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## **STRIKING A HEALTHY WORK/LIFE BALANCE RANKED BIGGEST HEALTH ISSUE FOR UK BUSINESS**

- Work/life balance is a bigger health issue to businesses than stress and mental health issues.

Britain's embattled business community enters 2012 with major concerns about striking a healthy work/life balance for its workforce according to new research from Group Risk Development (GRiD), the trade body for the group risk industry.

After enduring a difficult year where many businesses were obliged to reduce headcount, the survey of 500 employers with 5-1000 employees, found that maintaining a good work/life balance for those remaining in the business ranked as the top health issue for more than 1 in 5 employers (21%). This is ahead of stress and mental health issues (19%) - currently cited as the most common cause for workplace absence.

The results suggest employers appreciate a long hours culture can be beneficial in the first instance but can lead to problems with morale and could further increase stress related absence in the longer term. Interestingly, 32% of employers suggest that their absence rate has improved over the last 12 months with 50% believing their absence rate is lower than the industry average. However, employers should guard against taking comfort from these findings as typically in times of economic uncertainty employees are more likely to turn up for work – even if they should really be at home.

Encouragingly, employers seem poised to take action to improve the situation in 2012. More than one in three (38%) said taking steps to improve work/life balance was top priority. By comparison, 27% said actively managing workplace stress was their key goal.

**Katharine Moxham, spokesperson for GRiD, commented:** “A strong work/life balance is often overlooked as a major health issue to businesses, compared to more direct factors such as dealing with chronic conditions. But, the economic

situation seems to have provided a timely reminder for businesses to take action to rectify unsustainable working practice.

“In times of increased economic pressure it is particularly important for employers to consider the impact a long hours culture can have on the wellbeing of their employees and to develop strategies for dealing with the fall out such as, for example, increased stress related absence.

“The recently published Sickness Absence Review recognises the importance of supporting employees to remain in the workplace. As welfare reform moves forward, any business that has already embraced the value of integrated health, wellbeing and absence programmes will feel vindicated while businesses that have not already understood how crucial this is will come to do so.

“Many employers in the private sector have found implementing a group income protection (GIP) scheme as part of their overall absence management strategy and integrated health programme has been beneficial in providing peace of mind, support and security to all involved. The Group Risk industry fully understands the importance of early intervention – particularly for managing stress in the workplace - and many GIP policies include valuable tools to do this, such as free or discounted Employee Assistance Programmes, vocational rehabilitation and counselling.

“In the event that a return to work is not possible, for as little as 0.25% of salary, the insurance element of the GIP product provides a continuing income for employees if illness or injury prevents them from working for a prolonged period of time. In fact, efficient use of the free or discounted services attached to a GIP policy can release significant savings as well as mitigating an employer’s liability to continue salary in the event of long-term disability.

“If employers include a reappraisal/restructure of protection, ill-health and sickness absence provision – instead of just purchasing piecemeal - they get something back in return. Providing a fit for purpose integrated health and protection package could even release the money to pay for itself!”

**-Ends-**

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### **About GRiD Employer Research**

The Group Risk Employer Research study was undertaken in October 2011 among a sample of 500 UK businesses. Research was conducted by Lightspeed Research for Group Risk Development (GRiD) and sponsored by Towers Watson, Aviva, Munich Re, Enrich, Canada Life, Portus Consulting, Mercer, Legal & General, Zurich Corporate Risk, Swiss Re, RGA, Unum, Lutine, Risk Assurance Management (RAM), Ellipse, Friends Life, Met Life, Lane Clark & Peacock, Self Assured Limited, Bluefin, Gen Re and Generali.

### **About GRiD**

Founded in 1998, Group Risk Development (GRiD) encourages awareness and uptake of corporate group protection benefits – income protection, group life insurance and critical illness cover – on behalf of its members which include insurers, reinsurers and intermediary businesses.

Under the chairmanship of David Cross, Head of Benefits, General Consulting, Towers Watson, GRiD aims to enhance the industry's profile among media and stakeholder groups. The Group provides a collective voice to Government and participates in industry wide initiatives such as the qualification in Group Risk launched jointly with the Chartered Insurance Institute. In May 2009, the Group appointed its first dedicated spokesperson, Katharine Moxham, to provide expert media comment on a full range of group risk issues.

In July 2010, GRiD was named Organisation of the Year 2010 by the Protection Review.