

9 April 2024

DWP mental health crisis - Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary refuse to engage with PCS

PCS has been refused a meeting with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the DWP Permanent Secretary following the publication of damning evidence detailing the scale of the mental health crisis in DWP.

PCS was made aware by Disability News of data provided by the DWP following a Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) request that highlighted the mental health crisis being experienced by PCS members working in the DWP.

[Disability News published a story](#) outlining the issues that this data demonstrated:

- The proportion of universal credit caseload managers who took time off with a mental health condition rose from seven per cent in 2019 to 23 per cent in 2022 and 26 per cent in 2023
- the proportion of caseload managers who spent more than four weeks off sick during the year nearly doubled, from 14% in 2019 to 23% in 2022 and 27% in 2023,
- the average number of universal credit cases each caseload manager was expected to deal with had more than doubled, from 550 in January 2020 to 1,230 in January 2023,
- the proportion of work coaches taking at least four weeks off sick during the year rose from 14% in 2019 to 24% in 2022, and then 22% in 2023,
- The proportion of work coaches taking time off due to mental health concerns increased by more than three times from 4% in 2019 to 16% in 2022 and 15% in 2023.

The data shared by the DWP in response to the FoIA request conclusively supports PCS demands for more staff and confirms the evidence provided in the

testimonies provided by our members in November.

The data makes it clear that excessive workloads are creating unacceptable pressure for our members which is resulting in a mental health crisis in DWP.

Despite repeated attempts by PCS to engage with DWP leadership about finding solutions to the staffing crisis we have hit a brick wall.

On publication of the Disability News article, PCS wrote again to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Mel Stride, and the DWP Permanent Secretary, Peter Schofield, to make an urgent request for a meeting to discuss the mental health crisis in DWP. Again we were rebuffed by the Permanent Secretary who stated "I think the most fruitful way continues to be for you to raise issues within the appropriate engagement forums".

PCS will of course continue to pursue every avenue available to explore how we can improve the working conditions of members and turn back the tide of the mental health crisis. However it remains extremely disappointing that this issue is not being treated with the seriousness it deserves.

The Department's response is disappointing but unsurprising given recent comments by the Secretary of State who said in the Daily Telegraph "There is a real risk that we are labelling the normal ups and downs of human life as medical conditions which hold people back and increase benefits bills there is a "danger that this has gone too far". As a culture, we seem to have forgotten that work is good for mental health".

PCS DWP group and acting national president, Martin Cavanagh responded "What "has gone too far" is the government's disdain for its own employees and the underplaying of the seriousness of mental health conditions affecting both its staff and the claimants they provide services for."