

**Attendance Management  
Schools and Academies Management Toolkit**

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## Additional Guidance - Return to Work Discussions

The Return to Work Discussion will normally be relatively brief and informal. Where an employee has a good attendance level a quick discussion may be all that is needed.

### Preparing for Return to Work Discussions

Managers should carry out some simple steps in preparation for the Return to Work Discussion:

- understand the facts relating to the most recent absence and past absences
- review attendance records for any growing absence frequency, patterns of days off or repetitive reasons given for absence
- ensure any statements made can be substantiated
- be open minded
- find a suitable private area for the interview
- allow enough time
- allow sufficient time for the employee to settle back in to work before having the discussion
- remember that Return to Work Discussions are not part of the disciplinary process. If disciplinary action is necessary, this must be initiated separately.

### Structure of Return to Work Discussions

It may be useful to use the WARM (**W**elcome **A**bsence **R**esponsibility **M**ove on) mnemonic as a guide.

**W**elcome – helping the employee to feel good about returning to work

- create a non-threatening and supportive atmosphere
- welcome the employee back and tell them they have been missed
- if appropriate, check they are fit to return to work

**A**bsence – helping the employee to openly discuss issues relating to their absence

- explore reasons for the absence, and whether there are any issues relating to their role
- if the absence relates to the employees private life, avoid counselling them
- ask questions in an understanding way and listen courteously
- discuss any previous absences and whether there are any underlying medical issues
- be sensitive to personal problems and illnesses and be prepared to refer the employee to any relevant available support
- show that you are listening, be constructive, avoid confrontation but do ask questions
- offer solutions where these are within your power

**R**esponsibility – helping the employee take responsibility for overcoming issues causing absence:

- this part of the meeting is most relevant to cases where absence is likely to re-occur
- ensure the employee understands it is their obligation to come to work and to actively solve problems that are resulting in them being absent from work
- ask the employee to take ownership for taking the action necessary to improve their attendance
- do not ask for a guarantee from the employee to be at work every day, but do ask that they do everything they can to fulfil their responsibility to come to work

**M**ove on – helping the employee leave the meeting on a positive note – this is vital

- express confidence in the employee's ability to attend work in the future
- brief the employee on events that have occurred during their absence
- discuss work priorities for their return
- thank them for meeting with you.

## Information - Counselling Service

A confidential counselling service called Employee Assist is accessible for all schools and academies in Northamptonshire. Northamptonshire County Council covers the costs for any of its employees who access this service. We recommend that Academies offer the same to their employees as part of fulfilling their employer's duty of care.

The service is delivered by Relate Northamptonshire.

The counselling service has been developed and designed to support the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of employees. Counsellors are able to work with the many and varied issues that employees may face, including:

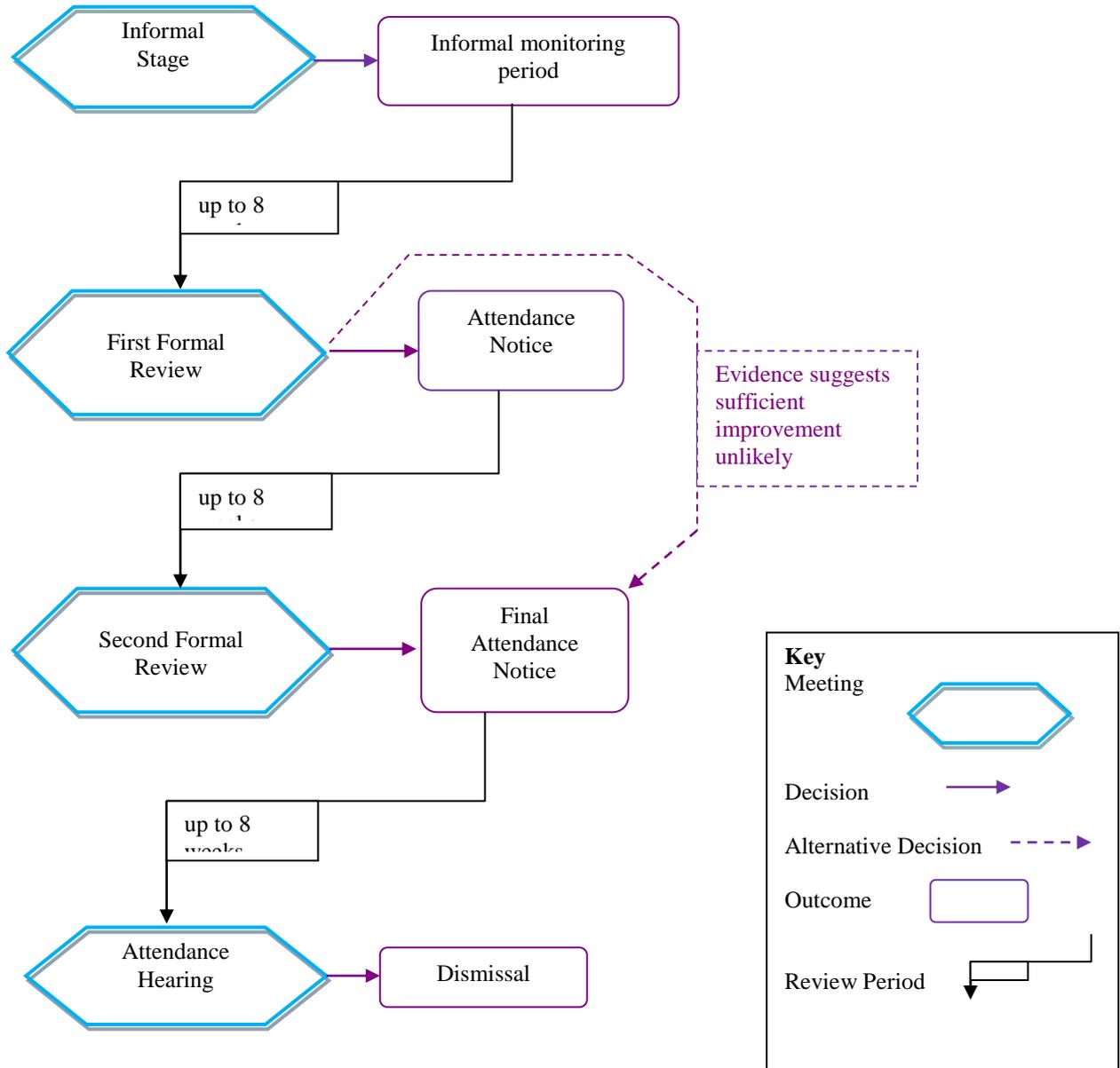
- Stress or anxiety issues
- Work/home life balance challenges
- Concern over working relationships
- Concern over performance or personal development areas
- Time management issues
- Bereavement / loss
- Self-esteem issues
- Communication difficulties
- Workload, cases or incidents causing stress

The service is entirely confidential, providing a safe place for employees to work through their issues to support and assist their personal well-being. At no time are personal details or contents of the counselling sessions revealed.

Employee Assist can be contacted on **01604 626787** or e-mail [employeeassist@relatenorthants.org.uk](mailto:employeeassist@relatenorthants.org.uk). Services are provided Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm. Appointments for an initial assessment or meeting are usually arranged within 3-5 working days.

If you would like to know more about Employee Assist and getting confidential counselling for you or your staff, please contact your HR Advisor.

## Standard Attendance Management Procedure Flowchart



## Head Teacher checklist - Managing Attendance

Are you managing attendance in your team? Are you doing it well?

By taking a few moments to complete this checklist you will find out how well you are doing and if you have any areas you need to develop.

Statement	1= disagree	2 = agree	3 = strongly agree
Reducing absence is one of my objectives			
I accept responsibility for managing the attendance of my staff			
I create an environment that supports employee wellbeing at work			
I understand the level of support HR can give me			
I understand the HR policies that cover attendance management			
Absence levels are discussed in team meetings			
I have received appropriate training to help me manage absence			
I am confident in handling complex attendance management cases			
I carry out return to work discussions after all periods of absence			
Monthly absence returns are completed accurately for my team and submitted on time			
I know what the sickness absence targets are for my service area			
I review absence levels and trends at team and individual level on a regular basis			

**Mostly 1's** – You need to take more steps to manage absence effectively. Use the Attendance Management Policy & Toolkit to start putting some of the basic attendance management processes in place.

**Mostly 2's** - Good - you have made some progress in managing attendance effectively but may need to develop this further. Look at the statements that scored 1 or 2 and decide on some actions that you can take to develop these areas.

**Mostly 3's** - Excellent – you have a good understanding of how to manage attendance effectively. Look at any statements you have scored less than 3 and decide whether you can take any actions to develop these. Why not think about coaching some colleagues who are looking to develop their skills in this area?

## Informal stage – Manager Guidance

### Overview

Cases of unsatisfactory attendance are usually best dealt with informally. In many cases an informal discussion at the right time and in the right way may be all that is needed.

This kind of informal chat is not part of any formal action. However, both manager and employee should be aware that formal processes will start if there is no improvement or if any improvement fails to be maintained.

### Who should be invited to the Informal Discussion?

The policy is that the informal stage provides managers and employees with an opportunity to discuss the issue(s) on a **one-to-one** basis outside of the formal processes.

However, you may invite the employee to bring a colleague or Trade Union representative if;

- the manager involved decides that they need to bring a colleague/HR advisor to the meeting, or
- the case is particularly sensitive and all parties agree it will help

Under no circumstances should a third party be invited into an informal meeting without the knowledge of the manager and the employee.

Additionally, a decision should be made on whether this meeting remains informal if others are in attendance. If this is the case, it is essential that HR guidance has been sought prior to taking action as it is a common error that what should have been an informal meeting between manager and employee, has inadvertently become the first stage meeting of a given procedure.

### What should be discussed at an Informal Discussion?

The manager should talk to the employee, in private about their concerns over attendance. This should be a two way discussion, aimed at pointing out any shortcomings and encouraging improvement. The emphasis being on finding ways for the employee to improve and for the improvement to be sustained.

The manager should listen to whatever the employee has to say about the issue and if the manager decides that no further action will be taken this should be made clear to the employee.

Where improvement is required, the employee needs to understand what must to be done, how their attendance will be reviewed, and over what period. The employee should be told that if there is no improvement, then the next stage will be the Formal Procedure.

It may be useful to confirm any agreed action in writing but this does not form part of formal action.

Be careful that any informal action does not turn into formal action, as this may unintentionally deny the employee certain rights, such as the right to be accompanied.

### Should notes be taken at the meeting?

The meeting should not be formally minuted as it is Informal. However, it may be useful to note any agreed actions as a result of the meeting.