

Sickness Absence – Case Study

In 2013 Advertising Company had a sickness absence rate of 8.8 per cent. By 2015, the rate had fallen to 3.33 per cent, with a rolling average of 3.67 per cent for the previous 12 months.

There were a number of factors that we helped the Company with; a new sickness absence policy was written and implemented and support to the employees who were off work was given by occupational health specialists.

The sickness policy covered all employees and set up clear procedures for managing attendance and a process for collating absence figures was introduced and monitored on a monthly basis by senior management.

The employees only receive statutory sick pay during the probationary period and full pay for six months thereafter.

The notification procedure set out in the sickness absence policy required employees to telephone their manager before 10.00am on the first day of their sickness absence to say that they will not be coming into work and to provide details of their illness. They must speak to their line manager personally. Texts, emails and voicemail messages are not accepted as notification methods.

Regular contact with absent employees enabled the Company to provide them with support, manage workloads within their teams and assess the likely length of their sickness absence. It also served as something of a deterrent.

Upon returning to work the employees are expected to meet their manager for a return to work interview on their first day back at work after a period of sickness absence.

The aims of this interview are to:

- Ensure that the employee is fit to return to work.
- Clarify the reason for the absence.
- Discuss any support the individual needs, including temporary workplace adjustments.
- Identify any links between different periods of absence and arrange further discussion about levels of attendance.

Forms completed by employees after return to work interviews are used for self-certification purposes following absences of up to seven days. For longer periods of sickness absence, employees must provide a 'fit note' from their GP within three days of returning to work or three days of the note's issue date.

For short terms, persistent absence, formal action will be triggered when employees are absent on three separate occasions within a six-month period or if their attendance record gives cause for concern.

Managers will still retain some discretion but in most cases will be expected to hold an informal discussion covering:

- The employee's sickness absence record,
- Reasons for the individual's absences,
- The impact of these absences on the employee's team and the business as a whole,
- Whether further absences are likely to occur in the future,
- Any support they can offer to facilitate regular attendance and targets
- Timescales for improvements in attendance.

Managers will also need to make clear to employees that a formal disciplinary procedure may be instigated unless their attendance improves.

Disciplinary procedure

If there is no improvement in attendance the employee will be given at least two working days' notice of a formal absence review meeting where the matter may be escalated under the Company disciplinary and dismissal procedure. The procedure consists of the following three stages:

Stage 1: absence review meeting - first written warning

Stage 2: absence review meeting - final written warning

Stage 3: dismissal

Employees will have the right to appeal against the outcome of any meeting held as part of this disciplinary process. Appeals hearings will be chaired by a manager more senior than the one who determined the outcome of previous review meetings.

In addition to reacting to sickness absence, the Company takes a proactive approach to helping employees stay fit and well. Employees themselves are closely involved in this process.