



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

# Dealing with Absenteeism/Abscondment Cases Protocol

<b>Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty</b>	HR division
<b>Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager</b>	Director of HR
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<b>Review Cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years etc)</b>	n/a
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# **HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION PROTOCOL ON DEALING WITH ABSENTEEISM/ABSCONDMENT CASES**

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that immediate supervisors<sup>1</sup> know what to do in cases of absenteeism and or abscondment. It is also to make staff members aware of the processes that will be followed and the seriousness of failing to report for duty.

## **2. Severity of absenteeism and abscondment**

Each and every staff member within the University contributes to the success of the institution. This means that staff are required to be at work and to do the duties required of them. The smooth running of the University requires planning of activities within the various department and divisions. The failure of a staff member to report for duty disrupts this planning of the department which in turn disrupts the work of the department or division and the provision of the services of that area. In areas where the work needs to be done on the same day e.g. in Food services or in cleaning posts or lecturing posts, the absence of a staff member, will impact other members of the department or area who are likely to have to pick up that work. On-going absences of staff may result in additional staff needing to be employed which impacts the finances of the University. In a budget environment where the University is striving to improve remuneration of staff, this may be a waste of valuable resources.

## **3. Staff member's responsibility**

The University expects the staff member to be aware of the impact of their absence of the work area and department/division and to show due diligence in advising the immediate supervisor of the absence.

The University acknowledges that there are or there will be circumstances that will result in the staff member not being able to come to work e.g. being ill oneself, having a very sick child, a death in the family. In such instances, the staff member has a duty to inform the immediate supervisor by 10h00 of the first day of absence. The staff member must personally contact the supervisor by telephone as the supervisor needs to ask the staff member what is happening and when the return to work can be expected.

In instances where it is impossible for the staff member to contact the supervisor (e.g., s/he is hospitalised), the staff member may ask someone to report his/her absence to the supervisor.

## **4. Supervisor's role**

The University expects supervisors to manage staff absences consistently and fairly with concern for the staff member as well as the entire team. It is very important for the supervisor to handle absenteeism cases with the urgency they deserve. Delays in dealing with absenteeism can be costly to Rhodes and have a negative impact on others in the team. Other staff get frustrated at having to do the absent staff members's work particularly when they know that the supervisor is not doing anything about the problem. A supervisor's failure to deal with absenteeism sends an implicit message to staff that it is "okay" to be away from work. If individual cases of absenteeism are not dealt with, in due course, on-going absenteeism from all staff may become the norm. This in turn impacts the productivity in a particular work area and frustrates other departments and divisions that are

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<sup>11</sup> This is the person to whom the staff member reports directly. In some cases this will be the Assistant Manager, Manager, Head of Department, Director, Deputy Director, Dean, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Executive Director.

relying on that area to provide a service or do required work. If this happens, the supervisor is failing in their responsibilities.

Supervisors are encouraged to be proactive in dealing with absenteeism by doing the following:

- Explain to staff why reporting being absent and seeking permission for being away is so important;
- Make sure that all staff in the department are aware of what is required if they are going to be absent from work;
- Agree on how contact can be made e.g. can the staff member send you a “sms” and you will return their call;
- Involve your HR Generalist in talking to staff about these issues.

#### **4. Processes to be followed**

The critical issues regards the processes to be followed are:

- Staff must keep the supervisor informed of absences even if there is a legitimate reason e.g. being ill;
- Deal with the absenteeism immediately. Do not delay. A day’s delay could mean the staff member is paid for days when they are not absent with permission because of the payroll being closed;
- Days of absenteeism dictate the level of disciplinary action to be taken. See below for more detail;
- Involve your HR Generalist.

##### **4.1 Step 1: the staff member does not come to work and has not phoned in**

The supervisor must call the staff member (at the last known number) the following day to check his/ her whereabouts. In your conversation with the staff member, the reason for not coming to work should be ascertained. If there is no legitimate reason or permission to be away, the staff member should also be informed to return to work the following day.

##### **4.2 Step 2 (a): the staff member returns to work after being absent**

Since the staff member has been absent without permission and did not phone in to indicate a reason for the absence, the supervisor must proceed with disciplinary action as per the staff disciplinary procedure. This is a level two offence. The following steps must take place:

- Human Resources must be involved. Contact your HR generalist;
- Hold a disciplinary hearing adhering to the disciplinary code and procedure requirements;
- Where the staff member is found guilty, HR and the manager must make sure that a “no work no pay” common law rule is implemented. Please note that this absence is not to be converted into annual leave.

The first offence for this misconduct is usually a written warning. If the staff member persists with this behaviour and is found guilty of misconduct, it may result in the second instance in a final written warning and in the third instance in a dismissal. Please remember that this is only a guideline. All disciplinary sanctions should be determined bearing the specific context in mind.

Even where the staff member has a reason to be absent, the fact that no call was made to the manager on the first day of being absent may constitute level 2 disciplinary action. The staff member needs to be absent with permission which can only be obtained from phoning in on the first day of being absent from work. Where the staff member has a legitimate reason for failing to phone the supervisor e.g. hospitalisation, being stranded in a remote area, disciplinary action would not be taken.

#### **4.3 Step 2 (b): the staff member still does not return to work after being absent and being phoned**

If the staff member does not return to work on the third day even after you have contacted them (on the second day of their being absent), then the following steps must be followed:

- Contact your HR generalist on the third day;
- A letter will be drafted by your HR Generalist for the manager's/HOD's signature. This will inform the staff member to report for duty before another three days laps failing which s/he will be considered to have absconded<sup>2</sup>; and
- Forward the letter to the staff member's last known address.

#### **4.4 Step 3 (a): the staff member returns before the six day period**

If the staff member does return to work within 6 days, the following steps must be followed:

- Involve your HR generalist;
- The supervisor must charge the staff member for serious absenteeism as per the disciplinary policy (level two). The disciplinary procedure must be followed;
- Where the staff member is found guilty, HR and the manager must make sure that a "no work no pay" common law rule is implemented. Please note that this absenteeism is not to be converted into annual leave.

Absences of more than 3 days but less than 6 days may result in a final written warning. An absence of 6 days or more may result in dismissal. Please remember that this is only a guideline. All disciplinary sanctions should be determined bearing the specific context in mind.

#### **4.5 Step 3 (b): the staff member does not return to work before the six days**

In cases where the staff member does not come to work despite receiving or being sent a letter, the following steps must be followed:

- The manager/HoD must inform HR on the sixth day (no later please because of pay date implications);
- HR will immediately effect a stop payment on the staff member's salary;
- The manager/HoD must write a report motivating to escalate the disciplinary matter to a level 3 disciplinary process. This report must include all correspondence with the staff member and proof of contact;
- HR will then manage the disciplinary process.

Level 3 disciplinary offences may result in dismissal.

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<sup>2</sup> This is important if and when the University may need to proceed with a charge of abscondment. Then the manager/HOD will need to show that an attempt was made to contact the staff member with no success.