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SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

Purpose and scope

As part of its duty of care to staff, QRS has put in place procedures to manage sickness absence. Staff are expected to maintain a satisfactory record of attendance. However, QRS aims to balance the sensitive nature of individual sickness and ill health against its needs to achieve its objectives. As a caring employer, QRS aims to assist employees to retain or regain good health.

It is essential that the following procedures be carried out with tact and sensitivity and a realisation that the management of attendance is the joint responsibility of the line manager and the individual member of staff. The HR Director will be available to advise and support line managers and their staff.

Should a member of staff fail to comply with notification or certification procedures or otherwise abuse the procedures, the disciplinary procedure may be used. The policy and procedure applies to all QRS employees.

Principles

This policy and associated procedure incorporate the following principles.

- **Good faith**

The policy and procedures will be applied to all members of staff in a consistent manner and without discrimination.

- **Fairness**

Any action taken will be reasonable and necessary. Members of staff involved are entitled to be heard with courtesy and respect.

- **Confidentiality**

Information relating to sickness absence will only be shared with individuals who have a need to know.

- **Representation**

If issues of attendance arise within these procedures and a formal approach is required to deal with them, a member of staff will be entitled to be accompanied by a work colleague.

Procedure

Members of staff who are away from work due to sickness or injury must conform to the following procedure.

Reporting sickness absence

The member of staff must telephone their line manager by 9.45am on the first day of absence. If the reason for absence is sensitive and the member of staff prefers, they may contact the HR Director directly. If it is impossible for the individual to make contact personally, someone may do this on their behalf, for example, a family member. The reason for absence must be given, along with how long the individual expects to be away from work. If the employee's immediate line manager is not available, this information should be conveyed to the Operations Director / a Director. The same procedure should be used if an individual is unexpectedly absent from work for any other reason including an accident. If the employee is unsure how long they will be absent, they should keep their line manager updated. If there is no contact from an employee by 9.45am, the line manager or a Director will try and contact the employee or their emergency contact.

The line manager or Director taking the message must inform the Operations Director immediately so that any necessary follow-up action can be taken, for example, amendment to pay etc.....

Duration of sickness absence and medical certification

If a member of staff is sick for more than seven calendar days, they must provide QRS with a medical certificate to cover the period of their incapacity for work.

Recording sickness absence

All sickness absences must be recorded on the employee's personal record held by the Operations Director. Dates recorded must be for actual periods of sickness, including non-working days, for statutory sick pay purposes. The HR Director will record the absence on the individual's personal record. Absence monitoring reports will be provided to Directors.

Return to work discussion

On the employee's return to work, the Operations Director should discuss the reasons for absence with the employee, regardless of its length. This is intended to give the individual an opportunity to discuss any problems which may be a factor in the absence and for the Operations Director to discuss any action points and brief the member of staff on what has happened while they have been away. The details of the return to work discussion will be recorded by the Operations Director. The form will be placed with the individual's personal records along with the self-certification form.

Sickness during booked leave entitlement

Where uncertificated or self-certificated sickness coincides with booked leave entitlement, QRS will not count this as sick leave. However, in exceptional circumstances and where a medical certificate has been obtained, there may be grounds for reinstatement of leave in whole or in part. This should be discussed and agreed by the Directors.

Statutory sick pay

Statutory sick pay will be paid after 4 weeks at the current rate.

This will be topped up by normal salary for a maximum of 10 days in a 12 month period at the discretion of the company.

Frequent short-term sickness absences

If a member of staff has more than four separate sickness absences or 10 days' total sickness absence over a 12 month period, the Operations Director will arrange a meeting with the individual with the aim of the following:

- to identify any underlying reasons for the sickness absences
- discuss the frequency and reasons for the absences and ensure that the member of staff is aware that the absence record is giving cause for concern
- advise the member of staff to seek medical attention if appropriate.
- if appropriate, inform the member of staff that the absences are unacceptable and draw the member of staff's attention to the QRS's Absence policy
- give consideration to any personal problems and possible ways of helping the member of staff resolve them
- agree a reasonable period of time, normally three to six months, over which the member of staff's attendance can be assessed
- indicate what the next step will be if the member of staff fails to reach the standard required. The standards or targets will be specified.

If there is no underlying medical condition and the reasons for absence appear not to be genuine, the matter may be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure. If the absences are genuine, but the frequency remains unacceptable, the matter may be dealt with formally, and a formal meeting held.

Accident or injury

Any accident, however slight, which occurs in the course of work, whether or not on QRS premises or while travelling on QRS business, must be reported without delay to a Director.

Long-term absence due to ill health or disability

Where an employee has been absent for over three consecutive weeks, the Operations Director will make contact to see how the individual is and when they are likely to be back at work.

It is expected that the line manager will contact the employee regularly, normally weekly, while off long-term sick. In some circumstances, for example if the reason for absence is sensitive, it may be appropriate for the Operations Director to maintain contact.

In cases where an employee is not able to return to work to full duties after long term sickness absence, but a full return is expected within 6-8 weeks, the line manager /Operations Director should consider arranging a phased return in consultation with the employee.

Principles of a phased return

- Phased returns should normally last for up to eight weeks, but may be extended by four weeks in exceptional cases.
- The phased return programme must be agreed by the employee and Director's in consultation with a Health advisor.
- The programme must be recorded by the line manager.
- The programme will be reviewed regularly by the line manager and Operations Director, and adjustments made if necessary.
- When the phased return ends, the employee will be expected to return to work in their normal employment capacity. Where this is not possible, the line manager and Operations Director will jointly investigate alternatives, including permanent re-

deployment, early retirement on the grounds of ill health, dismissal on the grounds of medical incapability, and a temporary or permanent reduction in hours.

Where a phased return to work is agreed, the following arrangements in respect of pay will be put in place.

- when they return to full time hours their salary will return to full pay.

When an employee has exhausted all entitlement to occupational sick pay they will be paid only for the number of hours worked during their phased return. The Operations Director will write to the employee in advance of their pay being reduced to half or nil pay.

Where there is no clear indication of a return to work following two months of absence, the following will be taken into account when deciding on the next steps:

- the nature of the incapacity
- the prognosis for future health
- the requirements of the business
- the employee's views on continuing employment
- the employee's length of service and past sickness record
- whether the employee could be offered alternative work or other duties more suitable to their state of health
- whether the condition may be classed as a disability
- whether any reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act should be considered.

QRS will make every effort to deal with the case informally.

Formal meeting

Where it is unlikely that an employee will be able to return to work within a time period that is reasonable in all the circumstances, and it is not possible to make an accommodation to their current role or to redeploy them, ill health early retirement or termination of the individual's employment may need to be considered. Any early retirement would be facilitated by the Operations Director. No decision to pursue any of these options would be taken without reviewing the medical evidence available, writing to the employee to advise of these potential courses of action and consulting personally with the employee where possible.

Where an employee is a member of a relevant occupational pension scheme and the medical evidence indicates that their condition could qualify for ill health retirement, this will be pursued as the first option. Any decision on granting a pension under these circumstances rests solely with the trustees of the fund concerned and will be based on the medical evidence presented.

For employees who are ineligible for an ill health pension, or are not members of an occupational pension fund, the only option in the absence of redeployment or accommodation possibilities will be termination of employment on grounds of capability/incapacity.

Where the facts of a case appear to call for formal review, a meeting will be called as soon as possible. The meeting should comprise a panel of at least two people, normally a Director and another manager, advised by the Operations Director. A report will be

presented by the Operations Director detailing the medical evidence and a statement from the line manager indicating the impact of the absence. The employee will be informed of the options that may be considered at the meeting. This will be sent to the employee at least five working days before the meeting.

The employee shall be informed by letter giving at least five working days' notice that a meeting is to be held. The employee may request an alternative date to allow up to an additional five working days to prepare themselves or if the representative is unavailable. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a work colleague. The letter shall include a copy of the sickness absence procedure.

The purpose of the meeting is to consult with the employee and to determine options for the future.

A letter confirming the outcome will be handed to the employee whenever possible or posted directly by recorded delivery to the employee within three working days of the hearing.

In the event of a dismissal, contractual rights including payment during the notice period at the rate of sick pay applicable at the time will be honored.

Right of appeal against termination

An employee has the right of appeal against termination.

Should an employee wish to appeal they must do so, in writing, to a Director, within five working days of being informed in writing of the termination.

A request for an appeal must specify the grounds of the appeal.

A member of the original panel will attend to present the reasons for their decision.

The panel will consist of the Managing Director and another manager/Director, and will be advised by the Operations Director. Neither member of the panel will have been part of the original hearing. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a work colleague.

The panel will hear all or part of the previous hearing depending upon the nature of the appeal. The panel has the scope to uphold the previous decision or substitute an alternative decision.

Within three working days of the appeal the panel will record the decision and post it directly by recorded delivery to the employee.

The decision of the appeal panel is final.

These policies supplement your terms of employment but are not of contractual effect. Their purpose is to explain the Company's current policies and procedures but they may be subject to change without notice if changes are considered appropriate by the Company or if there are changes in relevant legislation.