

Ref: FOI2022/04123

22 June 2022

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 14 January 2022 to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) requesting the following information:

"This is an information request relating to sick leave in the department.

Please include the following information for the years; 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22:

- The number of employees taking more than seven days of absence without a sick note*
- The total number of days lost in excess of the seven days"*

You clarified the request on 25 March 2022 as follows:-

"Please provide information for all staff. If this breaches S12 requirements, please just provide information for civil staff".

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). I apologise for the time taken to complete this request for information. A search for the information has now been completed within the MOD and I can confirm all the information in scope of your request is held.

I will first explain that sick notes were replaced by fit notes in 2010. I have presumed that this is what is being referred to in the question.

Please see below the requested information for civilian staff, which is all that can be provided within the cost limit. The information provided below is the recorded information held on the Human Resources Management System (HRMS) computer system. I have interpreted question two to mean a count of the number of sick absence days over the initial seven where individuals are shown on the central HRMS system as not having recorded a fit note. I must also inform you that due to the transfer to a new HR system, the data for FY 2022 runs until the HRMS switch off on 14 January 2022.

Management of staff absence is the responsibility of the individual line manager. There is a reminder on HR Systems for managers to obtain and record the fit note for absences that have

reached eight days. There is also a manual process for submitting fit notes to the individual's personnel file, which is separate to the HR System. For sickness absences of eight calendar days or more, the fit note should be submitted as soon as possible or upon the employee's return to work.

Additionally, between 10 Dec 21 and 26 Jan 22, and in accordance with Government advice, staff were not expected to obtain fit notes for COVID symptoms in order to avoid putting additional pressure on GP practices.

	Financial Year		
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Individuals	1,643	1,688	2,428
Number of Days in Excess of Seven	37,911	27,428	29,744

- Totals represent all sick absences recorded in HRMS (whether open or closed) that exceed seven days where there is no start date recorded for a fit note after the sickness commences and before the sickness ends.
- The count of individuals is based on the date the absence period commenced, so for each financial year, it is a unique count of all individuals who have a period of sick absence that commenced between 1 April and 31 March of the respective year, where the duration is over seven days and no details of a Doctor's medical certificate (fit note) for any date between the start and end of the absence has been recorded.
- The number of days in excess of seven days is also based on the date the sick absence commenced, even if the absence continued into the following year.

Under Section 16 of the FOIA (Advice and Assistance), I can confirm that it would be possible to identify the number of fit notes submitted manually by cross-referencing the personnel file, for each individual with a sickness absence that exceeded seven days where there is no start date recorded for a fit note after the sickness commences and before the sickness ends, to establish if a fit note is held on file. However, to do this would far exceed the cost limit of £600 in accordance with Section 12 of the FOIA 2000.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

Defence Business Services Secretariat
DBS (Secretariat)