

# Time off to watch the World Cup?



As World Cup Fever heats up, employers may be getting hot under the collar. There's no doubt that employees will want to take time off to watch games, most of which will fall within working hours. Higher levels of absence are also expected, after boozy nights out celebrating, or commiserating.

The HR Dept says that *"employers are not required to grant time off for employees wanting to watch the World Cup. If an employee requires time off to watch games this can be processed as a normal holiday request and may be rejected if there is a business reason. However, if possible, a flexible approach can be beneficial to all. By providing flexible working solutions, employers are able to provide a healthy work life balance which makes for happy, productive employees"*.

Asda certainly seem to be thinking along these lines. The supermarket chain plan to reduce 'sickies' by introducing a shift-swap scheme allowing employees to rearrange their shifts around different games, providing they can arrange the appropriate cover.

The HR Dept advises that *"a clear policy and some planning are essential. The key for any employer is to establish a consistent approach which is fair to all their staff including those who have no interest at all. A policy should be consistent whether an employee loves football or not and whether they support England or any other team. Allowing employees to watch specific games but not others, for instance England matches, may mean that an employer discriminates against an employee who supports another team"*.

But where do you draw the line? What about other sporting events; should a policy stretch to include other national sports such as cricket or rugby? What about Wimbledon, the Commonwealth Games or less popular sporting events such as Cheese Rolling.

The HR Dept suggest that *"it's unrealistic to cover every sporting event; the key is to be reasonable. Some events are more widely publicised than others, like the World Cup, but there may well be other events that employees support and it's important to be consistent in your approach to everyone."*

The HR Dept specialises in advising small and medium sized businesses on all employment issues.

**[www.hrdept.co.uk](http://www.hrdept.co.uk)**