

Managing and monitoring sickness and absenteeism

Managing sickness and absence at work is a key concern for all employers.

Whilst a proportion of this is genuine sickness, there is still a substantial amount which could be avoided. As usual the best approach combines prevention and best Human Resources practice, in terms of fair policies and procedures and training for managers.

Policies and procedures

Employers need to set the parameters and identify the frequency and causes of absence. They need to train their managers and supervisors in applying the policies and procedures and also communicate and consult with employees. Both long and short term sickness needs to be handled carefully. As usual there are legal issues to be considered and the Disability Discrimination Act imposes a burden on employers in relation to certain debilitating illnesses and conditions.

Recruitment

Some people are 'absence prone', i.e. in many firms between

5 per cent and 10 per cent of workers account for about half the total absences. Employers should enquire at interview about the absence record of a potential new employee over the last two years, as it may be an indication of the future attendance record.

Managing stress

The human and financial costs of stress are overwhelming. Managers have to be trained to identify the causes and symptoms of stress in themselves and others, and where necessary adapt their management style and behaviour.

Return to work interview

One of the single most effective strategies in reducing sickness absence is the return to work interview. When conducted properly, return to work interviews can not only substantially reduce the level of absence but also enable the employer to ascertain the real reason for the absence, which may not be what was originally stated. The interview needs to be carried out sensitively and managers may need training.

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- HR audit of contracts, policies, procedures and systems
- Preparation of contracts of employment and handbooks
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- Training including management development, recruitment and selection, performance management, communication skills and client care
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- Employee relations, including managing absence, disciplinary and grievance issues, redundancy and other dismissals
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