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**Title**

# "Added value through effective absence management policies and procedures"

**By Mark Clair**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for a BA in Human Resource Management**

**National College of Ireland**
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**July 2005**

DESK
RESERVE 1

**Authorship declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study to the award of BA (Honours) in Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed.....

Date 24th July 2005

Student Number 03234754

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# Abstract

Absenteeism represents a significant cost, both directly and indirectly to businesses today. This thesis highlights those costs and introduces recommended absent management strategies aimed at reducing those costs by controlling the levels of absenteeism within organisations. Asking if absence management policies are effective, the thesis places absenteeism within an organisational context where it was perceived to be a problem, and assesses the effectiveness of an absence policy introduced in January 2003 to establish if the policy brought added value. Data was obtained through qualitative and quantitative sources to present pre and post absence policy conditions within the company, which allowed for a longitudinal analysis.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to specifically thank my supervisor Serge Basini for his guidance, and in particular his patience and support throughout the last number of months. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all participants for their time and invaluable contribution particularly those within my own organisation.

# Preface

The motivation behind the thesis was to show that the HR function in a small enterprise can add value, and to demonstrate this an absence management policy introduced by my company was evaluated.

# Introduction

The research objective was to evaluate an absence management policy to demonstrate that added valued can be achieved through effective policies and procedures.

Section 1 will introduce the importance of HR practices and the following sub-sections will discuss the general topic of absenteeism and its implications for businesses, suggest best practice strategies and will conclude by asking if these strategies are an effective tool in dealing with absenteeism.

Section 2 will introduce the research agenda, which was to obtain data for pre and post policy implementation years for a longitudinal analysis. The research will be justified and placed within an organisational context.

Section 3 will describe in detail the methodology used to achieve the research agenda while section 4 will present an analysis of the data, in accordance with the research agenda. The thesis will conclude with findings and conclusion along with other implications and these will be presented in section 5.

# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1 Introduction

What value does the human resources function contribute to the bottom line of the organisation? Traditionally, HR professionals could talk generally and conceptually about employee moral, turnover, and employee commitment being outcomes of HR efforts, but Ulrich (1997) stressed that concepts need to be replaced with evidence, ideas with results, and perceptions with assessments.

Most of the recent research examines the impact of formal HRM practices on organisation-level performance measures (Guest, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Koch and McGrath, 1996). This line of research has led to what has been referred to as the "best practices" theory of HRM, suggesting that universally, certain HRM practices, either separately or in combination are associated with improved organisational performance (MacDuffie, 1995).

The reoccurring theme of HR practices and added value was reported in the Irish Times recently under the headline, "Good human resource practice can add € 50,000 to the bottom – line" , (Dooley C , Irish Times, June 2005). The paper reports that based on a survey of HR practices in 165 of Irelands top employers, there are strong links between progressive HR policies and other areas of company performance.

In essence the literature tells us that HRM through appropriate practices, can create value. Therefore the challenge for HR professionals must begin by not focusing on the work activities or work of HR but by defining the deliverables of that work. Sorensen ( 1995) stated that the best way for HR to gain credibility so that it can make meaningful changes is for practitioners to measure the effectiveness of what they do. The thesis will attempt to demonstrate this by using one specific HR policy, absence management within my own company.

## 1.2 Absenteeism

All employers experience the extremes of employees that are never absent and those that are seldom present. The issue of absence is often, at worst ignored or at best , badly monitored, resulting in many companies including my own, being completely unaware of the cost and impact absence has on the bottom line.

An organisation's behaviour in dealing with this issue is critical as it can greatly influence the behaviour of others within that organisation.

The management of attendance is integral to all aspects of human resource management, (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). There are links with other parts of employee resourcing in terms for example of recruitment, induction and employee development. Questions about sick pay, pension schemes and attendance payments link it with employee reward, and there are a multitude of connections with employee relations. As well as being part of disciplinary procedures, the causes of absence have much to do with moral, commitment and conflict at work,(Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). The same authors have suggested that, if it is ignored, or not dealt with effectively through appropriate policies and procedures, absenteeism will have significant consequences on the business.

An important consideration in measuring absence and taking steps to improve it, is to define what constitutes absenteeism. IBEC (2004) defined it as " an unscheduled disruption of the work process due to days lost as a result of sickness or any non-statutory leave"

### 1.2.1 The Causes of short-term and long-term absence

Although not all absences are avoidable, many are undoubtedly the result of minor ailments, or are for reasons which do not necessitate a day off work, (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). A report issued by ISME in December 2003 seems to add

credence to this, as companies indicated that in their opinion, 75% of time taken off was due to feigned illness or malingering.

So what are the main causes that prevent employees' from attending work?

The main causes of short term absence for both male and female is outlined in table 1 and 2, and have originated from IBEC's 2004 survey. For both sexes minor illness such as colds, flu and stomach upset are the main causes of short term absence. The report stated that because women are mainly responsible for domestic and family issues and therefore have higher demands on their time, 37% of women compared to 19% of men cited home responsibilities as a cause of absence.

**Table 1**

| **Causes of short term absence - Males** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cause of short term absence | 1st Cause | Mentioned as a cause (1st, 2nd or 3rd) |
| | Percentage of companies | |
| Minor Illness | 54 | 81 |
| Other absences not due to genuine ill health | 6 | 24 |
| Alcohol/alcohol related problems | 3 | 12 |
| Personal problems | 1 | 21 |
| Recurring health problems | 1 | 20 |
| Home responsibilities | 1 | 19 |
| Back pain | 1 | 15 |
| Low morale / job commitment | 1 | 13 |
| Accidents outside work | 1 | 10 |
| Work stress (*increase in work demands*) | - | 7 |
| Accidents at work | - | 6 |
| Commuting difficulties | - | 3 |
| mental ill health | - | 2 |
| Management / employee relations | - | 1 |
| Bullying / harassment | - | - |
| Other | - | 3 |

**Table 2**

| **Causes of short term absence - Females** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cause of short term absence | 1st Cause | Mentioned as a cause (1st, 2nd or 3rd) |
| | Percentage of companies | |
| Minor Illness | 51 | 80 |
| Home responsibilities | 5 | 37 |
| Recurring health problems | 3 | 26 |
| Other absence not due to genuine ill health | 2 | 16 |
| Personal problems | 1 | 28 |
| Low morale / job commitment | 1 | 11 |
| Back pain | - | 10 |
| Work stress (*increase in work demands*) | - | 6 |
| Accidents outside work | - | 5 |
| Alcohol/alcohol related problems | 1 | 4 |
| Accidents at work | - | 3 |
| Commuting difficulties | - | 3 |
| Mental ill health | - | 1 |
| Management / employee relations | - | 1 |
| Bullying / harassment | - | - |
| Other | - | 3 |

The two main reasons given for increases in short-term absence levels were: the increase in staff numbers in organisations and the perception that some younger employees did not have the same work ethic as older employees and were not interested in their work.

The predominant cause of long term absence has been cited in IBECs survey as recurring health problems, which covers such ailments as back problems, cancer and heart. Almost a quarter of companies (24%) cited personal problems as a cause of long-term absence for females compared to 15% for males.

To effectively address the issue of absence an organisation must understand the extent of the problem. However, as mentioned in section 1.2, most companies lack the very basic information to assess the impact of absenteeism on the business.

### 1.2.2 Measuring lost time

Collecting data on absence levels, and then disaggregating this, is a crucial first step in trying to establish if there is an attendance problem. There are several measures which can be used to quantify the level of absence on an individual, department and organisational basis, (Torrington and Hall 1995) and are typically gathered from attendance sheets, medical records and other personnel files (Gunnigle et al. 1997).

The literature promotes similar methods in the measurement of absenteeism levels, (Gunnigle et al. 1997; Torrington and Hall,1995; Sargent,1989 )

The CIPD 2004 fact sheet provided two measures that can be used to assess absence.

1. Severity Lost Time Rate

According to Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service, this is the most common measure. It expresses the percentage of total time available which has been lost due to absence:

Total absence (hours or days) in the period x 100

---

Possible total (hours or days) in the period

This method can also be used to calculate the severity lost time rate separately for individuals, departments, or groups of employees to reveal particular absence problems.

2. Frequency Rate

This method shows the average number of absences per employee, expressed as a percentage. It does not give any indication of the length of each absence, nor any indication of employees who take more than one spell of absence.

Number of spells of absence in the period x 100

---

No of employees

By counting the number of employees who take at least one spell of absence in the period, rather than to total the number of spells of absence, this calculation gives an individual frequency rate.

Collecting reliable and relevant data , and using the above mentioned measures, either in isolation or in combination, the organisation can establish the extent of the problem and decide on the appropriate course of action.

## 1.3 The Cost of Absenteeism

Most companies lack the very basic information that is needed to enable them to understand the impact absenteeism may be having on their profitability. To effectively address it, a company must understand the extent of the problem and communicate that cost to employees. It is apparent from IBEC's 2004 survey that few organisations have mechanisms in place to identify absence costs, and fewer still actually examine them systematically. Only a third of companies (34%) calculate the cost of absence, although only 14% of the companies do so in a formal way.

Companies tend mainly to cite the cost of sick pay when calculating the cost of absence, followed by overtime and employee replacement costs. However indirect costs are significant. Costs are increased many times by extensive repercussions on the work of other employees, often involving delays in work process, over- time and lowered morale. Indirect costs of poor levels of attendance are seen in inadequate levels of customer service, unanswered telephone calls, and over worked staff who cover for their absent colleagues, only to run into problems when attempting to complete their own work on time, (Torrington and Hall,1995).

In general companies underestimate the cost of absence because of the calculation difficulties. Indirect costs are much more difficult to calculate. Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989), suggested that companies underestimate the cost of absence by 100% , and once the direct costs have been calculated, the figure should be doubled to get the real cost. Table 3 sourced from IBEC's 2004 report illustrated the lack of consideration by companies of indirect costs.

**Table 3**

**Costs included in the calculation of absence**

| Absence Cost Components | Percentage of Company |
|---|---|
| **Direct Costs:** | |
| Company Sick pay Scheme | 73 |
| Replacement of employee | 49 |
| Overtime | 41 |
| Medical Referrals | 30 |
| **Indirect Costs** | |
| Effect on Productivity | 37 |
| Effect on Quality | 21 |
| Admin/HR time on managing absence | 24 |
| Increased work pressure on colleagues | 31 |
| Other costs | 3 |
| **TOTAL** | **194 (100%)** |

So what is the real cost of absenteeism to businesses and the economy. The recent IBEC survey received a 10% response rate from companies prepared to offer actual costs of absenteeism. Within those 10%, the average cost was estimated at € 882 per employee, per annum, and multiplied by the total number in employment for the same period, found that the total cost of absence in 2002 was € 1.5 billion.

Having regards to the aforementioned figures, there is a clear incentive for businesses to confront the issue. The next section will discuss appropriate strategies for reducing the cost of absenteeism.

## 1.4 Absence Management Strategies

### 1.4.1 Absence policies

Sargent (1989) warned that one of the main difficulties in managing attendance lies in measuring it accurately. In almost every organisation some absence is regarded as acceptable, frequently without any form of medical evidence. The level of acceptability varies, but it needs to be faced that a number of personnel policies effectively encourage people to take time of. Such policies include ;

- Only taking action when a certain trigger point is reached.

- Paying attendance bonuses, which simply become accepted as part of the total remuneration package and do very little more than restrict absenteeism to somewhere around a barely acceptable level.

- Over- participation by personnel specialists in the management process ; the result is that supervisors and managers become inclined to opt out, and are only too happy to leave absence control to somebody else.

If management are putting policies and practice in place, it is important to have some idea of the factors that might be undermining these policies, (IBEC, 2004)

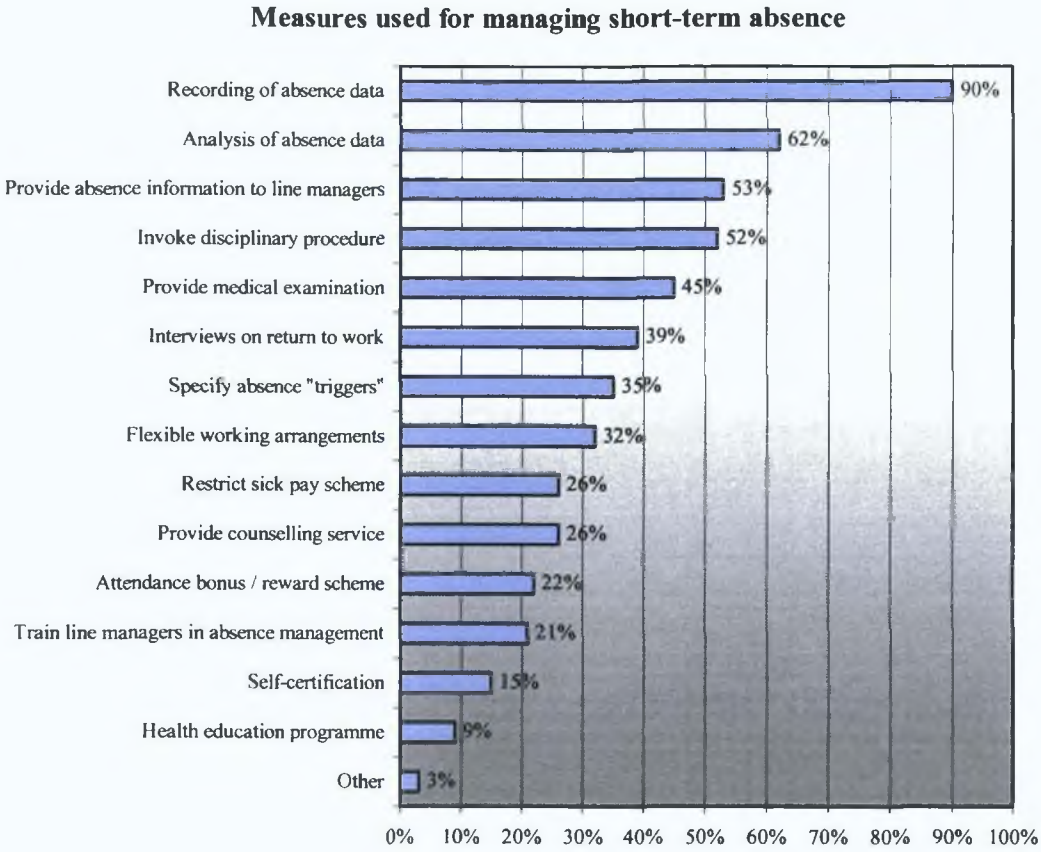
The CIPD 2004 fact sheet on absence management recommended that the first step to managing absence effectively is to ensure that the organisation has a clear policy in place. Effective absence policies must clearly set out employees' rights and obligations when taking time off from work due to sickness and the policies:

- Must provide details of contractual sick pay terms and its relationship with statutory pay ;

- Should outline the process employees must follow if taking time off sick , covering when and whom employees should notify if they are not able to attend work ;
- Should contain when they require a medical certificate from their doctor to certify absence ;
- Should mention that the organisation reserves the right to require employees to attend an examination by a company doctor and to request a report from the employee's doctor ;
- Should include provisions for return to work interviews as these have been identified as the most effective intervention to manage short term absence.

There are numerous measures that can be availed of by organisations to manage short-term absence. The most common measures are outlined in figure 1 below, and have been obtained from IBEC's 2004 survey, a number of which have also been cited by CIPD as effective interventions.

**Figure 1**




However behind these initiatives, the role of the Line Manager is significant, and that is one consistent message that comes from the literature, (CIPD, 2004; IBEC 2004; Sargent 1989; Bolton and Hughes, 2001)

## 1.4.2 Role of Line Manager

Line managers have an important role to play, either directly or indirectly, in the interventions to reduce absence levels. In addition to ensuring that work is appropriately covered during the employee's absence, there are a number of critical actions recommended by IBEC in their 2004 report. Line Managers need to:

- Ensure that staff are fully conversant with the organisation's views and procedures for dealing with absence;
- Be the first point of contact when an employee phones in sick;

- Ensure that staff are fully conversant with the organisation's views and procedures for dealing with absence;
- Be the first point of contact when an employee phones in sick;
- Maintained appropriately detailed, accurate and up-to-date absence records for their staff.

They also have a role in;

- Identifying any patterns or trends of absence;
- Holding of return to work interviews;
- Disciplinary procedures where necessary;
- Offering support and welfare provision to employees and;
- Keeping the HR department up to date.

However, only 40 % of organisations train their line managers in the skills needed to do this effectively (CIPD 2004). Inept Managers, according to Sargent (1989) can create conditions which do nothing for employee motivation except undermine it by applying or implementing the solution offered by HR specialist with cynicism or disbelief or perhaps with half hearted effort and he asserted that this is because they don't own the problem. The evolvement of Personnel Management into Human Resource Management has re-orientated this ownership issue. Storey (1995) maintained that "because HR practice is critical to the core activities of the business, it is too important to be left to personnel specialists alone". So direct policy implementation, not just in relation to absence management, is no longer perceived as a core HR role, but one that is transferred to line managers.

### 1.4.3 Controlling Absence – The early stages of the employment relationship

Bolton and Hughes, (2001) believe that all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that those staff who are employed are likely to be good attendees. There can be few more important decisions made in the life of an organisation, than ensuring the

selection of the right people to join the workforce IRS (1999a). This process of controlling absence begins at the recruitment and selection stage ; is emphasised during induction by providing copies of policies and procedures ; and monitored during the probationary period, before making the appointment permanent (Bolton and Hughes, 2001).

However absence management is an ongoing process and other strategies such as return -to-work interviews, restricting sick pay, attendance bonus and invoking disciplinary procedures are some of the necessary interventions in managing and controlling absence and these will be discussed further.

### 1.4.4 Recording and monitoring absence

In sub-section 1.3.2 the importance of recording data to identify if a problem exists was highlighted. However, recording data is an ongoing activity and is also an important monitoring device which assists in deciding on the most appropriate intervention, as outlined previously in figure 1, and is a key component in managing absence.

One of the main uses of absence information is to highlight those staff on whom the line manager should focus attention. An increasingly common way of doing this is to set triggers for further investigation, using the Bradford scoring method which highlights more frequent absences. Triggers are easy to introduce for organisations which have a computerised personnel information system. Typical triggers are:

- Cumulative days absence in a set period ;
- Number of spells in a set period ;
- Combinations of days and spells ;
- Pattern – related.

However the information is worthless if it is not utilised. As Evans (1991) cautioned, computers only provide information which can then stimulate management action, they do not solve the absence problem if the information is not used effectively.

Absence triggers are generally used in conjunction with disciplinary procedures, having first investigated the circumstances surrounding the absences through return-to-work interviews.

### 1.4.5 Return to work interviews

Training of line managers in dealing with absenteeism needs to include the management of effective and fair return to work interviews (IBEC, 2004). According to the CIPD 2003 study findings, return to work interviews are regarded as the most effective tool for managing short-term absence. Return to work interviews provide a useful opportunity to enquire about the reasons for absence, to follow up any serious problems and suggest further assistance if required. Or to make it clear that attendance is expected unless there are good reasons for being absent. It focuses attention specifically on the absence, helping to generate an attendance culture, one which genuine illness is acknowledged but malingering is dealt with severely (Torrington and Hall, 1995).

### 1.4.6 Restricting sick pay

The existence of a sick pay scheme is sometimes considered to be a contributory factor to short-term absence. This is due to the way some schemes are managed, with employees feeling entitled to take their allocated number of days casual absence per annum. The notion of restricting sick pay is generally part of the control mechanism built into a scheme and can consist of either: restricting the number of days of casual absence in a given period of time, or suspension from benefit where abuse of the scheme has proven or where the absent employee has failed to comply with the rules of the organisation's sick pay scheme.

Over eight out of ten companies in the IBEC study indicated that they had a sick pay scheme. In these companies, the average absence rate was around half a per cent higher than in companies who did not have sick pay schemes.

### 1.4.7 Attendance bonus

Some employers see virtue in offering employees additional payment on top of normal pay, (Bolton and Hughes, 2001). However the IBEC report suggested that attendance bonuses and over time can lose their effectiveness, or alternatively, they are not at high enough level to encourage increased attendance. Others would argue that many staff members are good attendees so you are paying them more for what they are already prepared to do, (Bolton and Hughes, 2001)

### 1.4.8 Disciplinary procedures

In dealing with matters that require such drastic action, it is essential that not only records of attendance and absence are kept but that they are complete, correct and up-to-date. All absence should be promptly investigated and subject to the findings the companie's own agreed disciplinary procedure can be invoked, (IBEC 2004; Bolton and Hughes, 2001)

## 1.5 Conclusion

The total cost of absenteeism represents a significant cost to businesses in Ireland. The first consideration is to evaluate the level of absenteeism within the organisation before considering appropriate interventions, upon which the role of the line manager in implementing such interventions is vital.

Having discussed absenteeism and its impact on individuals and the organisation, are absence management policies , as described in section 4, an effective tool in dealing with the problem ?

This section reviewed the research topic within the dimensions of the literature and introduced a research question worth developing in later sections. The subsequent section will build on this by introducing the research agenda and placing the research question within an organisational context.

# 2. CONTEXT

## 2.1 Introduction.

Absenteeism is one of the biggest expenses faced by businesses today. Workplace absence is a perennial problem for employers and can have a significant impact on a company's profitability. Absenteeism is one of the most persistent obstacles to productivity, profitability and competitiveness. It causes overtime, late deliveries, dissatisfied customer and a decline in employee morale amongst workers who are expected to cover for absent employees.

## 2.2 Research Agenda

Drawing on the introduction presented in section 1.1, the thesis will measure the effectiveness of an absence management policy introduced in January 2003 in a small organisation, to establish if the policy brought added value. To achieve this, data will be obtained by using qualitative and quantitative techniques, on pre and post policy implementation for comparative analysis.

## 2.3 Absenteeism – a pervasive problem

As discussed in section 1.3 absenteeism represents a significant cost, both directly and indirectly to businesses, and introducing appropriate interventions and evaluating them is important in attempting to reduce its cost. The issue of absenteeism knows no boundaries and is a problem that is represented internationally, in both large and small organisations and within every sector.

### 2.3.1 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, 192 million working days were lost in 2000, costing the economy stg £10.7 billion. A CBI survey in 2003 found on average absence rate of 2.9% for the same period covered by the IBEC study issued in 2004. The other major study of absence conducted by CIPD in 2003 found on average absence of 3.9%. Both large and public sector companies tend to have higher than average rates of absence which is representative of the situation in Ireland.

### 2.3.2 Europe

According to a study published in September 2004 by the British Journal Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Irish workers came second only to Greece in the league of employees who take the fewest days off work due to illness. The survey which included a random and representative sample of employees in each country, totalling 21,703, found that, on the whole, southern European workers spend far less time off work due to illness than their northern counterparts.

Greece had the lowest rate, of 6.7% with France (14.3%) and Finland holding the highest rates at 24%.

### 2.3.3 Ireland

In 2000, Irish workers were absent from work for an average of 11 days each, which nationally represented 12 million lost working days compared to just 97,000 lost days due to strike action, (Flood, Sunday Business Post, 2001) . This represented a direct cost of € 634 million.

In 2001 an IBEC survey maintained that the average time lost due to absenteeism was 8.5 days per employee per annum, a decline on the previous year.

In 2002 the average number of days lost through absenteeism per worker per annum was 7.8 days, (VHI, 2004).

In IBEC's most recent report published in 2004, the average number of days lost per employee per annum was 7.8 days or 14 million days for the working population. The average absence rate was 3.4% but almost a third of companies had an absence rate of 4% or more.

## 2.4 The Dynamics of Absenteeism

Absenteeism is a pervasive problem and is a concern for both large and small organisations across all sectors. The next sub-sections will explore this in more detail.

### 2.4.1 Firm size

In IBEC's 2004 report, statistics show that larger companies have a higher incident of absenteeism. The average absence rate of companies with 250 or more employees stood at 4.61 %, compared to 3.7 % for those employing 50 – 249 and 2.4 % for companies with less than 50 staff. This is in spite of the fact that 88% of the companies surveyed employing over 250 employees had formal monitoring policies, as compared with 51 % of companies employing fewer than 50 employees, (Sunday Business Post 2004).

### 2.4.2 Regional and sectoral analysis

In the public sector, workers continue to be absent for more days than those in the private sector. Figures compiled by the Confederation of British Industry show that absenteeism by Irish Civil servants is almost one third higher than the private sector.

At 4.61 %, the electronic industry scored the highest rate of absence in IBEC's 2001 report, with wholesale distribution scoring the lowest at 2.18 %. In the same report the Midlands was top of the regional league with an absence rate of 4.73 %, almost

double the rate in the South East. ISME's report in 2003 revealed that the highest incidence of absenteeism was recorded in Dublin, with an average 7 days per employee, followed by an average 6 days being taken in the rest of Leinster and Munster. The lowest levels were recorded in Ulster, with 5 days and Connaught 4.5 days lost.

More up to date data contained in IBEC's report revealed that absence rates are higher in manufacturing at 4.4% than in the service sector at 2.5%

### 2.4.3 Small to medium enterprises

As organisations become bigger, it becomes more and more difficult for individuals to feel that they matter or to see where they fit into the scheme of things. Small firms tend not to have the same level of absenteeism as larger organisations but whatever other differences there may be between the two, it would seem in small firms everybody relies on each other more and understands where they fit in.

That said small companies are finding absenteeism particularly problematic. A survey published in December 2003 by the Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association ( ISME) into conditions in small to medium – sized enterprises (SMEs) confirmed that absenteeism is on the increase and imposing additional cost on small businesses.

The survey for 40 companies employing 12,000 people highlighted that on average employees are absent for an additional six days annually on top of their holidays and other authorised absences. With over 900,000 individuals employed by SMEs, this equated to 5.4 million working days lost to the small business sector. Companies indicated that 75% of time taken was due to feigned illness.

Taking an average cost of € 100 per employee, ISME estimated that the direct cost of absenteeism was € 540 million. This figure does not absorb the indirect costs of absenteeism through disruption, late deliveries, decline in employee moral, dissatisfied customers and deteriorating productivity, which Huczynski & Fitzpatrick (1989) suggested could be doubled to get the true cost of absenteeism.

## 2.5 ARB Underwriting Ltd.

In a study conducted by Heneman and Berkley (1999) specialists are less likely to be found in the smaller firms within the HRM function. Whilst it is accepted that many small businesses may have too few employees to ever consider the creation of an actual HRM department or even allocate one individual to the role of HRM, effective management of human resources is necessary for any organisation and there is much that small business can learn from HRM policy and practice, normally associated with larger organisations.

### 2.5.1 A brief history

ARB Underwriting Ltd was founded as a limited company in 1991 The Company is wholly owned by the Directors and operates in a non union environment.

From the late 1990's the company has steadily grown, with currently 25 employees.

The company trades in Non-Standard Motor Insurance, Commercial Combined Insurance and Travel Insurance. It was at the time, and remains, the only dedicated General Underwriting Managing Agency in Ireland.

ARB Underwriting Ltd, as regards HRM, is typical of many small firms.
Like many SME's it found it too costly or had no requirement, to hire someone to manage HR and other non core functions themselves, and as a result it was neglected or got managed inefficiently.

### 2.5.2 Absenteeism within the Company

Absenteeism was seen as a problem for the company a number of years ago. The aggregate number of days lost for years 2001 and 2002 was 374 days, with the average number of staff employed for those years at 24.

The company had no defined policy for dealing with the issue and exacerbated the problem by rewarding all staff in the same manner. Consequently good attendees suffered from increased work loads and poor morale, whilst a sub culture of poor absenteeism, which was more prevalent in some departments, was validated.

A staff manual was introduced, with various protocols, one of which was an absence policy and the thesis will attempt to evaluate the impact of that policy by providing a comparative analysis.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Having introduced the research agenda and question followed by a brief description of the methodology, section 2 justified absenteeism as a valid research topic and placed it within an organisational context, where it was regarded as a problem.

The next section will describe in detail, how data was gathered in compliance with the research agenda ensuring that appropriate procedures were justified and followed.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

Section 1 identified a research question worth developing; section 2 introduced the research agenda and mentioned briefly the methodology; this section will build on that brief introduction and provide assurance that appropriate procedures were justified and followed.

The research objective was to measure the effectiveness of an absence management policy introduced in January 2003. To that end data was required to present pre and post absence policy conditions within the company. The methodology used for the purpose of the thesis was a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, sourced through the use of organisational records and semi structured interviews.

## 3.2 Justification for methodology

Researchers in many disciplines in the social sciences, almost exclusively perform secondary analysis of existing data in their research (Cherlin, 1991). Another source of data, and one that is underused, is a strategy of using existing company data bases.

### 3.2.1 Administrative sources

As this was an organisationally based investigation a good source of primary data was available from administrative sources such as personnel records, HR documents and procedures and operational records.

Some of the potential disadvantages of organisational data, which were considered, were the appropriateness of data, completeness of documentation and overall quality of data. However, organisational evidence, although requiring attention to authenticity, credibility and representativeness in the context of this exploratory research had the advantages of allowing for repeated study of the various documents,

provided exact details of names, age profiles, departments and details of particular events or initiatives.

In combination with other sources of data, it was regarded as an effective way to reduce threats to internal validity like experimenter bias. The sources mentioned above provided both quantitative and qualitative data, in particular operational records proved to be a good source of quantitative data on the level of absenteeism within the company allowing for both trend and longitudinal analysis. These sources were deemed to be sufficient and there was no merit in pursing additional data through questionnaires.

### 3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Although quantitative data can identify the extent to which things are, or are not, occurring in organisations, it is less helpful in answering the question *why* things were the way they were , why change was necessary and the effects of such change. Most organisationally focused HR projects therefore include the use of qualitative data, (Anderson, 2004).

While qualitative data can be obtained through a variety of mediums, some of which have been referred to in section 3.2.1, it can also be sourced from diaries, focus groups, interviews and through observation and participation. For the purpose of this thesis, and to allow for further data analysis obtained from administrative sources, semi structured interviews were regarded as the most suitable option.

However, whether structured or semi structured, interviews posses their own challenges. They are a time consuming process and require to be of a certain duration to generate sufficient qualitative data. In an organisational based research, such as this, pressures at work made it difficult for interviewees to be available for more than one hour. Furthermore, the time-intensive nature of the process meant that the number of respondents could have been lower than would be possible with other methods, such as a postal survey, and the lack of formal structure can lead to concerns about generalisability.

Another problem is the issue of recording data in terms of what is said and how it is expressed which can be difficult to record accurately. Tape recording, if acceptable to the interviewee, may inhibit the respondent and taking notes can distract both parties and can pose difficulties as to how accurately the information is recorded. That said semi structured interviews were deemed the most suitable option on two counts. Firstly, interviews are a powerful way of assessing, to some degree of depth, peoples experience and understanding of the work situation they are involved in, and secondly, they allowed for longitudinal analysis.

## 3.3 Survey instruments.

### 3.3.1 Organisational evidence

The first step in the research process was to obtain access to organisational data. The purpose of the process was to obtain: quantitative data to allow trend and longitudinal analysis of the level of absenteeism over a 5 year period; qualitative data to expose previous and current procedures and to establish if there had been changes to procedures since policy implementation.

Sargent, (1989) recommended that everything except authorised leave should be included, and justified this by maintaining that if you don't know the extent of the problem, you can never manage it, so all unauthorised leave was included.
Data in relation to absenteeism figures from years 2001/ 2005 was recorded in excel format and obtained from the Office Accountant, appendix 1 and 2.

However on analysis and having reviewed secondary data sources, the information contained in excel format was limited across a number of areas such as age profile, departmental data and whether leave was certified or non-certified. This information was deemed necessary as it would allow for a more complete and stratified analysis and such data was sourced by reviewing manually all relevant personnel files. The

task thereafter was to simply insert the additional headers and populate each category with the relevant data.

### 3.3.2 Data manipulation

The original excel spread sheet which presented data for years 2000 / 2001 did not record whether leave was certified or non-certified. It was decided that to do this manually was an onerous task and clarification of the issue would be best dealt with through the interview process.

The original data contained in the excel sheet for each year, was sub divided into individual employee work sheets and accompanied by one summary sheet (Appendix 1 and 2). However the summary sheet presented a more favourable picture in that it did not capture those staff who had ceased employment with the company during that particular year. To reflect a more accurate picture, the work sheets for.those staff who had not been recorded in the summary sheet were added to the excel list. Due to the level of data, same was reduced to quarterly segments, for ease of presentation.

This process created a master sheet containing various information on a quarterly basis under the following headings: name of employee, age, department and quarterly summaries (Appendices 3-7).

In view of the sensitive nature of the data, and to retain some anonymity employee names were recorded using their initials. All staff employed during a particular year were recorded and the number days absent inserted. For those with no sick days a 0 was placed in the appropriate cell, while a blank cell was used to signify those employees who had not been employed by the company during that quarter or had ceased employment during that quarter.

### 3.3.3 Overall company analysis

From the master sheet a template was designed to capture data in relation to total absences during each year. The table recorded on a quarterly basis the number of employees; number of days absent per quarter; cumulative number of days per quarter; severity loss time rate; average severity loss time and average number of days lost per employee.

The final template for each year recorded: year; number of employees per quarter; name of employee by initial; age; department; quarterly total and individual total; and this is depicted in Appendices 3-7.

The formula used for calculating absence figures was that presented in section 1.2.2 'severity loss time rate', and was applied because it has been cited as the most common method. The average number of working days per year of 228, cited in CIPD's 2004 report was used and averaged out over each quarter, giving a quarterly working day figure of 57 days per employee.

In relation to number of employees, the quarterly figures were averaged and rounded up to the nearest whole number, to give the average number of employees for the year. The total number of days captured in quarter 4 under the heading of 'cumulative number of days per quarter' was divided by the average number of employees, to calculate the average number of days lost per employee for that year. Severity loss time rates per quarter were averaged to arrive at the average severity loss time and rounded up to the nearest decimal place.

The final template is presented in section 4.2.1 (table 1).

### 3.3.4 Departmental analysis

From the same master sheet, data was extracted pertaining to each department (Appendix 8). From this template, under the following headings: number of employees ; number of days absent ; cumulative number of days absent per quarter ;

severity loss time rate per quarter ; average severity rate, data was again presented in quarterly summaries. Severity loss time rate per quarter and average severity were arrived at in the same manner described in the previous section.

The final template is presented in section 4.2.2 (table 1).

### 3.3.5 Age analysis

Data pertaining to the age profile of the company, specifically those under 25, was extracted from the master sheet and is presented in Section 4.2.3 table 1. Again the data is presented in quarterly summaries, recording the number of employees and staff under 25. The percentage of staff under 25 was calculated against the total number employees per quarter and averaged out to arrive at the yearly average.

### 3.3.6 Total cost of absenteeism

Taking ISME's figure for one day's direct cost of € 100 and applying Huczynski & Fitzpatrick's (1989) belief that this figure should be doubled to account for indirect costs, the sum of € 200 was derived at and was the basis for calculating the total cost of absenteeism on the company from years 2001 to 2005.

### 3.3.7 Absence policy and amendment

Copy of the company's absence policy, issued in January 2003, was readily available and obtained from the company's staff manual (Appendix 9). The policy defines reporting procedures and statutory obligations, sets the criteria in relation to paid sick leave and certification protocols and concludes with the discretionary use of a company Doctor by the company.

Copy of an e-mail in relation to new reporting procedures dated 18th August 2003 was also contained in the same staff manual (Appendix 10). This e-mail specifically

required staff to contact the HR Manager as opposed to their Manager, to report sickness.

### 3.3.8 Semi structured interviews

To place some meaning behind the quantitative data which detailed the level of absenteeism and to evaluate *why* things were the way they were, why change was necessary and the effects of such change, semi structured interviews were performed, targeting those individuals who had experienced both pre and post policy implementation conditions.

14 questions were designed to obtain qualitative data pertaining to pre and post policy implementation, focusing on themes around: the extent of the problem; policies and procedures in place; impact of absenteeism on individuals and the business, and the effectiveness of the intervention as a whole. Prompts were inserted in parenthesis to ensure key areas were addressed and to allow the respondents to talk freely (Appendix 11). Not all prompts were relevant to each respondent.

To ensure that the data collected was pertinent and typical to the enquiry, a specific question was asked during the closing stage of the interviews to address this concern (Appendix 11, question 14).

Interview scripts (Appendices 12-16), were analysed by way of matrices around the themes mentioned above and are presented in section 4.

## 3.4 Sampling

The basis of gathering qualitative data was achieved through non probability sampling and specifically purposive sampling was deemed to be appropriate. Other alternatives such as random, stratified and systematic sampling were deemed to be inappropriate.

The nature of the research question required people whose experience and perspectives were deemed to be important to the research question. Although the

company currently employs 25 people, including two Directors, in total eight key informants were identified who would be regarded as having specialised and unique knowledge and experience of the research issue.

## 3.5 Administration of procedures

On the 23rd June a request seeking assistance in the research was made by way of a brief letter, marked private and confidential, to six of the likely informants as both directors were unavailable (Appendix 16a). The letter outlined the research agenda and also sought respondents' availability for week beginning 27th June for interviewing purposes.

Out of the six letters issued, five responded, which represented a response rate of 86.5 % with one line manger failing to respond.

The interviews took place in a back office which was discreetly positioned and allowed for greater privacy than other office spaces. Respondents were asked to set aside 35-45minutes. Although an unstructured interview, consideration was given to some framework designed around themes mentioned in section 3.3.8.

Consideration was also given to: an opening / introduction; 'warm –up' questions; the main body of the interview; exploring the main themes in a relatively logical way; 'cool-off' questions; the conclusion / ending; thanking the interviewee and explaining the next steps in the research process.

General issues about experience and perspective of interviewee were considered as well as focusing on more 'critical incidents' or situations that could lead to the identification of behaviours or attitudes relevant to the research questions. In that regard respondent 2 by virtue of her position of Office Accountant, was a rich source of data.

There was an emphasis on open questions, which encouraged respondents to describe and explain. Efforts were made to avoid or limit closed questions, which were less

suited to semi structures interviews. Multiple questions, long questions, leading questions and jargon were also avoided. Probing techniques, which allow for reflection on issues in more depth for responses to be further explored and which can be verbal and non verbal were considered an utilised as necessary.

### 3.5.1 Recording information

This issue was referred to in the penultimate paragraph of section 3.2.2 While it was intended to tape record the interviews as it would have allowed the interviewee to concentrate on the process of questioning and listening rather than being distracted by the need to take notes and it would have ensured that responses to questions had been accurately recorded and could have been listened to more than once, respondents felt uneasy despite having the option of turning the tape off, if they felt uncomfortable.

Therefore hand written notes were taken during the interview allowing sufficient space to record information under each question. A separate page was used to record other questions and responses not previously anticipated. As an aid to effective and accurate recording of data, immediately following the interviews, and whilst the information was still clear, a dictaphone was used to record the hand written notes in more detail. Scripts were typed up that same day (Appendices 12-16).

## 3.6 Validity & reliability

### 3.6.1 Organisational evidence

The process involved in obtaining organisational evidence, as outlined in section 3.3.1 was straightforward and it is maintained that a revisit would offer the same information. The data relating to absence figures, which had been recorded on an ongoing basis was presented in a simple excel format requiring insertion of additional headers and reduced to quarterly summaries for analysis. Despite this process and the insertion of additional information to allow for further analysis, it is maintained that

this manipulation which was explained in section 3.3.2 did not have any impact on the integrity of the numerical data.

### 3.6.2 Interviews

The fact that the interviews were not recorded coupled with the assurance of anonymity, created a forum for frank discussion. The process was described in section 3.2.2 and every effort was made to use as many open ended questions as possible. It was stipulated at the outset that there was no right or wrong answers but what was required was a truthful portrayal of both contexts. By coincidence all interviewee's had good if not excellent attendance history, however it is accepted that inclusion of those who had poor attendance records, although not possible in this instance, would have in all likelihood generated different data and this might be regarded as a limitation as regards generalising the findings in section 5.

In combination with organisational data sources it was regarded as an effective way to reduce threats to internal validity.

## 3.7 Ethical Issues

As this is an organisational study, every effort has been made to meet the request of all individual and the company regarding anonymity. Every effort has been made to adhere to the CIPD Code of Professional Conduct surrounding important ethical principles such as accuracy of information; confidentiality of personal information; equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practices; and fair dealing in the treatment of individuals.

Data collection utilising organisational evidence and individual interviews, has considered objectivity, confidentiality and anonymity and fair treatment.

Specifically the company has asked that due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the exposure of organisational data that this information is only to be

reviewed by those involved in accessing the paper and thereafter must remain strictly confidential.

This section has described and justified in detail, the methodology used in accordance with the research agenda. The thesis can proceed with an analysis of the data and this will be presented in section 4.

# 4. Analysis

## 4.1 Introduction.

This section will analyse the data obtained through the procedures described in section 3.3 and section 5 will discuss the findings relative to the literature.

The section is divided in to two main sub-sections, pre and post policy implementation years. Quantitative analysis pre implementation, years 2001 and 2002, is presented in section 4.2 with qualitative analysis for the same period presented in section 4.3. Analysis of post implementation year 2003 to date is presented in the same order in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

## 4.2 Pre Policy Implementation.

In this organisationally focused thesis, data was obtained from a variety of sources referred to in section 3.3 which captured all employees who worked for the company for the periods 2001 to 2005.

### 4.2.1 Company analysis

Table 1 presents a yearly analysis of absence rates for 2001, the process of obtaining such data was described in section 3.3.3.

The total number of days lost for 2001 was 176. The severity loss time rate for quarters 1 and 2 were similar at 2.56% and 2.42% respectively and would be regarded as reasonable. Quarter 3 with a loss of 29.5 days presented as the best period during that year resulting in a severity loss time rate of 1.79%. However there was a marked deterioration in quarter 4 with the total number of days at 78.5 days resulting in a severity rate of 5.51%. This represented a significant increase compared to the previous quarters. Despite this the severity rate for the year average out at 3.07% which equated to an average of 6.76 lost days per employee.

**Table 1. 2001 Yearly Analysis per Quarter**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days absent per qtr | Cumulative no of days absent per qtr % | Severity loss time rate % | Average severity loss time % | Average No of days lost per EE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 23 | 33.5 | 33.5 | 2.56 | | |
| 2 | 25 | 34.5 | 68 | 2.42 | | |
| 3 | 29 | 29.5 | 97.5 | 1.79 | | |
| 4 | 25 | 78.5 | 176 | 5.51 | 3.07 | 6.76 |

2002 saw significant deterioration across all areas and this is presented in Table 2 with the total number of days lost recorded at 198. The number of employees fell from an average of 26 in 2001 to 21. The severity rate for quarter 2 was a respectable 2.36%. However severity rates for quarters 1 and 3 were significantly higher at 4.82% and 6.36% respectively. Quarter 4 showed a marked improvement compared against the same quarter in 2001. That said the average severity rate increased from 3.07% to 4.17% on the previous year resulting in the average number of days per employee increasing by 2.66 days to 9.42 days.

**Table 2. 2002 Yearly analysis per Quarter**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days absent per qtr | Cumulative no of days absent per qtr (%) | Severity loss time rate (%) | Average severity loss time (%) | Average No of days lost per EE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 24 | 66 | 66 | 4.82 | | |
| 2 | 20 | 27 | 93 | 2.36 | | |
| 3 | 20 | 72.5 | 165.5 | 6.36 | | |
| 4 | 21 | 32.5 | 198 | 3.17 | 4.17 | 9.42 |

## 4.2.2 Departmental analysis

The data presented above masked variations within the organisation and having researched both secondary and primary sources a departmental analysis was undertaken. The process of gathering such data was described in section 3.3.4 and is represented in the following tables.

The Accounts Department, table 1 & 2, with staffing levels of two, had no reported absence in 2001 or 2002.

**Table 1. 2001 Departmental Analysis – Accounts**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 2. 2002 Departmental Analysis -Accounts**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In 2001 the Claims Department (table 1), with staffing levels of three, lost 11 days for the year which equated to a severity rate of 1.60% and represented 3.6 lost days per employee.

In 2002 the same department (table 2), saw a fall in the number of days on the previous year from 11 to 9.5 days and consequently with the same staffing levels, the severity fell from 1.60% to 1.39%. This represented 3 days lost per employee for that year against 3.6 days in 2001.

**Table 1. 2001 Departmental Analysis – Claims**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2.34 | |
| 2 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 1.75 | |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 1.75 | |
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 11 | 0.58 | 1.60 |

**Table 2. 2002 Departmental Analysis -Claims**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 2.05 | |
| 3 | 3 | 6.5 | 1.75 | |
| 3 | 3 | 9.5 | 1.75 | |
| 3 | 0 | 9.5 | 0 | 1.39 |

The Commercial Department, with average staffing levels of four, lost 16 days which averaged out at 4 lost days per employee and a severity rate of 1.65%.

An analysis of the same department in 2002 (table 2), showed improvement on the previous year. Of note is that staffing levels fell to one for the last half of that year. The total number of days compared against 2001 fell from 16 to 11 days reducing the severity rate from 1.65% to 1.36%.

**Table 1. 2001 Departmental Analysis – Commercial**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 2.93 | |
| 2 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 1.40 | |
| 3 | 5 | 0.5 | 10.5 | 0.18 | |
| 4 | 4 | 5.5 | 16 | 2.41 | 1.65 |

**Table 2. 2002 Departmental Analysis -Commercial**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 2.10 | |
| 5 | 4.5 | 10.5 | 1.59 | |
| 1 | 0 | 10.5 | 0.00 | |
| 1 | 1 | 11.5 | 1.75 | 1.36 |

The Motor Underwriting Department (table 1), had the highest staffing levels with an average of 9 for the year. The total number of days lost during the year was 56.5 which equated to an average severity rate of 2.77% and represented 6.27 lost days per employee. Compared against both the Commercial and Claims Departments the figures were higher, but in themselves were not overly excessive.

In 2002, the same department (table 2), saw a reduction in staffing levels from 9 to 7. There was significant deterioration in this department overall with the total number of days lost increasing from 56.5 to 82 days on the previous year. This however was heavily influenced by the level of absence in quarter 3 which was recorded at 56 days lost. This impacted significantly on the total number of days lost during the year and increased the severity rate from 2.77% in 2001 to 5.14%, an increase to 11.71 days lost per employee.

**Table 1. 2001 Departmental Analysis – Motors**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 8 | 15 | 15 | 3.28 | |
| 2 | 9 | 12 | 27 | 2.34 | |
| 3 | 10 | 15.5 | 42.5 | 2.72 | |
| 4 | 9 | 14 | 56.5 | 2.72 | 2.77 |

**Table 2. 2002 Departmental Analysis -Motors**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 4 | 4 | 1.00 | |
| 7 | 13 | 17 | 3.26 | |
| 7 | 56 | 73 | 14.04 | |
| 7 | 9 | 82 | 2.26 | 5.14 |

The final departmental analysis related to the Personal Lines Department and is detailed in table 1. The second largest department with average staffing levels of 6 for 2001, this department clearly had the worse levels of absenteeism. That said quarters 1 and 3 were at acceptable levels of 2.63% and 2.13% respectively. By quarter 3 the cumulative number of days lost was 29, however quarter 4 impacted on the figures significantly with an additional 53 days, resulting in a severity rate of 6.21% for the year.

In 2002 the same department (table 2) saw no improvement on 2001. Staffing levels fell from 6 to 5. Quarters 2 and 3 showed improvement for the same periods in 2001; however quarter 1 recorded 49.5 days lost which had a significant impact on the overall figures. There was a minor increase on the total number of days lost form 82 in 2001 to 82.5, which equated to a severity rate of 6.59%.

**Table 1. 2001 Departmental Analysis – P/Lines**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 2.63 | |
| 2 | 5 | 13 | 20.5 | 4.56 | |
| 3 | 7 | 8.5 | 29 | 2.13 | |
| 4 | 6 | 53 | 82 | 15.5 | 6.21 |

**Table 2. 2002 Departmental Analysis -P/Lines**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr % | Av. seve-rity rate % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 49.5 | 49.5 | 14.47 | |
| 4 | 4 | 53.5 | 1.75 | |
| 5 | 7.5 | 61 | 2.63 | |
| 5 | 21.5 | 82.5 | 7.54 | 6.59 |

### 4.2.3 Age analysis

Having researched both secondary and primary sources, and to establish if age was a source of the problem an analysis was carried out to establish the number of staff under 25. The process of obtaining such data was described in section 3.3.5 and is presented in the following tables.

Table 1 presents the total number of staff employed by the company for 2001 and has specifically isolated those staff who were under 25 at time. For 2001 the number of staff employed by the company under 25 as a percentage of all staff was 49%.

Table 2 presents the same analysis for 2002 and although average staff numbers fell from 26 to 21, a decrease of 19%, the yearly average when compared against 2001, was only slightly lower at 48%.

**Table 1. 2001 Age Analysis**

| Quarters | No of EE | Staff under 25 | Under 25s as a % of staff per qtr | Yearly % of staff under 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 23 | 10 | 43.5 | |
| 2 | 25 | 11 | 44 | |
| 3 | 29 | 16 | 55 | |
| 4 | 25 | 13 | 52 | 49 |

**Table 2. 2002 Age Analysis**

| No of EE | Staff under 25 | Under 25s as a % of staff per qtr | Yearly % of staff under 25 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | 11 | 46 | |
| 20 | 11 | 55 | |
| 20 | 9 | 45 | |
| 18 | 8 | 44 | 48 |

Using quantitative data the level of absenteeism within the company for years 2001 and 2002, the pre policy implementation years have been presented.

## 4.3 Staff Interpretation Pre Policy Implementation

Although quantitative data can identify the extent to which things are, or are not, occurring in organisations, it is less helpful in answering the question *why* things were the way they were. Most organisationally focused HR projects therefore include the use of qualitative data, (Anderson 2004).

These next sub-sections will present the findings arising from the semi structured interviews relative to pre policy implementation.

### 4.3.1 Extent of absence problem

Section 3.3.8 presented the interview design whilst section 3.4 described the sample. Respondents represented most departments within the company and have been employed by the company for at least 6 years.

To identify if absenteeism was regarded as a problem within the company, question 2 asked, do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times?

Respondent's answers are summarised in Table 1. Most respondents (80%) felt that absenteeism was a problem. Respondent 1 felt that it wasn't an issue when he joined as did respondent 5, although she felt it had become a problem a number of years ago. Two of the respondents 2 and 3, (40%), felt it was a problem when they first joined while respondent 4, the longest serving member felt it became an issue 11 years ago when the company began to grow.

The general consensus was that absenteeism was a problem for the company.

**Table 1. Summary to question 2.**

| | **Resp 1** | **Resp 2** | **Resp 3** | **Resp 4** | **Resp 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q2 Was absenteeism a problem.** | Q2 Appeared it wasn't when I first joined. | Q2 From the time I joined the company both absenteeism and lateness was a huge problem. | Q2 When I started it was a problem but since procedures in place I think it has improved. | Q2 I think it became a problem in the last 11 years. Before then we were small, more close knit, never had any procedures, didn't need them. | Q2 I would say absenteeism is always there, problem with certain people. I wouldn't have said that it was a problem when I joined, but it was a few years ago. |

Q4 asked why did absenteeism become a problem and respondents answers are summarised in table 2.

A number of reasons were put forward by each respondent. Respondent's 1 and 4, (40%) felt that it was as a result of the company growing along with the recruitment of young staff, while respondent 5 placed the problem on "certain staff who were recruited". Respondents 2, 3 and 4 (60%) indicated that absenteeism became a problem because there were no procedures in place whilst respondents 2 and 4 (40%) made reference to Line Managers as a contributing factor.

The narratives indicate a number of sources, which contributed to the problem namely, growth, recruitment practices, lack of procedures and line managers.

**Table 2 . Summary to question 4**

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q4 Became a problem.** | Q4. In 1999. The company began to grow and we had a lot of local staff who were quite young. I think some managers were to blame. Q4a. Friends with most staff...ack-ward. Didn't know what to do..never questioned it | Q4. there was no personnel assigned to the role.. Line managers did not appear to have any interest. .. Problem grew with staff disintereste d as a result of absenteeism in particular areas.. Expected to carry weigth unfairly. | Q4. ..became a problem as no control and didn't have to get a doctors note. | Q4. ... became a problem because staff grew and one could see no procedures in place.. We had a lot of young staff... if they weren't sick they'd be late | Q4. ..it became a problem when certain staff were recruited didn't respect their position or the company.. reward themselves with a few sick days. .it only takes one person to take this attitude and rest will follow. |

## 4.3.2 Policies and procedures

Q5 asked respondents if the company did anything to make the problem worse and answers are summarised in table 3.

Respondents 1, 2 and 5 (60%) agreed that the company didn't do anything to address the problem despite respondent 2 advising that reports were given to Line Managers and respondents 1, 3 and 5 (60%) indicated that the company made the problem worse by paying everyone the same bonus. Respondent 2 recalled that bonuses were reduced but percentage reductions did not have a direct effect. Respondent 1 made reference to

the practice of making people permanent while respondent 2 alluded to line managers' inaction.

From interpretation of this analysis it would appear that the company failed to address the problem despite data being presented to line managers. Senior management validated the behaviour by rewarding all employees with similar bonuses or didn't penalise them sufficiently to have any affect.

**Table 3. Summary to question 5**

| | **Resp 1** | **Resp 2** | **Resp 3** | **Resp 4** | **Resp 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q5 Made situation worse** | Q5 ..didn't do anything..part of the problem. People made permanent..we would all get bonus.Q5a.. never sick or 20 days sick still got bonus with pay review. | Q5 Didn't deal with the problem.. Despite reports LM took no real action. Bonus reduced but percentage of reduction did not have direct effect | Q5..by not looking for doctors notes.. No one was pulling them up on how many sick days they were taking. It seemed to be the same people..still got their bonus | Q5.. Employee who had good attendance were not rewared any different than those who abused during year. | Q5.. Offenders not pulled up on amount of sick day.. and nothing done by management |

Q's 3, 3a & 3b asked respondents to describe how the company traditionally handled absenteeism and their responses are summarised in table 4.

In relation to reporting all 5 respondents indicated that there was no designated person to contact and no efforts made to ascertain the nature of the illness. Respondents 1 and 2 indicated that there was no stipulation to phone back or advise likely duration of absence. As regards certification 4 respondents (80%) indicated that it was not necessary to produce a doctor's certificate and the same respondents confirmed that the non production of a doctor's certificate did not affect payment.

From interpretation of the narratives there was no clear policy in place for reporting or dealing with absences and payment was guaranteed, with or without certification.

**Table 4. Summary to questions 3 (a), (b) & (c)**

| | **Resp 1** | **Resp 2** | **Resp 3** | **Resp 4** | **Resp 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q3 Pre policy procedures** | | | | | |
| Reporting | Q3 No designated person. Parents or sister to phone the office and leave a message with the reception. Never asked for details of sickness or when I would be back. No obligation to call back. | Q3 Traditionally employee would contact the office i.e reception and advise that they would not be in. No questions asked as to nature of illness or length of expected time they would be absent. | Q3 The person who was not coming in would ring the office and report that they were not coming in. | Q3 Employee phoned and was never told do's and don't's. | Q3 I spoke to a manager but I know others didn't. Q3a. My mother phoned the odd time. |
| Certification | Q3a.I was never asked for a cert<br><br>Q3b. I think 3 continuous days other than that there was no limit to the no. of individual days you could take without a cert. | Q3a There was no real pressure or emphasis on getting a cert | | Q3 Never any pressure for a Doctor's note | Q3b.When you were out for 3 or more days in a row but if you were out for one or two days you didn't need one. |

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Payment | Q3b. There was no pressure to get one if you forgot to get it.You still got paid. | Q3b It didn't make a diffence. Staff were still paid, that was the tradition and they weren't encouraged to apply for social welfare. | | Q3a. Yes even if you forgot to get a doctors note | Q3c Payment was never an issue for me..was always paid regardless |

### 4.3.3 Affects on staff and the business

Q6 asked respondents to describe the affects absenteeism had on both staff and the business and Q6a asked for examples. Responses are summarised in table 5.

Respondents 1, 2 and 3 agreed that the affects on staff was demoralising while 4 respondents (80%) agreed that it resulted in additional work. In relation to affects on the business, respondents offered different examples from clients not being able to get through to the office, resulting in loss of business, complaints being made to Director and additional calls required to redeem the situation.
The consensus was that morale was poor, work load had increased, service levels were poor and the ability to generate revenue was reduced.

**Table 5. Summary question 6**

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q6. Affects on staff & business** | Q6. ..very demoralising | Q6. ..loss of manpower required additional efforts from staff. Morale affected.. Customer service poor. Overtime resulting in increase costs | Q6.Departments were put under pressure due to staff not turning up and became less efficient. | Q6. ..created low moral and tension was put on all staff to do extra work.. post or call not dealt with ..created extra call and delays | Q6. ..those who are easily lead follow suit, for others extra work load. |

## 4.3.4 Departmental focus

Q7 asked if absenteeism was a problem in all departments and Q7a asked why. Respondents' answers are summarised in table 6.

All five respondents agreed that it was a problem in just some departments. As to why, four respondents (80%) indicated that managers were a contributing factor and respondents 1 and 2 indicated that there were no role models. Respondents 3 and 4 agreed that it was more of a problem in the larger sections.

The narratives emphasised the role of the line manager as an important influence along with the size of department, in contributing to the level of absence within some sections.

**Table 6. Summary question 7 & 7(a)**

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q7 Problem in all department** | Q7... it wasn't in ours ..more of a problem in motor dept and personal lines brokers | Q7..problem extended to the majority of depts..some depts where LM were more effective | Q7 In some departments only | Q7 Some departments... ones with more staff | Q7 Just some |
| **Q7a Why** | Q7a ..managers being friendly with staff, 2nd in command persistent offender, no role models. No manger upstairs and Snr member was offender | Q7&7a some departments where LM more effective in managing staff. Also staff who would have had a more moral approach and would not have had high levels of absenteeism | Q7a .. In the larger sections.. It wasn't noticed as much.. manager in one dept was too friendly with staff | Q7a It may not have been noticed as much or felt as much as the 1 or 2 people departments | Q7a Two particular offenders in one department started it and the rest followed suit even new staff...manager didn't seemed too concerned either |

By using quantitative data, this section has assessed the level of absenteeism in the company during 2001/2002. It has also established, through semi structured interviews, that absenteeism was regarded as a problem, and has described how absenteeism was handled and the consequences this had on both the individuals and the company. The next section, using the same quantitative and qualitative sources, will present the situation post policy implementation.

## 4.4 Post Policy implementation.

### 4.4.1 Company absence policy.

In 2003 an absence policy was introduced through a Staff Manual. A copy of the absence policy is presented in Appendix 8, the main points of which will be presented in this section.

All staff members had to notify their manager no later than 10:00am on the first morning and were required to give details of their illness and when they would return. Payment of sick leave was determined by length of service and stipulated that certificates should be obtained when attending the Doctor along with a Social Welfare form. For absence over two days, the company required a Doctors certificate. For any absences of two days or less, a certificate was not required but only 3 individual uncertified days were allowed and the company had the discretion to arrange its own medical examination.

An amendment was made to the procedures by way of e-mail in August 2003 (Appendix 9), asking staff to contact the HR Manager and reminding them of the general procedures.

### 4.4.2 Company analysis

Table 1 presents a yearly analysis of absence rates for 2003. Quarter 1 showed a significant improvement on previous years with 7.5 days lost resulting in a severity loss rate of 0.88%. Although the number of days lost increased in the subsequent quarters, the loss rate for the year averaged out at 2.22%, which represented 5.08 days lost per employee, compared against 9.42 for 2002. 91.5 days were lost due to absenteeism in 2003 against 198 in 2002.

**Table 1. 2003 Yearly Analysis per Quarter**

| Qtrs | No of EE | No of days absent per qtr | Cumulative no of days absent per qtr % | Severity loss time rate % | Average severity loss time % | Average No of days lost per EE % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 15 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 0.88 | | |
| 2 | 15 | 23 | 30.5 | 2.69 | | |
| 3 | 20 | 29 | 59.5 | 2.54 | | |
| 4 | 20 | 32 | 91.5 | 2.8 | 2.22 | 5.08 |

2004 saw a marked improvement as presented in table 2. As staffing levels increased, for the first time severity loss time rates for each quarter was less than 2%, with quarters 2 and 3 just above 1%. The loss rate for the year averaged out at 1.30%. With the total number days lost at 70.5 this represented 2.93 days lost per employee.

**Table 2. 2004 Yearly Analysis per Quarter**

| Qtrs | No of EE | No of days absent per qtr | Cumulative no of days absent per qtr % | Severity loss time rate % | Average severity loss time % | Average No of days lost per EE % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 21 | 19.5 | 19.5 | 1.63 | | |
| 2 | 24 | 14 | 33.5 | 1.02 | | |
| 3 | 26 | 15 | 48.5 | 1.01 | | |
| 4 | 25 | 22 | 70.5 | 1.54 | 1.30 | 2.93 |

Table 3 presents absence rates for the first 6 months of 2005. The year on year improvements has continued and with the average number of employees at 25, the total number of days lost was 34.25 which represents 1.37 days per employee and a severity loss rate for the first 6 months of 1.20%.

**Table 3. 2005 6 Monthly Analysis per Quarter**

| Qtrs | No of EE | No of days absent per qtr | Cumulative no of days absent per qtr % | Severity loss time rate % | Average severity loss time % | Average No of days lost per EE % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 25 | 27.5 | 27.5 | 1.92 | | |
| 2 | 25 | 6.75 | 34.25 | 0.49 | 1.20 | 1.37 |

### 4.4.3 Departmental analysis.

The Departmental analysis for Accounts, Claims, Commercial, Reception and IT/Marketing are contained in Appendix 18. This section will focus specifically on Motor Underwriting and Personal Lines Departments, which had the highest levels of absenteeism pre policy implementation.

The Motor Department (Table 1) saw a fall in staffing levels from 7 in the last 6 months of 2002, to 5 for quarters 1 and 2 of 2003. However three further staff members were recruited in quarter 3 taking the average number of employees to 7. There was a significant improvement in all quarters compared against 2002. The total number of days lost was 30.5 compared against 82 for the previous year, which represents a yearly severity rate of 1.89%, a marked improvement on 2002's 5.14%.

For the same department 2004 saw minor variances in absence rates from the previous years improvements which is presented in table 2. Whilst the higher than average severity rate from quarter 4 of the previous year continued into quarter 1, the yearly severity rate averaged out at 1.89% which was the same average for 2003 and represented 32 days lost, an increase of 1.5 days.

**Table 1. 2003 Departmental Analysis -Motor**

| Quarter | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 0.88 | |
| 2 | 5 | 4 | 6.5 | 1.40 | |
| 3 | 8 | 8.5 | 15 | 1.86 | |
| 4 | 8 | 15.5 | 30.5 | 3.40 | 1.89 |

**Table 2. 2004 Departmental Analysis -Motor**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 12 | 12 | 3.00 | |
| 7 | 5.5 | 17.5 | 1.38 | |
| 8 | 6.5 | 24 | 1.43 | |
| 8 | 8 | 32 | 1.75 | 1.89 |

Table 3 presents the first 6 months of 2005. For the first time, two consecutive quarters have seen a severity rate of less than 1%. With the total number of days lost to date at 7.5, a fall of 10 days for the same period last year but with an additional employee, the average severity rate for the first 6 months stands at 0.83%

**Table 3. 2005 Departmental Analysis - Motor**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 8 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 0.99 | |
| 2 | 8 | 3 | 7.5 | 0.66 | 0.83 |

An analysis of the Personal Lines Department is presented in table 1. 2003 saw a minor reduction in staffing levels from 5 to 4. The quarterly severity rate for quarter 1 of 1.75% was a marked improvement on 14.47% for the same quarter the previous year. Quarters 2 and 3 saw deterioration on the same period for 2002, although there was an improvement in quarter 4. The significant improvement in quarter 1 clearly influenced the overall figures and with the total number of days falling from 82.5 to 43.5 on the previous year, this equated to a yearly severity rate of 4.77% compared to 6.59% in 2003.

Table 2 presents figures for 2004, and there was a marked improvement in this department. Staffing levels increased by 2 on the previous year, however the total number of days dropped significantly from 43.5 days to 10.5, resulting in the yearly severity rate averaging at 0.78%, compared to 4.77% in 2003.

**Table 1. 2003 Departmental Analysis -P/Lines**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1.75 | |
| 2 | 4 | 11 | 15 | 4.82 | |
| 3 | 4 | 16 | 31 | 7.01 | |
| 4 | 4 | 12.5 | 43.5 | 5.48 | 4.77 |

**Table 2. 2004 Departmental Analysis -P/Lines**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 1 | 1 | 0.35 | |
| 5 | 3.5 | 4.5 | 1.23 | |
| 6 | 0.5 | 5 | 0.15 | |
| 7 | 5.5 | 10.5 | 1.37 | 0.78 |

There had been minor deterioration for the first 6 months of 2005 (table 3). With staffing levels at 2003 levels, the total number of days lost to date is 5.75, which is an improvement on the same period in 2003 but an increase of 1.25 days on last year, which equated to a severity rate of 1.26% compared to 0.78% for the previous year.

**Table 3. 2005 Departmental Analysis - P/Lines**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1.75 | |
| 2 | 4 | 1.75 | 5.75 | 0.77 | 1.26 |

### 4.4.4 Age analysis

An age analysis for years 2003 to 2005 is contained in Appendix 18 and is summarised in section 4.6 (Table 2). Compared to 2001 / 2002 the company had clearly 'matured' with the number of employees under 25 as a percentage of the total number of employee's decreasing from approximately 48% for both pre policy years to it's current figure of 18%.

## 4.5 Staff Interpretation of Absence Policy

Part 2 of the interview process sought respondents' interpretation of the absence policy under various themes and findings will be presented in the following sub-sections.

### 4.5.1 Current absence procedures

Question 8 asked respondents to describe the current procedure and a summary is contained in appendix 19. The narratives confirmed the procedures outlined in section 4.3.1, however respondents 2 and 4 provided additional information regarding other HR practices. Respondent 2 advised that;

*"At interview stage, new potential employees where informed of the problems the company had in relation to absenteeism. They were also advised that consistent absenteeism would not be tolerated. Probationary periods were used to determine if new staff had problems and at the six month probationary reviews they were reminded of the rules and at times probationary periods were extended a further six months"*

Respondent 4 indicated that the disciplinary procedure had been invoked.

*"They are disciplined when numbers get out of hand, I think we've used the disciplinary once or twice, certainly once anyway and the bonus is affected at the end of the year which it wasn't before".*

### 4.5.2 Attitudes towards policy

Q9 to Q11 sought respondents' general attitudes towards the policy and is summarised in table 1.

All five respondents welcomed the policy and four respondents felt that any negative reaction emanated from the worse offenders. Respondents 1, 2 and 4 agreed that it influenced these employees to leave and this was further reiterated by respondents 1, 2, 4 and 5, when asked to describe the consequences of the policy.

An analysis of the narratives indicates that apart from the worse offenders, the policy was welcomed, and it was cited as a factor in influencing these people to leave.

**Table 1 . Summary questions 9 to 11**

| | **Resp 1** | **Resp 2** | **Resp 3** | **Resp 4** | **Resp 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q9 Resp feelings** | ..quite positive, didn't effect me too much .. It was a good idea and fair, people knew where they stood and handled consistently. | Q9 … the fact that the rules within the manual where applied, ensured that there was a smother running of the business and staff morale increased. | Q9 .I though it was a good idea. It stopped people taking days off whenever they felt like it | Q9 …there was a time when we didn't need procedures but the time was right and I was happy to see them | Q9. I welcomed it - it was time something was done because morale was so bad |

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q10 Other staff members** | Q10 .. those who complained were worse offenders and tried to undermine it...those people are gone. | Q10 . Difficult to assess. Staff who were abusing the sick leave have since left.. Proves unhappy with new regime and not committed to the co. their role or fellow workers | Q10 .. Most people felt the same..it was fair | Q10 One of two couldn't believe it and thought they would still get away with it.. I think that drove them out. | Q10 For those who only ever call in sick when they are really sick, it made no odds, for those who weren't it was off putting. |
| **Q11 Other consequences** | Q11 Worse offenders had good experience but have been replaced by people with better attitudes and experience just as good. | Q11. .. those unhappy with the new system have since left | Q11 Yes even though it was a good procedure offenders felt they were being watched. | Q11 ...some staff left using procedures as a reason, but these were constant abusers.. | Q11 . No if you are really sick there is nothing to feel guilty about.. The only people who find it negative are those who abuse sick days.. most have left |

### 4.5.3 Affects on staff and the business

Q12 Asked respondents to describe the effects the policy had on both staff and the business and question 12a sought examples. Respondents' replies are summarised in table 2.

Four respondents agreed that the morale had improved with respondent 4 expressing the view that staff were reluctant to abuse absenteeism. Respondent 1 felt that line managers were more comfortable and liaised with the HR manager.

Question 12a sought examples and respondent 1 felt that the image and service of the company had improved. Respondent 2 felt that work loads were more evenly distributed and loss of business had greatly improved. Respondent 4 felt that we had a better group of staff, which was endorsed by respondent 1 in his reply to question 12.

The general consensus was that moral had improved, along with service and business.

Table 2 . Summary question 12 & 12(a)

| | **Resp 1** | **Resp 2** | **Resp 3** | **Resp 4** | **Resp 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q12 Effects on Staff and business** | Q12 Staff agree it's fair. Morale is much better.. Good staff in all depts... managers are more comfortable and liaise with the HR manager. They are told when there are problems and deal with it. | Q12. Overall the fact that absenteeism levels are reduced , staff morale is higher. Work loads are more evenly distributed and managemen t are happier. Loss of potential business has greatly improved. | Q12. Less absenteeism and a better feeling in t he company... no one dragging us down like before | Q12.. staff are reluctant to abuse it | Q12 .. better atmosphere |

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q12a Examples** | Q12a ..our overall image and service has improved. We don't have the same problems I mentioned earlier about the busy switch.. | Q12a Apart from what I just mentioned | Q12a . Fewer staff phoning in sick | Q12a ..I sometimes over hear staff saying they were out and are dying with a hangover but came in because they didn't want to have to ring in. We have a better group of people with some new blood | Q12a Afraid not. |

### 4.5.4 Extent of problem currently

Q13 asked respondents if absenteeism is still considered a problem and their answers are captured in table 3.

All respondents felt that absenteeism was not a problem for the company. Respondent 2 felt that having more mature staff along with the policy, record keeping, pay and bonus penalties have resolved the issue.

**Table 3 . Summary question 13**

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q13 Is absenteeism still a problem** | Q13 No. I would say the level of absenteeism has fallen an the manual has been a major influence. People know they won't get away with it and non of the bad eggs are here now to influence new staff | Q13 No. Current staff have a more mature approach to their work and the company's expectation of them. Levels since introduction of manual, record keeping, reduction in bonus and pay have hopefully resolves issue. | Q13 No | Q13 No not at all compared to years ago | Q13.. there will always be some elements of absenteeism .. I don't think it's abused as it once was |

## 4.6 Longitudinal Analysis - a numeric summary

This section integrates the various quantitative data presented in the previous sections and is summarised in table 1. Section 3.3.6 provided a costing which represented both the direct and indirect cost of absenteeism per day and this has been utilised to measure the total cost to the company on a yearly basis, since 2001. A summary of the departmental analysis is summarised in Table 2

**Table 1 Pre & Post Policy Data**

| Year | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total No of days lost** | 176 | 198 | 91.5 | 70.5 | 34.25 |
| **Severity Rate Overall %** | 3.07 | 4.17 | 2.22 | 1.30 | 1.20 |
| **Av no of days lost per EE** | 6.76 | 9.42 | 5.08 | 2.93 | 1.37 |
| **% of EE under 25** | 49 | 48 | 17 | 18 | 18 |
| **Total Cost €** | 35,200 | 39,600 | 18,300 | 14,100 | 6,850 |

**Table 2 Departmental Summary**

| Lost Time Severity Rate Per Department | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Accounts** | 0 | 0 | 0.33 | 0.77 | 0 |
| **Claims** | 1.6 | 1.39 | 0.73 | 1.46 | 1.75 |
| **Commercial** | 1.65 | 1.36 | 0.44 | 0.99 | 1.93 |
| **Motor U/W** | 2.77 | 5.14 | 1.89 | 1.89 | 0.83 |
| **P/Lines** | 6.21 | 6.59 | 4.77 | 0.78 | 1.26 |
| **Reception** | 4.16 | 4.17 | 4.38 | 2.19 | 1.75 |
| **IT/Marketing** | | | | 0.58 | 0.88 |

Against a defined absence policy, sub-sections 4.4 & 4.5 have assessed the level of absenteeism in the company post policy implementation against the context described in sub-sections 4.2 & 4.3. Table 1 section 4.6 presented a longitudinal analysis and showed a number of significant changes since the introduction of the absence policy in January 2003. The following section will set out conclusions and implications arising from these findings.

# 5. Conclusions and Implications

## 5.1 Introduction

Section 1 introduced the importance of HR practices and suggested that there were strong links between HR policies and other areas of a company performance. The following sub-sections discussed the general topic of absenteeism and its implications for businesses, suggested best practice absence management strategies and concluded by asking if these were an effective tool in dealing with absenteeism. Section 2 introduced the research agenda, which was to obtain data for pre and post policy implementation years for a longitudinal analysis. The research was justified and placed within an organisational context, where absenteeism was perceived to be a problem. Section 3 described in detail the methodology necessary to achieve the research agenda. Following the procedures outlined in section 3.3, section 4 presented an analysis of the data, in accordance with the research agenda. The following section will present the findings and conclusions from the analysis presented in section 4.

## 5.2 Findings and Conclusions

The following sub-sections will present the findings in the order presented in section 4.1 under the headings of pre and post policy implementation and make relevant conclusions based on section 1.

### 5.2.1 Pre policy implementation

The research regarding the pre policy years illustrated in sub-section 4.2.1 showed a deterioration in the levels of absenteeism from 176 days to 198 days for the two years prior to policy implementation.

On closer examination of the figures, sub-section 4.2.2 revealed that the problem was confined to the Motor and Personal Lines departments, which introduced the importance of the role of line managers in dealing with absenteeism (CIPD 2004),

and to the other extreme their inability in dealing with the issue as described by Sargent (1989).

Overall sub-section 4.2.3 illustrated that the company had in its employment a significant number of staff under 25 and this had been cited as a possible cause, which is supported by IBEC's 2004 findings.

Behind the figures presented, it was revealed in sub-section 4.3.1 that absenteeism was considered a problem. Sub-section 4.3.1 also uncovered a variety of possible sources such as growth, recruitment practices, lack of procedures and line managers and these findings are consistent with the literature (IBEC 2004; CIPD 2004; Marchington & Wilkinson 2000; Sergant 1989).

It would seem that the company heeded IBEC's (2004) advice as regards understanding the factors that might be undermining the policies by issuing an email in August 2003, changing reporting procedures. It was illustrated in sub-section 4.3.2 that despite recognition of the problem by senior members, there was data available but as Evan (1991) warned this does not solve the problem if it is not used effectively, and that proved to be the case. The same section found that the problem was made worse by offering similar bonuses to all staff and Sergent (1989) cautioned that this could influence the acceptability of a certain level of absenteeism, which it did for some staff. Attempts were made to penalise those staff by reducing their bonus, but as Bolton & Hughes (2001) warned this proved to be ineffective as the percentage reduction was insufficient to have any effect, and the problem continued.

The lack of procedures cited as a source of the problem is developed in sub-section 4.3.2, where there was clearly no procedure in place and payment was guaranteed with or without certification. Marchinton & Wilkinson (2000) warned of the consequences on the business of not having appropriate policies in situ. The consequences are illustrated in sub-section 4.3.3, where staff became demoralised as work loads increased and the business suffered as customers found it difficult to contact the office resulting in loss of revenue and complaints being made at all levels.

It was revealed in sub-section 4.3.4 that the extent of the problem was significantly influenced by the line managers and department size, which supports the findings in section 4.2.2.

It was against the increasing levels of absenteeism illustrated in section 4.2.1 (table 2) that an absence policy was introduced.

### 5.2.2 Post policy implementation

Subsection 4.4.1 identified the main obligations of the absence policy which included a number of the key criteria suggested in CIPD's 2004 fact sheet referred to in sub-section 1.4.1. Within the first year of implementation sub-section 4.4.2 showed a marked improvement on previous years particularly on 2002. There was a significant improvement in 2004 and this has continued for the first 6 months of 2005. Sub-section 4.4.3 illustrated that both the Motor and Personal Lines departments saw marked improvements since policy implementation. Sub-section 4.4.4 showed that the company had matured compared to previous years, and whilst it is accepted that this could be seen as a natural process, the company had suffered from a fall in staff numbers which have steadily increased to their 2001 levels, suggesting the influence of changing recruitment practices, which is supported by respondents 2 comments in sub-section 4.5.1.

Whilst there was significant improvement in absence levels, the issuing of the e-mail referred to in section 4.4.1 highlighted again the negative influence of some of the line managers ( CIPD 2004; Sargent 1989). This created the scenario presented by Sargent (1989) where over participation of the personnel function had allowed supervisors and managers to opt out, shifting the ownership issue to HR, which goes against Storey's (1995) belief that policy implementation is "too important to be left to personnel specialists alone".

In asking respondents to describe current procedures it was revealed in sub-section 4.5.1 that there was an overall strategy in place and that the policy illustrated in Appendix 9 was not a stand alone procedure. The policy incorporated other best

practice absent management initiatives recommended in the literature (IBEC 2004; CIPD 2004; Marchington & Wilkinson 2000; Sergant 1989), such as restricting pay and bonuses and invoking disciplinary procedures.

There was also evidence from the same sub-section that the issue had been addressed at the early stages of the employment relationship from the interview stage through to induction and probation, and this strategy, recommended by Bolton & Hughes (2001) helped to generate what Torrington & Hall (1995) described as an attendance culture. In combination these practices are supportive of Marchington & Wilkinson (2000) view that the management of attendance is integral to all aspects of human resource management.

The general attitude towards the policy presented in section 4.5.2 was positive and it is suggested that any adverse reaction emanated from those few individuals who had higher than average levels of absenteeism. It has been put forward that the policy and its enforcement was a factor in their leaving the company. The impact on staff and the business, outlined in sub-section 4.5.3 revealed that since policy implementation morale had improved along with service and revenue levels supported by an increase in staffing levels illustrated in section 4.4.2 and the introduction of a specific IT and Marketing function. Overall the general consensus illustrated in sub-section 4.5.4 was that absenteeism was not a problem and the overall strategy had resolved the issue.

Overall, the research identified that while levels had increased the year prior to policy implementation and the general feeling was that absenteeism was a problem, on closer analysis excessive levels were confined to a small group of people within certain departments. While possible sources of the problem have been cited and supported by the literature it would appear that the problem was not pervasive enough to support age as a source, and growth was not that significant to have been an influence. What appears to be a more plausible explanation rests with the effectiveness or otherwise of the line managers and the company as a whole in dealing with the problem which created an environment where a policy was required to address the issue. Wherever the source of the problem lay, regardless of age, growth or department size, the policy currently in situ, at a time when staff numbers are at pre policy levels, has confronted

the problem and has created a good platform from which other HR initiatives can be introduced.

The subjective view of respondents has presented a changing favourable context underpinned by the absence policy which they have clearly welcomed and commended. However in the final analysis the longitudinal data presented in section 4.6 has measured and confirmed the effectiveness of the absence policy in not only reducing absence levels to less than the industry average but by reducing significantly overall costs.

## 5.3 Conclusions about the research problem

A number of issues emerged from the research agenda which fell outside the literary review in section 1, and these will be discussed in the following sub-section.

### 5.3.1 A Change in culture

It was revealed during the interviewing process that some respondents felt that the problem of excessive absence revolved around certain individuals and this encouraged other staff to follow suit as opposed to those who didn't because of their own morals. It has been argued that culture can be examined both from an organisational, and from an individual perspective (Marcoulides and Heck, 1993; Chatman, 1991), and that the presence of influential sub-units within the organisation with their own cultures, may have either an inhibitory or enhancing influence on performance (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988) and this appears to describe the dynamics of the culture within the company, prior and post policy implementation. Whilst the interplay of various interventions has helped address the levels of absenteeism within the company, all respondents agreed that the policy and its enforcement was a factor in staff leaving. This was a significant factor in changing the culture of the company and the introduction of such initiatives can be, as suggested by Bourdiotch & Buono, (1997), used to remove deviant employees, which was an unintentional consequence of the intervention.

## 5.4 Implications for theory

### 5.4.1 Best practice policies are effective in small organisations

Literature has consistently highlighted the lack of HRM application in small businesses and therefore it is very difficult to assess best practice policies that are normally associated with larger organisations. While this was an organisational based thesis, and the conclusion based on a small population, it is maintained that best practice policies and procedure can be applied effectively within the dynamics of small organisations.

## 5.5 Implications for policy and practice

### 5.5.1 An ownership issue to be resolved

While the impact of the absence policy has been evaluated and its implications presented, there is an ownership issue of the absence problem arising from the research that needs to be addressed. This could be achieved by appropriate training of line managers and a redefining of the role by encompassing the duties outlined in sub-section 1.4.2.

## 5.6 Implications for further research

### 5.6.1 Implications for further research

As mentioned in sub-section 3.6.2 it was not possible to include those individuals who had poor attendance records. To gain an understanding of their motivation and to obtain a more balanced view to identify if other HR interventions could have been introduced, it would be worthwhile contacting those individuals who have since left the company for further research purposes.

By using the topic of absenteeism, this organisational based thesis has shown that by measuring what HR practitioners do, HR can add value through effective policies and procedures.

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix 1 - Summary Sheet 2001

| NAME | Total due 2000 | Leave applied/taken | Balance | Sick Leave | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Comments |
| BD | 23 | 19 | 4.0 | 2 | |
| BA | 23 | 23 | 0.0 | 4 | |
| BB | 25 | 16 | 9.0 | 0 | |
| BC | 5.25 | 5.5 | -0.3 | 0 | |
| CM | 21 | 21 | 0.0 | 5 | |
| CF | 21 | 21 | 0.0 | 6 | |
| CA | 15 | 15 | 0.0 | 2 | |
| DC | 21 | 21 | 0.0 | 10.5 | |
| DM | 23 | 23 | 0.0 | 2 | |
| DS | 19.25 | 19.5 | -0.3 | 11 | |
| FP | 8.75 | 9 | -0.3 | 6 | |
| FG | 21 | 17.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | |
| GL | 10.5 | 16 | -5.5 | 6 | |
| HS | 8.75 | 9 | -0.3 | 8.5 | |
| LR | 14 | 15 | -1.0 | 4 | |
| LM | 9 | 11 | -2.3 | 3 | |
| MV | 21 | 23 | -2.0 | 6 | |
| MP | 23 | 16.5 | 6.5 | 0 | |
| OHJ | 26 | 26 | 0.0 | 4.5 | |
| ONL | 21.08 | 21.5 | -0.4 | 0.5 | |
| RA | 21 | 25.5 | -4.5 | 53.5 | |
| TD | 21 | 21 | 0.0 | 0 | |
| | | | | 0 | |
| | | | | | |
| | 401.3325 | 395 | 6.3325 | 137.5 | |

## Appendix 2 – Individual Sub Sheet 2001

| NAME: | BA | Annual Leave | Sick Leave | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Entitlement | | 21 | | |
| C/F from 2000 | | 2 | | |
| | Details | No. of days | | No. of days |
| Jan | 22nd | 0.5 | | |
| Feb | | | 5th | 1 |
| Mar | 12th 21st | 1.5 | | |
| Apr | 20th | 1 | | |
| May | | | | |
| Jun | 5th | 1 | 8th | 1 |
| Jul | 13th | 1 | | |
| Aug | 20th to 31st | 10 | | |
| Sep | | | 24th 25th | 2 |
| Oct | 30th & 31st | 2 | | |
| Nov | 28th & 29th | 2 | | |
| Dec | 21st 24th 27th & 28th 1st Jan | 4 | | |
| Total | | 23 | | 4 |
| | | | | |
| Outstanding | | 0.00 | | |

# Appendix 3 – 2001 Master Sheet

| Name of EE | Age | Dept | Jan-Mar | Apr-June | July-Sept | Oct-Dec | Indv Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| BD | | Commercial | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| BA | <25 | Claim | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| BB | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BC | <25 | Motor U/W | | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BR | <25 | Motor U/W | 6 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| CT | | Commercial | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| CL | | Claim | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| CP | <25 | Motor U/W | 1 | 4.5 | 1 | | 6.5 |
| CF | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3.5 | 5.5 |
| CA | | Claim | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| DC | <25 | Motor U/W | 6 | 0 | 3.5 | 1 | 10.5 |
| DM | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DS | <25 | P/Lines | | | 2.5 | 8.5 | 11 |
| DS | <25 | P/Lines | 2.5 | 5 | 1 | | 8.5 |
| FP | <25 | Reception | | | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| FG | <25 | Commercial | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1.5 | 3.5 |
| GL | <25 | Motor U/W | | | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| HE | | Reception | 1 | 2.5 | 1 | | 4.5 |
| HF | | Motor U/W | 1 | 0 | | | 1 |
| HS | <25 | Motor U/W | | | 5 | 3.5 | 8.5 |
| LR | | Motor U/W | | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| LM | <25 | P/Lines | | | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| MV | <25 | Commercial | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| MP | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| NR | <25 | P/Lines | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| OHJ | | P/Lines | 2.5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4.5 |
| ONC | | P/Lines | | | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| ONL | | P/Lines | 0.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 |
| PG | <25 | Commercial | | 2 | 0.5 | | 2.5 |
| RA | | P/Lines | 2 | 6 | 2 | 43.5 | 53.5 |
| SA | | Motor U/W | 1 | 2.5 | | | 3.5 |
| TD | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No of EE | | | 23 | 25 | 29 | 25 | |
| Qterly total | | | 33.5 | 34.5 | 29.5 | 78.5 | |
| Yrly total | | | | | | | 176 |

# Appendix 4 - 2002 Master Sheet

| Name of EE | Age | Dept | Jan-Mar | Apr-June | July-Sept | Oct-Dec | Indv Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| BD | | Commercial | 1 | 2 | | | 3 |
| BA | <25 | Claim | 3.5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 7.5 |
| BB | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BC | <25 | Motor U/W | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| CT | | Commercial | 2 | 0 | | | 2 |
| CM | | Claim | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| CF | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 5 | 4.5 | 6.5 | 16 |
| CA | | Claim | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DC | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| DM | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DS | <25 | P/Lines | 5 | 2 | 3.5 | 7.5 | 18 |
| FP | <25 | Reception | 3 | 2.5 | 5 | | 10.5 |
| FK | | Commercial | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| FG | <25 | Commercial | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| GL | <25 | Motor U/W | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2.5 | 11.5 |
| LR | | Motor U/W | 2 | 0 | 1.5 | 0 | 3.5 |
| LM | <25 | P/Lines | 3.5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9.5 |
| LM | | Reception | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| MV | <25 | Commercial | 1 | 2.5 | | | 3.5 |
| MP | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 45 | 0 | 45 |
| OHJ | | P/Lines | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ONC | | P/Lines | 4 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 9 |
| ONL | | P/Lines | 4 | | | | 4 |
| OSP | | P/Lines | | | 0 | 9 | 9 |
| RA | | P/Lines | 33 | | | | 33 |
| TD | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No of EE | | | 24 | 20 | 20 | 18 | |
| Qtrly total | | | 66 | 27 | 72.5 | 32.5 | |
| Yrly Total | | | | | | | 198 |

# Appendix 5 - 2003 Master Sheet

| Name of EE | Age | Dept | Jan-Mar | Apr-June | July-Sept | Oct-Dec | Indv Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 15 | 15 | 20 | 20 | |
| AJ | | Motor U/W | | | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| BE | | Commercial | | | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| BA | | Claims | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| BB | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 | 1.5 |
| CJ | <25 | Motor U/W | | | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| CM | | Claims | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CA | | Commercial | | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CJ | <25 | Motor U/W | | | 7.5 | 5 | 12.5 |
| CF | | Motor U/W | 1.5 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 6.5 |
| DC | | Claims | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| DM | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DS | <25 | P/Lines | 2 | 6 | 14 | 12.5 | 34.5 |
| GL | | Motor U/W | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| LR | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| LM | | Reception | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| MK | <25 | P/Lines | 0 | 5 | 1 | | 6 |
| MP | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| OHJ | | P/Lines | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| ONC | | P/Lines | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| SC | <25 | P/Lines | | | | 0 | 0 |
| TD | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No of EE | | | 15 | 15 | 20 | 20 | |
| Qrtly Total | | | 7.5 | 23 | 29 | 32 | |
| Yrly Total | | | | | | | 91.5 |

# Appendix 6 - 2004 Master Sheet

| Name of EE | Age | Dept | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | July-Sep | Oct-Dec | Indv |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| AJ | | Commercial | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BE | | Commercial | 2.5 | 3 | 0 | | 5.5 |
| BK | <25 | IT | | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| BA | | Claims | 2 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 7 |
| BD | <25 | P/Lines | | | | 0 | 0 |
| BB | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| BS | | Claims | | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CJ (F) | <25 | Motor U/W | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| CM | | Claims | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| CA | | Commercial | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| CJ | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 3 | 2.5 | 1 | 6.5 |
| CF | | Motor U/W | 4 | 1.5 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 9.5 |
| CJ | | P/Lines | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| DC | | Claims | 1 | 0 | | | 1 |
| DM | | Motor U/W | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 2.5 |
| FG | | Commercial | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| GL | | Motor U/W | 4 | 1 | 0 | | 5 |
| LR | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 | 1.5 |
| LM | | Reception | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| MP | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ME | | Marketing | | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| NS | | P/Lines | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| OHJ | | P/Lines | 0 | 1.5 | 0.5 | 0 | 2 |
| ONC | | P/Lines | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2.5 | 3.5 |
| OR | | Motor U/W | | | | 0 | 0 |
| PN | | P/Lines | | | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| RA | | Motor U/W | | | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| SC | <25 | P/Lines | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TD | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No of EE | | | 21 | 24 | 26 | 25 | |
| Qtly total | | | 19.5 | 14 | 15 | 22 | |
| Yrly total | | | | | | | 70.5 |

# Appendix 7 - 2005 Master Sheet

| Name of EE | Age | Dept | Jan-Mar | Apr-June | July-Sept | Oct-Dec | Indv Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| AJ | | Commercial | 3 | 0 | | | 3 |
| BK | <25 | IT | 2 | 0 | | | 2 |
| BA | | Claims | 2 | 1 | | | 3 |
| BD | <25 | P/Lines | 1 | | | | 1 |
| BB | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| BS | | Claims | 2 | 0 | | | 2 |
| CJ(F) | <25 | Motor U/W | 0 | 1.5 | | | 1.5 |
| CM | | Claims | 1 | 0 | | | 1 |
| CA | | Commercial | 1 | 0 | | | 1 |
| CJ | <25 | Commercial | 2 | 1 | | | 3 |
| CJ | | P/Lines | 1 | 0 | | | 1 |
| DM | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| FG | | Commercial | 2 | 0 | | | 2 |
| GT | | P/Lines | | 1 | | | 1 |
| LR | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| LM | | Reception | 2 | | | | 2 |
| L S | | Reception | | 0 | | | 0 |
| ME | | Marketing | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| ML | | Motor U/W | 1.5 | 0.5 | | | 2 |
| OHJ | | P/Lines | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| ONC | | P/Lines | 2 | 0.75 | | | 2.75 |
| OR | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| OSE | | Motor U/W | 3 | 1 | | | 4 |
| PN | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| RA | | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| SC | <25 | Commercial | 2 | 0 | | | 2 |
| TD | | Accounts | 0 | 0 | | | 0 |
| No of EE | | | 25 | 25 | | | |
| Qtly Total | | | 27.5 | 6.75 | | | |
| 6 Monthly total | | | | | | | 34.25 |

# Appendix 8 - 2002 Master Sheet Departmental Analysis

| Name | Department | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sept | Oct-Dec | Indv Total | Average severity loss time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BB | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| TD | Accounts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | 0% |
| BA | Claims | 3.5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 7.5 | |
| CM | Claims | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | |
| CA | Claims | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| | | **3.5** | **3** | **3** | **0** | **9.5** | 1.39% |
| BD | Commercial | 1 | 2 | | | 3 | |
| CT | Commercial | 2 | 0 | | | 2 | |
| FK | Commercial | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | |
| FG | Commercial | 0 | 0 | | | 0 | |
| MV | Commercial | 1 | 2.5 | | | 3.5 | |
| | | **6** | **4.5** | **0** | **1** | **11.5** | 1.36% |
| BC | Motor U/W | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | |
| CF | Motor U/W | 0 | 5 | 4.5 | 6.5 | 16 | |
| DC | Motor U/W | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | |
| DM | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| GL | Motor U/W | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2.5 | 11.5 | |
| LR | Motor U/W | 2 | 0 | 1.5 | 0 | 3.5 | |
| MP | Motor U/W | 0 | 0 | 45 | 0 | 45 | |
| | | **4** | **13** | **56** | **9** | **82** | 5.14% |
| DS | P/Lines | 5 | 2 | 3.5 | 7.5 | 18 | |
| LM | P/Lines | 3.5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9.5 | |
| OHJ | P/Lines | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| ONC | P/Lines | 4 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 9 | |
| ONL | P/Lines | 4 | | | | 4 | |
| OSP | P/Lines | | | 0 | 9 | 9 | |
| RA | P/Lines | 33 | | | | 33 | |
| | | **49.5** | **4** | **7.5** | **21.5** | **82.5** | 6.59% |
| FP | Reception | 3 | 2.5 | 5 | | 10.5 | |
| LM | Reception | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| | | **3** | **2.5** | **6** | **1** | **12.5** | 4.17% |

# Appendix 9 – Absence policy

ARB Group,
STAFF MANUAL
Section 2.4 Page 1
Date of issue: 01.01.03

## 2.4 SICKNESS

*General policy*

It is your responsibility to look after your health and ensure as far as you can that you are fully fit for work during working hours.

*Notifying the office*

If you are away from work because you are ill you must inform the office - normally your manager – during the first day of the absence, not after 10.00am. You should say what the general nature of the illness is and when you hope to return to work. In cases of prolonged absence you should contact the office at least each week.

*Paid sick leave*

There is no statutory requirement on employers in general to provide sick pay. Paid sick leave is not to be regarded as an additional leave allowance and may only be claimed for genuine illness or medical treatment. Payment during time off sick/injury will only be made if all the procedures set out here are properly observed. (In any case payment for sick leave will limited as follows:-

| **Length of Service** | **Paid Sick/Injury Leave** |
|---|---|
| 0 to 2 years | 1 Weeks Certified |
| 2 years and over | 26 Weeks Certified |

The employee must at all times obtain a Certificate of Sick/Injury from their GP and complete and return to the Social Welfare Department. On receipt of payment from Social Welfare the employee is required to forward copies of cheques to the Payroll Manager who will process these payments in your next salary. If the employee does not complete this procedure the standard Social Welfare Payment will be deducted automatically from their next payroll payment.

*Doctor's certificates and self-completion notes*

For any absence over two days, the Company requires to have a Doctor's Certificate(s) authorising the whole absence. This should be posted to the HR Manager as soon as it is available, and should reach the HR Manager no later than one week after the beginning of the absence. For any absence of two days or less, a doctor's certificate is not compulsory but only a total of 3 days uncertified sick leave will be paid in any given year. Furthermore, for any uncertified sick days you are required to give the HR Manager a Self Completion Sickness Report (see over) stating the general nature of your illness. All records of sickness are placed on your personnel file and will be treated as confidential. Continuous uncertified leave is considered unacceptable by the Company. The Company can insist on a medical certificate for any given individual absent due to illness whether they are due to be paid or not.

*Health problems*

If you have any persistent health problems affecting your work you should inform the HR Manager. The Directors may in some cases need to make direct enquiries of your Doctor or may ask you to have medical checks arranged by the company. You will be informed of any such requirements in advance.

*Medical records and drugs*

If you have any special conditions of which we should be aware, or are taking any drugs that might affect medical treatment in an emergency, please ensure that this information is recorded on your personal file.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

To: HR Manager

Date:

ARB Underwriting Ltd — Self completion sickness advice note

Sick Leave claim - Self completion report for all absences under 2 days (to be passed to Personnel Manager on return to work)

Name :

Date(s) of absence :

Week No :

Week beginning :

Hours claimed :

1. Please indicate the general nature of the illness:

2. Was a doctor consulted, and if so who?

Signed: Date:

Note: For absences over 2 days or for any fourth day yearly absence, a Doctor's Certificate must be submitted.

## Appendix 10- E-mail Change in reporting

----- Original Message -----

**From:** Mark Clair

**To:** everyone@arb.ie

**Sent:** Wednesday, August 13, 2003 12:14 PM

**Subject:** Re : Illness

Dear All,

Can I ask you all to note that if you are away from work due to illness you must inform me no later than 10:00 am on the first day of your absence. In the event that I'm not available please notify Betty. As outlined in your Staff Manual I will need to know what the general nature of your illness is and when you are likely to return to work. In cases of prolonged absence I would ask you to contact me at least each week.

As you are aware, for any absence over two days, the Company will require a Doctor's Certificate(s), authorising the entire absence. For any absence of two days or less, a Doctors certificate is not compulsory but only a total of 3 days uncertified sick leave will be paid in any given year.

Please remember that the Company can insist on a medical certificate for any given individual absent due to illness whether they are to be paid or not.

Can I also remind you that you must at all times obtain a Certificate of Sick/Injury from your GP for completion and same should be returned to the Social Welfare Department. All staff members who are entitled to disability benefits under the Social Welfare or any other schemes should ensure that all such benefits are claimed. Benefits must be claimed if you are out of the office for more than three consecutive days.

This e - mail should be read in conjunction with section 2.4 of your Staff Manual.

Regards,

Mark

## Appendix 11 – Question Semi Structured Interview

1. How long have you been with the company now ?

2. Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times ? ( Allow to talk freely)

**Pre policy implementation**

3. Can you describe how we traditionally handled absenteeism ? ( prompt - from phoning in , number of days allowed without a cert, recording methods, payment )

4. Why do you think it became a problem ? ( Ad hoc, no procedures, young staff, inexperienced line managers - no interest / lack of training / friendships = culture)

5. Did we do anything to make it worse ? (Didn't deal with the problem / record keeping , bonus to all , didn't use probation period to deal with issues, recruitment of young staff )

6. Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business ? ( Allow to talk freely)

6a Would you be able to give an example. (Allow to talk freely)

7 .Do you think it was a problem in all departments or just some ? (Allow to talk freely)

7a. Why do you think that was ? (size of dept, role of manager, age profile)

**Post policy implementation**

8. How would you describe the process now ? ( prompt - from reporting in , recording methods, certification, bonus affected, disciplinary, payment , recruitment , interviews, induction - presentation of staff manual , use of probationary period. )

9. What was your own feeling about the new procedures ? (Allow to talk freely)

10. How do you think others felt ? (Allow to talk freely)

11. Do you think it has had any other consequences ? (Allow to talk freely)

12. What difference had it made, if any, to staff and the company ? ( prompt – overall morale , service levels)

12a. Can you offer any examples ? (Allow to talk freely)

13. Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now ?

14. Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments ?

# APPENDIX 12 - Interview Respondent 1

Interview 27th June 2005 at 10am in back office.

First of all can I thank you for participating in my research.

Can I just remind you that I'm researching the effectiveness of an absence management policy implemented by the company. There are no right or wrong answers but what I would ask is that you give truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation.

*Q1. How long have you been with the company now?*

Respondent 1 has been working for the company for at least 6 years.

*Q2. Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times ?*

It appeared that it wasn't a problem when I first joined the company but in saying that there was no awareness created, by that I mean there was no one really responsible for HR issues when I started and no one was reprimanded.

**Pre Policy implementation**

*Q3. Can you describe the procedure then ?*

There was no designated person to phone. It was a case of getting your parents or sister to phone the office and leave a message with the reception or whoever answered. I was never asked for details of my sickness or when I would be back. There was no obligation to call back at any point.

*Q 3a. Was a cert required ?*

I was never asked for a cert.

*Q3b. At that time can you remember if there was an allocation of days when a cert was required. ?*

I think it was if you were out for 3 continuous days you needed a cert other than that there was no limit to the number of individuals days you could take without a cert. With the 3 continuous, there was no pressure to get one if you forgot to get it , it didn't really matter , you still got paid.

*Q4. When do you think absenteeism became a problem ?*

I think when we moved out to Rathfarnham in 1999. The company began to grow slowly and we had a lot of local staff who were quite young. I think some managers were to blame, one in particular was laid back about it.

*Q4a. Why do you think that was ?*

It was a case that he was friends with most of the staff and probably found it awkward or perhaps he didn't know what to say or what to ask when people phoned in . Anyway it seemed to me that he never questioned it .

*Q5. Did we do anything to make the situation worse ?*

We didn't do anything at all that was part of the problem. People were made permanent and then at Christmas time we would all get our 4% bonus.

*Q5a Even those who has poor records during the year ?*

Yes. Whether you were never sick or 20 day sick you still got the full bonus along with a pay review.

*Q6.Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business*

For those of us who were pretty good at coming into work it was very demoralising I have my own standards but I'm sure people took advantage when they could because they knew they weren't going to get punished

*Q6a Would you be able to give any examples ?*

I know we had a bad situation upstairs. That department took about 80% of the calls and had a relatively small number of people. So when one person was out it put every one under strain. Because they do travel insurance certain times of the year were busier than others. On the busier occasions I remember Solicitors telling me that they had problems getting through and messages weren't being passed on. I think the volume of calls was so high and with the lack of staff the switch couldn't cope. I know complaints were also made to the Directors and people complained about our service.

*Q6b How about within you own department ?*

Well I don't think absenteeism was a major problem but on those occasions I would have to reschedule settlement meetings, that was a problem sometimes and of course because it was a two man department my own work would get neglected and the day would be quite pressurised.

*Q7 Do you think absenteeism was a problem in all departmens ?*

It wasn't in ours but it seemed to be more of a problem in our motor department and personal lines brokers.

*Q7a Why do you think that was ?*

Managers being friendly with staff and not wanting to or unable to address the issue. Also the second in command was a persistent offender and certainly wasn't a role model. I think upstairs there was no manger as such which didn't help and again a more senior member was an offender .

**Post policy implementation**

*Q8 How would to describe the process now ?*

Staff have to phone the HR Manager themselves by 10am. I think at one stage people could phone their managers or no. 2 but people were abusing this. The HR Manager will ask us whats wrong and when we'll be back. He'll also ask if there are any work issues that need to be followed up on and if need be he'll that person through to the section manager. From my own experience if I can't say I'll be in the next day I am asked to phone in with an update. I'm also reminded of the number of uncertified days I have taken. We are allowed 3 individual uncertified days within a year and when you are sick two days in a row and are likely to be out on the third day a cert is required.

*Q8a Are you paid when you are out ?*

If you don't produce a cert when you need one, you get stopped and you have to apply to social welfare al the time.

*Q9 What were your feelings about the new procedures ?*

I would say it was quite positive, it didn't affect me too much. I think it was a good idea and was fair , people knew were they stood and new things were being handled consistently.

*Q10 How do you think other felt ?*

Naturally those who complained were the ones who were the worse offenders and tried to undermine it but those people are gone .

*Q11 Do you think it has had any other consequences ?*

I can't think of any. Ironically the worse offenders had good experience but they have been replaced by people with better attitudes and there experience is just as good .

*Q12 What difference has it made, if any, to staff and the company ?*

I think staff agree that's its fair. Compared to previous years more staff have left but the morale is much better and we have good staff in all departments. There doesn't appear to be anyone with a poor records perhaps one or two but you're always going to get that. I think also Managers are more comfortable and liase with the HR Manager more. They are told when there are problems and deal with it, if need be, but I don't think there are major problems now.

*Q12a Can you offer any examples ?*

I think our overall our image and service has improved. We don't have the same problems I mentioned before about the busy switch and morale is much better.

*Q13 Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now ?*

No. I would say that the level of absenteeism has fallen and that the manual has been the major influence. People know they won't get away with it, its that simple and none of the bad eggs are here now to influence new staff.

*Q14 Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments ?*

Yes I think so because the change has been so noticeable and I think this is down to enforcement.

*Q15. Would you like to add anything else ?*

No.

A brief summary given .

Thanks for your time .

Explanation as to what would be done with data and overall procedure in relation to thesis.

## APPENDIX 13 – Interview Respondent 2

Interview 30th June at 11am in back office.

First of all thank you for participating in my research.

I'm researching the effectiveness of an absence management policy implemented by the company. There are no right or wrong answers but what I would ask is that you give truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation.

*Q1 How long have you been with the company now?*

Respondent has been working with the company for almost 6 years. Since December 1999

*Q2 Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times?*

From the time I joined the company both absenteeism and lateness was a huge problem with no proper defined system in place to record same. Staff arrived typically between 10 to 20 minutes late and were often out sick in excess of 3 days with no Doctor's note provided. Social welfare payments were also not applied for and therefore were not deducted from salary.

**Pre policy implementation**

*Q3. Can you describe how we traditionally handled absenteeism?*

Traditionally employees would contact the office, i.e. Reception and advise that they would not be in on that day. No questions were asked (as the receptionist was not qualified or required) as to the nature of the illness or the length of expected time they would be absent from work.

*Q4. Why do you think it became a problem?*

Having come from a previous company which has proper reporting systems and procedures in place I felt it was necessary to put in place some procedures. Having discussed these issues with management I found that they too were unhappy with the status quo and the fault was purely that there were no personnel assigned to the role of timekeeping and absenteeism. Line manager in general did not appear to have any interest in performing these tasks.

The problem continued to grow with staff becoming increasingly disinterested in their jobs as a result of absenteeism in particular areas. Staff felt that they were expected to carry the weight of absenteeism unfairly.

*Q5. Did we do anything to make it worse?*

Didn't deal with the problem. Despite reports, timekeeping systems etc. daily, distributed to Line Managers no real action was taken. Although bonuses were reduced to penalize those that were consistently late and also those that had high levels of absenteeism the percentage of reduction in bonus did not have any direct effect. Senior management wanted the problem resolved but didn't follow through.

*Q5a why do you think that was?*

Didn't know how to do it, and what to do. I suppose part of it was that they were too focused on generating revenue

*Q6. Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business?*

Due to absenteeism the loss of manpower required additional efforts from staff. Staff moral was greatly affected and Customer Service was very poor. Our business depends on maintaining a high level of staff as most of our business is directed via the telephone.
There were times when staff had to work overtime resulting in increase costs.

*Q6a Would you be able to give an example.*

In areas where phones are the main source of business staff would be inundated with calls. Clients found it increasingly difficult to contact us resulting in loss of business

*Q7 .Do you think it was a problem in all departments or just some? 7a. Why do you think that was?*

The problem extended to the majority of departments, however there were some departments where the Line Managers were more effective in managing staff. There are also staff who would have a more moral approach to their work and therefore would not have had a high level of absenteeism

**Post policy implementation**

*Q8. How would you describe the process now?*

At interview stage, new potential employees where informed of the problems the company had in relation to absenteeism. They were also advised that consistent absenteeism would not be tolerated. Probationary periods were used to determine if new staff had problems and at the six month probationary reviews they were reminded of the rules and at times probationary periods were extended a further six months.

A direct result of the production of staff manual, which stated clearly the expectations of the management in relation to absenteeism, in tandem with clear payment structures and restricted payment for sick leave ensured that there was a marked improvement on the levels of absenteeism.

A staff memo issued sometime post introduction of the manual, reminding staff of their requirements to contact the office on the first day of illness, advising the HR Manager of their illness and how long they would be absent ensured that staff were fully aware of their responsibility.

Where staff had reached the limit of pay during illness, and were appropriately deducted for days in excess of their limit also ensured that the levels of absenteeism remained low.

The Staff Manual also advised staff that they needed to claim social welfare. In situations where staff did not claim social welfare the appropriate amount was deducted from salary.

The recruitment of more experienced staff also ensured that staff joining the company had a high level of understanding and practices relating to illness/absenteeism.

*Q9. What was your own feeling about the new procedures?*

Having come from a professional environment and being familiar with employment law the introduction of both the Staff Manual, Employment of Experience Staff and the fact that the rules within the manual where applied, ensured that there was a smoother running of the business and staff moral increased.

*Q10. How do you think others felt?*

Difficult to assess. Staff who were abusing the sick leave have since left, which in itself proves that they were unhappy with the new regime and therefore not committed to either the company, their role within the company or the fellow workers.

Staff which were not affected by the new rules were happier that they were not being further burdened by absenteeism and were happier within their roles.

*Q11. Do you think it has had any other consequences?*

No. Other than those that were unhappy with the new system who have since left.

*Q12. What difference had it made, if any, to staff and the company?*

Overall the fact that absenteeism levels were reduced, staff moral was higher. Workloads were more evenly divided and management were happier. Loss of potential business was greatly improved.

*Q12a. Can you offer any examples?*

Apart from what I just mentioned

*Q13. Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now?*

No. The current staff has a more mature approach to their work and the company's expectation of them. The levels of absenteeism since the introduction of Staff Manuals, recording keeping, reduction in bonus and pay due to excess levels have hopefully resolved these issues.

*Q14. Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments?*

The more mature and experience staff would most likely have similar views.

*Q15. Would you like to add anything else?*

No.

A brief summary given.

Thanks for your time.

Explanation as to what would be done with data and overall procedure in relation to thesis.

# APPENDIX 14 – Interview Respondent 3

Interview 29th June 2005 at 10: 30 am in back office.

First of all can I thank you for participating in my research.

Can I just remind you that I'm researching the effectiveness of an absence management policy implemented by the company. There are no right or wrong answers but what I would ask is that you give truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation.

*Q1 How long have you been with the company now?*

Respondent 2 has been working for the company for 7 years.

*Q 2. Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times?*

When I started it was a problem but since the company procedures have been put in place I think it has improved.

**Pre policy implementation**

*Q3 Can you describe how we traditionally handled absenteeism?*

The person who was not coming in would ring the office and report that they were not coming in.

*Q3a Could you elaborate?. For instance what did you do when you were sick?.*

Well to be honest for 6 of the 7 years I have been working here I was never sick. One year I had to go to hospital for surgery and then rest for a few weeks, so I don't really know.

*Q4 Why do you think it became a problem?*

I think it became a problem as there was no control and you didn't have to get a Doctors note.

*Q5. Did we do anything to make the problem worse?*

We did by not looking for doctors' notes so therefore people felt they could stay out when they wanted. No one was pulling them up on how many sick days they were taking. What use to really annoy me was that it seemed to be the same people all the time and they would still get their bonus so you got no recognition for being in. just taken for granted and left to deal with the extra work.

*Q5a How did you feel about that?*

Well to be honest I said why bother what the point in making the special effort when I wasn't feeling in great.

*Q5b But your record as you said earlier was great?*

Yes, it was just annoying that people were getting away with it but I wouldn't stoop that low.

*Q6. Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business?*

Departments were put under pressure due to staff not turning up and became less efficient.

*Q6a Would you be able to give an example?*

In my own instance when the receptionist was sick, I had to go down and fill in. Unfortunately as far as I am concerned I did not have a choice on these occasions and my work was left undone. Because of that I would have to come in early the next morning to catch up or work late or through my lunch break with no extra pay. When items are paid on the accounts or policies have to be lapsed I could tell the Brokers I'm sorry but I did not have time this month to complete all my work as I was filling in for someone who was not well. Because I handle important accounts I feel also that my position was undermined by covering the switch.

*Q6b Can you explain that?*

Well I was asked by one of the Directors of a big broker I would deal with on an account did I get demoted because he phoned the switch looking for me and I was covering because M was supposedly sick.

*Q7 .Do you think it was a problem in all departments or just some?*

In some departments only.

*Q7a Why do you think that was?*

Generally in the larger sections because I don't think it was noticed as much and I think the manager in one of the departments was too friendly with his staff. Some of them were good friends with him, met for drinks over the weekend and I think he didn't want to be the bad guy so it went unchecked.

**Post policy implementation**

*Q 8 . How would you describe the process now?*

The process now is clearly outlined in the staff manual, I hope that doesn't sound smart. To elaborate when somebody phones in now they have to speak to HR and are asked to phone every day and a cert is required after 3 days. It s good because people know things are being monitored and something will be done. It's fair I think but it hasn't changed anything for me because I've always had a good record.

*Q 9. What was your feeling about the new procedures?*

I thought it was a very good idea. It stopped people taking days off whenever they felt like it.

*Q10 How do you think others felt?*

Most people felt the same I think. Yes I think most people would have said it was fair.

*Q11 Do you think it has had any other consequences?*
Yes even though it was a good procedure offender felt they were being watched.

*Q11a Surely that was good.?*

Yes I suppose it was and that probably made the difference.

*Q12. What difference has it made, if any, to staff and the company.*

Less absenteeism and a better feeling in the company, you can see it. There's no one dragging us down like before.

*Q12a Can you offer any examples?*

Fewer staff phoning in sick

*Q13. Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now?*

No

*Q14 Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments?*

Yes

*Q15. Would you like to add anything else?*

No but I'm sure when I'll leave the room I'll think of something else.

A brief summary given.

Thanks for your time.

Explanation as to what would be done with data and overall procedure in relation to thesis.

# APPENDIX 15 – Interview Respondent 4

Interview 28th June 2005 at 3pm in back office.

First of all can I thank you for participating in my research.

Can I just remind you that I'm researching the effectiveness of an absence management policy implemented by the company. There are no right or wrong answers but what I would ask is that you give truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation.

*Q1 How long have you been with the company now?*

Respondent 4 has been working with the company for the last 35years.

*Q2. Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times?*

I think absenteeism became a problem since ARB Underwriting was founded 11 years. Before then we were very small with 4 or 5 people at most and we all just got on with it. It was more close knit. We never had any procedures in the old days, we didn't need them.

**Pre policy implementation**

*Q3 Can you describe how we traditionally handled absenteeism?*

Employee phoned and was never told do's and don't, and there was never any pressure for a doctors note at all.

*Q3a We're you paid for been out sick?*

Yes even if you forgot to get a doctors note

*Q4 Why do you think it became a problem?*

I think it became a problem because staff grew, and one could see that no procedures were in place so in turn it became obvious that in turn absenteeism became a problem and we had a lot of young staff in their late teens early twenties who if they weren't out sick they'd be late, it was one or the other.

*Q5. Did we do anything to make the problem worse?*

In my view employees who had a good attendance were not rewarded any different that those who abused during the year.

*Q5a How did that make you feel?*

Worthless and taken for granted.

*Q6. Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business?*

It created I think a very low morale and tension as pressure was put on all staff to do extra work which sometimes meant that post or calls were not dealt with on a daily basis which created extra calls queries and delays.

*Q6a Would you be able to give an example?*

Well for example a customer sends in travel application for cover. This client is travelling within days. Post was not dealt with immediately due to absent staff, after 2 days client phones for papers which should have been processes and posted and now involves making apologies to an irate customer and faxing or making extra phone calls to redeem the situation.

What is usually said to the client on urgent travel is post it in , mark it urgent and it will be dealt with on the day received.

Another example would involve two people when the receptionist was sick.

*Q6b Explain that if you don't mind?*

Well employee 1 can do none of their work at all, and could be affected for more than 2 days.

Employee 2 is left to handle incoming post herself and distribute which involves more time due to no help and also must to relief work herself for employee 1.

*Q7 .Do you think it was a problem in all departments or just some?*

Some departments. The ones with more staff

*Q7a Why do you think that was?*
It may not have been noticed or felt as much as the 1 or 2 people departments like my own.

**Post policy implementation**

*Q8. How would you describe the process now?*

Very good.

Go on !

Well staff have to report in before 10am to HR of if not available Manager. They are told after 2 days that a cert is required. They are disciplined when numbers get out of

hand, I think we've used the disciplinary once or twice, certainly once anyway and the bonus is affected at the end of the year, which it wasn't before.

*Q9. What was your feeling about the new procedures?*

I've been with the company a long time now and there was a time when we didn't need procedures but the time was right and I was very happy to see it and it's fair.

*Q10. How do you think others felt?*

One or two couldn't believe it when the procedure came in and thought they would still get away with it but they didn't and I think it drove them out to be frank.

*Q11 Do you think it has had any other consequences?*

As I just mentioned some staff left using procedures as a reason, but these were constant abusers and company are well rid of them.

*Q12. What difference has it made, if any, to staff and the company.*

Presently staff are reluctant to abuse it because of procedures that is telephone calls, doctors certs, monitoring, deduction in bonus and therefore full staff in place.

*Q12a Can you offer any examples?*

From doing switch relief I sometimes overhear staff saying they were out and are dying with a hangover but came in because they didn't want to have to ring in. That wouldn't have happened before. We have a better group of people with some new blood which is good and I think we're on the up now.

*Q13. Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now?*

No not all, not compared to years ago.

*Q14 Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments?*

Yes I would say so.

*Q15. Would you like to add anything else?*
No that's it really.

A brief summary given.

Thanks for your time.

Explanation as to what would be done with data and overall procedure in relation to thesis.

# APPENDIX 16 – Interview Respondent 5

Interview 27th June 2005 at 2pm in back office

Firstly can I thank you for participating in my research.

Can I just remind you that I'm researching the effectiveness of an absence management policy implemented by the company. There are no right or wrong answers but what I would ask is that you give truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation.

*Q1 How long have you been with the company now?*

Respondent 2 has been working for the company for the last 8 years

*Q2. Do you think absenteeism was always a problem or just in recent times?*

I would say absenteeism is always there – it's a problem with certain people more than others. I wouldn't have said that it was a problem when I joined to ARB but it was a few years ago.

**Pre policy implementation**

*Q3 Can you describe how we traditionally handled absenteeism?*

Whenever I needed to call in sick I spoke to a manager but I know others didn't.

*Q3a Did you ever get someone else to phone in for you.*

My mother the odd time.

*Q3b. Was a Doctors cert required.*

When you were out for 3 or more days in a row you were supposed to have a cert but if you were out for one or two days you didn't need one.

*Q3c If you forgot to get a cert were you still paid?*

I think so, payment was never an issue for me, at most I was sick for 3 days and was always paid regardless.

*Q3d When you spoke to your Manager would he/she enquire as to the nature of the illness?*

I'm not sure, I'd probably tell them what was wrong with me.

*Q 4 Why do you think it became a problem?*

I think it became a problem when certain members of staff were recruited who really didn't respect their position or the company. They had what I'd describe as 'a chip on their shoulder' and when challenged over their work etc they had the attitude that the company could shove their job and as a result reward themselves with a few sick days off. In my opinion it only takes one person to take this attitude and the rest will follow suit.

*Q5. Did we do anything to make the problem worse?*

To a certain extent the problem was with only few people but these offenders were not pulled up on firstly the amount of sick days they had, and secondly when management knew that the offenders were not sick and were overheard discussing what they were planning on doing or what they had done on their sick day nothing was ever said by management. Granted it's impossible to prove however I felt that the offender should have been made aware that management had their suspicions, which would have perhaps made the offender think twice about repeating their actions.

*Q6. Can you describe the affects it had on staff and the business?*

As I already mentioned for those who are easily led they followed suit. For others I don't think it bothered them apart from the extra workload they had as a result of it.

*Q6a Would you be able to give an example.*

A certain person was seen driving not too far from the office who was 'out sick' – nothing was ever said. It was a joke to be honest and probably encouraged others.

*Q 6b Is that person still employed here?*

No she left soon after the procedures were brought in.

*Q6c What about the business, can you give an example?*

Well because we're quite a small company when one or two people are out especially in the smaller sections it means those that were in were always on the phone and found it difficult to ring back and complaints were made. I know Brokers use to give out about not being able to get through and when they did were on hold for ages.

*Q6d Do you think we lost business because of this?*

Yes I would say so. In fact one or two Brokers would have told me that they were bringing their business somewhere else that they had spent half the morning trying to get through.

*Q7 .Do you think it was a problem in all departments or just some?*

Just some.

*Q7a. Why do you think that was?*

Two particular offenders in one department started it and the rest followed suit even new staff. The manager didn't seemed too concerned either.

**Post policy implementation**

*Q8. How would you describe the process now?*

The system is much better now. You have to phone the HR Manager and give him details of you complaints. If you are not sure you'll be in the next day, he'll ask you to ring for an update and will remind you if you'll need a cert. We are stricter on doctors' certs, not like before and you are allowed 3 days without a cert and 2 days in a row requires a cert for the next day. Once you have 3 non certified days any day after that the company requires a cert even if it's for one day. I know the younger staff had a problem with that I would come in rather than pay the Doctors fee. There would be nothing wrong with them any way just suffering from the night before A few of the girls had told me when the new procedures came out that they wouldn't be enforced and even if they were they would continued the way they use to. I think when we stated having to ring the HR manager it was off putting to those who are not truthfully ill.

*Q8a Before you said you got paid, is that still the case now?*

I know form speaking to some of the others, if you don't get a cert when you've been at the doctor or if you just don't go when you've should have you don't get paid. The company also insist on you asking the doctor for a social welfare form.

*Q9. What was your feeling about the new procedures?*

I welcomed it – it was time something was done because morale was so bad.

*Q10. How do you think others felt?*

For those who only ever call in sick when they are really sick like me, it made no odds for those who weren't it was off putting

*Q11 Do you think it has had any other consequences?*

No – if you really are sick there's nothing to feel guilty about that's the way I see it. The only people who find it a negative thing are those who abuse sick days but most of them have left.

*Q12. What difference has it made, if any, to staff and the company.*

Its made a difference to those who can no longer call in sick willy nilly – it's a positive for the company and there is a better atmosphere for sure.

*Q12a. Can you offer any examples?*

Afraid not

*Q13. Do you think absenteeism is a problem for the company now?*

As I said before there will always be some element of absenteeism however I don't think it's abused as it once was.

*Q14 Do you think your views would be typical of others who have experienced both environments?*

Very much so.

*Q15. Would you like to add anything else?*

No, that all I can think of.

A brief summary given.

Thanks for your time.

Explanation as to what would be done with data and overall procedure in relation to thesis.

## APPENDIX 16a– Initial letter to sample

23rd June 2005

Private & Confidential

Dear

As you are aware I am researching the effectiveness of the absence policy introduced by the company in January 2003. To achieve this I need to obtain information from staff who have been with the company since at least January 2001 so that I can give a true account of conditions both pre and post policy implementation. As it would appear that there are only a small number of staff who fall into this category, (6 excluding John and Cathal), I would very much appreciate your assistance.

I intend to obtain information through semi structured interviews, which should last 30 / 45 minutes and these will take place week beginning 27th June. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, but what I would ask is that you give a truthful portrayal of how things were in the company both before and after policy implementation. If you need any further details before deciding please give me call.

Your contribution would be greatly appreciated but please don't feel under any obligation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in anticipation,

Mark

# APPENDIX 17 – Departmental Analysis 2003 -2005

**Table 1. 2003 Departmental Analysis –Accounts**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 3 | 2 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.44 | |
| 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.88 | 0.33 |

**Table 2. 2004 Departmental Analysis -Accounts**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.07 | 0.77 |

**Table 3. 2005 Departmental Analysis – Accounts**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 4. 2003 Departmental Analysis –Claims**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2.34 | |
| 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 0.58 | |
| 4 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0.73 |

**Table 5. 2004 Departmental Analysis -Claims**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 1.75 | |
| 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | |
| 3 | 6 | 9 | 3.51 | |
| 3 | 1 | 10 | 0.58 | 1.46 |

**Table 6. 2005 Departmental Analysis – Claims**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 2.92 | |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 0.58 | 1.75 |

**Table 7. 2003 Departmental Analysis –Commercial**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 | | | | |
| 2 | 0 | | | | |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.88 | |
| 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.44 |

**Table 8. 2004 Departmental Analysis -Commercail**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 2.05 | |
| 4 | 3 | 6.5 | 1.32 | |
| 4 | 0 | 6.5 | 0 | |
| 3 | 1 | 7.5 | 0.58 | 0.99 |

**Table 9. 2005 Departmental Analysis – Commercial**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 3.51 | |
| 2 | 5 | 1 | 11 | 0.35 | 1.93 |

**Table 10. 2003 Departmental Analysis –Reception**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1.75 | |
| 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 7.01 | |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 5.26 | |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 3.51 | 4.38 |

**Table 11. 2004 Departmental Analysis -Reception**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 1 | 2 | 2 | 3.50 | |
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 1.75 | |
| 1 | 2 | 5 | 3.50 | 2.19 |

**Table 12. 2005 Departmental Analysis – Reception**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3.50 | |
| 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1.75 |

**Table 12. 2004 Departmental Analysis Analysis –IT Marketing**

| Quarters | No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days absent per qtr | Severi-ty rate per qtr (%) | Av. severi ty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.87 | |
| 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0.87 | 0.58 |

**Table 14. 2005 Departmental -IT Marketing**

| No of EE | No of days abs. | Cumu-lative no of days abs. per qtr | Seve-rity rate per qtr (%) | Av. seve-rity rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.75 | |
| 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0.88 |

# Appendix 18 – Age Analysis 2003 – 2005

**Table 1. Age Analysis 2003**

| Quarter | No of EE | Staff under 25 | Under 25s as a % of staff per qtr | Yearly % if staff under 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 15 | 2 | 13 | |
| 2 | 15 | 2 | 13 | |
| 3 | 20 | 4 | 20 | |
| 4 | 20 | 4 | 20 | 17 |

**Table 2. Age Analysis 2004**

| No of EE | Staff under 25 | Under 25s as a % of staff per qtr | Yearly % if staff under 25 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 21 | 4 | |
| 2 | 24 | 4 | |
| 3 | 26 | 4 | |
| 4 | 25 | 5 | 18 |

**Table 3. Age Analysis 2005**

| Quarter | No of EE | Staff under 25 | Under 25s as a % of staff per qtr | Yearly % if staff under 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 25 | 5 | 20 | |
| 2 | 25 | 4 | 16 | 18 |

# Appendix 19 – Q.8 Respondents Summary

| | Resp 1 | Resp 2 | Resp 3 | Resp 4 | Resp 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q8 Describe the process** | | | | | |
| Reporting | Q8. HR Manager by 10am. One stage could phone managers or no 2 but this was being abused..ask whats wrong and when we'll be back.. Also ask on any work issues to be followed up on… reminded of no. of uncertified days taken. | Q8 .. production of staff manual clearly stated th expectations of the managemen t in relation to absenteeism . Memo issued post introduction reminding staff of their requirement s | Q8. Process clearly defined and outlined in staff manual… when somebody phones in now they have to speak to HR and asked to phone every day and a cert is required after 3 days | Q8 .. Report in before 10 am to HR or if not avaialble Manager .. | Q8 The system is much better now. You have to phone the HR Manager and give him details of you complaints. If you are not sure you'll be in the next day, he'll ask you to ring for an update and will remind you if you'll need a cert. |
| **Certificati on / procedures** | Q8 3 individual uncertified days within year.. 2 or more days in a row a cert is required. | | | Q8 2 days a cert is required | Q8 Stricter on certs. Allowed 3 days without a cert and 2 days in a row requires a cert for the next day. After that company requires a cert event if its for one day |