

Date 28/11/2025
Your Ref
Our Ref 10773

Enquiries to Richard Mutch
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Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION – STAFF ABSENCES

I write in response to your request for information in relation to staff absences over Christmas.

Question:

- Please provide the total number of NHS staff absences recorded across your health board area during the **Christmas fortnight** (defined as **24 December to 6 January**, inclusive) for each of the **last five years** (2020/21 to 2024/25).

If available, please also include:

- A breakdown by staff category (e.g. medical, nursing, allied health professionals, administrative/support staff).
- The primary reasons for absence (e.g. sickness, annual leave, other).

If projections or internal estimates are available for **the forthcoming Christmas period (2025/26)**, please include these as well.

Answer:

Table 1: No. of Absences by Job Family

Job Family	24/12/2022 to 06/01/2023	24/12/2023 to 06/01/2024	24/12/2024 to 06/01/2025
Admin Services	10,702	11,568	13,939
Allied Health Professions	5,850	6,451	7,454
Healthcare Sciences	2,825	2,894	3,491
Medical and Dental	3,368	3,569	4,565
Medical and Dental Support	965	1,006	1,234
Nursing/Midwifery	14,742	16,283	19,325
Other Therapeutic	3,026	3,258	4,302
Personal & Social Care	173	162	174
Senior Managers	178	175	178
Support Services	4,740	4,919	5,315
Total	46,569	50,285	59,977

Headquarters
Mainpoint
102 West Port
Edinburgh EH3 9DN

Chair Professor John Connaghan CBE
Chief Executive Professor Caroline Hiscox
*Lothian NHS Board is the common
name of Lothian Health Board*

Table 2: No. of Absences by Top 5 Absence Reasons

Absence Type	24/12/2022 to 06/01/2023	24/12/2023 to 06/01/2024	24/12/2024 to 06/01/2025
Public holiday	25,172	27,255	28,948
Annual leave	14,431	16,270	23,831
Sick leave	3,806	3,517	3,847
Special leave	1,403	1,371	1,187
Maternity leave	581	578	616

Notes:

Metric provided is number of absence episodes. If an individual had multiple absence episodes for different reasons during the period (e.g., Public Holidays and Annual Leave), they will appear as separate episodes in the count.

The figures specifically covers employees who were absent between 24 December and 6 January (inclusive) for each year requested. However, some absence episodes may have started before 24 December or continued after 6 January, so the data reflects any absence that overlaps this period, not only those fully contained within it.

We are not able to differentiate between work and non-work related absences.

SSTS (Scottish Standard Time System) only retains absence data for a rolling three-year period. As a result, we are only able to provide data from December 2022 onwards. Unfortunately, data prior to this date is no longer accessible through our system.

The absence data provided includes all absence categories provided on SSTS system.

The rise in overall absences is partly attributable to the natural correlation between higher staff numbers and increased absence occurrences. For example, overall NHS Lothian headcount grew from 27,675 in December 2022 to 29,049 in December 2024 (5% increase), contributing to a proportional increase in absence figures.

It is important to note that high usage of Public Holiday and Annual leave is due to pattern of leave taking over the Christmas period and depends on how Christmas dates fall. Staff who take Public Holidays on 24th & 25th December, as well as 1st and 2nd of January often choose to use annual leave to bridge the gap between these dates, creating an extended break. Furthermore, the increase in Public Holiday usage can also be contributed to the growth in registered nursing from 8,368 employees in December 2022 to 9,180 in December 2024 (10% increase).

Please note that estimates are not covered under FOI(S)A only accurately recorded information.

I hope the information provided helps with your request.

If you are unhappy with our response to your request, you do have the right to request us to review it. Your request should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this letter, and we will reply within 20 working days of receipt. If our decision is unchanged following a review and you remain dissatisfied with this, you then have the right to make a formal complaint to the Scottish Information Commissioner within 6 months of receipt of our review response. You can do this by using the Scottish Information Commissioner's Office online appeals service at www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal. If you remain dissatisfied with the Commissioner's response you then have the option to appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law.

If you require a review of our decision to be carried out, please write to the FOI Reviewer at the email address at the head of this letter. The review will be undertaken by a Reviewer who was not involved in the original decision-making process.

FOI responses (subject to redaction of personal information) may appear on NHS Lothian's Freedom of Information website at: <https://org.nhsllothian.scot/FOI/Pages/default.aspx>

Yours sincerely

ALISON MACDONALD
Executive Director, Nursing
Cc: Chief Executive