



CASE STUDY

Managing absence, improving business performance

Post Office has come a long way since it all started nearly 400 years ago – building a network of 11,500 branches across the country to become the largest retail network in the UK. And that means a lot of people – enthusiastic, ambitious and customer-focused people.



Employing almost 5,000 people and operating in a heavily regulated environment brings challenges, and this requires significant investment in people – personal development, e-learning and continually measuring engagement and wellbeing. Because if employees are not happy, or they're unwell and that absence isn't managed properly, it can have a massive impact on the business – culturally and financially.

That's why Post Office takes employee relations and engagement incredibly seriously, investing in diversity and inclusion (for example, they're a Disability Confident Leader), wellbeing at work, talent development and rewards, not to mention innovation and finding the right partners to support them along the way.

We've worked with AdviserPlus for eight years now, through MyHR Help, which has been a great success. But we got to a point where we needed more help – not all managers were raising cases and that was affecting our ability to resolve issues and get people back in work. Naturally, we turned to AdviserPlus for help

Employee Relations & Policy Director, Post Office

HR transformation and absence management

The Post Office MyHR Help service (an outsourced employee relations advice line delivered by AdviserPlus), identified that, in the four years from 2013/14, sickness absence durations had increased from eight to fourteen days.

This included a rise in mental health-related absence, which was costing Post Office approximately £1.5m per year. In fact, 25% of all days lost were attributable to mental health conditions – over twice the national average – even though the number of cases being opened by MyHR Help was very low.

That meant cases were not being managed and employees not supported enough – either before, duration or after absence. In addition, and on the back of staff surveys, Post Office discovered that they needed to do more to address mental health and wellbeing. All of which was reinforced by the data.

We needed some help – we knew absence was on the increase, with a worrying rise in mental health related absence, but cases weren't being raised – so we asked AdviserPlus how additional intervention from our MyHR Help service could support us

Martin Kirke, Group HR Director, Post Office




We want our people to be well, and putting the right tools and processes in place to support this is critical. Since working with AdviserPlus on our mental wellbeing programme, we've heard line managers say how proud they are to work for Post Office and how it has opened their eyes to all the things they can be doing to proactively support their people at work. Spotting the early signs is crucial and we've helped our managers to do that very well.



Amber Kelly, Engagement, Talent and Learning Director, Post Office

Intervening early

AdviserPlus worked with Post Office to deliver four new services, all of which were specifically designed to address absence and mental health, and help managers intervene early.


<p>LINE MANAGER TRAINING – </p> <p>65 workshops, 6 months, 700+ line managers. Refreshing knowledge on mental health related ER processes, how to spot the early signs of distress, and building confidence in handling difficult and sensitive conversations.</p>	<p>PRO-ACTIVE ADVICE LINE SERVICE – </p> <p>access to a group of dedicated HR advisers, who actively call managers when an absence or mental health trigger occurs, coaching them through the process to a successful resolution.</p>	<p>MI AND VISUAL ANALYTICS – </p> <p>providing management with the means to measure the impact of the new service and identify key learnings that can be embedded into future business practices.</p>	<p>HR KNOWLEDGE PORTAL – </p> <p>holding more than 500 templates, HR documents and guides, all tailored around Post Office policies and procedures. Nearly 5,000 employees and 800 managers can access these resources if they need them.</p>
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SAVINGS OF OVER £500,000

Capable and confident managers

Since Post Office adopted this new approach:

- **Ten times as many sickness absence cases have been opened** per year (550 vs approx. 50)
- **More mental health issues have been identified** – rising from an average of 28.8 per month in 2017 to **39.6 per month** in 2018
- The average duration of **mental health absence has fallen by 25%** over the same period – even despite more cases being opened
- **Three times as many occupational health referrals** have been made per year
- Post Office has experienced productivity **savings of over £500,000**

 It's now very clear that when we proactively manage absences, and intervene early, there is a significant reduction in absence rates –and the benefit to our business cannot be understated.

We've seen an increase in employee engagement and satisfaction, absence rates have fallen and we've saved a lot of money!



Employee Relations & Policy Director, Post Office

In addition, managers are much more aware of what mental health is and the signs they need to look for, enabling them to have difficult conversations with confidence.

A senior manager's story



"I had someone in my team who was struggling managing worklife and homelife – was very tearful and couldn't concentrate on anything – therefore not productive. Having attended the course I was able to identify with it as a mental health issue, and was more enthused to help."

The Senior Manager applied her training, listening intently, changing the team member's workloads, instigating cognitive behavioural therapy and briefing colleagues. The impact has been dramatic.

"She is far better now. She is more able to cope with the challenges she faces back home and at work, and she is far better at spotting the things that make her more anxious [...] so she can address them before things escalate. At work she is a different person."

The success of the programme, coupled with the Post Office's validation as a Disability Confident Leader, has helped to demonstrate a further commitment to their core values of Care, Challenge and Commit, and importantly enabled managers to access the support network they need to help their staff.