

# Figures reveal sickness absence falls



An unexpected aspect of the recession has been a drop in absences. According to a recent survey by the CIPD the overall level of workplace absence across all sectors of the economy now averages 7.4 days per employee per year. This is of course a welcome improvement on the 8 days recorded a year earlier, but the figure still represents a loss of 185 million working days at an overall cost to the UK economy of £17.3 billion. The drop in absence can be understood as a response to the economic downturn, with managers hot on the tail of those employees taking repeat or long term sick leave in order to cut costs, and a rise in employees concerns with job security.

Sue Tumelty, managing director of Bristol based HR Dept says *“with swine flu and the government proposition that employees are entitled to self-certify up to two weeks sick leave, we can expect figures to rise”*.

With the recent decision of the European Court of Justice in the case of HMRC v Stringer, ruling that workers on long-term sick leave continue to accrue statutory holiday and should be allowed to take that holiday or carry it over to the next year, it adds yet another pressure to businesses attempting to stay afloat.

Somewhere between having to deal with complicated employment legislation, and the effects of an impending swine flu pandemic in our current economic climate, small to medium sized businesses are under more pressure than ever.

Three top tips for businesses dealing with absenteeism:

- 1 Implement return to work interviews
- 2 Create a sickness absence policy and stick to it consistently
- 3 Take professional advice when dealing with long term sickness absence issues – they are often complicated and fall under The Disability Discrimination Act

**The HR Dept is a human resources outsource business providing advice on HR and employment issues for SMEs.**