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PCS calls for 30,000 extra jobs to revive “failing” DWP

More than 250 civil servants reveal the stresses caused by under-staffing

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union today calls for 30,000 extra jobs to revive the “failing” Department for Work and Pensions.

The union, which represents 190,000 civil servants, asked its members working for the DWP to explain how the department’s staffing crisis was affecting them.

It received more than 250 responses detailing how shortages were impacting on them, their colleagues and the quality of work they were able to deliver.

The union has collated a 64-page document of some of the responses which will be presented to the Secretary of State at DWP headquarters at 1pm today.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: “The responses demonstrate the DWP is a failing organisation in a state of crisis.

“We knew the issue of a lack of staffing was a deeply and widely-felt issue among DWP staff but nonetheless were overwhelmed by the power and volume of the responses.

PCS DWP group president Martin Cavanagh said: “Unacceptable workloads caused by the staffing crisis are creating an epidemic of mental health and failing to protect some of the most vulnerable citizens in society.

“Poor working conditions, particularly in Jobcentres where staff are refused the opportunity to work from home, means that staff are either leaving the DWP or attempting to find roles they find less stressful.

“In the short term, we’re demanding the DWP urgently reconsiders its priorities to ensure work is prioritised to deal with issues impacting on vulnerable citizens.

“In the longer-term PCS is demanding there are enough staff to ensure there is a social security system that provides a genuine safety net for its citizens.

“A combination of 30,000 additional staff and of a refocusing of priorities could ensure the DWP was able to deliver a modern and supportive welfare state.”

One respondent, who works in a Universal Credit review team, said the staffing crisis had a huge impact, writing: “Cases are taking months instead of days or weeks. It essentially renders any UC review pointless – even if we find anything, there’s nowhere for the issue to go. If the government cared they would have more staff to increase efficiency.”

Another wrote: “We spent a lot of the summer with around five people a day, dealing with 3,600 claims apiece. Every day felt like drowning, getting upwards of 60 messages from claimants to deal with on top of all the other work. At worst, it pushed me to self-harm and heavy contemplation of suicide.”

A third wrote: “As a work coach who has been at the DWP for over 20 years, I can honestly say I cannot remember stress levels ever being as bad. We are being asked to do more and more in less and less time.”

A fourth wrote: “When I started as a case manager on Universal Credit in 2019 we each had 600 claimants. Now I have over 1,800. Management don’t know the job and expect us to achieve the impossible. It’s no wonder people are leaving in their droves.”

ends