

FIRE SERVICE EXAMINATION BOARD

STUDY NOTE

EXAMINATION

SUB-OFFICERS EXAMINATION

PAPER

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT

EMPLOYMENT

TOPIC

ABSENCE THROUGH SICKNESS

TOPIC REFERENCE

2301

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY NOTE

This study note has been prepared as the basis of study in connection with the qualifying examinations for promotion.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the information contained in the study note and understand how it should be applied:

The 'References' made at the end of the Study Note are included for information only and candidates will not be expected to study these as part of the bibliography.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE THROUGH SICKNESS

1. Introduction

Absence through sickness is a common problem, which needs to be dealt with continually and consistently both to ensure that any inherent sickness problem can be identified and that abuse is kept at a minimum. This study note outlines the general arrangements that a Sub-Officer should be aware of so that sickness absence can be monitored in a proper manner

2. Sickness

All employees must know arrangements for reporting sick. They should also be aware that a failure to observe them in full could render them liable to disciplinary action when unable to attend work because of ill health.

Whilst fire authorities accept that its staff are its most valuable resource, it also recognises that if employees spend less time at work than they are contracted to do, there is a direct effect on the service that can be provided to the public and a drain on resources. Fire authorities have therefore determined that the control of sickness absence must be given a high priority.

Consequences of high absence rates involve:

- (a) costs to the organisation in terms of contractual sick pay;
- (b) increased salary cost;
- (c) lower standards of service;
- (d) disruptive working practices; and
- (e) low morale, if others attempted to follow the example of their colleagues where their absence is not justified.

Therefore, there is the need for an effective but fair sickness absence control scheme.

3. Notification and Certification of Sickness

Entitlement to sick pay is conditional to employees fulfilling the following obligations:

- (a) That notification is made immediately to persons identified by the fire authority.
- (b) Further notification and probable duration of the injury or illness is made as required by the fire authority.

- (c) That a doctor's statement is submitted to the fire authority not later than the eighth calendar day of absence.
- (d) That in cases where the doctor's statement covers a period exceeding fourteen days or where more than one doctor's statement has been submitted, the employee shall, before returning to work, submit to the fire authority a final doctors' statement as to fitness to resume duties.
- (e) That, on returning to work the employee signs a statement detailing the reasons for all absences up to and including seven days (self-certificated).

4. Doctors Statements

Where it has been necessary for an employee to provide a doctor's statement at their own cost to qualify for sick pay, the fire authority shall reimburse the cost of the doctor's statement.

5. Sickness During Annual Leave and Public Holiday Leave

Annual leave is programmed, so where an employee falls sick whilst on annual leave or when the annual leave falls due, they shall be regarded as being on sick leave provided such absence is covered by a doctor's statement. In this event, they may be permitted to take all, or part of their outstanding leave at a later date. This will normally be before the end of the current leave year or, in exceptional circumstances, not later than 31 of March of the following year at the discretion of the fire authority.

Where employees are on sick leave on a public or extra statutory holiday they will not be entitled to a day's leave in lieu later.

6. Medical Examinations

Fire authorities may require employees to submit to an examination by a medical practitioner. The fire authority shall meet the costs associated with the examination.

7. Return to Work

The role of the fire service Sub-Officer in relation to the sickness absence of personnel should be clearly defined and observed. Many fire authorities are likely to adopt the following procedures as part of a sickness control system:

- (a) Keep employees attendance / sickness records up to date.
- (b) See each employee privately as soon as they return from sickness absence. The intention of this would be to convey to the employee that their absence was of concern, while also providing the employee with an opportunity to elaborate on the reasons for their absence and whether it is likely to recur.

- (c) Complete an interview form recording date, time and details of absence. Any relevant remarks made by the employee should be included and signed by the employee if appropriate.
- (d) Dissatisfaction with the employee's explanation for sickness absence should be reported without delay to the appropriate senior officer.
- (e) In appropriate cases the employee may be offered and wish to discuss any assistance from the fire authority which may help the employee reduce repetitive sickness absence.

8. Effect of Neglect or Default

The fire authority is entitled to determine sick leave payments where:

- (a) An employee refuses to undergo any medical examination required by the fire authority or, in the opinion of the fire authority on medical advice, caused or substantially aggravated any illness or injury by neglect or default, or refused or neglected fully to co-operate in any treatment which the fire authority considers necessary.
- (b) If it is the opinion of the fire authority, acting on medical advice, an absence from duty is by reason of an illness or injury that is wholly attributable to the employee holding any other office or employment for hire or gain, or carrying on a trade or business, or participation in sport as a profession.

References

Schemes of Conditions of Service (Grey Book)