

Are You Ready for the Olympics?

By Grania Sweeting
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As we approach the start of the 2012 Olympic Games in July, it is worth considering what impact this event may have on businesses and how it may affect staff working in London next summer.

Planning

Possible disruptions such as security breaches, I.T. network failures and breakdowns in the transport system could occur during the Olympics, so it would be wise to have a Business Continuity Plan in place, so that your company experiences the minimum amount of disturbance.

A review of policies and employment contracts is also a good idea, particularly in relation to working hours and place of work; these should be sufficiently flexible so that any temporary changes imposed will not require having to obtain consent from employees.

Annual Leave

It is likely that demand for annual leave will be high during the Games, so having a plan that outlines minimum staffing requirements during this time – and communicating this plan to staff well in advance – will help to avoid potential staff shortages. A review of annual leave policy is also a good idea so staff will be clear how your business would deal with scenarios where more leave is requested than can be granted.

Staff should be told as early as possible as to how their applications will be dealt with, so that last minute disappointment can be avoided. If key Olympic events are to be shown live in the office, disgruntled staff may be placated, so this may be worth some consideration.

Flexible Working

During the Games, organisations may have consider flexible working patterns to ensure that business is not adversely affected so that staff are permitted to alter their working patterns (e.g. starting early or working late in order to watch or attend key events). An alternative is to allow remote working (e.g. employees working from home) so that travel delays can be avoided. Obviously increased absenteeism during the Games is a possibility, so politely reminding employees of the disciplinary procedures perhaps a few weeks before would be advisable.

You may decide to relax your IT policy and allow staff to watch key live events on the internet – and even lay on some refreshments! This will encourage a social atmosphere amongst staff who may be working long hours.

IT

There could be surges in internet and telephone networks during the Games, so make sure your business has a contingency plan in place in case systems crash.

Finally, a word of caution: being too partisan (e.g. supporting team GB) could lead to friction among staff, particularly with multinational events, so beware of discrimination or harassment claims that may arise.

Acas has issued guidelines on this matter and their advice is to start talking to your staff early in order to manage expectations and minimise the impact on productivity. Acas encourages employers to:

- Be flexible – allow longer lunch breaks so that staff can watch key events during the day – and if necessary alter start and finish times.
- Be clear about what is expected from staff in relation to attendance
- Communicate – start talking to staff sooner rather than later on managing leave and working hours
- Be honest about how you will manage changes to working practices and where such changes can't be accommodated, explain the reasons
- Be fair and consistent about the way you respond to requests for time off

Summary

Check policies and procedures – and communicate these in advance

Consistent approach in relaxing rules and regulations

Plan early – and avoid problems later on

About the Author

Grania Sweeting is a CIPD qualified Human Resources specialist, providing HR expertise to help senior teams manage their people more effectively. She provides outsourced HR support to organisations on a retained, ad hoc or consultancy basis. Her company – Grapevine HR Ltd - was established in 2005 and her clients include SMEs to PLCs. Her commercial experience and friendly yet discreet approach has led Grania to work across a variety of industry sectors.