

Adaptive Focus

Absence

Reviewed June 2008

THE COST OF ABSENCE



Employee absence is a significant cost to 90% of businesses according to research from the CIPD.

The latest employee absence survey reveals that on average sickness absence costs employers £659 per employee every year.

Employee absence costs employers 8.4 working days for every member of staff per year; this represents 3.7% of working time.

SHORT TERM ABSENCE

Effective interventions in managing short-term absence include:

- a proactive absence management policy
- return-to-work interviews
- disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence levels
- use of trigger mechanisms such as the Bradford Factor to review attendance
- involving trained line managers in absence management
- providing sickness absence information to line managers
- restricting sick pay
- involving occupational health professionals.

For HR advice specifically adapted to the needs of you and your business please contact us by telephone on 0560 230 6508

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or visit or website at www.adaptivehr.co.uk**

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Human Resources Consultants

ABSENCE POLICY

The first step to managing absence effectively is to ensure that you have a clear policy in place. Employers have a legal duty to provide staff with information on 'any terms and conditions relating to incapacity for work due to sickness or injury, including any provision for sick pay'.

Effective absence policies must make clear an employees' rights and obligations when taking time off from work due to sickness.

The policy should:

- provide details of contractual sick pay terms and its relationship with statutory sick pay
- outline the process employees must follow if taking time off sick – covering when and whom employees should notify if they are not able to attend work
- detail when employees need a self-certificate form
- make clear when a medical certificate (sick-note) from the doctor is required to certify their absence
- state that the organisation may (with the worker's consent) request a report from the employee's doctor
- mention that the organisation reserves the right to require employees to attend an examination by a company doctor
- include provisions for return-to-work interviews as these have been identified as the most effective intervention to manage short-term absence.



RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS

Return-to-work interviews can help identify short-term absence problems at an early stage. They also provide managers with an opportunity to start a conversation with staff regarding underlying issues, which might be causing the absence.



Interviews need not be complex but should be carried in accordance with the internal organisational policy to ensure consistency and fairness.

Training should be given to line managers regarding -

- How to conduct return to work interviews
- Confidentiality of meetings
- Record keeping

The use of disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence may be used to make it clear to employees that unjustified absence will not be tolerated and that absence policies will be enforced.

LONG TERM ABSENCE

There are four typical elements in the recovery and return-to-work process.

Keeping in contact with sick employees - ensure contact is maintained on a regular basis using a sensitive and non-intrusive approach. The form of this contact should be agreed with the member of staff and manager and, where appropriate, the union or employee representative.

Planning and undertaking workplace controls or adjustments - some obstacles may hinder an employee's return to work. A risk assessment can identify measures or adjustments to help workers return and stay in work. Examples may include:

- allowing a gradual return-to-work, eg building up from part-time to full-time over a period of weeks
- changing work patterns or management style to reduce pressure and give the employee more control
- altering the employees working hours, eg allowing flexi-working to accommodate family demands
- accommodating the employee's mobility.

Using professional advice and treatment - occupational health professionals should be able to play a major role in evaluating the reason for absence, carrying out health assessments, and assisting HR professionals and managers in planning a return to work. For more information see our factsheet on occupational health.

Planning and co-ordinating a return-to-work plan - a return to work plan must be agreed by the employee and the line manager, and any other staff likely to be affected. The plan needs to include:

- the goals, such as modified working hours, or a modified job role
- the time period
- a statement about the new working arrangements
- the checks that will need to be made to make sure the plan is put into practice
- the dates when the plan will be reviewed by the employee and the line manager.

It may be helpful to appoint someone to co-ordinate the return-to-work process. This may include keeping colleagues of the absent employee informed of progress, so that all understand the situation, as well as easing the transition back to work and maintaining working relationships.