# 1. Policy Statement

The SSE Group recognises the importance of a positive approach to the management of sickness absence to enable the company to operate effectively and to provide the necessary support to employees. The aim of this policy and procedure is to ensure that employees are aware of the company’s approach to sickness absence management and they are treated in a fair and consistent manner.

The lowest possible levels of absence are crucial to the success of any organisation and unduly high levels of absence is a costly, time consuming problem which adversely affects efficiency, productivity, profitability and morale.

The overall aim of the SSE Group, as well as the recognised Trade Unions, is to secure the best possible levels of attendance from all of its employees. The management of sickness absence procedure therefore applies to all staff within SSE Group who have successfully completed a period of probation. Employees within their probation period will be reviewed under probation. However, all employees are expected the follow the correct sickness reporting procedures (section 3).

This policy and procedure should be read in conjunction with the Employee Guidelines (REF-COR-HR-005) and the Manager Guidelines (REF-COR-HR-004).

This policy and procedure should be read and used, taking in the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (UK) and the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2011 (Republic of Ireland).

This policy and procedure does not apply to agency workers or self-employed contractors/consultants.

This policy and procedure applies to all SSE employees within Great Britain (GB), Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI). Where there are differences depending on location, these are identified throughout the procedure.

As part of the commitment to making SSE a great place to work, the company seeks to have a fair and equitable set of policies that are applied equally to everyone in the company. This policy follows this principle.
2. Responsibilities

Specific responsibilities of the employee, the manager, the Human Resources team (AskHR and HR Operations depending upon business area) and the Company Occupational Health Adviser are integrated throughout this policy and procedure. In summary, the responsibilities are as follows:

The employee will:

- maximise their attendance at work
- notify their manager of any absence in accordance with the correct reporting procedures (see section 3)
- provide information regarding their absence when speaking to their manager
- keep in regular contact with their manager regarding their progress during any spell of absence from work
- conduct themselves in a responsible manner which will not hinder their return to work
- recognise that the company has a right to manage sickness absence proactively and therefore co-operate fully with all reasonable attempts to manage their absence and promote well-being at work, this includes attending meetings and completing consent forms when requested
- attend appointments with the Company Occupational Health Adviser, either face to face, telephone or video conference.

The manager will:

- ensure that good physical working conditions are provided and that health and safety standards are properly maintained
- ensure that absences are accurately monitored and recorded to allow early notification and identification of potential problems
- notify the Absence team (for GB SSE), or the ROI inboxes: absence-ROI@sserenewables.com/absence-ROI@airtricity.com or the appropriate department of any absence from work (or return to work) to enable accurate and timely processing of sick pay
- ensure regular contact with the employee regarding their progress during any spell of absence from work, where appropriate
- ensure that the employees under their control understand what is expected of them with regard to attendance and are aware of the facilities available to support them
- ensure employees are treated in a fair and consistent manner
- take responsibility in ensuring full consideration for reasonable adjustments
- ensure AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area) are kept up to date with long term absences

The Human Resources in general will:

- promote the sickness absence policy and procedure and support managers to ensure the fair and consistent management of absence
- provide managers with sickness management information upon request
AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area) will support managers (where needed) and employees throughout all stages of the sickness absence management process.

The Company Occupational Health Adviser will:

- Provide a referral and reporting service for SSE Group in respect of employees with short and long-term absence problems.
- Raise awareness of the Company Employee Assistance Programme.
- Provide a referral service for employees with issues not yet affecting their attendance or performance, where this is deemed suitable.
- Assess the need for rehabilitation and redeployment of employees with ill health problems and provide the necessary advice, guidance, and support.
- Arrange and manage GP referrals.
- Provide advice and guidance on medical retirements.

3. Sickness Reporting

All employees are required, as far as is reasonably practicable, to personally notify their manager of any absence caused by sickness or injury before they are due to commence work. If this is not possible, then within 30 minutes of their normal starting time. An employee should call to report their absence personally however, under exceptional circumstances where this is not possible (i.e. where the employee needs medical attention or is incapacitated), they must make arrangements to have a spouse/partner, relative, or a friend call on their behalf with the same relevant information. Attempts should be made for the employee to speak to their manager, however if they are unable to speak to them (or their nominated person), then the manager may call them back later that day for general welfare and further information regarding the absence.

It is the employee’s responsibility to make contact with their manager. Failure to properly report absence may result in an unauthorised absence situation and therefore lead to disciplinary action under the Company’s disciplinary procedure. Company Sick Pay may also be withheld.

When notifying the manager of absence from work, employees should provide specific information about the reason(s) for absence including:

- When illness commenced.
- Time absence started (where appropriate).
- Expected return date.
- If they have the ability to undertake light duties, reduced hours or other accommodations which may prevent further absence from work (please refer to Section 5 of this procedure - please note that this will be dependent on the employee being fit to undertake alternative work and alternative work being available).
- And to agree regular contact with the manager.
4. Self Certification

4.1 GB & NI only

For sickness absence lasting up to 7 calendar days, the manager will complete the first section of the Sickness Absence form (FO-HR-018) which will be used to notify the Absence team or the appropriate department of the absence. It is both the employee and manager’s responsibility to ensure full completion of this form and that the employee signs this form on their return to work, as part of the return to work interview.

4.1 ROI only

Self certification in ROI is for 2 days, from day 3 onwards the employee must obtain a Medical certificate. The manager will complete the first section of the form which will be used to notify the ROI Absence team. The manager and employee must complete the relevant section of the Sickness Absence Form for the self certification cover.

5. Fit Notes/Medical Certificates GB & NI Only

5.1 Fit Notes (GB & NI only)

After the employee has been absent for more than 7 calendar days they will be required to provide a fit note from their GP. The employee must ensure that the fit note covers their absence from the expiry of the 7 calendar days of self-certification, and forward to their manager immediately. Upon receipt, it is the manager’s responsibility to forward the fit note to the Absence team or the appropriate department.

No Sick Pay, Company or Statutory, will be paid for any period of absence which is not covered by a self certificate or fit note.

Fit notes must be submitted on time to ensure continuity of Company and Statutory Sick Pay. Persistent late submission of fit notes may result in Sick Pay being withheld in accordance with Section 10 of this policy and procedure, and disciplinary action being taken under the Company’s disciplinary procedure.

The fit note will confirm that the employee is either:

- fit for work
- not fit for work
- may be fit for work with workplace adjustments

Where the employee is declared as ‘may be fit for work with workplace adjustments’, the GP will outline proposed adjustments which may facilitate a return to work. Managers will discuss these adjustments with the employee and, where appropriate / feasible, the adjustments will be implemented to enable the employee to return to work.
Where it is not possible to implement the GP's recommendations, the fit note will be treated as if it said 'not fit for work' and the employee will remain absent. There is no need in these circumstances for the employee to return to their GP for another fit note which confirms that they are not fit for work.

Where an employee returns to work on reduced hours, the relevant Sick Pay will be used to make up the shortfall in an employee's salary. Where no relevant Sick Pay is due to be paid then payment will be for hours worked only.

Where an employee refuses to return to work despite the GP’s recommendations being implemented, then any relevant Sick Pay due to be paid may be withheld in accordance with Section 10 of this procedure. Failure to return to work in this instance will be deemed as unauthorised absence and may lead to disciplinary action.

Unlike the previous Medical Certificates, when a fit note expires the employee can return to work. Previously a “fit to return / signing off certificate” was required – this is no longer the case.

5.2 Medical Certificates (ROI only)

For employees within the Republic of Ireland, medical certificates will apply instead of fit notes.

A medical certificate will be required for absences which last for 3 or more days.

To be accepted, a medical certificate must:

- state the nature of the illness
- cover the full period of the absence from the date of last attendance (first day of absence) or from the expiry of the last medical certificate
- be signed by a duly qualified registered medical practitioner
- state the employee’s name

Medical certificates should be sent to Team Leaders and Managers.

6. Fit for Work Service (FFW)

FFW is a Government-funded occupational health assessment service. The service is intended to assist employees return to work, using a return-to-work plan where appropriate. If an employee or manager wants to know more about FFW please speak to AskHR.

Once an employee has been absent for four weeks, either the company or the employee's doctor may suggest referring them to FFW. The doctor may do this before the employee has been absent for four weeks if they think it would be beneficial for the employee.

If the employee’s doctor refers them to FFW the employee must let their manager know, unless they would prefer not to tell us. If the employee’s case manager at FFW wishes to speak to the company, the employee should ask them to contact AskHR.
6. Return to Work Interviews

The manager will conduct a return to work interview following all periods of sickness absence. Return to work interviews must be conducted promptly and preferably on the employee's first working day. The interview will be carried out in a suitable location where there is privacy. The purpose of the interview is:

- to ensure that the reason for the absence is accurately recorded
- to assist in the completion of the sickness absence form
- to enable any problems associated with the absence or return to work to be identified and discussed e.g. any developing problems or trends which might indicate some underlying work related or other difficulties or further absence
- to confirm any adjustments of a temporary nature to help facilitate a return to work where previous conversations have taken place
- to identify whether any trigger points have been breached
- to possibly refer the employee to the Company Occupational Health Adviser

7. Trigger Points

Sickness absence which falls into any of the following categories will prompt the manager to hold an Absence Meeting with the employee:

- 3 occasions of absence within a rolling 12 month period - or
- 14 or more calendar days of absence within a rolling 12 month period - or
- patterns of absence are evident (for example, absence on Fridays/Mondays, absence before/after annual leave)

These triggers are guidelines and tools used to highlight absence levels causing concern and do not represent an exhaustive list. Managers have full discretion to invite employees to an absence meeting under any circumstances which they reasonably deem to be giving cause for concern.

Managers are encouraged to look for patterns of absence which persistently fall just outside the trigger points (see section 5.1 of the Manager guidelines REF-COR-HR-004).

8. Managing Absence

This procedure will be used when a trigger point in Section 7 is breached.

The following procedure is for use in dealing with unsustainable levels of sickness absence. Failure to follow the procedure may be considered as misconduct and will be dealt with under the Company’s disciplinary procedure.
8.1 Informal Discussions

The first step in the procedure is an Informal Discussion with the employee about their absence. The purpose of the meeting is for the manager and employee to review the absence record and agree actions to improve attendance. **This may be recorded on an Informal Improvement Notice and will be on file for 12 months.**

The outcome of an informal discussion may result in:

- no further action at this time but the case is kept under review
- referral to the Company Occupational Health Adviser
- advice given to use the Employee Assistance Programme
- actions agreed to facilitate a return to work including any reasonable adjustments
- advising that current sickness absence levels are unsustainable and must improve, and the employee will be made aware that:
  - their absence will be monitored over a set period and that any further concerns may lead to formal action
  - the matter may escalate to the formal stage of the procedure, if, when the current Informal Improvement Notice remains live, the employee's attendance level continues to cause concern
- action is to be taken in accordance with the Formal Procedure outlined in section 8.2
- any other outcome which is deemed appropriate given the circumstances

While, it is not normal practice for employees to be accompanied at an informal discussion, any reasonable requests to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative will be considered.

Where the employee is accompanied, so should the manager, normally with a member of HR.

8.2 Formal Procedure

Where an employee's attendance record has not improved sufficiently following the informal discussion, they will be invited to a formal absence meeting. A possible outcome of the formal review meeting may be a Written Improvement Notice, as outlined in the table below.

The number of review meetings and the duration of review periods will be determined by the individual circumstances of the case, but not normally exceeding 12 months.

Where a previous improvement notice has expired and a further trigger point is breached, managers can opt to commence the procedure at stage 1 or 2 if a pattern has emerged, e.g. further absence shortly after the expiry of an Improvement Notice, hitting trigger points shortly after completion of an improvement period etc.

It is important that the employee understands all the potential consequences throughout the process.
ABSENCE IMPROVEMENT GUIDELINES

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Employees will have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague (a companion) or accredited representative of a Trade Union (where appropriate) to all stages of the formal procedure.

For those who wish to be accompanied by a companion, some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting. Companions should not normally work at another site, unless no-one reasonably suitable is available at the location at which the employee works.

Employees will have the right to appeal any stage of the formal procedure within 5 working days of the outcome of the formal procedure being confirmed to the employee in writing.

The stages of the formal procedure are set out to take place in chronological order. However, this is dependent on each individual case. An employee may have a number of review meetings at each stage in the procedure in order to review progress. The stages are as follows:

**Formal Stage 1 – Review**

Where absence levels are unsustainable as indicated by the triggers in section 7 and where an Informal Improvement Notice has been issued but absence has continued, a formal review meeting will take place to discuss with the employee their absence records, and reasons for it.

It will also be an opportunity to explore support methods that may be required to assist the employee. During this meeting it should be made clear to the employee how the impact that their absence has on the company and their colleagues.

The manager should consider whether to obtain medical evidence or further evidence if previously sought, this will not be required in every case.

Following this meeting a Written Improvement Notice will confirm agreed actions. This may include the following actions, for example, referral to the Company Occupational Health Adviser, referral to the Employee Assistance Programme, work adjustments where possible and reasonable.

The matter may escalate to the next stage of the procedure if, when the Written Improvement Notice remains live, an employee’s attendance level continues to cause concern, and that significant improvements have not been reached.
Formal Stage 2 – Review

If the employee’s absence has not improved in line with a Written Improvement Notice, a stage 2 meeting will be held. The manager should consider whether to obtain medical evidence or further evidence if previously sought, this will not be required in every case.

Should it be deemed that the employee has not made a significant level of improvement, and has been given ample opportunity and support, and then a Final Written Improvement Notice may be issued confirming agreed actions. This notice will also highlight that further failures to improve may result in termination of employment and will be confirmed in writing to the employee.

The matter may escalate to the next stage of the procedure if, when the Final Written Improvement Notice remains live, an employee’s attendance level continues to cause concern, and that significant improvements have not been reached.

Where the above is confirmed, the employee will be invited to a Stage 3 review. The employee must be advised of the consequences of the next stage within the procedure.

Formal Stage 3 (final review) – Possible termination of employment

Whilst it is hoped that termination of employment can be avoided, it is important that the employee understands all of the potential consequences throughout the process.

If dismissal is contemplated, Occupational Health advice will, where it is deemed appropriate, have been assessed to ensure that the company is fully aware of all medical factors and in particular any disabilities which need to be recognised and accommodated where reasonable.

8.3 Appeals

Should the employee wish to appeal against any of the stated outcomes, they should do so in writing to a nominated person (this will be provided in the employee’s letter), stating the full grounds of appeal and confirming the penalty which they are appealing, within 5 working days of the date on which the decision was sent to the employee. The appeal hearing will be conducted by a senior manager (more senior to the manager involved within the previous formal stages).

The employee will have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or accredited representative of a Trade Union (where appropriate) at the appeal hearing.

Some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting. Companions should not normally work at another site, unless no-one reasonably suitable is available at the location at which the employee works.

The outcome of the appeal will be provided to the employee in writing without reasonable delay. There will be no further right of appeal.
9. Managing Long Term Absence

Any single period of absence lasting 4 weeks or longer will be classed as ‘long-term absence’. The company will take reasonable steps to support the employee to return to work.

For further guidance on managing long term absence, managers must refer to section 16 of the manager guidelines (REF-COR-HR-004).

Where previous triggers have occurred, employees returning from a period of long term absence may be subject to the appropriate stage of the Managing Absence procedure described in section 8, and issued with improvement notices where necessary.

It is not necessary to issue improvement notices whilst the employee is absent under long term sickness, the required approach is to manage the employee’s return to work, if this is not possible after a number of steps have been exhausted, then dismissal is considered. Formal Improvement notices are to be issued if the employee returns to work, and has previous notices on file.

See the manager guidelines (REF-COR-HR-004) for the long term sickness process.

9.1 Contact and Informal Discussion

Where the absence becomes long-term the purpose of this contact should focus on the company understanding the reason for the absence, the likely duration and what treatment and support is being received. It also allows the manager to keep the employee up-to-date with company and work-related news.

Where visits or meetings are held with the employee, these will be arranged to accommodate any reasonable request by the employee e.g. location or time. All such meetings will be pre-arranged with the employee. A refusal from an employee to meet with their manager should be reported to AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area).

Managers visiting an employee at home should be accompanied, this may be another manager or someone from HR.

It is the responsibility of the employee to keep their manager advised of any changes to the circumstances of their absence, or any other changes that may arise during their absence i.e. change of contact details etc.

To fully understand the employee’s condition, and to assess when there may be a return to work, it may be necessary to request the employee attends an Occupational Health appointment.

The measures above are designed to help the employee successfully return to work and are therefore in both parties’ interest, and is aimed to support a return to work at the earliest possible date. The company expects the employee to co-operate fully with managing this procedure.
9.2 Assessment

Where (a) long-term absence has continued for a considerable length of time and (i) medical evidence suggests that there is no indication of immediate return and (ii) it has been approved by Pension, or (b) where the employee reaches the end of the period of Company Sick Pay or similar, a further series of considerations may be made. These may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Termination of the employee's employment, in particular if the advice of the Company's Occupational Health Adviser concludes that a return to work cannot be foreseen or will be delayed
- GB & NI only - If the employee is in a pension scheme with provision for ill health retirement evaluate if the employee will meet the criteria and agree to retirement
- ROI only – this is determined by the Company's insurer through an independent medical assessment following discussions with HR

In all of the above situations the following will be borne in mind:

- There will be full consultation with the employee
- The company will be in the possession of up-to-date medical advice, where possible and necessary
- All reasonable adjustments will have been considered and explored
- The employee's absence record will be judged sufficient to justify termination of employment (this could be a capability termination due to ill health or dismissal due to extent of absence)
- Where termination of employment is appropriate, the employee will be advised in writing as soon as it is established that this has become a possibility and invited to a meeting

10. Company Sick Pay Scheme

Employees absent from work through illness or injury may be eligible to receive Sick Pay as directed by their contract of employment.

Payment of Sick Pay is conditional upon the proper notification and certification procedures being followed. Where medical certificates are not received, no Sick Pay will be payable and the employee may be deemed to be on unauthorised absence, and will lead to disciplinary action under the Company’s disciplinary procedure.

Company Sick Pay is a benefit which may be withheld where it is deemed that the employee is not co-operating with reasonable attempts to manage their absence from work, or where it is considered that they are acting in a way which is prejudicial to their recovery.

Company Sick Pay may also be withheld in the following circumstances:

- failure to do alternative work which you are considered fit and qualified/trained to do
- failure to attend Company medical appointments
failure to follow absence notification and certification procedures
failure to attend absence review meetings
where there is a belief that any absence from work is not for genuine sickness reasons
where there is a belief that the individual is hindering their return to work, for example, by participating in inappropriate activities
where the repeated absence is due to repeated and careless participation in dangerous sports, which have an impact on attendance levels. For example, ski-ing, rock climbing, diving, parachuting, hang-gliding, horse riding, rugby (this list is not exhaustive)
where the absence was due to an accident at work that is found to have been caused by an employee’s willful negligence

Please note that the above list is for guidance only and is by no means exhaustive.

If a decision is made to withdraw Company Sick Pay, the employee will be advised of this decision, in writing, along with the reasons behind the decision. Employees will be given the right to appeal against this decision. Should they wish to exercise this right, they must write to the manager who confirmed the decision to withdraw payment of Company Sick pay, setting out the grounds for their appeal, within 5 working days of receipt of the original letter. Managers in receipt of this appeal letter must contact AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area) who will arrange for a higher manager, not previously involved in the decision, to conduct an appeal hearing. Any requests by the employee to extend the time period to submit their appeal, will be subject to agreement by the company.

It is not normal practice for employees to be accompanied at an appeal meeting for sick pay, however any reasonable request will not be refused.

Sick Pay will only be reinstated when the company is satisfied that the employee is complying with the conditions and spirit of the policy and procedure.

11. Referral to the Company Occupational Health Adviser

Employees may, at any time, be required to attend an appointment with the Company’s Occupational Health Adviser, either face to face, via telephone or video conference, if appropriate, and in line with their contract of employment.

The aim of Occupational Health is to support the employee and to provide further information to the company in order to help manage the employee’s absence from work. It is within the company’s interest to ensure the welfare of all its employees by obtaining medical evidence where necessary.

Employees are required to comply with Occupational Health referrals and to initially provide the Company with their consent for referrals. Where an employee continues to refuse the authorisation of a referral, the company will have no option but to proceed with the appropriate course of action, depending upon the stage of the process, in the absence of medical evidence.

Employees who do not comply may be subject to disciplinary action and the payment of Company Sick Pay may be withheld.
Where there is a conflict between Occupational Health advice and the employee's medical practitioner's advice, the matter is to be referred to AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area) for further discussion.

Where the Occupational Health Advisor concludes the absence is related to work, then a full risk assessment should be undertaken to identify the root cause. Please ensure that you speak to AskHR or an HR Manager (depending on the business area) if you need further guidance on this.

12. Reasonable Adjustments

In accordance with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 (reasonable accommodation for Republic of Ireland under the Employment Equality Acts 1998 - 2011), the company will try, wherever possible, to accommodate an employee in their current role where they are suffering from a disability. This may involve making reasonable adjustments to the role, equipment and/or work pattern.

Where it is not possible to make adjustments, or, where the adjustments made do not have the desired effect, redeployment will be considered.

The employee will be fully involved in discussions concerning reasonable adjustments and redeployment opportunities, and is encouraged to make suggestions.

For further guidance on disability and reasonable adjustments, managers must refer to the manager guidelines (REF-COR-HR-004).

12.1 Redeployment

There may be occasions when employees are deemed unfit to do their current job, but fit to undertake another. In these instances and provided there is a requirement, employees may be redeployed to another area of the company to undertake work which is suitable given their condition, where there is a vacancy.

Employees will be fully involved in discussions concerning redeployment opportunities. Employees will only be redeployed to positions for which they are either currently trained or qualified, or for which they could be retrained.

Where a suitable redeployment opportunity is identified and available, the employee may be redeployed on the terms and conditions that go with that position. This may be a permanent change to the employee’s contract of employment.

13. Review Periods

This Policy was developed through consultation with the Company’s recognised Trade Unions (UK).