

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation

Date 18th March 2025
Your ref
Our ref SH/EH/JS/180325
Enquiries to Scott Heald
Email scott.heald@phs.scot

Dear Ed,

18 WEEKS REFERRAL TO TREATMENT PUBLICATION PAUSE

I have taken the decision to pause data collection and production of the PHS quarterly statistics publication on adherence to the NHS Scotland 18-week referral to treatment (RTT) standard. This will enable us to divert resource to developing statistics about NHS performance around activity for eight key diagnostic tests, an area of significant public interest. Developing these statistics will contribute to the measurement of progress towards the Scottish Government's commitment to see 150,000 more patients in the financial year 2025/26.

My decision reflects PHS's need to prioritise our work and release capacity when new information needs arise and corresponds with similar steps being taken in Scottish Government (as outlined in the Chief Statistician's letter to you last October¹). In line with the principles in the Code of Practice for Statistics, we will inform users that this is happening when the 18 weeks RTT statistics for quarter ending 31st December 2024 are published on 18th March 2025. We will invite feedback so we can assess the impact of this decision and use that to inform any future plans for PHS's waiting times statistics. My latest [blog](#), which describes PHS's

[i Alastair McAlpine to Ed Humpherson: Statistical Strategic Priorities in Scotland – Office for Statistics Regulation](#)

approach to supporting NHS renewal with data, also mentions my decision to pause the RTT statistics.

As Scotland's lead Official Statistics producer about the health and care service, PHS publishes a wide range of statistics about waiting times for different services, including via our new [website](#) developed for patients and their families with information about waiting times for elective treatment. My rationale for pausing the RTT statistics is:

- In recent years, the focus of NHS boards and Scottish Government has been directed to individual targets for each part of the patient journey (**6 week standard for patients to receive a key diagnostic test**, Treatment Time Guarantee (TTG) that all eligible patients should wait no longer than 12 weeks for treatment as an inpatient or day case, and the **new outpatient standard that 95% of patients waiting for a new appointment at a consultant-led clinic are to wait no longer than 12 weeks**). These are more reliable sources of statistics on waiting times because they don't rely on boards having to go through complex processes to link different parts of the patient journey together.
- The level of resource required in boards and PHS to collate the 18 weeks RTT statistics is disproportionate to their value, especially when greater insights can be drawn from the other waiting times statistics that we produce.
- We are also aware that the number of views per quarter for 18 weeks RTT is significantly lower than for other waiting times analytical outputs.
- We currently publish Accredited Official Statistics on waiting times for 8 key diagnostic tests, but have a known data gap in relation to activity for these tests.
- The Scottish Budget includes a commitment that an additional 150,000 extra patients will be treated by the end of 2025/26. We understand that this has a focus on planned care waiting times, in particular new outpatients, TTG inpatients and day cases and 8 key diagnostic tests.

It is therefore my judgement that diverting resource to developing data to support monitoring progress towards this target serves the public good by meeting an important information need. The PHS team is working with Scottish Government analysts to confirm definitions for this commitment so that we can provide users with

confidence that any information we publish to monitor progress is based on reliable data.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Heald', written in a cursive style.

Scott Heald

Director, Data and Digital Innovation

Head of Profession for Statistics