

Is your HR fit for the Olympics?

It may feel like the whole country is geared up in anticipation of the Olympic games, but what are the HR consequences? Councils across the country - not just in London - should put their plans in place now, says **Gemma Brown**.

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With more than 3.5 million tickets sold to date excitement is rising in anticipation of the London 2012 Games. But with up to 70,000 volunteers at over 600 competitions taking place at 37 venues across the UK it's certainly not just London employers that will feel the heat.

The Olympic Torch Relay will be passing through every nation and region of the UK and there is a wide range of Games-related activity set to take place across the UK throughout the year.

Now is the time to put in place an action plan to reduce the impact on staffing levels and instead achieve the positive atmosphere the Games inspire.

Human resources managers across the UK should consider the following in preparation for the Games:

- Key events nationally and locally
- Staffing requirements
- Holiday requests
- Travel disruption for staff travelling to and from work
- Flexible working arrangements
- Sickness absence

Any policies adopted should be fair, non-discriminatory and compliant with any existing obligations contained in contracts of employment, staff handbooks and collective agreements including the [National Joint Council agreement](#).

It may be useful to seek feedback from staff in relation to their plans during the Games, key events that employees would wish to see and inviting comments from staff in relation to any proposed arrangements for the Games.

Relevant policies should be communicated to staff, for instance by memo or email, in good time to enable employees to consider their options and managers to deal with requests accordingly.

Requests for Time Off

Employers may receive requests for time off from employees who have tickets to events, those who have successfully applied to volunteer as Game Makers or from employees who may wish to watch the events from home.

Game Makers are required to commit to a minimum of ten days volunteering in addition to having to attend at least three training sessions prior to the events.

It will be necessary to consider staffing requirements during the Games to establish how many requests can be accommodated and then adopt a fair process in dealing with such requests.

A fair process might be to adopt a 'first come, first served' basis or alternatively by carrying out an anonymous draw. Preference may also be given to those with tickets to events or volunteers.

Where employees have insufficient leave to cover their request for time off employers should consider whether it is possible to allow unpaid leave or whether the request can be accommodated in any other way, for instance by agreeing flexible working hours.

Travel Disruption

Whilst it is an employee's responsibility to ensure they arrive at work on time it would be prudent to make preparations to help staff with their travel arrangements to avoid being understaffed where employees are delayed owing to additional pressure on transport services.

Alternative arrangements during the Games should be considered such as allowing staff to work from home or altering working hours.

Employers should check dates of events that are likely to cause disruption and encourage staff to think in advance about their travel arrangements to and from work.

Car sharing might be an option, particularly where parking is likely to be a problem. This might be the case in locations such as Weymouth where spectators without tickets may watch the sailing events from several vantage points or Newcastle where park-and-ride services will be in place for ticket holders.

It is important to consider what action, if any, will be taken in the event that employees are consistently late during the Games and that any disciplinary action is consistent and reasonable taking all relevant circumstances into account.

Preventative Measures

A number of measures may be taken to reduce absence during the Games. This might include televising key events such as the Olympic and Paralympic opening ceremonies taking place on 27 July and 29 August 2012 respectively or providing radio coverage throughout the Games.

This might not be possible and where it is appropriate employers will have to consider how to manage this, for instance will staff be allowed to watch events only during existing breaks or will a rota need to be agreed.

Employers might also consider varying working hours during key events where this can be accommodated. This would be subject to the terms of employees' contracts of employment or agreement with employees concerned.

In implementing such measures employers should ensure that they do not discriminate against employees, for instance by favouring a particular country when broadcasting events.

Finally despite planning ahead it may be that employers will experience an increase in sickness absence during the Games where requests for time off work have been refused.

To seek to avoid this, employers may inform employees that any sickness absence during the Games will be followed up with a return to work meeting.

This might reduce the level of sickness absence that is not entirely genuine. Where employers have substantial evidence suggesting that employees were not sick during such periods of absence it may be appropriate to take disciplinary action.

This should only be considered following a reasonable investigation and pursuant to relevant policies and procedures.

Wherever you may be based in the UK timely preparation, a comprehensive plan and effective communication with staff will keep disruption to a minimum and avoid any false starts.

- Olympic Torch Relay arrives 18 May 2012, Lands End
- Olympics Games 27 July – 12 August 2012
- Paralympic Games 29 August – 9 September 2012

Non-London Venues:

- Weymouth and Portland
- Hampden Park, near Glasgow
- St James Park, Newcastle
- Millenium Stadium, Cardiff
- Lee Valley White Water Centre, Hertfordshire
- Old Trafford, Manchester
- Eton Dorney, near Windsor Castle
- Brands Hatch, Kent
- Hadleigh Farm, Essex
- City of Coventry Stadium, Coventry

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