

Employment

Reducing absences and presenteeism in the workplace - a new approach

Did you know that UK employees lost 13.6% of their working hours due to absence and presenteeism (being present at work but being limited in some aspects of job performance by a health problem) in 2018? This reduction in productivity equates to an average of 35.6 days of productive time lost per employee per year. This statistic is set out in the latest annual Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey.

The causes of the loss of productivity are varied but reasons include mental health issues, work-related stress, financial concerns, workplace bullying, chronic physical conditions (such as asthma, severe allergies, arthritis or rheumatism) and lack of sleep.

Sadly, another conclusion of the survey report is that productivity-loss in the UK has been worsening over time. The average employee is now losing 35.6 days in 2018 as compared to 23.0 days in 2014. With this downward trend in mind, it is important for employers to consider how they can support employees' health and therefore improve their productivity.



In recognition of the best employers, the survey report includes awards for Britain's Healthiest Workplace as determined by a distinguished panel including Professor Dame Carol Black (Principal of Newnham College, University of Cambridge) and Professor Gina Radford (Deputy chief medical officer for England). The winners include Nomura International Plc, which won the title in the large organisation (1000+ employees) category.

The solution to workplace health-issues is not straight forward but it is becoming clear that any solution must include a holistic approach to improving health. The survey report recognises that the healthiest

employees are provided with various workplace programmes such as subsidised gym membership, providing access to healthy meals, bicycle purchase schemes and clinical screening services. The survey report encourages employers to consider various workplace programmes to encourage and improve employees' overall health. The clear outcome of the report is that simply expecting employees to look after their own health is unlikely to be successful.

The cost to businesses of workplace absence and presenteeism is sadly on the rise and without intervention, employers are likely to see the cost to their business continue to increase. It is also foreseeable that a further decline in employee health is likely to lead to the loss of valuable workforce knowledge and experience if it results in employee resignations or dismissals. As such, it is worth considering whether to implement an appropriate workplace programme that may help turn around the decline in your employees' overall health.

As there is no one single solution to the problem of declining health, it is important to consider your particular workforce when deciding how best to tackle this issue. It may be that the provision of a free personal-budgeting service would help resolve employees' financial problems or the provision of shower facilities would enable employees to cycle to work. You may also wish to consider flexibility in working hours to facilitate childcare or implement a Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) policy so that employees can balance their working time with their home life. Many of these workplace programmes will come at an initial cost for employers but it is very likely that the implementation of the programme will pay for itself in the future when it reduces the level of absence and increases employee productivity overall.

If you would like advice on implementing a workplace programme to improve attendance and productivity, please contact our employment team.

David Rushmere
Senior Solicitor
E: david.rushmere@3hrics.com



This newsletter is designed to provide general information only. It does not constitute legal or other professional advice and thus should not be relied on. Definitive advice can only be given with full knowledge of all relevant facts. If you would like to discuss any aspect further, please contact us.