

Review of the Quarterly Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Report

Background

In light of the financial challenge facing public services in Northern Ireland, NISRA has been developing strategies to tailor our outputs and activities to align with available resources while continuing to produce high quality statistics.

As part of the wider effort to operate within these financial constraints, the Human Resource Consultancy Services (HRCS) team within NISRA, has reviewed the content and format of a number of publications in 2023. This included the quarterly [Sickness Absence in the NICS](#) report. There are two main elements to this report – a set of excel tables, and a written report which contains the same tables and descriptive commentary.

A formal consultation with users opened on Monday 18 September 2023 and closed on Thursday 8 November 2023, including a three-week extension at the request of customers. Notice of the consultation was placed on Departmental Intranets, the NISRA website, Twitter and Facebook feeds. In addition, an email was sent to those on the Sickness Absence in the NICS user mailing list. Users were invited to complete our online [questionnaire](#) to provide feedback on :

- their usage of the report and particular sections within it, including reasons for use, the element used (written report or tables) and frequency of use;
- how the report meets their needs; and
- the impact of proposed changes to the report – specifically proposals to suspend or scale back the written report.

Summary of Responses

Users

We received 20 responses to the consultation, all which were from internal NICS users.

The main reasons for use were identified as:

- Policy making/monitoring (11)
- To aid decision making on resource allocation (10)
- Responding to information requests (8)
- To facilitate research (7)

Elements Used

All 20 users responded that they used the written report, and 17 used the Excel tables. Each section of the report was used often or occasionally by all users.

Meeting Needs

When asked to what extent the current quarterly Sickness Absence in the NICS report met their needs, five said fully, 13 said mostly and two said partly. When asked about each section of the output, most users (at least 16) reported the corresponding section fully or mostly met their needs.

Proposals

Almost all (19) users indicated that the impact of stopping the written report would be high or medium, while one said it would be low. The same overall response was noted when asked about the impact of scaling back the written report. When asked about suspending both the written report and tables all users indicated that the impact would be high or medium.

Five users provided written comments on the proposed changes and how the report could better meet their needs. All comments referred to the importance of the

quarterly sickness absence information for responding to ad hoc queries as well as reporting to Departmental Boards. A number of users requested more detailed information.

Proposed Action

HRCS is grateful to all the users who took time to provide detailed responses to the consultation. The collective feedback paints a positive picture of the importance which users derive from this particular output. While we recognise the value that users place on the written report and the commentary provided, we have decided to suspend publication until further notice to ensure continued delivery of wider analytical priorities, in the face of constrained resource. We will continue to publish the data tables on a quarterly basis as normal. This position will be kept under review.

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