

So you want to be an effective LUU manager...

You'll need to know about managing absence!

This module of '**So you want to become an effective LUU manager...**' covers the topics of managing short and long term absences.

Frequent and persistent short-term absences can be extremely disruptive for any manager. The first half of this module aims to help you understand the impacts of short-term absence and how to manage absenteeism effectively at LUU.

Occasionally you may be faced with dealing with an employee who has a period of long term absence. It is important to treat this type of absence differently as other factors may need to be taken into consideration. Guidance on managing long-term sickness absence can be found in the second section of this training module.

Before You Begin....

Complete the e-learning module – Managing Performance Every Day

Read section 3.3 in the staff handbook - sickness absence.

Managing Short Term absences

Why tackle absence? – The benefits

Many managers feel apprehensive about tackling an employee's absenteeism. It's natural to feel uncertain about what action you can reasonably and legally take. While these doubts and fears are understandable, doing nothing can lead to further problems, including a general increase in absenteeism.

On the other hand, an active role in managing absence can often help to:

- identify the causes of an individual's poor level of attendance and allow you to deal with the matter effectively
- provide support to the employee if needed and so potentially increase motivation and loyalty
- deter more casual absences
- establish whether an employee's level of attendance is likely to improve within a reasonable time frame
- identify whether there are any problems at work that are contributing to the absences and ensure that they are dealt with
- improve morale and motivation
- lead to a reduction in absence rates and associated sick pay costs within LUU as a whole and an improve productivity

Rights under employment contracts

Employees' rights to in relation to short-term absence are determined according to the terms of their employment contract and the LUU employee handbook. The handbook clearly states what employees' obligations are when they are unable to attend work, including how they should notify you and what supporting medical certification is required.

As a manager, you should make sure that you are familiar with LUU's rules and requirements particularly surrounding the absence reporting procedure and that these are applied consistently throughout your team.

Find out...

How long does a new member of staff have to be with LUU before they are entitled to sick pay?

Common causes of frequent absenteeism

An employee's frequent spells of short-term absence can have any one of a number of root causes, including:

- an underlying medical condition that flares up from time to time
- an unusually high - but genuine - vulnerability to colds, flu, etc
- excessive tiredness, for example because they have a second job
- personal or family problems
- specific problems in the workplace
- de-motivation

Always strive to remain open minded about an employee's absences rather than jumping to the conclusion that the employee is taking time off work without good reason! It may be that the cause of the employee's absences is something outside his or her control. Understanding the root cause of the absenteeism will be important.

REMEMBER - until the cause is properly identified, it won't be possible for you to find the best course of action to remedy it!

Barney has worked in LUU's Finance department for 3 years. Over the last 18 months, Barney's sickness record has taken a turn for the worse and he has had numerous spells of sickness with various minor ailments, colds, flus, stomach bugs. Barney also usually takes time off during the end of the month, which is the department's busiest time with the month end accounts. Barney works in a small team of 4 so there are a few others that can cover Barney's role who can cover for Barney in his absence. It also appears that Fred (Barney's manager) is doing nothing to tackle Barney's absence!

Note 4 possible negative consequences of Barney's frequent short term absence on the finance department:

Stress at work

Stress is one of the most common causes of absenteeism in the UK workplace today. Whilst the cause of the stress may be outside of your control, specific cause of work-related stress can be within your remit.

As a manager, you should be constantly alert to signals that one of your team may be suffering from stress to an extent that they are not coping with their job. Medical certificates that state 'stress', 'depression' or 'anxiety' should alert you that there may be a workplace problem that needs to be addressed urgently.

List 5 possible workplace factors linked to high rates of absence and causes of stress

If you believe that an employee who has had a high rate of short-term absences is suffering from problems in the workplace that is contributing to their absence levels, you should arrange to have a conversation with them immediately.

Your enquiry should be made sympathetically, reassuring the employee of your genuine wish to provide support with a view to resolving the issue if the employee is experiencing problems at work.

When faced with dealing with an employee who you believe may be suffering from stress, **prepare by asking yourself 5 key questions:**

1. Will the member of staff who is suffering from stress always be open?
2. How can you get to the root of their problem?
3. Should other departments in LUU be involved at this stage?
4. What facts do you need to have prepared before the discussion?
5. What can we do to offer support?

If a workplace problem is identified, you should take steps to remove or reduce the factor that is causing the problem, if at all possible. Once the

cause of the employee's frequent absence has been removed (or at least reduced), the employee's attendance may well improve.

Try to remember that levels of stress and the ability to cope with a perceived 'stressful situation' is a very personal and subjective matter. What one individual finds stressful, the next may find a walk in the park and vice versa! As the manager you should be prepared to listen and be empathetic, but sometimes the problem may be outside of your comfort zone or experience and would be better referred to the experts.

It's also worth bearing in mind that failure to take reasonable steps to support an employee who is known to be experiencing health problems as a result of factors in the workplace may have serious consequences. LUU could be held liable in law if the employee subsequently has a mental breakdown as a

LUU has access to a number of support functions that may assist the employee who is suffering from stress related symptoms. Find out at least 3 of these services:

result.

Monitoring short-term absences

There is a great deal that you can do to manage short-term absenteeism effectively to reduce the frequency.

At LUU we take positive steps to monitor and control employees' periods of absence from work.

There are two stages to this, the first being the action to take each time an employee has a spell of absence. The second stage kicks in if and when the employee's absences exceed a threshold in terms of their number and duration within a given period of time.

REMEMBER -Your effective management of short-term sickness absence starts when your member of staff phones in to say that they are unable to attend work!

