

# Taking on Britain's 'sick note culture'

May 14 2008

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GPs should lend a hand to beat the 'sick note culture' that sees millions of working days lost every year, according to a survey of smaller business owners.

The UK Business Barometer, an internet survey run by The University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI) found there was strong support for a change to the way employees are signed off sick by doctors.

Almost two-thirds of respondents to the latest UK Business Barometer (UKBB) felt it would be better if GPs issued 'fit notes', spelling out what a person can do, rather than sick notes signing them off work completely. 'Fit notes' would give details of the type of tasks that a person was still capable of, despite their illness.

The latest UKBB survey follows the publication of 'Working for a Healthier Tomorrow' — the first government review into the health of the working age population — published by Professor Dame Carol Black, National Director for Health and Work. The report put the total cost of ill health to the British economy at £103bn, a figure greater than the annual budget of the NHS.

The UKBB and parallel UKBAB (UK Business Advisers Barometer) surveys, which are all completed online, assess current business conditions through a series of topical questions aimed at smaller businesses and their advisers. The questions change each time the surveys are circulated.

In the latest survey, smaller business owners were also asked about employment rights for agency workers, in the light of government moves to give them the same rights as full-time employees. The Temporary and Agency Workers (Equal Treatment) Bill 2007-08 passed its second reading in February 2008 and has strong support from backbenchers.

But among employers, there is significant resistance — with 65 per cent of respondents saying they would be ‘less’ or ‘much less’ inclined to employ agency workers if they are given identical rights to those of full-time employees. Only two per cent said they would be ‘more’ or ‘much more’ inclined to employ them on this basis.

‘Keeping it in the family’ makes companies better able to bounce back from adversity, the latest surveys found. Of the business advisers responding to the UKBAB survey, 55 per cent thought that family-run businesses were ‘more’ or ‘much more’ resilient than comparably-sized non-family businesses. Only 15 per cent took the opposite view.

Around two-thirds of smaller businesses and just over half of medium-sized businesses are family-owned. According to the government’s business advisory service, the benefits of family-run businesses include common values, strong commitment, loyalty, stability and decreased costs.

The UKBB and UKBAB (UK Business Advisers Barometer) are run by The University of Nottingham and operate over the web to generate very rapid results. The surveys have unique software that enables results to be processed and posted on their respective websites immediately they arrive.

The surveys assess current business conditions through a series of topical questions aimed at smaller businesses and their advisers. The surveys are issued bi-monthly and more information, including results and analyses,

can be found on the web at [www.ukbb.ac](http://www.ukbb.ac) and [www.ukbab.ac](http://www.ukbab.ac) Businesses and advisers wishing to contribute as panellists on the project should visit the appropriate Business Barometer website to register.

Source: University of Nottingham

Citation: Taking on Britain's 'sick note culture' (2008, May 14) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-05-britain-sick-culture.html>

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