



Latest update 23 October:

- Extension of carry forwards of Annual Leave – page 9

Covid-19 Coronavirus: Employee Advice

Overview

This guidance reflects Scotland's [route map](#) through and out of the crisis. Key points to note are:

- Current HR policies apply but these are being reviewed regularly and exceptions made, where necessary
- For the latest information on Test and Protect, self-isolation and available support please refer to NHS Inform
- For information on the current restrictions in place, please refer to the [route map](#)

Physical distancing at work

As we move through the phases of the route map, we want to encourage and work with all employees to ensure their own safety and the safety of others is at the forefront of everyone's mind in terms of our thoughts and behaviours. This means all employees familiarising themselves with re-opening guidance, completing or following risk assessments and instructions and asking questions wherever they are unclear. It also means encouraging and reminding others to comply with physical distancing measures put in place and challenging behaviours, where appropriate or escalating concerns through line management.

We recognise this may be a difficult transition period to a new way of working and our aim is to work together to achieve this through clear guidance and signage and employee co-operation. Ongoing dialogue between managers and employees is encouraged to provide clarity on expectations, to dispel any myths and to allay and resolve any concerns raised.

In the event that repeated or deliberate breaches of physical distancing are reported, these will be investigated under the Agency Discipline Procedure and if substantiated, would be deemed to constitute serious misconduct.

Whistleblowing

The ways in which we work may have temporarily changed, however the need for you to be able to raise concerns when things go wrong has not. [Whistleblowing](#) can be a valuable early-warning system and we appreciate employees need to feel safe and supported, now more than ever, when you speak up and that issues are properly investigated and resolved.

It is important all that employees across the Agency understand what whistleblowing is; how and where to raise and escalate concerns; the difference between whistleblowing and grievances and where they can get independent advice as a whistle blower.

You can escalate concerns of suspected wrong doing, which you consider to be in the public interest to your line manager or someone in your line management chain; a member of the Executive Team or Chief Executive; Head of People and Organisational Development; or the designated Nominated Officer in either Agency. If these routes are not appropriate due to the seriousness of the concern or efforts to report concerns internally have failed, you can raise your concerns to the Civil Service Commission.

Covid-19 – if you become unwell at work

If you are currently undertaking work away from home and begin to display symptoms of Covid-19, you will be sent home.

If your symptoms are severe, you will be moved to an area at least two metres away from other people and, where possible, behind a closed door, such as in an office or first aid room. An ambulance will be called. If you need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, you should use a separate bathroom, if one is available.

You should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze.

Tissues should be put in the bin immediately after use or, if no bin is available, put in a bag or pocket and then in the next available bin. If you don't have any tissues, you should cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow. You should wash your hands thoroughly after coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom.

Notifying FLS - sickness absence related to Covid-19

If you have symptoms of Covid-19, your absence must be reported using normal sickness absence reporting procedures. In other words, you should contact your manager on your first day of absence, within one hour of the time you would normally start work.

If, in exceptional circumstances, you are unable to contact your manager yourself, then a relative or friend may do this on your behalf.

Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating “Confirmed Symptoms of Covid-19” as the reason for absence, and send it **via e-mail** to:

absence@forestryandland.gov.scot. Absence Notifications can only be sent **electronically**, as HR staff working remotely will be unable to access or process paper copies.

Notifying Health Protection Scotland of a workplace outbreak of Covid-19

FLS is required to notify the local NHS Board Health Protection Team of a suspected outbreak in the following circumstances:

- where there are 2 or more confirmed Covid-19 cases from the same setting within a fourteen day period; **or**
- there is an increase in background rate of sickness absence due to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Line Managers must notify their Cost Centre Manager of any confirmed Covid-19 cases where the virus may have been contracted at work. Where there are 2 or more cases reported within a fourteen day period from the same setting, Cost Centre Managers should notify the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team via e-mail to

HealthSafetyWellbeing@forestryandland.gov.scot to enable the relevant NHS Board Health Protection Team to be advised.

The HR Team will also monitor the background rate of sickness absence due to suspected or confirmed cases and liaise with the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team as required.

Covid-19 – self certification and fit notes

If you have, or suspect you have, Coronavirus, you can self-certify for the first seven calendar days by following normal sickness absence reporting procedures.

FLS is aware that current guidance means you will not be able to attend your GP surgery to get a 'fit note', however you should be able to obtain an 'isolation note' by following the procedure set out on [NHS Inform](#).

When you return to work, must complete a [Returning from Sick Leave Form](#), stating "Confirmed Symptoms of Covid-19" as the reason for absence, and send it **via e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Covid-19 – sickness absence trigger points and sick pay entitlement

Absence related to Covid-19, whether displaying symptoms, physical distancing, lockdown or other Government interventions, will not count towards normal sickness absence, trigger points or the calculation of contractual sick pay entitlement. In other words, the period of absence will be discounted and you will continue to be paid as normal during this period.

Notifying FLS of sickness absence not related to Covid-19

If your sickness absence is not related to Covid-19, you should still notify your manager using normal sickness absence reporting procedures. Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating your reason for absence, and send it via **e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Due to the pressures likely to be faced by GP practices and the need to follow advice on self-isolation, for this period only, a 'Fit Note' will not be required for the first 14 days of absence.

Notifying FLS that you cannot work for other reasons

In circumstances where you are symptom-free and fit to work but are unable to do so as a result of Covid-19, you will be eligible for special paid leave for this period. This means **you will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time.

These circumstances could include: there being no appropriate work for you to undertake; your work has been designated essential but you are required to self-isolate; or you are caring for a family member who has symptoms of Covid-19.

Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), detailing the reason you are unable to work, and send it to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot. This is mandatory, as FLS is required to record and monitor the number of employees who are unable to work for any reason relating to Covid-19.

Working from home

You should continue to work from home, unless your manager has agreed an alternative arrangement, in line with Government advice.

You may have already been strictly following guidance on physical distancing, for example if you are pregnant or have an underlying health condition that means you are at an increased risk of severe illness from Covid-19. If you remain symptom-free and able to work from home, please continue to do so.

You may be working from home as a result of activities being shut down or reduced. In this instance, you are not on leave and must stay available for work.

You may be asked to undertake basic alternative duties that can be done at home: assist with shutting down a work site; or conducting weekly checks at sites that have been closed down. Any alternative duties will be discussed and agreed with your line manager. **You will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time.

For guidance on homeworking, please refer to the [Home and Alternative Working Arrangements Guide](#).

Caring responsibilities while working from home

You are expected to consider all options that will allow you to continue working, wherever possible. During this period, your working hours do not need to be completed between 7am and 7pm; they can be worked at any time, so long as they are recorded - informally, on your flexi-time spreadsheet or using any other normal time-recording system in place. There is no expectation that you will be able to complete your normal working hours and it is understood you will have to find a balance of work and caring responsibilities that works for you and your individual circumstances.

Your manager will prioritise the work to be undertaken, fully considering your wellbeing when determining what work you should do and what work cannot be completed at this time. It is recognised that it will be particularly stressful for those who are balancing work with having children at home. Everyone will do their best, during this time, to understand that colleagues may have to work differently and flexibly, depending on their circumstances.

If you have exhausted all options that would have allowed you to continue working, you will be eligible for special paid leave. This means that **you will continue to receive your full basic salary** during this time. Your manager must complete a [Notification of Absence Form](#), stating “caring commitments as a result of Covid-19” as the reason you are unable to work, and send it **via e-mail** to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot“.

Employees subject to a probationary period

Probation is typically an eight month process, during which there is continuous assessment and feedback. Formal probation review meetings and Probation Reports, are completed at regular intervals, normally after two, five and eight months.

Managers were asked to pause probationary periods following the implementation of tighter measures in March.

In recognising that alternative ways of working will continue for some time, we have adapted the Probation Procedure to enable the majority of employees to continue their probation or be confirmed in post, as appropriate.

Your manager will discuss the best way to take your probationary period forward with you and how this will work.

End of Year performance reviews

Under normal circumstances employees and their managers would meet face to face during the month October to complete mid- year reviews. Mid– year reviews should go ahead as normal, however in many cases they may have to take place via skype or telephone.

Forward Job Plans

Due to the impact of Covid-19 on working lives, line managers will need to consider the content of Forward Job Plans and the impact this may have had on ability to achieve objectives during the

performance year. Employees may have not been at work; unable to progress work; or work may have changed as a result of Covid-19; and adjustments to objectives may need made as a result of this. Employees should not be assessed against objectives that it was not possible for them to complete due to Covid-19.

HR Processes

A number of HR processes would normally involve face to face meetings, for example:

- disciplinary investigations and hearings
- grievance investigations and hearings
- long and short term attendance meetings
- performance improvement meetings
- probationary and performance management reviews

We will be adhering to current ACAS guidance on managing discipline and grievance procedures during the pandemic. The principles of this guidance are that any process still has to be fair and reasonable, taking into account physical distancing measures and home working.

This includes ensuring that discipline and grievance cases are progressed consistently and promptly and without unreasonable delay, to avoid a negative impact on the parties involved. Formal meetings that would normally be undertaken face to face can therefore take place by Skype or teleconference, to avoid undue delays.

Careful consideration will be taken by managers, working in close liaison with HR Business Partners to ensure that our processes do remain fair and reasonable at this time and that any concerns raised by employees are addressed sensitively and timeously.

Impacts on HR Service and Payroll Processing

Both the HR Operational Support Team and the Pay and Reward Teams have continued to process monthly employee changes, such as new starts, leavers and contractual changes and pay elements such as sickness absence, overtime and allowances etc. as normal.

The People Team are following current Government advice to work from home. To ensure processing is completed in line with our pay cut off dates (which cannot be adjusted), we require the following forms to be completed and sent electronically:

- employee change forms;
- absence notifications and returns;
- leaver forms ;
- overtime claims and
- expenses claims forms

We cannot provide any guarantee that forms sent by hard copy will be picked up and processed on time in the current circumstances, which is why this new practice has been adopted. Forms should be sent electronically, ensuring that changes and payments can be processed timeously while both teams work remotely.

Electronic or scanned signatures will be accepted. If you do not have access to a computer and need to submit an overtime or expenses claim form, please speak to your line manager and they can arrange for a form to be completed and sent on your behalf. Forms that are received after payroll cut off dates, will be processed for the following month's salary.

To enable forms to be processed on time you should:

- submit either a Word or PDF version of the form attached to an e-mail;
- ensure the latest version is used (most forms are now on Saltire under the My Workplace Section); and
- complete in full, clearly showing details such as name, pay reference etc. You can find your payroll number by logging on to I-Trent via the following link: [Employee Self Service](#)

All forms **must** be signed and countersigned by either your line manager or confirming officer, where appropriate to ensure they are not returned to you, thus delaying payment.

Where should I send forms to?

All **pay** related forms should be sent to the Pay and Reward mail box at:

payroll@forestryandland.gov.scot.

All **sickness** related forms should now be sent to: absence@forestryandland.gov.scot.

All **other** employee related forms such as the new starter, leavers, ECN forms etc. should be sent to: hr@forestryandland.gov.scot.

Annual Leave

While we recognise holiday plans may have been altered or cancelled as a result of Government measures, you should continue to apply for and take pre-booked annual leave. Annual leave balances must be managed proactively to ensure we are all taking annual leave at regular intervals though out the annual leave year, thus supporting our wellbeing.

Annual Leave – carry forwards

The HR Procedure – Annual Leave and Public/Privilege Holidays outlines the position on carry forwards of annual leave: If you have unused annual leave at the end of the annual leave year, providing you have taken 28 days' leave including Public/Privilege Holidays, you may carry over the excess for use in future years. You can 'bank' a cumulative maximum of 20 days annual leave without line manager approval.

In line with the revised Agency terms and conditions, the ability to carry forward annual leave was to be reduced to **10 days without approval** and to **20 days in exceptional circumstances** from **April 2021**. In recognition of the three month period of lockdown between 23 March and the end of June 2020, this period has now been extended until 30 June 2021, giving staff an additional 3 month period in which to reduce annual leave balances to the new limits by **30 June 2021**.

This means that from 1 July 2021, in line with the revised Agency terms and conditions, the ability to carry forward annual leave will be reduced to 10 days without manager approval and up to 20 days in exceptional circumstances (as detailed in the HR Procedure – Annual Leave). Please note, the Covid-19 pandemic does not constitute 'exceptional circumstances' in this context as provision has already been made for this by extending the carry forward period by 3 months. We appreciate some of you may have family members who live abroad and may be seeking a longer period of leave when it is safe for you to travel – provision is made for this under 'exceptional circumstances' and managers are encouraged to support this, wherever possible.

In line with the revised Agency terms and conditions, the ability to buy or sell annual leave will be discontinued from April 2021.

More information on management of annual leave and carry forwards is available at [Annual Leave, Public and Privilege Holidays](#) on Saltire.

Foreign Travel and Quarantine

The Scottish Government has published a [list](#) of countries where the requirement to self-isolate for 14 days on return will not apply. This list will be continually reviewed in light of the risks posed as a result of coronavirus transmission and should be checked on a regular basis to ensure you are following the correct advice, noting that the position may change between the dates of outward and return travel. The exemption from self-isolation also applies to the Common Travel Area, ie Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

At all times, the [FCO advice and guidance on travelling abroad](#) and the latest government travel advice for the country or countries being visited should be followed.

If the country you are travelling from does not appear on the [Scottish Government list](#) of exemptions, you will be required to undertake a 14 day period of self-isolation on return.

If you are considering travelling abroad for recreational purposes, you should have an early discussion with your manager to consider any quarantine requirements which may apply on your return to Scotland. Where annual leave is agreed to travel to a country which is not covered by the exemptions, you should explore all practical options to allow working from home during the quarantine period, in liaison with your manager. This might include temporary changes to working patterns or finding alternative work which can be done from home, including training.

In the scenario where you had booked travel abroad prior to **10 July 2020** and this has not been cancelled by the travel operator, we recognise you would lose financially if you did not travel.

If it is not possible to find alternative work which can be done from home on your return to Scotland, you will receive special paid leave for the 14 day quarantine period.

Where you have booked travel abroad **after 10 July 2020**, if no alternative work can be found to enable you to work from home during the quarantine period, you will have to use annual leave, flexi or special **unpaid** leave to cover the quarantine period.

Travelling for Compassionate Reasons

If you are considering foreign travel for compassionate reasons, we will look to support this; depending on the individual circumstances and taking account of the latest travel advice from the FCO.

Examples of reasons for considering a compassionate approach might include:

- attending a close family funeral
- receiving urgent and serious medical attention
- accompanying a family member requiring urgent and serious medical attention
- complying with urgent legal responsibilities overseas
- supporting a relative overseas who needs urgent and immediate help.

Where travel overseas is undertaken for compassionate reasons and you are required to self-isolate on your return to Scotland, you should work from home for the 14 day quarantine period. Where you cannot carry out your normal role from home, you should seek to identify suitable alternative duties and/or training that you can undertake from home for the quarantine period. Where that is not possible, you will receive special paid leave for the duration of the quarantine period.

For further advice on foreign travel and quarantine, please contact your HR Advisor or HRBP.

Overtime

Normal arrangements for overtime continue to apply, including those for claiming overtime or time off in lieu. Overtime remains at management's discretion and must be authorised in advance.

Updating your contact details

There may be times when FLS need to contact you in an emergency, for example, to check that you are safe and well.

You are encouraged to keep your contact details, including your emergency contact details, updated on iTrent in the Employee Self Service section. You can access I-Trent via the following link: [Employee Self Service](#).

There is an iTrent specific FAQ on these pages that details who can see and access personal details and also provides guidance for accessing and using this system.