

TOWERGATE RESEARCH

Strategic insights into workforce wellbeing and employee benefits

How employers are monitoring
and managing absence



Employee Absence Management

Employee absence has long been a fact of working life – but the pressures facing today's workforce are changing the way organisations monitor, interpret and respond to it.

From long NHS wait times to rising mental health concerns, the causes of absence are increasingly complex – and so too are the consequences.

Faced with growing demands on performance and people, employers are taking a more proactive approach – tracking absence more closely, tailoring wellbeing strategies in response and recognising the wider business impact of disengagement and time away from work.

About the research

This research was conducted among 500 HR decision makers from the UK through online polling, on behalf of Towergate Employee Benefits, by Opinium Research.





Understanding employee absence and its impact

The majority of employers (81%) say they have a good understanding of absence within their organisation, suggesting that tracking and monitoring processes are in place.

However, understanding absence is just one part of the picture. Gaining insight into why employees are absent – particularly when the reasons are sensitive or may go unreported – is equally important in addressing the underlying issues.

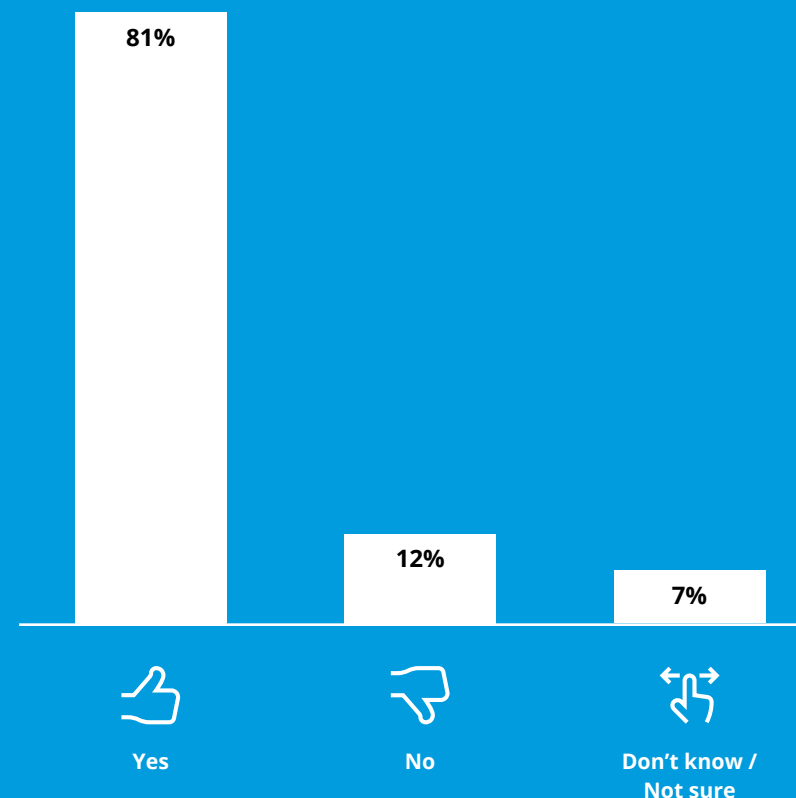
When asked about key wellbeing concerns that could influence absence trends, more than half of employers highlighted mental health pressures (51%), while 49% pointed to physical health challenges, such as difficulty accessing NHS services.

Financial wellbeing (46%) and social isolation from hybrid working (33%) were also flagged as areas of concern – highlighting the interconnected nature of modern workplace health.

Despite this, one in ten employers reported no concerns at all, indicating awareness levels and perceived risk still vary considerably.



Do you feel your business has a good understanding of employee absence within your company?





Do any of the following concern you in terms of your employees' health and wellbeing?

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“Most employers now track absence, but the real value lies in understanding what’s driving it.

“When mental health, physical strain, and financial stress converge, absence becomes not just a health issue, but a business risk.



Iain Laws, CEO, Health & Benefits,
Towergate Employee Benefits

51%

The mental health of our staff, for instance with increased anxiety as a result of pressures such as cost of living

49%

The physical health of our staff, for instance with the difficulty getting to see GPs, pressures on the NHS, and delays in being diagnosed and treated for illness

46%

The financial wellbeing of our staff, for instance with financial pressures they face

33%

The social health of our staff, for instance with isolation from hybrid working

10%

None of the above: 10%



The role of absence management in shaping wellbeing strategies

Absence management is not just reactive, it plays a central role in shaping how employers think about and deliver health and wellbeing support.

A majority (59%) use wellbeing initiatives as a preventative measure to reduce the likelihood of absence occurring in the first place. Nearly half (46%) also use support to aid return-to-work efforts, underscoring the growing recognition that proactive, flexible and supportive approaches can reduce long-term absence, support employees' recovery and a return to work.

Together, these findings suggest a shift toward more strategic, joined-up thinking, where absence data informs tailored wellbeing responses.

“

Wellbeing strategies are most effective when they're built on real workforce insight. This includes absence data, but also long-term sickness trends, income protection claims and, where available, private medical insurance data.

“Together, these sources can help employers deliver more responsive, preventative support – both before absence occurs and during recovery.”



David Williams, Head of Group Risk,
Towergate Employee Benefits



How much does managing staff absence drive your health and wellbeing approach?

59%

We use health and wellbeing support as a preventative measure to reduce the likelihood of absence

46%

We use health and wellbeing support to get employees back to work sooner

59%

None of these

46%

Don't know / not sure



Issues affecting business performance

Absence does not exist in a vacuum. It sits within a wider ecosystem of workforce pressures that can affect productivity, culture and commercial performance.

When asked about the issues currently causing problems in their business, employers cited a range of interlinked challenges – quiet quitting (26%), absence rates (23%), staff turnover (23%) and presenteeism (17%) – highlighting workforces that may be under strain, disengaged or not fully supported.

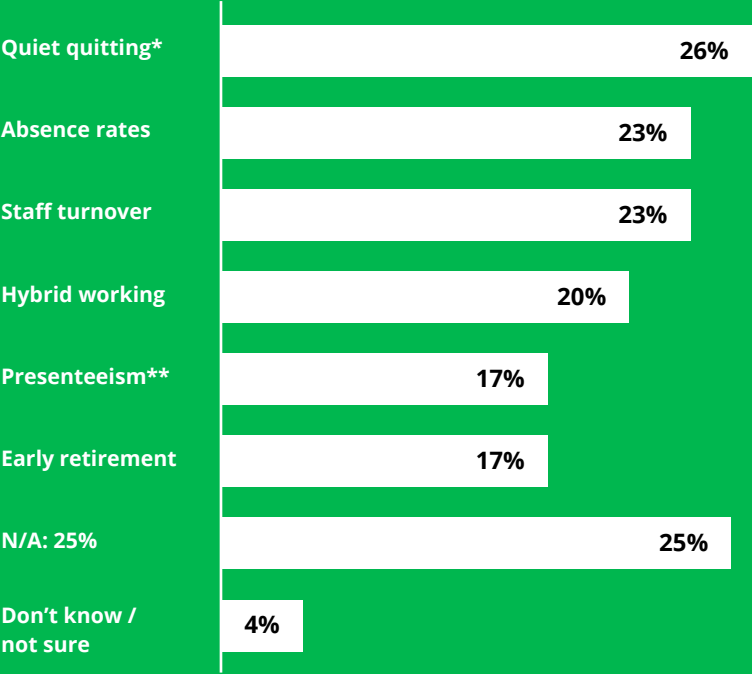
Looking ahead, nearly half of respondents believe it will become more difficult to recruit (47%) and retain (44%) talent over the next 12 months.

More than a third (37%) foresee challenges in keeping employees engaged, while one in two employers (50%) say their focus is currently pulled toward other areas of running the business – not the health and wellbeing of their workforce.

While many organisations recognise the value of supporting employee health, competing priorities and workforce pressures risk leaving wellbeing and absence management under-resourced – despite the clear link between a healthy, supported workforce and improved productivity, loyalty and long-term resilience.



Which, if any, of the following causes problems for your business?



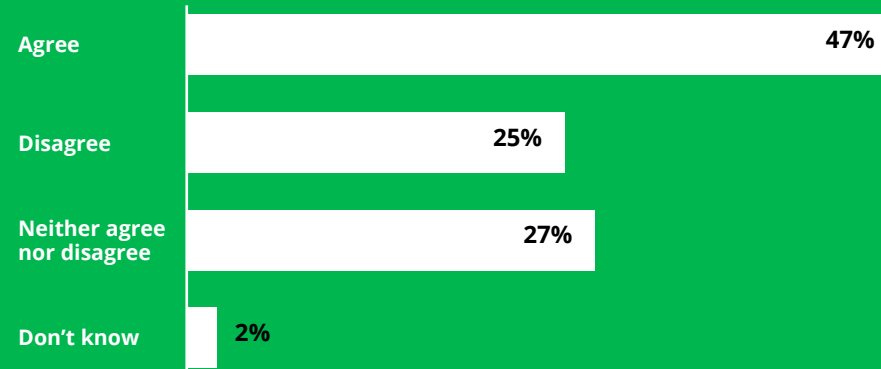
*doing only the bare minimum that the role involves, without effort or enthusiasm

**people continuing to work when they're not really well enough to

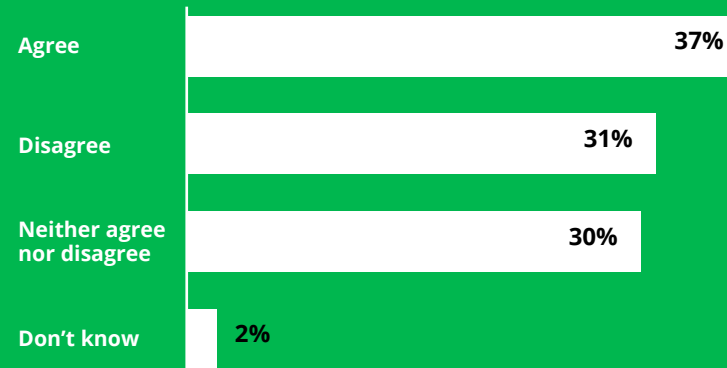


Thinking about the next 12 months (future trends), how far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

It will be harder to recruit talent



It will be harder to engage employees





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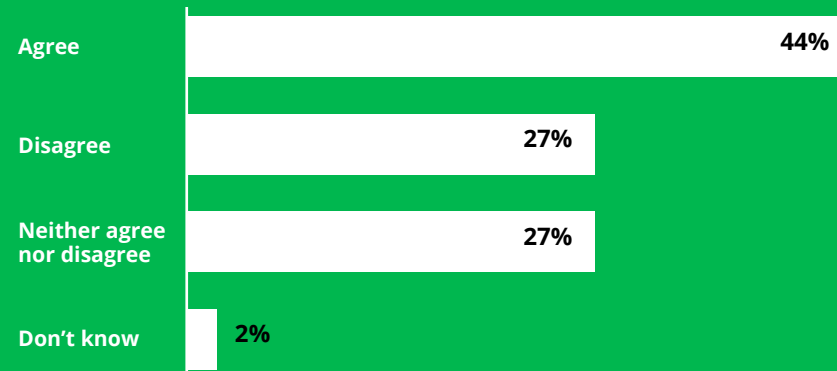
“Disengagement, presenteeism and absence are all signals of deeper workforce challenges.

“For employers, recognising the business impact of these issues is the first step toward building a healthier, more sustainable performance culture.”

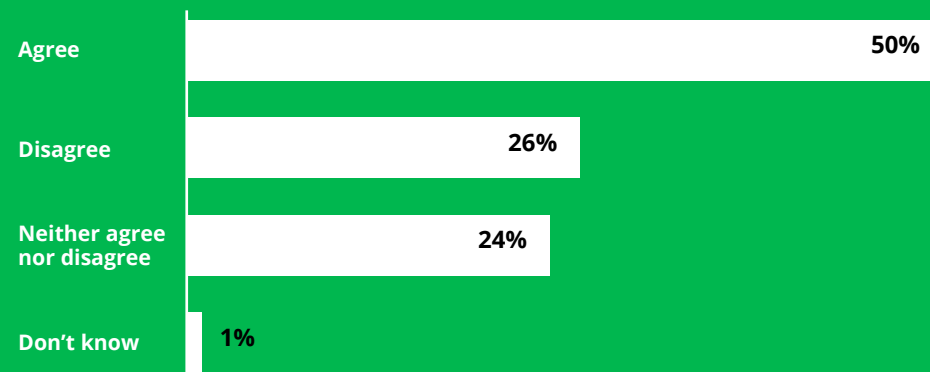


Debra Clark, Head of Wellbeing,
Towergate Employee Benefits

It will be harder to retain talent



Our focus is on other areas of running the business, not the health and wellbeing of our staff



0800 389 7723 (Monday to Friday)

everybodybenefits.co.uk

Head office address

Towergate Employee Benefits
West Park House, 23 Cumberland Place,
Southampton, SO15 2BB

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