

3 October 2023

Chancellor's statement - Punishing claimants and DWP members

The chancellor's statement at the Tory Party Conference that the government will freeze civil service staffing levels and make it harder for claimants to access benefits is a punishment for both staff and claimants.

PCS members have been reporting for years that chronic under-staffing and backlogs of work have led to toxic working environments, with stress levels going through the roof and pressure ramping up as more is expected for less. Yesterday's announcement by the chancellor will only add to the concerns of our members.

While the full implications of the announcement are as yet unknown, what is clear is that any freeze on staffing and "reducing the headcount to pre-pandemic" levels would deprive DWP of much needed extra resource and exacerbate the existing pressures of understaffing in DWP.

Claimants again in the firing line

Our members told us that during the pandemic when the conditionality and sanctions regime was dropped and they were empowered to prioritise supporting claimants they were able to develop more productive relationships with claimants. This enabled members to support claimants into work more successfully. That supportive culture is what they wanted to see permanently rather than the hostile environment of the sanctions regime.

Unfortunately the pressure to revert to the previous punitive benefits culture has been ramped up since the chancellor's Autumn Statement and March's Budget. PCS members have done a fantastic job in limiting the amount of sanctions in the face of increased expectation and pressure.

The chancellor's announcement means increasing the scapegoating of those who are unable to find work or are too sick or disabled to work. This is the Tories' go-to ideological approach for reducing the benefits bill and punishing working class people.

PCS condemns the anti-worker policy

This latest pronouncement tells us everything we need to know about the value this government has for our members and those we provide vital services for.

The DWP group executive committee will be meeting later this month to fully discuss our response and review any further details we have by then.

In the meantime, we will, alongside our general secretary, Mark Serwotka, continue to condemn these attacks on government workers and some of the most vulnerable in society, and campaign alongside other pressure groups for a better, fairer, properly resourced DWP, that has support, and compassion, not blame and punishment, as its core values, .