**Guide to HR for Line Managers**

**Introduction**

Managing people is often the most challenging part of a line manager's role, and organisations may not always provide sufficient support in this area.

The relationship between HR and line managers can be complex. HR serves as an advisor, offering guidance and setting policies, but ultimately, decision-making rests with the line manager. Managers must operate within legal frameworks and company policies, which can sometimes be tricky.

Line managers must view their people management responsibilities as a core function of their role rather than something that can be handed off to HR.

Employees rely on line managers for guidance, performance management, and problem resolution.

**Scope of This Guide**

This guide outlines key responsibilities for line managers, including:

* How HR can provide support
* Key areas of responsibility for line managers:
  + Recruitment
  + Discrimination
  + Bullying and harassment
  + Performance management
  + Appraisals
  + Disciplinary processes
  + Grievance handling
  + Managing absence
  + Family-friendly policies, including:
    - Maternity, paternity, and adoption leave
    - Parental leave
    - Flexible working arrangements

This document does not replace company policies or offer comprehensive legal guidance. Instead, it highlights the most common challenges for line managers and how to address them effectively.

**HR Support for Line Managers**

Organisations typically have dedicated HR departments that can sometimes be outsourced to assist line managers in various ways:

HR provides essential support to line managers in several key areas:

**1. Training and Development**

HR designs and delivers training programmes to enhance managerial skills, such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and performance appraisal techniques. This equips line managers to lead their teams more effectively.

**2. Recruitment and Onboarding**

HR collaborates with line managers to identify staffing needs, develop job descriptions, and facilitate recruitment. They also assist in onboarding new employees, ensuring a smooth integration into the team.

**3. Performance Management**

HR provides frameworks and tools for performance evaluations, helping line managers set clear expectations, monitor progress, and provide constructive feedback to employees.

**4. Employee Relations**

HR advises line managers on handling employee grievances, disciplinary actions, and conflict resolution, ensuring compliance with employment laws and company policies.

**5. Employee Engagement and Well-being**

HR guides line managers in implementing strategies to boost employee morale, recognise achievements, and support work-life balance, contributing to higher job satisfaction and employee retention.

By partnering with HR in these areas, line managers can effectively lead their teams and contribute to the organisation's success.

**Key Areas of Responsibility for Line Managers**

**Recruitment and Selection**

Hiring the right people is a line manager’s key responsibility. A structured approach ensures a fair and effective selection process:

1. **Defining the Role**: A clear job description and person specification are essential for attracting suitable candidates.
2. **Sourcing Candidates**: Whether this is done through agencies or advertising, past recruitment experiences can inform the best approach.
3. **Shortlisting**: Candidates should be assessed against essential criteria to ensure fair and objective selection.
4. **Assessment Methods**: Other evaluation techniques, such as skills tests or presentations, may be used in addition to interviews.
5. **Final Selection**: The candidate who best meets the job requirements should be chosen. HR may provide input, particularly on legal or procedural matters.
6. **Job Offer**: Employment is contingent upon verification of your legal right to work in the UK; additional checks, including references, may also be conducted.

**Legal Considerations in Recruitment**

Managers must ensure recruitment processes comply with UK employment law, particularly concerning:

* Avoiding discrimination based on protected characteristics, such as age, gender, disability, race, religion, or sexual orientation.
* Conducting right-to-work checks to prevent illegal employment, with potential fines for non-compliance.
* Ensuring health-related questions are only asked after a job offer is made unless adjustments are required for the recruitment process.

**Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Line managers are crucial in promoting an inclusive workplace. Discrimination—whether direct, indirect, associative, or perceptive, is unlawful. Managers must:

* Make unbiased decisions in recruitment, promotions, and redundancies.
* Handle complaints of discrimination fairly and promptly.
* Be aware that they can be personally liable for discriminatory actions.
* Address inappropriate behaviour, including subtle or unconscious biases, before they escalate.

Failure to prevent discrimination can result in costly legal claims with unlimited compensation awards.

**Bullying and Harassment**

Managers must ensure a workplace free from bullying and harassment. These behaviours can include:

* Unfair criticism or exclusion
* Threats or humiliation
* Excessive workloads or unreasonable targets
* Offensive language, jokes, or inappropriate physical contact

Unaddressed bullying can lead to tribunal claims, reputational damage, and high staff turnover. Managers should:

* Create an open culture where employees feel safe reporting concerns.
* Investigate complaints promptly and take appropriate action.
* Follow disciplinary procedures where necessary.

**Managing Performance**

Effective performance management includes:

* **Regular Feedback**: Addressing issues promptly rather than waiting for formal appraisals.
* **Appraisals**: Providing structured opportunities for goal setting, skills development, and career discussions.
* **Disciplinary Procedures**: Using informal discussions before progressing to formal action when performance does not meet expectations.

If disciplinary action is required, managers must follow fair procedures, provide employees with opportunities to improve and document all steps taken.

**Handling Grievances:** Grievances should be managed through:

1. **Informal Discussions**: Attempting to resolve issues at an early stage.
2. **Formal Grievance Process**: A structured process must be followed if informal resolution fails.
3. **Right to Appeal**: Employees have the right to challenge decisions through a formal appeal process.

Taking grievances seriously helps prevent escalation and contributes to a positive workplace culture.

**Managing Absence:** Absence management involves:

* Keeping accurate records of employee attendance.
* Conducting return-to-work interviews to identify patterns or underlying issues.
* Taking disciplinary action for excessive or unexplained absences.
* Supporting employees with long-term illnesses through reasonable adjustments and occupational health referrals.

**Family-Friendly Policies** Employees have statutory rights to:

* Maternity, paternity, adoption, and shared parental leave
* Neonatal Leave (*from 6 April 2025*)
* Parental bereavement leave
* Flexible working requests
* Time off for dependants
* Carer’s leave

Managers should ensure employees understand their entitlements and support them in balancing work and personal responsibilities.

Breaches of health and safety laws can lead to serious legal and financial consequences for employers and managers alike.

**Conclusion**

Line managers are central to effective people management. While HR provides guidance and support, managers must take responsibility for:

* Recruiting fairly
* Maintaining an inclusive workplace
* Managing performance and addressing issues promptly
* Supporting employees with family-friendly policies
* Ensuring health and safety standards are upheld

By understanding these responsibilities and working collaboratively with HR, managers can foster a positive and productive work environment while ensuring legal compliance