

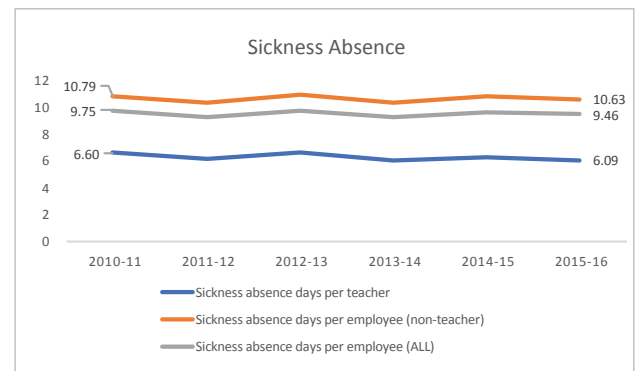
Absence Management Briefing 2017

The management of sickness absence is a major priority for Scottish councils in their efforts to manage their costs. This briefing looks at local government sickness absence trends over time, and highlights current practice and developments in managing absence as discussed at our HR Benchmarking Event in May 2017.

National sickness absence trends over time

There has been a small reduction in sickness absence days per employee both for teaching and non-teaching staff since the base year of 10/11. Although this has fluctuated over the period, there has been a reduction for both groups in the past 12 months.

Sickness absence days for non-teaching staff have reduced from 10.8 days to 10.6 days, while for teaching staff they have reduced from 6.6 days to 6.1 days.



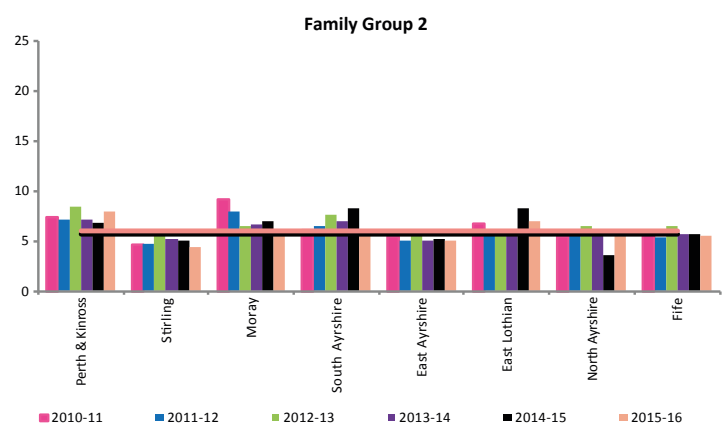
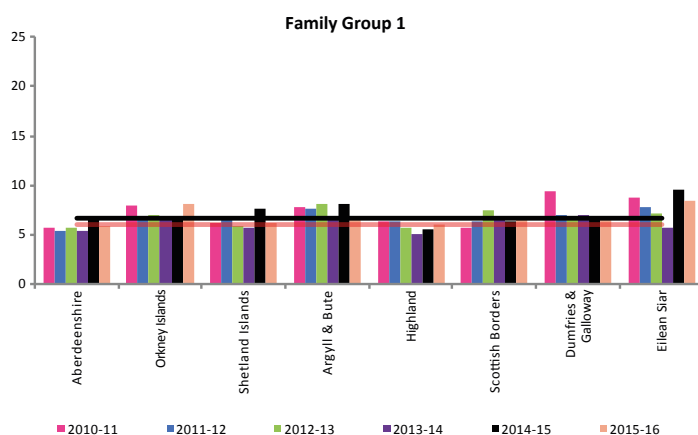
Variance

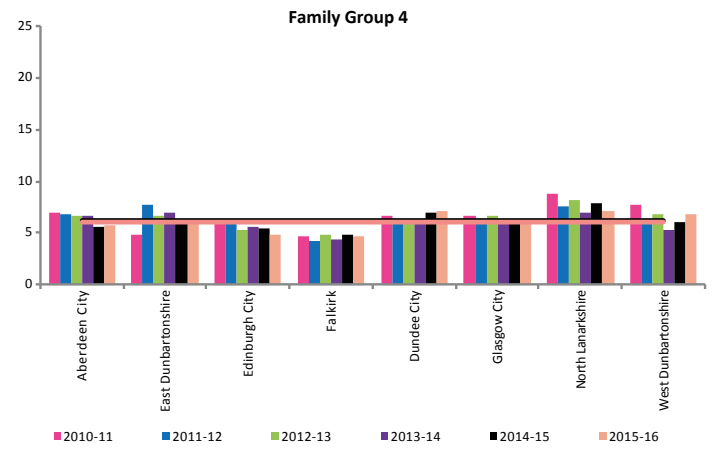
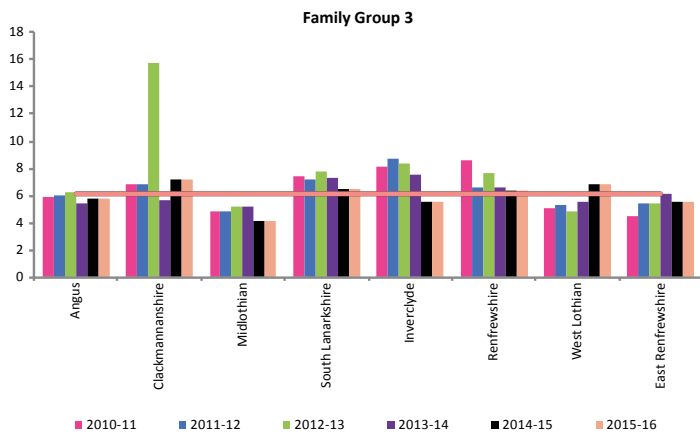
There is significant variation in absence rates between councils. For teaching staff, the number of absence days ranges from 4.16 to 8.68, with rural authorities generally reporting higher levels and smaller authorities reporting lower levels (although neither of these is statistically significant). For non-teaching staff, the number of days range from 8.76 to 14.76, with variation not related to the urban/rural nature of a council or its size. The variation is presented below by family group (councils are grouped by rurality).

The following local factors are important in interpreting the variation:

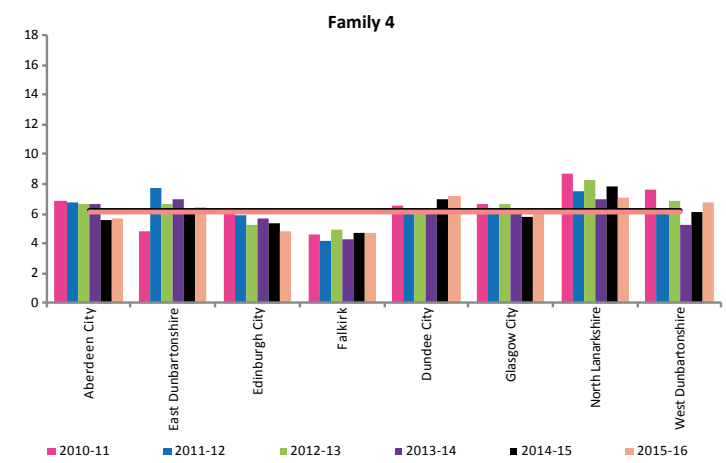
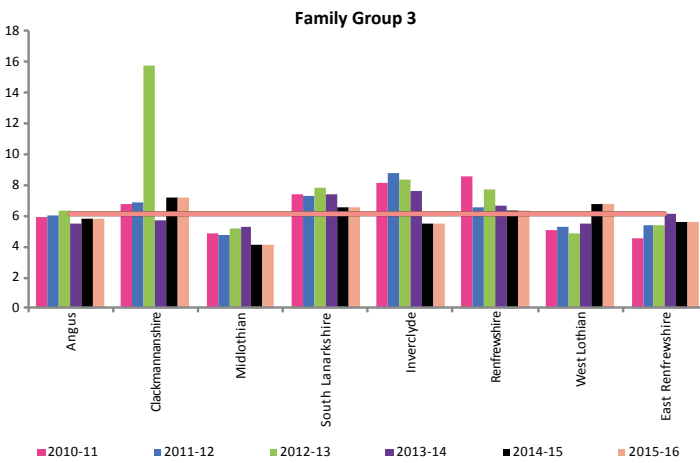
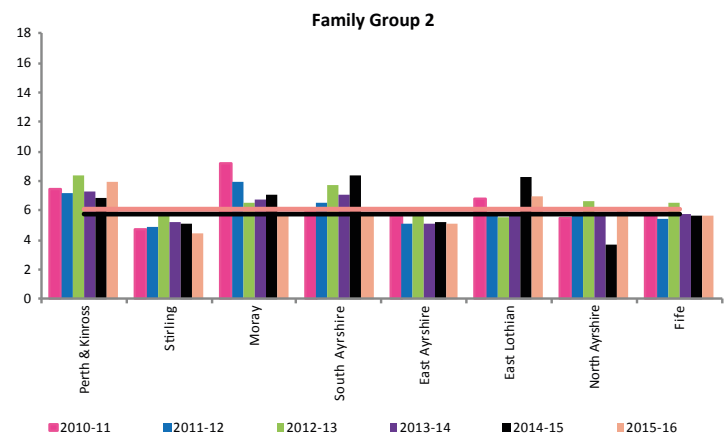
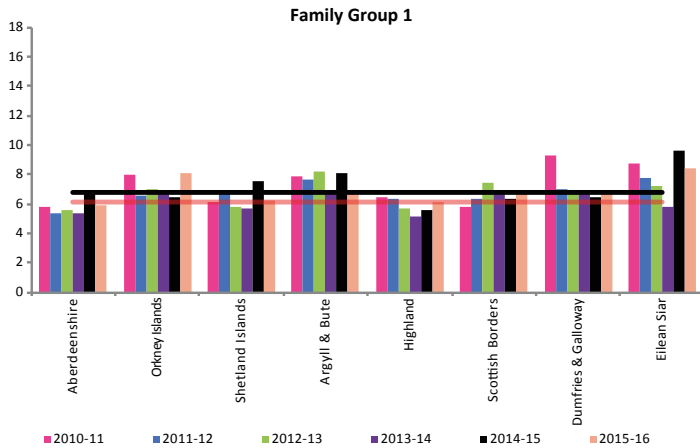
- Local policy, practice and procedures in managing absence and maximising attendance
- Extent to which service delivery has a reactive or proactive focus
- Commitment to digital agenda
- Emphasis given to promoting culture change
- The role of managers in the absence process
- Workforce structure and profile

Absence: Non-teacher





Absence: Teacher



Sharing Practice—2017 Benchmarking Event

The shape of HR services is changing but not in a uniform way. The approach taken is primarily determined by elected member buy in and senior level commitment. Some are opting for a **'spend to save'** approach and are resourcing accordingly, while others are seeking to **reduce their corporate HR function to achieve savings**. Common themes across authorities are **digital transformation** and **early intervention via health and wellbeing initiatives** but the extent to which each of these feature in local areas varies significantly.

Strategic Direction

HR services are evolving differently in line with the strategic approach adopted by each local authority. While some authorities continue to invest in a comprehensive corporate HR function (**Stirling**), others have scaled down the corporate function and placed greater emphasis on rolling out HR responsibilities to managers (**North Ayrshire, Fife, Midlothian**). Some authorities are also increasing the focus on health and wellbeing, and believe prevention is where future investment should be made. (**Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway**)

Digital Transformation

HR services are at different stages of digital transformation, especially around self-service and automation. While many councils procure external software and digital solutions, some are choosing to develop solutions in-house (**Dumfries & Galloway**). When implementing digital services, some councils highlighted that usage was much higher than originally estimated which could prove useful learning for future digital projects (**Stirling, West Lothian**).

Service Redesign

In addition to the centralisation agenda, councils are implementing a variety of different approaches to redesigning their HR service in order to operate more efficiently and effectively. These include different approaches to occupational health (**Stirling, Fife**), process mapping and simplification (**Argyll & Bute**) and reviewing disciplinary procedures (**Midlothian**). Almost all councils are looking at implementing different levels of both external and internal self-service for recruitment and absence management.

Workforce

Greater responsibilities are being pushed out to managers in many councils as a result of the self-service agenda and increased digital innovation. This has led to new approaches to training among many organisations (including **Argyll & Bute, Angus, Dumfries & Galloway**).

However, other councils have chosen to maintain staffing levels and funding for the corporate HR role, including developing the role of interns (**Stirling**). Some organisations are choosing to direct HR processing work to a separate administrative team (**West Lothian**) while some continue to give HR advisors this responsibility (**South Lanarkshire**). Increasingly managers are holding absence meetings with their staff, with HR advisors providing an advisory role.



Useful Links

Presentation: [COSLA Health & Wellbeing Survey Results](#)

Presentation: [The Evolving Role of HR in South Lanarkshire](#)

Presentation: [Stirling First Day Reporting](#)

Explore the LGBF data by service, across councils and over time using the [My Local Council Tool](#)



Case Studies

[South Lanarkshire – Evolving Role of HR](#)