


World Cup 2022 – how employers can avoid scoring an own goal!

The World Cup kicks off in Qatar on Sunday 20 November 2022, with the final taking place on Sunday 18 December 2022. Undoubtedly, this is a huge sporting event, and many employees will be keen to show their support for their favourite teams. However, due to the time difference, start times for the matches are between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. UK time, which could have an impact on employers if employees who wish to watch the matches are scheduled to work.

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This could result in a higher demand for employees wishing to take annual leave or an increase in lateness and/or sickness absence. There may also be an increase in employees wishing to work from home on match days or being inclined to watch matches remotely in the workplace on their mobiles, which could cause operational difficulties for employers.

We have set out below some top tips for employers on how to strike a balance between managing the operational needs of the organisation whilst still maintaining good employee relations.

Our four top tips:

Be clear on expectations and communicate clearly in advance.

The key for employers is to determine their approach to the tournament in advance and communicate it clearly to employees. For example, employers may be able to relax their usual rules on how many employees can take annual leave at the same time if the period of leave is only for half a day or a day.

However, all requests for leave should be considered fairly and a consistent approach adopted (including for other major sporting events). Alternatively, employers may be able to agree a more flexible working day with later or earlier start times or extended breaks. However, any agreements should again be applied consistently and be made in advance so that employees are clear on expectations.

Employers should also bear in mind that non-football fans may also wish to take leave or require flexibility during this period and again should be treated fairly and consistently. It may also be possible to allow employees to listen to the radio or watch the match in the workplace if this is feasible having regard to their role or have a rota so employees can take it in turns in being able to watch or listen to part of the match. Equally, if employees are permitted to work from home, employees should be reminded that they are still working and must be contactable. Again, clear communication about what is permitted is the key.

The rules on sickness absence, lateness and conduct continue to apply.

Employers should make it clear to employees that the usual policies on sickness absence, lateness and conduct continue to apply during the tournament. Therefore, notwithstanding any flexibility that has been agreed, any unauthorised absences, patterns of absence,

lateness or suspected dishonestly (for example calling in sick to watch a match) will be investigated and could lead to potential disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Websites, mobile phones and social media usage

Matches will be available to view online and therefore employees who are working may be tempted to view them on their mobile phones or laptops which again could cause operational difficulties for employers. Alternatively, employees will be able to stay updated on news feeds and social media channels. Again, it would be prudent for employers to remind employees of any policies on acceptable use during working hours and the consequences of any breaches.

Banter and dignity at work

Football tournaments can pave the way for “banter” between different supporters and if this is based on nationality or sex this could give rise to discrimination claims. Whilst humour in the workplace is important, it also has the potential to cause upset and conflict as fans can be passionate about their team so emotions can run high. Therefore, it is worth reminding employees that the usual standards of behaviour and respect continue to apply during the tournament and any bullying or discrimination will not be tolerated.

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