

## 2010 FIFA World Cup and employee absences

The 2010 FIFA World Cup begins in South Africa on 11 June 2010. Whilst this is great news for football fans it may strike fear in the minds of employers given their experiences during previous football tournaments. Many employers will already have received requests for time off from their employees whilst others may not find out about their employees taking time off until the employee phones in sick, or does not turn up for work at all.

Whilst employers have no obligation to cater for their employee's interest in the tournament, evidence suggests that where employers demonstrate they care about their staff, employees are more likely to go the extra mile for the organisation. Also, if time off is flatly refused the employee may take the time off anyway by phoning in sick or not turning up at all.

### Suggestions

Employers may wish to implement one or more of the following measures:

1. Agreeing with employees that they can take days or half-days off as part of their annual leave entitlement.
2. Granting employees special unpaid leave.
3. Shift swaps - allowing staff to rearrange their shifts around different games, providing they can find the appropriate level of cover.
4. Operating a flexi-time system on match days so that employees can watch the matches by taking a longer break or coming in later or leaving earlier and making the time up.
5. Allowing staff to listen to the radio or watch the television whilst at work. This will depend upon the nature of the work and/or the facilities you have available. You may wish to allow short breaks to enable employees to watch or listen to matches or have the matches on the background. Either way, you should make it clear that it is discretionary and any abuse will mean that the privilege will be withdrawn. You also need to remain considerate to employees who have no interest in football.
6. Employers should remind employees of their internet usage and monitoring policies. It is up to individual employers to decide whether they are happy for employees to keep track of games or take a zero-tolerance approach. The

important thing is to communicate the policy to the staff and remain consistent.

If you choose to implement any of the measures set out above you will need to consider making similar concessions when other major sporting events take place. Also, remember that not everyone supports England and not every who is a football fan is male!

### Abuse of the system

Irrespective of what measure(s) you put into place, there will always be employees who will abuse the system. Where an employee simply does not turn up for work it constitutes an unauthorised absence.

It would be useful to issue all staff with a memorandum, making your policy clear, well in advance of **11 June 2010**. You should inform them of any measures that you have put into place to assist them in watching the matches whilst complying with their contracts of employment. Be as positive as you can about working with your employees to keep them happy. However, make it clear to them that if any employee turns up late for work or fails to turn up on match days or post-match days without the time off being authorised, then disciplinary action will be taken against them. You should also remind employees of the organisation's policy on misuse of alcohol.

You may also wish to consider whether to require any employees who phone in sick on key match days (or post-match days) to provide medical evidence of their sickness absence, for example, some proof that they visited their GP or a doctor's certificate. If you do this you must be consistent by requesting this even if you do not suspect that the employee has phoned for a reason related to the football. You will also have to bear the cost of any doctor's certificate provided where the employee's absence is less than seven calendar days.

### Match dates

The matches which England will or may be involved in are as follows:

<b>Saturday, 12 June 2010</b>	<b>19:30</b>	<b>USA</b>
<b>Friday, 18 June 2010</b>	<b>19:30</b>	<b>Algeria</b>
<b>Wednesday, 23 June 2010</b>	<b>15:00</b>	<b>Slovenia</b>

If England finishes either first or second in their group, they will play again on either Saturday, 26 June 2010 at 19:30 or Sunday, 27 June 2010 at 15:00 respectively.

If they reach the quarter finals, they will play on either Friday, 2 July 2010 at 19:30 or Saturday, 3 July 2010 at 15:00.

If they reach the semi-finals, they will play on either Tuesday, 6 July 2010 at 19:30 or Wednesday, 7 July 2010 at 19:30

The final takes place on Sunday, 11 July 2010 at 19:30.

At the time the matches are played, South Africa will be one hour ahead of the UK. The above times are the times that the matches will be shown in England.

You may have employees supporting other teams who want to watch other matches.  
Details of all fixtures can be found at the following link  
<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/matches/index.html>.