



# It's time for kick-off!

The FIFA World Cup 2010 starts on Friday 11 June and employers are making contingency plans for staff who want to watch their favourite team play. The key consideration for employers is how to be fair when managing requests for time off but also having a strategy for minimising and dealing with 'unexplained' absenteeism.

## Teamwork

If you haven't already, now is a good time to decide what approach you will adopt during the World Cup. You might decide to screen key matches in the workplace or allow employees to follow the results on the radio. At the same time, you will want to remind employees what is expected from them during the World Cup. A number of your employment policies will be relevant, including your sickness absence policy and, where a sickness is not genuine or there is a pattern of absence, your disciplinary policy. You may also have an alcohol policy in place. It is important that supervisors and other line managers are clear about your rules and what to do if they suspect employees' drinking is affecting their work. They also need to be aware of the implications of not tackling possible alcohol misuse, especially where safety is an issue.

You may also want to remind employees of your IT policy and you may expect an increase in web use during the World Cup with employees trying to catch up on the latest scores.

Most matches will start at 12.30pm, 3pm and 7.30pm (UK time) and employers should plan now how they will respond to employees who want to support their team. England's dream of ending the 44-year wait starts on the evening of Saturday 12 June, with further matches scheduled for the evening of Friday 18 June and the afternoon of Wednesday 23 June. You are also likely to have employees who support other teams. And don't forget the need to consider staff who are not interested in the World Cup and the impact on them of increased or unexpected colleague absence.

## The genuine request for leave

Depending on the make-up of your workforce, you may receive an increased number of requests for time off or flexible working during matches (or the mornings following a match). Employers can of course take into account the needs of the business when approving such requests. You may want to remind your employees that they need to request holiday with advance notice and that although all requests will be considered, there is no guarantee that each request will be approved. Employers will need to treat each request fairly and consistently. If you do approve a greater number of requests for time off or flexible working, you may want to remind employees that you are doing so on a one-off basis.

## The 'sickie'

Employers may also be concerned that some employees may call in sick to watch a match or as a result of post-match celebrating (or commiserating). The CBI/Pfizer absence and workplace health survey revealed this week that employees took 180m sick days last year, averaging 6.4 days each. It estimated that around 15 per cent of these weren't genuine. The figure is higher in the public sector, where employees took more sick days, with an average of 8.3 days per year, whereas the average for the private sector is 5.8 days.

Employers often find an increased rate of absence during special events, such as the World Cup, so you might want to put in place a requirement that employees who are sick on key match dates (or the following day) provide

medical evidence (eg proof that they visited a GP) or inform employees that sickness absence will be closely monitored during this period.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has published 'World Cup – advice and guidance' ([www.acas.org.uk/worldcup](http://www.acas.org.uk/worldcup)), which offers guidance and some commonly asked questions about World Cup issues.

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