

Managing employees during the World Cup 2014

The World Cup 2014 is firmly upon us and, with over 3 weeks to go until the Final on 13 July 2014, there are some employment issues that organisations of all sizes should be aware of:

- Holiday requests
- Fitness to work
- Sickness absence
- Internet usage
- Discrimination and harassment

Holiday requests

Employers may want to consider operating a more flexible ad-hoc leave policy during the tournament to accommodate their employees' requests for time off. Any requests for time off should be dealt with consistently, whether the employee is requesting time off for footballing reasons or otherwise. As the teams are progressing to the knockout stages of the tournament, employers should be prepared for last minute requests for time off and the appropriate way in which to deal with them, particularly as several employees may wish to take the same time off at once.

Fitness to work

As Brazil is four hours behind the UK, the matches mostly kick off at 5:00 p.m., 8:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Therefore, for many employers operating a standard 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. working day, the matches take place (just) after work hours. Whilst this will undoubtedly cause issues for those employers who operate during the evening (such as restaurants), it may affect employers operating the standard working day in different ways. For example, employees may stay out late to watch matches or socialise afterwards. They may also be drinking alcohol late into the night.

Therefore, employers should be wary of employees attending work in an unfit state (e.g. tired or suffering from a hangover). Employers may be well advised to remind employees of their obligations to present themselves to work in a fit state. Employers should also review any policy they have on alcohol at work.

If an employee is deemed to be in an unacceptable state to work, depending on the circumstances, an employer considering taking disciplinary action should refer to its disciplinary procedure for guidance.

Sickness absence

Employers should review their sickness absence policies and make clear to their employees exactly what is expected of them and what will not be tolerated. For example, it should be made clear that absent employees should follow the reporting procedures if they are sick and the potential consequences for anyone found to be abusing the policy and to be malingering.

Internet usage

Employers should make sure that they have a clear policy in place about internet/IT use. There may be an increase in employees watching live matches streamed through the internet at their desks and an increase of the use of social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter. Employers should make it clear what is considered acceptable use in this regard. Again, employees found to be making excessive use of the internet to watch matches or to use social media could find themselves subject to disciplinary action. However, due to the temporary nature of the potential disruption to work, employers may consider being flexible with employees, which may in turn also boost morale in the workplace.

Discrimination and harassment

As the name "World Cup" suggests, the football teams competing come from all over the world. In turn, organisations (particularly large multinationals) may have employees of many different nationalities supporting many different teams (i.e. not just England). Therefore, there is the potential for employees to engage in banter with one another about their team's performance and prospects. Employers should be mindful of this and ensure that such banter does not go too far. Employers should have in place equal opportunities policies to which employees should adhere.

Employers must be careful to apply all of the policies referred to above in a consistent and clear manner to all employees, regardless of which team they support or they themselves could face a discrimination claim. For example, non-English employees may justifiably complain if greater flexibility is given for England matches and not their national teams.

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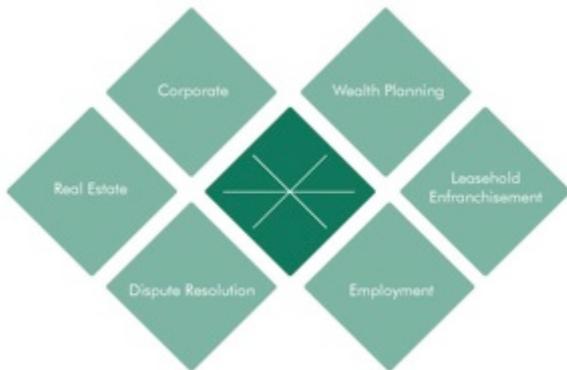
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