

# Sickness Absence in the Civil Service

## Management Information up to 31 March 2020

This bulletin presents headline information on sickness absence in the UK Civil Service workforce, including by sex, age, length of absence, absence reason, work location and department.

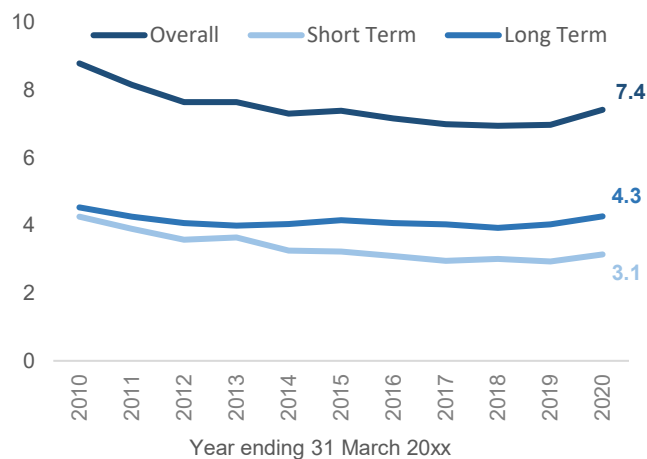
### Key Highlights from Management Information:

- Overall Average Working Days Lost (AWDL) per staff year in the Civil Service was 7.4 days in the year ending 31 March 2020, up from 7.0 days in the year ending 31 March 2019.

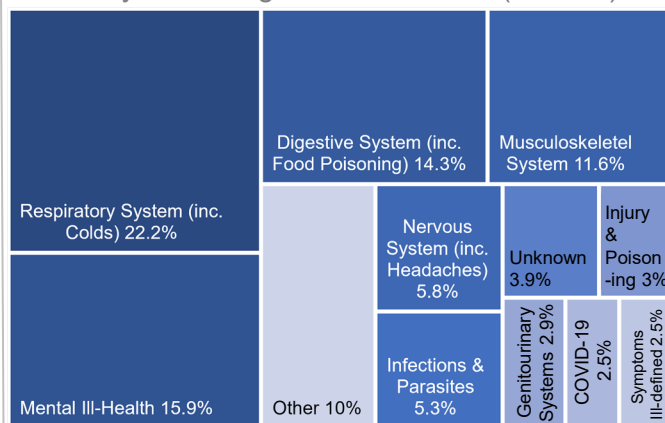
Of these average working days lost (AWDL) per staff year:

- 4.3 days per staff year were lost to long term sickness, and 3.1 days to short term sickness. Both increased on the previous year from 4.0 and 2.9 respectively.
- Mental Health is the largest cause of long term sickness absence (41%), with 22% of all short term sickness absence due to illness relating to the Respiratory System including colds.
- COVID-19 accounts for 2.5% of short term absence although this report only covers the beginning of the pandemic – up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
- London has the lowest level of sickness absence (5.4 days), compared to Northern Ireland (9.6 days) and Scotland (9.4 days).
- Women took 8.3 days on average compared to 6.5 days for men, some 1.8 days more.
- Sickness absence levels increase with age, with those over 60 taking 9.7 days compared to 6.2 days for those aged 16-29 years.
- More than half (52%) of Civil Servants took no sickness absence in the year to 31 March 2020, this is over 10 percentage points higher than a decade earlier (41% took no absence in 2010)
- The five largest departments (DWP, MoJ, HMRC, MoD, HO) account for 69% of working days in the Civil Service and 74% of sickness absence taken.

Average Working Days Lost (AWDL per staff year), 2010 to 2020 (Table 1)



Short-term sickness absence by absence reason year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 (Table 2)



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## Contacts

Statistical Enquiries:

[aandi-socialresearch@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:aandi-socialresearch@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

Press enquiries:

[wayne.bontoft@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:wayne.bontoft@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

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# Introduction

Sickness Absence in the Civil Service is an annual report describing sickness absence across the UK Civil Service workforce in terms of departments, grade, location, age, sex, length of absence and reasons for absence.

These figures incorporate home Civil Service departments and staff, including those based in Northern Ireland and overseas. Not included are the Northern Ireland Civil Service, other Crown servants and employees of the wider public sector, for example, employees of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and the National Health Service (NHS). There are a small number of Civil Service organisations not currently covered as part of these statistics. A listing of all Civil Service organisations contained in these statistics and those not currently included can be found on Page 9 of this report.

## **Sickness absence figures are derived from management information**

All data presented in this report are sourced and collated from Departmental Quarterly Sickness Absence Management Information returns to Cabinet Office. The data presented in this bulletin are not Official Statistics.

## **Notes on measures of sickness absence**

These statistics present the headline measure for sickness absence in the Civil Service, Average Working Days Lost (AWDL) per staff year. This measure is used because it is the most accurate measure available and accounts for part-time workers and workers that have not worked for the entire year i.e. leavers and new entrants during the reporting period.

Organisations outside the Civil Service mainly report their sickness rates using the Average Working Days Lost per person measure. This measure could under-report the true levels of sickness absence in an organisation as it gives equal weighting in the AWDL calculation to individuals that are part-time or have only worked part of the year and have therefore worked fewer days during the course of the year than full-time staff that have worked the entire year.

## **Sector Comparisons**

Caution should be used when comparing data from this bulletin with other sectors of the economy due to differences in measurement definitions. The Office for National Statistics publishes sickness absence statistics including comparisons between different industry sectors and the public sector.

## **Methodology**

Average Working Days Lost per staff year is calculated as follows:

AWDL per staff year =

$$\frac{\text{Working Days Lost during the year at organisation}}{\text{Total Staff Years at organisation}}$$

Where Total Staff Years at organisation =

$$\frac{\text{Total Working Days Available at organisation}}{\text{Working Days available for 1 full-time employee employed for the entire year}}$$

For consistency purposes, working days available over a year for a typical full-time employee is assumed to be 225 working days.

## **Collection Time Periods**

All data is annual in order to remove seasonality. However, departments report their annual data on a quarterly basis. For this report we focus on data collected ending in March every year. So the latest data for 2020 covers the time period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Data for the preceding year (2019) covers the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 and so forth. Unless otherwise stated, all the data reported in the bulletin refer to time periods ending 31 March 20xx.

## **Definitions**

Short-Term sickness absence: All absences less than or equal to 20 working days or 28 calendar days.

Long Term sickness absence: All absences greater than or equal to 21 working days or 29 calendar days.

## **Request for Feedback**

If you would like to provide feedback on any aspect of this publication, please contact us at: [aandi-socialresearch@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:aandi-socialresearch@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

# Departmental Sickness Absence

Major trends in overall Civil Service absence levels are often due to changes in the five largest departments (DWP, MoJ, HMRC, MoD, HO). These departments account for 69% of working days in the Civil Service and 74% of sickness absence taken.

Average Working Days Lost per staff year by main departments in 2019 and 2020 (Table 3)



### Statistical Note

Caution should be exercised when comparing organisations due to differences, for example, in grade structures. Furthermore, smaller organisations may exhibit more variability across time and within particular years in sickness absence due to smaller headcounts.

The data presented in all the charts in this report can be found in the accompanying csv file published alongside this report.

\* Did not take part in collection in 2019

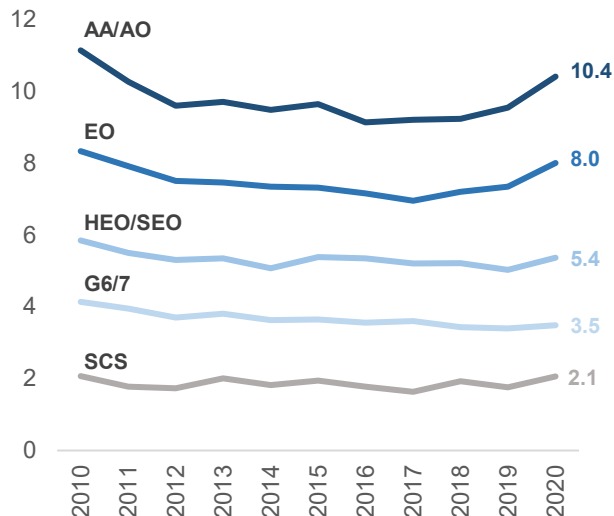
# Sickness absence and grade

Sickness absence levels decrease with seniority, with AWDL per staff year at the most junior grades (AA/AO) at 10.4 days compared to SCS levels that stand at 2.1 days.

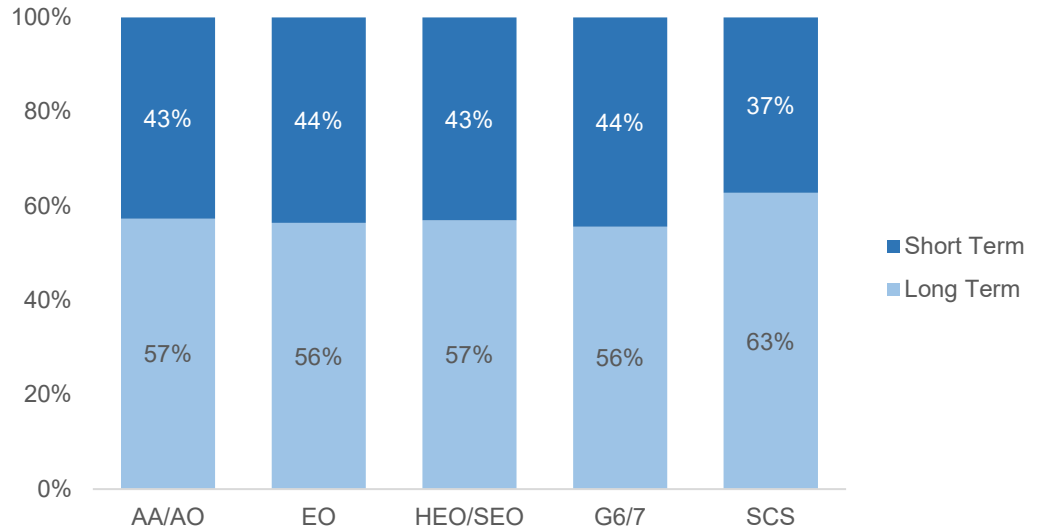
The percentage of days lost to long term sickness absence is broadly similar across grades outside of the SCS (between 56 and 57%). In the SCS this increases to 63% of all days lost to sickness.

The proportion of staff taking no sickness absence increases with grade, and for SCS is over double that of those at AA/AO grades.

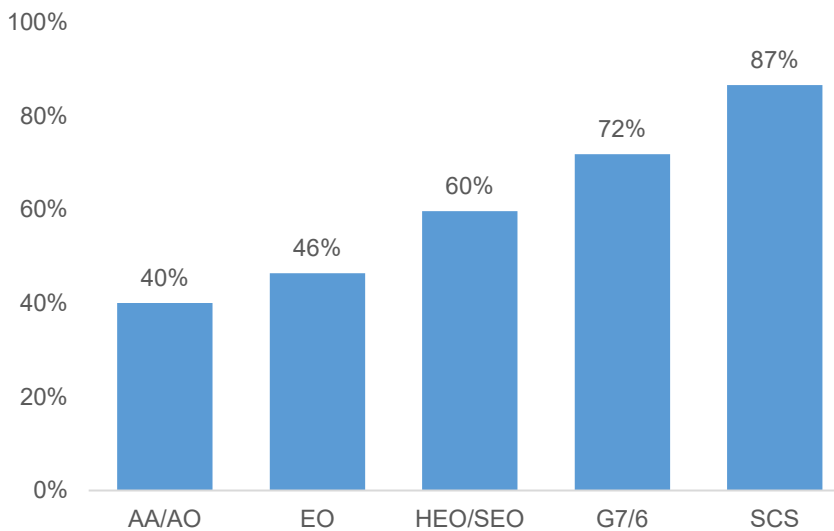
Average Working Days Lost per staff year by grade, 2010 to 2020 (Table 6)



Percentage of working days lost to long term and short term sickness absence by grade, 2020 (Table 4)



Percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence during the year by grade, 2020 (Table 5)



# Regional sickness absence

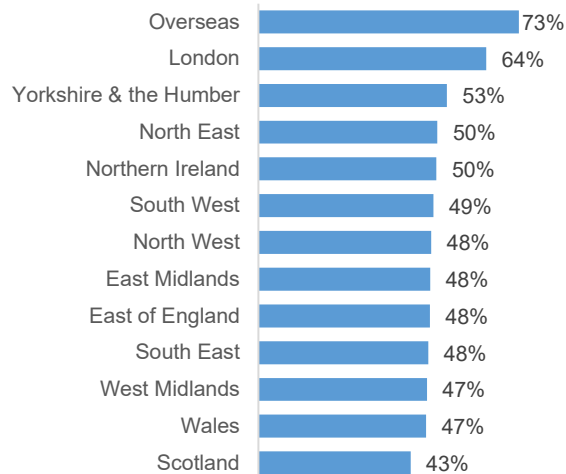
Average working days lost per staff year varies across the regions.

The regions with the highest levels of sickness absence are Northern Ireland (9.6 days) and Scotland (9.4 days).

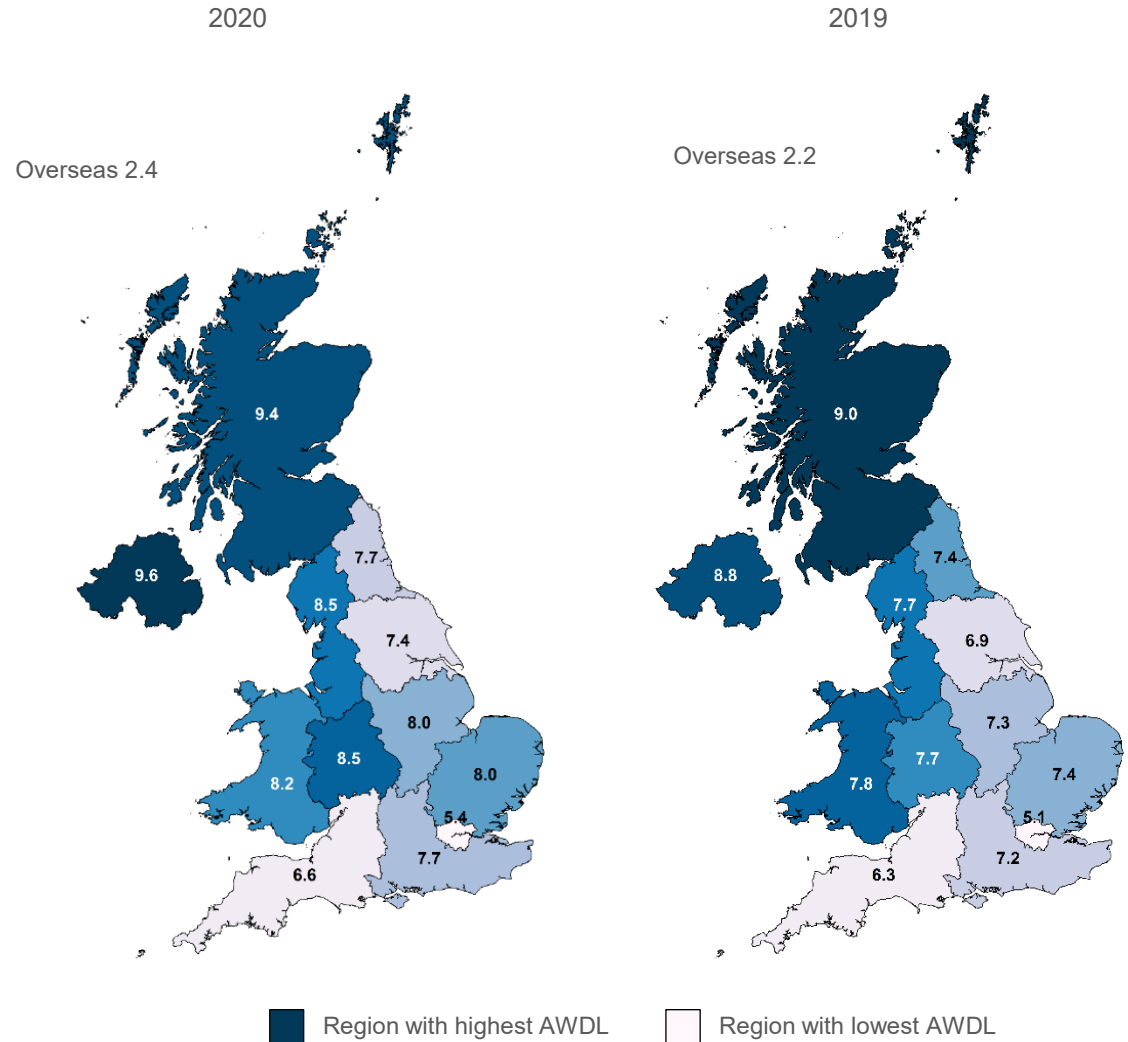
After overseas, the regions with the lowest levels of sickness absence are London (5.4 days) and the South West (6.6 days).

There is also variation in the percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence; after overseas (73%) this ranges from 64% in London to 43% in Scotland.

Percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence by region, 2020 (Table 8)



Average Working Days Lost (AWDL) per staff year by region for 2019 and 2020 (Table 7)



# Sickness absence by sex

Sickness absence levels for women (8.3 days) are higher than men (6.5 days).

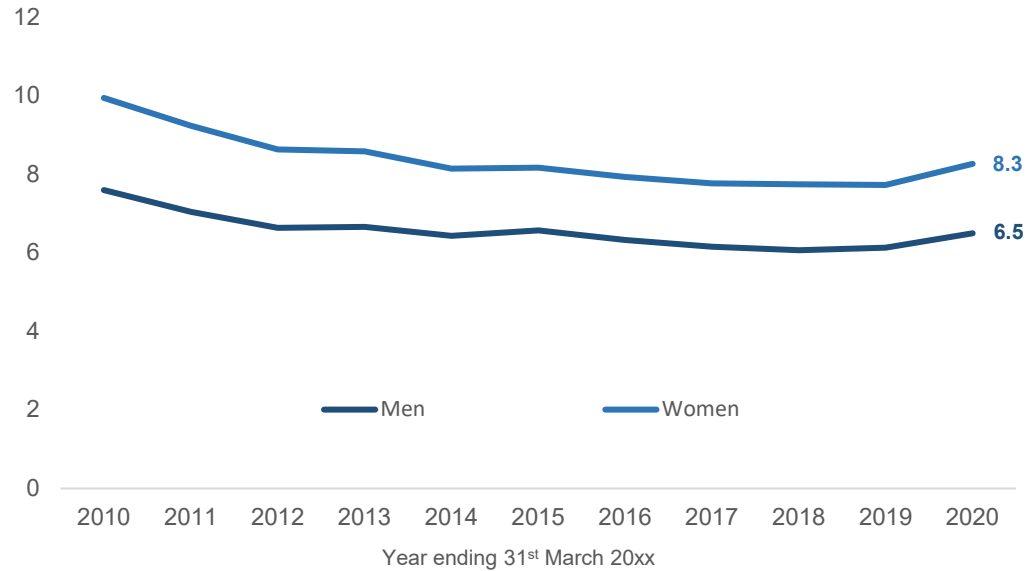
There is little difference between the long term and short term split of sickness for men and women.

The percentage of staff with no sickness absence is seven percentage points higher for men (55%) than for women (49%).

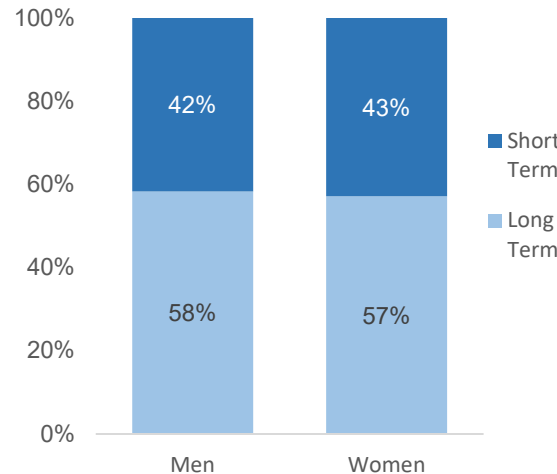
Between 2019 and 2020 the number of days of sickness absence increased for men and for women by 0.4 and 0.5 days respectively.

However, over the last 10 years sickness absence rates for both men and women have been declining. The number of days absence taken by women has fallen by 1.7 days since 2010. Over the same period the number of sickness absence days taken by men fell by 1.1 days.

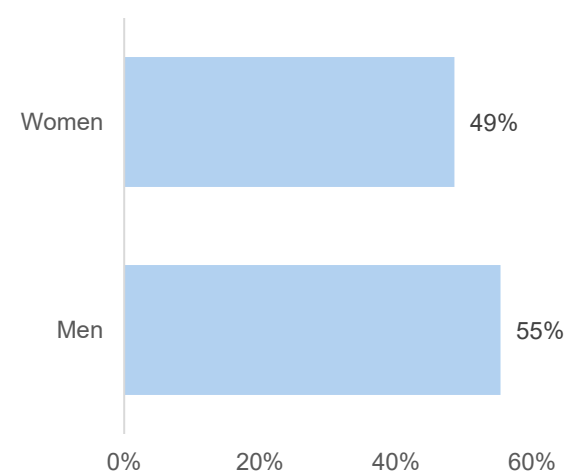
Average Working Days Lost per staff year by sex, 2010 to 2020 (Table 9)



Percentage of working days lost to long term and short term sickness absence by sex, 2020 (Table 10)



Percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence during the year by sex, 2020 (Table 11)



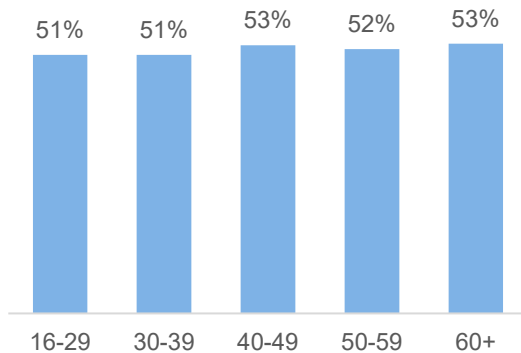
# Sickness absence and age

Sickness absence levels increase with age, increasing from 6.2 days for those aged 16-29 to 9.7 days for those aged 60 and over.

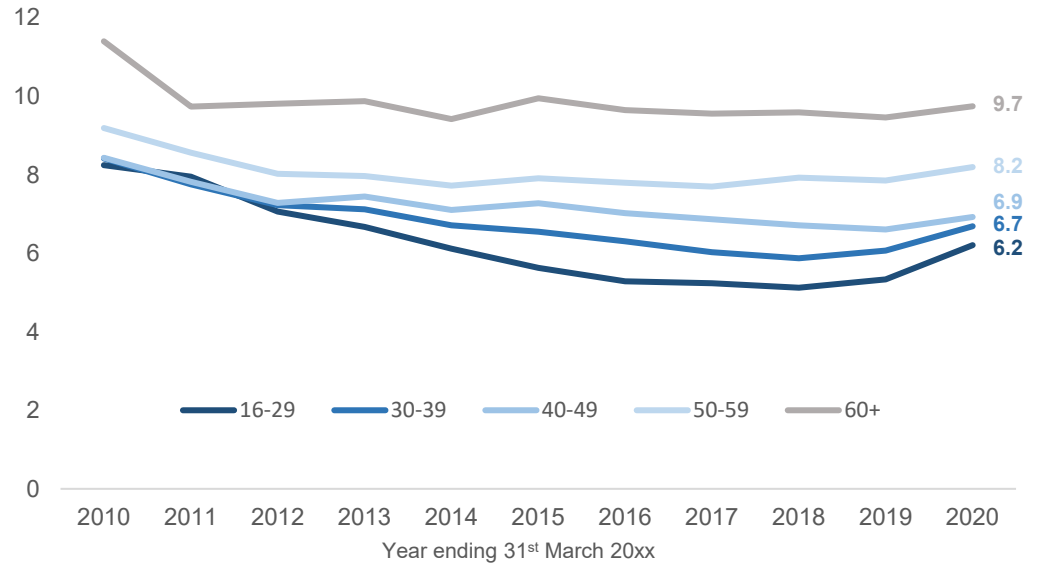
The percentage of absence that is long term also increases with age, from 41% in the under thirties to 67% in the over sixties.

There is very little variation between age categories in the percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence.

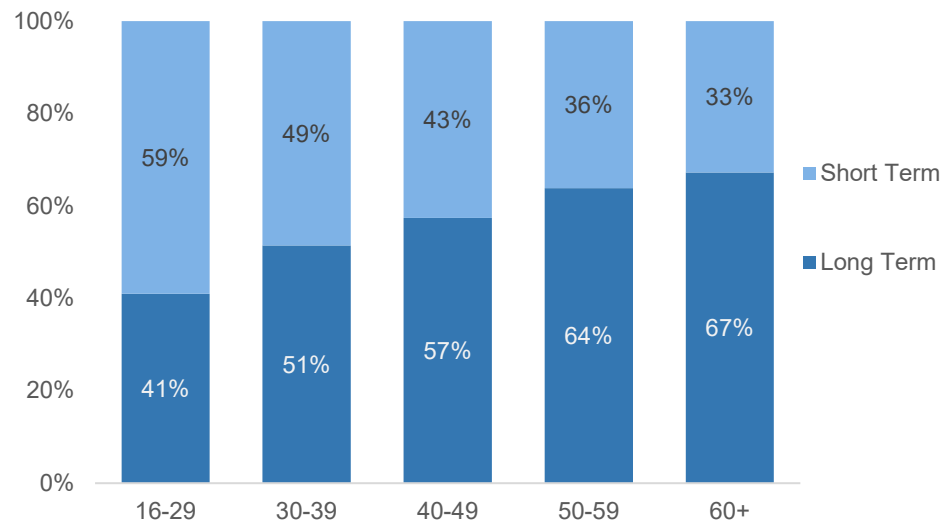
Percentage of staff with no reported sickness absence by age, 2020 (Table 14)



Average Working Days Lost per staff year by age, 2010 to 2020 (Table 12)



Percentage of working days lost to long term and short term sickness absence by age, 2020 (Table 13)



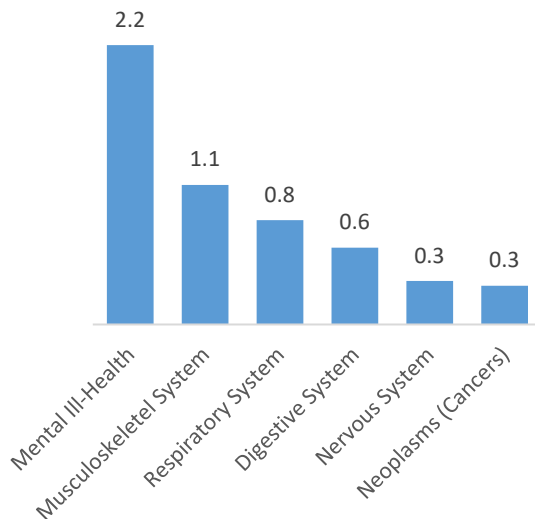
# Sickness absence reason

Mental ill-health is the leading cause of sickness absence, with an average of 2.2 days lost during the year.

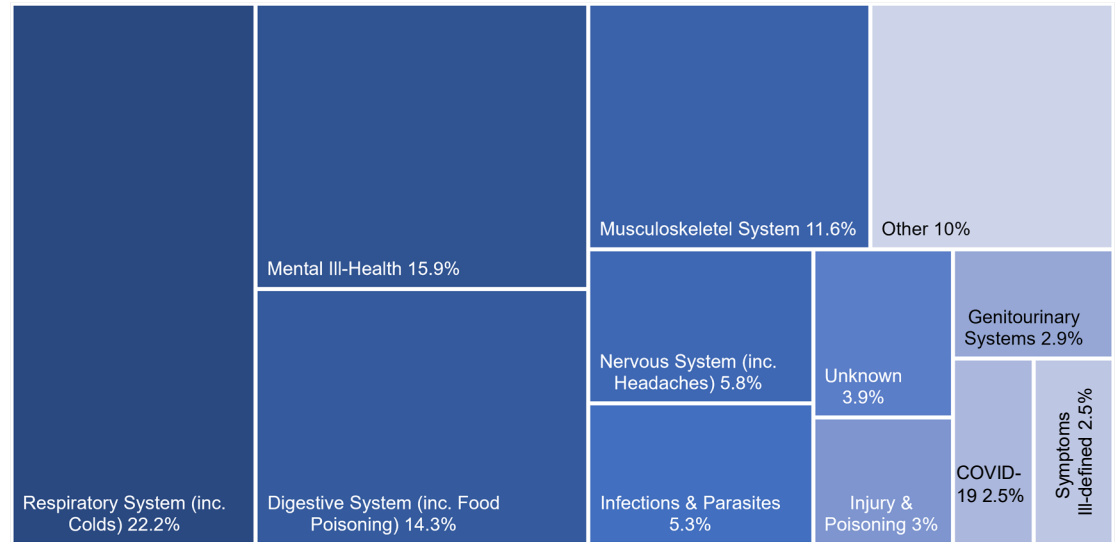
Mental ill-health and musculoskeletal system disorders are the largest causes of long term sickness absence at 40.8% and 17.7% respectively.

22.2% of all short term sickness absence is due to illness relating to the respiratory system, followed by mental ill-health (15.9%) and digestive system issues including food poisoning (14.3%).

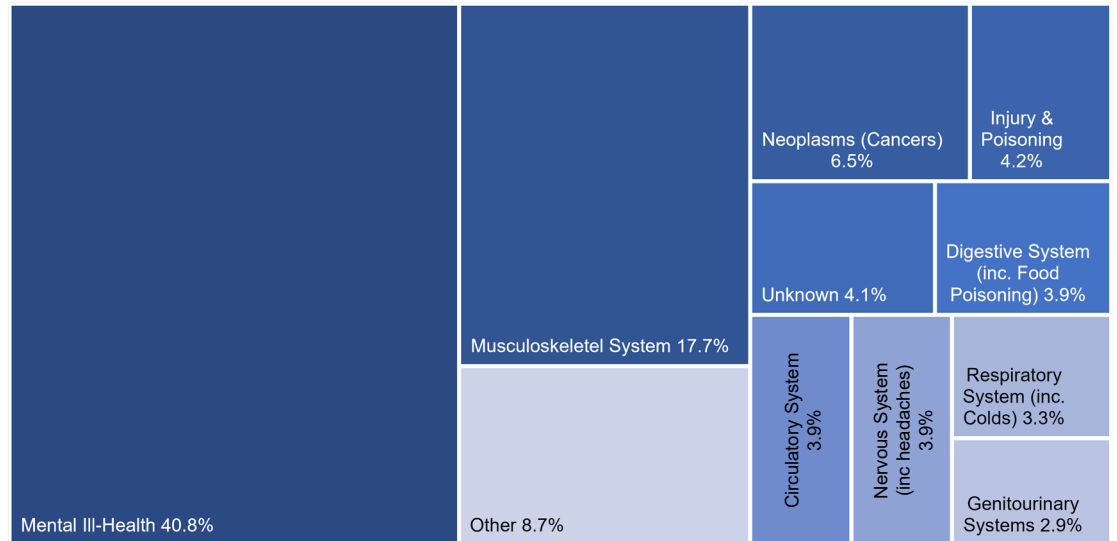
AWDL by main sickness absence reason, 2020 (Table 16)



Short Term sickness absence by absence reason, 2020 (Table 2)



Long Term sickness absence by absence reason, 2020 (Table 15)





# Coverage of UK Civil Service

Parent Department included in reporting (N=39)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB included in reporting by parent department (N=64)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB not currently included in reporting by parent department (N=4)
Attorney's General Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attorney General's Office</li> <li>• Government Legal Department</li> <li>• HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate</li> <li>• Serious Fraud Office</li> <li>• Crown Prosecution Service</li> </ul>	
Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies House</li> <li>• Insolvency Service</li> <li>• Met Office</li> <li>• UK Intellectual Property Office</li> <li>• UK Space Agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service</li> </ul>
Cabinet Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crown Commercial Service</li> <li>• Government Equality Office</li> <li>• Government in Parliament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Property Agency</li> </ul>
Chancellor's Other Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Savings and Investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Actuary's Department</li> </ul>
Charity Commission		
Competition and Markets Authority		
Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defence Equipment and Support</li> <li>• Defence Science and Technology Laboratory</li> <li>• Royal Fleet Auxillary</li> <li>• UK Hydrographic Office</li> </ul>	
Digital, Culture, Media and Sport		
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Skills Funding Agency</li> <li>• Standards and Testing Agency</li> <li>• Teaching Regulation Agency</li> <li>• Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education</li> </ul>	

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Parent Department included in reporting (N=39)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB included in reporting by parent department (N=64)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB not currently included in reporting by parent department (N=4)
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Payments Agency</li> <li>• Animal and Plant Health Agency</li> <li>• Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs</li> <li>• Veterinary Medicines Directorate</li> </ul>	
Estyn		
Exiting the European Union (Q1 2019 Data Only)		
Food Standards Agency		
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FCO Services</li> <li>• Wilton Park Executive</li> </ul>	
Health and Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority</li> <li>• Public Health England</li> </ul>	
HM Land Registry		
HM Revenue and Customs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuation Office</li> </ul>	
HM Treasury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Internal Audit Agency</li> <li>• National Infrastructure Commission</li> <li>• Office for Budget Responsibility</li> <li>• UK Debt Management Office</li> </ul>	
Home Office		
Housing, Communities and Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning Inspectorate</li> <li>• Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre</li> </ul>	
International Development		

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Parent Department included in reporting (N=39)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB included in reporting by parent department (N=64)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB not currently included in reporting by parent department (N=4)
International Trade		
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority</li> <li>• HM Courts and Tribunals Service</li> <li>• HM Prison and Probation Service</li> <li>• Legal Aid Agency</li> <li>• Office of the Public Guardian</li> </ul>	
The National Archives		
National Crime Agency		
Northern Ireland Office		
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills		
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets		
Office of Rail and Road		
OFWAT		
Scotland Office		
Scottish Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountant in Bankruptcy</li> <li>• Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal</li> <li>• Disclosure Scotland</li> <li>• Education Scotland</li> <li>• Food Standards Scotland</li> </ul>	

# Coverage of UK Civil Service

Parent Department included in reporting (N=39)*	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB included in reporting by parent department (N=64)	Executive agencies/Crown NDPB not currently included in reporting by parent department (N=4)
Scottish Government (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Records of Scotland</li> <li>• Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator</li> <li>• Registers of Scotland</li> <li>• Revenue Scotland</li> <li>• Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service</li> <li>• Scottish Fiscal Commission</li> <li>• Scottish Housing Regulator</li> <li>• Scottish Prison Service</li> <li>• Scottish Public Pensions Agency</li> <li>• Social Security Scotland</li> <li>• Student Awards Agency for Scotland</li> <li>• Transport Scotland</li> </ul>	
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency</li> <li>• Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency</li> <li>• Maritime and Coastguard Agency</li> <li>• Vehicle Certification Agency</li> </ul>	
UK Export Finance		
UK Statistics Authority		
UK Supreme Court		
Wales Office		
Welsh Government		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Revenue Authority</li> </ul>
Work and Pensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety Executive</li> </ul>	

\* There is only one parent department not currently included in reporting - Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation