

PRESS RELEASE

STATISTICS PRESS NOTICE – SICKNESS ABSENCE IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE 2018/2019



09.30am – Thursday 20th June 2019

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) today published the report “Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2018/2019”. This is their nineteenth 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 2018/2019 was 12.6 days (average days lost per staff year), a decrease from 13.0 days in the previous year. This is the first reduction in the NICS absence level since 2013/2014 and is mainly due to the spike in Flu absences that occurred in the winter of 2017/2018 not being repeated this year. As a result the absence level was similar to that experienced 2 years ago in 2016/2017 (12.5 days).
- The 12.6 days lost per staff year represented 5.8% of the available working days in 2018/2019, an improvement on the 6.0% days lost in 2017/2018. In salary terms, this equated to an estimated £32.9 million of lost production - equivalent to 3.8% of the total NICS pay bill in 2018/2019. This is a reduction of £0.9 million on the cost of lost production in the previous year (2017/2018).
- Just over half of staff (51.3%) had no recorded absence in 2018/2019 – the highest rate for the last four years.
- The level of absence within Departments varied from 8.4 days for the Department of Health (DoH) to 14.9 days for the Department for Communities (DfC), with most of the Departments recording lower absence levels compared to 2017/2018.

- The absence level for females (14.4 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 (7.4 days) than staff who had been employed for two years or more (12.8 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.
- Over one in eight staff (13.1%) had at least one spell of long-term absence - these spells lasted around three months on average. This accounted for over three quarters (77.6%) 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 (38.7%) during 2018/2019. Within this category, work-related stress accounted for approximately a third of the days lost.

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 nineteenth 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.
- c. Media enquiries should be addressed to the Department of Finance Press Office on Tel: 028 9081 6895 or 028 9081 6724. Out of Office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07623 974 383 and your call will be returned.