

**Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service**

**Statistics Development Plan for 2019/20**

**Incorporating the Branch’s Action Plan for addressing the 5 Requirements resulting from the Office for Statistics Regulation Assessment Report published 30th April 2019**

1. **User need to publish official NICS sickness absence figures earlier in the year**

The NICS sickness absence statistics produced by HRCS/NISRA on behalf of NICSHR have been assessed for National Statistics accreditation by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). One of the things that arose during their consultation process with key users was the need to have the statistics published earlier in the year. Normally the statistics are published in mid-late September covering the previous financial year. As a result, one of the recommendations of the OSR’s [assessment report](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/statistics-on-sickness-absence-in-the-northern-ireland-civil-service/) is that we (HRCS/NISRA) bring forward the publication date to June to address this user need.

In light of this recommendation, we published the NICS Sickness Absence statistics for 2018/19 on **Thursday 20th June 2019**.

1. **Prison Grade staff transferring from COMPASS HR system to HRConnect**

It is currently planned that during 2020, all Prison Grade staff within the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) will be migrated from their COMPASS HR system onto the HRConnect system used by the rest of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). The source of the data that we use for Prison Grade sickness absences will then be the same as for all other staff in our analyses. This will increase the internal consistency of our data.

As we have previously successfully managed similar data system moves in the past, any risk to the absence statistics being adversely affected by this change is thought to be minimal. The Youth Justice Agency, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and the non-Prison Grade staff within NIPS have all previously moved from other standalone HR systems to HRConnect with no difficulties encountered. This process is therefore a tried and tested one with numerous validation steps built in by Fujitsu/Capita and ESS staff within the NICS to ensure that it runs smoothly and that the migrated data is accurate (for pay purposes). The Prison Grade HR information on HRConnect will also be closely tied to their rostering system which will further ensure its accuracy.

The HRCS/NISRA plan to ensure that the migration of Prison Grade staff to HRConnect does not adversely affect the sickness absence statistics includes the following;

* HRCS will liaise with the key parties involved (NICSHR, NIPS, ESS, Fujitsu and Capita) about the proposed date for the data migration. Advanced notice will be given through the normal HRConnect change implementation process, to ensure that HRCS/NISRA has sufficient time to check that the sickness absence data quality will not be adversely affected by the process
* as with all previous data migrations to HRConnect, comprehensive training will be made available to all relevant staff and line managers to ensure that they know how to update the new system correctly. This will be overseen by the relevant NIPS and DoJ HR policy staff along with input from HRConnect (Fujitsu & Capita).
* HRCS/NISRA statisticians will compare the migrated data on HRConnect against the original data on COMPASS to identify any discrepancies before finalising any historical back series conversions/transfers from Compass to HRConnect.
* HRCS will continue to monitor trends after the migration of NIPS Prison Grades to HRConnect, analysing the data for evidence of any impact. The findings of this analysis will be published and made available to users in due course.

We are liaising closely with colleagues in HRConnect, Fujitsu and in the NI Prison Service in terms of making preparations for the move. We will update users of our statistics with details of the transition date once it has been agreed and finalised.

1. **Comparators (including “Working Days Lost per Employee” CIPD & CBI/Make UK comparator)**

Feedback from users has suggested that we should include comparative sickness absence figures in order to contextualise the NICS figures. On pages 2-4 of our [User Guide](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/HRCS-Sickness-Absence-Statistics-User-Guide-October-2018-PDF_0.pdf) we have presented, and discussed, some of the sickness absence figures that are available for other organisations as well as their suitability. This has now been included in the 2018/19 NICS Sickness Absence Report which was published on 20th June 2019.

Some of these organisations report on a “per Employee” basis which, whilst not recommended for comparison purposes, is the simplest to calculate where reporting/recording systems may not be as advanced as those within the NICS. Despite our reservations around the suitability of this measure for comparative purposes, we feel that providing a “per Employee” figure for the NICS would at least ensure that a similar methodology was being applied to the calculation. This ‘per employee’ comparison has also therefore been included in the 2018/19 NICS Sickness Absence report published on the 20th June 2019.

We should stress that our headline “Working Days Lost per Staff Year” figure is still the official figure for the level of sickness absence within the NICS as it is not affected by any changes in the level of part-time working or staff turnover.

1. **Future user consultation plans**

We continue to be in regular contact with policy colleagues within the NICS but are always keen to receive feedback from other users of our statistics. In order to increase our visibility and level of interaction with our users we intend, over the coming year, to:

1. Send out a new user survey, specifically relating to this publication only, around the time as we publish our next report (20th June 2019). A link to the survey will also be placed on this website. [Results from our last user survey can be found [here](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/official-statistics/hrcs-customer-survey-report).]
2. Update our development plans on the HRCS/NISRA website with any progress we have made and seeking feedback on potential future developments.
3. Contact users and producers of similar sickness absence statistics within the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), Local Councils, the Cabinet Office, the Scottish Office etc., with a view to raising the profile of sickness absence statistics and to gain a better understanding of the different methodologies being used.

If you wish to provide any feedback to any of these potential future developments, please respond using our [hrcsabsence@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:hrcsabsence@finance-ni.gov.uk) email address, or through our user survey which will be accessible through this website from 20th June 2019.

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**NICS Sickness Absence Statistics Report – Assessment Requirement Action Plan (ORS Report No.342)**

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|  | **Requirement** | **HRCS/NISRA Action Plan** |
| 1 | **Public Value**  Bring forward the publication of headline figures to June and publish the insight report and more detailed data tables in September. | We published the full 2018/19 NICS sickness absence report on Thursday 20th June 2019. |
| 2 | Ensure that there is collaborative engagement with key stakeholders on the annual publication. Publish a development plan for the annual statistics, so that users are aware of changes to the annual publication. | Stakeholders and key users were informed on 11th & 12th April 2019 of our intention to publish the 2018/19 annual report on 20th June 2019. A development plan for the annual statistics was published on the HRCS absence statistics section of the NISRA website on 31st May 2019 with key users being notified of this at that time. Our engagement will be ongoing as part of future development of the statistics, to ensure their continued value to users |
| 3 | Fulfil commitment to engage with users, about the inclusion of a comparator with CIPD and CBI absence rates in the publication. | The comparator statistics (public and private sector) from the User Guide were incorporated into the Annual report which was published on 20th June 2019. The comparator information was updated with the most up-to-date information available and also included the NICS absence estimate to a ‘per employee’ basis. The CBI absence rates have been replaced by absence rates provided by Make UK as it appears that they are the source of the figures previously quoted by the CBI. HRCS emailed users in advance of the report being published, informing them of our plan to include these comparators in the annual report and they were given the opportunity to provide feedback. |
| 4 | **Quality**  Fulfil commitments to publishing a plan for managing data quality during the migration of prison staff on the NISRA website by July 2019. Ensure any effect of the migration is published on the website and highlighted in the analysis with suitable guidance to aid appropriate interpretation. | A development plan has been published on the HRCS website which includes our plans regarding the data migration of the Prison grade staff from the current NI Prisons HR system to the NICS HR system (HRConnect). Details of the quality assurance checks planned to ensure that the absence statistics are not adversely affected by the data migration, are included in the development plan. At the moment it is anticipated that the change will take place at some stage in 2020. Discussions around the completion of the migration are ongoing and the actual date of the migration will be provided when these discussions conclude. HRCS will continue to monitor trends after the migration of NIPS Prison Grades to HRConnect, analysing the data for evidence of any impact. The findings of this analysis will be published and made available to users in due course. |
| 5 | **Trust**  The job title of those granted pre-release access should be recorded. The list should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it is kept to a minimum. | The job titles of pre-release access recipients have already been added to the list published on the NISRA website. The number of recipients has been significantly reduced in the last 2 years and the list will continue to be reviewed annually with a view to seeing if further reductions can be made. |