# Sickness absence

**Policy**

The Church aims to secure the attendance of all employees throughout the working week. However, it recognises that a certain level of absence may be necessary due to sickness.

It is the Church’s policy to offer security of employment during such periods, subject to operational requirements and the conditions below.

The Sickness absence policy is not contractually binding, and the contents may be subject to revision from time to time.

**Procedure**

**Notification and certification**

If the employee is unable to attend, he or she must notify Manager by 9:30am on the first day of absence, indicating; the nature of the illness, if possible when he or she expects to return to work, their contact details and any outstanding/urgent work that requires attention.

The employee must complete a self-certification form for the first 7 calendar days of all sickness absences and give it to Manager. This form can be completed on the employee's return to work if their absence lasts less than 7 calendar days. Otherwise, they must request a copy of the form and complete and post it to their Manager as soon as possible.

If the employee is absent by the eighth day (including Saturday and Sunday), they must also send a Dr’s note/fit note issued by their GP, (alongside the self-certification form), to their Manager.

Current Dr’s notes/fit notes must cover all subsequent periods of absence. The employee should also keep in touch with the Manager regarding their condition and likely return to work date.

If the employee does not follow this procedure, they may be dealt with under the Church’s disciplinary procedure. Furthermore, the employee's statutory sick pay (SSP) may be withheld.

**Illness at work**

If you are taken ill while at work, you should contact your line manager explaining the situation and ask for permission to leave work.

**Return to work**

The employee should return to work as soon as they are fit to return.

Requests for temporary adjustments to the employee's working conditions will be considered by the Church and will be accommodated wherever possible and if Church circumstances permit.

In the case of extended periods of absence, the Church may require that the employee's fitness to return is confirmed by a medical practitioner of the Church’s choice.

**Return-to-work catch-up**

Line managers will arrange for anyone absent on sick leave to have a return-to-work catch-up. A return-to-work catch-up is informal but gives us the opportunity to;

* check on the employee's fitness to return
* check they have correctly recorded the reason for and number of days of the absence
* check all absence paperwork is completed and up to date
* ensure that all the support the employee needs is in place
* bring the employee up to date on any changes.
* It also gives the employee the opportunity to raise any concerns or questions they may have on their return to work and to bring any matters they consider relevant to the attention of the manager.

**Extended absences**

The Church will be sympathetic when an employee is ill, but the employee should appreciate that if they are persistently absent through ill-health or long-term injury or incapacity, it will not be possible for the situation to continue indefinitely, and their employment may be reviewed or terminated. Termination will not take place without:

* full consultation with the employee
* medical investigation
* A consideration of alternative employment.

Where a return to work does prove possible, the Church may require that the employee's fitness to return is confirmed by a practitioner of the Church’s choice.

The Church reserves the right to amend an employee’s contractual hours of work as a health and safety measure and/or to take account of any adjustments to working hours that may need to be made for reasons relating to your health, whether as part of a rehabilitation plan or otherwise.

Where sickness or injury prevents an employee from fulfilling their contract of employment, the Church reserves the right to terminate your employment on the grounds of ill-health.

**Meetings/home visits**

During any absence it is important that the employee keeps in touch so that Manager is kept informed of the employee's health and likely return-to-work date.

The employee will therefore be periodically asked to attend meetings with Manager on work premises, for the purpose of providing information and facilitating an effective return to work.

If the employee is too unwell or physically unable to attend the office, the Church reserves the right to visit him or her at home.

### Disability

If the employee has a condition that means they might be considered disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010 (EA), the Church has a duty to attempt to make reasonable adjustments to their job to accommodate their requirements. The employee will be fully consulted at all times.

Reasonable adjustments to be considered may include an adjustment to working hours or working equipment being adapted (or special equipment to be provided) as appropriate to assist the employee in continuing to complete their role. Physical adjustments may also be considered i.e. a ramp being required for entry to a building; moving furniture or widening doors.

If reasonable adjustments or alternative employment prove not to be viable options, and there is no likelihood of a return to work in the near future, a decision to dismiss may be the inevitable outcome.

### Dismissal and the right to appeal

In the event of a dismissal, the reason for the dismissal and the circumstances leading up to that decision will be documented in writing to the employee. The employee may appeal against their dismissal by writing, within two working days of their receipt of the dismissal letter, to a director of the Church, stating the grounds on which they wish to appeal.

The appeal will be heard in accordance with the Church’s disciplinary appeals procedure.

### Payment arrangements

Under the terms of the Sickness Absence Policy and subject to complying with the terms of that policy the employee may, following absence from work because of sickness or injury, be eligible to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), provided they meet the qualifying conditions. If they are eligible for the payment of SSP, it will be subject to the deduction of tax and National Insurance contributions.

Once the employee has completed your probationary period, subject to complying with the terms of the Sickness Absence policy they may be entitled to receive Company sick pay for periods of absence on the following basis;

* basic salary (inclusive of any SSP due) for the first three weeks in any such absence; and
* half their basic salary (inclusive of any SSP due) for the next three weeks in any such absence; up to a maximum of six weeks company sick pay (including both full and half pay).

### Unpaid sickness

There are circumstances where the employee's absence due to sickness will be unpaid, e.g. when:

* he is she is ineligible for Statutory sick pay

Company sick pay shall not be payable;

* during probation
* during an employee’s notice period
* Following notification of a disciplinary or grievance investigation or procedure, (unless that sickness absence relates to pregnancy or to a pre-existing disability).
* or if the employee fails to comply with the terms of the Sickness Absence policy.

The employee should note that during periods of unpaid sickness he or she will receive neither any basic salary nor variable payments (e.g. commission). Further, holidays will only accrue at a rate that is commensurate with his or her statutory entitlement under the Working Time Regulations 1998, i.e. pro rata up to a total of 28 days per annum, including public holidays.

The employee must comply with any reporting and certification of injury or ill health requirements which the Church may from time to time require, which are set out in the policy.

Any unusual, frequent, pattern or prolonged absence or any absence whether supported by evidence of sickness may lead to investigation and disciplinary action being taken against an employee and/or sick pay being withheld.

**Keeping in contact during sickness absence**

Employees should keep in regular contract with the Church to update on their fitness and expect to be contacted from time to time by their Line Manager to discuss their wellbeing, expected length of continued absence from work and any work that requires attention. Such contact is intended to provide reassurance and will be kept to a minimum in view of our needs.

In the event that an employee has any concerns, about the reason for their absence or their ability to return to work, they should feel free to contact your Line Manager team at any time.

**Return of the Church’s equipment**

If the employee is off sick for an extended period of time (e.g. one month or more) the Church may require them to return Church equipment until they are well enough to return to work.

If the employee does not return to work following a period of sickness absence, they will be required to return all outstanding Church equipment on the date of termination of his or her employment.

**Sickness absence meetings procedure**

We may apply this procedure whenever we consider it necessary, including, for example, when you:

1. Have been absent due to illness on six separate occasions during any 12-month period;
2. Have discussed matters at a return to work catch-up that require investigation; and/or
3. Have been absent for more than seven days.

**Notice of Meeting**

We will give 48 hours written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. We will put any concerns about sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing or otherwise advise why the meeting is being called. A reasonable opportunity to consider this information before a meeting will be provided.

**The Meeting**

The meeting will be conducted by your line manager and/or a member of the management team. You must take all reasonable steps to attend this meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If you or your companion is unable to attend at the time specified, you should immediately inform your line manager of alternative dates you are available.

**Decisions**

Confirmation of any decision made at a meeting, the reasons for it, and of the right of appeal will be given in writing to you within seven days of a sickness absence meeting.

If, at any time, the Church consider that you have taken or are taking sickness absence when you are not unwell, the Manager will initiate disciplinary proceedings.

**Right to be accompanied at meetings**

You may bring a companion to any meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure. The companion may be either a trade union official or a fellow employee. Their identity must be confirmed to the Manager conducting the meeting in good time before it takes place.

Employees are allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay to act as a companion. However, they are not obliged to act as a companion and may decline a request if they so wish. Some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting.

We may at our discretion, permit a companion who is not an employee or union official (for example, a family member) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability, or difficulty understanding English. A companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up an employee’s position, but will not be allowed to answer questions on their behalf. An employee may confer privately with their companion at any time during a meeting.

**Stage 1:** First sickness absence meeting

The purposes of the first sickness absence meeting may include:

* Discussing the reasons for absence.
* If you have been on long-term sickness absence, determining how long the absence is likely to last;
* If you have been absent on a number of occasions, determining the likelihood of further absences;
* Considering whether medical advice is required;
* Considering what, if any, measures might improve your health and/or attendance; and/or
* Determining a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting under the sickness absence procedure.

**Stage 2:** Further sickness absence meeting(s)

Depending on the matters discussed at the first stage of the sickness absence procedure, a further meeting or meetings may be necessary.

The purposes of further meeting(s) may include:

* Discussing the reasons for and impact of ongoing absence(s).
* If you have been on long-term sickness absence, discussing how long the absence is likely to last.
* If you have been absent on a number of occasions, discussing the likelihood of further absences.
* If it has not been obtained, considering whether medical advice is required. If it has been obtained, considering the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required.
* Consideration of your ability to return to/remain in your job in view both of your capabilities and our organisation needs and any adjustments that can reasonably be made to your job to enable you to do so.
* Considering possible redeployment opportunities if appropriate and whether any adjustments can reasonably be made to assist you to redeploy.
* Where you are able to return from long-term sick leave, whether to your job or to a redeployed job, agreeing a return to work program.
* If it is considered that you are unlikely to be able to return to work from long-term absence whether there are any benefits for which you should be considered.
* Determining a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting(s). This may, depending on steps already taken by us, include warning you that you may be at risk of dismissal.

**Stage 3:** Final sickness absence meeting

Where you have been warned that you are at risk of dismissal, we may invite you to a meeting under the third stage of the sickness absence procedure.

* The purposes of the meeting will be:
* To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed.
* Where you are still on long-term sickness absence to consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under stage two of the procedure; either about your possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.
* To consider any further matters that you wish to raise.
* To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time.
* Termination will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice.

**Appeals**

You may appeal against the outcome of any stage of this procedure and may bring a companion to an appeal meeting.

An appeal should be made in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, to a Senior Manager

within seven working days of the date on which the decision was sent. One week's written notice of an appeal meeting will normally be given. In cases of dismissal the appeal will be held as soon as possible. Any new matters raised in an appeal may delay an appeal meeting if further investigation is required.

You will be provided with written details of any new information which comes to light before an appeal meeting.

You will also be given a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the meeting.

**Meeting**

The appeal meeting will be conducted by a Senior Manager, more senior than the individual who conducted the sickness absence meetings if practicable.

**Decision**

Following an appeal, the original decision may be confirmed, revoked or replaced with a different decision. The final decision will be confirmed in writing. There will be no further right of appeal.

The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

## Capability policy – sickness absence

**Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the approach that will be taken in addressing capability issues that have arisen due to sickness absence.

Whilst it is accepted that employees will be sick from time to time, The Church is concerned when this sickness impedes on the ability of the employee to do his or her job. This could be because the level of absence means that the employee is missing vital training.

Or it could be that the persistent but intermittent pattern of absence makes it difficult for The Church to plan the allocation of work duties. This policy is not contractually binding, and the contents may be subject to revision from time to time.

**Probationary period**

This policy applies to employees who have satisfactorily completed their probationary period. Issues arising during the probationary period will be dealt with separately.

**Acceptable levels of absence**

The Church does not set an “acceptable” level of absence. When absence is impacting on the performance of the individual or The Church, action will be taken.

**Responsibilities of the employee**

If the employee is suffering from an illness that is likely to impede his or her performance at work, he or she should inform the manager. If the illness is of a sensitive nature the employee can opt to speak to a manager of the same sex.

The employee is responsible for informing his or her manager of any difficulties that he or she is having in relation to ill health and informing his or her manager of any ways that this might impede attendance or performance at work.

**Responsibilities of the manager**

The manager will make every attempt to assist an employee who has health issues, within the constraints of the operation of The Church.

**Recording of sickness absence**

In accordance with the sickness absence policy, all employees are required to complete a self-certification form and/or produce a medical note from a doctor when they return to work following a period of absence. Employees will then be required to attend a return to work discussion with their manager. Any concerns about the level of absence will initially be raised informally by the manager at a return to work interview. A formal warning will not be issued as part of a return to work interview.

**Medical reports**

If the level of sickness absence of an employee is seen to be unacceptable the employer will ask the employee for permission to seek a medical report. This will either be a request to the employee’s doctor or will be a request for the employee to attend an appointment with a doctor appointed by The Church.

The employee will be allowed access to any medical reports in line with the sickness absence policy.

**Medical suspension**

If there are concerns that the employee’s health might mean that it is unsafe for the employee to continue working, the employee will be suspended on full pay on medical grounds whilst further investigations take place.

If the persistent but intermittent absence of the employee makes the allocation of work duties very difficult, The Church might suspend the employee on full pay whilst discussions about the sickness absence take place.

**Home visits**

If the employee has a persistent period of sickness absence The Church reserves the right to request to meet with the employee at his or her home. This will be arranged at a convenient time for both the employee and the manager making the visit.

**Re-allocation of work duties**

If the employee is not able to continue with his/her work duties due to the sickness that has been identified, all attempts will be made to allocate alternative duties to the employee. If this is not possible then termination of employment will be considered.

**Disability**

If the employee is disabled under the definition of the Equality Act 2010 the employer will make any reasonable adjustments to accommodate the employee in the workplace.

**Persistent and intermittent absence**

If the employee is taking a number of persistent and intermittent periods of absence The Church might decide that disciplinary action is appropriate. This action will only be taken when the medical situation has been investigated, an informal warning has been given and no improvement has been seen. The process that will be taken for the disciplinary hearing will be that set out in the disciplinary procedure.