DWP project on the feasibility of SSP data collection

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A report of research carried out by the Fit for Work Research Group on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCC</td>
<td>British Chambers of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>CATI</td>
<td>Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing</td>
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<td>CBI</td>
<td>Confederation of British Industry</td>
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<td>CIPD</td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development</td>
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<td>CPAG</td>
<td>Child Poverty Action Group</td>
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<td>DDA</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
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<td>DETI</td>
<td>Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment</td>
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<td>DSM IV</td>
<td>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>EEF</td>
<td>Engineering Employers Federation</td>
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<td>GHS</td>
<td>General Household Survey</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health and Safety Executive</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<td>ICD 10</td>
<td>International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDBR</td>
<td>Inter-Departmental Business Register</td>
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<td>IDR</td>
<td>Inter-Departmental Register</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>Institute of Occupational Medicine</td>
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<td>LEL</td>
<td>Lower Earnings Limit</td>
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<td>LFS</td>
<td>Labour Force Survey</td>
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<td>NHS</td>
<td>National Health Service</td>
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<td>NI</td>
<td>National Insurance</td>
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<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
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<td>OSP</td>
<td>Occupational Sick Pay</td>
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<td>PAYE</td>
<td>Pay As You Earn</td>
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<td>PIW</td>
<td>Period of Incapacity for Work</td>
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<td>SADQ</td>
<td>Sickness Absence Data Questions</td>
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<td>SART</td>
<td>Sickness Absence Recording Tool</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>Small Business Council</td>
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<td>SIC</td>
<td>Standard Industrial Classification</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>Statutory Sick Pay</td>
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<td>SART</td>
<td>Sickness Absence Recording Tool</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>VAT</td>
<td>Value Added Tax</td>
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<td>WERS</td>
<td>Workplace Employee Relations Survey</td>
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<td>WHASS</td>
<td>Workplace Health and Safety Survey</td>
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Summary

Phase 1

The aim of Phase 1 of the research was to critically appraise the validity and reliability of current large-scale datasets on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). It was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in December 2005, as part of a three phase research brief to investigate the reporting and recording of SSP.

A literature search was conducted using academic, governmental and non-governmental sources to identify the existence of large-scale surveys that included questions about the reporting and recording of sickness absence. Sources of information included the British Library, government department websites and reports, academic journals and reports from associated relevant organisations, such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

Findings

The topic of sickness absence has been under-researched and under-reported in the United Kingdom (UK). Even though changes to reporting have been made since the 1980’s, there are few historical data sources for comparison. Where early data does exist they are not always reliable, due to the way in which sickness absence has been measured and the low response rates to sickness absence surveys. It is therefore difficult to compare the findings of previous and more contemporary large-scale datasets with any precision.

To our knowledge there are no surveys that report on absence measurements in relation to SSP and/or Occupational Sick Pay (OSP). Where SSP is mentioned in the literature, it is usually to provide clarification for employers, on whether they can claim any money back.
Sickness absence is measured in numerous ways, the most common being the number of days lost per employee, per annum, which is calculated through the loss of productivity at a day's pay. However, the quality of this measurement is questionable. For example, the CBI asks participants to calculate both the direct and indirect costs of absence but it fails to provide guidelines on how to do so and there is no indication as to how the final estimates of cost were determined.

Thus, there is a paucity of data on sickness absence recording and reporting and little historical data to draw on, either in the public or academic domain. Data on SSP that are held within organisations tend not to be centralised, as various departments and differing internal systems are involved, particularly in larger companies. Therefore even though data may exist at the organisational level on SSP, it does not appear in current large-scale data sets.

Current available data

The following governmental datasets; the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS), appear to offer more valid and reliable information as they have devoted significant amounts of time, planning and resources to questions of sampling and survey design, and return rates. This has led to a rigorous survey instrument and the production of statistically reliable results. The employer organisation surveys, ask a more comprehensive range of questions relating to sickness absence, for example, length of absence, cost to employer, cause of absence, type of contract the employee is on, level of seniority within the company. However, they are more limited in terms of sample size and a lack of weighting and low response rates, which reduces their comparative validity and reliability.

Recommendations

Given their validity we recommend adding additional questions to an existing governmental dataset or creating a bespoke survey instrument. Consideration would have to be given to costs, sampling, weighting, response rates and the frequency of data reporting required. This will ensure that a valid and reliable dataset can be gathered and generalised from, with regard to future policy planning.

Phase 2

Phase 1 identified that existing datasets did not provide data on SSP and rather than identifying gaps and building on available data sets, a feasibility study was proposed to inform new data collection methods.

Phase 2 was the development of such a feasibility study and was divided into two parts. Part A explored the approaches of a variety of employing organisations to collecting and recording sickness absence data through qualitative methods while
part B firstly extended the study to include a greater number and types of organisations and would test the ability of an organisation to actually collect, record and report the sickness absence data identified in the telephone interviews in part A.

Part A

The research was carried out with 20 organisations of differing sizes across a range of sectors. It entailed semi-structured telephone interviews and the results were subsequently utilised to inform the development of a data collection tool in part B of the study. None of our sample collated specific SSP data, nor had any ever recouped money from the Inland Revenue for payment of SSP. Half of the organisations we surveyed had an occupational sick pay scheme.

Findings

The results indicated that;

• Organisations have widely varying structures, systems, policies and processes for the collection, recording and management of sickness absence data.

• Many organisations have separate departments for the collection of sickness absence information, usually a human resources department and a salaries or wages department. Few organisations had linked human resources (HR) and salaries management systems.

• Most organisations kept detailed records of staff sickness but the ability to easily access this information varied from organisation to organisation.

Part B

Part B extended the study to include a greater number of participants to achieve a broader range of results. The original qualitative interview questions were used to inform the development of a quantitative questionnaire which was then adapted to be completed online.

In addition, a pilot data collection sheet was developed to test the feasibility and ease with which organisations could collate simple data and to highlight any challenges and difficulties organisations had in providing these data in a structured format.

Findings

Despite a well designed questionnaire and making direct contact with, and gaining agreement from, the relevant personnel, there were only four responses returned with useable data from the data collection sheet.

There were responses from 22 organisations indicating that they would not be able to take part in the research at this time due to work commitments, time demands and difficulty in obtaining the data.
Follow up contact with the 24 non-responding participants resulted in nine post research interviews.

The following are the key points from responses from these 31 participants:

- The primary reason given for non-completion was that organisations were required to prioritise the core business function. Taking part in research was not a priority in the day-to-day running of the organisation and sickness management was a secondary issue to core business.

- Workloads, demands and priorities at the time of the research were another reason for non-completion. Sickness absence management is a proactive task and although an important issue for many employers, it takes second place during periods of greater demand. HR departments are multi-functional and much of their work is reactive. Recruitment and salaries always take priority and demand can fluctuate. Seasonal demands and key personnel absence also contributed to increased workloads during research period.

- The third difficulty was that the research data requested, needed information from separate departments. Many organisations are multi-sited and nearly all had a separate HR and wages department. This created difficulties as the data requested needed to come from the two separate sources. Whilst the HR or Personnel department had agreed to take part, it was not always possible for them to get an agreement from the wages department. Outsourcing of payroll also affected the opportunity to gather the data.

- Four of the organisations attempted to collect and report the data in the format requested, however, they concluded that their systems were unable to retrieve the information retrospectively.

- The relevance and usefulness of the research to the organisation was a key consideration. Participants felt that there was no motivation to prioritise the research as they could not see how it would be beneficial to them in the long term. Participants pointed out that there had been no consequence of missing the deadline and therefore it had been continually pushed down the list and was not prioritised against more demanding aspects of the business.

- Four of the participants reported technical problems which included being unable to open the attachments, losing the data reported when sending, being unable to return the e-questionnaire and internet access problems during the research period. No further response was achieved from these four participants despite e-mail contact so verification of the difficulties was not possible.

Phase 3 recommendations

The results of the Phase 1 and 2 indicate that it is not currently possible to build up a comprehensive picture of SSP use in England (by region, industry and size of firm). In order to gather the required data we recommend that the DWP should either add a set of questions to an existing large-scale survey, or create a bespoke survey instrument.
Option 1

If the first option were to be pursued we would strongly suggest adapting one of the government surveys (LFS, WERS and Workplace Health and Safety Survey (WHASS)), due to their methodological rigour. The LFS already asks questions related to work absence. However, it is sent to members of a household, who may not remember absence accurately, or be able to provide information in enough detail. The WERS survey asks a number of relevant background questions. Although, its occasional nature would make it difficult to collect data for a baseline and a policy assessment afterwards. Of the three, the WHASS survey appears to be the most relevant in terms of content and design. The longitudinal nature of this survey series means that differences in outcome can be compared over time.

The benefits of adapting an existing survey include a pre-existing sampling frame, sampling methodology and lower costs. However, it might not be possible to ask as many detailed questions, given a reduction in space. The sampling frame might not reach the people who are most able to give the details required, i.e. employers through a household survey, doctors through an employer survey. Even if a survey is aimed at employers, it is likely that HR/personnel staff will know more about the recording and reporting of SSP. There could be attrition difficulties, companies we approached had no idea how hard it would be to collect the data.

Option 2

Given the difficulties anticipated with option one, our second and preferred option would be a prospective, independent survey. A reliable dataset linking health and occupational data about causes of short-term absence would go a long way to unpacking the causes, prevention and management of the development of longer-term sickness absence and frequent short-term absence.

To reduce the burden on employers, any survey or data collection system would have to mirror current data collection practices. Therefore, if a large-scale survey response is required some sort of considered inducement/set of incentives will be required. The survey team should build supportive ongoing relationships with participants in advance, including recruitment from senior management downwards. It should use a simple system, with enough flexibility to allow for all systems and third party collating. Given the detailed nature of the information required it is not certain whether the preferred one survey fits all approach would be possible.

One way forward might be to add the questionnaire electronically to a variety of HR software packages, however, ensuring compatibility would require ongoing, and potentially on-site IT support, which would be resource heavy. This solution would also create a problem for smaller organizations that use paper based systems. It may be that a range of data collection options are made available.
Repeating the survey would require additional support. We anticipate that attrition could be a problem. Providing organizations with a set of anonymised baseline data comparing their results with others based in the same region, sector or industry could help to keep them on-board. This option is currently not available in a valid and SSP specific form. However a significant bonus for employers would be regular reports from their data, compared to comparable organizations, both locally and elsewhere. This will also act as an incentive to embed the data recording within the organization, and ensure the data are accurate and updated, as it would directly benefit the employer.

Conclusion

A great deal of detail will be needed to assess national, regional and industrial SSP use. As such it might be more appropriate to create a new bespoke survey instrument, so that it can be designed to meet the specific objectives of the data required and feed into effective policy formation. A one fits all survey would be more cost effective, however, it might be impractical due to the detailed nature of the information required from all interested parties.

If data from more than one group are required the DWP might consider conducting a series of standalone surveys, targeting key groups simultaneously. This approach might provide a more complex, in-depth understanding of the target issue, however, it would increase costs considerably. It is recommended that a specialist statistical organisation be invited to contribute input in the crucial areas of sampling strategy by firm size, by region and by industry, to ensure reliability and therefore validity.
1 A history of Statutory Sick Pay

1.1 Introduction

This report fulfils the final part of the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) research brief, which was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and designed by the Fit for Work Research Group. The report is based around the results of our investigations into the two stated objectives.

1.2 Objectives

1 To carry out a feasibility study of SSP claims across a range of organisations and types of employment in order to inform the development of a methodology for a United Kingdom (UK) wide survey on SSP.

2 To present a number of options for carrying out a UK wide survey of SSP in order to inform DWP policy development.

This report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research, explains SSP in some depth and gives a brief policy review. Chapter 2 examines the findings of the Phase 1 report while Chapter 3 reports on the findings of the feasibility study. Chapter 4 contains Phase 3 of the research and presents the DWP with two main options for carrying out a UK wide survey on SSP.
1.3 Key features of SSP and OSP

1.3.1 SSP

There are several criteria that have to be considered in deciding entitlement to SSP.

At its simplest someone will qualify for SSP if:

- they are an employee;
- they are aged 16 or over and under 65;\(^1\)
- their average earnings in the previous eight weeks are equal to or more than the lower earnings limit;\(^2\)
- they are incapable for work because of sickness or disability;
- the sickness or disability lasts for at least four consecutive periods of absence;
- the employee produces satisfactory evidence of incapacity for work – self-certification for the first seven days of sickness absence and a medical certificate from a doctor after seven days;
- women receiving maternity pay cannot claim.

Once we move away from these basic guidelines the rules become more complex. Employees are only eligible for SSP after three ‘waiting days’, or three continuous periods of absence, e.g. if an employee is contracted to work Monday to Wednesday and falls ill on a Friday, SSP would only be payable from the following Thursday (if the employee continued to be off work sick). A waiting period of three days originates from the rules of the former Sickness Benefit and has traditionally been a holding period for payment of social security contributory benefits.

SSP is paid by employers for up to 28 weeks at a flat rate, currently £70.05 per week.\(^3\) SSP may be accrued as a result of a continuous spell of sickness absence or it may be made up of separate spells of absence up to a maximum of 28 weeks. Separate spells of incapacity for work can be considered as ‘linked’ spells and treated as one spell if they are separated by eight weeks or less. Subsequent spells of absence must last for four days or more but the waiting period does not have to be served again. Even a period of absence from a previous employer must be considered as a linked spell if it has taken place within the previous eight weeks.

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1 These age limits were removed from 1 October 2006.

2 The Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) was £84.00 at April 2006. Those whose earnings fall below the LEL or who are self-employed may be able to claim the lower rate of short-term Incapacity Benefit instead.

3 Employers do not pay the full rate of SSP during the first week to take account of the waiting day period.
If after 28 weeks of SSP an employee is still incapable for work they can apply for Incapacity Benefit (IB). If a claim for IB is successful and the claimant subsequently returns to work and falls sick after eight weeks, the employer must not pay SSP for the first 52 weeks of employment\(^4\). In such circumstances the employee is expected to return to IB at the same rate at which they left (for further details of the intricacies of SSP see Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook 2005/6; Disability Rights Handbook 31st Edition April 2006-April 2007 A guide to benefits and services for all disabled people, their families, carers and advisers). There are a number of rules surrounding employee SSP eligibility, further details can be found at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/lifeevent/benefits/statutory_sick_pay.asp.

Once employers have made the necessary calculations they are required to record and keep the following details by law:

- ‘dates of sickness lasting four or more days in a row, period of incapacity for work (PIW) reported by employees’
- ‘all payments of SSP they make during a PIW’
- ‘dates for which they did not pay SSP and why they did not pay it’
- ‘copies of medical evidence will need to record a number of basic details’ (http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/employers/employee_sick.htm#i)

Employers who opt out of the SSP scheme must also keep the following records:

- ‘all dates of employee sickness lasting for four or more days in a row, and’
- ‘all payments of earnings or occupational sick pay (OSP) made during each PIW (for example normal pay or OSP records)’ (http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/employers/employee_sick.htm#i).

Optional information recorded by an employer may include: the date they were first informed of an employees absence; how many days they are off for; whether any evidence is produced, i.e. self-certificate or doctor's note; if they have claimed before within the same linking period; if they qualify or not regarding length of employment service; the amount the employee is entitled to (SSP or OSP), the amount the employer is entitled to claim back (within a tax month) and the reason given for the absence. This information will be useful to assess the national picture on SSP recording and reporting.

### 1.3.2 OSP

OSP can be claimed by an employee, from an employer, where an organisation has opted out of the SSP scheme. OSP is paid at a higher level and employees are usually eligible for remuneration earlier than with SSP. OSP is also eligible for tax and insurance deductions.

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\(^4\) This will increase to 104 weeks from October 2006.
1.3.3 Welfare reform

From 1 April 1983 employers were legally responsible for the payment of SSP to employees who qualified. It was to provide support for those who did not receive any form of OSP. A claim could be made from the fourth consecutive day of absence, (a rule which still applies today). These were not necessarily the first three days of sickness, but the first time an employer had been alerted to the problem. An employer could legitimately withhold payment if they felt they had not been informed properly (Social Security Act 1982). The benefit was to be payable for up to eight weeks in total and payable at three levels depending on income. The cost to employers was to be offset through a reduction in employee national insurance contributions and the reclaiming of some SSP payments from central government.

SSP was deemed a success (National Audit Office 1984) and in 1986 its remit was extended (Social Security Act, 1985). Claims were allowed for up to 28 weeks (which remains today). Employees who were still unable to work after this period were re-assessed for Invalidity Benefit, which was payable by the Government (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/osp5.pdf). As this depended on the level of National Insurance contributions and tax previously paid, the correct recording and reporting of information by employers became significant, which continues to the present (R.Disney:1986:61).

In January 2006, the Green paper ‘A new deal for welfare’ was published by the DWP (January 2006). Chapter 2 focused on helping ill or disabled people through three key measures: increasing the number of people who remain in work when they fall sick; increasing the number leaving benefits and finding employment and addressing the needs of all those who need extra support. SSP reform broadly falls under the first heading. The document sets out a case for the simplification of SSP policies based on employer concerns with overly complex rules. Proposals such as ignoring the first three days of sickness, linking together periods of sickness of less than eight weeks and not paying SSP where an employee was previously claiming incapacity, were put forward.

In June 2006, the DWP published its response to comments on the Green Paper. In spite of the proposed agreement to simplify the rules surrounding SSP and remove some bureaucracy a consensus was not reached. Interest groups representing different sectors of industry (CBI, British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), Small Business Council (SBC)) the Trades Union Council (TUC) did not agree on the proposed removal of the three day waiting period. The SBC welcomed the reduction of the waiting period from three to two days or possibly one day without pay. The CBI and the BCC were opposed to any reduction, where as the TUC welcomed the proposal to pay SSP from the first day of absence. The proposed changes to SSP have now been put on hold, though it is expected they will be re-evaluated. Strategic development would be enhanced by a robust survey of current SSP data. Details on the methodological and practical considerations of developing such an instrument can be found in Chapter 4.
2 Relevant Phase 1 information

2.1 Introduction

The aim of Phase 1 of the research was to critically appraise the validity and reliability of current datasets on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

Regarding large-scale surveys, it was envisaged that an examination of the profile of the employer; SSP/Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) payments; including duration, amount; number of claims; number of spells of claiming and outcomes subsequent to claiming would provide baseline data, from which to assess any policy changes. An extensive search of academic, United Kingdom (UK) Governmental, public European and private organisational sources was conducted to assess the history and current provision of sickness reporting and recording. In spite of the legal requirement to record sickness absence, no large scale absence datasets were identified that dealt specifically with SSP reporting and recording. There are several reasons for the lack of data. The large scale reporting and recording of sickness absence only goes back a few decades. In addition, the methods of measurement of sickness absence that do exist differ from one another to the extent that it is difficult to compare them directly, or to create one longitudinal baseline from which to measure potential change.

As a detailed SSP database was not available a search was conducted to identify sources where SSP/OSP rates were gathered as part of a wider survey. The following surveys were identified as containing the most relevant data:

- The Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) by the Department for Trade and Industry, archive only.
• Absence Management: A Survey of Policy and Practice Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 2005.

• Workplace Health and Safety Survey (WHASS) HSE 2005.

The surveys and resulting datasets were assessed for their content relevance and methodological rigour. In terms of contents, we were looking for specific questions about SSP, more general questions relating to sickness i.e. how many days off sick, an employees’ employment profile, why they were off sick, whether they received SSP or OSP etc. In terms of methodology, we were looking to assess whether the sampling technique, survey design and response rate were rigorous enough to provide a representative and valid picture of sickness absence nationally. A summary of the results has been provided here. This information, along with the results of the Phase 2 feasibility study has been used to inform the third phase of the report, the options for recording and collating future SSP data.

2.2 Critical overview of the surveys

A summary of survey methodology information is provided at the end of this section together with a table of relevant survey questions.

2.2.1 The LFS survey

Survey overview

‘Sickness Absence from work in the UK’ (April 2005), is a report produced from data by the LFS. The aim of the report is to ‘provide information on the UK labour market to develop, manage, evaluate and report on labour market policies’.

Methodology

Sampling

The survey sample of addresses is taken from the Postcode Address File. In addition, a small sample of addresses of the National Health Service (NHS) and Health Trust accommodation is included in the survey and anyone aged 16 or over and at boarding school or living in a hall of residence is included in their parent’s household.

The survey has a stratified random sample and within any continuous thirteen week period every postcode sector is sampled. This feature allows representative results to be produced for any thirteen week period.

Survey design

The survey has a panel design where each sampled address is interviewed for five waves. Interviews take place at three month intervals with the fifth interview at an address taking place a year after the first. Each quarter, interviews are achieved at about 59,000 addresses with about 138,000 respondents. Over 60 per cent of all LFS interviews are conducted by telephone. During the year, a response rate of 79 per cent was achieved for the first wave of the survey.
The survey measures male/female absence by day of the week, sickness per week, by Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) disability, type of sector (i.e. public private) and workplace size (less than 25, 25-49, 50-499, 500+) hours worked, i.e. less than 16, 17-31, by region.

**Survey**

The LFS asks respondents whether they took days off because of sickness or injury in the reference week (usually the week before the respondent was interviewed). It also records which particular days were taken off. From this information, an estimate of the number and proportion of working days lost because of sickness absence in the reference week can be constructed. A sickness absence rate can also be produced, which is the proportion of all employees who took at least one day off sick or injured in the reference week.

Information relating to SSP/OSP:

- **Employees covered by SSP/OSP:**
  - The survey is not set up to ask an organisation’s absence rate. It asks employees, who are sampled from a household survey.

- **Data on SSP/OSP:**
  - The LFS does not ask for data on SSP/OSP claimed by individuals.

- **Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time:**
  - No information is provided on the total number of employees on SSP/OSP at any one time.
  - The survey does not ask for separate periods of absence of more than one week, which makes it impossible to assess the right to claim SSP.
  - There are no details giving the amount of SSP/OSP claimed during a one year period.

- **Length of SSP/OSP spell:**
  - Not stated.

- **Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP:**
  - Not stated.

- **Outcome following SSP/OSP:**
  - Not stated.

- **Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity:**
  - Not stated.
Conclusions

The LFS appears to be a reliable source of large-scale data. It has a large sampling frame, a representative sample and a high response rate. There are some areas of interest covered by the survey, including sickness absence periods, health issues and employment history in the last year. However, the survey does not collect or measure any sickness absence by SSP, nor does it currently provide information on sickness absence lasting for more than seven consecutive days.

2.2.2 Who Cares Wins: Absence and labour turnover 2005, produced by the Confederation for British Industry

Survey overview

The Confederation for British Industry (CBI) is a business lobbying and information organisation, with an estimated membership of 240,000. It produces an annual absence report based on the results of a self-reporting members’ survey. Key themes addressed are: the costs of absence, both financial and time; management perceptions on absenteeism, including non-genuine absence and the perceived effectiveness of absence management policies. Absence is defined ‘to include all absence from work but exclude public holidays, annual leave and statutory leave such as maternity/paternity leave’ (page 9).

Methodology

Sampling

The survey was sent to 10,000 public and private sector organisations. Figures were not given in the report to indicate what percentage of the membership was included in the sampling frame. The CBI states it has 200,000 member organisations. If we use this as an estimation of the total, four per cent of the total sampling frame has been sampled. No information has been provided as to how the 10,000 organisations were selected. Of those sampled, 528 responded, 483 to the full survey and 45 by fax, to an abridged version. This represents a five per cent response rate to the survey, representing 0.25 per cent of their stated membership, covering around six per cent of the UK workforce.

Survey design

The survey was conducted during January and February 2005, with respondents being asked to report on absence from January to December 2004. The survey was designed to measure absence by sector, level of seniority, industry and region of the UK. The questions were mostly closed with a fixed number of responses. There are opportunities for respondents to give information, however these were all of a quantitative nature e.g. ‘Please indicate the number of employees in your organisation’ (Page 33). The findings are based on a 228 day working year.
Survey

CBI surveys are targeted at senior managers and Human Resources (HR) practitioners and enquire about the causes of absence, i.e. general illness (physical and mental) and about the type of illness, for example minor illness, recurring illness or stress. Organisations are questioned about the average number of days off, per employee, over the last year and the status of their employees, for example full-time or part-time. Employers are asked about their monitoring of absence and policies to reduce it. The direct and indirect costs of absence are requested. The results of the survey are then compared by sector, industry, region, and size of firm.

Information relating to SSP/OSP

- Relevant Survey Questions:
  - None.

- Employees covered by SSP/OSP:
  - Not stated.

- Data on SSP/OSP schemes:
  - Not stated.

- Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time:
  - Not stated.

- Length of SSP/OSP:
  - Not stated.

- Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP.

Four out of five organisations monitor the causes of sickness absence. Employers with fewer than 50 staff are the least likely to keep records: 69 per cent compared with an average figure of 79 per cent for all organisations. Genuine minor illness — such as ‘flu’ — was the main cause of absence across the economy in 2004. The second most significant cause of absence was stress among non-manual workers, and recurring illness (for example back pain) among manual workers.

- Outcome following SSP/OSP:
  - 87 per cent of organisations are taking action to reduce absence and return-to-work interviews are the most common absence management policy. Two-thirds of respondents have a stress management policy and 60 per cent have rehabilitation schemes in place.

- Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity:
  - Not stated.
Conclusions
The report offers a starting place from which to examine some of the issues
surrounding sickness absence. The variables of region, sector, industry and size of
organisation all help to elucidate on possible reasons for absence. However, the
sampling frame is only drawn from an estimated five per cent of its membership
base. There is no evidence of weighting. Of those sampled only five per cent
responded to the survey, or 528 out of a possible 200,000 organisations. We would,
therefore, advise treating the results with caution.

2.2.3 The Absence and Labour Turnover Survey is produced
annually by the Engineering Employers Federation

Survey overview
The EEF is a lobbying organisation for those in manufacturing, engineering and
technology-based businesses. EEF also provides support and advice to its membership.
One source of advice is the annual survey it conducts amongst members to assess
the costs of employee absence. The figures quoted relate to information collected
during spring 2004.

Methodology
Sampling
The survey was sent to EEF members in the spring of 2005. EEF has 6,000 members.
The report does not indicate if all members were contacted, however, 600 responses
were usable for the labour absence section, giving a total membership response of
ten per cent. No information is provided on the breakdown of who responded to the
sample in terms of size and type of employer or location. The sampling excludes
Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Survey design
The survey was designed as a postal survey and asks quantitative, mostly closed,
questions. There are no open-ended qualitative questions, so it isn’t possible to
probe into why absence occurs or why yearly patterns might vary.

Survey
The survey was sent to members in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is
based on the reporting period 1 January 2004 – 31 December 2004. It focuses on
‘absence statistics and targets absence rate, average number of days, absence per
employee, levels of short-term absences, absence measurement and absence
targets’ (Page 2).

The survey is split into three sections, two of which are useful here. Section 2
examines absence and asks about the total number of days lost to short and long
term absence. Short term absence is defined as less than four weeks of continuous
leave, excluding holidays, annual leave, maternity/paternity leave and parental
leave.
Respondents are asked to rank a series of absence factors in terms of significance to their organisation. *How significant do you perceive the following causes of absence to be in your organisation? Please rank each cause 1-5 by ticking the appropriate box…* (page 2 of the survey). The question is based on the perception of significance, rather than on actual causes of absence, and as such, the results should be treated with caution.

The questions in section 3 ‘Sick Pay’ are particularly useful, though under utilised in the final report. ‘On what basis is sick pay calculated?’ Statutory Sick pay only, Basic pay, Average Pay, Other? There is no indication of how many employers only pay SSP in the report.

**Information relating to SSP/OSP**

- Survey employees covered by SSP/OSP:
  - Not stated, but employers are asked in Section 3 of the survey ‘On what basis is sick pay calculated? Statutory Sick pay only, Basic pay, Average Pay, Other?’

- Data on SSP/OSP schemes:
  - Not stated.

- Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time:
  - Not stated.

- Length of OSP/SSP spells:
  - Not stated.

- Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP:
  - The survey asks employers to rate a list of causes of absence in terms of their significance (page 2). The survey might benefit from an additional question, asking employers to supply statistics on reasons for absence within their organisation. However, this might prove challenging for some firms, given the fact that data are handled by different departments and tend not to be centralised.

- Outcome following SSP/OSP:
  - The survey asks employers whether they have an absence target, what it is and whether it was achieved in 2004 (survey page 3). Employers are also asked to identify any potential return to work barriers from a list provided.

- Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity:
  - Not stated.
Conclusions
The survey asks a range of questions relevant to the topic of sickness absence, however its methodology and sampling is not examined in any detail and it has a low response rate. It would appear that consideration has not been given to assessing the reliability of the response and the validity of its conclusions. We would therefore advise treating the results with caution.

2.2.4 The Workplace Employee Relations Survey 2004, produced occasionally by the DTI

Survey overview
The purpose of each survey in this series has been to provide large-scale, statistically reliable evidence about a broad range of industrial relations and employment practices. This evidence is collected: to map employment relations practices in workplaces across Great Britain; to monitor changes in those practices over time; to both inform policy development and permit an informed assessment of the effects of public policy, and to bring about a greater understanding of employment relations as well as of the labour market. Managers, employee representatives and employees were questioned. The survey is completed only periodically, the previous one being conducted in 1998.

Methodology
Sampling
The WERS 2004 cross-sectional survey is based on a stratified random sample of establishments and a sample of employees at those establishments. The sampling frame is drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) which is maintained by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which we were unable to locate despite exhaustive web searches.

A random selection of 25 employees was made at each establishment (provided that management agreed) and self-completion questionnaires, along with freepost reply envelopes, were left for the selected employees (random not defined). The sampling fractions increase with employment size. This is primarily so that separate analysis by employment size group is possible – the aim being to obtain at least 250 productive interviews in each of the size bands below 500 employees and at least 150 interviews in each of those above. The exact sampling fractions were chosen so that the standard errors for ‘all establishment’ estimates would be reasonably small.
Response rate per industrial classification:

Hotels and restaurants 25 per cent;
Construction 24.6 per cent;
Other business services 21 per cent;
Education 10.8 per cent;
Public administration 8.9 per cent.

Survey design

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with around 3,200 managers and almost 1,000 worker representatives. Over 20,000 employees completed and returned a self-completion questionnaire. The survey was widened to include firms with five to nine employees for the first time in 2004.

One or more respondents were interviewed at the selected workplace, each being interviewed as a role holder with specific responsibilities. In the great majority of cases this person was identified and interviewed at the sampled establishment.

Survey

The fieldwork was conducted between February 2004 and April 2005 by the National Centre for Social Research, who were also responsible for conducting the fieldwork for the previous surveys in the series. Managers, employee representatives and employees were questioned with both a union representative and a non-union representative at each establishment:

‘In the main survey, 2,295 workplaces with five or more employees took part, a response rate of 64 per cent. In addition, 991 worker representatives were interviewed, a response rate of 78 per cent. Employee questionnaires were distributed in 76 per cent of workplaces; 22,451 of these questionnaires were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 61 per cent.’

(Inside the Workplace: 2004:12).

Information relating to SSP/OSP

- Relevant survey questions:
  - No directly relevant questions.
- Survey employees covered by SSP/OSP:
  - Not stated.
- Data on SSP/OSP schemes:

  ‘Managers were more likely than core employees to have access to…sick pay in excess of statutory requirements (62 compared to 54 per cent)’

(WERS:2004:21)
• Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time
  Not stated
• Length of SSP/OSP spell
  Not stated
• Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP
  Not stated
• Outcome following SSP/OSP
  Not stated
• Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity
  Not stated

Conclusions
The survey appears to be very comprehensive. Regional, industrial and level of employee responsibility variations are accounted for. This survey does not directly address the reporting and recording of sickness absence. However, it is a representative large-scale survey, which provides information on employment related themes, from the perspective of employers, employee representatives and employees. It might be possible to include additional questions on the theme of sickness absence. However, the survey is conducted only once or twice a decade.

2.2.5 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Survey, Absence Management: A Survey of policy and practice produced annually

Survey overview
The CIPD is a professional organisation which aims to lead and support in the field of management and the development of people. One of the services it offers to members is the report based on its annual sickness absence survey. The 2005 survey focuses on sickness absence rates, targets and benchmarking and the costs and causes of workplace absence.

Methodology
Sampling
10,000 questionnaires were sent out in March 2005, to a sample of ‘people management specialists’. Little information is provided about how the final sample was reached, for example, whether the membership was sampled and if so what method was used to reduce it to roughly ten per cent of its sampling frame. (The CIPD website states its membership for 2006 is currently 124,000). One thousand and thirty-eight usable replies were received, giving a response rate of 10.4 per cent
(0.8 per cent of its membership). ‘In all, 20 per cent of responses were from the public sector, 40 per cent were from private sector organisations, 32 per cent were from manufacturing and production employers, and eight per cent were from non-profit organisations’ (CIPD:2005:44).

Survey design

The survey is a self-complete questionnaire, containing mostly, fixed response questions. However, the number of responses available is extensive in places, especially when compared to similar, non-governmental absence surveys, (CBI, EEF). The CIPD also make extensive use of the category ‘other’ and asks respondents to name their response if it isn’t listed. For example the following list taken from question 16 represents a useful contribution to our understanding:

‘Which of the following approaches are used to manage sickness absence in your organisation?
(Please tick all that apply)

Short-term Long-term absences (four weeks or more)

Attendance record is a recruitment criterion
Use of trigger mechanisms to review attendance
Providing sickness absence information to line managers
Managers are trained in absence handling
Line management involvement in absence management
Nominated absence case manager/management team
Return-to-work interviews
Disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence
Restricting sick pay
Attendance bonuses or incentives
Leave for family circumstances
Changes to working patterns or environment
Health promotion
Physiotherapy services
Stress counselling
Employee assistance programmes
Rehabilitation programme

Occupational health professional involvement

Flexible working

Attendance driven by the board

Attendance officer

Other (please specify)’ ………………………………………………………………………..

Survey

There are 48 questions divided into two sections. Section 1 is short and requests background data on the organisation, the number of employees, its region and sector. Section 2 is much more detailed and asks questions on absence management including: the level of sickness absence; causes and costs of absence; how organisations manage absence; (both long and short-term) and new questions on the provision of occupational health services, attendance incentives, occupational sick pay and pre-employment screening’.

Information relating to SSP/OSP

• Survey employees covered by SSP/OSP:

  ‘A total of 94 per cent of employers provide occupational sick pay, with little difference across sectors.’


• Data on SSP/OSP schemes:

  ‘The survey shows that, while 83 per cent of respondent organisations’ sick pay schemes cover the first three days of absence, a significant minority of organisations’ schemes (15 per cent) do not.’


  ‘A third of employers have withheld sick pay in the previous 12 months because of a belief that an employee was not genuinely ill.’


• Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time:
  – Not stated.

• Length of SSP/OSP:
  – Public sector organisations continue paying occupational sick pay for longest among the main sectors, averaging five months and 18 days before sick pay is stopped. The survey shows that, on average, employers stop paying occupational sick pay at the full rate after three months and one week. Manufacturing and production businesses are most likely not to provide occupational sick pay (24 per cent) for the first three days of absence, compared to just eight per cent of public sector organisations.
• Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP:
  – Private services organisations are least likely to rate occupational health services as effective. The use of rehabilitation programmes to manage long-term absence is rated as the second most effective response to long-term absence, yet only 31 per cent of employers make use of co-ordinated rehabilitation initiatives. Again, private services organisations are least likely to rate them as effective. Manufacturing and production employers are most likely to rate rehabilitation programmes as effective.
  – Involving line managers in managing long-term sickness absence is also rated highly as an effective intervention among respondents across all sectors.

• Outcome following SSP/OSP:
  – Return-to-work interviews and disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence, are the two most commonly used methods of managing short-term absence, with four-fifths of respondents using these approaches. Non-profit organisations are most likely (88 per cent) and private services sector organisations least likely (76 per cent), to use return-to-work interviews.
  – Public sector organisations are least likely to make use of disciplinary procedures to manage unacceptable levels of short-term absence, and manufacturing and production organisations are the most likely to do this. Providing sickness absence information to line managers, so that they are aware of the levels of absence among their staff, and ensuring line managers are involved in the process of managing absence, are the next most commonly used approaches to managing attendance.

• Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity:
  – Occupational Health professionals are rated as the most effective method of managing long-term absence, but it is only the fourth most commonly used approach. No direct information is provided on the transfer to incapacity benefit.

Conclusions
The survey asks a number of well designed, pertinent questions and it reaches a broad range of organisations. Unfortunately, not as much attention seems to have been given to the sampling and weighting of responses, to ensure reliability and representativeness. We would advise treating the results with caution.

2.2.6 Health and Safety Executive Workplace Health and Safety Survey Programme, 2005 Employer Survey First Findings Report, S D Clarke et al.

Survey overview
The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is proposing to conduct a number of large-scale surveys between 2005-2015 to ‘assess the health and safety of Britain’s workplaces’ (page 2, HSE Technical Report). The 2005 Employer Survey is part of the piloting process. The survey aims to measure progress towards government health
and safety targets and to provide information that can be used by policy makers. The content is taken from the first findings report, published in October 2005.

**Methodology**

**Sampling**

The sample was drawn from the Inter-Departmental Register (IDR), with units containing five or more employees. The person responsible for the ‘*day-to-day management of health and safety*’ (page 2) at the sampled workplace was identified and an information sheet was sent in advance. The field work was conducted between 11 May 2005 and 13 July 2005. Nine hundred and sixty-six workplace health and safety managers were interviewed, from an initial sample of 1,542; a response rate of 63 per cent.

**Survey design**

‘A stratified variable probability sample, with units being randomly selected from within cells of a 72-cell sampling matrix.

1) Number of employees at the local unit – as follows:
   - 5-9 employees
   - 10-49 employees
   - 50-249 employees
   - 250 or more employees

2) Industry classification of the local unit – 16 categories corresponding to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) (2003) Sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N1, N2, O including two categories which separate the SIC Group N into Human Health (N1), and Vet and Social work (N2)

3) Country. We wish to boost Scotland and Wales so there is a separate table for the boost sample (stratified by local unit size only).

The sampling matrix provided at the end of this specification identifies the number of local units to be selected in each of the 72 cells.

*When selecting units within each of the 72 cells in each area, all available units should firstly be ranked by individual industry section (A to O with N separated into the two groups), and then within industry section by the total number of employees at the local unit’* (page 5).

Cell and variable weighting were applied and the weights were scaled to match un-weighted and weighted cases.

**Survey**

The survey was completed as a telephone interview, using CATI (Computer aided telephone interviewing). The questions were mostly closed, with fixed responses. The mean length of time for completed interviews was 27 minutes.
Information relating to SSP/OSP:

• Employees covered by SSP/OSP

Not stated:

• Data on SSP/OSP:
  – The survey asks if records are kept about accidents for workers who are injured, whether at work, or off the premises. If records are kept, respondents are asked how the information is stored, for example, an accident book, other paper records, or computerised records (see page 12 of the questionnaire).
  – Ninety-eight per cent of employers kept records of employee accidents and 90 per cent of those recorded them in an accident book. Only 54 per cent of those who kept records recorded an injury that occurred if the employee was working off-site.

• Total employees on SSP/OSP at any one time:
  – Employers are asked to give details about the total number of days employees have taken off through work related sickness or injury in the last 12 months. The survey concludes that an estimated 0.18 days were lost per employee due to work related injuries and 0.14 days were lost due to work related sickness. Very few other similar surveys ask for the amount of time lost through work related sickness/injury absence. There is no other measurement of time lost through absence, for example hours, costs.

• Length of SSP/OSP spell:
  – Not stated.

• Reasons given for being on SSP/OSP:
  – The report splits the causes of absence into two events, days lost due to accidents and days lost due to ill-health. No further details are given.

• Outcome following SSP/OSP:
  – If the absence is caused through work, employers are asked if a doctor’s certificate was provided.

• Transfer from SSP/OSP to incapacity
  – Not stated.

Conclusions

A robust survey with a reliable sampling mechanism, containing some relevant questions. Some useful background, establishing questions are provided i.e. questions on sickness policies and how the information is recorded. However, the survey is more focused on employers’ mechanisms for recording and acting on work related absence, rather than ascertaining the causes of absence. In its current form the survey is not set up to assess whether employers provide sickness absence payment.
Table 2.1  Summary of survey methodology information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Survey Design</th>
<th>Sampling</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Reliability of survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LFS</td>
<td>It is a panel design, conducted on a quarterly basis using a household survey. It uses face-to-face and telephone interviews.</td>
<td>Stratified random sample, taken from the Postcode Address File. Every postcode sector is sampled within a continuous 13 week period.</td>
<td>Provides information on the UK labour market including, employment, economic activity by region, earnings, unemployment.</td>
<td>During the year a 79% response rate was achieved. Each quarter 138,000 interviews took place with respondents.</td>
<td>Reliable sampling and design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>A self-report postal survey of senior managers/HR CBI members. Completed on an annual basis.</td>
<td>Non-representative sampling. 4% of the total sampling frame was surveyed.</td>
<td>The costs of absence, both financial and time; management perceptions on absenteeism.</td>
<td>5% response rate to the survey, representing 0.25% of their stated membership, covering around 6% of the UK workforce.</td>
<td>No consideration of sampling techniques, very low response, treat results with caution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEF</td>
<td>A self-report postal employer. Completed on an annual basis.</td>
<td>Non-representative survey to EEF members.</td>
<td>Absence rate, average per employee, levels of short-term absences, absence measurement and absence targets.’</td>
<td>10% response rate. number of days, absence.</td>
<td>No consideration of sampling techniques, low response, treat results with caution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WERS</td>
<td>A cross-sectional, occasional survey using face-to-face Interviews.</td>
<td>Stratified random sample of establishments and a sample of employees at those establishments. The sampling frame is drawn from the IDBR. Workplaces with 5 or less employees were not sampled.</td>
<td>It gathers information on a broad range of industrial relations and employment practices, no specific focus on sickness absence.</td>
<td>64 % response for the main survey 78% of worker representatives responded to their survey 61% of employees returned their workplace based questionnaires.</td>
<td>Reliable sampling and survey design.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
### Table 2.1  Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Survey Design</th>
<th>Sampling</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
<th>Reliability of survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIPD 2005</td>
<td>It is a self-complete questionnaire, to CIPD members, completed on an annual basis.</td>
<td>10% of its membership was sampled, no details were provided about how this was achieved.</td>
<td>The 2005 survey focuses on sickness absence rates, targets and benchmarking and the costs and causes of workplace absence.</td>
<td>1,038 usable replies were received, giving a response rate of 10.4% (0.8% of its membership)</td>
<td>No consideration of sampling techniques, low response, treat results with caution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHASS 2005</td>
<td>A stratified variable probability sample, with units being randomly selected from within cells of a 72-cell sampling matrix.</td>
<td>The sample was drawn from the IDR, with units containing five or more employees.</td>
<td>The survey aims to measure progress towards government health and safety targets and to provide information to policy makers.</td>
<td>966 workplace health and safety managers were interviewed, from an initial sample of 1,542; a response rate of 63%.</td>
<td>Reliable sampling and survey design.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2: Summary of SSP related questions

(N/A = none available)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Relating to SSP</th>
<th>LFS</th>
<th>CBI</th>
<th>EEF</th>
<th>WERS</th>
<th>CIPD</th>
<th>WHASS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday the [ref Day], on which days were you scheduled to work? RECORD ALL THAT APPLY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On what basis is sick pay calculated</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Does your organisation monitor the cost of sickness absence?</td>
<td>Does your company keep a record of employee’s sickness absences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Monday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>If NECESSARY, ADD: By sickness absences I am referring to sickness absences in general, not just absences relating to work-related illnesses or injuries. Yes 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Tuesday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Wednesday</td>
<td>How many waiting days do you have before payment commences?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>If yes, which direct financial costs are included in your calculations?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Thursday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Please tick all that apply)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Friday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Occupational sick pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Saturday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overtime costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Sunday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statutory sick pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 not working at all</td>
<td>(Please do not complete if your company only provides Statutory Sick Pay)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 scheduled working days not relevant</td>
<td>Manual Staff All employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Costs of replacement labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In that week, did you have any days off work because you were sick or injured?</td>
<td>Non ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Costs of reduced performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. lost production)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 no</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK ILL DAYS RECORD ALL THAT APPLY Which days were they?</td>
<td>Waiting Days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Monday</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tuesday</td>
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<td>3 Wednesday</td>
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<td>4 Thursday</td>
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<td>5 Friday</td>
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<td>6 Saturday</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Sunday</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLIES IF ILLWK = 1 (days off work due to sickness or injury)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relevant Phase 1 information
2.3 Conclusions and recommendations from Phase 1

The aim of Phase 1 was to examine whether any large scale datasets containing information on SSP recording and reporting were in existence. In spite of the legal requirement to record SSP, our research has demonstrated that a paucity of literature and data exists on the subject. Employer’s interests appear to be more focused around the proportionately more costly OSP (A new deal for Welfare: Empowering people for work, 2006, [36]).

The few questions investigating SSP are limited in nature and are rarely presented in conjunction with other key variables. This is in part due to the lack of centralised sickness absence data within organisations. Documents suggest that there are a large number of sickness absence systems available, employers often use more than one and they are not always compatible with each other. This is compounded by the variable means of measuring absence, i.e. hours or shifts missed, or by cost, neither of which is standardised. Consequently, where SSP/OSP data has been identified within large-scale surveys, reporting rates vary substantially between industry, sector and size of firm.

Information of a more general nature on sickness absence was identified within some surveys and data-sets. However, given the lack of specific survey questions, there is not enough information to build up a national picture of SSP use by employers and employees. Therefore to assess the impact of changes to SSP policy, the DWP will have to either add questions to an existing source, or develop a new survey instrument.

In terms of ‘piggy-backing’ questions onto an existing survey, the employers’ organisations (CBI, CIPD, EEF) ask a more comprehensive range of questions relating to sickness absence, for example, length of absence, cost to employer, cause of absence, type of contract the employee is on, level of seniority within the company. However, they are more limited in terms of sample size and a lack of weighting and low response rates, which reduces their comparative validity and reliability. Whereas the Governmental datasets including the LFS, the HSE and WERS tend to be more reliable. Consideration has been given to methodological issues such as: sampling, weighting for region, industry etc. and response rate. Given the methodological superiority of the government surveys, if an existing source were to be adapted, we would recommend the use of a government survey. It might be possible to utilise the non-government surveys if they address issues of representivity and low response rates. However, it might be more difficult to negotiate any changes with non-government survey bodies, due to variations in organisational set-up.
3 Phase 2 feasibility study

Phase 1 identified that existing datasets did not provide data on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and rather than identifying gaps and building on available data sets. A feasibility study was proposed to inform new data collection methods.

Phase 2 was the development of this feasibility study in two parts part A and B.

3.1 Phase 2 Part A

Qualitative study to inform questionnaire development

3.1.1 Introduction

Part A explored the approaches of 20 varied employing organisations to collecting and recording sickness absence data through qualitative methods.

3.1.2 Methods

Participant selection and recruitment

We undertook purposive sampling of local employers, using contacts through the University of Liverpool’s business school, academics and local and regional employer organisations, to identify a range of different types of employers from public and private sectors, from small, medium and large enterprises and in different areas of the economy. This provides an indication as to whether there are common issues depending on the size or type of organisation. These headings formed a matrix (Table 3.1) and it was proposed that two organisations would be recruited per section.
Table 3.1 Sampling strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Small to medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private – retail</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private – service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private – manufacturing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the list of contacts, 20 organisations agreed to complete the interviews needed for this stage of the research. Verbal agreement was reached for a convenient time for the interview to take place and this was followed up with a confirmation e-mail.

The appropriate person within an organisation was identified by calling and explaining the purpose of the research and asking for a named person who could participate. Contact was made with the named person and an agreement was reached for a date and time to carry out the phone interview. Copies of the questions to be asked during the interview were forwarded in advance to ensure they could prepare for the interview. A covering letter outlining the project’s aims and objectives and detailing the organisation’s role was attached and permission was sought for the interview to be recorded (Appendix E).

Telephone interviews were carried out over a three week period in May 2006 and were recorded onto tape whilst notes were taken. The interview tapes were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. (Bowling, 1997, [p347])

Pre-designed, open ended questions, allowing participants to expand on their responses, were used during a pre-arranged semi-structured telephone interview. (Bowling, 1997, Chapter 16) (Appendix F). The questions were divided into the following headings:

- Organisational detail;
- Collection of sickness absence data;
- Use of sickness absence data;
- Effectiveness of current systems;
- Attitudes and issues.

Organisations were then asked whether they would be able to collect, record and report the following sickness absence data:

- Number of employees covered by SSP and Occupational sick pay (OSP) schemes.
- Data on SSP/OSP including number of employees receiving and number and length and spells of SSP, amount of SSP payments.
• Total of employees on SSP/OSP at any one time.
• Number of SSP/OSP spells during a one year period.
• Length of SSP/OSP spells.
• Reasons for SSP/OSP.
• Outcomes following SSP/OSP claims.
• Details of employees who transfer from SSP to Incapacity Benefit (IB).
• Reasons why SSP/OSP comes to an end.

(NB organisations were not asked to supply this information at this stage only to respond as to whether it would be feasible to do so.)

Interviews took less than 30 minutes to complete and a ‘Thank you’ e-mail was sent on completion. Participants were asked whether the organisation would be prepared to take part in the next phase of the project. Those organisations agreeing were transferred to Phase 2 part B.

3.1.3 Results

Participant selection and recruiting

Significant problems arose in relation to making contact with the relevant member of staff within organisations and with larger organisations, identifying the department handling this information. In larger organisations, more than one person was responsible for the collection, recording and analysis of sickness absence data and some departments needed permission from a senior manager to take part.

Organisations differed widely in their approach to the systems, processes and personnel used for the collection, recording and use of sickness absence data. Small businesses had one person responsible for the tasks, often the person who also did the accounts and wages. Some organisations outsourced to a payroll company and many of the larger organisations had specialised departments and personnel to deal with different aspects of the process e.g. Human Resources (HR) or a Personnel Department and a wages or accounts department. For very large organisations these separate functions are sometimes carried out on different sites around the country.

There were some challenges during the interview procedure with 16 of the 20 originally scheduled interviews taking place. One participant was off sick and did not return during the time allocated for the study. Three further interviews did not take place as participants were unable to allocate the time during the study period. Three of the initial interviews were rescheduled after staff found they were unavailable on the day due to work pressures and took place at a later date.
Collection and recording of data

- Twelve organisations employed a member of staff who specialised in HR and dealt with sickness related issues. Those that didn’t were the smallest organisations and in these companies, sickness was dealt with by payroll or accounts personnel.

- Although most participants said that they were aware of the legal requirements of SSP data collection, no respondent could clearly say what these were. All participants were collecting data above the minimum data set required by law.

- Twelve organisations recorded all of the following; employee details, reasons for absence, length of absence, dates of absence and outcome. Four participants didn’t record reasons for absence.

- Systems and methods of collection varied widely with every organisation having a different method. Line managers were generally the first line of contact for staff phoning in to report absence. Information was recorded and subsequently passed to the HR department. Many used a pro forma or systematic process such as the clocking in system or rota sheets as a tool for measuring absence.

- The HR recording systems varied across organisations. All but one used computerised systems though the smaller organisations tended to use a customised Excel© or Access© database or a Sage payroll system. The smallest organisation used a simple accounts book. The other systems were specialised for each company (Compel database, SAP system, Pegasus Opera©, Time 2000© in-house clocking system, Workforce Client Service© database, Open Door© personnel database).

- Only the SAP© system is a combined HR and payroll system.

- Several service companies had complex shift patterns and needed a more sophisticated package to manage a range of personnel functions.

- All the organisations who recorded a reason for absence used the diagnosis on the self-certificate or sick note as the reason for sickness, but some of the larger organisations converted this to a specific coding such as the International Classification of Disease to record this diagnosis on their data system.

SSP/OSP and Inland Revenue

- Thirteen organisations recorded information specifically for SSP. This was usually dealt with separately by a payroll department and was generally triggered through self-certification or doctors’ notes. Most did not have a link through from the human resources database and information was passed on manually.

- No organisations had recouped money from Inland Revenue. The reasons given for this were that they were too large or the smallest ones stated that they had not had any longer term sickness.

- Thirteen companies paid some form of OSP. All staff qualified after a probationary period, often with a sliding scale of benefit based on length of service.
Using sickness data

- Eight of the organisations used sickness information proactively. They analysed data, reported on trends, sent reports and used the data to plan sickness management. Five organisations used the information reactively when issues arose and three organisations didn’t use it at all.

- Eleven of the organisations circulated reports and figures internally on a regular basis and fourteen stated that they would be able to collect, record and report the sickness absence data (though half of these would need to get all SSP related information from payroll). The rest would be able to access all but the reasons for sickness.

Satisfaction with software

- Both companies using SAP© and the Pegasus© system said they were excellent systems.

- Half of the companies were satisfied with the system they used for the size of organisation and the information they needed. The tailor-made systems were cost effective, simple and adaptable to growth and changing demands.

- Eight said that they had no plans to change their system.

- Four organisations are currently looking into the possibility of a new system.

- Only three organisations believed a single comprehensive system would improve sickness absence management.

- Four organisations believed that a direct link to payroll would be an advantage.

Attitudes and behaviours

- Six organisations who did not pay unless sick notes were returned found no problems with staff following procedures and four further organisations reported no problems at all in self-certificates being returned.

- All organisations followed strict confidentiality practices with limited named access to systems, passwords, and locked cabinets and all reports having identifiable material removed. There were no difficulties reported in maintaining high levels of confidentiality.

- When questioned, there were no opinions reported on the Government agenda in relation to sickness absence, there was little knowledge of any current policy change.

- All but one organisation were willing to take part in the next phase of the research.

There were no discernable patterns or associations in relation to the size or sector of the organisation.
3.2 Phase 2 Part B

Quantitative study to explore sickness absence recording in a range of organisations and to pilot a data collection sheet.

3.2.1 Introduction

The purpose of Phase 2 Part B of the study was firstly to extend the study to include a greater number and types of organisations completing the questionnaire to achieve a broader range of results, using a quantitative approach. Secondly Phase 2 would test the ability of an organisation to actually collect, record and report the sickness absence data identified in the telephone interviews in Part A.

3.2.2 Methods

Participant selection and recruitment

Of the 20 part A participants, 15 volunteered to undertake part B. In addition, 35 new organisations were recruited for part B, to give a total sample of 50. Organisations were approached at two local business fairs. Researchers made direct contact with the organisational representative at the fair and either gained agreement from that person or a name and contact number of the relevant person was requested. The contacts were telephoned the following week and agreement to take part in the study was obtained.

These further 35 participants would complete the revised questionnaire via e-mail and then complete the data collection sheet and the 15 original participants would complete just the data collection sheet.

Despite many attempts, it was not possible to make telephone contact with five of the names given at the business fair. The named potential participants were e-mailed with details of the research, the questionnaire and the data gathering sheet. Our study suggests when considering the feasibility of a national study where individual contact with a named person would not be practical, it would be important to test the response rate from a direct e-mail when phone contact had not been made initially and agreement not verbally received.

Questionnaire design

The responses from the telephone interviews in part A provided the basis for the development of the e-questionnaire. Rather than the open ended format of the original telephone interview, options were provided for selection taken from the range of responses from the telephone interviews (Appendix G).

The original questionnaire was adapted to be completed online and developed in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and was piloted for face validity with three individuals and the head of HR at The University of Liverpool to check for accuracy of wording and ease of use. As the online questionnaire was only to be completed by an additional 35 organisations it was not deemed necessary to pilot the questionnaire with further organisations.
The questionnaire was designed to be completed via e-mail as this was considered to be the most effective method for a larger scale study in the future:

‘Web-based surveys can significantly reduce turnaround time and cost compared with mail surveys and may enhance survey item.’

(Schleyer and Forrest, 2000, [416-25]).

The e-questionnaire was coded with a numerical identifier for the purposes of confidentiality and was designed to be returned anonymously without the originators’ e-mail link address. For ease of completion and to increase uptake, tick boxes were used rather than text. Couper et al. (2001) [230–253] found that using ‘radio buttons’ for responses increased the completion of these questions and reduced missing data. They also found that the larger a text box for answering, the more respondents’ filled in. This format also allowed response coding for a more accurate analysis when using larger numbers. The results could then be input directly to a statistical analysis database. The e-questionnaire was sent directly to the 35 named contacts.

A covering letter provided further details and a deadline of three weeks was given for completion (Appendix D). The contact phone number and an e-mail address for the researcher was included and support was offered in case of any queries.

**Data Collection Sheet Design**

Participants had been asked during the telephone interviews in part A, whether they would be able to collect the Sickness Absence Data Questions (SADQ) information. At this stage they were not asked to collect, record and return the information. The purpose of part B was to test the ability of organisations to now collect record and return this data in a simple format.

Lori Foster Thompson et al. (2003, [197]) describe the importance of simple design structures for online surveys to avoid access difficulties as connections, band width limitations and software set up varies from user to user. She comments on the importance of the survey appearing in an identical way to all participants. To encourage maximum response, the data collection sheet was therefore kept as simple as possible using a table format in a Word document. Participants were asked to complete the 12 responses, taken from SADQ, onto the table and return via e-mail (Appendix E).

Participants were requested to provide data for the period 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2006 because all organisational records would be up-to-date for this time period and the end of the tax year would be avoided.

This was sent to the participants via e-mail along with the questionnaire and covering letter. Also included was a post collection evaluation (Appendix F) which participants were invited to complete.
3.2.3 Results

Recruitment

Recruitment was simplified for Part B as face-to-face contact was made with employees at the business fairs and direct contact names were given. In only two cases the names given were not the most appropriate contact and further phone calls were required. Having the name of the contact and name and recommendation from the employee at the fair appeared to increase the likelihood of agreement to participate.

As the purpose of this research was a feasibility study to identify any issues and problems a large scale survey could experience, chasing the data after the deadline was not be considered to be a valid exercise. Follow up of non-returned questionnaire and SADQ was restricted to three further contacts after the deadline as continuing to chase would be neither ethical nor feasible in a rolled-out large survey.

Questionnaire and data collection sheet

On the 28/06/06, emails were sent to all 50 participants including the data collection sheet, post data collection evaluation and a covering letter. The online e-questionnaire was sent to 35 of the participants as 15 of the organisations had already completed the questionnaire in the phone interview. A deadline of 21 July 2006 was given for completion of the e-questionnaire and the data gathering sheet.

The response is summarised in a chart format (Appendix K).

Despite the well designed e-questionnaire, direct contact with, and agreement from, the relevant personnel, there were only four responses returned with useable data from the SADQ. Three of these responses were from organisations who had completed the telephone interview in part A of this study and one was a small organisation with minimal data.

Email responses were received from 22 of the participants giving reasons for non-completion.

There were 24 non-responders who were followed up with a telephone call. Nine of the participants agreed to be interviewed. All nine had kept the questionnaire and data collection sheet, however eight of them had not opened the e-mail.

Summary of reasons given for non-completion of data collection sheet

All quotes are anonymised and coded thus:

Each organisation was allocated a number randomly from 0 – 52

Sector is coded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pu</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Voluntary/Charity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2 feasibility study

Size is coded  
< 250 – Small to Medium – S/M

> 251 - Large – L

Response noted as e-mail or phone:

• The primary reason given for non-completion was that organisations were required to prioritise the core business function. Taking part in research was not a priority in the day-to-day running of the organisation and sickness management was a secondary issue to core business:

  ‘We are a small business and company business must come first.’

  (17PrS phone)

• Workloads, demands and priorities at the time of the research were another reason for non completion. Sickness absence management is a proactive task and although an important issue for many employers, it takes second place during periods of greater demand. HR departments are multi-functional and much of their work is reactive. Recruitment and salaries always take priority and demand can fluctuate:

  ‘We have been very short staffed over the summer and recruitment of new staff was a priority. This is our main function and extra jobs just don’t get done.’

  (8PrL phone)

• The third difficulty was that the research data requested, needed information from separate departments. Many organisations are multi-sited and nearly all had a separate HR and wages department. This created difficulties as the data requested needed to come from the two separate sources. Whilst the HR or Personnel department had agreed to take part it was not always possible for them to get an agreement from the wages department:

  ‘Colleagues in non-HR departments appear to be having issues with this data. With these issues in mind not having been resolved I suggest you take it that we will not be able to contribute.’

  (25PuL E-mail)

• Four of the organisations attempted to collect and report the data in the format requested however they concluded that their systems were unable to retrieve the information retrospectively.

• Four of the organisations experienced unusually increased work loads due to business demands, legislation changes or policy changes during the period of study and so had not prioritised the research:

  ‘Unfortunately we will not be able to complete the questionnaire. From the end of March we have been restructuring the company following the completion of a major contract. This has resulted in staff changes and myself spending much time with our sister company.’

  (34PrS/M e-mail)
• The research took place in June, July and August so some organisations reported staffing had been a problem with annual leave resulting in staffing problems or key staff for the data gathering being on leave:

‘I have looked at the questionnaire and unfortunately I don’t think I will be able to gather this info for you. It would involve requesting reports for each sites and to be honest our reporting resource is somewhat stretched at the moment.’

(4PrL E-mail)

• Agreement to take part had been given by one department. However there was a reliance on co-operation from others, management permission or needing input from others who had not agreed to it:

‘I have passed all the relevant details on to the relevant director here and asked him to let me know if and when he will have the data. However, despite a number of prompts I haven’t had a reply.’

(43PrS/M E-mail)

• Outsourcing of payroll contracts does not allow for requesting this level of information from the payroll company. Organisations pay for a specific service from a payroll company and requesting these additional data was not included in the contract.

• In four of the organisations, changes in the named personnel through sickness, maternity leave and resignation created problems. One participant had forwarded all the research information to a colleague and the colleague failed to action it and missed the deadline for the data collection.

• The relevance and usefulness of the research to the organisation was a key consideration. Although they had initially agreed to take part, participants felt that there was no motivation to prioritise the research as they could not see how it would be beneficial to them in the long term. They would have considered putting in the required work if at the end the report would have given them real evidence in how to manage sickness absence more effectively but this research was not perceived as useful or practical to the organisations taking part.

• In one of the companies the reminders/prompts had not gone through to the original participant and so had not been acted upon.

• One participant pointed out that there had been no consequence of missing the deadline and therefore it had been continually pushed down the list and was not prioritised against more demanding aspects of the business.

• One participant said that they get at least two research or information requests a week via e-mail and phone and it would be impossible to consider taking part in everything.
• Four of the participants reported technical problems which included being unable to open the attachments, losing the data reported when sending, being unable to return the e-questionnaire and internet access problems during the research period. No further response was achieved from these four participants despite e-mail contact so verification of the difficulties was not possible.

• It was noted that there was a dependency on management values and attitude in relation to taking part in research for external organisations.
4 Phase 3: Statutory Sick Pay survey options

4.1 Introduction

The Fit for Work Team were commissioned to examine the feasibility of collating data on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), either from an existing survey, or from an employers’ survey. The aim of Phase 3 was to provide a number of options to inform a proposed survey into the recording and reporting of SSP, nationally, regionally and sectorally.

The results of our research indicate that it is not currently possible to build up a comprehensive picture of SSP use in England. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, SSP policy, from its inception in 1983, was not designed to be measured in a standard way by organisations, making centralisation difficult with very little information available about payments, costs and recipients. Secondly, SSP data are not readily available from employers. Employers are required to keep the data by law. However, it is not necessarily useful to them as employers’ surveys suggest that many pay above the rate of SSP through Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) schemes (CBI 2005). Even if valid data on SSP were obtainable most employers do not routinely record diagnosis in their sickness tracking datasets, and those that do often re-classify them into diagnostic categories. Finally, where sickness absence data does exist, its quality is varied, making comparisons between findings highly problematic. As such, there are at present no reliable data on the causes of short-term sickness, particularly from self-certification and periods of less than three days where often no reason is recorded for the absence.

Given the results of our research it will be challenging, but not impossible, to collect data on SSP use by region, industry and size of firm. We recommend two main options, the first would be to add a set of questions onto an existing large-scale survey. Given the methodological rigour of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) and Workplace Health and Safety Survey (WHASS) surveys in terms of design, sampling, response rates and ease of negotiation we would strongly suggest using one of these. It might be possible to
adapt a non-government survey if issues of representivity and low response rates were dealt with. The second option is to create a bespoke survey instrument that can be used prospectively to record relevant data at regular intervals at relatively little extra cost or effort (once the systems in place). Before giving an overview of the strengths and challenges involved with each option we will set out the aims, and the main requirements of the survey. These have been placed under two headings; content related issues and design related issues. A number of these points are short and distinctive from one-another so they have been bullet pointed or numbered.

4.2 Requirements of the prospective sickness absence survey

1. That it can be used as a baseline indicator of current trends in SSP recording and reporting.
2. That it can be repeated to assess the impact of any policy changes.
3. It must be capable of measuring patterns of sickness absence regionally, by sector and by size of organisation.
4. If possible the survey should be universally applicable, to all sectors and sizes of organisation.
5. That it should be cost effective and free from unnecessary bureaucracy.

4.3 Survey considerations

4.3.1 Content related issues

Definitions of key variables

There is very little standardisation of key terms and concepts across the surveys. This needs to be addressed to enhance the rigour and validity of the survey. We would recommend giving thought to how absence is measured, for example by the number of shifts or hours absent, or the cost involved. The non-government employer surveys tend to ask for aggregated data in these areas, which is not sufficiently detailed enough to map SSP/OSP payment patterns. Where calculations on cost are involved they should state clearly the criteria involved, i.e. extra staffing costs, agency costs, overtime payments to existing staff, OSP costs, changes to national insurance payments etc, whether any SSP can be claimed back. Questions asking about the loss of revenue might be worth considering, though again, calculation criteria would have to be included.

Consideration should be given to how sickness is assessed and by whom, i.e. by a doctor, a self-certification note, or an employee ringing in. Whilst causes for absence might be mapped against a standardised classification scheme e.g. the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) or the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, (ICD10), these are complex, and problematic even when used by health care professionals. They are not
recommended for use by lay people, for example, Personnel/HR departments. However a simplified categorisation might prove useful to standardise absence causes (Shiels et al. 2004). We recommend the following data are included in a survey.

**Individual employee data**
- Individual records are vitally important. A number of the employer surveys only ask for aggregated data about employees, which is not sufficient to build up a predictive indicator of sickness absence.
- Personal details including gender, age, National Insurance (NI) number, tax code and tax status will be required. These details will help to assess the feasibility of incapacity or invalidity claims, after the end of the 28 week period.
- Employment details including job title, sector, hours contracted for, level of seniority, gender and age. Consideration should be given to creating categories for those who are self-employed or those who work for an agency.
- Separate categories for the amount of tax and NI payable at the end of the period of absence that the person must pay (calculation used if employer can claim a refund, small employers only).
- Reason for absence, whether sickness absence, or for other sanctioned reasons, i.e. statutory leave (paternity/maternity/jury service) annual leave/time off in lieu.
- Thought should be given to whether to ask for the number of waiting days, and the date and day of the first waiting day, as OSP may be paid earlier than SSP (SSP is currently only payable from the fourth day of notified absence).
- Reasons why SSP/OSP comes to an end.
- Outcomes following SSP/OSP claims, i.e. return to work, occupational therapy.
- Depending on how detailed the survey is, considerations could be given to adding a category for planned (and unplanned) sickness absence, for example for employees with a medical condition requiring future periods off work?
- Details of employees who transfer from SSP to incapacity benefit.

**Aggregate data from employers**
- Length of SSP/OSP spells.
- Number of employers paying OSP and SSP.
- Number of individuals on SSP/OSP by employer size/industry etc.
- Number of employees covered by SSP and OSP schemes.
- Data on SSP/OSP including number of employees receiving and number and length and spells of SSP, amount of SSP payments.
- Total of employees on SSP/OSP at any one time.
• Number of SSP/OSP spells during a one year period.
• Comparison of qualifying conditions for SSP/OSP.
• Details of any other periods of SSP request for payment, and whether they are in the a) same, b) linked or c) separate claiming periods. Plus the outcome of the request for payment together with any internally useful information, i.e. referred to occupational therapy, job adapted…

4.3.2 Design related issues

Sampling

A stratified random sample is the most reliable way to ensure representative and valid data, to ensure that all key variables are controlled for accuracy. The sample will have to take into account the following variables:

• Sector: Public/Voluntary; Private: Commercial; Industrial; Service.
• Size: Small (including self-employed); Medium and large employers.
• Region. The Government Office for the English Regions, which classifies England as follows: Yorkshire and Humber; North East; North West; East Midlands, West Midlands; London; East of England; South East and South West.
Response rate; implications for survey design

As noted elsewhere in this report, response rates achieved in existing non-government surveys are typically low. Given the need for policy makers in this area to be properly informed, we see the achievement of an adequate response rate as being a critical element of the usefulness of any future survey, as the generalisation of existing data are limited by potential bias. We would therefore recommend commissioning an organisation experienced in the development of large-scale surveys and representative sampling.

Recruitment and contacting of organisations

During Phase 2, initial recruitment from direct contact or referral appeared the most successful. Using directories or lists of organisations was more time consuming as they were often out of date and identifying the relevant department, person with authority to give permission and the relevant staff member to carry out the survey data was very time consuming.
Organisations were happy to take part in the survey being carried out by The University of Liverpool and with the guarantee that any data would not be made available to government departments. Therefore, if a large-scale survey response is required, resources should be devoted to establishing an independent team to examine trends stemming from the anonymous data and to recommend and fund future research on sickness absence and return to work.

A positive attitude from executive and senior management to taking part in research was essential as was gaining their agreement to take part, thereby securing the cooperation of the teams and individuals involved in the data collection.

**Response rate**

Maintaining a consistently high response rate is essential to limit systematic bias and enhance the generalisability of the findings. During Phase 2, organisations struggled to complete and return the information requested despite pre-agreement, support and simple paperwork. The best results were gained from the phone interviews in part A, however this did not provide the data for the Sickness Absence Data Questions (SADQ). This data would need to be collected from different sources and therefore could not be done over the phone. Time spent chasing up non-returnees was considerable in part 2 of this study.

The time needed to access and retrieve data from records was the major factor in the non-return of data. Organisations stated that priority must be given to the business rather than non-essential work which had no direct benefit to the organisation. Participants also acknowledged that there was no consequence to non-response to the survey, which there would be for not completing essential business. Consideration should therefore be given for inducement or incentives to take part.

The identification of one member of staff, who recruited, would co-ordinate the collection and reporting of data would considerably improve the response rate as would requesting data prospectively, enabling systems to be set up in advance minimising the involvement of staff in retrieving data.

Timing of the survey should be considered to avoid busiest times of the year, for example year end, summer months and Christmas. Recruitment and preparation for the gathering of data by providing a simple system would need to be done well in advance. However, the data collection needs to encompass the whole year to account for seasonal effects on sickness absence.

**Systems and process**

Many problems with data gathering arose because of the wide variety of systems for collection and recording of sickness absence data between organisations. Data collection methods varied in sophistication from written account book to complex IT programmes, specialised departments to one person in accounts or outsourcing to payroll companies. Most organisations did not have a direct computerised link between payroll/wages and the Personnel department, which made the gathering of the data both time consuming and problematic.
The amount and detail of the data recorded differed widely, as did the use of information for sickness absence management. There were complications with complex shift patterns, not all organisations measured absence by ‘days’, i.e. some used hours, or costs, and finally, a wide variety of OSP schemes were found to exist. There were some reported problems using software, even with IT support, therefore it is important to consider a simple collection and recording tool needing minimal IT skill, software and support.

4.4 Option 1 – Adding a set of questions to an existing government survey

The benefits of adapting an existing survey include a pre-existing sampling frame, sampling methodology and lower costs than setting everything up new. However, there are a number of drawbacks. It might not be possible to ask as many detailed questions, given the shortage of space. The sampling frame might not reach the people who are most able to give the detail required, i.e. employers through a household survey, doctors through an employer survey. Even if a survey is aimed at employers, it is likely that Human Resources (HR)/personnel staff will know more about the recording and reporting of SSP. As with the Sickness Absence Recording Tool (SART) evaluation, there could be attrition difficulties. (The SART was developed by the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) for the United Kingdom (UK) Health and Safety Executive (HSE).)

Companies we approached had no idea how hard it would be to collect the data. To compound this problem there are a number of differing software packages currently in use, however, a few are more widely utilised, for example SAGE. Smaller companies, who collect information using paper based systems, might find a new electronic process more burdensome in terms of costs and staff training. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) figures state that 75 per cent of Value Added Tax (VAT) registered businesses in England in 2004 employed four people or less (http://www.detini.gov.uk/cgibin/get_builder_page?page=1431&site=&parent=57&prevpage=1353). Nearly half the UK workforce is self-employed or working for organisations of less than 50 employees, with such small employers vastly outnumbering (at around four million) the 26,000 medium and 6,000 (more than 250 staff) enterprises. In this respect, consideration would also have to be given to the most effective way to gather data from employees on a range of contracts, i.e. self-employed workers. Those who identified as self-employed, as their main job, accounted for just under ten per cent of the UK workforce in 2002 (LFS, 2003, page 442). Some form of positive inducement and ongoing support will be needed to gain a response rate similar to other employment related government surveys, i.e. LFS 79 per cent, WERS 64 per cent, WHASS 63 per cent.

The following table contains a summary of information needed to assess the utility of adapting: the LFS (Office for National Statistics (ONS), which utilises the General Household Survey (GHS)); the WERS by the Department for Trade and Industry; and the WHASS HSE.
Table 4.2 Summary of methodology used by government surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>LFS 2005</th>
<th>WERS 2004</th>
<th>WHASS 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling</strong></td>
<td>Significant attention is given to the sampling procedure, 60,000 households are sampled per quarter, using a random stratified sample, which utilises every postcode location. This results in a statistically representative sample of the population being assessed.</td>
<td>The sampling frame is drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The frame is continuously up-dated from VAT and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) records. It is based on a stratified random sample of establishments and a sample of employees at those establishments.</td>
<td>A stratified variable probability sample, with units being randomly selected from within cells of a 72-cell sampling matrix. The matrix included both public and private organisations. The sample design was constructed according to 1) size of organisation, 2) industry classification 3) Country (England, Scotland, Wales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey design</strong></td>
<td>The LFS uses face-to-face and telephone interviews. The interviewers are exclusively LFS. Consideration might be given to whether the surveys would be self-report, telephone or face-to-face, depending on the questions asked, people may be more or less likely to be truthful.</td>
<td>Cross-sectional survey, face-to-face interviews were conducted with around 3,200 managers, employee representatives and employees, with both a union representative and a non-union representative (1,000) over 20,000 employees completed and returned a self-completion questionnaire.</td>
<td>Standalone employer survey. Telephone interviews were used, using CATI (Computer aided telephone interviewing). The questions were mostly closed, with fixed responses. The mean length of time for completed interviews was 27 minutes. The proposed longitudinal nature of this survey series means that differences in outcome can be compared over time, providing the same questions are asked and the responses weighted. Questions could be added to the employer and/or employee surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>The LFS already asks questions related to work absence i.e. employment, unemployment, temporary work, hours of work and average wages.</td>
<td>The survey asks a number of relevant background questions, such as industry, sector, employment, contract conditions and personal characteristics, however very few questions are directly relevant.</td>
<td>The questionnaire contains some pertinent questions, such as the percentage of firms recording and reviewing sickness absence (page 112-113). Information on the number of firms using the data to manage sickness absence is also provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>LFS 2005</th>
<th>WERS 2004</th>
<th>WHASS 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Respondents</strong></td>
<td>The survey is a household panel survey. Householders, are not necessarily likely to know the answers to detailed questions on SSP.</td>
<td>A Survey of Employees A Financial Performance Questionnaire was completed by management. A panel survey of managers A cross-sectional survey of managers</td>
<td>The person responsible for day-to-day health and safety at the specified workplace. In multi-site organisations, head office was approached and contact details were asked for the health and safety manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
<td>Quarterly, ongoing, which can illustrate seasonal changes. Though reliable and frequent, it might prove much more costly to administer than annual surveys.</td>
<td>The WERS surveys yield a large amount of generally related data, however, they are only produced occasionally and would not be useful if a baseline and repeat survey needed to be carried out in the next couple of years.</td>
<td>The HSE is conducting longitudinal research on work related sickness and injury absence between 2005 and 2015. One way forward might be to negotiate the inclusion of relevant SSP questions within their survey. This would also allow for piggybacking onto a secondary survey at a later date, to assess changes after policy amendments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Rate</strong></td>
<td>Seventy-nine per cent for first wave interviews</td>
<td>Sixty-four per cent in the main survey</td>
<td>Sixty-three per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey omissions</strong></td>
<td>With a face to-face interview people might be less willing to admit any absence which may not appear in the official figures, especially if employees responses can be traced. It can only measure absence up to seven days in its present form. Therefore, we cannot gather information about long-term sickness absence The survey is not able to offer explanations as to why sickness absence may occur.</td>
<td>Companies with five or less employees were not included in the main survey The questions are not directly relevant to SSP related issues. The WERS surveys are not repeated frequently enough to use as a before and after assessment tool.</td>
<td>In its current form the survey is not set up to assess whether employers provide sickness absence payment Sampling was based on companies with more than five employees, which means that the sickness absence practices of a number of very small firms have been left out of the final report. There are no questions directly addressing the types or causes of sickness or injury leading to absence whilst not at work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Option 2 creating a bespoke survey instrument

Given the difficulties anticipated with option one, our second and preferred option would be a prospective, independent survey, with data collection undertaken on a periodic basis. Current policy and opinion relies on anecdote in the absence of valid and reliable datasets. A reliable dataset linking health and occupational data about causes of short-term absence and the risks for developing longer-term absence would go a long way to unpacking the causes, prevention and management of the development of longer-term sickness absence and frequent short-term absence. UK published research to date suggests that only around a quarter of the variation in sickness absence outcome can be explained by health factors (Shiels and Gabbay in press). To achieve a representative outcome, specific resources would have to be given to sampling, weighting, and survey design, particularly if the results are to be representative by region, sector and industry. Further consideration needs to be given to the most cost-effective way to collect accurate and meaningful data on the current costs of SSP to employers in order to understand the potential impact of planned or future policy options.

Currently employer-based sickness absence surveys are unlikely to include reasons for absence, and sick note diagnoses are often deliberately vague to protect the confidentiality of personal health information. These issues will need further exploration, with thought being given to some standardization of the definitions and resources associated with the process i.e. time, money, indirect costs incurred.

To reduce the burden on employers any survey or data collection system would have to mirror current data collection practices. Evidence from the final SART evaluation report states that HR staff experienced problems, which led to increased attrition in spite of ongoing support (Managing health at work – recording and monitoring information on sickness absence including work relatedness:2005). Therefore, if a large-scale survey response is required some sort of considered inducement/set of incentives will be required. Resources should be devoted to establishing an independent team to examine trends stemming from the data and have the power to recommend and fund future research on sickness absence and return to work. The survey team should build supportive ongoing relationships with participants in advance, including recruitment from executive and senior management downwards. It should use a simple system, with enough flexibility to allow for all systems and third party collating. However, given the detailed nature of the information required it is not certain whether a one-survey fits all approach would be possible. One way forward might be to add the questionnaire electronically to a variety of HR software packages, however ensuring compatibility would require ongoing, and potentially on-site IT support, which would be resource heavy. This solution would also create a problem for smaller organizations that use paper based systems. It may be that a range of data collection options are made available. Given the potential for complexity and the demands made on already busy HR departments/employers more effective results might be gained from onsite visits from the data collection team. However, preparatory work might be needed, as we have already found that the required data are rarely easily found (see Phase 2 results).
Repeating the survey would require additional support. We anticipate that attrition could be a problem. Providing organizations with a set of anonymised baseline data comparing their results with others based in the same region, sector or industry could help to keep them on-board. This option is currently not available in a valid and SSP specific form. However a significant bonus for employers would be regular reports from their data, compared to comparable organizations, both locally and elsewhere. This would help them develop their sickness and return to work strategies and interventions, linked to audit and training. In our surveys many respondents considered that such information would be of considerable benefit to their organization, and allow them to compare their data with peers. This would help them gauge their sickness absence profile with other enterprises, and give them both internal and external benchmarking data. This will also act as an incentive to embed the data recording within the organization, and ensure the data are accurate and updated, as it would directly benefit the employer. Consideration still needs to be given as to whether participating organizations should also receive remuneration to cover the costs of data entry directly or perhaps in kind with free software and related support.

4.6 Conclusion

A great deal of detail will be needed to assess national, regional and industrial SSP use. As such it might be more appropriate to create a new bespoke survey instrument, so that it can be designed to meet the specific objectives of the data required and feed into effective policy formation. Ongoing support to companies and a real incentive to take part will be vital to its success.

We have set out the key issues that will need to be addressed from an SSP related survey. An employer survey will undoubtedly provide data on SSP calculations and costs, but it will not ascertain the feelings or experiences of employees. Nor will it elucidate on the thoughts and feelings of medical practitioners who play a pivotal role in the recording and reporting of sickness absence. One way forward might be the development of a one fits all bespoke survey. This would be cost effective; however it might be impractical due to the detailed nature of the information required from all interested parties. If data from more than one group are required the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) might consider conducting a series of standalone surveys, targeting key groups simultaneously. This approach might provide a more complex, in-depth understanding of the target issue; however, it would increase costs considerably. Whatever final decision is reached we recommend that an organisation with considerable experience in the design of representative large-scale surveys be invited to contribute into the crucial areas of sampling by firm size, by region and by industry.
Appendix A
Covering letter Phase 2 Part A
The UK Government’s Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned the ‘Fit for Work’ group at the University of Liverpool to undertake research into the systems and processes organisations have in place to record sickness absences.

There is currently very little information held centrally into the recording of Statutory Sick Pay and the aim of the study is to examine how this information is currently collected and recorded by the employer and how these records could be managed more efficiently.

For the first part of the project we wish to explore the approaches taken by a variety of employers to paying and recording statutory sick pay and this information will help to formulate a more detailed questionnaire for the second stage of the project to be carried out after Easter.

At this stage we are not looking for the actual hard data held by organisations relating to sickness absences but only at how and what data are collected, the systems and processes used and benefits and disadvantages of these systems.

Those organisations willing to take part in this first phase will be invited to take part in the second phase and will be offered the opportunity to trial new software designed to save time and money in the recording of sickness information.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a simple short telephone interview about how your organisation collects and records data on sickness absence. The interview is scheduled for 00.00pm on 00 of March 2006.

It would be appreciated if you could give consent for the interview to be taped for analysing by the research team. The tapes will be destroyed on completion of the project and will not be accessible to anyone else.

Confidentiality will be guaranteed and all research will be conducted within the data protection act guidelines. Only the fit for work team will have access to the interview data and no findings will be attributed to named employers in any report.
Appendix B
Telephone interview schedule

The purpose of this study is to determine the pattern of collecting and recording of sickness absence. Therefore all your answers to the following questions are equally valuable to us. Even if you do not collect or record sickness absence data or keep detailed records, your responses will inform the study.

Organisational detail
What is your organisational size?
(Small <50 employees Medium 50 – 250 employees Large >250 employees)

What is your organisational sector?
(Private, Public, Voluntary)

What is your organisational type?
(Industry, Health Care, Education, Hospitality, Retail etc)

What is your role within the organisation relating to the collection and recording of absence?

Are you aware of the legal requirement to record sickness absence?
(If so what are the requirements?)
(Does your organisation comply with this requirement?)
Question 1

**Collection of sickness absence data**

What data does it collect? (Employee details, reasons for absence, length of absence, dates, outcome etc)

How is it collected?

Who collects it?

How is it recorded? (e.g. paper, electronic, types of software used)

Who inputs data?

What classifications do you use? (e.g. illness reason details)

Who decides about classification of absence? (e.g. do you record ‘stress’ as a reason for absence or time off with sick dependants?)

Do you collect data specifically for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?

(How does this link to other sickness absence and payroll data and systems?)

Has your organisation recouped costs from the Inland Revenue?

Do you pay Occupational Sick Pay (OSP)?

(What are the qualifying conditions?)

(What proportion of staff qualify for OSP?)

Question 2

**The use of sickness absence data**

What happens to it?

How is it stored?

Who sees results?

Are statistics produced and used?

Do you use data to look at patterns of absence? (e.g. reasons, length of sickness, how many off etc)
With the systems you currently use which of the following information could you easily access? *(NB we do not require the figures as answers for these questions. We only need to know whether your systems for collecting and recording sickness would allow you to produce these figures)*

- Postcode
- Job title
- Working hours
- Number of employees covered by SSP or OSP schemes
- Number of employees receiving SSP or OSP
- Amount of payments for SSP or OSP
- Length and spells of sickness absence for individuals
- Total number of employees on SSP or OSP at one time
- Number of SSP or OSP spells in one year
- Length of SSP or OSP spells in one year
- Reasons for SSP or OSP
- Outcomes following SSP or OSP claims
- Details of employees who transfer from SSP to incapacity benefit
- Reasons for SSP or OSP coming to an end

**Question 3**

**The effectiveness of your current system**

What is effective and efficient about your system?

What are the barriers or gaps in your recording system?

How could your current system be improved?

Do you have plans to improve your systems?

How could data be used more effectively within the organisation?

Would a single more comprehensive system improve sickness absence management?
Question 4

**Attitudes and issues**

What are management attitudes towards collecting and recording sickness data?
What are staff attitudes towards collecting and recording sickness data?
What concerns from these groups have been highlighted?
How do you manage confidentiality and data protection legislation requirements?
What issues arise from meeting these requirements?
Do you have any thoughts about Government policy and agenda around sick pay and work absences?

Would you be prepared to take part in the second phase of the study? (This will be a paper based survey for you to complete)

Thank you for your time and for all your information. This will be very useful to the research team.

We will send you copy of the final report at the end of the project.
Appendix C
E-questionnaire
Feasibility study for the collection and recording of statutory sick pay data from UK organisations

Please complete these brief details about your organisation.

Date: [01 January]

I) What is the size of your organisation?
   Please select ONE
   - Small - up to and including 50 employees
   - Medium - from 51 - 250 employees
   - Large - 251 or more employees

II) What is your organisational sector?
    Please select ONE
    - Public Sector
    - Voluntary Sector
    - Private Sector

III) Which of the following categories most closely describes your organisation’s main business?
    Please select ONE
    - Retail
    - Hospitality and leisure
    - Manufacturing
    - Construction
    - Transport
    - Security
    - Health and Health Care
    - Finance
    - Education
    - Other

If 'Other' please state:
IV) How many sites does your organisation have across the U.K.?

Please type hi

V) Does your organisation have a dedicated Human Resources (HR) or Personnel department?

☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Don’t know

VI) If yes, where is that department situated?

Please type hi

VII) How many staff does your organisation employ in total?

Please type hi

VIII) How many of this total are management?

Please type hi

IX) How many of the total staff are office based workers?

Please type hi

X) How many of the total staff are manual workers?

Please type hi

1) The following questions ask about the collection of sickness absence data.

1a) Which information from the following list do you collect?
(Please tick all those applying to your organisation)

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t Know ☐ DK

Employee Name
1b) Which of the following statements most closely characterises the process for the collection of sickness absence data within your organisation?

Please select ONE

- Line managers send regular sickness absence return on paper based proforma
- Line managers send sickness absence return on paper based proforma each incident
- Line managers send regular sickness absence return on electronic proforma
- Line managers send sickness absence return on electronic proforma each incident
- HR/personnel request regular sickness absence return on paper based proforma
- HR/personnel request regular sickness absence return on paper based proforma each incident
- HR/personnel collect records regularly from the work place
- Information is sent electronically to HR/personnel from clocking in system
- HR/personnel regularly collect information from clocking in/rota system
- Other

If 'Other' please state:
1c) What is the job title of the person responsible for collecting the data?  

Please type here.

2) The following questions ask you about how your organisation records sickness absence data.

2a) Which of the following statements most closely characterises the system on which the collected data is recorded?

Please select ONE:

- Book/ledger
- Combined paper/electronic format
- Access database
- Excel spreadsheet
- Payroll system
- Custom designed by external IT specialist
- Custom designed by internal IT specialist
- Purchased ‘off the shelf’ system (please name)
- Purchased tailored system (please name)
- Other

If ‘Other’ please state:

2b) What is the job title of the person responsible for recording the collected data?  

Please type here.

2c) Which of the following statements most closely characterises how the system for recording sickness absence data links to the payroll system?

Please select ONE:

- All in one personnel and payroll system
- It is the payroll system (e.g. Sage)
- Linked to payroll though needs some input from operator
- Not linked as information is sent through to payroll dept manually
2d) If we asked you for the data, would you be able to report periods of absences per employee for the last financial/tax year?

- No
- Yes
- Don’t know

3) The following questions relate to the payment of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

3a) Does your organisation pay sick pay?

- No (If No please go straight to question 4)
- Yes
- Don’t know

3b) Does your organisation collect data specifically for SSP?

- No
- Yes
- Don’t know

4) The following questions relate to any Occupational Sick pay (OSP) schemes provided by your organisation.

4a) Do you pay Occupational Sick Pay?

- No (If No please go straight to question 5)
- Yes
- Don’t know
4b) Do you pay Occupational Sick Pay as well as Statutory Sick Pay?

☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ Don't know

4c) Which of the following statements most closely characterises the qualifying conditions for receipt of OSP?

Please select ONE

☐ All staff qualify immediately on start of contract
☐ All staff qualify after probation period
☐ Only senior staff and managers qualify
☐ Only full time staff qualify
☐ Selected sites/departments only
☐ Qualification is discretionary
☐ Other

If 'Other' please state:

4d) What percentage of staff qualify for OSP?

Please type %

4e) For how long do staff receive OSP?

Please type %

4d) What is the job title of the person responsible for collecting the data?

Please type
4e) What is the process for the collection of information for OSP?

5) Please answer the following questions about how your organisation uses sickness absence data.

5a) Are statistics produced from the recorded data?
- [ ] No (If No please go straight to question 6)
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Don’t know

5b) Do you use the statistics to produce reports?
Please select ONE
- [ ] Yes, regular reports circulated throughout organisation
- [ ] Yes, we do when requested
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other

If 'Other' please state:

5c) Which of the following are regularly produced?
(Please tick all those applying to your organisation)

- [ ] Yes  [ ] No  [ ] Don’t Know

- [Y]  [N]  [DK] Regular reports produced for management and department heads
- [Y]  [N]  [DK] Report of over all organisational sickness
- [Y]  [N]  [DK] Reporting on number of days of sickness
- [Y]  [N]  [DK] Reporting on number of periods of absence
5d) Which of the following groups of people see the results of the analysis of sickness absence? (Please tick all those applying to your organisation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Board
- Management Team
- Team Leaders/Department Heads
- Human Resources/Personnel
- Occupational Health
- Company Doctor
- Finance Department
6) The following section asks about the effectiveness of your current system.

6a) Please describe what is effective and efficient about your system

6b) Please list any problems or gaps in your recording system

6c) Please explain how your current system could be improved

6d) Do you have any plans to update/replace your system?

- No
- Yes
- Don’t know
If yes, why

What systems have been considered?

6e) Please describe how sickness absence data may be used more effectively within your organisation

6f) Would a more comprehensive system improve sickness absence management?
- No
- Yes
- Don’t know

If yes, why

7) The following questions ask you about the attitude of management and employees to the collection of and recording of sickness absence data.
7a) Please comment on management attitudes towards the collection and recording of sickness data

7b) Please comment on any other concerns that have been highlighted by either staff or management about the collection and recording of sickness data

Thank you for the time you have taken to complete this questionnaire. All the answers you have given will be very useful for the research team. We will forward a copy of the final report to you on completion of the project.

Please click on the 'Submit Form' button to send us your answers or the 'Clear Form' button to clear all of your answers and start the form again.
Appendix D
Covering letter Phase 2 Part B
Dear

Many thanks for your agreement to participate in the second phase of the research into sickness absence recording for the university. Your responses will be very valuable to the team of researchers. The ‘covering-letter’ document attached gives further details of the project and instructions for completion of the questionnaire.

I am attaching an e-questionnaire (attached an html file called ‘sspeval.html) Save the file to your hard drive, then open it with a web browser. The questionnaire which has been carefully designed for you to complete easily and simply, can be returned by clicking on the ‘submit’ button at the end. (You will need to be online for the document to be sent directly to me.)

Your questionnaire has been given a numerical identifier to ensure confidentiality and so it is unnecessary for you to include your name or the name of your organisation.

In addition to the questionnaire, we are asking organisations to complete a small data gathering exercise to test feasibility for a national study in the future. We are also interested in how easily organisations find this exercise and so have included a very brief evaluation of this process.

These files are also attached and named ‘data-collection-sheet’ and ‘post-data-collection-questionnaire’. They are simple word documents and include details for their completion. These can be emailed back to me separately to the questionnaire.

I would be very grateful if you could return all the completed documents via email to me by Friday 21st of July.

Please feel free to contact me either via email on this address or by phone next week, if you have any queries or difficulties.

Many thanks in anticipation of your continuing participation in this important research.

Sue Woolf
Appendix E  
Data collection sheet  

Please fill in as much of the following data as you are able for your organisation for the period 1 of January 2006 to 31 March 2006. This is a simple word document and figures may be typed directly into the column. Please save as a word document and return as an attachment. Many thanks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Code</th>
<th>001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of employees in your organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees receiving SSP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees receiving OSP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of payment for SSP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of payment for OSP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of SSP periods of absence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of OSP periods of absence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of SSP periods of absence of less than 3 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of SSP periods of absence of 3 days to 7 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of SSP periods of absence of 7 days to 4 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes following SSP Claims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Return to job role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Return to modified duties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Dismissal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Retirement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Resignation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for sickness absence (if recorded)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety, stress, depression, other psychiatric illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back problems and other musculoskeletal problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold, cough, influenza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest and respiratory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart, cardiac and circulatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other known causes not elsewhere classified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown causes, not specified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Post data collection questionnaire

The following evaluation asks how easily you were able to collect the data for each question on the ‘Data Gathering’ document. Please could you indicate your response using the scale below, by simply changing the text in the relevant box to bold type?

- Easily – Data was in an accessible format on the system
- Fairly easily – Data was available on the system but needed some adjustment
- With some difficulty – Data is on the system but in an inaccessible format
- With considerable difficulty – Data is not available on the system, collection from alternative source
- Unable to collect these Data – not available on the system

1. Total number of employees in organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Number of employees receiving SSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Number of employees receiving OSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
4. Total amount of payment for SSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Total amount of payment for OSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Number of SSP spells

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. Number of OSP spells

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Outcomes following SSP Claims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Reasons for SSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easily</th>
<th>Fairly easily</th>
<th>Some difficulty</th>
<th>Considerable difficulty</th>
<th>Unable to collect data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Did you collect all the data requested?

Yes

No

Who was involved the collection of the data?

How long did it take to collect and record the data?

Did you experience any other difficulties during the collection of the data?

Do you have any other comments about your experience during the collection and recording of the Data?
Appendix G
Response results chart
Appendices – Response results chart

28/06/06
50 data collection sheets and
35 e-questionnaires sent

14/07/06
50 reminders sent

- 4 returned completed
- 4 replied unable to complete
- 4 replied having technical problems
- 6 requested extra time

31/07/06
38 reminders sent

- 1 returned completed
- 4 replied unable to complete
- 2 requested extra time

August
24 companies contacted by phone

- 12 direct contacts made
- 8 prompts sent

9 contacts interviewed

- 2 had left company
- 1 on maternity leave
- 1 on long term sick
References


DWP (January 2006) A new deal for Welfare: Empowering people for work, HMSO.


Income Data Services (April 2006) Extract from IDS HR Study 810 The Bradford Factor – the pros and cons of this absence review technique, http://www.incomesdata.co.uk/studies/bradford.htm


