

# **QA Sickness Policy**

Last updated - November 2014

## 1. Introduction to QA's Sickness Policy

### 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to explain QA's approach to the management of sickness absence and performance when it is related to ill health and it applies to all of QA's UK based employees.

### 1.2 Principles

We encourage everyone to maximise their attendance at work while recognising that from time to time there will be episodes of absence and/or performance may be impacted due to ill health. Our aim is to strike a balance between our need for our team members to be able to attend work and fulfil the roles they work in while ensuring that we are effectively and pro-actively supporting individuals who are absent from work due to sickness. We aim to encourage joint responsibility between individuals and the business in managing sickness absence.

We realise that usually, sickness and serious illness are unavoidable. As a result, QA provides a discretionary company sick pay scheme to any staff member who has over six months service and who has passed their probationary period. In addition, for those who are facing very serious long term incapacity we also provide a Group Income Protection benefit for staff members with over a year's service. In the past, we have found these two benefits have provided a very valuable safety net for our team members when they have been faced with serious illness and we feel this is a key method for us to look after the welfare of our people. More details on these two areas can be found further on in this policy.

QA reviews its policies on a regular basis and this policy may be changed from time to time. You will be notified of any material changes through Exposure (QA's newsletter) or such other means as shall apply from time to time.

The remaining detailed sections of this policy cover:

- 2 Reporting sickness absence
- 3 Returning to work from sickness absence
- 4 Occupational health referrals
- 5 Home visits or suitable alternative venue
- 6 Time off for medical appointments/medical treatment/operations
- 7 Accident absence reporting
- 8 Alternative employment
- 9 Line manager responsibilities
- 10 Absence management and capability process
- 11 Sick pay and benefits including discretionary company sick pay policy
- 12 Group income protection benefit
- 13 Other benefits payable during sickness absence

If you have any questions remaining please feel free to contact the HR team.

## 2. Reporting sickness absence

### 2.1

#### Employee Responsibility and Recording

It is your responsibility to adhere to the following procedure on each episode of absence. All absence should be recorded on Cascade and you have responsibility to ensure an accurate record of all your absences.

### 2.2 Reporting Procedure

Depending on which role you perform, in the event of any sickness absence or lateness, you should:

*Customer facing delivery roles - QAL Trainers, QAHE Lecturers and QAA Assessors and Tutors*

You must contact the Scheduling team relevant for your role as soon as possible so they can organise cover and minimise the impact of absences on our delegates, students and learners before making contact with your line manager.

QA Learning Business Applications team – 01753 898560

QA Learning Professional Services team – 01753 898570

QA Learning Technical team – 01753 898550

QA Learning MLS team – 01455 623675

QA Apprenticeships - 01753 898577

QA Higher Education – 020 7656 8470

*All other roles*

Speak to your manager on the first day of any absence, before your start time, a text or e-mail is not sufficient. You should update your manager on the reason for your absence and provide a likely return to work date if possible. If you are unable to make contact with your manager, you should contact the HR Department at [HR@QA.com](mailto:HR@QA.com) or on 01753 898 660. You should then update your manager daily unless agreed otherwise, to enable them to support you and ensure that your work is covered for the duration of your absence. Should you be unable to make contact yourself (i.e. hospitalisation) a third party should contact your line manager or HR to advise them on your behalf. If the reason for your absence is for any other reason than sickness (i.e. Compassionate leave or time off to care for dependents) make sure you advise your manager, so they can guide you appropriately.

If you do not follow the reporting procedure of any absences, you may be subject to Disciplinary action.

If your manager wishes, they have the right to request a Doctor's Fit Note at your expense.

### 2.3 Sickness Absence Lasting Longer than 7 Calendar Days

For all absences longer than 7 calendar days you should provide a "Statement of Fitness for Work" certificate from your GP. This should be forwarded to HR via [HR@QA.com](mailto:HR@QA.com) so they can process your salary in line with Company sick pay guidelines (details of which are below). If you don't provide a copy of this certificate, you may not be paid for the period of your absence. Remember, you must maintain regular contact as agreed with your line manager. Depending on the reason for your absence, your manager may request a medical certificate of your GP's consent for your return to work.

### 3. Returning to Work from Sickness Absence

#### 3.1 Return to Work Interview

On your return to work, you must update the absence screen on Cascade to ensure you are paid correctly and in line with Company sick pay, as well as to ensure there is an accurate record of your absences.

After each episode of absence, your manager will conduct a return to work interview as soon as practicable and ideally within no more than three days of your return. You should ensure that this is scheduled with your manager on your return. This can either be face to face or via a telephone call depending on what is most practical. The return to work interview is an opportunity for you to discuss your recent absence and highlight any support you may require as well as an opportunity for your manager to provide you with an update on work and any other news that has happened during your absence.

#### 3.2 Return to Work Recommendations

In the return to work interview your manager will review any recommendations made by your doctor/consultant to ensure you are proactively managing your own health and attendance and to ensure that reasonable adjustments that are needed are made if any. Further advice will be sought from Occupational Health where this is appropriate and relevant.

### 4. Occupational Health Referrals

For any absences where there appears to be an underlying health condition as the reason for your absence, a referral to Occupational Health may be made. This is to provide your manager with advice on the nature of the absence, likely duration and any support which may facilitate your return to work. This will be explained prior to the referral being made and is a useful way to ensure the Company is able to do everything possible to support a return to work. The referral process may include taking part in a telephone based assessment or attending a face to face appointment and if you do not consent to the referral, your manager will continue to manage your absence in line with the information they have.

### 5. Home Visit or Suitable Alternative Venue

If your absence is prolonged, or there is concern about the nature of the absence, your line manager may, depending on the nature of the absence, arrange to meet with you either at home or a suitable alternative venue to discuss and identify what support the company may be able to provide to facilitate a return to work and/or as part of the formal management of your absence.

### 6. Time Off for Medical Appointments /Medical Treatment/Operations

Where you need to attend a doctor's or other medical appointment, where possible, these should be organised at the weekend/before/after work or if not possible either at the start or end of the day in order to minimise disruption to the business. If there is a requirement for you to attend regular appointments, you should provide your manager the appointment card in advance, detailing the frequency of appointments so they can manage the impact on your workload, your colleagues and support you appropriately. For regular appointments you must take all possible reasonable steps to ensure that disruption to your work (if any) is minimised.

Depending on the frequency and/or timing of these appointments, your manager may request that some of the time is taken as annual leave; that you agree to make up the time elsewhere or agree a temporary change to your working pattern.

Any absences for voluntary cosmetic surgery purposes will not be paid for in line with Company sick pay and should be taken as annual leave.

### 7. Accident Absence Reporting

If you have had an accident or incident while at work you should report it to your local Training Centre Administrator/receptionist (TCA), so that it can be logged in the 'Accident Book'.

The TCA team will update the Facilities Department, who are responsible for monitoring and managing our Health & Safety at work.

### 8. Alternative Employment

Whilst absent from work due to illness, you must not undertake any other work, either paid or unpaid, without prior written consent of a Director.

### 9. Line Manager Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all QA Managers to monitor and manage work attendance within their team, to maintain a good standard of attendance and to facilitate rehabilitation and return to work in the cases of ill-health. Each month, the HR department provide statistics and information about absence levels across the business, the number of Return to Work Interviews completed and other related information to the Executive team, so it is imperative that all data is input into the Cascade system and is accurate.

Line managers are expected to be responsible for the following actions:

- To ensure that their team are fully aware and reminded periodically of the correct absence notification procedures and adhere to them;
- To encourage employees to attend work wherever reasonably possible (making reasonable adjustments if needed) and to discourage absenteeism;
- To ensure that the formal absence management/capability processes below are followed as appropriate where there are repeated or lengthy absences;
- To check that Cascade has been updated with ALL absence data in a timely manner, as there are payroll implications;
- To ensure that absence is monitored and reviewed in line with Company policy, maintaining contact with absent employees as needed;
- To give reasonable support (if applicable) to any member of their team who is suffering from an illness or injury that either affects their ability to perform their job role or to attend work;
- Where a face to face review is needed, organise a home visit, or a meeting at an alternative suitable venue where an individual cannot come to one of the QA offices, to identify what suitable support may be provided in the event of a long term absence;
- To ensure the relevant medical certification is submitted to HR in a timely manner;
- To hold a Return to Work Interview within three days of the team member returning to work after EVERY absence, either face to face or by telephone;
- To support an individual's return to work by making reasonable adjustments where appropriate and necessary; and
- To seek advice and support from their HR Representative as required in relation to any long term absence or stress related illness or where there are frequent/persistent absences..

### 10. Absence Management and Capability Process

We proactively manage sickness absence to ensure that we are providing the right support to enable you to regularly attend work. All instances of sickness absence are recorded and monitored and

absence will be managed in line with the stages below to ensure we are taking appropriate steps to improve health and attendance and that we have the attendance required within teams to ensure the needs of the business are met.

### 10.1 The Bradford Factor

We use an absence management tool called The Bradford Factor for measuring and managing sickness absence. The scoring system places greater emphasis on the number of instances of absence, rather than the total number of absent days. This is because frequent absences are more disruptive and have more of an impact on the ability of an individual and teams to meet their objectives.

The Bradford Factor is calculated as follows:

$S \times S \times D = \text{Bradford Points Score}$

(S is the number of periods of absence and D is the number of working day's absence)

#### Example

1 period of absence of 14 days = 14 points

$(1 \times 1 \times 14)$

2 periods of absence of 4 days = 32 points

$(2 \times 2 \times 8)$

Within QA, the trigger for the Bradford Factor is 100 (in a rolling 12 month period or less) at which point your manager would begin the formal management of your absence. It is pro-rated for part time workers. Trigger points are detailed below based on the number of days worked and are irrespective of hours worked:

- 100 points for five days a week;
- 80 points for four days a week;
- 60 points for three days a week; and
- 40 points for two days a week or less.

### 10.2 Ill Health Capability Process

The process for the management of both short and long term absence is explained below. Should you be required to attend a formal meeting with your line manager with support from HR to discuss your absence or performance related to ill health, you will be given at least two working days' notice and advised in writing of the details of the meeting and of your right to be accompanied by either a trade union representative, or a work colleague. You should note that if you have unauthorised absence from work and there is not a genuine cause for your absence (e.g. an illness that is severe enough to prevent you attending or severe travel disruption that you cannot safely overcome) you will be subject to the companies disciplinary processes for misconduct (including possible gross misconduct if warranted) as outlined in the staff handbook rather than the ill health capability process outlined in this policy.

Should you be unable to make the original scheduled date of the meeting, for example should your employee representative not be available, the meeting will be rearranged on one occasion. If you are unable to attend the rescheduled meeting, your manager will hold it in your absence with support from HR and the outcome will be confirmed to you in writing. The purpose of any formal meeting will be to understand the reasons for the continued absence or poor performance due to ill health and to review any actions or support which have been put in place. Any sanction, new actions and timescales for review will be agreed and confirmed back to you in writing.

### 10.3 Short Term Absence

The primary aim of monitoring short term absence is to identify reasons and any underlying issues to help improve attendance. High levels of short term absence impact on the remainder of the team who have to cover as well as manage their own workload and negatively impact on QA's ability to meet its objectives and service levels.

Patterns of repeated short term sickness absence will be investigated and managed and where, for example absence occurs after a period of annual leave on a specific day or on a regular basis, it may be dealt with in line with our Disciplinary policy. The process directly below will be used in response to repeated short term absences unless there is an identifiable long term health condition causing the absences in which case the long term absence management process will be used instead.

#### Stage 1

Where your Bradford Factor score is 100, you will be invited to a Short Term Stage 1 formal meeting to discuss the reasons for absence and have the opportunity to provide an explanation. The outcome of this meeting will usually be a first written warning due to your poor attendance which will remain on your file for a period of 12 months.

#### Stage 2

If there are further absences, and your Bradford Factor remains above 100 you will be invited to a Short Term Stage 2 formal meeting to discuss the reasons for your continued absences and have the opportunity to provide an explanation. The outcome of this meeting will usually be a final written warning which would remain on your file for a period of 12 months. At this stage, we would additionally explore whether any reasonable adjustments to your role or alternatives would facilitate an improvement in your attendance.

#### Stage 3 – Final Stage

If you have further short term absence subsequent to the receipt of a final written warning, and your Bradford Factor remains above 100, you will be invited to a Short Term Stage 3 (final) formal meeting. This is the final stage of the Short Term Absence management process and at this stage your employment will probably be at risk. This meeting will be to discuss the reasons for your continued absences and you will have the opportunity to provide an explanation and present any mitigating factors you feel should be considered. Your manager will consider whether any reasonable adjustments could be accommodated to facilitate an improvement in your attendance or investigate whether there are any suitable alternative roles within the business. If after investigation, this is not found to be reasonably possible this meeting is likely to result in your dismissal due to your poor attendance record.

### 10.4 Long Term Absence

Absences are managed in line with the long term absence management process where your Bradford Factor score is either already above or reasonably foreseeable that your illness will make it rise above 100 and the primary cause of absence is due to an underlying health condition, or where you may have had 4 weeks or more of continuous or cumulative sickness absence, connected to the same health condition. During any period of absence you are reminded that you should maintain regular contact with your line manager so that they can understand the nature of the absence, likely duration and any reasonable adjustments that can be made to facilitate your return to work. You must where reasonably practicable make yourself available for meetings with the company and/or its medical advisers so that the process outlined below can be followed. The company will properly consider reasonable requests in relation to the timing and locations of the associated meetings and will be flexible where reasonably needed in response to those requests and/or your condition, but

failure to do what you can to cooperate with this process may be subject to the company disciplinary process for misconduct (including possible gross misconduct) in accordance with the staff handbook.

### Stage 1

Where this situation arises, you will be invited to a Long Term Stage 1 formal meeting.

The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the reasons for your absence, understand your medical practitioners' advice in relation to the prognosis and management of your condition and ascertain an anticipated return to work date. Your manager may recommend a referral to Occupational Health to seek advice and recommendations on any adjustments which we may be able to reasonably implement to facilitate and support your return to work. Adjustments could include, but are not limited to, a temporary or permanent change to your working pattern where this can be reasonably accommodated with the needs of the business, suitable alternative roles (if any) within the business or a change to your working environment where reasonably able to accommodate in line with the needs of the business.

If your performance and/or attendance is causing concern and is directly linked to your ill health the Long Term Stage 1 formal meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss and agree any actions between yourself and your line manager to clearly outline the expectations of you in your role including any improvements required. Any reasonable recommendations from Occupational Health which could support an improvement will also be considered in this meeting.

A review meeting will be scheduled between 4 to 8 weeks after the original formal meeting, to ensure either a full return to work or a sustained improvement in either your attendance or performance. The measurement period can be extended or reduced at the discretion of your manager but will be at least 4 weeks.

If there has been an insufficient improvement in your attendance or performance during the timescales agreed, or should you have further absence or performance issues relating to your ill health in the subsequent twelve month period, then the next stage of the Long Term Absence management process may be instigated.

### Stage 2

If within the agreed timescales you have not returned to your full time role, your performance and/or attendance linked to ill health remains a concern, or where there has been a relapse in the subsequent 12 month period, you will be invited to a Long Term Stage 2 formal meeting. Advice from Occupational Health or a company appointed medical specialist may be sought to enable your manager to have as much guidance and information to fully support and facilitate a return to work. If you refuse to attend a company required medical assessment and/or meeting with our Occupational Health specialist, then your absence may be treated as unsubstantiated and any entitlement to Company sick pay may also be suspended as a result of this refusal.

The purpose of this meeting will be to obtain recent medical advice from your medical practitioner or Occupational Health, understand the prognosis and likelihood of an anticipated return to your full time role and to further explore the possibility of reasonable adjustments which could be made to support a return to work. At this stage (or at the subsequent stage), should you meet the criteria for qualifying for cover under the Group Income Protection Scheme a claim will be pursued on your behalf, although acceptance for receiving benefit on this scheme is subject to the insurer's approval and terms and conditions of the scheme that are regularly reviewed and subject to change occasionally.



As previously, a review will be scheduled between 4 to 8 weeks after the original meeting to ensure either a full return to work or a sustained improvement in either your attendance or performance. The measurement period can be extended or reduced at the discretion of your manager but will be at least 4 weeks.

### Stage 3 - Final Stage

Where there has been no improvement in your attendance within the timescales agreed in the previous meeting or, if during the subsequent twelve month period there is a relapse then the final stage of the process may be invoked. This is the final stage of the Long Term Absence management process and at this stage your employment may be at risk. As in previous meetings, you will have the right to be accompanied by either a trade union representative, or workplace colleague and given at least two days' notice of the meeting

The purpose of the meeting will be to review your attendance or performance due to ill health to date and give you the opportunity to present any mitigating reasons for your continued poor attendance or performance which will be taken into consideration. Any other reasonable options will also be further explored in this meeting as in previous meetings. These could include but are not limited to a change in role, working pattern or any additional reasonable adjustments which may be accommodated.

Should an alternative to dismissal be found, the change would be implemented for a period of no longer than eight weeks, in order to determine whether the change would lead to an improvement in your attendance and performance.

Alternatively, if during the course of the meeting it becomes apparent that there are no additional adjustments or support which could be implemented to facilitate an improvement within a reasonable timeframe, a decision to dismiss due to incapability may be taken. You would be advised of this in writing and details of the appeals process would be included in the letter.

Where a decision is taken not to dismiss, further reviews will be scheduled for the following twelve month period, to ensure that sufficient progress towards the required attendance and performance targets for your role is being made and/or sustained. If it becomes apparent at review that there is insufficient progress, the final stage of the process could be reinstated, and the outcome of this meeting could be dismissal due to incapability.

### 10.5 Appeals Process

You have the right to appeal any sanction issued in the absence management process in writing within five days of receiving written notification of the outcome. You must clearly state the grounds for your appeal and provide any supporting evidence in advance of the appeal hearing.

An appeal will be heard by an equivalent level or more senior manager than the line manager who issued the sanction. Subject to it being practical to do so, we will aim for the appeal to be heard within two weeks of the appeal letter being received. You have the right to be accompanied at the appeal hearing by either a trade union representative or work colleague and details of the appeal meeting will be confirmed to you in writing from HR. The outcome of the appeal is final.

## 11. Sick Pay and Benefits Including Discretionary Company Sick Pay Policy

### Company Sick Pay (CSP)

CSP provides for the discretionary payment of an element of normal basic pay subject to the rules set out below and it is inclusive of any Statutory Sickness Pay (SSP). The payment of any CSP is subject to:

- The employee meeting the eligibility criteria;
- The employee meeting the sickness absence reporting criteria; and
- The employee meeting their responsibilities under this policy.

#### 11.1 Payments during Probationary Period

If you have less than six months service or are still in your probationary period, only SSP is payable. This is payable for up to 28 weeks of absence and is subject to qualification criteria. SSP is paid by QA and is subject to PAYE and NI Contributions. For current rates of SSP, which are fixed by the government and reviewed annually, please refer to the Department for Work and Pensions website.

#### 11.2 Company Sick Pay Entitlement

If you have over six months service and have successfully completed your probationary period your eligibility to Company Sick Pay is detailed below. This is calculated on a rolling twelve month period and is inclusive of SSP. A rolling year is looking at twelve months back from the first day of any period of absence.

Length of Service	Entitlement
6 months – 2 years	First 10 days of sickness in any consecutive 12 month period at 75% of basic pay only.
	Next 24 weeks of sickness in any consecutive 12 month period at 50% of basic pay only.
After 2 years' service	First 10 days of sickness in any consecutive 12 month period at full basic pay only
	Next 10 days of sickness in any consecutive 12 month period at 75% of basic pay only.
	Next 22 weeks of sickness in any consecutive 12 month period at 50% of basic pay only.

Company Sick pay is paid at the discretion of the company and may be withheld under the following circumstances:

- Absence immediately prior to, during or following annual leave (except for those on long term sick who are using their annual leave entitlement);
- In circumstances where you have been deemed fit to return to work by Occupational Health (OH) but have failed to return;
- Refusal or failing to attend an OH referral meeting without providing justifiable reasons;
- Non-compliance with any of this policy;
- Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the absence is not due to sickness or injury or that a claim on a medical certificate is fraudulent, these situations may be dealt with in line with the QA Disciplinary policy;
- Where there are unresolved performance or conduct issues with the employee concerned;
- Where the employee has raised a dispute or grievance with the company and upon investigation, there are reasonable grounds to believe it has not been done in good faith or where the employee has not promptly co-operated with the investigation to enable the company to swiftly establish if the grievance or complaint has been raised in good faith; and
- Where support offered by QA to facilitate a return to work has been refused.

Any payments of CSP for absence caused by injuries sustained wholly or partly due to the fault of a third party to the extent that compensation is recoverable from the third party, will be treated as a “forgivable” loan and shall be repayable on receipt of any compensation (to the extent it covers the amount of the CSP payments) that has been awarded in lieu of lost earnings.

### 11.3 Phased Return to Work

If your return after a period of long term absence is on a phased/reduced hour's basis, you'll be paid your full pay if you haven't exhausted your CSP entitlement. If however CSP has been exhausted, you'll be paid for the actual hours worked.

### 11.4 Unauthorised Absence

No CSP will be paid during any unauthorised or uncertified absence. Any absence, unreported or incorrectly reported, will be classed as unauthorised. Unauthorised absence will be subject to disciplinary action and following investigation could ultimately lead to dismissal.

### 11.5 Part Time Employees

If you work part time, any CSP will be paid on a pro-rata basis according to your contractual working day/hours.

### 11.6 Absence Whilst on Holiday

If you are unwell whilst on holiday, you will not be entitled to have the days leave credited back to your holiday entitlement.

### 11.7 Taking Annual Leave When Absent Due to Illness

If you have a health condition which means you are on a long term sickness absence, you continue to accrue annual leave and can request to take holidays in the normal way via Cascade. You will be expected to use up any untaken holiday while on sick leave in the event that your sickness prevents you from using up your holiday entitlement for the year rather than rolling over your leave entitlement from one year to the next. You will be paid for your holiday time as usual.

## 12. Group Income Protection Benefit

Once you have reached a year's service, you are eligible for cover under the Group Income Protection scheme. This scheme provides for a proportion of your basic income to be topped up (up to 75% net of any state benefits/any pension income and after deducting national insurance and tax) in the unfortunate event that you are suffering from a long term incapacity that has left you unable to work for over 6 months. Claims under the scheme are not guaranteed and are subject to our insurers accepting your claim and all other scheme rules which are subject to review and change occasionally. As part of any application made on your behalf, our insurers may require you to attend an independent medical examination. If you don't attend the examination, or don't follow the insurer's procedure, your claim may be delayed or rejected. If your claim is accepted, your cover under the Income Protection scheme is subject to regular review and any changes to your situation will be discussed with you at the time. If you are suffering with a serious long term health issue that has left you unable to work and where it is foreseeable that your absence will extend beyond 6 months duration, please contact the HR team to discuss the scheme.

## 13. Other Benefits Payable during Sickness Absence

### 13.1 Pension

If you are a member of the QA company pension scheme, while you are in receipt of some form of salary, whether this is CSP or under the Income Protection scheme, your individual and the QA company pension contributions will continue as usual, as a percentage of your actual income, unless you decide to opt out of the scheme. If you go to a period of nil pay (for example if you've exhausted CSP and are awaiting confirmation for an application for cover under the Income Protection scheme), this will be deemed as a pension service break and contributions will be on hold.

### 13.2 Company Car Allowance

If you are contractually entitled to a car allowance, you will continue to receive this benefit in full whilst in receipt of CSP/SSP.

### 13.3 Bonus Payments

Bonus payments may be pro-rated depending on actual days' work completed for the duration of the bonus calculation period (i.e. quarterly, half yearly or annually). However individual circumstances will be taken into consideration including performance prior to the period of absence and we will seek to be wholly reasonable and fair in the calculation of bonus payments.