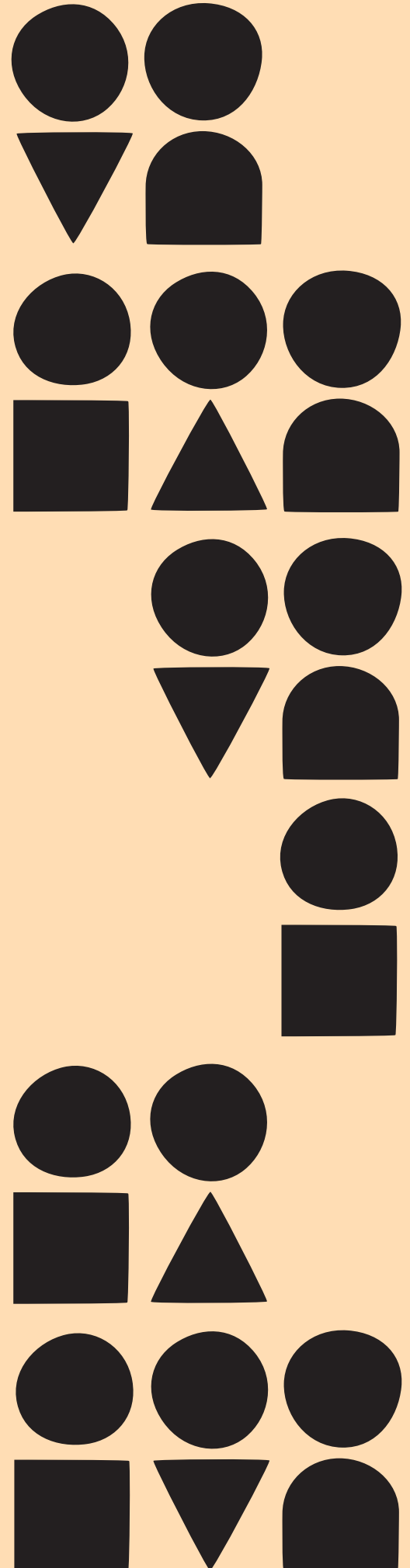


# Absence management: the principles, practice and payback.

With case study examples.



# What is absence management?

**Absence management is a means by which employers can minimise the business impact when employees unexpectedly need time off work for illness, injury, or other unplanned reasons such as travel disruption or caring for a dependant.**

‘But everybody needs time off work?’, you might say; ‘Why try to manage something that’s inevitable?’

Well, yes, most of us do need time off (70% of UK workers each year), but with the right processes, systems, and support in place, it’s proven that employers can make a positive difference to metrics like absence rate, duration of absence, and the likelihood of repeat absences.

Once you have the data to understand the nature and extent of your absence problem, there are countless and wide-ranging business benefits you can effect. Without that measurability, however, businesses risk untargeted investment in employee support initiatives, with little means of charting their effectiveness.

Few employers realise the broader benefits of absence management, though, or even that processes exist that go beyond simply ‘recording’ absence for the purposes of payroll. Perhaps that’s why it’s not yet as recognised a concept as, say, Occupational Health. But the significant number of employees who report absence each year (remember, that’s 7 in 10 of us) mean it can be a much more powerful tool for identifying and tackling the wellbeing issues affecting people than ‘go-to’ services like employee assistance programmes (EAPs), which typically engage fewer than 11% of your workforce.

\* GoodShape, 2022.

\*\* ‘Financial return on EAPs 2020: How Does Your Organisation Compare?’, Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA).

# 70%

**of UK workers need unplanned time off work each year\*.**

**But, at the most, only**

# 11%

**of employees engage with ‘go-to’ support services, such as EAPs\*\*.**



# How does absence management work?

**At its core, absence management involves employees informing their employer that, unexpectedly, they will not be able to attend work for a period of time. The employer is then in a position to take steps to mitigate how that absence will impact their business in terms of productivity, risk, cost, and more.**

Organisations' approaches to managing absence vary wildly, as does the effectiveness of their processes.

Some employers still rely on spreadsheet-based systems, whereby employees contact their manager at the busy start of a shift, who then manually records basic absence details such as reason and expected duration.

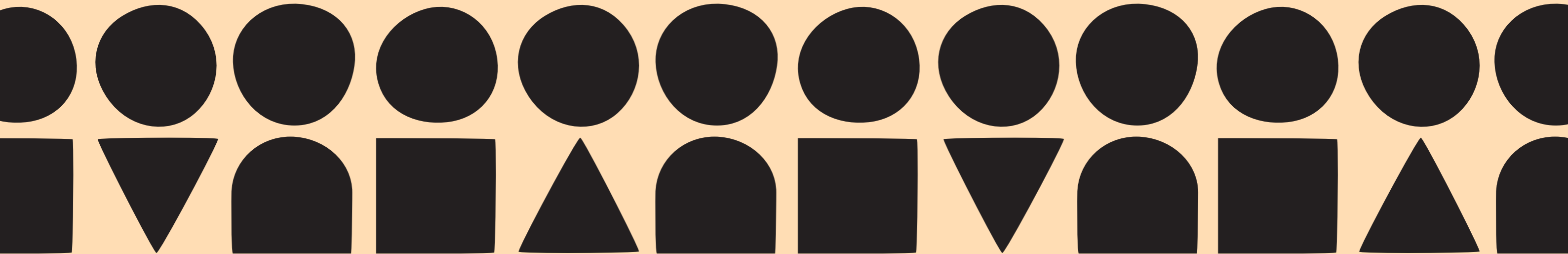
Immediate concerns such as arranging cover then take priority, with any subsequent admin – like payroll adjustments or employment policy actions – following when time allows.

There are numerous systems available that aim to ease the administrative burden of managing absence. For example, human resources information systems (HRIS) often offer

add-on absence management modules that supplement their main functions (typically shift and holiday tracking). They bring a degree of digital sophistication to the absence process, but most 'solutions' are still compromised in one way or another, in terms of accuracy of absence recording, consistency of process, information security, and/or time delays.

**Crucially, what is most often overlooked is the ongoing wellbeing of employees - and informing strategic changes for future improvement.**

# Why manage absence?



**Since 2004, we've worked with more than 200 of the UK's leading employers.**

**No two organisations face the same challenges, which is why there's no one-size-fits-all 'solution' to absence and wellbeing issues.**

**Here, we explore just some of the reasons why organisations have partnered with us to get a handle on employee absence.**

# Employee wellbeing.

**A growing and urgent priority for leaders at large organisations.**

Besides being the right thing to do, supporting your people's health means less absence, and increases your appeal as an employer. With the concept of 'employee as customer' increasingly coming to the fore, and more jobs available than qualified people to fill them, employer brand is crucial. For employees, right now, it's a buyer's market.

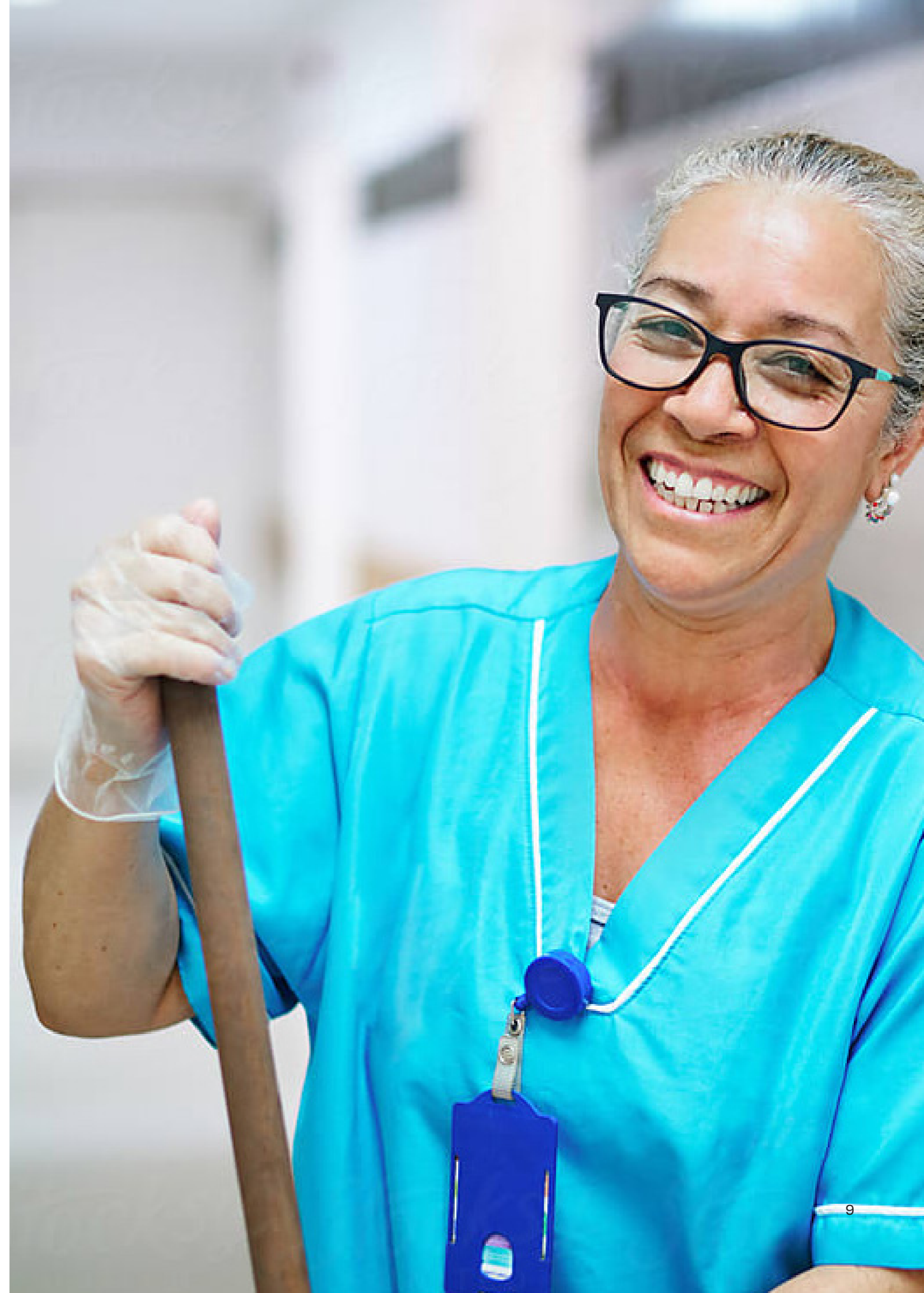
**“The GoodShape partnership has enabled managers to focus their support on their colleagues, by reducing the time needed to manage the data.”**

Operations planning manager,  
London Stansted Airport.



**“By using GoodShape’s data we were able to spot trends in the number of employees suffering with mental health issues, which led to long-term absence. This helped us respond proactively. We trained our staff to recognise mental health symptoms, and introduced employee support officers and stress audits.”**

HR support officer,  
Nuneaton & Bedworth  
Borough Council.



# Productivity.

**Inextricably linked with employee wellbeing.**

Having a system that tells you – in real-time – who is off, why, and for how long, enables you to plan more effectively, redeploy staff from around your business, and even forecast seasonal trends so you have contingency for times of high demand or absence. The benefits are powerful, for example: helping manufacturers to avoid costly downtime, or mitigating the knock-on effects on supply chains that dominated the headlines during the COVID pandemic.

**“As GoodShape operate a 24/7 service, the Trust had real-time absence information which was crucial [during COVID] for speedy decision making. From redeploying staff to ensure essential services were appropriately covered, to ensuring staff who were absent could receive duty of care calls, enabling them to receive medical advice, occupational health referrals, psychological support and even access to food parcels supplied by hospital charities.”**

Senior HR business partner and attendance improvement lead,  
NHS Foundation Trust.



**“We estimate that we’ve saved £152,000 in terms of increased productivity and efficiency savings. This means that the absence service has provided a great return on investment, and having more employees available to work gives us a far greater opportunity to deliver a good service for our customers. And that can only be a good thing.”**

Head of HR,  
Ealing Council.



# Cost.

**A perennial business priority, but never more so than in the lean, post-pandemic world of work.**

Many organisations fail to track the direct costs of absence, let alone indirect costs such as admin, overtime, and fees associated with replacement workers. Effective absence management helps you to quantify that expenditure, and measure the savings that you make through better supporting your people.



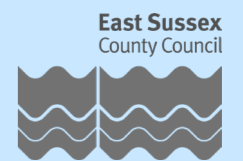
**“Year on year, the figures have improved, and we’ve saved more than £500,000 since we launched the system.”**

HR director,  
Bouygues Energies & Services.



# 12:1

**return on absence management investment.**



# 45k

**fewer overtime hours annually.**



# Risk.

**Operating a business with insufficient personnel poses risk, from patient care in hospitals to customer care in hospitality and retail.**

Equally risky is having people at work who are medically unfit to perform their job properly. Absence management with a clinical element helps you to both maintain optimal staffing levels and ensure that absent employees only return to work when they are well enough to do so. It also provides you with bulletproof absence documentation and, by using customisable triggers and alerts, it ensures you remain compliant with in-house employment policies - both crucial in cases of employment tribunal.

**“GoodShape trigger potential RIDDOR-reportable absences to the Health and Safety team, ensuring that such incidents can be investigated as soon as possible.**

**“Furthermore, several triggers are in place to highlight when employees may require further health and wellbeing support. For example, there is an alert whereby GoodShape nurses will make Occupational Health referral recommendations on day one of absences to help facilitate earlier intervention and to encourage managers to refer employees to appropriate support services. This has contributed to achieving a 47% reduction in the average length of stress-related absences.”**

Derby Homes case study.



# Insight.

**Understanding the scale and impact of absence is complex, particularly in large organisations.**

Formalising your absence management processes helps you to accurately identify the root causes of wellbeing issues affecting your people and highlight any hotspots that might exist. Data like this helps you to build a compelling business case for Board-level investment into targeted wellbeing support, and enables you to demonstrate the positive effect of your interventions, delivering powerful ESG and CSR metrics to strengthen client and investor relationships.

What's more, you'll be the first to know about emerging wellbeing issues. Our data, for example, tracked the rate of COVID cases up to two weeks in advance of Government-released figures, helping employers to take proactive steps to safeguard employee health, minimise business disruption, and protect communities.



**“... when we are alerted to high levels of absence, such as musculoskeletal problems in the factory, we can proactively address them because we now have clear trigger levels in place.”**

HR director,  
Philips

**PHILIPS**

# 70%

**reduction in unclassified absence.**



**“The system has helped us build stronger relationships with our clients, as we can show them that we take absence seriously and control it successfully.”**

HR director,  
Bouygues Energies  
& Services.



# Compliance.

**Without a formalised approach, it's virtually impossible to ensure consistent and compliant treatment of absence across your organisation.**

Unique employee-manager relationships, operational pressures, and a significant lack of in-house expertise in handling sensitive wellbeing issues (45% of UK managers have received no training\*) makes for an infinite variety of approaches and outcomes. The larger your organisation or more dispersed your workforce, the bigger the challenge becomes.

Outsourcing your absence management ensures fair and consistent treatment every time, while relieving pressures on line managers so they can focus on maintaining productivity. When it's time for employees to come back, managers are supported to carry out a compliant return-to-work process, ensuring employee safety and strengthening relationships.

**“We no longer have an ad-hoc approach to our absence reporting. Instead, we have absolute clarity on our absence levels.”**

HR director,  
Philips

**PHILIPS**

**“We would recommend GoodShape to other organisations who want to streamline processes and reduce absence.”**

HR business partner,  
Heathrow Express



\* 'Why employee wellbeing isn't working. And what you need to do about it.'  
GoodShape with Ipsos, March 2022.



# The opportunity in absence management.

**At GoodShape, we believe there's a better way to manage absence that benefits the health of your employees and your business. Our unique service combines:**

## **Clinical expertise**



- Trusted, professional medical support, 24/7, via phone or app.
- Consistent, confidential, and convenient processes.
- Early intervention, faster referrals, quicker recovery, and lives saved.
- A valued benefit, helping you to attract and retain the best talent.

## **Management tools**



- An intuitive and insightful software platform.
- Instant absence alerts, for faster, better-informed workforce planning.
- Task prompts, streamlining processes and promoting compliance.
- Customisable triggers, in line with your employment policies.

## **Data analytics**



- Real-time insight into the wellbeing issues affecting your people.
- Trend spotting and forecasting, from individual to organisational levels.
- The evidence you need to make targeted wellbeing support decisions.
- Proof of the impact your interventions have made.

**To find out how GoodShape can make a measurable improvement to your absence and wellbeing challenges, speak to one of our experts:**

+44 (0)333 321 8160

[questions@goodshape.com](mailto:questions@goodshape.com)

