**Managing Covid-19 related absence**

1. **Background**

At the outset of the pandemic in March 2020 the University agreed that Covid related absence would not be recorded as sickness absence for the purposes of sickness recording or sick pay but noted that this position would be kept under review. The pandemic has lasted far longer than anyone could have anticipated at its outset in March 2020; inevitably as time has gone on different issues have arisen in respect of what constitutes Covid related absence. The purpose of this guidance note, therefore, is to provide clarity on the position and to ensure consistency of approach across the University.

1. **Clinical definitions for Covid-19 illness**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have developed the following clinical definitions for the Covid illness and subsequent signs and symptoms dependent on how long these persist:

1. **Acute Covid-19**

Signs and symptoms of Covid-19 lasting for up to 4 weeks.

1. **Ongoing symptomatic Covid-19**

Signs and symptoms of Covid-19 lasting from between 4 - 12 weeks.

1. **Post-Covid-19 syndrome**

Signs and symptoms that develop during or after an infection consistent with Covid-19 which continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis.

1. **Managing Covid-related absence**

As with all illnesses and absence, members of staff suffering from Covid-19 will be supported by the University and will not be expected to return to work until they are fit to do so.

The University will continue to exempt any sickness absence arising from Acute Covid-19 (i.e. Covid-related absence lasting up to 4 weeks). Therefore, the first four weeks of any Covid-related absence will not count towards sickness absence pay and recording. This exemption will also apply to those serving a probationary period who are on support staff terms and conditions of employment and therefore would not normally qualify for sick pay.

Those support staff who are serving a probationary period will not however be entitled to occupational sick pay after the 4 week exemption until such time as they have completed their probationary period, although they may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay.

Absence attributed to ongoing symptomatic Covid-19 or post Covid-19 syndrome (i.e. that lasting for more than 4 weeks) will be managed under the relevant attendance management procedures pertaining to the individual’s terms and conditions of employment.

1. **Recording confirmed cases of Covid-19**

It is important that the University accurately captures and records all positive cases of Covid-19 amongst the staff population, regardless of whether or not the individual had recently been on campus or whether any potential close contacts have been identified. Therefore, all positive cases of Covid-19 should be notified via the University’s Test, Trace and Protect process, details of which are available [here](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/coronavirus/test-and-trace.aspx), together with a link to the online notification form.

1. **Recording Covid-related absence**
2. **Covid-related absence of up to 4 weeks’ duration**

Covid-related absence of up to 4 weeks’ duration should be recorded on Core systems under the category ‘Covid’ where an individual is not well enough to undertake their role from home, or where their role does not allow them to work from home. Absence recording under this category will be exempt for the purposes of sick pay.

If an individual feels well enough to work from home despite having Covid and their role allows them to do so, then there is no need to record this as an absence on Core.

1. **Covid-related absence of more than 4 weeks’ duration**

Any Covid-related absence lasting longer than 4 weeks should be recorded on Core Systems under the category ‘Long Covid’ and managed under the relevant attendance management procedure as usual.

1. **Certification of sickness absence**

Certification of Covid-related absence should follow normal procedures, i.e. that:

* + For absences of between four and seven calendar days where the individual is either too unwell to work from home, or their role does not enable them to do so, a personal sickness certificate must be completed;
  + For absences of eight or more calendar days, an isolation note should be obtained where the individual is either too unwell to work from home, or their role does not enable them to do so. Isolation notes are available [here](https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/) and do not have to be obtained from a GP. For longer term absences, a medical certificate is required.

1. **Disability-related absence**

Where an individual’s absence is disability-related, the University will consider if there are any reasonable adjustments that could be made to working arrangements to enable the staff member to return to work, for example by providing specialist equipment or making changes to working hours. Where necessary, Occupational Health can advise on what adjustments may be appropriate in such circumstances.

1. **Time off work to attend Covid vaccination appointments**

The University wants to encourage staff to receive the Covid vaccination when offered and therefore reasonable paid time off work will continue to be given to attend vaccination appointments (or booster appointments where relevant) – this time will not need to be made up.

Staff should try and book a vaccination appointment to minimise disruption to the working day as far as possible. However, the University appreciates that the organisation of the vaccination programme differs significantly across the country and therefore there may not always be an option on when a vaccination is booked.