HR Policy Development in response to COVID-19

Absence and Sickness

This note seeks to define amendments to the College’s HR policies in the context of the current and likely future implications of the Coronavirus situation in the UK, specifically in terms of staff members’ ability to attend work or undertake work activity in the coming months.

It is envisaged that the majority of staff, unless they are themselves unwell, will make their best endeavours to complete their work irrespective of their ability to attend.

Sickness Leave

1. The sickness policy currently carries the following entitlements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Service</th>
<th>Full Pay</th>
<th>Half Pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second and third years</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth year and after</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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</table>

2. As the College has already stated, deductions will not be made for staff members who move across a threshold (as outlined in the above table) for sickness related to COVID-19.

3. Staff members who are:
   a. non-symptomatic but are required to self-isolate, or
   b. following government guidance to stay at home with minor symptoms which would not normally stop them from working,

   should make arrangements to work remotely if possible.

   If agreed that this is not possible, this will be treated as authorised absence (under the same conditions outlined in point 2 above).

4. Work is underway to enable staff to record absence related to COVID-19 through TeamSeer, separately to other types of leave. This functionality and related guidance will be made available on the 13th March.

5. It is important to record COVID-19-related sickness separately from ‘other’ sickness.

Emergency Leave and Flexible Working.

6. Through the Special Leave Policy, there is currently provision for staff members to take emergency, paid leave to care for dependents. There is no qualifying period for this leave.

7. The policy allows for 3 days’ paid leave, followed by a ‘reasonable’ amount of unpaid leave.

8. Staff and line managers should use the current flexible working policy and the special leave policy in tandem to find pragmatic solutions when staff attendance is compromised through (for example) the illness of a dependent or the closure of a school.

9. In some circumstances, the use of the sickness leave policy will supersede the above policies (e.g. if a dependent is diagnosed with COVID-19 there may be a requirement for the staff member to self-isolate).

10. In exceptional circumstances Heads of Departments may authorise an extension of paid emergency leave beyond the three-day limit. In addition, Heads of Departments may agree emergency leave in exceptional cases related to COVID-19 where attendance at
work is not possible and remote working is not possible. Departments should notify their Deans or section heads as individual circumstances arise.

Examples of cases where emergency leave could be applied other than caring responsibilities could be:

a. Care of a family member that is not a legal dependent
b. An underlying health condition or member of a vulnerable group
c. Inability to attend work due to travel restrictions or closure of transport systems

This is a non-exhaustive list – this leave type can be applied at the department’s discretion with the advice of HR where required.

11. A method and related guidance for recording this type of absence will be made available on TeamSeer on 13th March.

12. One of the implications of the above approach could be an unusual excess of annual leave towards the end of the leave year (which runs from February to January). HR will monitor this situation and consider policies related to the carry-over or ‘selling’ of leave as appropriate.

13. This policy position will be reviewed regularly as the situation progresses, and reversion back to the standard application of College policies clearly communicated to staff and departments.

Joe Cooper
Deputy Director (HR and Service Transformation)  15/03/2020