

# DWP briefing



Public and  
Commercial  
Services Union

Department for Work & Pensions Group

To: All Members, Branch Secretaries, Additional Branch Contacts, Regional Secretaries & GEC  
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## Working Age Directorate Update

The Group Executive Committee (GEC) recently met with the Working Age Director on 11 April 2018. This briefing provides feedback from that meeting.

### Fixed Term Appointments

The decision not to extend the contracts of our Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) members has been met with anger and frustration by our members. Both by our members who have suddenly been told that there is little prospect of an extension to their contract or permanency and all members worried about how on earth they will be able to deliver even more work with less staff in the sites. A number of PCS members' car park meetings have taken place as a result. The Director confirmed that local managers should be proactive and supportive in helping find opportunities for our FTA members to remain working in the DWP as well as highlighting any other vacancies in other government departments.

This decision affects staff across operations but it hits the Working Age Directorate particularly hard as FTA staff make up 10% of the workforce. Senior WAD management continue to assert they are over staffed. They have advised that they are currently 788 over staffed. This figure will grow to 1031 in July after a number of FTAs have left the department. The GEC negotiators challenged these figures as it is clearly not the experience of our members on the ground that WAD is overstaffed.

PCS will continue to challenge staffing assumptions as it is clear that across operations that the staffing levels are severely limiting our members' ability to deliver services to the public. GEC negotiators also highlighted the high turnover in this directorate linked to the insecurity over the future which is further increased as staff who leave are not replaced. Despite management stating they are over staffed they have also taken action to push overtime, including all over the Easter weekend, increase the ESA HOTT Handovers to 48 hours Monday to Thursday, and cut team meetings to 30 minutes. We have also seen the huge queues on the lines waiting to get through which all indicate that there are not enough staff in this directorate.

The WAD Director advised that a Work Study on ESA Changes has commenced. The work study teams look at the staffing levels needed to actually do the work. This should give a more accurate picture of the actual workloads in this area and how many staff are actually needed.

There has been less focus on looking at the impact of changes on the more long-standing benefits as the busy work study teams have been prioritised to look at the workloads on the newer benefits. If members have examples of where the work has increased and this has not been taken into account then you should feed that into your local reps so that details can be sent to the GEC negotiators.

### **How members are managed**

Whilst it was disappointing that there was no movement at the meeting to address the staffing problems in WAD, PCS negotiators will continue to urgently press for this to be addressed at operations level. PCS negotiators also raised that the way the problems and the pressure on our members were being managed needed to be urgently addressed.

The clear message from the Director is that they are not chasing numbers and, as a result, stats should not be driving the work. The focus should be on delivering services to the public. You should feed in any examples of where management are focussing on stats, comparing sites with other sites in a league table or competitive type way etc., so that it can be challenged locally and urgently escalated to the GEC negotiators. PCS wants to provide the fullest feedback about all the sites where this is incorrectly taking place to get it stopped. Also, we need any examples where members are told to carry out work in a way simply so that it shows up in the stats rather than what needs to be done to provide the service to the public.

There have been confusing messages about the Flexible Resource Model (FRM) and what is being asked of sites. The WAD Director confirmed that she did now want sites to cover the opening hours of the service lines. But sites should consult with local TUS about how this is done so that it is disrupting the work on processing as little as possible. There is scope to look at how FRM is worked across the sites in the same area. FRM seems to be having a disproportionately worse impact on the ability of smaller sites to cover the work. There could also be scope to look at sites covering the work to regularly give each individual site a break from FRM so that all staff can focus on the processing. The more consultation that there is with PCS at local level and nationally the better.

Management confirmed that HOTTTS have to always be covered before allocating resource to FRM. It is pointless taking calls if there is no-one to deal with the issues arising from the call. The WAD Director confirmed that the 48-hour call back time will be reduced to an achievable level as soon as possible as it is clear that claimants are not waiting 48 hours so it is not reducing the volume of calls.

However, PCS negotiators also made clear that the emphasis on answering calls is having a detrimental impact on dealing with all the processing work and increasing the volume of calls progress chasing. Sites should escalate problems with delivering services to the public caused by the numbers being asked for on FRM. In many cases it is far less time consuming for trained processors to complete the action required after the call and deal with the query than have numerous members deal with increasing frustrated repeat calls trying to get the issue resolved.

The WAD Director advised that a workshop would be held in the next few weeks regarding telephony cover and how it works. Members should feed issues into their local reps to take up

with local management but also to feed into the talks at directorate level about how the delivery of services is organised properly to balance processing and telephony.

On the Employee Deal Collective Agreement Management confirmed that there is no requirement to stay beyond 18.30. Members should take the caller's details where they are unable to complete the call so that they can get a call back.

The WAD Director confirmed that there should be no messages trying to withdraw Assumed Consent. Any messages around the peak leave period can ask if members can help cover the busy work but cannot take away Assumed Consent.

Senior management confirmed that there is autonomy to manage the level of Employee Deal cover for the site-based functions in the best way for sites – this will be repeated to local management to ensure that the message gets out. This includes using rotas as a straightforward way to organise the team leader cover at both ends of the day.

The reduction in the length of team meetings should have clearly indicated it was just temporary to deal with the huge influx of work. Management cited a number of circumstances that have increased the pressure on our members with issues with extreme weather causing a high level of site closures, cold weather payments, PES, computer outages, Mortgage Interest changes and uprating. Management advised that team meetings should revert back to 60 minutes before the end of April. Where the full time for a meeting is still required then that should be requested by sites.

### **Meeting with new ESA manager**

PCS have requested a meeting with the new ESA manager as soon as possible to go through the specific pressures on ESA. This includes the accuracy of forecasts compared to the actual work volumes. We will also discuss any ways of reducing the pressure on our members

### **Wellness survey**

15% of the survey responses came from WAD so PCS will be working through the directorate results with WAD management when they come out to ensure that measures are taken to reduce the pressure and stress on our members.

### **Staffing Campaign continues**

PCS will continue to campaign to fight for jobs and deal with the lack of staff across operations and the DWP and challenge the flawed decision not to retain experienced, dedicated staff who are on fixed term contracts. There are clearly huge issues as sites are struggling to deliver services to the public with the staffing levels that we currently have. We are supporting PCS branches to campaign on these issues locally as well as campaigning at DWP Group level. We encourage members to support and get involved in this campaigning work so that we can keep the pressure on to get the staffing levels and jobs that are needed in the DWP.

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