



OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT ON MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE



MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY

Contents

Foreword

Page

Part One – Introduction

3	
Background	3
Statutory mandate	4
Vision and Mission	4
Goals	4
Budget	5
Organisational structure	5
Scope	7
Methodology	7

Part Two – Management of sickness absence 8

Process description	8
Sick-leave without medical certificate	8
Sick-leave supported by medical certificate	8
Effect of sick-leave on annual leave	8
Retirement on medical grounds	8

Part Three – Findings 9

Adherence to Public Service Regulations	9
Medical certificates	9
Late submission of sick-leave	9
Deductions from annual leave	10
Record keeping	10
Measuring sickness absence	10
Other related issues	11
Communication	11
Awareness	11
Staff motivation	11
Management skills	12

Part Four – Conclusions and Recommendations 13

Appendix 1 List of reviewed documents and interviewees
Appendix 2 Staff survey questionnaire

Part One – Introduction

- .1 Sickness absence is a term used to describe absence caused by sickness. Sickness absence has drawn attention in public and private sectors because of its effect on productivity and personal impact on the affected people, their families and their colleagues. Employers have a duty to prevent people from being made ill by the jobs they do and to support those who are off sick and help them return to work. On the other hand, it is employees' duty not to be absent without good reason. Committed employees are the most valuable resource in any organisation in order to effectively deliver services to the community. High levels of attendance enable attainment of objectives and achievement of goals. Therefore, public sector entities have to re-engineer the way they do their work to reduce some of the causes of sickness.

- .2 According to Government of Lesotho National Vision 2020, improved service delivery to the citizens is one of the core visions. It is therefore vital for Government Ministries and Departments to have healthy employees and to effectively manage sickness absence. According to the Lesotho Public Service Regulations 1969, sickness absence may be categorised as follows: **short-term sickness** whereby a public officer may be allowed a period up to but not exceeding two months on sick leave and **long-term sickness** whereby a public officer may be allowed up to six months on sick-leave.

Background

- .3 The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) with the assistance of the United Kingdom National Audit Office (NAO) undertook a review of Management of Sickness Absence. This was aimed at establishing the cost of sickness absence, finding out what problems were encountered in its management and to come up with recommendations that would address the problems. The Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology (MCST) was selected as a case study because compared to other ministries its staff compliment of approximately 600 was neither too large nor too small, therefore enabling the audit team to review more than 50% of personnel files. Also, there has never been a performance audit carried out in this Ministry before.

The Ministry has the following functions:

- Information dissemination
- Provision of postal services and products
- Development of communication technology infrastructure
- Management services and human resource management.

Statutory Mandate

- .4 A specific gazette / act which established the ministry was not available. However, the ministry grew from a simple Radio Service under the Prime Minister's Office to a Department of Information and Broadcasting in the early 1970's and eventually became the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The ministry was then composed of three departments namely; Administration, Information and Broadcasting. In 1980/81, it became the Ministry of Transport and Communications with Telecommunications and Postal Services as some of the key Departments.

In the 1990's Lesotho News Agency (LENA) which was a project under the auspices of UNESCO, was officially handed over to the Government and became one of the Departments of the Ministry. LENA was responsible for collection and distribution of news materials to internal and external subscribers while Telecommunications was privatized.

After the transfer of the transport component to the Ministry of works, the Ministry was then known as the Ministry of Communications (1999/2000). As a result of further restructuring and realignment of some Ministries and Departments, the Department of Science and Technology was transferred to the Ministry of Communications and was renamed the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology.

Vision and mission

- .5 According to the Ministry's strategic plan MCST's vision and mission are as follows:

Vision

“To attain nationwide media coverage, science and technology infiltrated programs and reduced digital divide by 2009”.

Mission

“To provide affordable, sustainable and high quality information services to the nation through the use of scientific and technological advances to achieve universal access”.

Budget

- .6 The Ministry's budget and expenditure for salaries during the period under review were as follows;

MCST Budget for 2005/2006 to 2007/2008

Year	Budget	Expenditure
1	M16,591,370.00	M19,440,068.39
1	M20,153,780.00	M19,730,997.00
1	M23,703,070.00	M22,953,948.54

Source: MCST budget Estimates 2005/2006 to 2007/2008

Organisational structure

- .7 The Ministry of Communications Science and Technology is divided into the following departments and functional areas;

- Administration
- Information Communication Technology
- Information
- Broadcasting
- Lesotho News Agency
- Science and Technology
- Postal Services
- Appropriate Technology Services
- Language Improvement and Culture Promotion

Scope

- .8 The audit covered the whole ministry, but district offices were not visited because all the required information was documented at the Ministry's and Postal Services headquarters. The audit covered three financial years, 2005 – 2006, 2006 – 2007 and 2007 – 2008

Methodology

- .9 The team reviewed the Ministry's personnel files to find out how sick-leave was recorded and whether deductions from annual leave were made accordingly. The team also reviewed the Ministry's Strategic Plan

to identify the Ministry organisational structure, and to learn about the Ministry's Mandate, Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives. Budget Estimates for the period under review were also reviewed to generally establish how the Ministry's allocation of funds was done and specifically how much was allocated for salaries. Casualty Returns and leave rosters were reviewed in order to calculate the cost of lost production for the days that employees did not come to work due to ill-health.

- .10 Interviews were held with some Departmental Heads and other members of staff. The interviews were aimed at establishing causes of illness, what was being done by both management and staff to best manage sickness absence and why Public Service Regulations were not always followed. Refer to **Appendix 1** for lists of reviewed documents and interviewees.
- .11 A survey was also carried out to complement information from the interviews. About ten percent (68) of the employees at MCST was issued with the questionnaire and 62 percent (42) of them responded. To make the survey more representative it was distributed across the grades. A sample of the survey questionnaire is attached as **Appendix 2**.

Part Two – Management of Sickness Absence

Management of sickness absence within the civil service as a whole and the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology is guided by the Public Service Regulations (PSR), 1969.

Process Description

2.1 Sick-leave without medical certificate

According to PSR 552, a civil servant/public officer may with the approval of the Head of Department be absent due to illness for a period not exceeding 48 hours without producing a medical certificate. Any absence in excess of 48 hours shall be supported by a medical certificate.

2.2 Sick-leave supported by medical certificate

PSR 1969, 551 states that, a head of department may on the recommendation of a state medical officer grant sick-leave to a public officer. A public officer will be allowed up to two consecutive months' sick leave on full pay. If there is still need for more sick-leave, such public officer will be granted all the remaining days on his annual leave. Afterwards he will be given six months sick-leave on half pay until he can be retired on medical grounds.

Upon receiving a Medical Certificate of Absence (Sick-Leave) of an employee, the Human Resources Department or Registry attaches such a certificate in the employee's personal file. The sick leave is then recorded in the employee's leave record. As per PSR 1969 553, the head of department is responsible for ensuring that all periods of sick-leave are recorded.

2.3 Effect of sick-leave on annual leave.

As per PSR 1969, 555, sick leave does not earn annual holiday, therefore, in every thirty days, one day will be deducted from annual leave for any sick leave exceeding seven consecutive days.

2.4 Retirement on medical grounds.

PSR 1969, 712 states that if the Head of Department (HOD) is of the opinion that an officer is incapable of performing his duties due to a physical or mental illness, he (HOD) shall report the circumstances to the Principal Secretary (PS) responsible for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. PS Health shall then on the basis of that report, appoint a Medical Board to enquire into the said officer's physical or mental condition. Such public officer may at any time be called upon to present himself for examination to the Medical Board in order to ascertain whether he is physically or mentally capable of performing his duties, and in order that he may be afforded the opportunity to make presentations to the Medical Board on that behalf. The findings of the Board will be reported to the Principal Secretary responsible

for the Ministry of Public Service, and then presented to the Public Service Commission to consider removing that officer, if it so resolves.

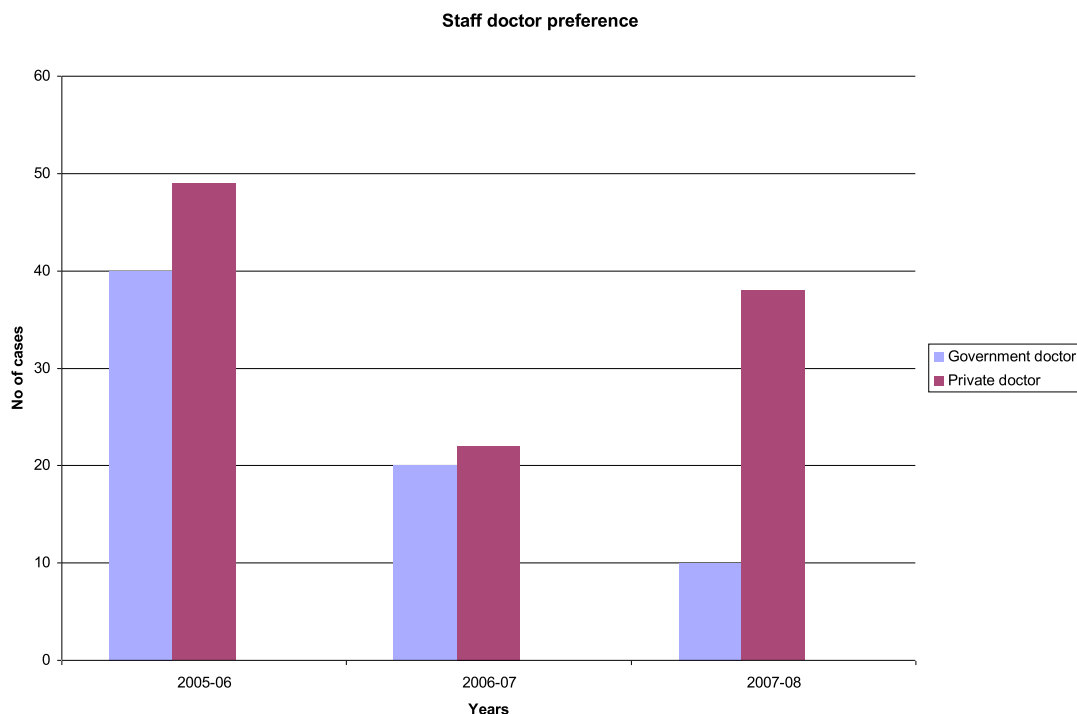
Part Three – Findings

3.1 Adherence to Public Service Regulations

3.1.1 Medical certificates

PSR 1969, 551 states that a head of department may on the recommendation of a state medical officer grant sick leave to a public officer. The team found out that medical certificates from private doctors were brought forth and accepted by the ministry, see figure 1 below. This was because people seemed to have lost confidence in state medical centres, due to; long queues and shortage of medication.

Figure 1 Staff doctor preference.



Source: Employees' Personal Files

3.1.2 Late submission of sick-leave

According to the Public Service Regulations, a civil servant's sick-leave has to be approved by the head of department. The team however, discovered that some officers did not seek the head of department's approval to be on sick-leave. They only absented themselves from work and later brought in their medical certificates or claim that they were on the forty eight (48) hour sick-

leave. Due to lack of good record keeping, the team did not have anything to substantiate how many cases were involved. This was attributable to lack of close supervision and monitoring. Government loses money on production/service delivery and cannot get value for the money paid for salaries of people who absent themselves from work.

3.1.3 Deductions from annual leave

As per PSR 1969, 555 one day has to be deducted from any sick-leave in excess of seven consecutive days as periods of sick-leave do not earn annual holiday. The team however found out that during the period under review no such deductions were made from all the sick-leaves that exceeded seven days. There were officers who still enjoyed the benefit of the annual leave that they had not earned.

3.1.4 Record keeping

Sickness absence information should be recorded and reflected in the personal files. The team found out that 82% of the reviewed personal files did not contain such information. This was as attributable to the fact that: some medical certificates either got misplaced or lost because human resource office is centralised and heads of department did not always ensure that the medical certificates reached human resource department and the forty eight hour sick-leave was not recorded at all. As a result a lot of officers might have enjoyed the benefits of being absent from work due to illness and also the annual leave earned during the same period.

3.2 Measuring Sickness Absence

Sickness absence should be measured in order to manage it properly. The team discovered that there was no measurement, in terms of money and time. People's salaries were not calculated on the basis of how much time they spent at work, so they still got their full remuneration regardless of whether they have been coming to work or not. For example during the period under review 43% of the questionnaire respondents called-in sick, while they were actually not. As a result MCST lost money on salaries of people who pretended to be ill. 22% of the reviewed personal files had sick-leave record as opposed to 78% that did not have any sick-leave record. For this 22% there was an indication that the Ministry lost an approximated M79, 817.00 for salaries that were paid to employees when they were not at work due to illness. The Ministry lost a total of 1, 430 man-days to sickness absence. In the long-run the government pays civil servants for the service that they have not rendered.

3.3 Other related issues

3.3.1 Communication

Clear communication between management and staff is vital for an organisation to operate smoothly. The team established that there was minimal communication between management and staff concerning sickness absence. This was evident in situations whereby staff did not report their absence and management did not follow-up on this absence. 53% of the questionnaire respondents agreed with this statement and indicated that contact with managers should be improved.

3.3.2 Awareness

- It is vital for each civil servant to be aware of the Public Service Regulations (PSRs). The team established that about 65% of the questionnaire respondents had limited or no knowledge of the PSRs relating to sickness absence. This was because no in-house or on-the-job training had been offered to middle managers and employees. They only learned about the Public Service Regulations during the induction course at Lesotho Institute for Public Administration and Management (LIPAM).
- The Lesotho Institute of Public Administration and Management's Induction Course emphasises that it is the civil servant's responsibility to acquire all material regulating the civil service. It was evident that not all civil servants were aware of the regulations that govern them, as 62% of the questionnaire respondents had not even seen the Public Service Regulations, 1969 that related to sick-leave. This was a result of ignorance and lack of commitment on the part of civil servants. This resulted in civil servants straying from the Public Service Regulations.

3.3.3 Staff motivation

Staff motivation is one of the key factors that enhance staff commitment to their job. The interviews held with some staff members and management of the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology revealed that the Ministry's management did not have any motivational strategies for their staff. This was because they perceived staff demoralisation broadly, as a problem for the whole Civil Service. This resulted in some staff members attending to their personal matters during working hours under the pretence that they were ill.

3.3.4 Management skills

It is vital for middle managers to possess people management skills, in order for the managers to deal with their subordinates' welfare matters.

- It was established that middle managers lacked people management skills. 98% of the 43 questionnaire respondents also reflected that there was no stress awareness and management training. This was due to middle managers not being oriented into the managerial positions. Managers, therefore did not follow-up when staff were sick to find out how they could assist and return-to-work interviews¹ were also not held.
- The team also found out that there was no universal support offered to staff; any form of support afforded to staff was from individual managers and did not apply to all staff members. For example, when staff members were ill, not all managers made follow-ups on them and not all staff members are followed up. The team also established that 58% of the questionnaire respondents were of the view that supervisors or team leaders should be more sensitive to employees concerns.

¹ A formal discussion between the immediate supervisor and subordinate upon return from sick-leave, on the employee's health status and commencement of work.

Part 4 – Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

- People submit medical certificates from private doctors because state medical facilities have deteriorated so much that they do not allow people to be examined within a reasonable time and provided with required medication.
- Because sickness absence management controls are weak people absent themselves from work even when they are not ill. The 48 hour sick-leave provision is also being misused and not recorded. Available statistics did not portray a clear picture of absenteeism.
- Employees take advantage of the fact that information dissemination between Heads of Department and Section and Human Resource Office is not procedural.
- Managers and officers are ignorant of the Public Service Regulations relating to sickness absence.
- MCST like any ministry or organisation needs its human resources to execute the plans and achieve its goals and objectives. The Ministry can only adjust its plan if records on sickness absence are properly kept.

4.2 Recommendations

- The Ministry of Public Service should consider including in the Guidelines for Public Service Regulations, 2008 clauses that enable civil servants to get sick-leave from any licensed/accredited medical practitioners.
- The Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology should strengthen controls and procedures in management of sickness absence.
- There should be a training policy which is clear on what type of training should be offered to employees upon promotion to managerial positions.
- Heads of department should ensure that officers take responsibility in accessing and practicing the Public Service Regulations.
- Heads of department should ensure that all forms of sick-leave are recorded.

APPENDIX 1

List of reviewed documents

Personnel Files

Strategic Plan 2006-2009

Budget Estimates:

- 2005/2006
- 2006/2007
- 2007/2008

List of interviewees

Director Administration

Director Broadcasting

Director Science and Technology

Director Human Resources

Financial Controller

Legal Officer

Head of News

Editor

Assistant Human Resource Officer

Executive Officer

Senior Reporter

Senior Photographer

Office Assistant

APPENDIX 2

Survey Questionnaire

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

MAIN AUDIT ON SICKNESS ABSENCE AT THE MINISTRY OF
COMMUNICATIONS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

STAFF OPINION SURVEY 2008

INTRODUCTION

This survey is being conducted by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). It forms part of a study it is undertaking into sickness absence including its causes, management, effect on staff and impact on the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology.

To gain a picture of opinions within the Ministry on the subject, this questionnaire is being issued to all staff. Your opinions are valued, and we would be most grateful if you could complete it. This questionnaire is largely, but not exclusively, in a simple, tick box format and will take relatively little time to complete.

HELPLINE

Should you have any questions relating to the process or questionnaire please contact any of the team members;

‘Malebete Phenya (+266) 62850739 mphenya0705@yahoo.co.uk

Mekhoa Lekhetho (+266) 58842405 lekhetho@yahoo.com

‘Mamoena Hlapisi (+ 2 6 6)

5 8 8 4 0 3 1 7

mamoenahlapisi@yahoo.com

COMPLETED RETURNS

Please complete the questionnaire by 23rd May 2008. Your completed form will be collected by members of the audit team at a time that would be arranged with you.

ABOUT YOU

In order to assess whether the opinions are influenced by issues such as age, we would ask you to complete the following information.

1. In which Department do you work?

	X
Administration	
Postal Services	
Broadcasting-Radio	
Broadcasting -LTV	
LENA	
Science & Technology	
ICT	

2. In which of the following functions do you work?

	X
Information dissemination	
Provision of postal services and products	
Information technology development	
Science and technology development	
Provision of communication infrastructure	
Administration services	
Human resources management	
Accounts	
Senior management	
Middle management	
Language improvement and culture	
Sales and marketing	
Other (specify)	

3. What are your working terms?

Permanent		Temporary		Contract	
-----------	--	-----------	--	----------	--

4. Are you?

Male		Female	
------	--	--------	--

5. In which age range are you?

Under 20		40 to 49	
20 to 29		50 to 59	
30 to 39		60 and over	

6. How long have you been working here?

Under 1 year	4 to 10 years	20 to 30 years	
1 to 3 years	10 to 20 years	Over 30 years	

7. Do you have any day-to-day caring responsibilities (taking care of the sick or the elderly) where you are the main or sole carer outside of work?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

8. If yes do you care for?

Children living with you at home	
Person/s with disability living with you at home	
Someone in a care home	
Older person living with you at home	
Other (specify)	

N.B. In completing the rest of the questionnaire, you are being asked for your opinions as a member of staff, even if you have management responsibilities. We are interested in your views about your management and the Ministry as a whole.

YOUR JOB

9. How satisfied are you with your current job?

Very satisfied	
Fairly satisfied	
Fairly dissatisfied	
Very dissatisfied	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	

10. On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “very well” and 4 is “very badly”, how does your current job provide you with the following?

Good physical working environment	
Safe working practices	

Team working opportunities	
Enough time to do your job	
Interesting, enjoyable work	
Opportunity to have a say in your work	
Flexible working hours (e.g. shifts where necessary)	
The feeling of being valued as an individual	
A friendly atmosphere at work	
The chance to make full use of your abilities and skills	
Job security	
Development opportunities	
Appropriate training	
Opportunities for promotion	
The ability to deliver service to the public	
The opportunity to try to improve society	
Support in your wider life (e.g. health care advice etc)	

YOUR WORK

11. My work involves:

- ❖ Frequent face-to-face contact with people – Yes No
- ❖ Frequent telephone contact with people - Yes No

12. If there are other specialist aspects of your work with which you consider we should be aware in assessing responses, please list them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

13. Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “always” and 5 is “never”, how you feel about the following statements in relation to your work.

I am clear what is expected of me at work	
I can decide when to take a break	
I now how to go about getting my job done	

If work get difficult, my colleagues will help me	
I am given honest and supportive feedback on my work	
I have a say on my own work speed	
I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	
I am clear about my goals and objectives	
I find that IT creates a lot of frustration at work	
There is friction/ anger between colleagues	
I have a choice in deciding how to do my work	
I understand how my work fits in the overall aim of the ministry	
I am pressured to work long hours	
I am subject to bullying at work	
I have unrealistic time pressures	
I get help and support from colleagues	
I receive the respect I deserve from colleagues	
My work time can be flexible	
When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice	
I am supported through emotionally demanding wok	

COMMUNICATION

14. How informed are you about the things that affect you in (i) workplace, (ii) your Department and (iii) the Ministry?

	(i) workplace	(ii) department	(iii) ministry
Fully informed			
Fairly well informed			
Receive limited information			
Don't receive much information at all			

MANAGEMENT

15. Please indicate on the scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “always” and 4 is “never”, how often your immediate supervisor or manager carries out the following actions

Involves you when making decisions which affect your work	
Keeps you well informed about things which affect your work	
Gives you constructive feedback on or about your performance	
Listens to your suggestions about work-related matters	
Is approachable and supportive	
Treats all staff fairly and consistently	

Makes you feel valued	
Trusts you to get on with your work	
Shows you respect as an individual	
Recognises good performance	
Deals with poor performance effectively	
Appraises your performance fairly	
Recognises your training and development needs	
Bears grudges where things go wrong	
Sets clear goals for you to work towards	

16. These questions relate specifically to the impact which management has on your ability to do your job. Please give positive and negative examples and include any suggestions you have for improving things. Please list any comments or suggestions you have about

a) The management of your Department

b) The management of the Ministry as a whole

SICKNESS ABSENCE

17. Have you seen the Public Service Regulations (PSR) 1969, relating to sick leave?

Yes	No	
-----	----	--

18. Which of the following best describes your knowledge of the PSR relating to sickness absence?

Full knowledge	
Good knowledge	
Basic knowledge	
Limited knowledge	
No knowledge	

19. How aware are you of the procedures and services which your department has in place to help staff manage stress?

Fully aware	
Broadly aware	
Aware	
Vaguely aware	
Unaware	

20. Have you been provided with stress awareness training?

Yes	No	
-----	----	--

21. In any one of these financial years (2005/2006, 2006/2007 and 2007/2008) have you been absent due to illness for up to 48 hours (2 days) without producing a sick leave?

Yes	No	
-----	----	--

22. How much (approximate) time have you taken off due to illness in 2005/2006?

None	11 to 20 days	6 months plus
Up to 5 days	21 days to 3 months	
6 to 10 days	3 to 6 months	

23. How much (approximate) time have you taken off due to illness in 2006/2007?

None	11 to 20 days	6 months plus
Up to 5 days	21 days to 3 months	

6 to 10 days		3 to 6 months	
--------------	--	---------------	--

24. How much (approximate) time have you taken off in 2007/2008?

None		11 to 20 days		6 months plus	
Up to 5 days		21 days to 3 months			
6 to 10 days		3 to 6 months			

25. How do you think the following issues are handled?

	Well managed	Inconsistently managed	Poorly managed	Procedures not followed	No opinion
Sick leave					
Referrals to occupational health (or other)					
Advice or counseling					
Warning procedures					

26. Does sickness absence amongst colleagues have any of the following impacts on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “significant impact” and 4 is “no impact”?

Creates a need to re-organise work at short notice	
Places pressure on other staff to cover	
Causes stress on staff who are at work	
Causes resentment amongst staff at work	

27. Have you in the last three financial years (2005/2006, 2006/2007 and 2007/2008) called in sick for any of the following reasons?

Family commitments	
Disenchantment with work	
Disenchantment with management policy	
To supplement annual leave entitlement	
Loss of commitment	
View that sick leave is an entitlement	
Other personal reasons (specify)	

28. To what extent do you think any of the following actions would help to improve attendance generally, on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is “substantially improves attendance” and 4 is “no impact on attendance”?

Encourage employees to spend time improving their health	
----------------------------------------------------------	--

Introduce more job sharing	
Open communication among employees	
Provide more workplace health and safety training	
Provide counseling on personal, financial and other problems	
Provide workplace recreational activities	
Provide or support stress management training	
Get more advice from employees on how to organise work	
Improved contact with your manager	
Improve workload measurement	
Train supervisors or team leaders to be more sensitive to employees' concerns	
Provide better quality information about changes in the organization	

29. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Yes	No	
-----	----	--