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Public and
Commercial
Services Union

STAFFING CRISIS IN THE DWP

PCS members explain
how they are affected



Staffing crisis in the DWP



The genesis of this document was from an email issued by the PCS DWP Group on 5 October, linking to a story on the PCS website Staffing Chaos in the DWP, asking members to respond to explain how the staffing crisis was impacting on them. The email said: **“We are aware of the unacceptable pressure that staffing shortages are putting on**

members and the stress this leads to. PCS is keen to hear from members how staffing shortages are impacting on them and their teams on a personal level and on the work that is being delivered. We also want to understand about levels of work that are building up and what kind of shortcuts and contingency measures are being used to mask shortfalls in staffing.”

This document is a selection of the most powerful responses from the several hundred received. We knew the issue of 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.

The responses contained in this document demonstrate that DWP is a failing organisation in a state of crisis. This crisis has been created by a government whose policies are vindictive towards claimants that need support and not the punishment that our members are expected to dish out. At the same time as creating policies that require ever more staff to maintain, PCS members in the DWP have been abandoned to extreme low pay with over 25% of staff paid below the Real Living Wage and following the Autumn Statement on 22nd November nearly all will now fall below the National Living Wage that is due to be introduced in April.



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There has been a minimal response from the DWP to address the lack of staff. Low pay means that it is extremely difficult for the department to recruit and retain staff. Poor working conditions, particularly in Jobcentres where staff are refused the opportunity to work from home in any circumstances, means that staff are either leaving the DWP or attempting to find job roles within the department that they believe are less stressful. Some minor easements have been introduced to manage workloads, but they do not go nearly far enough to address the shortfall of staff.

The members' testimonies demonstrate that the staffing crisis in DWP is creating an epidemic of mental ill health amongst staff and failing to protect the most vulnerable citizens in society.

In the short-term, PCS is demanding that the DWP urgently reconsiders its priorities to ensure that work is prioritised to deal with issues impacting on vulnerable citizens.

In the longer-term PCS is demanding that the UK Government and the DWP ensures that there are enough staff to ensure that 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 that the DWP was able to deliver a modern and supportive welfare state.

Martin Cavanagh

PCS DWP Group President



Shameful treatment

“ I work in a small Jobcentre in Wales. I suffer from late onset chronic fatigue as well as being autistic. After much fighting I finally got a reasonable adjustment to work from home on the two days our office is closed to the public. A month ago I was informed I would have to return to the office full time as one of our four work coaches was moving to a new role, and I would have to be in-office to meet minimum numbers for health and safety, covering leave and other absences. This was to be until a replacement was recruited but within a week became permanent. It's shameful that a disabled person's reasonable adjustment is being stolen away.



Massive workload

“ I am part of a Universal Credit review team. There’s around 2,000 of us across the country. My job is to establish if there is any fraudulent activity on a claim currently in place. If there is – I will then push it to a fraud advisor. As things stand, there are only four fraud advisors to support us. This has a huge impact on the workload as cases are taking months instead of days or weeks. It has a huge impact on the public purse as we are basically ignoring 90% of fraudulent activity. This essentially renders any Universal Credit 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.

Hitting crisis point

 Our service centre has been short staffed for some time but over summer it hit crisis point. My team of case managers had around 18,000 claims between 10 of us. This is already high but when you factor in peak leave and sickness, we spent a lot of the summer with around five people a day, 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. I've been in my role for several years and this was the worst it has gotten. It worsened my mental health to the point of severe burnout, with constant headaches when I am at work and bad anxiety. At its worst, it pushed me to self-harm and heavy contemplation of suicide.

Whenever we raised the staffing issue, we were told there was nothing to be done. Everyone I speak to feels overwhelmed. If the headcount is reduced, as suggested by Jeremy Hunt, I don't know what will happen, but something has to give. It seems like it'll be our mental health, based on the attitudes of those higher up.



All-time low



I am currently a work coach and staffing levels in the Jobcentre is at an all-time low. Staff are leaving due to workload pressure and the more flexible working arrangements that other departments offer. Work coaches like me are currently told to prioritise mandatory appointments as we simply do not have the capacity to see all claimants. This means completely ignoring our heavy caseload of people with English as a foreign language. A local Jobcentre is closing and the thousands of claimants in that area are being sent to us. A few new staff in training will not even make a dent in our work load for quite some time.



Short staffed



At my Jobcentre we're so short staffed that most of us have around 230 customers to manage. Weekly one-to-ones with claimants are booked as 30-minute work search reviews – but these are actually ghost diaries and used instead for group information sessions. This is so the office's stats look better.



Claims parked

“ For months, for thousands of people, we have parked almost every claim with a health condition which affects their ability to work. The public reason is so we can focus on those work-ready but in reality as it’s because they don’t appear in the relevant figures. Some of our most vulnerable claimants are left with little or no support. Some erroneously claiming they’re unable to work are left without the push they need to get a job and come off benefits.



Vulnerable claimants left to stagnate



I am a work coach team leader. Our work coaches have seen huge increases in caseload and more work coaches are leaving than joining. Customers on the with health problems and those not in an intensive work-search are not being seen. The complete focus is on mandatory appointments. The most vulnerable claimants have been left to stagnate for over three years now.



Ineffective staffing levels

“ In my 22 months as a case manager, there has been overtime every Saturday and Sunday and mid-week. This clearly shows ineffective staffing levels to manage the workload and a ridiculous amount being spent on overtime (double pay!). How much taxpayers' money must be being wasted!



Very low morale



Low pay means were struggling to recruit and to deal with the rising amount of work. So morale is very low and stress is high. It's broken and needs fixing.

Stressed and depressed

 I work front of house for Jobcentre Plus. There was eight in my team and now there are four – only three full-time. Work coaches have either left or moved to other departments. I am currently off sick with stress and depression. It is no longer a nice place to work.



Rising workload

“ I am a prison work coach and at the start of the year started a Ministry of Justice/DWP trial which changes the way we support prisoners to access benefits on release. What started as a trial is becoming permanent and our workload has risen massively. I am constantly chasing my tail, making stupid mistakes due to the pace I am working at. My flex sheet is always in credit as I can never leave on time – I’m working more hours each week than I want to.

Worn out

 I have worked for DWP for over 40 years and to be honest I am totally worn out physically and mentally. My health has suffered enormously, having to struggle with always being understaffed. This is because of constant pressure, poor pay and staff leaving to go better jobs with better pay and less stress. So I have resigned... I felt I had no other option.



Huge demand



There's such huge demand that the recruitment team aren't increasing quick enough to keep up.

Losing staff

“ Since December, we have lost five full time work coaches, and four members of staff have been on long term sickness – myself included! Our only front of house member of staff has recently left to work in a warehouse which offered more money and flexibility than DWP. Due to staff shortage, two Jobcentres have amalgamated and moved to partial opening hours. There is often not enough staff to stay open so both Jobcentres close early. Work-coaches are trying to fit in as many appointments as possible while claimants have to wait longer than usual. For the last few weeks, there has been a more than two-week wait for a first appointment, even though we are told we should get them booked in within 10 days.

Back-to-back appointments often result in missed breaks, even for the toilet. Our long-term manager juggles between the two jobcentres, but more recently has been pulled to help elsewhere so our deputy manager is now overstretched, juggling front of house meet and greet (because we have no AO staff), diary management, staffing and general issues. During these 11 months so far, they have



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only recruited two new work coaches who are still in initial training and won't be active until the new year.

I am technically not even part of this team but based here because I am not permitted to work from home despite DWP offering 'flexible' working. I have applied for a work coach role and the recruitment process feels completely irrelevant to the job. The interview consists of a pre-recorded interview asking 6 questions. I feel that this recruitment method does not take into account the qualities required for the role; instead it is a test on how well you can recite competencies that can easily be found with a Google search. Of the staff remaining here, three are actively looking and applying for new jobs with ambitions to leave DWP. The Jobcentre is an intolerable and miserable place of work.



Demand outstrips resources

“ There is no other organisation that I know of where you will be expected to complete casework plus take calls – you are either one or the other. The reason we have to be on the phone so much is because demand is outstripping resources by far! The DWP are so hung up on customers waiting for their calls to be answered. This means you can't complete any casework. You could take 15 calls a day on top of the 60 cases in your queue and then get given more work... so work just mounts up and gets left. Everything gets called a priority and you just don't know where to start. The pressure is immense, the constant interruptions that can last over an hour mean resources are not being used to the best of the staff's skills. The staffing crisis is just making this situation worse .

The job is complicated, from application, completing changes, dealing with complaints, collecting debt, dealing with abusive customers or vulnerable customers, and closing cases. All these are very time consuming and you have to read instructions for each case you deal with. DWP need to look for solutions. With this high pressure and the number of calls taken on a daily basis, with only 10 minutes



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after a call to write it up and deal with any resulting (this could be an hour-and-a-half suicide call), you then go back to what you looked at when you first started work that morning. Then the phone rings again and so on and so forth every day.



Inadequate training

“ The result of consistently inadequate training with expectation to ‘just get on with it’ has had a hugely negative effect on my mental and physical health. This experience has made me feel useless, hopeless, anxious and depressed. With some new work processes, highly experienced case managers are ‘bored and frustrated’ as they do not have enough work to do. Most wish they were still case managing and helping to clear the huge quantity.

It is hugely frustrating to go from feeling/being a useful member of staff to feeling stressed and depressed with not enough work to do, whilst other service centres are massively understaffed. Management should be ashamed of themselves.



Huge backlog

“ In my area of work (counter-fraud, compliance and debt) there are now more of us than before COVID. Yet the overall aim of getting so much money back by the end of the year is being thwarted by a lack of decision makers – in all of the benefits, but particularly within Universal Credit. When we send for a decision we have to create an ‘Agent To Do’ on the claimant’s journal and, for certain types of cases, this blocks any further payment until a decision is made. We can try and get this escalated but again the lack of decision makers (who take an average of 3 months to train) means that no decision is quickly being made. It is putting pressure on us and people are screaming for reinstatement of their Universal Credit, which has being blocked only by a lack of decision. This is unacceptable for us and more importantly, the claimant.

Similarly, Carers’ Allowance takes a very long time to make adjustments and for decisions to be made on those whose benefit is or has been incorrect. We have a huge backlog of such cases, often from over 6 months ago. Legacy benefit decisions are also taking a long time. Claimants keep phoning us about the wait, meaning extra



work for us and the stress of dealing with their frustration and angry. A lot of legacy benefit claimants, ESA for example, are very vulnerable and the wait for a decision can also have an adverse effect on their health. We are also experiencing more threats of suicide by claimants, in some cases already attempted, sometimes successfully.



Large caseload

 We are extremely short staffed. I am a work coach at a Jobcentre, I work 21 hours and have a caseload of over 200. I am interviewing on average between 15 and 20 people before lunch. No time to deal with journal messages – particularly those requesting help through FSF for travel to work etc. I rarely have a full lunch break and tea break is often non-existent.



Lack of respect

“ We received an email last week about a questionnaire for people transferring or leaving the office. They want to find out how they can keep staff. We all know the answers:

1. Wages
2. Respect
3. Lack of proper consultation
4. Being jumped from one job to another sometimes on an hourly basis never mind daily.
5. Being taken off a job you have done for years to be put on something you know nothing about and and being advised by a manager who can't do the job themselves.
6. Being refused a return to your own job because you had the affront to speak up in support of colleagues and customers.
7. Not being told when opportunities arise.

This is just the tip of the iceberg.



Terrible stress

“ As a work coach who has been at DWP for over 20 years, I can honestly say I cannot remember stress levels ever being as bad as they are currently. We are being asked to do more and more in less and less time. Customer service levels are also being severely affected as most people are expected to be seen within 10 minutes. We are dealing with more and more people with serious mental health conditions, and have only very basic of training for this. Claimants’ appointments continually have to be rebooked/cancelled or significantly reduced in time but still with the same expectations of productivity such as referrals. Staff are having to work far more hours than contracted in order to try and manage the workload. It’s a desperate situation but we are continually told that we are at the required staffing level. If something doesn’t change more staff will be lost and the situation will get even worse.



Unsustainable

“ The current work load as a Universal Credit work coach is unsustainable and has been for some time. There is no time to do the job properly and you are always rushing with back-to-back appointments, many of which are just 10 minutes long. I am finding I am not having a morning or afternoon break and this is now the norm in our jobcentre.



Unsupported

“ I have worked for the DWP for 32 years, first in the Employment Service and then in Jobcentres. I can honestly say I have never felt so undervalued and unsupported by immediate management in my whole service. The level of staffing for service delivery in my office is astonishingly low, stressful and unsustainable. The levels of staff leaving, sickness etc are by far the worst I've ever seen. I feel unsafe at times and under considerable pressure. We are often trying to deal with two or three customers at a time. With many other organisations closing their face to face operations, the jobcentre is getting increasingly more complicated and time-consuming enquiries.

We are a last resort for many, many vulnerable people with housing issues, etc etc. can't get through to HMRC? Pop into the Jobcentre. Problems with your PIP claim? Call into the Jobcentre. International student and want a part time job? Call into the Jobcentre. Kicked out of your house and nowhere to live? Jobcentre. No food, no money? Jobcentre. Carer allowance enquiries, bereavement benefits... we get it all.

We are told the staffing levels are right – that is all we



are allocated. Really? I challenge a senior manager to come and work with us full time for a few weeks on the pay we receive and see how they feel at the end. I raised my concerns with my team leader. I got nowhere.

Continuing circle of waiting and complaints

 I work within RSD, and the staffing shortages here are massively impacting the way we operate. Not only do staff at RSD have to continually firefight thousands of backlogged tasks, the department tends to just move groups of people around to tackle the next issue caused by improper staffing. Of the staff that are available, only a handful are capable of undertaking all tasks available in RSD. The majority of tasks sit and linger in queues for weeks, months... up to a year. Tasks where a customer has called once are low priority whereas a customer who constantly calls is given higher priority. This continuing circle means more complaints, more waiting and a waste of truly skilled RSD colleagues. Suggestions and improvements from the front lines fall on deaf ears. Staff are pressured into working harder and threatened with performance reviews if quotas are not met. There is a lack of mental wellbeing across the department and a wastage of staff who are looking elsewhere for different work or a department that respects them.

Reduced work-life balance

 Since starting the job almost two years ago, managers have told us we should have another two members of staff within our team to deliver the business. These posts were advertised some time ago but work coaches were required within the local offices so the recruitment did not go ahead. We are trying to do everything within the service level agreement as well as cover another centre one day per week. The team is already short yet we are also taking part in and delivering a new claim pilot.

We are being asked to push forward employability and training in a prison. We each work four days per week within a prison then one day per in a local office supporting recent prison leavers. We have delivered and organised events in prison but due to the normal daily business staff have had to cancel annual leave and sign in from home to ensure the events run smoothly. Obviously, this results in increased stress and reduced work life balance. We have also just lost a member of staff who will not be replaced.



Long hours

“ I have been working on a sanctions team. Many of the staff there are over-worked with management pressuring them to apply sanctions even to vulnerable customers. The staff themselves work longer hours and work through breaks and lunches. They log fewer hours in their time sheets to avoid performance management. Our SEO wants push performances. Previously we would have tried to support staff in work to avoid them going off sick in the first place but now the choice is work or go off sick. This makes it tougher for people with care needs such as parents and cares and has a negative effect on people with disabilities and health conditions. Staff are now leaving or going off sick with bringing further stress to those left.

Punished, undermined and overworked

 We need to recruit more people and faster. Work coaches must have full autonomy of their work – micromanaging does not work in this situation. The DWP also needs to have training for managers – there is no official training for people stepping into senior officer roles. This breeds an environment where managers become unnecessarily stressed, power-hungry and target-obsessed so they throw their teams under the bus. There need to be more transparency and stronger leadership.

I have moved to another working environment which has changed my life immensely. I am grateful for the DWP for showing a prime example of exactly what I am looking to avoid and what is now unacceptable to me. People should not be punished, undermined and overworked just because the DWP is incapable of recruiting staff.



Minimum wage job

“ The days where being a ‘civil servant’ brought some respect or kudos are long gone. We are one step below ‘scum of the earth’ thanks to government policies. It is essentially a minimum wage job. You can get higher entry level wages at a supermarket, with less stress. I have pretty much reached the end of my tether.

I work in a call centre and am constantly berated and shouted at because the work on people’s accounts hasn’t been done. It’s a vicious circle: the work doesn’t get done, people ring up to chase it, so people are taken off the processing to answer the extra phone calls, so even less processing gets done. We’ve all been downgraded wages wise and I’m either getting shouted at by customers or being nagged about my call times by managers. I’ve never worked anywhere with such low morale, and all the managers seem oblivious to it.

Poor pay, conditions and a total lack of respect

“ No one wants to work for DWP, especially in the admin position, due to poor pay, conditions and a total lack of respect and understanding from SLT. Massive emphasis on stats and none on staff wellbeing. Constant bending of guidance to suit a particular narrative. Members made to feel guilty by team leaders when they ask to use flexitime. A heavy-handed approach from LRO's to telephony staff...

We are supposed to be working a 'once and done' approach but are not being given the time during telephony to do it. We are actively encouraged to make a list and do this work in processing time. All breaks and training have to come out of processing time. Promotions to the case manager and decision maker roles means that we have lost many caseworkers. Recruitment has been to telephony only and they have only had minimal training which further stretches caseworkers and stops them taking inbound calls. A member of senior management openly says that they are more interested in stats than staff wellbeing!



Excessively monitored

“ When I started work as a case manager on Universal Credit in 2019 we each had 600 claimants. Now I have over 1,800. We are excessively monitored and not appreciated. The management don't know the job and expect us to achieve the impossible. It's no wonder people are leaving in their droves. I've been treated badly and unfairly when I have health conditions.

Fantastic managers not able to support staff properly

“ We have huge problems at our jobcentre. We are being offered overtime and have had staff from other Jobcentres helping us out either on site or remotely. Yet the upper echelons have the nerve to beat us all with a metaphorical stick for not clearing our admin or hitting our targets. The managers live in constant fear of being handed performance warnings. It’s heartbreaking when you consider how run–ragged we all are. To punish them and us for the government’s own failings is nothing short of outrageous, grossly insensitive and bullying. Those very managers are spending weeks on end covering the front door and dealing with all the people that come in, while also trying to cover full diaries of appointments due to not having enough work coaches. One–to–ones are cancelled all the time.

I have two members of staff off with work stress right now: both have said that the staffing situation is impacting their mental health, their sleep and personal lives. Low staffing levels, huge caseloads and lack of support from managers. Both said that they have fantastic managers but



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they just aren't being allowed or have time to support staff properly. And they're not being supported themselves. One manager broke down in tears last week when concerned staff asked her if she was ok. We were genuinely very worried – she looked so ill and exhausted.

We are now taking staff from their front desk roles and turning them into work coaches because we are so short staffed. Two people handed their notice in last week and I know of three others who are looking for other jobs and will no doubt be gone soon too. The situation is absolutely dire and has honestly been like this since they sacked the majority of staff that they took on during Covid. We have never recovered!



Unachievable and unbearable workload

“ I have worked for the department for 22 years. I’m a work coach in Jobcentre Plus where the workload is unachievable and unbearable, with a full diary each day of vulnerable customers, trying to cover staff absences, manage dashboard work, ‘failed-to-attend’ actions, journal messages, increase in flexible support funds, emails from providers with time consuming work to action... the list goes on.

The latest ask is upfront childcare costs – a complex process that can take an hour or more to complete and entail multiple appointments for customers to collect forms to take to their care provider, then return to us for us to then process and pay... all at short notice, to enable customers to start work. With no diary space to book these customers in. This process alone needs a dedicated team to deliver.

When raising this issue with management, we’re told that this is what we’re paid to do. I’m now only able to keep on top of my day-to-day work by coming in early and



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staying late. I regularly log in on my non-working day, in my own time, to action outstanding work and to catch up. Having time off, whether that's leave or non-working days, often creates more problems. Often I come in to urgent tasks yet with no time in my diary. This stress is unsustainable and has impacted on my general health. I'm not sleeping well and struggle to switch off when not at work. I always thought that I would be with DWP until retirement age but I feel that leaving the department will become a necessity.

Pressure on work coaches

“ The Jobcentres cannot keep up with housekeeping tasks. This creates more pressure on work coaches who have to deal with unhappy and desperate claimants who are under pressure from their landlords. I almost always work through my breaks to try and keep on top of my workload. Dealing with Universal Credit claimants face to face will always involve some stressful situations. What I find so exasperating is the stress that the DWP creates on top of that.

A new staff member has recently been seated next to me. He has completed the online work coach training and will not have any formal training from an experienced member of staff. Instead, I am supposed to mentor him while running a full diary and dealing with a caseload of over 300. I did speak to a manager about this and was told that proper training is just not going to happen. This is very difficult for me – but even more so for the staff member – who will start a difficult job, at a difficult time, without adequate training.

The attitude of managers is to ignore problems with staffing and morale. They criticise staff who complain. I do not know of an admin or exec officer in the Jobcentres who



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is not unhappy. Many people are trying to leave as soon as possible. There have been more managed moves in the last 24 months than I have witnessed in my previous 23 years in the DWP.

On better days, the job can be very difficult. On the worse days, it is close to unbearable. This has affected my own health – I have had difficulty sleeping and anxiety has become an issue for me. It is difficult working in an environment that is characterised by conflict, chaos and pressure. Even time off (evenings, weekends, holidays) can be spoilt by thoughts of what I will be returning to. It does take over your personal life, to an extent. I often feel too drained to take part in social activities with friends and family.

I feel hopeless. Conditions will continue to deteriorate. More staff will leave. This will create more pressure. Conditions will deteriorate further. Even more staff will leave. And so on. All the while, senior leaders will assure us that everything is fine and that we all deliver a great service. I think they know exactly what's happening. It's simply dishonesty.

Staff resignations

 I would like to share my experience of working as an employer advisor. I have had this role since July 2022 and in this time there has been a significant reduction in staff numbers at the site. The service delivery team has been reduced by 50% with no plans to replace the staff who have left. Four work coaches and our services manager have resigned. The onsite work coach team leader now has to double as services manager so we are a single-manager site. Every external recruitment campaign fails to fill our vacancies. I have even supported candidates with the application process and I am dumfounded by their lack of success, as I am confident they would be positive additions to the team.

The additional workload has increased stress levels and led to several staff being on long-term sick leave. Morale in the Jobcentre has been at rock bottom for a significant time now. We have approximately 2,000 Universal Credit customers plus a significant number of legacy benefit claimants. I am constantly under pressure to help out with duties and my own workload has been affected. I am acutely aware that I am not able to provide the service that



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I want to in my role. We recently received a visit from a DWP regional director. Our staff shortages were covered up by drafting additional people from other Jobcentres just for this day.



Pressurised into sanctioning

“ I started as a work coach in June, had six weeks of training and have been seeing customers since September. The training does not reflect recent policies. We are hugely understaffed. I am shocked at how we are being pressurised into sanctioning our customers instead of offering a whole load of assistances available to help them get out of Universal Credit and back into work. We are expected to sanction people for ridiculous reasons. I see customers who are on intensive work search. Many of these people are actually in work but because they are not earning over £677 per month, they have to be seen on a weekly basis. The irony is that many people cannot come to their appointments of 15 minutes on a weekly basis because they are working! If they don't realise they have an appointment, they have to complete a form to explain why. If they don't realise this, they get sanctioned. It's the worst way to treat somebody when they're at rock bottom. People are losing their homes because they can't pay their rent. The DWP are going sanction mad and punishing people who are out of work!



Vulnerable customers falling through the gaps



I'm a Universal Credit case manager. Our teams are badly understaffed. We are all regularly covering two caseloads most days. The absolute bare minimum is getting done and vulnerable customers are falling through the gaps. Experienced, hard-working staff are leaving due to the terrible wage and the amount and type of work we do. They're not replaced and their caseload is split between already thinly stretched staff. We all genuinely want to help our customers and do a good job but we constantly have to stay late, take on more work and choose between helping the most vulnerable in society or self-preservation.

Unreasonable upper-management expectations

 We are woefully understaffed, yet every member of the team gives their utmost to deliver a quality service. We hear so many times how our claimants respect our service to them. But I genuinely cannot remember the last time one of my colleagues was given any recognition. We are finding it so difficult to meet upper-management expectations without allowing some claimants to fall between the gaps.

Many of our claimants have health problems yet we are kicking their appointments down the road in an attempt to meet statistical demands. We see suspected fraud from a few claimants but when are we supposed to find the time to record this? Home visits are needed, yet the process of arranging one is dreadfully long.

It feels as if we are now mostly just checking in with our claimants to record them as attending their appointment. Due to the full diaries, other claimants who we haven't been in contact with in ages are pushed to the back. We simply don't have time to truly deliver the service our customers deserve. I see this affecting my colleagues mental health. Although our managers offer great support, when you are on your fifth manager in less than 10 months, the continuity falls off!



Full diaries

“ In our office you are not allowed white space in your diary. Whole diary must be full. So, over 22 daily appointments. All autonomy has been removed. Micro-management is atrocious. Any blocked-out time must have management approval.

DWP insist on promoting people with no background in benefits or how they work and this incompetence is then passed on, inflicting more stress on staff. We have no admin time, no time to write emails, no time to read emails... but we are still expected to fill all vacancies and training courses. This is with constant messages, emails and reminders. It's borderline bullying and harassment. Just writing this is making my heart go fast.

Completely overwhelming

 I'm a Universal Credit case manager and our workload is completely overwhelming. We're currently sitting with over 2,000 claimants each. Management never give us an answer on what the agreed maximum should be.

Today, I was also covering a colleague's 1,700 claimants. They're on annual leave and due to staff shortages, their work hasn't been looked at. There were three ex-prisoners that hadn't had their housing costs paid, leaving them at risk of eviction. Journals hadn't been looked at since Friday. There were hardship payments missed, appointment re-book requests missed... several claimants had sent multiple journals, each one getting more desperate.

I'm exhausted and I've genuinely never been this stressed. I only ever take one day off at a time – coming back is more hassle than it's worth.



Horrorific

“ I am a work coach team leader working in one of the Jobcentres involved in the additional support pilots and it was horrific. I am the only manager and have 15 members of staff! I have responsibility for estates and being a work coach team leader and am still expected to perform both roles 100%. I am currently 3 people down and all it takes is for one to be off sick or a couple to be on leave. My team are brilliant and supportive and we all get on with it but it does affect morale.



Fit to breaking

“ I feel fit to breaking after trying to attain impossible goals set by managers. Working as a work coach at the Jobcentre, I regularly miss half my lunch and almost never take my tea break in an attempt to keep up with the relentless pressure and heavy workload. Diaries are completely full, caseloads were double recommended levels throughout the summer. There is no time set aside for actual admin tasks. People walking in needing a work coach appointment are made to line up and fit in to any gaps in booked appointments. This leads to mistakes and work being rushed, and threats from managers threatening disciplinary action for paperwork not being completed correctly. It is impossible to keep up. My stress levels have never been so high – my mental health is suffering.



Unbelievable pressure

“ There’s unbelievable pressure on staff at present, leading to stress and inevitably sick leave. Dealing with the move to Universal Credit on top of an already unsustainable workload will end in vulnerable claimants falling through the cracks. Who knows what will happen to them. Loyal and caring staff are being pushed to their limits and treated with contempt in my opinion.



Unable to provide a proper service

“ Having worked for the department for seventeen years I have never known things to be as bad as they are now. I enjoy my job as a case manager but our work load has increased to such a level that we are unable to provide a proper service to our claimants. I cannot leave at the end of my shift knowing that I have left important work incomplete. It is unfair also to add that extra work onto my colleagues to complete if I am not in work the next day. I have annual leave and flexi leave that needs to be used but this would then leave my team with more work. Things are likely to get much worse and I don't see anything that will improve the situation at the moment.



Mental health worries

 I am a compliance officer in Liverpool and my workload has gone up tenfold over the last three years. Nobody in senior management has listened to my worries over my mental health. I have a medical condition but they don't listen or care. It's all about targets. It's sickening.

Overtime masking issues

 I currently work as a team case manager. The staffing crisis has had a constant effect on being able to do our jobs. A lot of work is constantly left over on a daily basis. This means that overtime staff are covering this work in a weekend. Because overtime staff are covering the work that we are unable to do, it is masking over the overall issue of work not being done and makes it look like we are always in a good position work wise. This is not the case at all!!

Most service centre are part-time and we are always covering other colleagues' caseloads of over 1,500. We are unable to give our all and do the job we should be able to do. It is having an effect on our team and all teams in the service centre, both physical and mentally! Things need to change with staff recruitment and something needs to give before more staff end up having to take time away because they have some sort of mental breakdown due to the stress.



Leaving in droves

“ I work 29.5 hours a week and have roughly 1,900 cases. Four of our team have to cover a new task instead of case management, one has left, one temporarily seconded and one sick. This leaves six of us to cover 13 peoples' work. We are barely getting past our payments and just not doing all the other tasks. Then we're told from April we will also be taking phone calls...

Staff are going off sick and leaving in droves.

Management tell us not to worry about it and then question why something hasn't been covered. Never, ever, in all my civil service years have I seen such a shambles and so many staff so stressed and miserable. We're constantly chasing our tails. We are a sinking ship and badly need more staff.



The job is excruciating



I work in frontline case maintenance. We are constantly telling management that we are understaffed. Other departments are offering promotion and more money to do the same or often less work. We're told we have the correct amount of staff but a huge proportion are new entrants and will not be up to speed with the job for at least 18 months. This is further compounded by the retention rates of the new staff: more than 50% leave within six months. Lots are not even completing the training, or leaving shortly after the probation period. They say the job is too hard for the pay. Experienced staff are leant on by the newcomers. The job is excruciating in its present format, with caseworkers unable to complete any work, due to the pressures of telephony. Case workers are under so much stress from clients and management, that they are leaving by the droves, for other areas of work.

Can't switch off

 I am a case manager for Universal Credit, with a caseload of nearly 1,800 claims which increases every day due to new claims and the tax credit claims that are being moved to us. We are being told we are getting 14 new staff to partly replace staff that have left. Only seven of these will be permanent. Each day I come into more than 50 journals on top of emails and handovers needing urgent attention as well as doing payments etc. I have been in the job for over five years but this is the worst it has ever been. I am not a stressful person by nature but I find I can't switch off. I worry constantly now about not getting through my work.

We have just been informed by senior management that we will be taking phone calls as from next year and we don't know how we are going to cope. It is no use complaining to management as you are labelled difficult and get talked about in their meetings. I and a lot of my experienced colleagues are seriously looking into leaving. I take pride in my job and aim to give my claimants an excellent customer service but this is becoming impossible.

Staff morale lowest ever

“ I work on child maintenance and the staff morale is at its lowest ever. We are so understaffed yet the absolute focus is telephony so hardly any casework is being completed. Managers are having to hide a team every two weeks just so they can do some of the outstanding casework. There's constant pressure on caseworkers to just answer the phones. Calls are at an all-time low with a very high percentage of customers threatening suicide or very irate and abusive because they're chasing outstanding actions.

The only time any casework is being completed is on overtime at a weekend. To top it all off they have brought back requirements to answer 14 calls a day and close 40 cases during the week. This is the most unrealistic thing I have ever seen. People are absolutely fuming. Many have been off sick and so many are applying for other roles in other areas, just to get out. Some have just quit without another job to go to – it is that bad. Something has got to give. It is awful. And all this stress for a job paid just a little over minimum wage.



Undervalued and underpaid

“ Undervalued and underpaid. I work on the most complicated benefit that can be processed – Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Staff that have been recruited have been promoted. Tasks are farmed out to other offices where they are not actioned because they have no training. We’re unable to keep up. There’s not enough new staff – it takes years to learn the complicated ESA system. We’ve lost too many staff to retirement, transport and parking issues at my office. Wheelchair users can’t get through the gates from the staff car park. Lots of mistakes are made on claims as actions are backlogged and this causes yet more work, frustration and upset for everyone.

ESA is a ticking time bomb due to the lack of experienced staff. One manager said ‘just pay everyone and if it’s wrong it can be written off’! But millions of ESA claims are incorrect and these vulnerable customers could be owed thousands. We have also been warned and told what to say if ministers or higher members of staff ask us questions. My daughter is paid more than me in McDonald’s.

Stockpiling work

 I work for child maintenance. Staffing levels are so low that we are just answering the phone all day and stockpiling the work to be done on overtime.

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