

Be Part Of The...



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MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

The UK's largest annual survey of sickness absence rates and costs shows that sickness absence was an average of 2.8% of working time per annum, or 6.5 days per employee, during 2014. This costs employers an average of £16 billion.

There are some fundamental things HR practitioners and line managers should demonstrate to ensure they are fair and consistent when it comes to managing sickness absence, particularly recurring absence.

Policy

In the first instance, a robust sickness absence management policy needs to be in place. This includes absence reporting and recording procedures, applied equally to all staff. You cannot manage sickness absence if you do not record it.

Staying in Touch

The frequency and methods of contact (keeping-in-touch calls or meetings) between the absent employee and their employer should be agreed between all parties. The employer needs to propose regular reviews to discuss the individual's progress, problems and their return to work plans. Should the employee not attend the keep in touch meetings or make contact this may lead to disciplinary action.

Medical Reports

If there is a concern about the length or frequency of the individual's absences from work, there is a possibility that there may be an underlying medical condition, and the employer may wish to arrange an independent medical assessment with their authorisation.

Definition of Disability under the Equality Act (2010)

You're "disabled" under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

You will need to obtain a medical report to assess if someone has a disability.

'Substantial' means more than minor or trivial, e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed whereas 'long-term' means 12 months or more.

For example: A breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection.

GOOD PRACTICE TIP: Be Prepared for Making Reasonable Adjustments!

Equality law says that you must make reasonable adjustments if you know that a worker is a disabled person, that they need adjustments and that those adjustments are reasonable. You don't have to put reasonable adjustments in place just in case one of your existing workers becomes a disabled person, but you may want to be prepared:

- Think in advance about what the core tasks of a particular job are and what adjustments might be possible (before starting a recruitment or promotion exercise, for example).
- Put in place a process for working out reasonable adjustments in the event of an existing worker becoming disabled or a disabled person starting work with the organisation, before being faced with an individual situation.
- Make sure you know in advance what support is available to disabled people from Access to Work.
- If you are making renovations or alterations to your building, thinking about how you can make the new parts of your building more accessible for disabled people will help you if you later employ a disabled person and will allow you to attract more potential employees.

As well as avoiding a possible Employment Tribunal claim, being open to making reasonable adjustments means you may be able to avoid losing the skills of a worker who has become a disabled person just by making a few changes.

Recurring Absences

If sickness absence is recurring, consider if there is a particular pattern or underlying issues:

- Consult the company's alcohol and drug use policy, if required.
- Consider if the individual may have an underlying medical condition that may be causing them to take time off work repeatedly.
- Initiate an open discussion with the individual concerned, enquiring about the problems they are facing and offering support.
- Suggest requesting their Doctor's opinion, if you have concerns about the employee's wellbeing, health or the duration of their sickness absence.

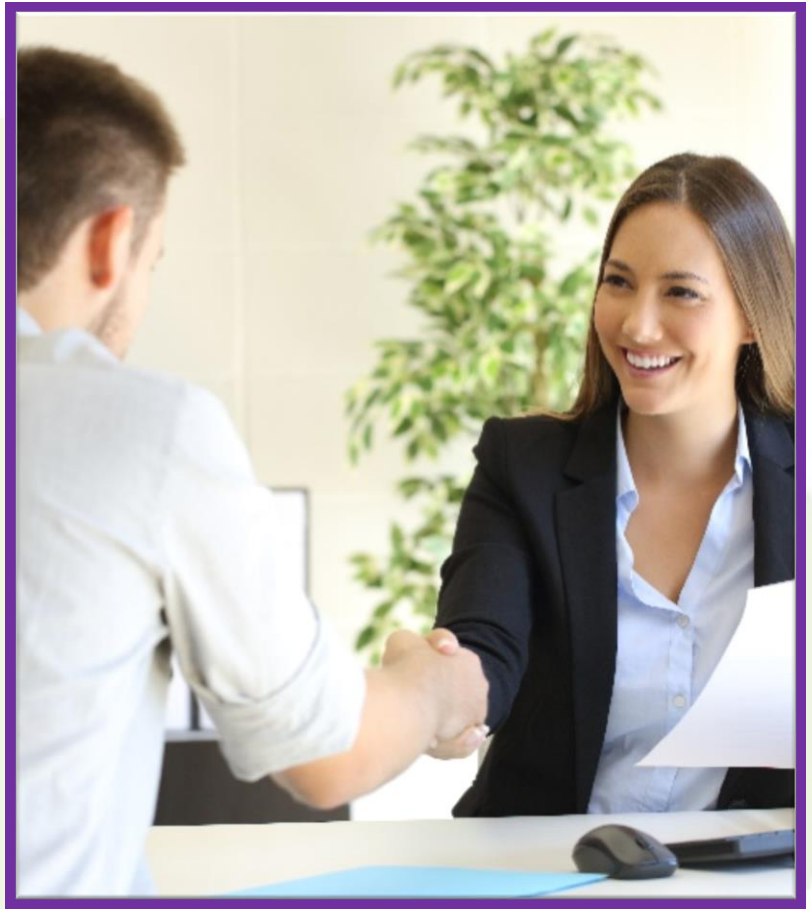


Return to Work Interviews

Return to work interviews should be used when managing sickness absence. Some of the topics to discuss with the individual concerned are:

- Any medication taken or are there any side effects of the medication that might affect the individual's ability to work.
- Whether the individual's Doctor has approved their return to work and made any recommendations regarding workplace support required.
- To enquire the employee, what help they may benefit from.

Any concerns about outstanding workplace issues, such as problems with workplace relationships, outstanding grievances, complaints, etc.



GOOD PRACTICE TIP:

General Advice on Effective Management of Sickness Absence

Do not be afraid of honest discussions with the absent employees, particularly when sickness absence is recurring. These discussions help to identify return to work barriers and underlying issues, initiating open conversations about any problems and support required. They also help to outline the expectations of all parties involved.

The open discussions encourage employees to voice their concerns and request help. From the employer's point of view, these discussions help to effectively manage and monitor sickness absence, particularly in most complex cases such as recurring absences.

It also helps to ensure that the sickness management process is structured, consistent, clear and fair.

Thank you for reading!

Got a question or want to know more? Let's Talk!

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