

Managing absence & improving overall performance

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The 2010 Absence Management survey conducted by the CIPD found that **82%** of UK companies are now recording their absence. The average level of employee absence is still quite low at **7.7 days** absence per employee. Two-thirds of working time lost to absence is accounted for by short-term absences of up to seven days.

Unsurprisingly the most common causes of absence noted are for minor illnesses, such as **colds, flu, stomach upsets, headaches and migraines**, are by far the most common cause of short-term absence. Musculoskeletal injuries and back pain are the next most common causes of short-term absence for manual employees, followed by stress, home/family responsibilities and recurring medical conditions such as asthma, angina and allergies.

Stress remains the second most common cause of short-term absence among non-manual workers, followed by musculoskeletal injuries, back pain and recurring medical conditions. Over a third of employers reported that stress-related absence has increased over the past year. The top causes of stress at work are **workloads, external relationships, organisational change/ restructuring and management styles**. Popular methods to identify and reduce workplace stress include using staff surveys, flexible working options/improved work-life balance, training for managers and/or staff and risk assessments, targets and bench-marking.

The survey concluded that the most common and successful method used to manage short-term absence are **return-to-work interviews, trigger mechanisms to review attendance, giving sickness absence information to line managers and disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence**.

To help you manage absence better within your organisation then you could start by implementing a framework of questions when you have an absence scenario to manage:

- Has the employee contacted the organisation to explain their absence?
- Is the employee aware that the absence is unauthorised?
- Has the organisation contacted the employee to explain that the absence is unauthorised?
- Has the employee had previous periods of unauthorised absence?
- Are there any disciplinary warnings on record?

Once you have answered these questions, the next steps to follow are:

1. Write to the employee explaining that the absence was unauthorised, explaining why.
2. Inform payroll, ensuring that there is no pay for the period of unauthorised absence.
3. Write to the employee, inviting him/her to a disciplinary meeting, if appropriate.
4. Meet with the employee on return to work, explaining that the absence was unauthorised and why.
5. Write to the employee confirming outcome of disciplinary meeting. If disciplinary action has been taken, inform employee of right to appeal.
6. Set date for review meeting with employee.
7. Monitor on-going absence.

The introduction of return to work interviews has been proven to assist many companies in managing their absence situations better and reducing the levels of short term absence.

