



HUMAN RESOURCES

GUIDANCE FOR STAFF AND LINE MANAGERS ON ABSENCE RELATED TO A DISABILITY

The purpose of this document is to signpost members of staff and line managers to a range of University policies, guidance and sources of support for absence related to a disability.

1. Workplace adjustments

Comprehensive advice on reasonable adjustments can be found in the [Workplace Adjustment Toolkit](#) where both staff and line managers will find sources of information and guidance on workplace adjustments and how to arrange, review and change them.

2. Staff Wellbeing Hub

This [webpage](#) provides a range of tools and resources for University of Sussex staff to look after mental, physical, and financial wellbeing, as well as the University's policy on staff wellbeing and guidance on carrying out stress risk assessments. The resources on this webpage include:

[Employee Assistance Programme](#)

Staff members can access confidential wellbeing support whenever they need help managing work or personal difficulties and challenges. Access to qualified counsellors is by phone 24/7, 365 days a year and also gives access to a medical helpline.

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

Within the University, we have a network of Mental Health First Aiders who are trained to listen non-judgmentally, provide support and reassurance for staff members who are experiencing mental ill health or distress and to signpost to appropriate professional services.

[Able Futures Mental Health Support Services](#)

Externally to the University, Able Futures support people with long-term mental health conditions to get back to work. Members of staff can apply to get up to nine months confidential support, guidance, and advice from a mental health professional free of charge.

3. Occupational Health

The role of [Occupational Health](#) is to provide impartial medical advice at both the pre-employment stage and via a management referral during employment if applicable. Occupational Health provide information that the University, as an employer, needs to know about a staff member's health condition, the implications for their future attendance or work performance. They can also provide recommendations regarding adjustments and/or other supportive measures that the University could consider in order to support the staff member in carrying out their role, where these are reasonable and operationally feasible.

4. Access to Work

[Access to Work](#) is a service run by the Department of Work and Pensions to support staff members with a long-term health condition or disability. The support takes the form of a grant and is intended to provide funding towards wide ranging adjustments – this could cover things like support towards additional travel costs, BSL interpreting, support workers, specialist equipment or assistive software.

Funding is available for both new and existing members of staff; for example, prospective staff in terms of communication support at interview, new members of staff (if applied for within the first 6 weeks) and existing members of staff who need workplace reasonable adjustments.

To apply, staff should go to [Check you're eligible](#) and then [apply for an Access to Work grant](#).

5. Sickness Absence Procedure

This [procedure](#) details the University's approach to managing sickness absence in a fair and consistent manner including referral to our Occupational Health service where appropriate. It is important that sickness absence is notified and recorded accurately in order that effective support can be provided. At induction, all staff will be made aware of the process for informing their immediate line manager of any sickness absence or, where not possible, to contact another senior member in their area.

Where sickness absence is disability-related, it is helpful for all parties if line managers are made aware of this. Sharing information about a disability is an individual decision, and there is no obligation to do so. However, if a line manager is not aware, they are reliant only on the information available to them and support may be less effective; whereas if they are aware they can provide appropriate support which may include how absences are managed under the Sickness Absence Procedure.

Under the procedure, return-to-work meetings will be conducted after all periods of sickness absence. At these meetings a line manager will discuss their staff member's wellbeing as well as the number of incidents of sickness that have occurred to establish any underlying reason or pattern. An OH referral (see paragraph 3) may be advisable to obtain a better understanding of the nature of the member of staff's health situation and its implications in terms of attendance or work performance and appropriate support or adjustments that can be provided.

Sickness absence should be recorded on [MyView](#), and there is a comments box where a member of staff can note that their absence is related to a disability if they wish to do so.

6. Sickness Benefit

[Faculty](#)
[Clerical & Related](#)
[Technical](#)

In order to be eligible for the University's sickness benefit schemes, members of staff are required to notify their line manager of their absence, provide a GP fit note where applicable, and the absence must be recorded on MyView by the member of staff or their line manager. The terms of the

relevant sickness benefit above detail the level of sick pay allowance applicable to members of staff in each category. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to extend sick pay entitlement for a defined period. Line managers should contact their [ER Partner](#) if they wish to discuss this further.

7. LearnUpon

[LearnUpon](#) is the University's online learning platform. The following courses are recommended for line managers:

- Disability Essentials
- Introduction to Neurodiversity (short film)
- Neurodiversity: an Introduction
- Mental Health in the workplace
- Diversity in the workplace (mandatory for all staff)
- Understanding Equality Impact Assessments.

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