

Advice Sheet 08: Advice for Stewards

Representing members: Sickness Absence cases

These are some questions/points you may wish to consider in advance of a meeting with management or at a pre-meeting with your member:

- What is the status of the meeting?
- What should you expect in light of the policy?
- What are your aims and objectives for the meeting with management: ideal; realistic; and fallback?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your case?
- What do you think the member's aims and objectives are likely to be?
- Are there different long and short term aims?
- What do you think would be a reasonable outcome: from your point of view; from the member's point of view; from the manager's point of view?
- How do you expect the meeting to be conducted?
- Have you anticipated the manager's arguments and reasoning?
- What will your role be in the meeting; e.g. doing the talking, asking questions, ensuring fair outcomes; presenting mitigating arguments?
- Is there anything helpful in the policy?
- How will you approach the member prior to the meeting?
- How will you sum up at the meeting?

This is not an exhaustive list; you may want to think about other issues.

Short Term Absences

- Has the manager followed the policy correctly at all stages?
- Are the reasons for the absences linked? If so has the manager investigated this/ has the member told the manager the reasons are linked?
- Does the member have a disability? If so under the Equality Act (Disability Discrimination Act in NI) have reasonable adjustments been considered. Reasonable adjustments can also apply to modify/ change triggers in the policy.
- Are the current short term absences out of character? Is this due to temporary one off events eg relationship breakdown or bereavement. Can you argue that the employer should offer support instead of punitive measures
- Are there any allegations of bullying or harassment? If so, are they being properly investigated by the employer? Is this sickness period related to this bullying?
- Has the member gone to Occupational Health? Are occupational health recommendations being complied with?

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Long-term sickness absence

- Has the manager followed the policy correctly at all stages?
- Is the member ready to return? If yes what does the member want? Is this allowed within your policy? Is it reasonable? If no then what is the prognosis for their return and what does that mean for the stage of the policy they are at?
- What does the Occupational Health report recommend? Is the employer following the recommendations?
- Consider phased return and/or reasonable adjustments including alternative duties. Remember that access to work can be used to assist with costs and give advice.
- Is early retirement due to ill health possible under the rules of the member's pension scheme? If this is being discussed please speak to your SNO for advice.
- If the member works in the NHS are they eligible for injury allowance Section 22 NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook & employer's sickness policy
- If the member is dropping onto half or no pay remember to tell them about the members benevolent fund (include link)