How to operationalise your HR policies in support of your business

Stephen Cowburn

(O) 020 8946 8734

(M) 07974 425 361

Stephen.cowburn@lgba.co.uk

stephencowburn@thehrc.co.uk

How to operationalise your HR policies in support of your business

Background

Legally employees must have a grievance and disciplinary procedure to refer to. Most employers use ones provided by ACAS or policies from their previous employer. This is fine but thought needs to be given as to where they are stored for this easy access. When an employer then thinks further there are some other policies that may be useful to incorporate at the same time. These are summarised in the appendix. All the policies are usually then put together in a staff handbook.

Your style

Business owners and entrepreneurs obviously have the common goal of wanting their business to succeed. The difference lies in how this is to be achieved. One extreme might be someone who is very driven and may be very controlling and directive in how tasks are to be achieved. There is potentially scope for disagreement and people getting fed up with being told what to do all the time.

At the other extreme is someone who is very laid back and, although clear on the business goals, is more open to others' views and has a more laissez-faire approach. There is scope in this situation for different people to make the rules up as they go along causing confusion when there is disagreement.

Neither style is right or wrong – it is what it is. The handbook needs to reflect the owners' style or it will constantly jar in the day-to-day operation.

A pragmatic first step

You may want to have a few basic policies in place before committing to a full handbook. If that is the case, we would suggest you start with the following policies and then build up over time:

- Absence
- Discipline
- Grievance
- IT
- Leave

These cover the core operational issues you are likely to encounter in the early days. Once the business is established and you better know the issues you are coming up against, you can add additional policies.

An important legal note

A staff handbook is a written collection and summary of your company's policies, procedures and practices. It is designed to answer employee questions on your procedures and helps with consistency as employees know that they will be treated in the same way. Generally, if you want to make changes to the handbook, you don't need to consult with staff, so long as you are not changing their terms and conditions. This is different from making changes in staff terms and conditions which are enshrined in the contract of employment. Any changes made in a contract need to be agreed with staff generally, or an individual specifically. Variation to contractual terms without agreement could result in a breach of contract and a potential constructive dismissal claim. Staff handbooks will stipulate that unless otherwise indicated, policies and procedures contained in them do not form part of the terms of contract.

Where to keep the policies?

The policies need to be accessible by all staff so they, as well as you, know what to do. If all staff have access to a computer then the best place is to keep a PDF version on a shared drive. This makes it easy to update and everyone is looking at the most up-to-date document.

If you have staff working on a production line or other manual roles then you probably need a printed version given to everyone or, at the very least, available in the staff room. The version needs to be clearly marked so that it is clear that the most recent version is being followed.

The whole shebang

Our experience is that once business owners have decided that a staff handbook is relevant, they tend to go for the full handbook immediately, even when the numbers of staff are less than 10. Handbooks can easily end up to be 70 pages long but owners feel that there is security in knowing that there are rules and that these need to be applied consistently.

What to do next

You need certain policies so why not start with a small handbook and build up. If you are not sure why not get in contact with us? Aletrnatively why not book on our bespoke employee documentation workshop and let us review your employment contracts at the same time so that you have the foundations of your employment proposition firmly in place.

Appendix

Most common policies checklist

Policy	Typical contents	When appropriate
Absence Management	Attendance/timekeeping Unauthorised absence Notification of absence procedure Certification Payment during sickness absence Accident/injury pay	As soon as start employing staff
Benefits	Pension provision (SMEs impacted with auto-enrolment) Life cover Company cars Income protection Health cover Share options Eye testing	Where have reached a size where offering a range of benefits and so keep all information in one place
Bribery (see Gifts and Hospitality below)		
Bullying and Harassment		More likely to be needed when the organisation gets bigger and management is distributed so scope for differences increase. Depends on senior manager management style.
Capability policy	Differentiating between performance due to ill-health and lack of capability. Steps a company will take	When staff numbers have increased and length of service has increased such that capability likely to be more of an issue
Conduct and appearance	Standards of performance and behaviour	As soon as start employing staff
Discipline	Principles Procedure Offences which will result in disciplinary action Gross misconduct Appeals Investigations Hearings	As soon as start employing staff
Equal opportunities	Start with a general statement regarding equal opportunities in recruitment, promotion opportunities and training to be added to as the organisation increases in	May want a general statement that all staff considered equally. More detailed policy

	size.	when company has grown and potential to treat people unequally.
Expenses	Approval and payment procedure Travel, meals, hotels Entertaining	As soon as start employing staff
Gifts and hospitality	Acceptable value of gifts Acceptable levels of hospitality Procedure for clarifying acceptability	Where sales and customer service is widely distributed across many staff.
Grievance	What an employee needs to do to raise a grievance and how the company will respond.	As soon as start employing staff
Hours of work	Core hours Scope for flexibility and rules surrounding this Overtime Time off in lieu	As soon as start employing staff
IT/communications	Standards of behaviour/appropriate use Company access to systems Use of personal devices Security Use of email/internet Installation of software Personal telephone calls Impact of breaches	As soon as start employing staff
Leave	Holiday procedure Compassionate leave Time off for dependents Jury/witness duty Medical/dental appointments Parental leave Unpaid leave Maternity/paternity leave Territorial army	As soon as start employing staff
Payment of salaries	Method and frequency of payments Pay discrepancies Bonus scheme arrangements Holiday pay Salary review Deductions from pay	As soon as start employing staff
Performance management	Policy on appraisal Training and development Salary reviews	When moving to next stage of growth
Personal data	Where records kept Security Responsibility for updating personal data	As soon as start employing staff
Smoking policy	No smoking in public areas inc cars Location of smoking areas	As soon as start employing staff
Social media	Use of social media at work and in personal life	Depends on age profile of employees and

	Monitoring usage	extent of work experience
Termination of employment	Notice periods Redundancy Retirement	As soon as start employing staff
Training costs	Clawback arrangements in the event of leaving within a certain time of the course completion	Less likely in the early days of a company. More likely when company has reached a critical mass and cost of formal training is potentially high
Visitors and strangers	Procedure and rules	As soon as start employing staff
Whistleblowing	Examples of malpractice Procedure for reporting	Where a diverse workforce in terms of nationalities (and so scope for cultural differences) or have business in the public sector