



Press Release

Title: Employers – on your marks, get set for the Olympics

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by Gill Brown, director specialising in employment law

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‘With only a few months to go until the start of the 2012 Olympic Games employers are probably aware that a set of guidelines has been issued by ACAS to help employers prepare for this major sporting event,’ says Gill Brown, head of the employment law team at Phillips. ‘The guidance is designed to try and minimise absenteeism and at the same time use this marvellous opportunity to boost employee and customer relationships.

This may all sound like common sense but to avoid problems over time off and productivity it is better to plan ahead and to have clear policies and procedures in place, so that everyone’s expectations are considered and balanced, especially those who have managed to get tickets for the Games or who are involved in the earlier torch bearing events. In addition to planning events for staff and/or customers, our recommendations include the following:

Communication – if not already done, start talking to employees about managing leave and working hours. Some employees may be lucky enough to have tickets, some may have volunteered to help, others may hope to see some TV coverage, some may be involved or want to view the local section of the torch relay and others may have no interest whatsoever.

Fairness – respond fairly to requests for time off. Those who know they have tickets or are volunteers or torch bearers should be encouraged to book their holiday as soon as they know dates to ensure their holiday requests can be accommodated. Remember that some members of staff may get fed up with the fuss and won’t want to see any favouritism shown to those with sporting interests.

Flexibility - consider whether there is a possibility to alter starting and finishing times, allow lunch breaks to be taken at different times or increase breaks so that staff can take time to watch key events



during the working day. If there is a television on the premises it may be that agreed events can be viewed and then the time is made up but this must be balanced with the company's business needs.

Clarity – ensure your expectations are crystal clear. Spell out what you expect in relation to employees' attendance, performance and flexibility and give transparent and honest reasons about the cover and any temporary changes in working practices that you require. Remember that volunteers will have rights too.

It's well known that all major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup can cause problems of absenteeism and performance for employers,' concludes Gill, ' this is not only caused by attendance and viewing but can also be due to the after effects of the follow up celebrations. Our hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games is a fantastic opportunity for the UK but employers need to be aware of the significant impact that 17 sporting days could have on their business productivity. For this reason I am passing on the suggestion, made by ACAS, that all employers should get properly prepared for one of the greatest sporting events the UK has ever hosted, with a view to maximising enjoyment and minimising problems.' Call Gill on 01256 854605 for more advice on all employment issues, including those surrounding the Olympic Games.

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