

Stress is main cause of sickness at work

Stress is now the biggest cause of long-term absence among public sector workers – and that is before the 500,000 job losses still to come.

Workers in the state sector took an average of just under ten days off ill in the past year – three more than employees in private firms, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

It costs almost £900 per worker per year – £300 more than the average across British industry, the study of 500 employers found.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: ‘Many public service jobs are stressful at the best of times but now, with everyone across the public sector fearful for their jobs and the extra pressure of having to do more for less, it’s hardly surprising that the health of many workers is under threat.’

A spokesman for the PCS union, which represents civil servants, added: ‘There have been tens of thousands of jobs already lost in the public sector in recent years.

‘It’s not surprising that stress levels are high given that civil servants are being asked to do more work with fewer resources and staff.’

Dr Jill Miller, of the CIPD, said closing the gap between public and private sector absence had proved difficult for successive governments.

He added: ‘More public sector employees are in challenging roles such as social work, policing, teaching and nursing where they often have to deal with people in difficult and emotionally charged situations.’

A third of all employers reported a rise in mental health problems among their staff, a big rise on last year.