

Where can I get more information?

Acas advisory booklet *Absence and labour turnover*; or Acas advisory leaflet *Flexible working* – to order, call Acas Publications on 08702 42 90 90 or order online at www.acas.org.uk.

DTI *Factsheets for small firms* – available at www.dti.gov.uk/publications.

Disability Rights Commission – telephone 08457 622 633.

Managing absence website at www.managingabsence.org.uk.

Acas runs charged training for small firms and has a national helpline – 08457 47 47 47 – which gives free advice on employment matters.

This information is intended to be a brief introduction to the subject. Legal information is provided for guidance only and should not be regarded as an authoritative statement of the law.

Acas can help with your employment relations needs

We inform

We answer your questions, give you the facts you need and talk through your options. You can then make informed decisions. Contact us to keep on top of what employment rights legislation means in practice – before it gets on top of you. Call our helpline **08457 47 47 47** or visit our website www.acas.org.uk.

We advise and guide

We give you practical know-how on setting up and keeping good relations in your organisation. Look at our publications on the website or ask our helpline to put you in touch with your local Acas adviser. Our Equality Direct helpline **08456 00 34 44** advises on equality issues, such as discrimination.

We train

From a two-hour session on the key points of new legislation or employing people to courses specially designed for people in your organisation, we offer training to suit you. Look on the website for what is coming up in your area and to book a place or talk to your local Acas office about our tailored services.

We work with you

We offer hands-on practical help and support to tackle issues in your business with you. This might be through one of our well-known problem-solving services. Or a programme we have worked out together to put your business firmly on track for effective employment relations. You will meet your Acas adviser and discuss exactly what is needed before giving any go-ahead.

Tackling absence problems

long-term
sickness

working
conditions

attendance

welfare

statutory
sick pay

What if I get it wrong?

High levels of unauthorised absence, including lateness and certificated or uncertificated sick leave, can:

- cause lost or delayed production
- reduce the range or standard of service
- cause low morale and dissatisfaction
- indicate other, more deep seated problems.

What are the legal requirements?

You are liable to pay employees' statutory sick pay for certain periods. Contact the Employers Helpline on 0845 7143143 for more information. Otherwise, there are no legal requirements, but, if you handle absence problems badly, it is more likely that employees could make successful claims to employment tribunals for unfair dismissal.

How do I get it right?

✓ Measure absence to find out:

- how much time is lost
- where absence occurs most
- how often individual employees are absent.

✓ Monitor absence by:

- obtaining the employee's consent to keep details of individual records of sick absence, which are 'sensitive personal data' under the Data Protection Act 1998;
- keeping accurate attendance records which show individual instances of absence, together with duration, reason and where in the company the absentee works;

- ensuring that records can be easily analysed by section or department, month or year;
- assure staff that any sensitive personal data will be kept for only as long as necessary and will only be assessed by named departments or individuals;
- making sure that absence measurement figures show the scale and nature of the problem – whether there is an absence problem and which of the main categories of absence are involved:
 - long-term sickness
 - short-term certified or uncertified sickness
 - unauthorised absence and lateness.

✓ Reduce absence levels by paying special attention to:

- working conditions
- job design
- payment systems
- communications and induction and training
- welfare
- employment relations
- health and safety (including stress)
- flexible working arrangements.

✓ Deal with short-term certificated or uncertificated sickness by:

- interviewing employees on their return to work;
- making arrangements for medicals where necessary;
- having a policy on the provision of certificates to cover sick absence, although GPs are not obliged to provide patients with certificates for illnesses of seven days or less;

- ensuring employees are told if their level of absence is putting their job at risk.

✓ Deal with long-term sickness by:

- discussing the problem with the employee concerned;
- considering alternative work or working arrangements, whether the job can be covered by other employees or temporary replacements and how long the job can be kept open (be aware of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which applies to all employers);
- seeking medical opinions from the employee's GP or a company doctor.

✓ Deal with authorised absence or lateness by:

- requiring absent employees to phone in by a given time on each day of absence;
- ensuring that the supervisor has an informal talk with the employee on the day after absence if no explanation is presented;
- taking disciplinary action if the unexplained absence continues.