

PRESS RELEASE

STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – SICKNESS ABSENCE IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE 2017/2018



09.30am – Wednesday 26th September 2018

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) today published the report “Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2017/2018”. This is their eighteenth annual report on sickness absence and it contains analyses of trends over the last five years as well as headline figures since 1999/2000.

The key findings are as follows:

- The headline absence figure for 2017/2018 was 13.0 days (average days lost per staff year), an increase from 12.5 days in the previous year. This was the highest level of sickness absence since NICS moved to a new HR system and recording process in 2008/2009, but lower than the peak of 15.5 days recorded in 2003/2004.
- The 13.0 days lost per staff year represented 6.0% of the available working days in 2017/2018. In salary terms, this equated to an estimated £33.8 million of lost production - equivalent to around 4.0% of the total NICS pay bill in 2017/2018.
- Just under half (46.6%) of staff had no recorded absence in 2017/2018 - a figure that was negatively impacted by the higher than usual number of Cold, Cough, Flu, Influenza absences this year.
- Over one in every eight staff had at least one spell of long-term absence - these spells lasted around three months on average. This was the highest level of long-term absence observed in the last five years, and accounted for nearly three quarters of all working days lost.

- Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Other Psychiatric Illnesses was the absence reason that accounted for the greatest proportion of working days lost (36.4%) during 2017/2018. Within this category, work-related stress accounted for approximately a third of the days lost.
- The level of absence within Departments varied from 7.6 days for the Executive Office to 15.4 days for the Department for Communities (DfC), with half of the Departments recording lower absence levels compared to 2016/2017.
- The absence level for females (15.4 days) remained higher than that for males (10.9 days) with over half of this difference being due to gender-specific conditions.
- Staff who had been in post for under two years had a much lower level of sickness absence (5.8 days) than staff who had been employed for two years or more (13.2 days). Around half of the staff employed for under two years would have been on probationary terms and conditions, which would include the more stringent management of sickness absence.

The report and associated infographic are available on the NISRA website at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/ni-civil-service-human-resource-statistics/sickness-absence-statistics> and linked to from the DoF website at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/sickness-absence-northern-ireland-civil-service>

Notes to Editors:

- a. This is the eighteenth annual report by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on sickness absence.
- b. Long-term absences are defined as absences lasting for more than 20 consecutive working days.