All new staff members will receive guidance from their Department on the reporting of sickness absence. In addition line managers have a responsibility to ensure that staff understand the level of performance and attendance expected of them. When managing and reporting sickness absence, it is important that line-managers are aware of the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). The relevant Code of Practice under the DPA states that where possible sickness records (i.e. the reason for absence) should be kept separate from absence records (i.e. the occurrence of absence). Sickness records of individual workers are classed as sensitive data and should not be made available to other workers unless it is necessary for them to do their jobs. Employees are not required to give a reason for their absence when they contact their line-manager. If they do so out of choice, the line-manager should not make a record of it and should not inform the absence administrator of the reason for absence – the absence administrator should only be made aware of the occurrence of absence. The reason for absence may be captured on the notification of absence form, should the employee choose to disclose it, or on any doctors’ certificates supplied. Employees will send such certificates direct to the UAS Personnel team, where they will be kept securely. The line-manager is not required to see any doctors’ certificates.

The following procedure has been adopted for all departments within UAS:

1) On the first day of absence, employees should contact their line-manager (or agreed alternative contact), preferably by telephone, and give some indication of when they expect to return to work.

2) Whether or not the employee has a doctor’s certificate, if they are not able to return on the day previously indicated, they should contact the line-manager again to update them.

3) For every occurrence of absence, the employee will need to complete a Sickness Absence Record/Return to Work Discussion pro forma 1. When the employee returns to work, they should complete Section 1 of the form and pass it to their line manager to complete Section 2a of the employee’s form and if appropriate Section 2b. The notification of absence form invites the staff member to record the reason for their absence by selecting from a list of codes. It is not compulsory to give a specific reason, although it is helpful if they do so, as this will assist in identifying any illnesses which may be work-related. If an employee does not want to give the reason for their absence, they may select code ‘NS’ (not specified).

4) Guidance from Personnel Services recommends that line managers conduct return to work interviews with employees after all absences. To structure the return to work interview, topics covered could include action taken by the employee to remedy the illness, whether they have consulted their GP or other healthcare professional, whether the absence was related to work, and whether any action is required by the line manager as a consequence. (this list is not exhaustive). Section 3 should be completed by the line manager following the return to work interview and signed by both parties.
5) The employee should not submit their completed notification of absence form to their line 
manager, but should return it direct to the UAS Personnel team (Level 4, University Offices) 
in a sealed envelope marked ‘strictly confidential’. The line manager should inform the 
departmental absence administrator of the date on which the employee returned to work.

6) In the case of frequent or longer-term absence, the line-manager is encouraged to 
discuss this with the staff member when they return to work. In some cases, it may be 
necessary to make a referral to the University Occupational Health Service for further advice 
(more information is available at http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/uohs/services/referrals.shtml). 
The UAS HR Business Partner should also be informed. For longer absences, the line 
manager should maintain appropriate contact with the absent employee and ensure that the 
UAS Personnel team is informed so that sick pay entitlement can be managed.

7) Each department should appoint an absence administrator responsible for recording staff 
absence. The absence administrator should be informed of any absences and compile a 
monthly report. Absence will be recorded in blocks of not less than half a day. For periods of 
absence less than half a day (for instance if the employee leaves work due to illness at 3.30 
pm), the line manager should use their discretion as to whether this should be recorded. 
Neither the line-manager nor the departmental absence administrator should have access to 
or keep any copies of notification of absence form or doctors’ certificates locally; all 
notification of absence form and medical certificates should be sent direct to the UAS 
Personnel team by the employee.

8) If an employee is taken ill during annual leave, their annual leave allowance can be 
credited and taken at a later date provided (a) the normal sickness absence reporting 
procedures (see above) have been followed and (b) they have provided a notification of 
absence form or doctor’s certificate (as appropriate).

9) Line-managers will be informed when members of staff have had three periods of 
sickness in any six month period so they can determine, in consultation with their UAS 
Personnel Manager, whether any action is required.

10) It is important that the line-manager keeps the departmental absence administrator up- 
to-date on any absences within their team and that a notification of absence form is 
completed or a doctor’s certificate is provided (and returned to the UAS Personnel team) for 
every absence.

11) All forms and guidance are also available on the UAS Personnel Team website: 
http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personneluas/leaveabsence/index.shtml#_Toc179349912

If you have any questions about the procedures for absence recording, please contact a 
member of the UAS Personnel team: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personneluas/

1 The notification of absence form can be downloaded from 
http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personneluas/forms/index.shtml. Alternatively, a hard copy can be obtained 
from the UAS Personnel team.