Managing Sickness Absence in the States of Guernsey
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Photograph courtesy of Guernsey Press and Star
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Staff are a crucial resource for public bodies. Their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm make an important contribution towards providing high-quality public services. Staff absences significantly reduce the productivity of government bodies, however. This Report identifies the level of sickness in the States of Guernsey and assesses its cost. The Report examines how sickness absence might be better controlled and costs reduced through improved management action. The Report was commissioned by the Public Accounts Committee.

Scope of the NAO Report

2. The Report is in three parts:

- Part 1 of the Report examines and analyses the figures for sickness absence in the States of Guernsey in 2005. It also considers how Guernsey’s rates of sickness absence compare with those in other jurisdictions.

- Part 2 of the Report examines how information on sickness absence is collected and recorded. It considers whether improvements can be made in data collection and analysis to enable sickness absence levels to be better monitored.

- Part 3 of the Report focuses on good practice in the management of sickness absence. It examines whether sickness absence management in the States of Guernsey meets generally accepted good practice. Appendix 1 sets out the methodology we used on this work.

Main findings

3. On the level and cost of sickness absence, we found that sickness absence cost the States of Guernsey £6.1 million in 2005 in lost working days. The indirect cost – in terms of the cost of temporary cover, management time in dealing with absences and reduced productivity – could add significantly to this direct cost.

4. In 2005, some 3.8 per cent of working time was lost and public servants were off sick for an average of 8.7 days each. Although these are better figures overall than in many comparator organisations, there were nevertheless wide variations between and within Guernsey Departments. These variations suggest that current sickness absence levels could be reduced, thereby leading to substantial financial savings and greater efficiency. For example, a 10 per cent reduction in current sickness absence levels would save £600,000 a year in direct costs.

5. On the recording and monitoring of sickness absence, we found that there have been inconsistencies in the past in the collection and analysis of sickness absence data. Previous sickness absence figures are not reliable. The provision of accurate, timely and accessible information is the cornerstone of a successful absence policy. Data on sickness absences need to be collected on a more consistent basis across Departments. The SAP payroll project also provides an opportunity to standardise data collection on sickness absence.
executive summary

On the management of sickness absence, we found that the States has issued guidance for Departments on managing sickness absence. Most Departments have clear procedures for the notification of sickness absence and these are generally complied with. Return-to-work interviews and the use of trigger points to prompt management action are widely recognised by HR experts as the two most effective tools for tackling sickness absence. However, these tools are rarely used in Guernsey Departments. We consider that the more widespread use of such tools could achieve significant inroads into the high levels of sickness absence in some areas.

The level and cost of sickness absence

A total of 37,285 working days were lost to sickness absence in 2005, some 3.8 per cent of the available working days. Excluding long-term absences of 21 days or more, the sickness absence rate in the States of Guernsey in 2005 was 2.4 per cent. This is equivalent to a loss of 5.4 working days per staff year. Just over a quarter of sickness absence was uncertified. On average, each member of staff took just over two spells of sick leave during the year.

The headline figures for 2005 are shown in Figure 1 overleaf. As can be seen, there were wide variations between Departments in the various indicators. In some of the larger Departments there were also significant variations in sickness absence levels between different functional areas or business units. A detailed breakdown of these figures by Department is given in Appendix 2.

Overall sickness absence rates in Guernsey (3.8 per cent) are marginally above those in Jersey (3.7 per cent) but below those in the UK public sector (4.5 per cent). The sickness rate for established staff (principally civil servants) in the States of Guernsey (3.3 per cent) is also lower than in the UK civil service (4.0 per cent).

Recording and monitoring of sickness absence

Certain basic data on each member of staff need to be collected by Guernsey Departments if they are to be able to calculate and monitor their sickness absence rates effectively. These include the number of days available for work in the year; the number of days of sickness absence in the year; the number of days of uncertified sickness absence; the number of spells of sickness absence; and the number of days of long-term sickness absence. Data collection on the causes of sickness absence is also not generally well-developed.

A well organised data set collected as defined above can enable a variety of analyses to be undertaken to inform management and provide information from which valid comparisons can be made across and within Departments. Records for individual staff will need to be aggregated to provide summary data from which performance measures can be calculated.

Management of sickness absence

Positive management of sickness absence is crucial in achieving long-term reductions in sickness levels. More than half of Departments have their own policies and procedures for managing sickness absence. Departments also generally have clear procedures on what staff are required to do when reporting sick. Only one Department, however, has set a target for reducing sickness absence.

Return-to-work interviews should be held after every absence no matter how short. The purpose of these meetings is to welcome the individual back, to check that they are recovered and to review their absence record. This simple, but vital, act of talking to employees after every sickness absence has been shown to improve attendance without any further action being taken. However, many Departments do not make effective use of this powerful tool.
A trigger point is a defined level or frequency of absence which automatically prompts management action. There are strong advantages in using trigger points to prompt a case review, since they allow organisations to focus on a level or pattern of absence. They also importantly provide management with a clear structure within which to manage, and so act as an incentive to fair and proper intervention. Trigger points, however, are not widely used in Guernsey to prompt action in cases of frequent or long-term sickness absence. We consider that Departments are thus missing out on an important and effective tool for managing sickness absence.

States employees on full pay who are in receipt of sickness benefit cheques from the Social Security Department are required to hand the cheques over to their Department. This creates work for Departments in recording sickness benefit details and chasing up people who have not handed their cheques over. We consider that these bureaucratic procedures could be avoided if the Social Security Department were to pay sickness benefit directly to Departments. The Department’s new computer system should allow payments to be made direct to Departmental payrolls. The Department will also be able to offer this option to local employers.
NAO recommendations

a. Departments should maintain a staff database with sufficient basic data on sickness absences to enable appropriate measures of performance to be calculated (paragraph 2.9).

b. The causes of sickness absences should be recorded and monitored by all Departments. This would enable Departments to identify trends, such as problems due to stress or other factors, which might be within the Department’s control (paragraph 2.10).

c. Departments should calculate measures of sickness absence performance on a consistent basis. The measures should include separate sickness absence rates with and without long term sickness, the proportion of uncertified absence, and the average number of spells of absence. Departments should also estimate the cost of their sickness absence (paragraph 2.14).

d. Summary data and basic sickness absence information should be provided by Departments to the Policy Council Human Resources Unit to enable States-wide performance measures to be calculated (paragraph 2.15).

e. The Policy Council Human Resources Unit should benchmark sickness absence levels in the States of Guernsey against other organisations (paragraph 2.15).

f. As the SAP HR project develops, the opportunity should be taken to enable line managers to input sickness absence data directly onto SAP. It will be important to ensure that the performance information that SAP will be able to generate on sickness absence will meet at least the minimum requirements recommended in this Report (paragraph 2.18).

g. All Departments should ensure that they have clear procedures whereby staff must notify their line manager or equivalent by a certain time on the first day they are off sick. Departments should also ensure that these procedures are complied with (paragraph 3.8).

h. Return-to-work interviews should be undertaken in all cases. The interview should be used to establish the underlying reasons for the absence and to demonstrate concern for the employee’s welfare (paragraph 3.11).

i. All Departments should use trigger points to prompt management action in cases of frequent or long term-sickness absence, based on an individual’s cumulative absence from work (paragraph 3.16).

j. Those Departments with high rates of sickness absence should set targets for reducing their sickness absence levels. Such targets should be realistic and stretching, yet recognise that absence rates cannot realistically be set at zero, and that some level of sickness absence will always occur (paragraph 3.20).

k. Once its new computer system goes live, the Social Security Department should pay sickness benefit for States employees directly to Departments. This would obviate the need for Departments to recover the amounts involved from individual members of staff (paragraph 3.24).
PART ONE

Sickness absence rates in the States of Guernsey

1.1 This Part of the Report examines and analyses the figures for sickness absence in the States of Guernsey in 2005. It also considers how Guernsey’s rates of sickness absence compare with those in other jurisdictions.

1.2 Our main findings are that:

- Sickness absence cost the Guernsey public sector £6.1 million in lost working days in 2005 (paragraphs 1.3 to 1.7).
- There are significant variations between and within Departments in sickness absence rates (paragraphs 1.8 to 1.15).
- Sickness absence rates in Guernsey are similar to those in Jersey but below those in the UK public sector (paragraphs 1.16 to 1.21).

Sickness absence cost the Guernsey public sector £6.1 million in lost working days in 2005

The headline rate of sickness absence in 2005 was 3.8 per cent

1.3 A total of 37,285 working days were lost to sickness absence in 2005. This figure represents 3.8 per cent of the total working days available. It is equivalent to a loss of 8.7 working days per staff year.¹

1.4 The rate of sickness absence in 2005 for established staff (civil servants) was 3.3 per cent. The rate for non-established staff was 4.2 per cent (Figure 2).²

The direct cost of sickness absence in 2005 was £6.1 million

1.5 The direct cost of sickness absence – in terms of the cost of the time lost – amounted to around £6.1 million in 2005. This cost is a broad estimate, which has been calculated by multiplying the 2005 staff costs for each Department by the Department’s sickness absence rate (Figure 3).

1 One staff year amounts on average to 227 days, excluding weekends, bank holidays and annual leave.
2 Established staff are principally civil servants. All other staff, including public service employees, teachers, nurses, police, fire and prison officers, count as non-established staff.
1.6 There are also a number of indirect costs associated with sickness absence. Such indirect costs include:

- the costs of temporary cover – using informal, internal cover by colleagues on a temporary basis, paying overtime or using external agency or contract staff (such as supply teachers);
- management time dealing with absences – arranging cover, supervising replacements, return-to-work interviews, case work, collating and reporting data;
- reduced productivity by having to use inexperienced staff as cover.

1.7 A study in 2001 by the Institute for Employment Studies in the UK estimated that the indirect costs of sickness absence could amount to as much as the direct costs incurred. ³

There are significant variations between and within Departments in sickness absence rates

1.8 In 2005 the rate of sickness absence varied between Departments, from 2.7 per cent to 5.0 per cent. ³ Four Departments had sickness absence rates above the Guernsey average of 3.7 per cent: Health & Social Services (4.0 per cent); Home (4.5 per cent); Public Services (5.0 per cent); and Social Security (4.5 per cent). Over 60 per cent of the workforce of the Public Services Department are non-established (Public Service Employee/manual) staff, who typically have a higher rate of sickness absence than established staff. The Health & Social Services and Home Departments also have over 60 per cent non-established staff.

³ Costing Sickness Absence in the UK, S Bevan and S Hayday, the Institute for Employment Studies.
1.9 The Social Security Department also pointed out that it has a very tight reporting system. Being located on one site makes it easier to monitor absence reporting. Some other Departments have more difficulty in monitoring sickness absence and there may be some under-reporting in such Departments. This issue was highlighted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in its 2005 absence survey. The CIPD noted that improving the way absence is recorded and monitored may result in an increase in recorded absence (particularly in the short term) because absence is reported more accurately.

1.10 In some of the larger Departments there were also significant variations in sickness absence levels between different functional areas or business units (Figures 5 to 7).
Excluding long-term absences, the rate of sickness absence in 2005 was 2.3 per cent

1.11 Long-term sickness absence is usually defined as a spell of sickness absence lasting longer than four weeks (20 working days). Excluding such long-term absences, the short-term sickness absence rate in the States of Guernsey in 2005 was 2.4 per cent. This is equivalent to a loss of 5.4 working days per staff year.

1.12 The rate of short-term sickness absence varied between Departments, with the Environment and Social Security Departments having the highest figures, at 3.1 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively (Figure 8).

A quarter of sickness absence in 2005 was uncertified

1.13 To qualify for sickness pay, employees are required to submit a medical certificate for each and every day of absence. Departments have the discretion to dispense with this requirement when the absence is for three days or less. In practice, Departments do exercise discretion and consequently medical certificates are not normally required except when absences exceed three days.4

1.14 Overall, in 2005, some 25.8 per cent of sickness absence was uncertified. Within Departments, the proportion of uncertified sickness absence ranged from 16 per cent in the Culture & Leisure Department to 47 per cent in the Environment Department (Figure 9 overleaf). The overall proportion of uncertified sickness absence in Guernsey is very close to that in Jersey (25.7 per cent).

4 This is a concession and not a right and it follows that Departments may require individuals to produce medical certificates for all absences if necessary (for example, where staff are believed to be absent without good cause).
On average, each member of staff took two spells of sick leave

1.15 The average number of spells of sickness absence per staff year was 2.1 in 2005. The lowest figure was 1.3 in the Culture & Leisure Department and the highest was 3.5 in the Environment Department (Figure 10). As can be seen from Figures 9 and 10, there is some correlation between the average number of spells of sick leave and the proportion of uncertified sickness absence. Departments with a high figure in one also tend to have a high figure in the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Average number of spells of sick leave 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Serv</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sec</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy C</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Deparmental data
Sickness absence rates in Guernsey are similar to those in Jersey but below those in the UK public sector

1.16 This section of the Report compares Guernsey’s figures with the UK public sector (central and local government), the UK private sector and other jurisdictions (such as Jersey). We have obtained the latest figures from a number of sources, and examined the extent to which the figures have been prepared on a comparable basis. There is much variation in the way that data relating to sickness absence are collected and presented, and these variations need to be borne in mind when making comparisons between different sets of data.

Overall comparisons with other jurisdictions

1.17 The sickness absence rate of 3.8 per cent in the Guernsey public sector is marginally above that in Jersey, although the periods covered are slightly different (2005 for Guernsey and July 2004 to June 2005 for Jersey) (Figure 11). The Guernsey and Jersey sickness absence rates are lower than the average figures for local authorities in England and for public sector bodies in the UK. But they are higher than the averages for companies in the UK private services sector.5

Civil Service comparisons

1.18 The sickness rate for established staff (civil servants) in the States of Guernsey is lower than in the UK civil service and in Scottish Executive core departments and Northern Ireland departments (Figure 12).

Departmental and sectoral comparisons

1.19 Comparisons between Departments in Guernsey and those in other jurisdictions are problematic. The scope, responsibilities and staffing of a Guernsey Department may be very different to a department with a similar name in another jurisdiction. Figures 13 and 14 overleaf compare the two biggest Departments in Guernsey with their counterparts overseas. These comparisons are shown for illustrative purposes and should be treated with caution.

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5 The UK comparators are from a survey in 2005 by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which covered employers across a range of industries and sectors. In some sectors the relatively small numbers of survey responses mean that it is difficult to draw robust conclusions from the data. However, the results at aggregate level should be more reliable.
International comparisons

1.20 There is little comparative data available from countries outside the UK. However, the OECD publishes an Economic Survey every 1½-2 years for each OECD country, and the report published for Sweden in June 2005 contained the chart below (Figure 15). There was no further information regarding the basis of the data.

1.21 The OECD chart shows the level of sickness absence for each country in terms of the number of working days lost per staff year. The equivalent sickness absence rate in the Guernsey public sector in 2005 was 8.7 working days per staff year.
PART TWO

Data collection and analysis

2.1 This Part of the Report examines how information on sickness absence is collected and recorded. It considers whether improvements can be made in data collection and analysis to enable sickness absence levels to be better monitored.

2.2 We concluded that better information is needed to help manage sickness absence more effectively. In particular we found that:

- There have been inconsistencies in the past in the collection and analysis of sickness absence data (paragraphs 2.3 to 2.5).
- Data on sickness absences need to be collected on a more consistent basis across Departments (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10).
- There are a number of useful ways to analyse sickness absence data (paragraphs 2.11 to 2.16).
- The SAP payroll project provides an opportunity to standardise data collection on sickness absence (paragraphs 2.17 to 2.18).

There have been inconsistencies in the past in the collection and analysis of sickness absence data

2.3 Sickness absence information has been collected in the States of Guernsey for a number of years. Since 2005, the Policy Council Human Resources Unit (PCHRU) has asked all Departments to provide information on their sickness absence rates as part of its annual Human Capital Audit. In both 2003 and 2004 the level of short-term sickness absence was reported as 2.0 per cent of working days lost. This compares with a short-term sickness absence rate of 2.4 per cent calculated by the NAO for 2005.

2.4 We have reviewed the reported 2003 and 2004 figures and do not consider, however, that they accurately reflect the true rate of sickness absence in those years. Because of the methods used, the figures may well be underestimates. Although the 2005 rate calculated by the NAO is higher, it is not in fact safe, therefore, to assume that sickness absence rates have risen.

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6  Before the Machinery of Government changes of May 2004, sickness absence information was collected by the former Civil Service Board.
2.5 The main problems with the previous years’ Guernsey figures are as follows:

- The 2003 and 2004 Guernsey figures exclude long-term absences of more than 20 working days. The comparator organisations covered by the other data sources quoted in this Report all include long-term absences in their statistics. Without including long-term absences it is therefore not possible to benchmark the Guernsey figures against other jurisdictions.
- Some Guernsey Departments did not supply sickness absence data in previous years and therefore had to be excluded from the overall statistics.
- There were significant differences between Departments in the reporting of the data, for example, adjustments were often not made for the large numbers of part-time staff.
- The overall figures were calculated by simply averaging the Departmental figures; they were not weighted according to the size of the Department, which means that the overall 2003 and 2004 figures are likely to be underestimated. This problem has been recognised by the Policy Council Human Resources Unit who intend to request the raw data from Departments in future so that Departmental figures can be analysed consistently and weighted averages can be calculated.

Data on sickness absences need to be collected on a more consistent basis across Departments

2.6 The provision of accurate, timely and accessible information is the cornerstone of a successful absence policy. Without good data managers have no grasp of what they are trying to control. Research has shown that the active monitoring of absence is effective in reducing absence by demonstrating that managers are taking the issue seriously, and enabling them better to understand the characteristics and causes of absence. Accurate reporting and recording of absence and its causes are essential. Ideally line managers should be able to update the data in the system and perform their own analyses of the information. This reinforces their role in absence management and gives them the ability to monitor effectively.

2.7 Many Guernsey Departments recognise that effective sickness absence management depends on good data. For example, the Health & Social Services Department’s procedures require line managers to monitor sickness absence regularly and to keep accurate records. The Education Department maintains its own sickness database to keep a handle on its sickness absence rates (Figure 16).

2.8 The detailed definitions of what is captured within the term “sickness absence” vary considerably between organisations. Figure 17 summarises the basic data on each member of staff that will need to be collected by Guernsey Departments if they are to be able to calculate and monitor their sickness absence rates effectively.

2.9 We recommend that Departments should maintain a staff database with sufficient basic data on sickness absences to enable appropriate measures of performance to be calculated. The data requirements recommended in Figure 17 are the minimum necessary to enable this to be achieved. To enable further analyses Departments may of course choose to record additional data in their databases, such as the days of the week on which sickness occurs or the age, grade, sex or location of the member of staff.

2.10 Data collection on the causes of sickness absence is not generally well-developed. The Environment, Health & Social Services and Social Security Departments maintain records of the causes of sickness absence for their staff. The Education Department does so for absences longer than three days. However, most Departments have little information on this subject. We recommend that the causes of sickness absences should be recorded and monitored by all Departments. This would enable Departments to identify trends, such as problems due to stress or other factors, which might be within the Department’s control.

16 Good practice – the Education Department’s sickness database

The Education Department maintains a sickness database, which includes information for each member of staff on the number of days sick leave taken, the number of uncertified days sick leave taken and the number of spells of sickness absence. The way this information is recorded makes it relatively straightforward for the Department to determine rates of sickness absence for the Department as a whole.

Source: Education Department
### Recommended minimum data requirements for effective sickness management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended basic data to be recorded for each member of staff</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether the staff member is full-time or part-time, and available for the whole year.</td>
<td>All staff should be included even those who have taken no sick leave. For part-time staff, record the number of days or hours attendance expected per week. For starters and leavers record the date that employment started or finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of days available for work in the year.</td>
<td>A full-time member of staff is assumed to be available for work for 227 days (which excludes weekends, bank holidays and an average annual leave allowance). For part-time staff, estimate the number of working days available as a proportion of 227. For example, someone who works 16 of a possible 36 hours a week would be available for 101 days ((227 \times 16/36)). For starters and leavers, estimate the number of working days available as a proportion of 227. For example, someone who started on 1 March would be available for 189 days ((227 \times 10/12)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether the staff member is established or non-established.</td>
<td>The Policy Council Human Resources Unit counts civil servants as established staff and all other staff as non-established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of days of sickness absence in the year.</td>
<td>Include all spells of sickness and industrial injury but exclude maternity leave and non-ill-health absences. Measure absences to the nearest half-day. Exclude weekends and bank holidays even if any periods of sickness absence span such days. For part-time staff record only the time actually absent from work (i.e. excluding time when they are not contracted to work). For spells of absence starting before the beginning of the year or ending after the end of the year, record only the sick days for the year in question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of days of uncertified sickness absence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of spells of sickness absence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The total number of days of long-term sickness absence.</td>
<td>A spell of long-term sickness absence is defined as an absence of more than 20 working days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cause of each spell of sickness absence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Audit Office
There are a number of useful ways to analyse sickness absence data

2.11 A well organised data set collected as defined above can enable a variety of analyses to be undertaken to inform management and provide information from which valid comparisons can be made across and within organisations. This variety of measures has the benefit of providing different ways of looking at the data so that trends can be identified, variations highlighted and causes diagnosed.

2.12 Some Departments, such as the Culture & Leisure and Health & Social Services Departments, have been pro-active in analysing and evaluating their sickness absence data (Figures 18 and 19). The Education Department has also done some work to determine the direct costs of sickness absence to the Department. This is in the context of having to pay for supply teachers to cover for teachers who are off sick.

2.13 Data records for individual staff will need to be aggregated to provide summary data from which performance measures can be calculated. The recommended summary data and performance measures for Guernsey Departments are set out in Figure 20. These are intended to ensure consistency throughout the States and to enable States-wide figures to be calculated.

2.14 We recommend that Departments should calculate measures of sickness absence performance on a consistent basis. The measures should include separate sickness absence rates with and without long term sickness, the proportion of uncertified absence, and the average number of spells of absence. Departments should also estimate the cost of their sickness absence.

2.15 We recommend that summary data and basic sickness absence information should be provided by Departments to the Policy Council Human Resources Unit to enable States-wide performance measures to be calculated. We recommend that the Policy Council Human Resources Unit should benchmark sickness absence levels in the States of Guernsey against other organisations.

2.16 Departments may of course choose to develop further measures for their own purposes. Examples of other measures that might be considered are:

- Length of absence. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has estimated that in the UK about 60 per cent of sickness absence is for periods of five days or less, about 20 per cent is for between five days and four weeks, and about 20 per cent is for four weeks or more.

- Trigger points such as Bradford factors. Bradford factors allow for an objective analysis of sickness absence patterns and tend to put more emphasis on multiple spells of absence rather than long spells of absence. Trigger points and Bradford factors are discussed further in Part 3 of the Report.

- Percentage of staff with no recorded spells of absence.

18 Good practice – the Culture & Leisure Department’s sickness absence report, 2005

The Culture & Leisure Department has analysed and reported on its sickness statistics for 2005. It has also benchmarked its figures against surveys in the UK. The report has gone to the Department’s senior management team.

The Department has estimated that sickness absence has cost it over £100,000 in 2005. The Department considers that more effective sickness management could reduce this cost. For example, demonstrating that management is taking an active interest in absence levels is, on its own, often enough to improve attendance.

The Department also plans to use Bradford factors (see Part 3 of this Report) as trigger points for investigating individual cases. These triggers would help to demonstrate to employees that attendance is taken seriously and to alert managers to review absences on a regular basis. Individual circumstances and wider factors would need to be taken into account for each individual, but the Department believes that the system would give a framework to begin managing and reducing sickness absence more effectively.

Source: Culture & Leisure Department

19 Good practice – the Health & Social Services Department’s annual sickness absence reports

The Health & Social Services Department produces an annual report on sickness absence for consideration by the Department’s Board. The report endeavours to set out the real costs of sickness absence to the organisation in terms of monetary value, including hidden costs such as the costs of covering absence and associated loss of productivity. The report also attempts to establish how well the Department is performing in comparison to UK figures.

The Department feels that there are substantial savings to be made through the proactive management of sickness absence.

Source: Health & Social Services Department
The SAP payroll project provides an opportunity to standardise data collection on sickness absence

At present, Departments use a variety of methods for recording sickness absence data. Some maintain a computerised database, others keep records of sickness absence on an Excel spreadsheet and some keep manual records. The variety of methods used makes it difficult to collate the information centrally and to calculate States-wide information easily. We note that Jersey implemented a new computer system in 2002, which captured appropriate data relating to all States’ employees. Since that time, it has been possible to track rates of sickness absence at a corporate level.

2.18 The States of Guernsey has recently implemented the SAP payroll module to replace an ageing central payroll system. This went live in January 2006. The next step is for HR information to be included on SAP. Once a corporate HR function is available, it should be possible for line managers to enter sickness absence data directly onto SAP. Line and HR managers, Departmental Business Units, Departments and the Policy Council Human Resources Unit will then be able to interrogate SAP to obtain sickness absence performance information for their particular areas. We recommend that, as the SAP HR project develops, the opportunity should be taken to enable line managers to input sickness absence data directly onto SAP. It will be important to ensure that the performance information that SAP will be able to generate on sickness absence will meet at least the minimum requirements recommended in this Report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Recommended summary data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Method of calculation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Total number of working days available</td>
<td>Add together the number of working days available for each member of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Total number of working days lost to sickness absence</td>
<td>Add together the number of days sickness absence for each member of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Total number of days uncertified sickness absence</td>
<td>Add together the number of days uncertified sickness absence for each member of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Total number of days of long-term sickness absence</td>
<td>Add together the number of days of long-term sickness absence for each member of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Total spells of sickness absence</td>
<td>Add together the number of spells of sickness absence for each member of staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Recommended performance measure</strong></th>
<th><strong>Method of calculation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F Percentage of working days lost to sickness absence per staff year</td>
<td>B/Ax100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Average number of working days sickness absence per staff year</td>
<td>Fx227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Proportion of uncertified sickness absence</td>
<td>C/Bx100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Percentage of working days lost to sickness absence (excluding long term sickness absence)</td>
<td>(B-D)/(A-D)x100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Average number of working days sickness absence per staff year (excluding long term sickness absence)</td>
<td>Ix227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Average number of spells of sickness absence per staff year</td>
<td>E/Ax227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Estimated direct cost of sickness absence</td>
<td>Fx(total staff costs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Audit Office
PART THREE
Managing sickness absence

3.1 Positive management of sickness absence is crucial in achieving long-term reductions in sickness levels. A sickness absence policy needs to prevent “illegitimate” absence whilst also providing support to those who are “legitimately” absent and aiding their return to work. This Part of the Report examines whether the management of sickness absence in the States of Guernsey meets generally accepted good practice. Appendix 3 sets out good practice in managing sickness absence.

3.2 We focused particularly on four main aspects of good practice:

- whether the States has a clear strategy for managing sickness absence;
- whether staff are required to make early contact with their line manager as soon as they take time off for sickness absence;
- whether return-to-work interviews are undertaken when staff return from sickness absence;
- whether action is taken in cases of frequent or prolonged sickness absence.

3.3 We concluded that more could be done to manage sickness absence effectively. In particular we found that:

- The States has issued guidance for Departments on managing sickness absence (paragraphs 3.4 to 3.6).
- Most Departments have clear procedures for the notification of sickness absence and these are generally complied with (paragraphs 3.7 to 3.8).
- Return-to-work interviews are often not conducted (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.11).
- Trigger points are rarely used to manage frequent or prolonged sickness absences (paragraphs 3.12 to 3.20).
- The issuing and subsequent recovery of sickness benefit cheques is wasteful and inefficient (paragraphs 3.21 to 3.24).

The States has issued guidance for Departments on managing sickness absence

3.4 Clear absence procedures have been found by many employers to have an immediate effect on sickness levels by their very existence and consistent application. Failing to have procedures in place can foster a perception of indifference towards sickness absence and can lead to an “absence” culture in the organisation. It is also important that staff should not be “encouraged” to attend work when they are not fit to do so.

3.5 In November 2004 the Policy Council Human Resources Unit (PCHRU) issued a guide for States Departments on managing sickness absence. The guide stresses the importance of managing absence, “not to compel genuinely unfit employees to work, but to ensure that employees do not take time off without a legitimate reason and, ultimately, to motivate staff to aim for full attendance”. The guide emphasises that line managers have a central role in controlling sickness absence.
Some Departments use the PCHRU guide for managing their own sickness absence. Most Departments, however, have prepared their own policies and procedures tailored to their own circumstances, although these tend to be based on the PCHRU guide (Figure 21).

### Departmental strategies for managing sickness absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department or grouping</th>
<th>Number of staff (full-time equivalents)</th>
<th>Strategy for managing sickness absence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce &amp; Employment</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>A document setting out the Department’s sickness absence policy and procedures is in draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>The Department follows the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence but plans in 2006 to develop its own strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>Central: The Department follows the central PCHRU guide. Schools: Sickness absence is covered in teachers’ conditions of service document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>The Department has prepared its own sick leave guidelines to supplement the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>The Department’s procedures for managing sickness absence date back to 1999 and are currently being updated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>Central, Customs, Probation: Follow the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence. Fire: Has its own written policy for managing sickness absence. Police: Has its own policy, which is based on the established staff procedure. Prison: Has its own operational order explaining the procedure for staff reporting sick, and guidance for Duty managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Central: The Department has its own sickness absence procedures. Residential Homes: There is a separate policy and procedures for the Department’s residential homes at Longue Rue House and Maison Maritaine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>The Department has prepared its own sickness absence policy as part of the induction pack for new staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury &amp; Resources</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>The Department follows the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Greffe: Has a written strategy/policy for managing sickness absence. Sheriff &amp; Sergeant: Does not have its own written strategy for managing sickness absence. Law Officers: Follows the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Council</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>The various units of the Policy Council follow the central PCHRU guide to managing sickness absence but tailor it to their own needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Departmental responses to National Audit Office enquiry
Most Departments have clear procedures for the notification of sickness absence and these are generally complied with.

3.7 Staff should be required to make early contact with their line manager as soon as they take time off for sickness absence. The Policy Council Human Resources Unit (PCHRU) guide to managing sickness absence stresses the importance of clear procedures for the notification of sickness absence (Figure 22).

3.8 The Housing Department has clear written procedures on what staff are required to do when reporting sick (Figure 23). Most other Departments also have clear procedures on this issue and staff generally comply with the notification requirements (Figure 24). We recommend that all Departments should ensure that they have clear procedures whereby staff must notify their line manager or equivalent by a certain time on the first day they are off sick. Departments should also ensure that these procedures are complied with.

### 22 Suggested notification procedures in the PCHRU guide

The initial stage of the procedure is for the employee to telephone his or her line manager to say that he or she will be absent from work.

Non-attendance should be reported to the employee’s line manager by a particular time on the first day – eg within half an hour of the scheduled start or core working time – and if necessary at regular intervals thereafter.

There is clear evidence that the requirement to inform their line manager of absence in itself acts as a deterrent to staff being absent without good reason. For this reason it should not normally be acceptable for a representative to act on the employee’s behalf nor for the employee to leave a message with a colleague or the switchboard. If the line manager is not available, he or she should phone the employee back as soon as possible.

In the absence (e.g. leave) of the line manager, another member of staff should be delegated to take over these duties.

Where an employee fails to follow the procedure for notification of absence the employee should be considered to be absent without permission. In such cases the line manager must discuss the matter immediately the employee returns to duty to ascertain the reason for absence and the reasons for failure to follow the agreed procedure. If no satisfactory reason is supplied, the line manager must discuss with senior management disciplinary action as appropriate.

Source: PCHRU guide

### 23 Good practice – the Housing Department’s notification procedures for sickness absence

If you are absent from work through sickness you must telephone your line manager and speak to him/her in person by 9.30am on the first morning’s absence. Generally, it is not acceptable to leave a message with a colleague or on voicemail, or for the call to be made by a third party.

If your line manager is not available, you must speak to his/her line manager or, if this is not possible, to the Chief Officer’s Principal Assistant.

You will be expected to give brief details of the reason for your absence and an estimate of when you might be able to return to work. You will also need to advise whether there are any urgent pieces of work someone else may need to pick up or appointments that will need to be rescheduled.

Source: Housing Department
### Departmental Reporting Requirements for Staff Taking Sickness Absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department or Grouping</th>
<th>Number of Staff (Full-time Equivalents)</th>
<th>Reporting Requirements for Staff Taking Sickness Absence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce &amp; Employment</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>Raymond Falla House and VisitGuernsey: An employee who is unable to attend work because of sickness, injury or incapacity must notify his or her line manager by 9.30 am on the first day of absence. In the absence of the line manager, a message must be left with reception for the manager who may then wish to phone the employee back. Dairy: Staff must contact their manager as early as possible on the first day they are sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>Staff are required to make early direct contact when off sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>Central: Staff are required to notify the Department as soon as possible when off sick. Schools: All staff have to notify a named contact (normally the Head or Deputy Head) when taking sickness absence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Staff must personally inform their line manager by 9.30am on the first day of sickness absence. If the line manager is not available, staff must inform the PA to the Chief Officer, the PA to the Planning Division or the Administration Officer (General).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>Employees have a duty to notify their line manager before the start of work on the first day of absence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>Central: When a member of staff is sick they are required to call their line manager before 9am that day. Most officers comply with calling their line manager early in the morning. Customs: An officer is required to call their line manager as early as possible informing them that they are sick. Staff do conform to this requirement. Fire: It is a requirement for an individual to 'book sick' and 'book fit' with the Control Room Operators immediately they are aware and everyone does comply with this. Police: Police Officers and established staff who are sick call the switchboard in the first instance from where calls are forwarded to the relevant Sergeant or line manager. Prison: Staff are required to contact the Prison as early as possible before the commencement of their shift when reporting sick. Staff do comply with this requirement. Probation: Staff are expected to contact the office if they are sick but not necessarily their line manager although he would be informed. Staff do always contact the office because they usually have to have their diaries rearranged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Central: Staff must speak to their line manager in person by 9.30am on the first morning's absence (see Figure 23 above). Staff comply with the notification procedure. Residential Homes: Night staff are expected to notify management of sickness absence before midday prior to their shift. Other staff must give at least 5 hours notice unless there are exceptional circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>Central Services: Staff are required personally to inform their line manager before 9.30am if they are ill and unable to attend work. Guernsey Airport: Staff are required to (and do) contact their line manager on the first day of sickness absence. Guernsey Technical Services: Employees are required to make contact with their line manager (or alternate contact in the absence of their line manager) before 9.30am. Employees comply with this requirement. Guernsey Water: It is a requirement that absent staff make early direct contact with their line manager on the first day of sickness absence and staff do comply with this requirement. Harbour: Absent employees are required to make early direct contact on the day with their line manager (or a designated officer/supervisor). As a rule this is in practice adhered to. States Works: Notification of sickness absence has to be done in person if at all possible and at the earliest opportunity, but before 9.15am regardless. In practice this works well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>Staff who are unable to attend work must contact their line manager at the earliest possible opportunity. In the majority of cases, staff comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Return-to-work interviews are often not conducted

3.9 Return-to-work interviews are widely recognised as being the single most powerful tool in tackling sickness absence. The purpose of these meetings, held after every absence no matter how short, is to welcome the individual back, check that they are recovered and review their absence record. They can range from a very brief welcome back to a longer, more formal interview in cases of frequent or prolonged absence. The interview also provides the opportunity to discuss any problems or any underlying difficulties that are causing the employee to stay away from work. Additionally, they show that the person has been missed and highlight the effect on business of the absence. Targets can be set for improvement, and the actions to be taken if there are further problems with absence can also be outlined. An example of the basic structure of a return to work interview is given in Appendix 4.

3.10 This simple, but vital, act of talking to employees after all absences has been shown to improve attendance without any further action being taken. To be effective they must be handled sympathetically and require managers to have received adequate training. The Policy Council Human Resources Unit (PCHRU) guide to managing sickness absence emphasises the merits of return-to-work interviews (Figure 25).

### Departmental reporting requirements for staff taking sickness absence continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department or grouping</th>
<th>Number of staff (full-time equivalents)</th>
<th>Reporting requirements for staff taking sickness absence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treasury &amp; Resources</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>Staff are required to make early contact on the first day of any sickness absence and generally comply with this requirement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Courts                     | 63                                      | Grefe: Staff who are ill and unable to come to work must telephone their line manager or, if they are unavailable, an immediate colleague by 9.30am. In practice, staff invariably comply with this requirement.  
Sheriff & Sergeant: Staff are required to make early contact with their line manager and do comply with this requirement.  
Law Officers: Staff are required to make direct contact with their line manager on the first day of sickness absence. Absent staff comply with this requirement although, if the line manager is unavailable, other members of staff may receive the call. |
| Policy Council             | 63                                      | Staff are required to make early contact on the first day of any sickness absence and generally comply with this requirement. |

Source: Departmental responses to National Audit Office enquiry

### Procedures for return-to-work interviews suggested in the PCHRU guide

On the day the employee returns to work the line manager must review the absence with the employee. This should be done in as private an environment as possible. The interview may be an “informal” word lasting only the few minutes it takes to check that the employee is better, or it may be a longer and more formal session with different objectives according to the individual circumstances. Whatever the length or degree of formality, the interview is a vital part of managing absence.

The return-to-work interview can be used to:

- demonstrate the employer’s concern for the welfare of the individual and confirm that the employee is fit to return to work;
- brief the employee on what has happened during his or her absence;
- help the employee return to work after a prolonged absence;
- make further investigation and establish the cause of absence;
- provide an opportunity for a general discussion of the employee’s attendance record (thus preventing a more serious problem arising);

The return-to-work interview may also help to:

- influence the attitude of the individual and other employees;
- raise the profile of the sickness absence procedures;
- reinforce the importance of good attendance.

Source: PCHRU guide
3.11 In some parts of the States, return-to-work interviews are established practice. For example, Guernsey Water has issued guidance to assist its line managers in conducting return-to-work interviews (Figure 26). However, many Departments do not make effective use of this powerful tool (Figure 27). We recommend that return-to-work interviews should be undertaken in all cases. The interview should be used to establish the underlying reasons for the absence and to demonstrate concern for the employee’s welfare.

26 Good practice – Guernsey Water’s guidance on conducting return-to-work interviews

Guernsey Water has prepared guidance to assist its line managers in conducting return-to-work interviews. The guidance explains how to prepare for the interview by gathering all relevant evidence regarding the employee’s absence record. The guidance also suggests a structure to be followed for the interview itself:

- welcome back/update on events;
- enquire about health;
- any consequences of absence (if necessary);
- future action (if necessary);
- completion of formalities (absence form).

Source: Guernsey Water

27 Departmental procedures for return-to-work interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department or grouping</th>
<th>Number of staff (full-time equivalents)</th>
<th>Procedures for return-to-work interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce &amp; Employment</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>Raymond Falla House and VisitGuernsey: Return-to-work interviews are not a requirement and are rarely undertaken. The Department’s draft sickness absence policy and procedures recognises the value of return-to-work interviews but leaves it to the discretion of line managers as to whether to undertake them. Dairy: Return-to-work interviews are carried out by line managers after every incident of sickness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>The Department requires line managers to undertake return-to-work interviews, but they are not always done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>It is left to line managers to decide whether or not to undertake return-to-work interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>There is no formal requirement for line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>Line managers are required to carry out return-to-work interviews on the employee’s first day back at work for each and every absence. However, implementation of this requirement is inconsistent and return-to work interviews are not always undertaken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>Central: Line managers do not conduct return to work interviews unless deemed necessary (the Human Resource Officer might flag up a trend). Customs: Line managers conduct return to work interviews when deemed necessary, for example, after a certain number of days off in a year. Fire: It is a requirement for individuals to complete a recorded return to work questionnaire once they return to work after a period of sickness. All questionnaires are completed. Police: Return to work interviews are not required unless the period of sickness has been a long one in which case the HR Manager or line manager would have a discussion with the officer. Prison: When returning from sick leave all staff must report to the Duty Manager for a return-to-work interview. However, staff will rarely do this and it is then the responsibility of the Duty Manager to ensure that a return-to-work interview is carried out. Probation: Return to work interviews are not held.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Departmental procedures for return-to-work interviews continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department or grouping</th>
<th>Number of staff (full-time equivalents)</th>
<th>Procedures for return-to-work interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Central: The Department’s procedures require line managers to carry out a review of the absence when an employee returns to work after sickness absence. Residential Homes: Where appropriate, an employee may be asked to see their line manager for a return from sickness interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Services</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>Central Services: It is not a requirement for line managers to undertake return-to-work interviews. However, if the nature or length of absence necessitates, action will be taken informally when the employee returns to work. Guernsey Airport: Informal interviews are conducted with staff on their first day back to work by the line manager, except in the case of long term sickness, when more formal procedures may need to be adopted. Guernsey Technical Services: The sickness absence procedures require line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews. Actual practice varies between directorates and is influenced by the nature, length or frequency of absence. Guernsey Water: It is a requirement that line managers conduct return-to-work interviews and in practice these are undertaken. Harbour: It is currently not policy for line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews. However, a common sense/pragmatic approach is followed. States Works: Return-to-work interviews are used as and when considered appropriate, but not in every case. States Works has found return-to-work interviews to be a useful tool in efforts to cut down on short term patterned absences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>Return-to-work interviews are not a requirement but are sometimes carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury &amp; Resources</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>There is no formal requirement for line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews. Greffe: Provision is made in the sickness policy document for return-to-work interviews but these do not always take place for a number of reasons. Sheriff &amp; Sergeant: Return-to-work interviews have not been undertaken in the past but HM Sheriff intends to conduct them in future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Greffe: Provision is made in the sickness policy document for return-to-work interviews but these do not always take place for a number of reasons. Sheriff &amp; Sergeant: Return-to-work interviews have not been undertaken in the past but HM Sheriff intends to conduct them in future. Law Officers: It is not a requirement for line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews. However, on return and on an informal basis, the line manager will enquire as to the well being of the member of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Council</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Return-to-work interviews are conducted and vary as appropriate from a few brief words to more involved interviews in respect of long-term sickness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Departmental responses to National Audit Office enquiry
Trigger points are rarely used to manage frequent or prolonged sickness absences

3.12 Trigger points are widely regarded as the second most effective measure, after return-to-work interviews, for managing sickness absence. A trigger point is a defined level or frequency of absence which automatically prompts management action. It provides a common understanding within an organisation of the level of absence that is of concern. Trigger points need to be used with discretion and take into account individual circumstances as there is a danger that they can be used too rigidly and unreasonably. Their effective use depends on managerial training and confidence.

3.13 There are strong advantages in using trigger points to prompt a case review, since they allow organisations to focus on a level or pattern of absence. They also importantly provide management with a clear structure within which to manage, and so act as an incentive to fair and proper intervention.

3.14 The Policy Council Human Resources Unit (PCHRU) guide to managing sickness absence has sections on how to deal with frequent short-term sickness absence and how to deal with long-term sickness absence. In respect of short-term sickness absence, the guide emphasises the importance of return-to-work interviews as discussed above. It also emphasises the need for monitoring absence records, particularly the number of days lost, the number of spells of absence and the pattern of absence.

3.15 Guernsey Prison uses trigger points to monitor sickness absence (Figure 28). We also found that some other Departments use trigger points to prompt particular management actions. The Health & Social Services Department’s procedures allow for employees to be referred to Occupational Health for a medical opinion in cases where four or more short term absences have occurred within 12 months or there is a continuous absence of four weeks or more. The Social Security Department’s sickness absence policy states that a medical certificate may be required for all periods of absence for staff who take 10 or more days uncertificated absence in any 12 month period. The Commerce & Employment Department’s draft sickness absence policy and procedures will also require medical certificates to be produced where uncertified sickness absence has occurred more than five times (or up to 15 days) in any 12-month period.

3.16 Trigger points, however, are not widely used in the States of Guernsey to prompt action in cases of frequent or long-term sickness absence. We consider that Departments are thus missing out on an important and effective tool for managing sickness absence. We recommend that all Departments should use trigger points to prompt management action in cases of frequent or long-term sickness absence, based on an individual’s cumulative absence from work.

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**Figure 28** Good practice – Guernsey Prison’s use of trigger points in monitoring sickness absence

Members of staff who have accrued three periods of sickness absence in the previous 12 months are invited to attend an informal interview with the Principal Officer Detail to establish whether there is any underlying problem which can be addressed.

Members of staff who have accrued five periods of sickness absence in the previous 12 months are invited to attend a formal interview with the Prison Governor to establish whether there is any underlying problem which can be addressed and to bring to the attention of the member of staff the seriousness of their sickness absence. A letter of unsatisfactory attendance is sent after the interview.

It does not matter about the length of absence; a period of absence could be from one day to one month.

**Source:** States of Guernsey Prison
Bradford factors

3.17 The Bradford factor is a particular type of trigger point, which is becoming more widely used in the UK to address problems of frequent short-term absences (Figure 29). The Culture & Leisure Department in Guernsey told us that in future it plans to use Bradford factors as trigger points for investigating individual cases.

3.18 We used the 2005 sickness absence data for Guernsey to calculate Bradford factors for individual members of staff. We found that nearly a quarter of staff in Guernsey had a Bradford factor greater than 50 in 2005 (Figure 30). Some eight per cent of staff had a Bradford factor greater than 400, indicating frequent spells of sickness absence. It should be emphasised that Bradford factors should be used only as a trigger for further investigation and discussion. Any action to be taken in individual cases will clearly depend on the circumstances of each case.

Targets

3.19 The Health & Social Services Department in Guernsey aims in its draft sickness absence plan for 2005 to reduce sickness absence by 20 per cent over the next three years through:

- liaison with managers with regard to the monitoring of sickness absence in individual areas and developing strategy for its reduction;
- encouraging use of an appropriate recording system;
- assisting managers in the monitoring of short term and Monday absences;
- encouraging return-to-work interviews;
- encouraging phased return and early return to work plan;
- regular monthly visits by Occupational Health to targeted areas to discuss cases.

29 Bradford factors

For many organisations, recurring short spells of absence can be more disruptive than longer spells of absence, as the latter are easier to plan for. This is particularly the case for employers with a large number of front-line employees such as teachers, nurses and police officers.

Bradford factors can be used to assist organisations in addressing this problem. To calculate the Bradford factor for an individual, multiply the number of working days lost by the square of the number of spells of absence taken in the same period:

- For example, an individual that took one absence that lasted six days would have a Bradford factor of $6 \times 1^2 = 6$
- However, an individual that took three absences, each of two days' length would have a Bradford factor of $(2+2+2) \times 3^2 = 54$

As these examples show, the Bradford factor tends to put more emphasis on multiple spells of absence, since in both cases 6 days were lost.

Bradford factors are used in many organisations, usually as a form of trigger mechanism. The 2005 report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) states that trigger mechanisms such as the Bradford factor are used by nearly 70 per cent of organisations which took part in its survey.

The UK Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety and Productivity published a report in November 2004 citing the following example:

This system is used in the Prison Service (where it is known as the ‘attendance score’), tied to a sliding scale of management action:

- 51 points in six months leads to a verbal warning;
- 201 points to a written warning and 401 points to a final warning. This also provides a clear framework for tackling persistent short term absence – a member of staff with an attendance score of 601 points in 12 months with a final warning may be dismissed on grounds of unsatisfactory attendance. 300 staff have been dismissed for all categories of sickness absence on these grounds in the prison service in 2003-04.

This approach has had a significant effect in reducing short term absence by an average of 0.4 days per person. The strength of the system seems to be that it requires line managers to issue mandatory warnings in all cases where trigger points are reached, without local discretion. This ensures that all staff know that poor attendance will be tackled. The mandatory management warnings are supported by sound local and corporate data, strong monitoring arrangements driven through the line by operational directors and an auditing system to ensure compliance.

As with any measure of performance, the Bradford factor is only as reliable as the data used to calculate it. It can also be seen as a fairly crude measure, giving certain types of absence an extreme weighting. This problem can be mitigated if line managers understand how the Bradford scores work, and what the appropriate next steps might be. This may necessitate some training for line managers. However, if Bradford factors are not used in isolation they can be a useful indicator providing managers with information on which to instigate a conversation with the absentee.

Source: National Audit Office
3.20 Nearly half of organisations in the UK have set targets for reducing sickness absences. We noted, however, that other than the example of the Health & Social Services Department referred to above, no other targets have been set for reducing sickness absence in Guernsey. We recommend that those Departments with high rates of sickness absence should set targets for reducing their sickness absence levels. Such targets should be realistic and stretching, yet recognise that absence rates cannot realistically be set at zero, and that some level of sickness absence will always occur.

3.21 Sickness benefit is a weekly benefit paid by the Social Security Department to persons who are incapable of work due to illness or disablement. Before sickness benefit can be paid, certain contribution conditions must be satisfied. Employees can still claim sickness benefit even if they are continuing to be paid by their employer but they may have to give their employer any benefit they receive. This is a matter for the employer.

3.22 States employees on full pay who are in receipt of sickness benefit cheques from the Social Security Department are required to hand the cheques over to their Department.7 The rationale behind this is that the employee should not receive more when sick than when working.

3.23 We found that all Departments have to keep records of which staff have received sickness benefit and whether the amounts have been paid over to the Department. Some Departments, such as Health & Social Services, have to spend a great deal of effort in chasing up people who have not handed their cheques over. We consider that these procedures are bureaucratic and unnecessary and could be avoided if the Social Security Department were in a position to pay sickness benefit directly to Departments.

3.24 The Social Security Department told us that it was aware of the concerns of some Departments about the need to chase up sickness benefit cheques and would be happy to pay sickness benefit directly to Departments. Its new computer system would be going live in the summer of 2006 and the new system would allow payments to be made direct to Departmental payrolls. The Department also aims by the end of 2006 to offer this option to local employers. We therefore recommend that, once its new computer system goes live, the Social Security Department should pay sickness benefit for States employees directly to Departments. This would obviate the need for Departments to recover the amounts involved from individual members of staff.

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7 Officers receiving half pay and/or officers working part time need to hand in their sickness benefit cheques only if their half pay plus their sickness benefit totals more than their normal rate of pay. Any difference is refunded.
APPENDIX ONE

NAO methodology

1 This Appendix sets out the audit methodologies we used during the course of this study.

Departmental sickness absence data and procedures

2 We asked Departments for their raw sickness absence data for 2005 in the form of a spreadsheet showing for each member of staff (including part-time staff, starters and leavers) the following information:

- the number of days available for work for that person (based on 227 days for a full-time person);
- whether the person is established or non-established;
- the total number of days sickness absence for that person for the year;
- the total number of days uncertified sickness absence for that person for the year;
- the total number of spells of sickness absence for that person for the year;
- the total number of days of long-term sickness absence for that person for the year (only counting spells of 21 days or more).

We analysed the data from each Department to obtain a variety of sickness absence indicators.

3 We also asked Departments about their sickness absence strategy and procedures:

- whether the Department/individual business units have written strategies/policies of their own for managing sickness absence;
- how sickness absence is recorded (e.g. paper-based or computerised system);
- whether it is a requirement that absent staff make early direct contact with their line manager on the first day of sickness absence and, if so, whether staff in practice comply with this requirement.

- whether it is a requirement for line managers to conduct return-to-work interviews on the first day that staff return from sickness absence and, if so, whether line managers in practice do conduct return-to-work interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with States of Guernsey staff

4 We discussed the management of sickness absence with:

- the Head of Human Resources and staff in the Policy Council HR Unit;
- Departmental HR staff.

Data sources in other jurisdictions

5 We obtained comparative data from a number of different sources. Figure 31 summarises the main features of each of these data sources. There was no published information available from the Isle of Man.

Good practice sources

6 We drew on a wide range of good practice sources on the management of sickness absence, including the following:

- Cabinet Office, Working Well Together: Managing Attendance in the Public Sector (1998);
- Cabinet Office, Department for Work and Pensions and Health & Safety Executive, Managing Sickness Absence in the Public Sector (2004);
- Employers’ Organisation for Local Government, Local Government Sickness Absence Levels and Management (2005);
- Institute for Employment Studies, Costing Sickness Absence in the UK (2001);
Institute for Employment Studies and Institute of Work Psychology, *Current Thinking on Managing Attendance* (research paper commissioned by the National Audit Office) (2004);

National Audit Office, *the Management of Sickness Absence in the Prison Service* (2004);

National Audit Office, *Managing Attendance in the Department for Work and Pensions* (2004);

National Audit Office, *Attendance Management Audit Toolkit* (2005);

National Audit Office, *the Management of Staff Sickness Absence in the National Probation Service* (2006);


### Summary of data sources

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<th>Data source</th>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<td>States of Jersey</td>
<td>July 2004 to June 2005</td>
<td>Sickness Absence Levels in Jersey’s Public Sector – States Greffe (February 2006)</td>
<td>Permanent staff only</td>
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<td>Scottish Executive</td>
<td>Financial year 2003-04</td>
<td>Sickness Absence in the Scottish Executive Core Departments 1999-2004</td>
<td>Non-industrial staff</td>
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<td>UK Civil Service</td>
<td>Calendar year 2004</td>
<td>Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 2004 – RED Scientific Limited (October 2005)</td>
<td>Reported sickness absence for the non-industrial Civil Service. Taken primarily from departmental payroll centres.</td>
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<td>Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)</td>
<td>Financial year 2004-05</td>
<td>Absence Management: A Survey of Policy and Practice (Annual survey report 2005) – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (July 2005)</td>
<td>Replies from 1,038 HR practitioners in organisations employing a total of more than two million people. In March 2005 a total of 10,000 questionnaires were sent out to a sample of people management specialists. A total of 1,038 usable replies were received – a response rate of 10.4 per cent.</td>
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<td>The survey was conducted during January and February 2006 and respondents were asked to report on absence in 2005. The survey questionnaire was sent to senior managers and HR practitioners in private sector companies and public sector organisations.</td>
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Figure 32 shows the detailed sickness absence figures for each Department in the States of Guernsey.

### Appendix Two

#### Departmental sickness absence figures

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<tr>
<th>Department or grouping</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Number of staff (full-time equivalents)</th>
<th>Percentage of working days lost to sickness absence</th>
<th>Proportion of un-certificated sickness absence</th>
<th>Percentage of working days lost (excluding long term sickness absence)</th>
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Source: National Audit Office analysis of Departmental data
APPENDIX THREE

Good practice in managing sickness absence

1. Good practice in managing sickness absence has been widely reviewed. The following list of good practices (Figure 33) draws on a number of reviews and surveys including those by the Confederation of British Industry (published annually), the Work Foundation (published annually), the Cabinet Office, the Institute for Employment Studies and previous National Audit Office reports on managing sickness absence.

### Good practice in managing attendance

1. **Demonstrate senior management’s commitment to improving attendance**
   - Formulate a clear, written policy for attendance which sets out the organisation’s commitment to the health, safety and welfare of its staff (and what support is available to them).
   - Develop performance measures and set targets for improving existing attendance.

2. **Establish and disseminate clear procedures on the management of attendance and systems for reporting and reviewing sickness absence**
   - Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of staff, line managers, local and central personnel managers and occupational health professionals.
   - Establish procedures for local recording and reporting of absence that are clear, precise and well publicised.
   - Provide appropriate and reliable absence information to management to enable them to review corporate and individual absence rates and to identify patterns.
   - Ensure policies are implemented constantly, consistently and fairly at all levels of the organisation.
   - Consult with employees and employee representatives on sickness procedures.

3. **Actively manage short- and long-term sickness absence**
   - Define the review points which identify when it is appropriate for further action to be taken.
   - Ensure absent staff make early contact with the organisation. Maintain regular contact with them.

4. **Take steps to minimise sickness absence – preventative measures**
   - Carry out return-to-work interviews in all cases to establish underlying reasons for absence and to demonstrate concern for the employee’s welfare. Set clear guidance on the content and conduct of the interviews and use them to agree on actions to be taken with employees.
   - Take sanctions against staff suspected of taking excessive sickness absence.
   - Take early and effective action by referring staff on long-term sickness absence, or whose attendance is irregular, to an occupational health adviser.
   - Where appropriate, identify the scope for offering recuperative or restricted duties to staff returning from long-term sickness absence.
   - Take a case management approach to long-term absence cases, bringing together individuals who can facilitate their return to work.

   - Ensure policies are able to respond sympathetically to exceptional demands on staff from outside work (social or family). Recognise that staff may have caring and social responsibilities – for example, for young children or elderly relatives, and find ways to help these staff.
   - Remove any incentives for staff not to attend work.
   - Motivate employees by ensuring that:
     - they feel they are valued by their employer and manager;
     - they have sufficient work each day;
     - they believe their absence would have an adverse affect on their colleagues.
### Good practice in managing attendance continued

- Implement rigorous health and safety policies for assessing risks, recording and reporting injuries, and dealing with accidents at work, and take any necessary preventative measures.
- Promote good health among staff members, for example by offering information about healthy eating and healthy living, lifestyle screening, and welfare and counselling services.
- Consider giving employees greater choice and flexibility in the hours they work.
- Consider job design techniques to improve job interest and involvement, including job rotation, job enlargement and job enrichment.
- Consider the pressures on staff from changes to working practices and find ways to help them deal with those pressures.
- Consider the provision of on-site medical services.
- Consider making earlier or wider referrals to occupational health services.
- Consider attendance management as part of the recruitment process.

### Train staff and managers

- Provide training to members of staff to help them understand the purpose of the sickness policy and how it will operate.
- Give managers training and guidance on the content and conduct of back-to-work and disciplinary interviews, review points and options.

### Evaluate policies and initiatives

- Measure and assess the level of compliance with policy.
- Consult employees and managers on their opinions of policy, procedures and initiatives.
- Monitor wider impacts on the organisational culture.
- Benchmark internally and externally.
APPENDIX FOUR

Suggested structure of a return-to-work interview

1. Return to work interviews, held by line managers immediately on the day of returning to work, emphasise the point that the period of sickness absence (no matter how brief), has not gone unnoticed. They can range from a very brief welcome back to a longer interview in cases of frequent or prolonged absence.

2. The return-to-work interview also provides the employee and his or her manager with the opportunity to discuss, informally (unless there is a recurrent problem), any ongoing or underlying problems. The interview should be held in a private setting.

3. The basic structure which is generally used is as follows:

   a. Line manager preparation: collect information about whether the employee complied with the procedures, details of previous absence patterns, etc.

   b. Welcome: set an informal and non-confrontational tone to the interview. Communicate the purpose of the discussion.

   c. Review of the absence period: discuss the employee’s current health, whether and when medical advice was sought, brief the employee on how their work was covered during their absence (both to emphasise the consequences of their absence and to enable them to take over their work again), probe for any underlying causes of absence that may be important for the individual.

   d. Reminder of previous absence record: demonstrate that data are held and regularly monitored to impress upon employee that attendance is under scrutiny, particularly where absence is causing concern.

   e. Action and timescales: where action is needed, it is important that there is agreement on this between line manager and employee, clarity over responsibility for these actions, agreement on when they are to be reviewed, and clarity on the consequences if they do result in improvement in attendance. Such actions should be recorded.