

Employee research

Phase 2:

Sickness absence and return to work

Technical details

March 2023

Quantitative survey: technical details

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Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other government department.

Statement of Compliance

This research complies with the three pillars of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#): trustworthiness, value and quality.

Trustworthiness

This research was conducted, delivered and analysed impartially by Ipsos MORI, working to the Government Social Research code of practice.

Quality

The survey was carried out using established statistical methods. The research has been quality assured using Ipsos MORI's internal quality checking processes, which have been shared with the Department for Work and Pensions. The technical report has been written by Ipsos MORI and checked by analysts at the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure it meets the highest standards of analysis and drafting.

Value

This research provides insight into workers' health, wellbeing, sickness absence and sick pay and contributes to the growing evidence base. Findings from this report have informed the ongoing development of policy decisions relating to workers and ill-health related job loss.

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1. Introduction

Ipsos MORI conducted research on behalf of the Work and Health Unit (WHU) (which is jointly sponsored by DWP and DHSC), to get an up-to-date assessment of workers' experiences of sickness absence and sick pay. The research consists of two phases of quantitative and qualitative research with employed and self-employed individuals. This technical paper provides information on the second phase and is split into two sections, discussing the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research separately.

Specifically, this research aims to explore:

- Employees' (including the self-employed) experience of sickness absence
- Medical evidence of availability to work
- Employees' sick pay arrangements, in terms of timing, rate, type (SSP, OSP, none), and length of provision and whether these have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Employees' understanding of SSP rules and eligibility
- How employees are supported in-work, or to return to work following a long-term sickness absence, including the effectiveness of support received from employers such as workplace adjustments
- How employees perceive the role of the employer and of the state during sickness absence

2. Quantitative Research

Cognitive Testing

A draft version of the questionnaire was cognitively tested with 10 individuals between 26th February and 5th March 2021. The purpose of the interviews was to test comprehension, recall, and suitability of the draft survey questions.

The interviews were conducted with individuals who were either employed or self-employed, some of whom had been on sickness leave for a period of 4+ weeks in the past year and some who had not experienced any long-term sickness in the past year. There was a mix of age and gender. As a thank-you for participating in these interviews, participants received £30 as a BACS payment.

Table 2.1 A breakdown of participants in the cognitive interviews

Criteria		Interviews achieved
Employment status	Employed	8
	Self-employed	2
Sickness absence	Had a sickness absence in the past 12 months	6
	Had a LTSA in the past 12 months	3
Pay received when off sick	SSP	4
	SSP and OSP	1
	None	5
Sick pay eligibility	Eligible for SSP	3
	Eligible for no sick pay	1
Total interviews completed:		10

Recruitment to the panel

The quantitative study was conducted via the KnowledgePanel between 1-7 April 2021. Panellists are recruited via a random probability unclustered address-based sampling method. This means that every household in the UK has a known chance of being selected to join the panel. Letters are sent to selected addresses in the UK (using the Postcode Address File) inviting them to become members of the panel. Invited members are able to sign up to the panel by completing a short online questionnaire or by returning a paper form. Up to 2 members of the household are

able to sign up to the panel. Members of the public who are digitally excluded are able to register to the KnowledgePanel either by post or by telephone, and are given a tablet, an email address, and basic internet access (see further information below) which allows them to complete surveys online.

Conducting the survey

The survey was designed using a 'mobile-first' approach, which took into consideration the look, feel and usability of a questionnaire on a mobile device. This included: a thorough review of the questionnaire length to ensure it would not overburden respondents from focusing on a small screen for a lengthy period, avoiding the use of grid style questions (instead using question loops which are more mobile friendly, and making questions 'finger-friendly' so they are easy to respond to. The questionnaire was also compatible with screen reader software to help those requiring further accessibility.

Sample and weighting information

This study was conducted on the KnowledgePanel between 1st and 7th April 2021. In total, 4,435 surveys were achieved with residents across Great Britain aged 16+, who were in paid employment.

The KnowledgePanel is a random probability survey panel. Therefore, the KnowledgePanel does not use a quota approach when conducting surveys. Instead invited samples are stratified when conducting waves to account for any profile skews within the panel.

Stratification

A key requirement for this research was to survey as many people who were employed as possible, and also to maximise the sample of respondents who had had or may have had statutory sick pay. It was therefore decided to invite all panel members living in Great Britain to complete the survey, with no stratification. A total of 12,101 panellists were invited to complete the survey. Due to the panel composition, this included an oversample in Scotland.

In total 4,435 respondents who were in paid employment, aged 16-74 completed the full survey.

Table 2.2 Sample and response rate

	N	%
Total sample	10,890	
Screened out – not eligible	3,300	
Completed interviews	4,435	
Did not respond	3,155	
Eligibility (complete / (complete + ineligible))		57.34%
Valid sample (fieldwork sample x eligibility)	6,244	100%
Response rate (complete / valid sample)		71.03%
Co-operation rate (complete / complete + refusal)		58.43%

Weighting

In order to ensure the survey results are representative of the Great Britain population in employment, the below weighting specification was applied to the data in line with the target sample profile.

Two members per household are allowed to register on the KnowledgePanel. Therefore, we employ a design weight to correct for unequal probabilities of selection of household members.

Calibration weights were then applied to correct for imbalances in the achieved sample; the data was weighted on age and gender, employment status and gender, region, and education. The targets were sourced from the Office of National Statistics and the Financial Research Survey.

The tables present the weighting profile targets.

Table 2.3 Age and gender

Age & Gender	Male	Female	In another way	Prefer not to say
16-24	5.67%	5.48%	0.04%	0.03%
25-34	12.25%	10.93%	0.17%	0.03%
35-49	17.32%	15.89%	0.06%	0.16%
50-64	14.72%	13.73%	0.03%	0.03%
65-74	2.00%	1.45%		0.01%

Table 2.4 Employment status and gender

Employment status & Gender	Male	Female	In another way	Prefer not to say
Employee (full-time)	38.33%	26.89%	0.17%	0.15%
Employee (part-time)	4.61%	15.81%	0.10%	0.03%
Self-employed	8.94%	4.87%	0.03%	0.07%

Table 2.5 Education level

Education level	
Degree level or above (including postgraduate qualifications)/ 2 years of degree / NVQ level 5 / HND/ 1 year of degree / NVQ level 4 / HNC	32.56%
2 or more A-Levels, NVQ Level 3, BTEC Level 3 Diploma or equivalent/1 A-Level or equivalent, 5 or more GCSEs of grade A*-C or equivalent, NVQ Level 2, BTEC level 2 diploma or equivalent/GCSEs of less than A*-C or equivalent, NVQ Level 1/Something else (Specify)	59.55%
No qualification	7.47%
Don't know	0.42%

Table 2.6 Region

Region (GOR)	
North East	3.81%
North West	11.04%
Yorkshire And The Humber	8.20%
East Midlands	7.42%
West Midlands	8.76%
East Of England	9.65%
London	14.95%
South East	14.55%
South West	8.66%
Wales	4.57%
Scotland	8.40%
No qualification	7.47%
Don't know	0.42%

Data outputs

Following the fieldwork of the study, the following outputs were delivered to WHU:

- **Data tables** – these showed the results for each question, broken down by a number of demographic and attitudinal cross-tabulations. The tables also included significance testing at the 95% confidence level, using letters to show where any differences between sub-groups are statistically significant. The data tables were provided in Excel format.
- **SPSS dataset** – to allow further analysis and linking with existing datasets, an individual level data file was provided to WHU in SPSS format, including weighting variables.

3. Qualitative Research

The qualitative research took place after the survey. Between 2nd June – 6th July 2021, Ipsos MORI conducted 20 in-depth qualitative telephone interviews with employees.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Ipsos MORI selected participants who completed the quantitative survey and contacted them via the KnowledgePanel to gauge their interest in participating in the qualitative research and to gain their consent to contact them regarding the qualitative research. Informed consent was provided prior to the start of each interview, with participants informed that they could stop the interview at any point. As a thank you for participating in these interviews, participants received £30 as a BACS payment.

Quotas were used to ensure a range of views would be included, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 A breakdown of qualitative participants

Description	Characteristics	Total
Primary quotas		
Employees	All participants to be employees, exclude the self-employed	20
Sickness absence	All participants to have had a sickness absence	20
Long term health condition	A high proportion to also have a long-term health condition to find people with more complex sickness absences	8
More than one sickness absence	A high proportion to have had multiple sickness absences	8
Sick pay	Statutory sick pay	11
	Occupational sick pay	5
	None	4
Employer size	Small	6
	Medium	6
	Large	8
Secondary quotas		
Type of contract	Permanent	14
	Non-permanent (e.g. zero hours, temporary, casual etc.)	6

Quantitative survey: technical details

Occupation	Manager/professionals	3
	Skilled trades/Associate professionals/Technical occupations	9
	Lower skilled occupations (admin/secretarial; personal service; sales/customer service and elementary occupations)	8