Health Service.

Informal review discussion

Informal review discussions may take place at any time before the formal procedure where there is concern about an employee's attendance. Within the formal procedure the manager may decide it is appropriate to undertake additional informal review discussions. An employee may ask for such a discussion at any time.

The aim is to make the employee aware of the reason for concern, ensure that the employee is aware of the attendance standards and identify any steps that the employee or company may take to help produce an immediate and sustained improvement. In advising an employee of an imminent informal review discussion, managers will explain its purpose and give him or her sufficient time to prepare for it, including consulting their union representative. The manager will provide a copy of the employee's attendance record at the meeting.

An informal review discussion might include consideration of:

- The causes, frequency, duration and pattern of absences
- Nature of work, shift system, recent changes to the demands of the job, work record and length of service
- Significant underlying health issues such as recent return from long term absence, recent or imminent hospitalisation, or problems at or outside work
- A reminder of the services of the Occupational Health Service and provision of contact numbers
- Action to be taken by the employee or the business including any rehabilitation measures, which might include retraining
- The prospects of improvement
- A reminder of the attendance standards and potential implications of not meeting them.

The approach to the informal review discussion should be both sympathetic and supportive, and also clearly focused on achieving improvement and maintaining standards. The manager and the employee will jointly identify any support measures that may need to be considered.

The attendance standards – short term

The attendance standards are at Annex 1.

Applying the attendance standards

Employees on 2nd Review who do better than the standard required with no more than one absence of four days or less will come off the formal procedure.

Employees on 2nd Review who otherwise meet the standard revert to 1st Review.

Employees who do not meet the standard on 2nd Review may be considered for dismissal. If they are not dismissed, they may be issued with a new Review 2.

Attendance Review meetings

When, despite previous measures as described above, attendance does not meet the required standards and taking individual circumstances into account, consideration will be given to arranging a formal meeting between the employee and their manager.

The purpose is to consider the overall attendance performance and any underlying causes. It aims to encourage employees to achieve the standard. If the manager decides that a formal meeting is unnecessary, the employee should be informed and reminded of the attendance standards that are expected.

Employees may be accompanied at the formal meeting by the relevant union representative or a work colleague.

If the employee is away on a further absence and does not attend for a review meeting, it will be rescheduled. If the employee is still unable to attend, the manager may decide to progress the case without a face to face

review, in which case the opportunity to raise any issues in writing must be provided.

A minimum of three working days written notice will be provided, which will include a copy of the employee's absence record, copy of any available Occupational Health reports and any other documentation which will form part of the decision making process.

All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the attendance discussion for that review. At this meeting the manager will outline the attendance record and ensure that the employee understands that the standard has not been achieved. The manager will explore with the employee ways in which attendance might be improved. The employee will have the opportunity both to raise any issues verbally and to record them in writing. If an underlying health condition emerges a referral to OHS should be considered.

Following the review meeting the manager will reflect before making a decision whether to issue a formal notification or not. Each case must be treated on its merits. Everything the employee has said by way of explanation for their attendance record must be taken into account along with the previous record, overall performance and reliability. The employee will be advised in writing of the decision and the standard expected in future.

Consideration of dismissal

After a second review, if the standards are again not met the employee will be invited to a meeting with their second line manager to discuss continued employment.

Employees will be provided with a minimum of five working days written notice of the meeting, along with details of their attendance record, copy of an up to date OHS report and any other documentation which will be considered as part of the decision making process. All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the meeting.

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The manager with authority to dismiss will discuss with the employee why the attendance remains poor and the employee will be given the opportunity to put forward reasons why dismissal should not take place.

At the end of the meeting the manager will reflect on what has been discussed and all the issues and factors the employee has raised, together with the employee's overall record. In deciding whether or not to dismiss, the manager will assess the likelihood of an improvement in attendance if employment continues.

Where a decision is taken to dismiss, the employee should be notified of their right to an appeal. If the employee is not dismissed they may remain under review at Attendance Review 2. The employee will be advised in writing of the decision and the standard required.

Appeal

Employees wishing to appeal a dismissal decision should tell the manager who imposed the penalty within three working days of the written notification. A hearing with an independent appeal manager from HR Services will be arranged within four weeks, and the employee will be given a minimum of five days written notice of the time and place.

Employees can be accompanied by a fellow work colleague, an official employee of a trade union, or a trade union representative.

Long term absence

This applies when an employee is absent from work for more than 14 days. It can also apply when repeated absences are due to a significant underlying health issue. The aim is to enable a return to normal work activities at the earliest opportunity or, if that is not possible, to find an alternative outcome.

Contact between the absent employee and the manager will have been established during the first two weeks of the absence. It is vital that

this continues as the absence extends beyond 14 days. Contact should normally be weekly.

Involvement of the relevant CWU representative can be helpful in maintaining contact and to resolving cases promptly: it is recognised that early resolution is beneficial to employees' well being. With the agreement of the employee, the CWU representative should be involved in absence review meetings and other activity intended to facilitate an early return to work.

Long term absence review meetings

At specific points in an ongoing absence, the manager will meet with the employee and, if the employee wishes, their representative to review the situation and clarify the next steps. The employee will be encouraged and supported to return to work as soon as practicable. A return to work plan will be agreed with the objective of enabling a return to full duties as quickly as possible. This may include short term work modifications when these are necessary and will normally last for between one and four weeks, but may continue beyond this period where appropriate. The employee's progress will be monitored by the manager and discussed with the employee and where the employee wishes their representative.

To achieve timely resolution both Royal Mail and CWU aim to see absences resolved in line with these timescales:

Day 28 review

- By this stage of the absence the employee and manager should have met face to face, if at all possible. Discussion should focus on any support that can be provided to help a return to work as early as possible. If not completed earlier, a referral for Occupational Health advice should normally be arranged at this point, unless an early return to work is anticipated.

Week 12 review

- A meeting should take place at this point to review the continuing absence and draw together the issues covered in previous contact and advice received from the Occupational Health Services. It should be face to face if possible. The purpose is to review the likelihood of an early return to work and any help necessary to support this. If at this point there is no prospect of an early return to work, the manager should request an update from Occupational Health on the prognosis.

Week 22 review

- For this meeting the fullest possible information will be made available. The purpose of this review is to consider the options available for the manager in taking decisions about the future employment of the employee. The aim is to resolve the majority of cases by this point.

Any employee who, notwithstanding the above, remains on continuing long term sick absence for more than 6 months, will continue to have regular reviews.

Alternatives to a return to normal role

If return to the normal role is not possible, then alternatives will be considered;

Permanent job modifications

When the employee is likely to be considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010, reasonable adjustments will be considered to enable the employee to continue in their role.

Redeployment

Redeployment to a different role or to a different location must be considered where the employee cannot continue working in their existing role due to a health issue. When a decision to look for redeployment has been made, suitable roles will be sought across the employee's home business unit or area and

then across the wider Royal Mail Group. These searches will normally be concluded within four weeks.

Leaving the business

Where a permanent job modification or redeployment is not possible, a discussion will take place to resolve the matter in line with the approach set out in the Managing Employees with Long Term Ill Health Agreement with, in appropriate cases, either a lump sum payment, or where OHS advise accordingly, early retirement with pension.

Appeal

Employees wishing to appeal against an ill health retirement or adjusted/alternative work decision should tell the manager who imposed the penalty within five working days of the written notification. A hearing will normally be arranged within four weeks, and the employee will be given five days notice of the time and place. Employees can be accompanied by a fellow work colleague, or a trade union representative.

The specific appeal route is set out in the *Managing Employees with Long Term Ill Health Agreement*.

Application of agreement

Any issues regarding the interpretation and/or application of the attendance agreement will be forwarded to the signatories of the agreement for resolution.

New Attendance Agreement

Review of agreement

The application of the approaches set out in this agreement, and the impact they have in ensuring good attendance and timely resumption to work will be subject to ongoing joint review both locally, at regional/divisional level and nationally.

Additionally both parties agree to review this agreement six months after its introduction.



Ray Ellis
CWU



Peter Walls
Royal Mail Group

Annex 1

Attendance standards

The standards expected vary depending on whether the employee is on trial or not and whether they have already come under notice of review.

All employees (except triallists)	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	4 absences or 14 days in a 12 month period
Attendance Review 2 prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an attendance review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

Triallists	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	2 absences or 7 days in 6 months
Attendance Review 2 prompt	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

No employee on trial should have his/her appointment confirmed whilst under an Attendance Review.

National Attendance Agreement between Royal Mail Group and Unite-CMA

Purpose

This agreement sets out a new approach to managing attendance in Royal Mail Group. Its aim is to support employees in achieving and maintaining a consistently good level of attendance by using Welcome Back meetings, informal and formal reviews and by outlining and encouraging understanding of clear standards. This Agreement has been jointly developed as part of a review of procedures with the objective of making Royal Mail Group a better place to work.

Scope

This agreement applies to all managers working for Royal Mail Group Ltd, with the exception of employees working for Post Office Limited, who should refer to their own agreement. This agreement also does not apply to agency staff, contractors or self-employed workers.

This agreement supersedes the former attendance agreements in Royal Mail Letters, Parcelforce, Customer Management and Logistics.

General points

- Employees should make every effort to meet the attendance standards
- Employees will be treated with dignity and respect and their attendance record considered on an individual basis, taking into account previous attendance history and any mitigating factors
- Employees will be provided with advice and support to help them meet the standards
- All sickness absences are assumed to be genuine and should be discussed between the employee and their manager on return to work
- Where an employee's absence is of concern, an informal discussion should normally take place to identify and address any issues
- Where there has been no improvement following informal discussion the manager will consider whether to arrange an interview under the formal procedure
- The formal procedure has three stages: two reviews and, in the absence of an improvement, consideration of dismissal
- Employees will receive sick pay in line with the provisions set out in the Sick Pay policy
- Where an employee's capability is affected by their health to the extent they can no longer undertake their normal role, Royal Mail will work with the employee to identify a suitable alternative role wherever possible
- Managers will consider whether job modifications are possible and appropriate in order to secure an earlier return to work
- Absences which result from accidents on duty will normally be discounted when deciding whether the attendance standards have been reached or maintained. Such absences will still be reviewed on return to work
- Absences arising from disability will normally be discounted when deciding whether the standards have been met
- Absences arising from maternity, including miscarriage will also be discounted when assessing against the standards
- Part day absences will not normally be considered. If the number of part day absences has become excessive, the matter will be discussed with the employee in line with the principles of this procedure. Further part day absences may be counted against the attendance standards, following written notice in advance
- A request by an employee for an interview with a manager of the same sex at informal or formal review meetings will be arranged wherever practicable
- Occupational Health advice will be sought as appropriate to assist managers in making decisions
- The importance of maintaining confidentiality is reaffirmed in this Agreement. Personal information will only be shared with the consent of the employee concerned and on a strictly need to know basis.

Notifying absence and maintaining contact

- Employees will advise of their absence before the commencement of their attendance in accordance with the arrangements set out for their office
- Discussion will cover the reason for absence, likely duration and anticipated return date and any support which Royal Mail may be able to offer
- The employee and their manager should seek to agree an appropriate time and date for reviewing together all but very short absences

National Attendance Agreement between Royal Mail Group and Unite-CMA

- Employees need to provide a self certificate for the first seven days of absence and a medical certificate for any absence over seven days
- The aim of maintaining contact during an absence is to encourage an early return to work wherever possible
- In the rare event that contact is not maintained following the expiry of a 'Fit Note', he or she will be given two days' written notice before any suspension of sick pay.

Welcome back meeting

- Following any period of absence, an informal Welcome Back meeting will be held between the employee and their manager, ideally on the first day back
- The purpose of the meeting is to:
 - Acknowledge the employee's return and show that his or her attendance is valued
 - Enable the employee to air any concerns and to see if help can be given to encourage regular attendance
 - Discuss the reason for the absence
 - Offer any support Royal Mail can provide
 - Ensure that the employee is fit for work
 - Ensure that the absence is properly certificated
 - Discuss if appropriate whether re-occurrence of absence is likely
- This discussion should be sympathetic and supportive
- If it is felt that there is an underlying health issue which has not been previously identified, the manager should consider a referral to the Occupational Health Service.

Informal review discussion

Informal review discussions may take place at any time before the formal procedure where there is concern about an employee's attendance. Within the formal procedure

the manager may decide it is appropriate to undertake additional informal review discussions. An employee may ask for such a discussion at any time.

The aim is to make the employee aware of the reason for concern, ensure that the employee is aware of the attendance standards and identify any steps that the employee or company may take to help produce an immediate and sustained improvement.

In advising an employee of an imminent informal review discussion, their manager will explain its purpose and give him or her sufficient time to prepare for it, including consulting their union representative. The manager will provide a copy of the employee's attendance record at or before the meeting.

An informal review discussion might include consideration of:

- The causes, frequency, duration and pattern of absences
- Nature of work, shift system, recent changes to the demands of the job, work record and length of service
- Significant underlying health issues such as recent return from long term absence, recent or imminent hospitalisation, or other problems at or outside work
- A reminder of the services of the Occupational Health service and provision of contact numbers
- Action to be taken by the employee or the business including any rehabilitation measures, which might include retraining
- The prospects of improvement
- A reminder of the attendance standards and potential implications of not meeting them.

The approach to the informal review discussion should be both sympathetic and supportive, and also clearly focused on achieving improvement

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and maintaining standards. The manager and the employee will jointly identify any support measures that may need to be considered.

The attendance standards – short term

The attendance standards are at Annex 1.

Applying the attendance standards

Employees on 2nd Review who do better than the standard required with no more than one absence of four days or less will come off the formal procedure.

Employees on 2nd Review who otherwise meet the standard revert to 1st review.

Employees who do not meet the standard on 2nd Review may be considered for dismissal. If they are not dismissed, they may be issued with a new Review 2.

Attendance Review meetings

When, despite previous measures as described above, attendance does not meet the required standards and taking individual circumstances into account, consideration will be given to arranging a formal meeting between the employee and their manager.

The purpose is to consider the overall attendance performance and any underlying causes. It aims to encourage employees to achieve the standard as set out in Annex 1. If the manager decides that a formal meeting is unnecessary, the employee should be informed and reminded of the attendance standards that are expected.

Employees may be accompanied at the formal meeting by the relevant union representative or a work colleague. If the employee is away on a further absence and does not attend for a review meeting, it will be rescheduled. If the employee is still unable to attend, their manager may decide to progress the case without a face to face review, in which case the opportunity to raise any issues in writing must be provided.

A minimum of three working days written notice will be provided, which will include a copy of the employee's absence record, copy of any available Occupational Health reports and any other documentation which will form part of the decision making process.

All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the attendance discussion for that review.

At this meeting the line manager will outline the attendance record and ensure that the employee understands that the standard has not been achieved. The manager will explore with the employee ways in which attendance might be improved. The employee will have the opportunity both to raise any issues verbally and to record them in writing. If an underlying health condition emerges a referral to OHS should be considered.

Following the review meeting the manager will reflect before making a decision whether to issue a formal notification or not. Each case must be treated on its merits. Everything the employee has said by way of explanation for their attendance record must be taken into account along with the previous record, overall performance and reliability. The employee will be advised in writing of the decision and the standard expected in future.

Consideration of dismissal

After second review, if the standards are again not met the employee will be invited to a meeting with their second line manager to discuss continued employment.

Employees will be provided with a minimum of five working days written notice of the meeting, along with details of their attendance record, copy of an up to date OHS report and any other documentation which will be considered as part of the decision making process. All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the meeting.

The manager with authority to dismiss will discuss with the employee why the attendance remains poor and the employee will be given the opportunity to put forward reasons why dismissal should not take place.

At the end of the meeting the manager will reflect on what has been discussed and all the issues and factors the employee has raised, together with the employee's overall record. In deciding whether or not to dismiss the manager will assess the likelihood of an improvement in attendance if employment continues.

Where a decision is taken to dismiss, the employee should be notified of their right to an appeal. If the employee is not dismissed they may remain under review at Attendance Review 2. The employee will be advised in writing of the decision and the standard required.

Appeal

Employees wishing to appeal a dismissal decision should tell the manager who imposed the penalty within three working days of the written notification. A hearing with an independent appeal manager from HR Services will be arranged within four weeks, and the employee will be given a minimum of five days written notice of the time and place.

Employees can be accompanied by a fellow work colleague, an official employee of a trade union, or a trade union representative.

Long term absence

This applies when an employee is absent from work for more than 14 days. It can also apply when repeated absences are due to a significant underlying health issue. The aim is to enable a return to normal work activities at the earliest opportunity or, if that is not possible, to find an alternative outcome.

Contact between the absent employee and the line manager will have been established during the first two weeks of the absence. It is vital that this continues as the absence extends beyond 14 days. Contact should normally be weekly.

Involvement of the relevant Unite representative can be helpful in maintaining contact and to resolving cases promptly: it is recognised that early resolution is beneficial to employees' well being. With the agreement of the employee, the Unite representative should be involved in absence review meetings and other activity intended to facilitate an early return to work.

Long term absence review meetings

At specific points in an ongoing absence, the manager will meet with the employee and, if the employee wishes, their representative to review the situation and clarify the next steps. The employee will be encouraged and supported to return to work as soon as practicable. A return to work plan will be agreed with the objective of enabling a return to full duties as quickly as possible. This may include short term work modifications when these are necessary and will normally last for between one and four weeks, but may continue beyond this period where appropriate. The employee's progress will be monitored by the manager and discussed with the employee and where the employee wishes their representative.

To achieve timely resolution the intention is to resolve absences in line with these timescales:

Day 28 review

- By this stage of the absence the employee and manager should have met face to face, if reasonably practical in the circumstances. Discussion should focus on any support that can be provided to help a return to work as early as possible. If not completed earlier, a referral for Occupational Health advice should normally be arranged at this point, unless an early return to work is anticipated.

Week 12 review

- A meeting should take place at this point to review the continuing absence and draw together the issues covered in previous contact and advice received from the Occupational Health Services. It should be face to face if possible. The purpose is to review the likelihood of an early return to work and any help necessary to support this. If at this point there is no prospect of an early return to work, the manager should request an update from Occupational Health on the prognosis.

Week 22 review

- For this meeting the fullest possible information will be made available. The purpose of this review is to consider the options available for the manager in taking decisions about the future employment of the employee. The aim is to resolve the majority of cases by this point.

Any employee who, notwithstanding the above, remains on continuing long term sick absence for more than six months, will continue to have regular reviews.

Alternatives to a return to normal role

If return to the normal role is not possible, then alternatives will be considered;

Permanent job modifications

When the employee is likely to be considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010, reasonable adjustments will be considered to enable the employee to continue in their role.

Redeployment

Redeployment to a different role or to a different location must be considered where the employee cannot continue working in their existing role due to a health issue. When a decision to look for redeployment has been made, suitable roles will be sought across the employee's home business unit or area and

then across the wider Royal Mail Group. These searches will normally be concluded within four weeks.

Leaving the business

Where a permanent job modification or redeployment is not possible, a discussion will take place to resolve the matter in line with the approach set out in the Managing Employees with Long Term Ill Health Agreement with, in appropriate cases, either a lump sum payment, or where OHS advise accordingly, early retirement with pension.

Appeal

Employees wishing to appeal against an ill health retirement or adjusted/alternative work decision should tell the manager who imposed the penalty within five working days of the written notification. A hearing will normally be arranged within four weeks, and the employee will be given five days notice of the time and place. Employees can be accompanied by a fellow work colleague, or a trade union representative.

The specific appeal route is set out in the Managing Employees with Long Term Ill Health Agreement.

Application of agreement

Any issues regarding the interpretation and/or application of the attendance agreement will be forwarded to the signatories of the agreement for resolution.

National Attendance Agreement between Royal Mail Group and Unite-CMA

Review of agreement

The application of the approaches set out in this agreement, and the impact they have in ensuring good attendance and timely resumption to work will be subject to ongoing joint review both locally, at regional/divisional level and nationally.

Additionally both parties agree to review this agreement six months after its introduction.



Brian Scott
Unite/CMA Officer



Peter Walls
Royal Mail Group

Annex 1

Attendance standards

The standards expected vary depending on whether the employee is on trial or not and whether they have already come under notice of review.

All employees (except those on trial)	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	4 absences or 14 days in a 12 month period
Attendance Review 2 prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an Attendance Review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

Employees on trial	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	2 absences or 7 days in 6 months
Attendance Review 2 prompt	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

No employee on trial should have his/her appointment confirmed whilst under an attendance review.

Attendance Policy

This policy outlines our approach to supporting employees to achieve and maintain consistently good levels of attendance.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees working for Royal Mail Group Ltd. This policy does not apply to agency staff, contractors or self-employed workers.

Employees working for Post Office Limited should refer to their own Attendance Policy.

'Royal Mail Group Ltd' will be referred to as 'Royal Mail Group'.

This policy does not form part of contracts of employment. Royal Mail Group reserves the right to amend this policy from time to time.

Purpose

This policy supports employees in achieving and maintaining a consistently good level of attendance. It applies to employees whose attendance is affected by ill health.

Agreement

In the event of any inconsistency between this policy, the attendance guides and the Attendance Agreement, the terms of the Attendance Agreement takes precedence.

Guiding principles

- Employees should make every effort to meet the attendance standards
- Employees will be treated with dignity and respect and their attendance record considered on an individual basis taking into account previous attendance history and any mitigating factors
- Employees will be provided with advice and support to help them meet the standards
- All sickness absences are assumed to be genuine and should be discussed between the employee and the manager on return to work
- Where an employee's attendance is becoming a cause of concern, an informal discussion should normally take place to identify and address any issues
- Where there has been no improvement following informal discussion the manager will consider whether to arrange a review meeting under the formal attendance process
- The formal attendance process has three stages: two reviews and, in the absence of an improvement, consideration of dismissal
- Employees who are absent due to illness will receive sick pay in line with the provisions set out in the *Sick Pay and Sick Pay Conditions Policy*
- Managers will consider whether job modifications are possible and appropriate in order to secure an earlier return to work
- Where an employee's capability is impacted by their health to the extent that they can no longer undertake their normal role, Royal Mail Group will work with the employee to identify a suitable alternative role wherever possible.
- Regular contact between the manager and the employee who is absent is vital and they should seek to agree an appropriate time and date for reviewing together all but very short absences
- The aim of maintaining contact during an absence is to encourage an early return to work wherever possible
- Following any period of absence, an informal welcome back meeting will be held between the employee and their manager, ideally on their first day back
- Employees need to provide an Absence Declaration form for the first seven days of absence and a medical certificate or fit note for any absence over seven days
- In the rare event that contact is not maintained following the expiry of a fit note, the employee will be given two days written notice before any suspension of sick pay
- Part-day absences will not normally be considered towards the formal process. If the number of part-day absences has become excessive, the matter will be discussed with the employee in line with the principles of the Attendance Agreement. Further part-day absences may be counted against the attendance standards, following advance written notice
- Absences which result from accidents at work will normally be discounted when deciding whether the attendance standards have been reached or maintained. Such absences will still be discussed at the welcome back meeting

In exceptional circumstances the manager may review the accident on duty related absence and decide that the absence should be considered under the formal attendance process. Further details can be found in the *Managing Short Term and Informal Absence Review Discussions Guide*

General points

- Employees should advise of their absence ideally before the beginning of their shift in accordance with the arrangements set out for their office if they are going to be absent from work due to illness

- Absences arising from disability will normally be discounted when deciding whether the standards have been met. Such absences will still be discussed at the welcome back meeting
In some circumstances where it is justifiable to do so, the manager may count the absence. Further details can be found in the *Managing Absence and Disability Guide*
- Absences arising from maternity, including miscarriage will be discounted when assessing against the standards. Such absences will still be discussed at the welcome back meeting
- Absences related to the medical process whilst an employee is undergoing gender re-assignment may be discounted when assessed against the standards. These absences will still be discussed at the welcome back meeting
- A request by an employee for an interview with a manager of the same sex at an informal or a formal review meeting will be treated sympathetically
- Occupational Health Service advice will be sought as appropriate to assist managers in making decisions
- Employees defined as disabled under the relevant legislation will be supported accordingly
- Personal information will be treated confidentially and will only be shared with the consent of the employee.

Attendance standards

The standards expected vary depending on whether the employee is on trial or not and whether they have already come under notice of review. For information on the attendance standards please refer to Annex 1.

Informal review discussions

Informal review discussions may take place at any time before the formal attendance process where there is concern about an employee's attendance. Within the formal attendance process the manager may decide it is appropriate to undertake additional informal review discussions. An employee may ask for such a discussion at any time.

The aim is to make the employee aware of the reason for concern, ensure that the employee is aware of the attendance standards and identify any steps that the employee or Royal Mail Group may take to help produce an immediate and sustained improvement.

In advising an employee of an informal review discussion, the manager will explain its purpose and give the employee sufficient time to prepare for it, including the opportunity for the employee to consult with their union representative. The manager will provide a copy of the employee's attendance record at the meeting.

An informal review discussion might include consideration of:

- The causes, frequency, duration and pattern of absences
- Nature of work, shift system, recent changes to the demands of the job, work record and length of service
- Significant underlying health issues such as recent return from long term absence, recent or imminent hospitalisation, or problems at or outside work
- A reminder of the services of the Occupational Health Service and provision of contact numbers
- Action to be taken by the employee or Royal Mail Group including any rehabilitation measures, which might include retraining
- The prospects of improvement
- A reminder of the attendance standards and potential implications of not meeting them.

The approach to the informal review discussion should be both sympathetic and supportive, and also clearly focused on achieving improvement and maintaining standards. The manager and the employee will jointly identify any support measures that may need to be considered.

Formal Attendance Review meetings

When, despite previous measures as described above, attendance does not meet the required standards and taking individual circumstances into account consideration will be given to

arranging a formal meeting between the employee and their manager.

The purpose of the meeting is to consider the overall attendance performance and any underlying causes. It aims to encourage employees to achieve the standards.

If the manager decides that a formal meeting is unnecessary, the employee should be informed in writing and if appropriate reminded of the attendance standards that are expected.

Employees may be accompanied by the relevant union representative or a work colleague.

The processes outlined below apply at both attendance reviews 1 and 2.

Process	Action
Arranging an Attendance Review meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will be given a minimum of three days written notice of the meeting, along with details of their attendance record, copy of any available Occupational Health Service reports and any other documents which will form part of the decision making process • All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the attendance review
Attendance Review meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this meeting the manager will outline the attendance record and ensure that the employee understands that the standard has not been achieved and why the standard is important • The manager will explore with the employee ways in which their attendance might be improved • The employee will have the opportunity to raise any issues, concerns or mitigating factors
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The manager may refer the employee to the Occupational Health Service if an underlying health condition is affecting the employee's ability to do their job • Following the review meeting, the manager will reflect before making a decision whether to issue a formal notification or not • Each case must be treated on its merits; the manager must consider everything, including what the employee discussed • The employee will be advised in writing of the decision and the standard expected in future

For further details refer to the *Attendance Review Meetings Guide*.

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Consideration of dismissal

After an attendance review 2, if the attendance standards are again not met, the employee will normally be invited to a meeting with their second line manager to discuss consideration of their dismissal.

Process	Action
Preparing for the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The original manager will prepare all the paperwork for the appropriate manager who must have the authority to dismiss • The manager may refer the employee to the Occupational Health Service if an underlying health condition is affecting the employee's ability to do their job.
Before the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will be given a minimum of five working days written notice of the meeting, details of their attendance record, any up to date Occupational Health Service reports and any other documents that will be considered as part of the decision making process • The employee should also be informed of their right to be accompanied by a union representative or work colleague • All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the consideration of dismissal meeting.
At the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The manager with authority to dismiss will discuss with the employee why the standards have not been met • The employee will be given the opportunity to put forward reasons why the standards have not been met and therefore why dismissal should not take place.
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of the meeting, the manager will reflect on what has been discussed, including all the issues and factors the employee has raised, any further investigation made, together with the employee's overall absence record including whether the employee is disabled or has an underlying medical condition • In deciding whether or not to dismiss, the manager will assess the likelihood of an improvement in attendance in the future • Where the employee is not dismissed, they will be issued with a new 2nd review and advised in writing of the decision and the standard required (or if appropriate advised on the decision taken if not a new 2nd review) • Where a decision is taken to dismiss, the employee should be advised in writing and notified of their right to an appeal.

For further information refer to the *Attendance – Consideration of Dismissal Guide*.

Right of appeal

Employees wishing to appeal against a dismissal decision should inform the manager who imposed the penalty, in writing within three working days of the written notification.

A hearing with an independent appeals manager from HR Services will be arranged within four weeks and the employee will be given a minimum of five days notice of the time and place. The independent appeals manager will normally communicate the decision prior to the employee's last day of service. The independent appeals manager may extend the notice period if more time is required by them to conclude the appeal.

Employees can be accompanied by a fellow work colleague, or a trade union representative.

For further information, refer to the *Attendance – Consideration of Dismissal Guide*.

Long term absence

This process will be followed when an employee is absent from work for more than 14 days. It can also apply when repeated absences are due to an ongoing health condition. The aim is to enable a return to normal work activities at the earliest opportunity or, if that is not possible, to find an alternative outcome.

Managing long term absence

General points which apply:

- Regular contact between the manager and employee is vital and requires the active participation of both parties
- Involvement of the relevant union representative can be helpful in maintaining contact and resolving cases promptly
- The aim is to encourage an early return to work as this is beneficial to both the employee and Royal Mail Group
- Occupational Health advice will be sought as appropriate to assist managers in making decisions

- Employees defined as disabled under the relevant legislation will be supported appropriately.

Long term absence review meetings

At specific points in an ongoing absence, the manager will meet with the employee to review the situation and clarify the next steps, these are:

- Day 28 absence review meeting
- Week 12 absence review meeting
- Week 22 absence review meeting

The employee will be encouraged and supported to return to work as soon as practicable.

The employee may wish to be accompanied by a colleague or union representative at these meetings.

A return to work plan may be agreed with the objective of enabling a return to full duties as quickly as possible. This may include short term work modifications and where these are necessary, they will normally last for between one and four weeks, but may continue beyond this period where appropriate.

Any employee, who remains on continuing long term sick absence for more than six months, will continue to have regular reviews and their manager should contact the HR Advice Centre for further guidance.

Further details can be found in the *Managing Long Term Absence Due to Ill Health Guide*.

Alternatives to a return to normal role

If a return to the normal role is not possible, then alternatives will be considered:

- Permanent job modifications
- Redeployment
- Leaving the business

For further information refer to the *Work Following Health Issues Guide*.

Annex 1

Attendance standards

The formal process consists of two reviews and consideration of dismissal.
The table below sets out the attendance standards required.

All employees (except triallists)	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	4 absences or 14 days in a 12 month period
Attendance Review 2 prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an Attendance Review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

Employees on 2nd review who do better than the standard required with no more than one absence of four days or less will come off the formal attendance process.

Employees on 2nd review with one absence of more than four days but less than ten will revert to 1st review and will remain on Review 1 for six months.

Employees who are on Attendance Review 2 and do not meet the attendance standards may be considered for dismissal. If they are not dismissed they may be issued with a new Attendance Review 2.

Triallists	
Attendance Review 1 prompt	2 absences or 7 days in 6 months
Attendance Review 2 prompt	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal	1 absence in the next 2 months following an Attendance Review 2 formal notification

Triallist employees on 2nd review who meet the standard required with no further absences at the end of the two month period will revert back to a 1st review for a further 2 months.

Triallist employees who are on Attendance Review 2 and do not meet the attendance standards may be considered for dismissal. If they are not dismissed, they may be issued with a new Attendance Review 2.

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Absence notification and maintaining contact guide

This guide sets out the process that employees must follow to report when they are absent from work due to illness and the approach managers should take to maintain contact with employees during these periods.

Overview

This guide provides information on both the process that employees must follow for notifying their manager when they are absent from work and on maintaining contact during periods of sickness absence.

It should be read in conjunction with the *Sick Pay and Sick Pay Conditions Policy* and the *Attendance Policy*.

Principles

Managers must ensure that employees are made aware of the appropriate absence reporting process for their workplace on joining Royal Mail Group as part of their induction, and when they move to a new work location or role within the business.

Employees must follow the appropriate absence notification process when they are absent due to illness, provide appropriate medical certificates in a timely manner and maintain contact with their manager throughout their absence.

Employees and managers should agree arrangements for maintaining contact during periods of absence. The purpose of the contact is to understand the issues, offer support and clarify the next steps. The discussions can be face to face or by telephone and will vary according to the length and nature of the absence.

Notifying absence and agreeing contact arrangements

Where an employee is unable to attend for work due to illness, they must notify their manager as soon as possible, before the beginning of their shift or usual work start time and in accordance with the local arrangements set out for their office or work location.

The employee should advise their manager of the reason for their absence, the likely duration and anticipated return date. There should also be a discussion between the manager and the employee about any support which Royal Mail Group may be able to offer, including any support that may be able to assist the employee in their return to work.

Where the employee's absence is going to be longer than a few days, the manager and employee should agree how they will maintain contact during the period of the absence, both the level of contact – how often, and the method e.g. email, telephone conversation. This is to ensure that managers are kept fully aware of the situation, can reallocate work and plan ahead where necessary.

Contact plan

Where the absence is longer term it is recommended that contact should be made on at least a weekly basis and that the manager and employee agree a contact plan

that should be maintained throughout the period of absence.

It is advisable to ensure that this plan is as detailed as possible, with agreed method and times of contact etc, so that both parties are prepared for these discussions. For example, it may be decided that telephone contact will be made twice a week as well as after any key events e.g. medical appointments. Employees should inform their manager of the dates of any medical appointments. Contact should be made by telephone or in person where practical to support ongoing discussions.

The manager should also remind the employee of the need to submit medical certificates at appropriate times during the absence.

Involving the relevant union representative can also be helpful in maintaining contact and to resolving cases promptly.

It is important that the manager and employee are both proactive in maintaining contact during period of absence due to illness. Contact should be used to discuss:

- How the employee is feeling
- Any change to the employee's expected return date
- The employee's health including any updates from medical appointments
- Any developments at work about which the employee should be made aware
- Any help or support that the manager can provide
- Whether referral to Occupational Health Service is appropriate.

Regular contact between the manager and the employee is beneficial to both parties. The employee is kept informed of developments in the workplace and more likely to remain motivated and engaged. The manager is more informed of the employee's progress and any additional support that can be offered. Managers should show sensitivity and empathy when maintaining contact with the employee.

Long term planned absence and the contact plan

Where the employee is going to be on long term absence that is planned in advance (for example, for an operation), the contact plan should be arranged in advance of the absence.

Contact letters

In addition to the regular conversations with the employee the manager may also send a contact letter; there are a number of contact letters which can be used at various stages of the employee's absence. These letters can be found on *Managing My Team on PSP* and the manager will automatically receive a prompt to complete this activity in their workflow.

Managers may wish to discuss these letters with the employee before sending them.

The local union representative has a role in facilitating this proactive approach by supporting and encouraging a two-way dialogue with the employee, with the employee's permission.

Recording absences

Once an employee has notified the manager that they will be absent due to illness, the manager should record the absence on *Managing My Team on PSP* (Enter/update absence). Once the absence is recorded, the manager will receive a prompt to produce and send the *Initial Contact Letter*. This letter provides the employee with details of any support available during their illness and explains their responsibilities during the absence. This letter should be sent to the employee where appropriate.

If the employee advises that the absence is due to an accident at work, the manager should also ensure that the accident has been reported through the Electronic Reporting of Incidents for Collation and Analysis (*ERICA*), the accident reporting system. This should be reported at the earliest opportunity.

What happens if the employee has to leave work early due to illness?

Where an employee has to leave work early due to illness, this will not normally be counted for the purposes of the formal attendance process however the part-day absence should still be recorded via *Managing My Team on PSP*. Please refer to the *Managing Short Term Absence and Informal Absence Review Discussions Guide* for further details on part-day absences.

Failure to maintain contact

What happens if the employee does not make contact and is absent?

Where an employee is absent and has not made contact with the manager, the manager should attempt to contact the employee. This should include several attempts before recording the absence as unauthorised. If contact is still not made then the manager should record the employee's absence as unauthorised via *Managing My Team on PSP* (enter/update absence). The manager will then be prompted to produce a *No Contact Letter*, which should be sent to the employee by Special Delivery and by First Class post. The manager should then follow the process contained within the *Unauthorised Absence Guide*.

What happens if an employee on long term absence fails to maintain contact or fails to provide a further medical certificate?

If an employee on long term sickness absence fails to maintain contact or fails to provide a further medical certificate, the manager should again make all reasonable efforts to make contact, including sending contact letters by Special Delivery and First Class post, ensuring that a record is kept of all the attempts to make contact.

If the employee does not make contact or fails to provide a further medical certificate, following written notification giving the employee two days notice, any sick pay they

may be entitled to from Royal Mail Group may be stopped.

Medical certificates

What type of medical certificate is required?

When an employee is absent from work due to illness they will need to produce certification for sick pay purposes as detailed in the table below:

Length of absence***	Type of certificate
Less than seven days or first seven days of illness*	Absence Declaration Form
More than seven days**	A Medical Certificate or 'Fit Note' from a registered doctor, usually the GP
Notes *Where the absence is longer than seven days the absence declaration form can be completed on return to work **If the employee is taken ill while abroad, certification from a registered doctor must be supplied on a weekly basis ***Absence is counted as continuous from the first day of absence until the employee returns to work and includes weekends and non-working days	

Absences of seven days or less

Where an employee's absence lasts for seven days or less, the manager should ask them to complete an Absence Declaration Form at the welcome back meeting.

Absences of more than seven days

Where an employee's absence lasts for more than seven days, they will need to provide a medical certificate, which can also be known as a 'Fit Note', to cover continuing absence until they return to work. This should be sent or given to the manager. The manager will record the information on *Managing My Team on PSP*.

Once the manager has recorded the appropriate information on *Managing My Team*

on *PSP* a prompt will be generated before the end date of the medical certificate, to remind the manager to discuss with the employee whether they intend to return to work at the end of the certification period, or whether they will be providing a further certificate. Where a further certificate is received, the manager should update the employee absence record on *Managing My Team on PSP*.

What happens if an employee's medical certificate expires?

If an employee's medical certificate expires, the employee does not attend work and has not provided a new one, please refer to the 'Failure to maintain contact' section above.

Offering support

When an employee notifies their manager that they are going to be absent due to illness, it is important for the manager to discuss with the employee if there is any support that Royal Mail Group could offer to the employee to help them during their period of illness and to assist their return to work as soon as possible.

The employee should also be reminded of the **HELP** helpline on **0800 6888 777** and the support that this can offer.

Absence that is not due to illness

There may be other circumstances besides illness where an employee is unable to attend for work. Please refer to the relevant policy and guide for further information.

Welcome back meetings guide

This guide outlines how to manage an employee who returns to work after an absence and sets out how and when a welcome back meeting should be held.

Overview

This is the guide on how to support employees who are returning to work after an absence in Royal Mail Group. It should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

When should a welcome back meeting take place?

Following any period of absence, a welcome back meeting will be held between the employee and their manager.

The discussion should always take place during the employee's first day back and where possible should be held within three hours of the start of their shift. It is very important that this discussion takes place and that both the manager and employee discuss the absence and the employee's overall wellbeing.

What is the purpose of a welcome back meeting?

The purpose of the welcome back meeting is to:

- Acknowledge the employee's return and show that their attendance is valued
- Enable the employee to raise any concerns and to see if help can be given to encourage regular attendance
- Ensure that the employee is fit to return to work
- Ensure that the absence is properly certificated and, where appropriate the employee should be asked to complete an *Absence Declaration Form*

- Discuss the reason for the absence and, if appropriate whether re-occurrence of the absence is likely
- Discuss whether there is a concern that there may be an ongoing health condition and whether there is a need to request advice from the Occupational Health Service
- To make sure that the employee is updated on events that have occurred in their absence
- Managers will need to make a judgement on the length of each meeting. Where a meeting is being held following a complex or long absence additional time will usually be required.

The remainder of this guide sets out in more detail how to carry out the welcome back meeting.

Preparing and carrying out the welcome back meeting

Although as stated above, welcome back meetings are informal, it is still important for both the manager and the employee to prepare for them.

During the meeting, the manager must make sure they give the employee every opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have. The discussion should be sympathetic and supportive.

After the welcome back meeting

After the welcome back meeting the following outcomes should have been met:

- The employee understands why the discussion was held
- The manager has an understanding of the employee's absence and ability to work. If it is felt that there is an underlying health issue which has not previously been identified, the manager should consider a referral to the Occupational Health Service
- The employee understands the support available e.g. HELP, the employee assistance service, and the manager understands whether there is any other support the employee may require to maintain their attendance at work
- The employee understands how their work was covered during their absence and the impact on colleagues
- The employee understands any changes to the business that have occurred during their absence and/or any issues that have arisen
- The employee understands the Attendance Standards
- The employee and manager both understand the next steps and any actions that have been agreed during the discussion. The manager is responsible for ensuring actions are completed.

The employee should confirm that they completing their *Absence Declaration Form*.

Keeping records

Details of the welcome back meeting should be recorded in the employee's attendance record and should be kept locally.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Managing short term absence and informal absence review discussions guide

This guide outlines the approach to take when managing short term absence and how these should be dealt with under the Attendance Policy including holding informal review discussions.

Overview

This guide sets out how to manage and support employees who are absent from work in Royal Mail Group for short periods of time. This should be read in conjunction with the Attendance Policy, as well as the related guidance documents listed in the 'related forms and documents' section later in the guide.

Purpose

Royal Mail Group recognises that during employment, there may be times when an employee will be absent from work, and it is important that the appropriate policies are in place to support them during these periods.

Regular attendance by all employees is important to ensure that the business maintains our high levels of customer service. If employees are frequently absent, this will both place a burden on colleagues and will have a commercial impact on the business.

Through identifying and discussing with an employee the underlying causes of their absence, attendance issues can often be resolved before they become a problem.

The level of support required by the employee should be identified during discussions. These absences should also be discussed if they increase to a level that requires formal action through the *Attendance Policy*.

Notifying absence and providing medical certificates

Initial contact

Employees who are going to be absent from work are expected to notify any absence to their manager. For further details on notifying absence, please refer to the *Absence Notification and Maintaining Contact Guide*.

Maintaining contact

The manager and the absent employee should agree how often and by what method they will contact each other until the employee returns to work. For further information on maintaining contact, please refer to the *Absence Notification and Maintaining Contact Guide*.

Medical certificates

Where an employee's absence lasts for up to seven days, the manager should ask them to complete an *Absence Declaration Form* at the Welcome Back Meeting.

Where an employee's absence lasts for more than seven days, they will need to provide a Medical Certificate, which can also be known as a 'Fit Note', to cover the continuing absence until they return to work. For further information on medical certificates, please refer to the *Absence Notification and Maintaining Contact Guide*.

Part-day absences

A part-day absence is where an employee has worked for part of their duty and due to illness is unable to continue working.

These absences will still be reviewed but will not usually count towards the formal attendance process. Where the number of part-day absences has become excessive or a pattern starts to emerge the manager should discuss it with the employee and advise them in writing that should this continue, future part-day absences may be counted towards the formal process.

Pregnancy related absence

Pregnancy related absences should be discounted from the formal attendance process but such absences should still be reviewed.

Where an absence is unrelated to pregnancy, for example if the employee has a cold, it could be considered as part of the formal attendance process.

Absence due to accidents at work

Under the Attendance Policy, any absence considered to be due to an accident at work will normally be discounted from the formal attendance process.

If the employee incurs an absence as a result of an accident at work, the absence should be discussed with the employee when they return.

While absences due to accidents at work will normally be discounted, they should always be discussed during an attendance review meeting.

There may be circumstances when an absence due to an accident at work may be counted towards the formal attendance process and therefore considered during an attendance review meeting, for example where the accident has been caused by the employee's own negligence or if the number of accidents have reached an unacceptable level. Managers should seek advice from the HR Advice Centre when deciding whether it is appropriate to count the absence.

Disability related absence

For further information on disability related absences please refer to the *Managing Absence and Disability Guide*.

Managing an employee's return to work

When the employee returns to work, managers should follow the guidance provided in the *Welcome Back Meetings Guide*.

A welcome back meeting must be held after any period of absence, including part-day, to discuss the employee's absence. It is very important that this discussion takes place and that both the manager and the employee discuss the absence and the employees overall wellbeing.

As part of that meeting, the manager should be sympathetic and supportive, making sure they give the employee every opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have, understand the employee's ability to work and offer any support available.

Employees may find it difficult to discuss their health concerns particularly for conditions that are of a personal nature, such as irritable bowel syndrome, the menopause or gender related health issues. Managers should allow time and listen to the employee when having these conversations.

Informal review discussion

Where an employee's attendance is becoming a cause of concern, an informal review discussion should normally take place to identify and address any issues.

The purpose of an informal review discussion is to:

- Provide an opportunity for the manager to discuss the employee's absence
- Ensure that the employee understands that their attendance is valued by Royal Mail Group and how their absence impacts upon the business

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- Identify any steps that can be taken by either the employee or Royal Mail Group to assist and support the employee to meet the standards
- Make the employee aware of the reason for concern
- Ensure that the employee is aware of the attendance standards and that they are reminded of the consequences of failing to meet the standards
- Provide the opportunity for the employee to ask to meet with their manager to discuss any concerns about their attendance.

Preparing for an informal review discussion

The manager should advise the employee that they will need to attend an informal review discussion, explaining the purpose of it and giving them enough notice of the date and time of the meeting to allow them to prepare for it, including consulting their union representative where required. A copy of the employee's attendance record should be provided at the meeting. The employee can also ask their manager for an informal review discussion if there is anything that they want to raise on their attendance.

An informal review discussion may include the following:

- A reminder of the support that Royal Mail Group can offer, including the **HELP** helpline, details below, and whether a referral to Occupational Health is appropriate
- Any underlying health issue, such as recent return from long term absence
- Other problems either in or outside of work
- The causes, frequency, duration and pattern of absences which could include; which part of the week, if the absence precedes or follows holiday, or if the employee has already been on an Attendance Review 1 in the last two years
- Nature of work, shift system, recent changes to the demands of the job

- Actions required by the employee to improve their attendance
- A reminder of the attendance standards and potential consequences of not meeting them.

The approach should be both sympathetic and supportive. It should be clearly focused on achieving improvement and maintaining standards. The manager and the employee will jointly identify any support measures that may need to be considered.

What if the attendance does not improve?

Where the employee's attendance does not improve following an informal review discussion, consideration should be given to arranging a formal attendance review meeting. For further information, please refer to the *Attendance Review Meetings Guide*.

Other support

Support and further information on managing health conditions can be found on the Royal Mail **HELP** helpline. **HELP** is the confidential and independent helpline – provided free for employees and available 24 hours a day.

HELP can be accessed by:

- Calling **0800 6888 777**
- Visiting **www.rmghelp.co.uk**

Keeping records

Records should be kept of all contact made with an employee who is absent and should be recorded in the employee's attendance record. It is particularly important to keep records of attendance review meetings.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Referral to the Occupational Health Service guide

This is the guide on how to refer employees to the Occupational Health Service and the support available.

Overview

This guide applies to all employees of Royal Mail Group and provides details of how they can be referred to the Occupational Health Service and the services offered and the support available from the Occupational Health Service.

Contacting the Occupational Health Service

For general advice managers can access the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre, telephone: **0845 612 4123**.

The Contact Centre is open at the following times:

- Monday to Friday 0900 – 2100 hours
- Saturday 0900 – 1300 hours

The contact centre is able to take referrals to the Occupational Health Service, although these are now better completed on line via Vista (see below).

What should the manager do if they are unsure about making a referral?

Firstly, the manager should access the Guidance Notes available under Health page on the intranet. Generic guidance covers many of the common health conditions which can affect the employee's ability to work.

If the guidance note does not have the relevant information, the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre can direct the

manager's call to the Medical Helpdesk. The Medical Helpdesk can advise on a range of work related medical issues, including:

- Whether to refer an employee for Occupational Health Service advice
- Health issues and potential impact on an employee's ability to do the job
- Equality Act specifically advice on disability
- Return to work plans
- Leaving the business due to ill health.

Making a referral to Occupational Health Service

Before being referred, the employee must give their consent. The manager should explain why they wish to refer the employee, the issues on which they are requesting Occupational Health Service and how the information will be used. Although the consent need only be verbal the manager should clearly record the agreement. The Occupational Health Practitioner will ensure that consent has been given when they speak with the employee.

How to make a referral to the Occupational Health Service

To make a referral the manager should use Vista. This is an online process accessed through the *Health Intranet* pages.

Before making the referral the manager should make sure that they have the following details available:

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- Consent from the employee
- The employee's personal details including their pay number, telephone number and home address
- Whether the employee is currently absent, or on modified duties, if so for how long
- Whether there is any known medical condition
- Dates when the employee would be unavailable to talk with the Occupational Health Service or attend an appointment
- Pay numbers for the referring manager and any other managers copied into the referral.

The employee's sick absence record will be automatically provided to the Occupational Health Service from the *Royal Mail Group PSP system*.

How to get the most value from a referral

The manager should:

- Clearly explain the reason for the referral and what the issue on which advice is needed
- Provide full details of the type of work the employee does and the hours they work. This will help the Occupational Health Service practitioner understand the demands of the role
- Share any issues that they have already discussed with the employee. Are there concerns about particular work tasks, or perceived barriers to returning to normal work?
- Explain whether duties have been, or could be, modified within the role

Vista allows a Choose & Book process online, the manager should talk with the employee so the manager can select an appropriate time and date of the appointment.

What happens after the referral has been made?

The manager will receive email confirmation of the referral within two hours. This will include a copy of the business referral form. The manager should check that the details and content of the business referral form are correct and provide a copy to the employee. Any corrections should be raised by contacting the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre.

If confirmation is not received within two hours the manager should call the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre.

The employee will be contacted by the scheduling team, who will arrange a telephone consultation with an Occupational Health practitioner.

What are the next steps?

The Occupational Health practitioner will either:

- Provide the manager with an outcome summary report. This will happen if the Occupational Health practitioner feels that sufficient information has been gained from the telephone assessment to answer the questions raised in full. Following this the case will be closed

Or

- Arrange a further intervention which could be:
 - A face to face appointment with an Occupational Health practitioner
 - A face to face appointment with an Occupational Health physician
 - Requesting further medical evidence from the employee's GP or specialist

In the event that the Occupational Health practitioner has been unable to contact the employee, the practitioner will inform the manager that the assessment cannot proceed.

Cancelling or rescheduling an appointment

The manager should contact the employee prior to the appointment to remind them of what is in the referral, and to ensure that they are still able to attend.

Where it is necessary to re-arrange or cancel an appointment, the manager should call the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre on **0845 612 4123**, explain the reason for rescheduling the appointment and advise when the employee is not available.

Where occupational health advice is no longer needed, the manager should confirm that the referral is no longer required and is therefore cancelled.

It is important to rearrange or cancel the appointment in a timely manner to save the business costs and to ensure the appointment time can be used by others and is not wasted.

What should the manager do if an employee does not attend an appointment?

If the employee does not attend an appointment, the Occupational Health Service will notify the manager. The manager should contact the employee to seek an explanation. There is an eight day period in which a new appointment can be arranged; however at the end of this period the referral will be withdrawn.

Following the manager's discussion with the employee they may discuss options via the HR Advice Centre.

What should be expected in the Occupational Health outcome summary report?

The outcome summary report may contain the following:

- Advice on the health condition(s) and prognosis
- An opinion on fitness for work
- An estimate of return to work date and a return to work plan if necessary

- If a return to full duties is unlikely, advice on modifications to allow continued employment and the duration of such modifications
- An opinion on disability according to current legislation.

The manager should take into account the occupational health advice provided in the report when they are deciding how to progress the case.

If clarification is needed, the manager should contact the practitioner, whose details will be given in the outcome summary report.

Complaint Process

If despite discussion with the practitioner, the manager is dissatisfied with the report, they may request a rework by calling the Occupational Health Service Contact Centre within 15 working days of receiving the report.

If this fails to address the issue, refer to the Occupational Health Service Complaints Procedure.

A complaint can be submitted by:

- Calling the Occupational Health Service Centre on **0845 612 4123**; a member of the team will log the complaint on the manager's behalf
- E-mailing the complaints team on **ohcsscomp@atoshealthcare.com**, including a brief outline of the complaint and full contact details

What happens when Occupational Health Service and the GP differ on fitness to attend work?

On occasion, the GP opinion regarding fitness to work may differ from that of the Occupational Health Service. In the vast majority of instances this can be resolved by the employee talking further with their GP, who may not be aware of the opportunity to modify the employee's role. If this does not

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resolve the situation the Occupational Health practitioner should contact the GP to ensure that such opportunities can be explored. If this does not resolve the issue for further advice, please contact the HR Advice Centre.

How to request an additional service

The Occupational Health Service provides guidance and support on a range of products.

If any additional services are required, the manager should complete a Route One form and email to:

bespokeservice@atoshealthcare.com.

These may incur an additional cost.

The Route One form is available on the Health intranet site.

Emergency response service

Following any major incident or situation where death or injury has occurred in the work place or involving a Royal Mail Group employee, there may be a need for prompt psychological support on site.

To access such support the manager should call the **HELP** helpline. This is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Telephone: 0800 688 8777

HELP will log the incident and assess the level of support required. Initially telephone support will be provided, but an onsite trauma response team can be made available if the situation requires.

Other situations where prompt Occupational Health Service advice or support may be required include possible employee exposure to dangerous chemicals e.g. asbestos, anthrax.

In such situations the manager must contact Central Postal Control (CPC) on **020 7016 2999** or Postline on **5785 2999** who will immediately inform the Occupational Health Service.

Managing absence and disability guide

This guide sets out how managers should manage an employee who is disabled or who has become disabled and is absent from work.

Overview

Royal Mail Group is committed to ensuring that disabled employees have the same opportunities as others to develop and progress within their role. If an employee becomes disabled, they should be provided with the support to allow them to continue in their current job or an alternative role.

This should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

When does this guide apply?

This guide applies to a wide range of people with conditions and/or impairments which may affect the way they do their job.

This guide applies to any employee who may be defined as disabled under the Equality Act 2010. The act replaced the Disability Discrimination Act.

The definition of 'disability' under the Equality Act 2010

In the Act, a person has a disability if:

- They have a physical or mental impairment
- The impairment has a **substantial** and **long-term adverse** effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities

For the purposes of the Act, these words have the following meanings:

- 'Substantial' means more than minor or trivial

- 'Long-term' means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months
- 'Normal day-to-day activities' include everyday things such as eating, washing, walking and going shopping.

There are additional provisions relating to people with progressive conditions. People with HIV, cancer or multiple sclerosis are protected by the Act from the point of diagnosis. People with some visual impairment are automatically deemed to be disabled.

Some conditions are specifically excluded from being covered by the disability definition, such as a tendency to set fires or addictions to non-prescribed substances.

What does this mean for managers?

It is very likely that managers are already managing people with a disability. Over 3.4 million employees in the UK have a disability – around one out of every eight people in the workplace.

There are many different reasons that an employee may be considered disabled and often a disability is not obvious because of successful treatment or management.

Managers may already have employees in their team who are disabled, but their disability may be hidden and the manager may not have been informed about it.

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Where managers believe that an employee's absence may be as a result of a disability they should discuss this with the employee.

When managing an employee with a disability, the manager should focus on the impact of the condition on the employee's ability to perform their job, rather than ask for details of their condition as such details are confidential.

How should this be applied?

Managers should be aware that even though an employee may be considered disabled under the Equality Act, this disability may not affect their ability to do their job, however we are required to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace to make sure a disabled employee is not disadvantaged when compared to a non-disabled employee. Therefore, it is important that managers identify and discuss an employee's disability appropriately. Further guidance on how to do this is set out below.

How to identify and discuss disability

It is an employee's responsibility to make Royal Mail Group aware of any disabilities that may prevent them from undertaking certain areas of work.

How should managers manage and discuss disability?

In order to understand the impact of the condition on their work, the manager should discuss the condition with the employee and understand the extent of the disability as it relates to their work. Through this discussion, the manager will then be able to determine in what capacity the employee may be able to continue to carry out their current role.

When having these discussions the manager should:

- Focus questions on how the employee's disability impacts on their ability to do their job rather than the details of their condition
- Discuss and outline the ways that Royal Mail Group can support the employee to return to work, e.g. modified duties, alternative roles etc., including any suggestions the employee may have for adjustments they believe could be implemented
- Be sensitive to the employee's circumstances
- Be discreet
- Seek advice from the HR Advice Centre.

The manager should explore all options in which the employee can continue to work.

Managing absence under the Attendance Policy

The manager should manage the absence in line with the *Managing Short Term Absence and Informal Absence Review Discussions Guide*, or, where the absence is for a period of more than 14 days or relating to an underlying medical condition, the *Managing Long Term Absence Guide*.

The manager and employee should both be proactive in maintaining contact during periods of sick absence, understanding the reason for the absence and identifying how the employee may be able to return to work, even in a reduced capacity.

Does an employee's absence count as part of the formal attendance process?

Any absence that is considered to be related to an employee's disability will still be reviewed but should normally be discounted as part of the formal attendance process.

Where the manager may be considering if the disability related absence should be considered as part of the formal attendance process, the manager should seek advice first from the HR Advice Centre.

In deciding whether to count a disability related absence towards the formal attendance process, the manager should have:

- Reviewed all relevant Occupational Health Service reports and considered whether it is appropriate to seek further advice from the Occupational Health Service.

Having sought advice from Occupational Health Service and HR Advice Centre and where it is justified to do so e.g. an employee's disability related absences reach an unacceptable level, the manager should advise them in writing that any future absences may be counted. The employee should receive written notice in advance.

Periods of absence that are discounted should still be recorded and reviewed, and details of any conversations retained.

If the absence is not related to the employee's disability, and it is being considered as part of a formal review the manager should explain to the employee that that particular absence is being counted and why.

Supporting an employee's return to work

When the employee can return to work and carry out their normal duties without any adjustments, the employee will return to work and a welcome back meeting should be held.

However, after a period of absence, an employee's circumstances may change and they may not be able to return to their job. In this situation, it may be necessary to consider adjustments so that they can return, or try to find them a more appropriate role within Royal Mail Group.

Welcome back meeting

The manager must hold a welcome back meeting with all employees after any absence. For more guidance please refer to the *Welcome Back Meetings Guide*.

This is also a good opportunity for the manager to discuss whether support from Royal Mail Group would help.

Returning to work following disability related sick absence

Under the Equality Act we are required to make reasonable adjustments where a workplace arrangement puts a disabled employee at a disadvantage when compared to a non-disabled employee. The adjustment is to make sure disabled employees have equal opportunities in applying for and staying in work.

It may be that the employee can return to work to perform some of their duties, complete a phased return to work, or that they can return in their current role if certain changes are made either to the workplace or to their duties.

A return to work plan may be necessary to allow a phased return to normal activities. This will usually be on either Occupational Health Service advice or via a 'Fit Note', medical certificate from the General Practitioner. This will usually last up to four weeks and be part of recovery to full fitness.

This is also important to the business as employees who are disabled often have valuable skills and experience that would be expensive to replace. Therefore, retaining an employee who has become disabled means keeping valuable skills and experience in Royal Mail Group.

Adjustments can be short term, to help employee's return to work gradually i.e. a phased return to work, or could be permanent, i.e. reasonable adjustments. For more information, please refer to the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*.

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Redeployment

Where an employee is not able to return to work and undertake their current role and all potential solutions have been explored in their current workplace, the manager should try to identify suitable work elsewhere within Royal Mail Group. In the case of an employee who is disabled under the Equality Act, this should include contacting other Royal Mail Group businesses to identify suitable opportunities.

More information about redeployment can be found in the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*.

Keeping records

Records relating to an employee's disability should be kept in the employee's file.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally
- Be discussed with the employee at their welcome back meeting.

Attendance Review meetings guide

This guide provides information on attendance review meetings, why and how they should be held and guidance on issuing a formal attendance review notification.

Overview

Royal Mail Group is committed to providing the highest quality of service to our customers and in order to achieve this commitment, employees must provide a high level of attendance.

This guide provides information on the attendance standards in Royal Mail Group and the consequences for employees when the standards are not maintained. It also sets out the process for holding an Attendance Review Meeting which should take place where, despite help and support, an employee does not achieve the attendance standards. It should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

Approach

Managers must ensure that employees are made aware of the attendance standards on joining Royal Mail Group and employees should make every effort to meet these standards.

Where an employee's attendance is becoming a cause of concern, an informal review discussion should normally take place to identify and address any issues. Where employees fail to meet the standards, advice and support will be provided to help them improve their attendance.

In some circumstances, for example where an absence is due to an accident at work, is maternity related or as a result of a disability, absences will normally be discounted when deciding whether the attendance standards have been reached or maintained.

What are the standards?

The current attendance standards are outlined in the table below. The standards expected will vary depending on whether an employee has already come under notice of review and whether the employee is on trial or not:

All employees (except triallists)	
Attendance Review 1 Prompt	4 absences or 14 days in a 12 month period
Attendance Review 2 Prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an attendance review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal Prompt	2 absences or 10 days in the next 6 months following an attendance review 2 formal notification

Triallists	
Attendance Review 1 Prompt	2 absences or 7 days in 6 months
Attendance Review 2 Prompt	1 absence in the next 2 months following an attendance review 1 formal notification
Consideration of dismissal Prompt	1 absence in the next 2 months following an attendance review 2 formal notification

Maintaining standards

All employees must be made aware of the attendance standards when they first join Royal Mail Group as part of their induction. Managers must ensure that employees understand the standards and take time to explain the reasons for having them.

Following any period of employee absence due to illness, the manager should meet with the employee for a welcome back meeting. The manager should also remind the employee of the standards, the commercial impact of not meeting them and ensure the employee is aware of, and fully understands them.

Standard setting should form part of any informal or formal attendance review meeting held as part of the attendance process.

Informal Reviews

At any point the manager or the employee may request an informal review discussion to identify any issues that maybe affecting or is likely to affect the employee's attendance. An informal review discussion may help identify the support the employee requires. For further information refer to the *Managing Short Term Absence & Informal Review Discussions Guide*.

What happens if an employee does not meet the standards?

Where despite previous attempts, attendance does not meet the required standards and taking individual circumstances into account consideration will be given to managing the employee under the formal attendance process.

Attendance Review meetings

When an employee's attendance does not meet the required standards, consideration will be given to arranging a formal Attendance Review Meeting between the employee and the manager. If an informal review discussion has not already taken place, the manager should consider why they or the employee have not asked for a meeting and be prepared to discuss the reasons.

If the manager decides that a formal Attendance Review meeting is not necessary in the circumstances they should let the employee know and take the opportunity to remind the employee of the expected attendance standards.

What is the purpose of an Attendance Review meeting?

The purpose of the Attendance Review meeting is:

- To provide managers with the opportunity to discuss the employee's absence with them, to understand the facts behind the absence and any underlying causes
- To make sure that the employee understands that their attendance is valued by Royal Mail Group and how their absence impacts upon the business
- To make sure that the employee understands why their absence levels are unacceptable and the consequences of failing to meet the standards.

Attendance Review – meetings 1 and 2

Before an Attendance Review meeting

- When an employee returns from an absence due to illness the manager will be notified by *Managing My Team on PSP* if the attendance standards have not been met
- The manager who is to arrange and conduct the meeting should send written notice to the employee at least three working days before the date of the proposed meeting to confirm the date, time and location
- They should also include a copy of the employee's absence record, copies of any available Occupational Health Service reports and any other documentation which will form part of the decision making process with the invitation letter. Invitation letters can be produced through PSP
- All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included in the attendance discussion for that review
- The employee has the right to be accompanied at the meeting by a union representative or a work colleague.

During the meeting

During the meeting, the manager should discuss the following issues with the employee:

- The importance of Royal Mail Group's attendance standards and why we have them
- Any informal review discussions that have taken place
- Why an informal review has not taken place
- The employee's attendance record; the employee will have an opportunity to provide evidence of mitigating causes for their absence
- If the employee has already received an Attendance Review 1 notification during the last two years
- If there are any temporary or permanent adjustments that could be made to the working environment, the employee's duties or role which may help them to improve their attendance record
- The impact of the employee's lifestyle and whether it impacts on their ability to attend work regularly
- Any underlying concerns that the employee may have about their ability to complete their duties
- Whether a referral to the Occupational Health Service is appropriate.

During the meeting the employee will have the opportunity to raise issues verbally and to record them in writing if they so wish.

It is important to remember that the purpose of this meeting is for the manager and the employee to work together to resolve unacceptable absence levels and to agree actions that will help the employee improve their attendance.

Outcome of the meeting

Following the meeting the manager should decide whether to issue a formal notification or not. The manager should tell the employee their decision face to face, confirm the decision in writing and remind them of the standard expected in future.

Each case should be treated on its merits, and any mitigating factors the employee has raised in relation to their attendance record must be taken into account, along with their previous attendance record and overall attendance performance. The manager must provide a rationale for their decision and should capture any actions agreed.

Issuing a formal notification

It is at the manager's discretion whether or not a formal notification should be issued. If the manager decides to issue a formal notification they should ensure that the process set out in the *Attendance Policy* has been followed, and in particular that the employee understands:

- Their responsibility to work with the business to maintain good attendance
- The agreed steps that will be taken to help them maintain good attendance
- That poor attendance can ultimately lead to dismissal.

The manager should contact the HR Advice Centre if they require advice.

Consideration of dismissal

Where the attendance standards have not been met and the employee is on an Attendance Review 2, the prompt will also be sent to the second line manager who has the authority to conduct the consideration of dismissal meeting. If it is not suitable for the second line manager to hear this meeting, an alternative appropriate manager will be appointed.

The consideration of dismissal meeting should take the same format as the Attendance Review 1 or 2 meetings (see above).

If the outcome is dismissal, the employee has the right to appeal the decision. If the employee does wish to appeal, they must inform the manager who heard the consideration of dismissal meeting in writing, within three working days of receiving the written notification of their dismissal. They should state the grounds for their appeal in the written notification.

For more information please refer to the *Attendance - Consideration of Dismissal Guide*.

Other support

Support and further information on managing health conditions can be found on the Occupational Health Service intranet health pages.

HELP is the confidential and independent helpline, provided free for employees and available 24 hours a day.

HELP can be accessed by:

- Calling **0800 6888 777**
- Visiting **www.rmghelp.co.uk**

Keeping records

Records should be kept of all contact made with an employee who is absent and should be recorded in the employee's attendance record. It is particularly important to keep records of Attendance Review meetings.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Attendance – consideration of dismissal guide

This guide provides details of the process that should be followed when, despite formal reviews, the employee consistently falls below the attendance standards.

Overview

Royal Mail Group is committed to providing the highest quality of service to our customers and in order to achieve this commitment, employees must provide a high level of attendance. Royal Mail Group has attendance standards which employees are expected to meet and exceed.

This guide provides details of the process that should be followed when, despite support, guidance and formal reviews, an employee consistently falls below the attendance standards. It should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

When might a manager consider dismissal?

The manager may consider dismissal where:

- Two formal reviews have taken place
- The employee has received written notification of being on a 2nd formal review; and
- They have still not met the attendance standards.

For further details on Attendance Review Meetings, please refer to the *Attendance Review Meetings Guide*.

The employee will be invited to a meeting with their second line manager or another appropriate manager with the authority to dismiss, to discuss their continued employment with Royal Mail Group.

Information for second line manager

The employee's manager should ensure that the manager hearing the consideration of dismissal is provided with all relevant papers prior to the meeting.

This will include:

- Details of the employee's attendance record up until the day of the meeting this should include at least the last four years plus current year
- Notes of any welcome back meetings
- Notes of any informal review discussions
- Notes of any attendance review meetings
- All records of review meetings 1 and 2
- All Occupational Health Service reports, in particular the most recent.

Copies of all the documentation should also be provided to the employee in advance of the hearing.

Notifying the employee of the meeting

Where the employee is invited to attend a meeting to discuss the consideration of their dismissal, they will be provided with a minimum of five working days notice in writing of the date, time and location of the meeting, along with the information listed above.

All absences up to the day of the meeting will be included.

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The employee has the right to be accompanied at the meeting by a union representative or a work colleague.

During the meeting

The manager with the authority to dismiss, usually the second line manager, will discuss with the employee that dismissal is being considered as their attendance record is a continued cause of concern and outside of the agreed attendance standards.

The employee will be given the opportunity to put forward an explanation in regards to the absences they have incurred, their ability to attend for work on a regular basis and reasons why dismissal should not take place.

After the meeting

Following the meeting

Based on the conversation held between the manager and the employee during the meeting, the manager may need to carry out further investigation, at the end of which the manager should share the findings of the investigation with the employee, giving them enough time add any comments, once returned the manager should reflect on all the points raised before making a final decision.

Outcome

The manager will reflect on what has been discussed, including the issues and factors the employee has raised, any further investigation made and the employee's absence overall record. In deciding whether or not to dismiss, the manager will assess the likelihood of an improvement in attendance.

Outcome decision

There are three possible outcomes following the meeting:

- The employee remains under review at Attendance Review 2 and receives a new Attendance Review 2 notification

- The Attendance Review 2 should not have been prompted
- The employee is dismissed.

Notification of outcome

Following the manager's decision, this should be confirmed to the employee both face to face and in writing.

Where the manager decides that the employee will remain under review at Attendance Review 2, they should issue a new Attendance Review 2 in writing and ensure that the employee understands:

- Their responsibility to work with the business to maintain good attendance
- The agreed steps that will be taken to help them maintain good attendance and to avoid further consideration being given to dismissal
- That poor attendance can ultimately lead to dismissal.

If the outcome is dismissal, in the outcome letter the manager should include a detailed rationale for dismissal and the employee should be advised that they have the right to appeal the decision.

Right to appeal

If the employee wishes to appeal against the decision to dismiss they must inform the manager who heard the consideration of dismissal in writing within three working days of receiving the written notification of their dismissal. They should state the grounds for their appeal in the written notification.

The manager who heard the consideration of dismissal should forward all paperwork to the HR Services Archive, clearly indicating that the employee wishes to appeal. A hearing with an independent appeal manager from HR Services will be arranged within four weeks, and the employee will be given a minimum of five days written notice of the time and place.

The independent appeals manager will normally communicate the decision prior to the employees last day of service. The independent appeals manager may extend the notice period if more time is required by them to conclude the appeal.

Right to be accompanied

The employee has the right to be accompanied to the appeal hearing. Their companion may be:

- A fellow work colleague
- An official employee of a trade union
- A trade union representative.

Keeping records

Records should be kept of all contact and meetings held with an employee under the attendance process.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Managing long term absence guide

This guide outlines the approach to take when managing long term sick absence.

Overview

This guide sets out how to manage and support employees who are on long term absence due to illness in Royal Mail Group.

It should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

Understanding long term absence

A long term absence is defined as an absence of more than 14 days. It can also apply when repeated absences are due to a significant underlying health issue.

Royal Mail Group recognises that reducing levels of long term ill health requires a joint approach between the employee and their manager. Royal Mail Group takes positive and supportive action to help employees with long term health issues to recover and return to work wherever possible. Involvement of the relevant union representative can be helpful in maintaining contact and resolving cases promptly.

Prolonged sickness absence is recognised as generating further problems for the employee such as isolation, loss of confidence, mental health issues and social exclusion. Therefore it is likely to be beneficial for the employee to return to normal work activities at the earliest opportunity.

How we manage long term ill health

Royal Mail Group will consider a range of options to support the employee who has long term ill health through:

- Understanding their issues

- Regular contact with their manager and work colleagues
- Occupational Health Service: provides advice on the employee's capability, a professional opinion on disability under relevant legislation, potential role adjustments and review of progress
- Counselling if appropriate
- Short term job modifications to allow return to work without having to wait for full recovery/fitness.

Reducing absence levels

Prevent it before it happens

Managers should be aware that they can help reduce long term absence in their teams by:

- Knowing their team members individually
- Recognising changes in behaviour, performance and attendance pattern
- Investigating any such changes to ensure that any underlying health issue is recognised and managed effectively
- Understanding the impact of change
- Maintaining a healthy and safe work environment.

How should long term absence be supported?

It is especially important to stay in contact with employees who are absent for long periods. Absent employees rapidly become disconnected from the workplace, and this in

itself can form a barrier to a return to work if not addressed. It helps to ensure they are kept up to date with any changes at work and that they receive all necessary support to facilitate their return to work. The union representative may help in maintaining contact. This should not replace contact between the manager and the employee.

It is important that both the manager and employee are proactive in maintaining contact during periods of long term sickness absence. A weekly phone call can help to maintain the link with the workplace and reassure the employee that they are not forgotten.

The local union representative has a role in facilitating this proactive approach by supporting and encouraging a two-way dialogue with the employee and with the employee's permission.

For further information on maintaining contact, please refer to the *Absence Notification and Maintaining Contact Guide*.

Absence review plans

The plan will be developed between the employee and their manager to maintain progress and support a return to full duties as quickly as possible. This will be monitored by the manager and discussed with the employee and where the employee wishes their representative.

An absence review plan should start at the beginning of a long term sick absence. Actions being undertaken by the employee to address the health issue can be noted and wherever possible, milestones and a potential return to work date identified. It is however important to be mindful of the employee's right to maintain their medical information as confidential, and not to give the employee the feeling that they are being pressurised to return to work, especially early in an absence. The plan can be kept up to date with:

- Management contact and a summary of the discussion held

- Progress in the employee's health or condition
- Occupational Health reports requested or received.

The absence review plan should be kept locally in the employee's file.

Absence review meetings

During an ongoing absence, the manager will meet with the employee to review the situation and clarify the next steps. Ideally these meetings will be face to face, but the manager will recognise that there will be occasions when this is not possible.

The manager and the employee should agree on a suitable location for the face to face meeting, this may not always be at the employee's usual place of work and should be within a reasonable distance for both parties.

Whenever the meeting is face to face the employee may wish to be accompanied. With the agreement of the employee, the union may be involved in absence review meetings and other activities intended to facilitate an early return to work.

The purpose of the meetings will vary according to the length of the absence, but normally a number of points should be covered:

- Discuss progress and any developments
- Be mindful of confidentiality and that these meetings are not primarily about the medical management of the health problem, but about how and when the employee can be supported back to work
- Identify the likely length of the absence and if or when a return to work may be possible
- Consider any support that can be provided to help the employee return to work. This may include short term work modification which will normally last between one and four weeks, but may continue beyond this period where appropriate
- Identify whether the case may need to be referred to the Occupational Health Service.

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The manager should first discuss the need for an absence review meeting with the employee via a phone call. This avoids the employee being unaware of the process and feeling that undue formality is being applied. The opportunity should be taken to reassure the employee that this process is routine and aims to encourage early return to work whenever possible.

In cases of especially serious injury or illness, the planned review meeting which would normally take place by day 28 of the absence, may be impossible. The manager should note this and postpone the meeting. This is unlikely to be a problem later in the absence.

For a face to face meeting, written notice should be sent to the employee at least five working days before the date of the proposed meeting to confirm the date, time and location. This should be sent by both first class post and Special Delivery.

Absence review meeting milestones

Long term sick absences should be continuously managed to enable the case to progress and to achieve timely resolution in line with the following timescales:

Day 28 absence review meeting

By this stage of the absence the employee and manager will have established regular phone contact and possibly already met face to face. At this stage, discussion should focus on any support that can be provided to help a return to work as early as possible. If not completed earlier, a referral for Occupational Health Service should normally be arranged at this point, unless a return to work is anticipated in the next few days. The employee will need to give consent to be referred. For more information see the *Referral to Occupational Health Services Guide*.

Week 12 absence review meeting

A meeting should take place at this point to review the continuing absence and draw together the issues covered in previous contact and advice received from the Occupational Health Service.

At this stage of an absence, a face to face meeting should be possible and is preferable. The purpose is to review the likelihood of a return to work and any help necessary to support this; the Occupational Health Service advice should give information to help the manager understand the situation. If at this point there is no prospect of a return to work, the manager may request an update from the Occupational Health Service on the prognosis.

Week 22 absence review meeting

For this meeting all relevant information should be made available to both the manager and the employee prior to the meeting. The purpose of this review is to consider the options available for the manager. This may include considering short term work modifications or permanent adjustments, redeployment, or leaving the business due to ill health. The aim is to resolve the majority of cases by this point.

Any employee, who remains on long term sick absence for more than six months, will continue to have regular absence review meetings.

Potential outcomes

The manager should consider all reasonable options for supporting the employee to continue working; however it is also important to recognise that there are some situations where employment may no longer be a viable option for either the employee or Royal Mail Group. The decision should be based on all relevant information, including recent advice from the Occupational Health Service.

The manager is ultimately responsible for making the decision which should lead to one of the following outcomes:

- **Return to work:** The employee can return to work and carry out their normal duties without any adjustments. For more information refer to the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*

- **Phased return to work:** The employee can return to the same role but requires a phased return, i.e. a Return to Work Plan. For more information refer to the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*
- **Return to work with short term modifications:** The employee can return to the same role but requires modifications that are not expected to be permanent, but longer than a Return to Work Plan. For more information refer to the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*
- **Return to work with permanent adjustments:** The employee has a health condition that is likely to be considered a disability, and as a result permanent reasonable adjustments to their work may be required. For more information refer to the *Managing Absence and Disability Guide* and the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*
- **Redeployment:** The employee cannot return to their current role; however there is an opportunity for alternative employment to be considered elsewhere within Royal Mail Group. For more information please refer to the *Work Following Health Problems Guide*
- **Leaving the business due to ill health:** The employee is not able to return to work which may result in them leaving the business due to ill health. This option should only be pursued when all other options have been exhausted. For more information please refer to the *Ill Health Policy (Managing Employees with Long Term Ill Health Agreement)* and *Leaving the Business due to Ill Health Guide*.

The appropriate manager should discuss the decision with the employee and give the employee the opportunity to respond.

Other support

Support and further information on managing health conditions can be found on the Health & Safety intranet site.

HELP is the confidential and independent helpline provided free for all employees and available 24 hours a day.

HELP can be accessed by:

- Calling **0800 6888 777**
- Visiting **www.rmghelp.co.uk**

Keeping records

Records should be kept of all contact made with an employee on long term absence and should be recorded in the employee's attendance record. It is particularly important to keep records of review discussions.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Work following health problems guide

This guide explains the options available when managing an employee who cannot perform their normal role when returning to work following a period of sick absence.

Overview

This guide sets out the different options available for employees returning to work following a period of sick absence, where they are unable to return to their normal role immediately and may require a short term job modification or permanent adjustments to be made to their role.

It should be read in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy*.

Modifications to the role

In order to allow an employee to return to work following a period of sick absence, the manager may need to consider making short term job modifications or permanent adjustments to the employee's normal role.

This may involve a change to their hours, working times or content of their role to ensure that the employee is supported and provided with the opportunity to continue their employment in Royal Mail Group.

When an employee has been away from work for a period of sick absence, their return to work will need to be planned and where necessary, adjustments considered to support them. Advice from the Occupational Health Service may be sought prior to the return to ensure that any modifications or adjustments are appropriate; the manager should also refer to the 'Fit Note' for additional information.

The Occupational Health Service will advise upon how the employee's health condition affects their ability to perform their role. The Occupational Health Service will provide advice, based on the medical evidence, outlining which parts of the role the employee may be capable of, and whether any changes are required to help them return to work. This advice should be shared with the employee.

The local union representative has a role in facilitating this proactive approach by supporting and encouraging a two-way dialogue and the employee, with the employee's permission. Managers may also contact the HR Advice Centre for further advice.

Meeting with the employee

The manager should meet with the employee to identify any changes to their normal role that could be made to enable them to return to work. The employee may wish to be accompanied by their union representative.

During the meeting, the manager should discuss the following:

- Ensure that the employee understands that their knowledge and skills are valued by Royal Mail Group and that the joint aim is to help them return to work
- Identify the kind of work that the employee is capable of performing

- Explain the options available, discuss the employee's ability to perform their role and any potential changes to their role that will help them return to work
- Any other factors that should be taken into account when considering their return to work, for example, distance the employee is able to travel, shift pattern and hours of work
- Consider how the employee may be able to return to work and develop a return to work plan.

Following the meeting

Following the meeting, the manager should reflect on the discussion and the options available before making a decision. This should include reviewing the workload in the office and how it could be tailored to accommodate a short term job modification. They should take the following information into consideration:

- The advice provided by the Occupational Health Service
- The employee's knowledge, skills and experience
- The types of work the employee may be able to perform
- Any other relevant factors, for example distance the employee is able to travel, shift pattern and hours of work
- Any reasonable training that the employee may require in order to perform modified duties.

Communicating the meeting outcome

The manager should agree a return to work plan with input from both the employee and Occupational Health Service and should communicate the decision to the employee. The plan will cover:

- Whether there will be a phased return to work, modified duties or a combination of both

- The timescales for the return to work plan
- Review dates throughout the return to work plan
- Any training that the employee will require
- Any support that is necessary such as buddying or mentoring etc.

The precise point during recovery which is the best time to return to work activities is an individual's judgement and expert guidance will be given to the manager by the Occupational Health Service. As a general guide, it is reasonable and appropriate for an employee to return to work when recovery allows completion of approximately half of their work activities. Similarly the aim would be for the employee to be able to perform their full role usually within four weeks but may continue beyond this period where appropriate.

What is a phased return to work?

A phased return to work is when an employee gradually increases the amount of hours worked each week. It allows the employee to readjust to full attendance in the workplace. For example, they may work shorter working days, flex their attendance times or work a shorter working week. Over a period of time, the time spent working will increase until the employee is working their normal contracted hours.

A phased return to work can take up to four weeks for an employee to progress to the full hours of their normal role. If the return to work is going to take a longer period, then this should be considered as a short term job modification.

The manager should hold a welcome back meeting on the employee's first day back to work. For more information on welcome back meetings please refer to the *Welcome Back Meetings Guide*.

What are short term job modifications?

Short term job modifications are where the content of the employee's normal role is

changed to allow them to return to work. It is used where the employee cannot undertake full work activities due to the constraints of their health condition.

Short term job modifications are temporary; to allow an employee to recover from their condition or while an employee is receiving or waiting for treatment.

When arranging short term job modifications, managers should consider:

- Whether the short term job modification will be helpful in getting the employee to return to work
- What impact the short term job modification may have on the rest of the team
- The cost of arranging the short term job modification.

The Occupational Health Service will advise managers on any necessary temporary modifications and the suitability of an employee's return to work.

Where short term job modifications have been agreed with the employee, details of their short term job modifications and the timescales agreed for their return to their normal role should be recorded through *Managing My Team on PSP*. The manager should include agreed review dates throughout the period of temporary modifications.

A short term job modification may take place at a separate location. The employee will return to work and receive full pay; therefore overtime cannot be claimed until the employee is working in excess of their full contractual hours.

A short term job modification will normally last for between one and four weeks but may continue beyond this period where appropriate, for example while an employee is waiting for treatment, this will be agreed between the manager and employee.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes made in the workplace and to employment arrangements to ensure that a disabled person is not at any disadvantage when compared to a non-disabled person.

The Equality Act gives a number of examples of "steps" which Royal Mail Group may consider as reasonable adjustments. However each case is different and treated on its merits and will depend on how much the employee's disability affects them. These might include:

- Allowing the employee to be absent during working hours for medical appointments, assessment or treatment
- Altering the employee's working hours
- Acquiring or modifying equipment
- Making adjustments to premises

Reasonable adjustments will be agreed following a meeting with the employee.

How quickly does a reasonable adjustment have to be made?

Royal Mail Group aims to put adjustments in place as promptly as possible. There are no prescribed timescales for making reasonable adjustments and these will be dependent upon circumstances and on whether or not the adjustment is substantial.

The manager is responsible for keeping in contact with the employee to keep them updated and to manage their expectations about when adjustments may be made. The employee may also contact the manager for an update if required.

If the implementation of a reasonable adjustment is planned but cannot be implemented immediately e.g. equipment has been ordered but has not yet been received, then the employee may not complete certain tasks/duties while adjustments are progressed.

Managers may also contact the HR Advice Centre for further advice.

What to do if no adjustments are possible

Where it is not possible to identify any suitable adjustments to the employee's role, the manager should document that they have made every effort to discuss adjustments with the employee, and that every option has been considered. Where making the adjustment is not feasible the manager must inform the employee in writing giving reasons.

In cases where no adjustments to their current role are available, the manager must discuss with the employee whether they would be able to return to work in an alternative role or location.

What is redeployment?

Redeployment is the process by which suitable alternative employment in Royal Mail Group is sought for employees who are unfit or unable to carry out the duties of their normal role due to ill health.

When should redeployment be considered?

Redeployment will typically be considered in situations where an employee is returning to work after a period of long term absence due to ill health and they are unable to carry out their normal role.

An employee may be unable to work because of illness or disability, or when their condition is affecting, or will potentially affect, their ability to undertake the duties their normal role requires.

In this situation the redeployment process should be considered, which will involve the employee's manager exploring whether there are any alternative roles or positions in Royal Mail Group that the employee will be able to undertake. It is important that redeployment is considered as it has many benefits, both to the employee and the business.

An employee can only be considered for redeployment where:

- The employee has a long term illness or has a condition which affects their ability to perform their job effectively, and all other options have been exhausted
- The employee has requested redeployment on the grounds of ill health, and is supported by advice from the Occupational Health Service.

The Occupational Health Service will produce a report containing recommendations, based on the medical evidence.

Managers can also contact the HR Advice Centre for further advice.

Redeployment meeting

The manager should hold a redeployment meeting with the employee, giving them at least five days written notice of the date, time and location. The employee should also be informed that they can be accompanied by a work colleague or union representative to this meeting.

The meeting should be used to discuss the employee's ability to work, to identify the work they are capable of performing and other issues that should be considered when identifying redeployment options e.g. distance able to travel or shift patterns or hours the employee is able to work. The manager can use this information, along with the outcome of the Occupational Health Service referral to identify potential roles for the employee, including any appropriate vacancies.

Outcome of the redeployment meeting

After the meeting the manager should decide whether redeployment is a suitable option for the employee.

Exploring options for redeployment

Where it is established that redeployment into another role would be a suitable option, the manager should explore potential roles and positions available in Royal Mail Group for the employee.

Redeployment within the same location

Managers are encouraged to identify suitable opportunities for redeployment within their own unit in the first instance. If this is not possible, redeployment roles should be sought in the wider business area or across Royal Mail Group in a different location.

Redeployment to a different location and/or business area

Where there are no appropriate roles within the employee's business area or location, the manager should consult the wider business in order to find a suitable opportunity. Before beginning the search, the manager should inform their Senior HR Manager.

Roles should first be sought within the employee's business area. In order to conduct the search, the manager should contact:

- Other managers in neighbouring offices
- The Senior Resourcing Manager.

If no suitable positions are found within the first two weeks, the manager should extend the search to include other business areas across Royal Mail Group.

During this period of searching for a new position, the manager should remain in contact with the employee to make sure that they understand the process and what is happening. The manager should ensure that they keep a record and document all discussions they have with the employee, union representatives and other parts of the business. This must also include contacts made and responses received.

Decision to follow redeployment

Once a suitable redeployment option has been found the manager will be responsible for arranging the redeployment.

The process for redeployment to another role is dependent on whether the role is within the same location and business area, or in another location and business area.

Redeployment within the same location

If there is a suitable role within the employee's own area, the employee's manager is responsible for arranging the change of role.

Having accepted the redeployment, and assuming there are no changes to the employee's contracted working hours or pay, the manager and the employee should agree a return to work date, at which point the employee can start their new role.

If, however, there are changes to the contracted hours of work, or payment terms, the manager must complete an *Employee Change Request (ECR)* through *Managing My Team on PSP*. This will generate a variation of contract so the employee can return to work.

On the employee's first day back to work in their new role, the manager should hold a welcome back meeting. Part of this discussion should include identifying any training that the employee may need to complete in order to undertake their new role.

Redeployment to a different location and/or business area

If the proposed redeployment is to another location or business area, the employee's current manager should work with the proposed new manager to arrange the change of role.

Having accepted the redeployment, the outgoing manager should contact the employee's new manager to arrange a return to work date. The outgoing manager must complete an *Employee Change Request (ECR)* through *Managing My Team on PSP* if appropriate. This will generate a variation of contract.

Good practice is for the employee's new manager to contact the employee prior to their return to work, to discuss the new role and to get to know the employee before they start work. Part of this discussion should also cover any training the employee may need.

The employee's new manager should hold a welcome back meeting on the employee's first day back to work.

What to do if an employee questions the redeployment

Royal Mail Group will make every effort to identify suitable and appropriate roles, however in some situations an employee may question a proposed redeployment on the grounds of either suitability or reasonableness.

How the employee should raise their concerns

Where an offer of redeployment is not acceptable to the employee, the employee should inform their manager of their intent not to accept the role, and should confirm this in writing within five days of receiving the offer of redeployment. A meeting should then be held to discuss the employee's concerns.

The meeting will be held by an appropriate manager who may seek further advice from Occupational Health Service and/or the HR Advice Centre.

The review meeting

The review meeting should be held within two weeks of the written request being received. The employee should be notified at least three working days in advance of the date, time and location of the meeting.

The employee may wish to be accompanied by a work colleague or union representative.

The outcome of the review meeting

The outcome of the review will be one of the following:

- The review is successful and further discussion will take place to identify an appropriate redeployment opportunity. The manager should follow the redeployment process set out above to find a more suitable position

- The review is unsuccessful. The employee should be formally offered the job for a last time. If this is refused, managers must seek advice from the HR Advice Centre.

What happens if no suitable positions can be found?

Where it is not possible to identify a suitable redeployment option, it is important that the manager must be able to document that they have made every effort to contact other managers in neighbouring offices, Senior Resourcing Manager, and Senior HR Manager to find an alternative role.

Where no suitable alternative work is identified, and no further adjustments can be made, the manager should refer to the *Ill Health Policy*.

Keeping records

Records should be kept of all contact made with an employee throughout both the return to work process and the redeployment process and should be recorded in the employee's attendance record.

Records should:

- Be accurate
- Be up to date
- Contain details of all absences and any discussions between the manager and the employee
- Be held securely and locally.

Employees who are unable or refuse to attend absence related meetings guide

This guide provides details on how to manage employees who either are unable to attend for health reasons or decline to attend Occupational Health Service referrals or refuse to attend attendance meetings.

Overview

This guide provides advice to managers on how to deal with employees who are unable to attend Occupational Health Service referrals or meetings under the attendance process due to health reasons, or who otherwise decline or refuse to cooperate with the requirements of the attendance process.

Inability to attend meetings under the attendance process

Where an employee's health is such that they are unable to attend a meeting under the attendance process, the manager should seek advice from the Occupational Health Service to confirm this. The manager may also wish to understand whether the employee would be well enough to participate in such a meeting either at their own home, or else remotely:

- Via telephone
- Via written submissions
- By their representative attending the meeting on their behalf

If the Occupational Health Service advise that the employee is too ill to participate in any way, the manager should consider progressing the case under the Long Term Absence Process.

If the advice is that the employee can participate in a review meeting, then the manager should write to the employee inviting them to attend the meeting in person.

If the employee refuses to participate in the process and attend the meeting, the manager should explain to them that the formal attendance process will be continued without their cooperation and any decision made will be based on the information available to the manager at the time.

Declining Occupational Health Service referrals

As part of the attendance process, the manager should refer the employee to the Occupational Health Service for advice on whether there are health issues that are affecting attendance. In order for the Occupational Health Service to provide expert practical guidance, it is necessary for them to be provided with all the employee's details through the referral document and to assess the employee to discuss their absence and any underlying health issues or problems they may have.

The employee must understand and consent to this process.

An employee may refuse to cooperate with the attendance process by either declining to give this consent or in refusing or failing to attend their referral appointment.

In such cases the approach that should be taken by the manager should be the same:

- The manager should ensure that they document every attempt made to encourage the employee's cooperation with the process
- The manager should also ensure that the employee clearly understands why the referral to the Occupational Health Service is being made and how the information received from them will be used. In order to demonstrate this, the manager should write to the employee to explain why the referral is being made

Ensure the employee understands the consequences of non-cooperation

Where, despite the manager's best attempts, the employee still declines to give consent or attend a referral, they should make the employee aware of the consequences of failing to cooperate with the process. They should ideally meet with the employee to discuss or speak with them on the telephone. This conversation should be confirmed in writing.

The manager should advise the employee that it is in their best interests to attend a referral with the Occupational Health Service to enable the manager to support them with their attendance and any medical or other problems they may have. Where the employee continues to refuse to cooperate, then any decision made will be on the basis of any information that is available at the time and without the input of the Occupational Health Service. This would normally be within two weeks.

Failure to attend meetings under the attendance process

Where an employee refuses to attend a meeting under the attendance process the manager should seek advice from the Occupational Health Service as to whether they are in fact unable to attend for medical reasons.

If the advice is that the employee can participate in the formal meeting, then the manager should write to the employee and explain that they must attend the meeting in person and if they do not attend that meeting the attendance process will continue. The employee can respond in writing.

If the employee still refuses to participate in the process and attend the meeting, or respond in writing, the manager should write to them and explain that the attendance process will continue and any decision made will be based on the information available to the manager at the time. This would normally be within two weeks.

Q&As

1. How will we ensure that everyone knows what the new agreement is and how it should apply?

3 We have produced a policy and guides to provide an overview of how the agreement should apply across the business in a consistent way. These guides cannot be varied locally. Any future changes will be the subject of a discussion between CWU, Unite and Royal Mail with the aim of achieving consensus. 9

2. Why do we need these additional guides?

3 The guides are intended to clarify/elaborate upon the key elements in the agreement. The policy document is quite clear that "in the event of any inconsistency between this policy, the attendance guides and the attendance agreement the terms of the attendance agreement take precedent". 9

3. Is there a change to the attendance standards?

3 The new approach is focussed on supporting employees in meeting the standards. The attendance standards match the existing current Royal Mail and Parcelforce Worldwide attendance standards. However, the review period for employees on a Review 1 or a Review 2 becomes a fixed six months. This replaces the current rolling period. 9

4. Is there a change to how the length of an absence is calculated (i.e. the inclusion of days when no attendance is due)?


3 The way an absence is calculated remains the same. Currently calendar days are counted, for example where an attendance was due on Saturday and Monday but not on Sunday this would be treated as one absence of three days. 9

5. What is the sick pay policy? Is this part of the agreement?



3 The sick pay and sick pay conditions policy remains unchanged and is not part of this agreement. We have clarified in the new attendance agreement how some elements of the approach should work prior to pay being stopped including provision of written notice in advance. Details of this can be found within the policy and guides. 9

6. How should contact be made while an employee is away from work due to illness?



3 Employees have a responsibility to notify their manager as soon as possible before the beginning of their shift or usual work start time in accordance with local arrangements for their office or work location. The employee should advise the manager of the reason for their absence, the likely duration and anticipated return date. Where the employee's absence is going to be longer than a few days then the manager and the employee should agree how they will remain in contact during the period of absence.

This would include the level of contact, how often and the method by which contact will take place. For example, this could be by email or telephone conversation. Where the absence is not likely to last more than a few days further contact should not normally be necessary. Where the absence is longer term it is recommended that contact should be maintained on a weekly basis throughout the period of absence. 



7. It may not be possible for an individual to notify the office of sickness before the commencement of their shift. If, for example, an employee lives alone or is unwell it could be very difficult and may be the last thing on their mind to phone the office. What happens then?

 There is already an existing business approach dealing with unauthorised absence in place which has not changed and should be used in the event that an absence is not notified. This approach requires the manager to attempt to make contact in a variety of ways. Royal Mail has a duty of care to attempt to contact an individual particularly when they live alone or may be unwell. If managers need any help they should contact the HR Services Advice Centre. 



8. What is the new informal review process?

 This is a new part of the agreement to help employees and managers raise any concerns as early as possible. For example, employees might want to let their manager know about an issue or the manager might want to discuss the pattern and frequency of absence with an employee. The idea is that informal discussion in a supportive way can address any perceived problems about attendance. Whilst there will be occasions when it is not possible or appropriate to hold an informal review meeting before a formal attendance review meeting takes place, the clear expectation in the Agreement and guide is that normally an informal meeting will have taken place. 

9. Can an employee take a work colleague or a union representative to an informal discussion?

 The employee will have time to consult with their union representative before the informal discussion if they wish. However, as this is informal, a work colleague or union representative would not attend this meeting. They would, of course, be able to have a work colleague or union representative attend with them for any formal meetings. 

10. Will employees have access to records for informal discussions?

 The manager will give the employee a copy of their attendance record at the informal discussion. 

11. Can employees request copies of records of informal discussions kept by managers?

Employees may request a copy of the records at any time and they will also be provided with a copy before any meeting under the formal process.

12. Are there any prompts for managers about holding informal attendance discussions?

Informal discussions should take place where either the manager or the employee has concerns about their attendance. It should provide an opportunity for the manager and employee to discuss the concerns and identify if any support is required. When an informal discussion may be appropriate will depend on individual circumstances and therefore there are no formal prompts within the system.

13. When employees provide mitigation during a formal attendance review meeting how will this be considered by managers?

The supporting guide is clear that: "Each case should be treated on its merits, and any mitigating factors the employee has raised in relation to their attendance record must be taken into account, along with their previous attendance record and overall attendance performance." The manager must provide a rationale for their decision and should capture any actions agreed.

14. Could you explain why, when the manager is assessing the individual's attendance pattern, the words 'overall performance' and 'reliability' have been added? Is this an additional criterion for issuing formal attendance reviews?

The new agreement is based on the fact that individual circumstances should be taken into account when making decisions. Managers will take into account an individual's circumstances to consider whether a formal Attendance Review is necessary and, if it is, whether the Attendance Review should be issued. An additional criterion has not been added.

15. Can employees be accompanied at any of the attendance meetings?

Employees have the right to be accompanied by either a work colleague or a union representative during any formal part of the attendance process. There has not been any change to the role of that representative; they can put forward a case on behalf of the employee. The employee would, however, be expected to answer any questions directly put to them by the manager, as they do now.

16. What would the approach be to maintaining contact for an employee who has been absent from work for more than 14 days due to sickness?

It is especially important to stay in contact with employees who are absent for long periods. Absent employees rapidly become disconnected from the workplace, and this in itself can form a barrier to a return to work if not addressed. It helps to ensure they are kept up to date with any changes at work and that they receive all necessary support to facilitate their return to work.

It is important that both the manager and employee are proactive in maintaining contact during periods of long term sickness absence. How the contact takes place should be agreed and there should normally be contact on at least a weekly basis. The local union representative, if the employee wishes, may have a role in facilitating this proactive approach by supporting and encouraging a two-way dialogue with the employee.

17. How will long term absence be managed now?

One important aspect of the new agreement is that there should be ongoing contact between the employee and their manager. In addition, there will be regular review meetings which can also involve the local union representative if the employee wishes. The emphasis is on facilitating as early a return to normal duties as possible. This may require a phased return or, if this is not possible, the consideration of permanent job modifications or redeployment.

18. I have recently had an accident on duty and had time off work as a result. Will these absences count on my attendance record?

Absences due to accidents at work will normally be discounted from the formal attendance process. There are a few exceptions to this – Any manager considering counting an absence arising from an accident at work must contact the HR Services Advice Centre and inform the employee.

19. What if the advice provided by Occupational Health differs to that from a GP?

If the advice provided by Occupational Health differs to that from a GP then an Occupational Health practitioner will contact the employee's GP to discuss any issues and come to a mutual consensus.

20. If an employee is on sick absence and they are due to go on holiday what do they need to do?

If an employee is unable to take holiday due to being unwell they should notify their manager at the first opportunity and the sick absence should be recorded as continuous.

If annual holiday follows a period of sick absence and the employee is now able to return to work the employee should inform their manager that they are fit to return to work, however they are resuming onto annual holiday. The manager would then close the absence on PSP.

21. What can I expect to see as my attendance record?

PSP provides reports on attendance details for the current year and the previous four years.



**Managing attendance
is and always will
be important**



We have to meet demanding customer expectations of a regular, reliable service and we want to do this in a way that treats each and every employee as we ourselves would like to be treated.



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