

## BRIEFING NOTE ON DOE AND PRIVATE SECTOR SICK ABSENCES

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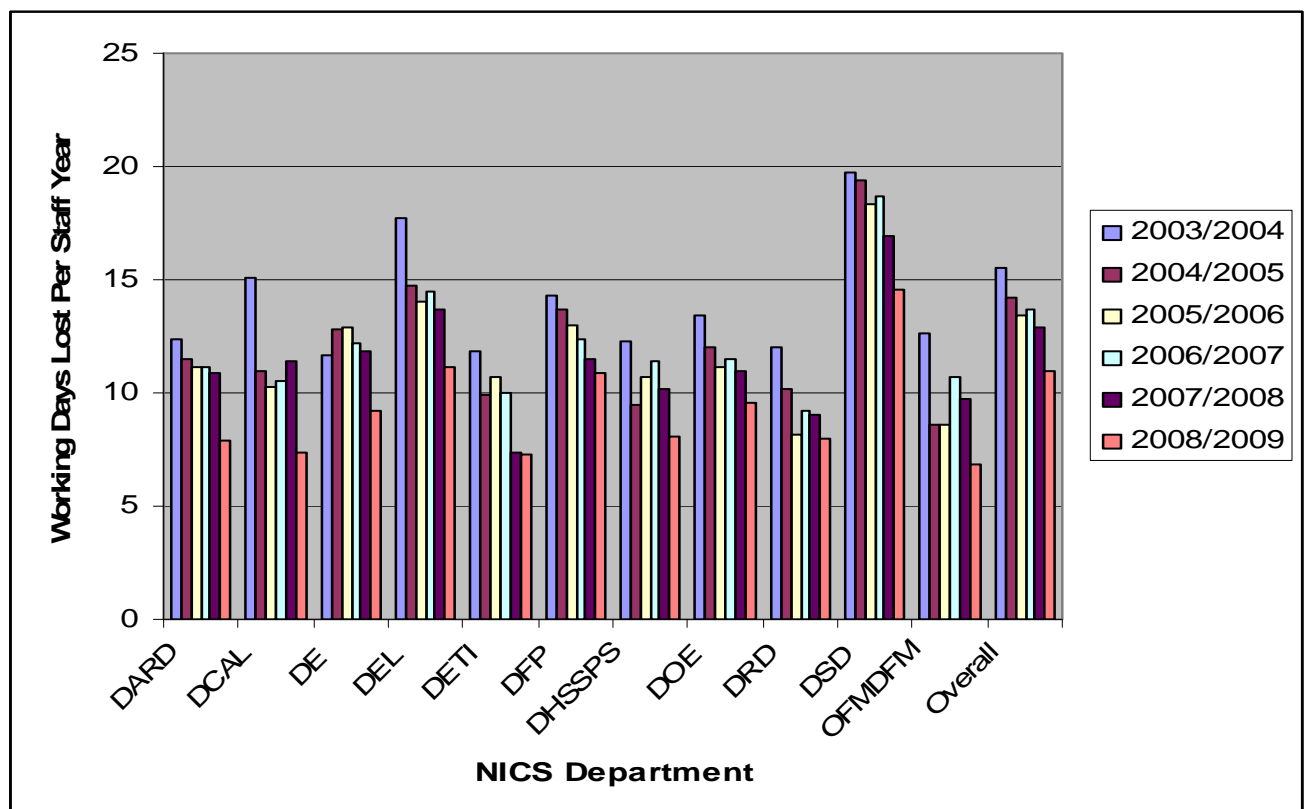
### BACKGROUND

This paper will compare the level of sickness absence in the Department of the Environment (DOE) with the levels of sickness absence in the Private Sector. Statistics for the Department is provided in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008/09" (NISRA report)<sup>1</sup>. Data for the Private Sector is taken from the 2008 Northern Ireland Audit Office report "Management of Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service" (NIAO Report)<sup>2</sup>.

### A GENERAL LOOK AT DOE

#### Chart 1

**Average Number of Days Lost Per Staff Year by Department 2003/2004 – 2008/2009**



Source – Figure 1 from the NISRA Report page 10

<sup>1</sup> [NISRA Report, Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008/09](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NIAO Report, Management of Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service \(2008\)](#)

It appears that there is not one year, in the time frame displayed in Chart 1, where the DOE stands out for having a particularly high or low level of absences in comparison with the rest of the Departments.

Looking more specifically at the DOE figures, there has been a general trend of decline in the average number of absences between 2003/04 and 2008/09.

## **COMPARING DOE WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

The following observations focus specifically on the data for 2006/07. The data for the Private Sector is taken from the NIAO Report which is based on UK statistics from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) surveys 2007<sup>3</sup>. These surveys use data from 2006/2007.

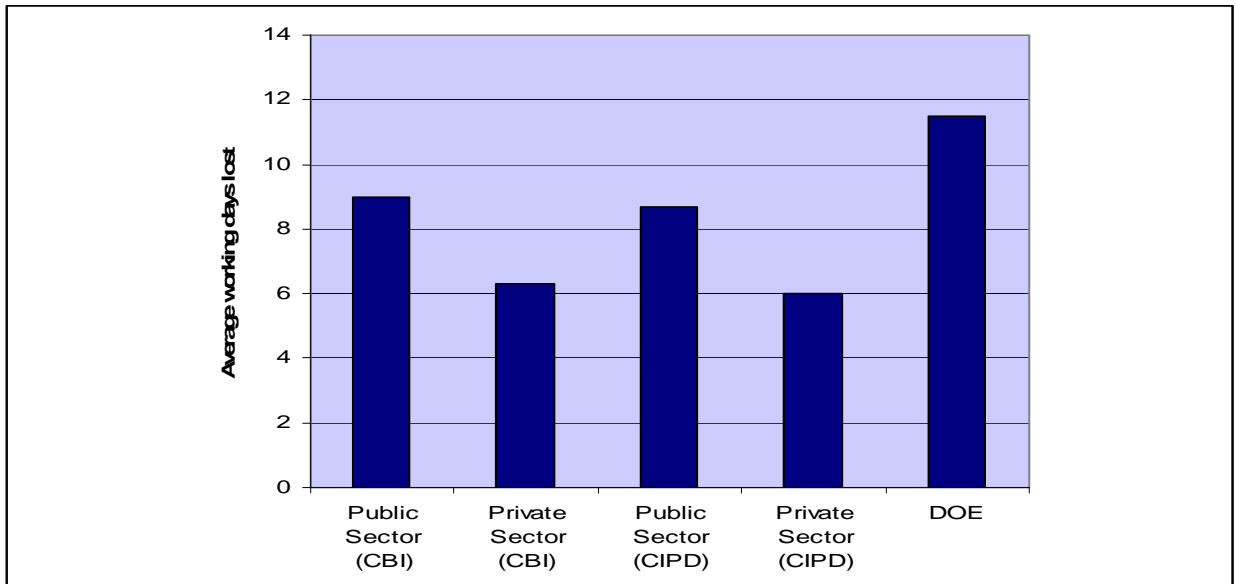
### **1. The DOE absence level for 2006/07 is lower than the level over all the Departments combined**

Taking an overall look across all the Departments for the 2006/07 year, the average number of days lost per employee is recorded on the graph as 13.7

Looking more specifically at the DOE level for 2006/07, the average number of days lost is 11.5, which shows a lower level compared to the 13.7 average for all the Departments. (See figure 1 page 10 of the NISRA Report for a detailed breakdown of figures displayed in Chart 1<sup>4</sup>).

### **2. The DOE absence level for 2006/07 is much higher than the level for the Private Sector**

**Chart 2: Public and Private Sector absences compared with the DOE**



Source: Figure 1, p 6 of the NIAO Report<sup>5</sup> DOE figure is taken from the NISRA Report p 10<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Attending to absence: absence and labour turnover survey 2007, CBI, May 2007* and *Absence management: annual survey report 2007, CIPD, July 2007*.

<sup>4</sup> [NISRA Report, Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008/09](#)

<sup>5</sup> [NIAO Report, Management of Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service \(2008\)](#)

According to the NIAO Report, for the Private Sector the CBI Survey records an average of 6.3 days absence per employee, and the CIPD Report states 6 days (Figure 1 page 6 of the NIAO Report). These levels are remarkably lower compared to the 11.5 days the NISRA Report has recorded for the DOE in 2006/07.

It is important to note that the DOE's absence level also appears higher than the Public Sector levels for the UK as a whole; according to the UK Public Sector figures provided in the NIAO Report.

## **ABSENCE LEVELS IN NI COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE UK**

The latest CBI Survey was conducted in 2008 and asked respondents to report on absence and labour turnover rates for 2007.

Looking at the absence levels of employees across the whole UK workforce, according to the survey<sup>7</sup> there were regional differences in absence across the UK. The North West and Yorkshire & Humberside lost the most days in 2007 with 8.9 days each. This was followed by:

- Wales with 7.6;
- West Midlands with 7.5;
- South East with 7.4;
- Scotland with 6.8;
- Eastern with 6.7
- East Midlands with 6.6; and
- Northern England with 6.5.

The regions with the lowest levels were Southern England (5.6), **Northern Ireland (5.7)** and Greater London (5.9)

## **IN SUMMARY**

The DOE:

- shows a decrease in the average number of days lost per staff year from 2003 to 2009;
- has a lower level of absence per staff in 2006/07 (11.5) than all the Departments combined for that year (13.7);
- has a much higher level of absence per staff for 2006/07 (11.5) than the Private Sector (6.3 and 6); and
- appears to have a higher level of absence in 2006/07 compared to the UK Public Sector.

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<sup>6</sup> [NISRA Report, Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008/09](#)

<sup>7</sup> [CBI/AXA Absence and labour turnover survey 2008 \(p 14\)](#)

According to information provided directly by the DOE, based on the ministerial target for sickness absence for the current year, a total of 18,754 working days have been lost due to sick absence over the period 1 April to 31 December 2009.

Northern Ireland has one of the lowest absence rates among its workforce compared to the rest of the UK.

