

UK Government bid to reduce long term sick-leave



The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are to introduce health assessments for Scots who are absent from work for over a month.

The announcement [follows the publication of DWP figures earlier today](#) showing that around 95,000 Scots took four weeks or more of sick-leave each year between October 2010 and September 2013.

The Health and Work Service scheme, which will not be mandatory, is intended to assist people back to work after an accident or illness.

Employers or doctors will be able to refer staff who have been off work for more than four weeks to the scheme. Doctors will work with the employee and employer to create a “return to work” plan.

This will include a timetable, advice and signposting to appropriate help and services available.

Minister of State for Work and Pensions Mike Penning said:- “As part of the government’s long-term economic plan, we are taking action to improve getting people back into work.

“This is a triple win. It will mean more people with a job, reduced cost for business, and a more financially secure future for Britain.”

The scheme will be funded by cutting the Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold Scheme (SSPPTS) – which compensates employers who are paying the wages of absent staff – leading to fears that businesses may be left out of pocket when

employees have an accident.

Colin Borland, head of external affairs at the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland told The Edinburgh Reporter:- "I'm slightly sceptical about scrapping the SSPPTS.

"While I accept the government's logic that they want fewer days lost to sickness, how does this help an individual small business that has an employee who breaks their leg playing football at the weekend or has a heart attack?

"The government might argue that not many people benefit from the SSPPTS, but the impact of an absence on a small business can be very significant. Losing just one staff member for a month in a business that has only two employees is halving their workforce."

However, the DWP say that any financial losses will be offset by an overall reduction in lost working days.

Meanwhile, the DWP's treatment of those receiving disability benefits faced further criticism this afternoon, following a report in today's Daily Record that nearly 10,000 sick and disabled Scots were incorrectly told they were fit for work.

The figures show that 43% of people who were judged fit for work during their Work Capability Assessment – a test administered by the DWP – were later shown to be too unwell on appeal.

Aberdeen Central MSP Kevin Stewart, a member of the Scottish Parliament's Welfare Reform Committee, said:-

"As well as the obvious human cost of these system failures, it is staggering that the DWP's system manages to get things so badly wrong – at a cost of £66m to the taxpayer to manage the appeals process.

"It's clear that the DWP's Work Capability Assessment process is not fit for purpose."

