



Port of London Authority

The PLA employs 365 staff to provide safe navigation on the tidal Thames. By implementing an effective sickness absence management policy, the PLA ensures that staff are supported during ill health absence. As a result of reduced absences, the business benefit is more staff contributing to services.

No. of employees: 365

Business sector: Public sector

Business activities: Facilitating safe navigation of the tidal Thames

Stakeholders: Employees & the PLA

Location: London & Gravesend

Managing Absence and Ill Health

When a new Head of Personnel & Development was appointed at the PLA he conducted an analysis of staff absence through ill health. This found that absence levels were a considerable drain on the organisation.

With a view to helping the PLA provide the best service it could for its clients, and to support staff during absences, the PLA decided that a more effective sickness absence management system should be introduced.

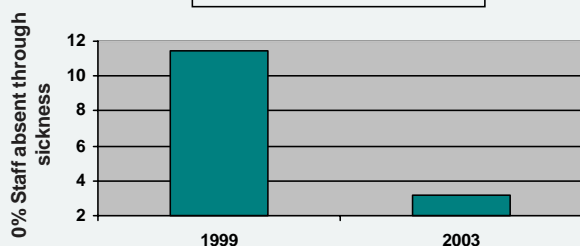
“The overall benefit in managing absence has resulted in a much more focused approach to absence monitoring and ill health issues in the organisation”

Glenn Witham, Head of Personnel & Development



BUSINESS BENEFITS

- 70% drop in overall absence rates from 11-12% in 1999 to 3-3.4% in 2003
- Numbers of staff on long-term absence have dropped from about 15-16 employees to about 2-3 employees at any one time
- A system for providing line managers with timely data on absence levels which assists in their management duties

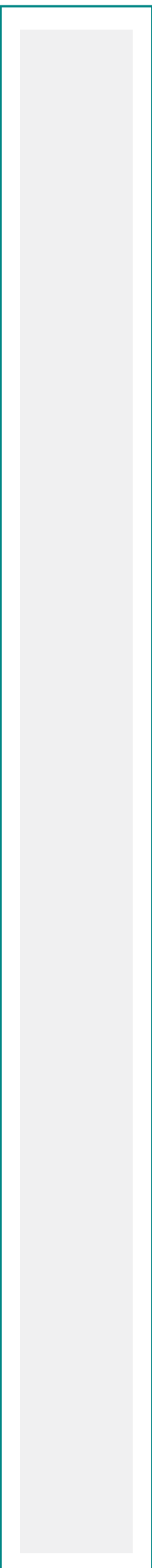


HEALTH & SAFETY BENEFITS

- Fewer staff days absent due to ill health
- Fewer staff suffering from long-term absences
- Increased awareness by line managers of existing and potential health and safety issues

“All staff are aware that absence is effectively managed. This has had a positive effect on morale to those staff who have to cover during periods of sickness absence”

Glenn Witham, Head of Personnel and Development



THE COST-BENEFITS

The expanded use of the PLA's occupational health service has cost an estimated £16,000 / year. Manager's time spent managing absence is the same, but the focus is different. More effort is placed on causes of absence and assisting staff return to work, rather than coping with the effects of absence in the workplace.

70% reduction in staff absence

Exact savings from the reduced levels of absence haven't been calculated (due to the wide salary span within the PLA). However, the 70% reduction in staff absence is equivalent to around 30 staff at work. This greatly outweighs the additional cost of their occupational health service.



Minimal costs

As all PLA's operations are financed from revenue with no outside support, the increase in staff in work has been very welcome.

A DIRECTOR'S VIEW

The Head of Personnel & Development is a member of the Executive Committee (PLA's equivalent to a Board of Directors) and secured the Committee's full support for the initiative.

WORKER INVOLVEMENT

All managers and employees have received training and briefings in the new systems and procedures. Representatives from T&GWU, National Union of Maritime, Air and Sea Transport (NUMAST), Unison and the London Pilots Committee were kept informed of the initiative.

What did the company do? The PLA introduced an effective sickness absence management programme which includes:

- Referral to the PLA's occupational health doctor for any absence that is potentially long-term
- Managers being more involved in their employees' absences, and being held more accountable for that management

- Using the occupational health doctor's advice to provide opportunities for safe earlier return to work where staff aren't able to carry out their normal duties
- Return to work interviews
- Training for managers & staff in the procedures and support available