
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Siobhan Carey
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

7 August 2019

Dear Siobhan

ASSESSMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE STATISTICS

We have reviewed the actions that your team has taken to address the requirements in the Assessment Report 342 on Sickness Absence in Northern Ireland Civil Service Statistics.

On behalf of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority, I am pleased to confirm the designation of National Statistics for the NISRA Sickness Absence in Northern Ireland Civil Service Statistics. Given the actions taken, you may retrospectively apply this to the most recent publication dated 20 June 2019.

During the course of the assessment the team responsible for producing the statistics showed great commitment to the improvement of these statistics. We commend the team for bringing forward the publication date of the statistics and for publishing the full report to this quicker timetable, thereby increasing the value of the statistics. We welcome the progress made in ensuring collaborative engagement with key stakeholders and look forward to seeing the actions taken because of this process.

We have included more detail about our judgement in an annex to this letter. If necessary I, or my team, would be happy to talk you or your colleagues through any aspects of this letter or Code compliance more generally.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value and is something to be celebrated. We invite you to include a statement alongside the statistics which reflects the National Statistics status.

I am copying this letter to Tracy Power, Director of Analysis (NISRA); Danielle Clarke, HR Consultancy Services (NISRA) and Ruth Fulton, Head of NISRA Statistical Support and Business Planning.

Your sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

Annex Review of actions taken in response to Assessment Report 342: Statistics on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)

Requirement	Actions taken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to meet Requirements	OSR's evaluation of evidence
<p>1 Bring forward the publication of headline figures to June and publish the insight report and more detailed data tables in September.</p>	<p>NISRA has brought forward the publication and both the headline data and insight analysis have been published in the same report.</p>	<p>This was one of the main issues to be raised as part of our stakeholder engagement. Given the resource issues the team faced and highlighted during the assessment, we commend the team for achieving this requirement. The landing page for the statistics is located here.</p> <p>Bringing the publication date forward adds value, ensuring users can now include up-to-date figures in their business plans and reports, and by increasing the relevance of the statistics to users.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>NISRA informed stakeholders and key users on 11 & 12 April 2019 of its intention to publish the 2018/19 annual report on 20 June 2019.</p> <p>The team published a development plan for the annual statistics on the Human Resource Consultancy Services team (HRCS) section of the NISRA website on 31 May 2019 with key users being notified of this at that time.</p>	<p>The plan contains a section highlighting how NISRA will continue to consult users. There is a link to a customer survey, which was released at the same time as the new publication.</p> <p>NISRA highlights that any changes to the website or plan will be consulted on and updated in line with user feedback.</p> <p>The team has also made greater collaboration with other devolved and public sector organisations central to the plan, stipulating that it will be building stronger relationships with the Scottish Government, NI Audit Office and local authorities.</p> <p>We look forward to seeing the continued development of this collaborative engagement which will increase the value of the statistics to users.</p>
<p>3 Fulfil commitment to engage with users, about the inclusion of a comparator with CIPD and CBI absence rates in the publication.</p>	<p>The comparator statistics (public and private sector) from the User Guide were incorporated into the annual report which was published on 20 June 2019. The comparator information was updated with the most up-to-date information available and included the NICS absence estimate on a 'per employee' basis. The CBI absence</p>	<p>The time series charts from the user guide are now included; the commentary around the charts is clear that the figures can't be directly compared due to the different methods of calculation. This ensures that users</p>

	<p>rates have been replaced by absence rates provided by The Manufacturers' Organisation UK (MAKE UK) as that is the source for the CBI figures. CBI had previously been quoting MAKE UK figures; HRCS contacted MAKE UK to investigate this and they confirmed the figures were theirs. HRCS emailed users in advance of the report being published, informing them of its plan to include these comparators in the annual report and they were given the opportunity to provide feedback.</p>	<p>will not be misled and provides greater value and understanding to the statistics.</p> <p>The team has included an appendix which contains greater detail about the calculations and the organisations that produce the different figures. The relevant information about the calculations is in one place, bringing greater clarity and insight to the statistics.</p>
<p>4 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.</p>	<p>NISRA published a development plan on the HRCS section of its website which includes its plans regarding the data migration of the prison-grade staff from the current NI Prisons HR system to the NICS HR system (HRConnect).</p> <p>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. HRCS is also clear in the plan as to when the migration will take place and that it will keep users informed.</p>	<p>We welcome the inclusion of quality assurance checks planned to ensure that the absence statistics are not adversely affected by the data migration.</p> <p>NISRA has shown a commitment towards transparency around its data collection methods.</p> <p>The strategy detailed in the development plan will assure the continued quality of the data and statistics.</p>
<p>5 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.</p>	<p>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 two years and the list will continue to be reviewed annually with a view to seeing if further reductions can be made.</p>	<p>This requirement was met during the course of the assessment, illustrating the team's commitment to ensuring the continued orderly release of the statistics.</p>