

STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE

Report By: Directorate Personnel Officer, Education

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To consider levels of staff sickness and absence in the Education Service

Monitoring

2. The following staff absence figures have been produced for the Education Service from the period 01.01.01 to 31.04.03:

	Blackfriars %	Teachers %	School Support Staff %
01.01.01 – 30.04.01	2	5	4
01.05.01 – 31.08.01	1	3	4
01.09.01 – 31.12.01	2	3	5
01.01.02 – 31.04.02	3	4	6
01.05.02 – 31.08.02	2	3	6
01.09.02 – 31.12.02	2	6	7
01.01.03 – 31.04.03	2	5	3

3. The Council's absence report for the financial year 2002-03 is attached as Appendix A and shows how the Education Service fares as compared with the rest of the Council. Given the large number of employees in disparate locations and some in difficult working situations, i.e. special schools and PRUs, the **average days lost at 6.28/FTE** is a positive attendance level (for school based staff 2 day's absence equals 1%). In a similar vein the number of absences of more than four weeks duration expressed as a rate per FTE is lower than four other directorates.

Summer Term 2003

4. The equivalent information for the summer term 2003 is still being recorded and finalised, though some details are now available.

For further information on the subject of this report is available from
Nick Austin, Directorate Personnel Officer, Education on (01432) 260932

5. During the summer term 2003 there were 26 employees who had been absent from work through sickness for more than a month. Of these 12 were teachers, 10 were school support staff and 4 were employed at Blackfriars. In total that equals less than 1% of the total Education Service labour force.
6. In most cases Education Personnel has a file in relation to individual referrals to Occupational Health and follow-up activity. Monitoring of these situations is a continuous activity.
7. At the end of the summer term there were 2 retirements on grounds of ill health both of whom were teachers. Since then there has been confirmation of a further ill health retirement that relates to one employee at Blackfriars.

Funding the Cost of Staff Absence in Schools

8. For all schools the cost of absence is difficult to bear. In the case of the smaller primary school, a long absence can mean the difference between a positive or negative carry-forward at the end of the budget year.
9. For many years now, schools have been able to decide annually whether or not to join the self-financing absence insurance schemes offered under LMS arrangements to reduce the risks to the school budget. There is currently one scheme relating to teachers and one to school support staff. Schools pay an annual premium to the schemes that reflects their staff complement. The point at which the level of absence will trigger payments from the insurance scheme is related to the numbers of staff in the school.
10. The purpose of the schemes is to enable schools to have a source of funding with which to buy in cover for the absent employee. The schemes' cover includes maternity and adoption leave, long-term sickness after pay is reduced to half pay and all sickness absence once the threshold for claiming has been reached.
11. Experience indicates that most primary schools join the scheme but the proportion is lower in the case of the high schools. All schools have to make a judgement and do calculations about their ability to use their current employees sufficiently flexibly to cover absence. There is, of course, the risk that an unforeseen long-term illness could confound the original decision.
12. Schools that choose not to join the schemes have to use their formula budgets to meet the full costs of all of their absences.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted and the Committee be invited to comment upon any further action that might be appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.