

Dear

## **ATISN 26608 – Waiting Times**

Thank you for your request to Welsh Government for information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) received on 22 January and 26 January regarding waiting times.

In reference for your request for an internal review. We agree with your complaint that we missed the deadline and apologise for not providing a response to you sooner. Unfortunately, gathering the information needed to fully answer your questions has taken longer than expected due to unforeseen circumstances. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused and appreciate your patience and understanding.

You requested the following:

*All relevant information requested between January 2023 to present day.*

### **1. Definition and Methodology**

- a. The definition used by Welsh Government to calculate “waiting list size” in NHS Wales statistics.*
- b. Any methodological changes to waiting list counting, reporting, or classification since January 2023.*

### **2. Raw Waiting List Data**

*For each month from January 2023 to the most recent available month:*

*Total number of patients on NHS Wales waiting lists.*

*Number of patients added to waiting lists per month.*

*Number of patients removed per month, broken down by:*

- a. Treatment completed*
- b. Patient declined treatment*
- c. Patient no longer clinically appropriate*
- d. Patient died*
- e. Patient moved to private sector*
- f. Administrative removal / data cleansing*

### **3. Long Waiters**

*Number of patients waiting:*

- a. Over 52 weeks*
- b. Over 104 weeks*
- c. Over 156 weeks*

*Any internal targets, policies, or directives regarding removal or reclassification of long-wait patients.*

### **4. Number of Patients Waiting but Not Counted on RTT Waiting Lists**

*The number of patients who are clinically waiting for treatment or diagnostic procedures but are not recorded on the official Referral to Treatment (RTT) waiting list, including but not limited to:*

- a. Patients awaiting diagnostics prior to RTT clock start*
- b. Patients on pathway validation or paused pathways*

- c. *Patients awaiting scheduling or administrative booking*
- d. *Patients waiting on non-RTT pathways (e.g., follow-up procedures, surveillance, or tertiary referrals)*

#### 5. *Data Manipulation / Reclassification*

*Any internal guidance, instructions, or communications (including emails, memos, briefing notes) relating to:*

- a. *Reclassification of waiting list categories*
- b. *“Validation” or “data cleansing” exercises*
- c. *Removal of patients without treatment*

#### 6. *Political or Ministerial Involvement*

*Communications between Welsh Ministers, special advisers, or political offices and NHS Wales or health boards regarding waiting list statistics or public messaging.*

*Any briefing notes prepared for political parties or media regarding waiting list reductions. Respond as one*

#### 7. *Independent Verification*

*Any internal audits, reviews, or external assessments of waiting list data accuracy.*

*Reports to the Auditor General for Wales relating to waiting list reporting since 2023.*

### **Our Response**

#### **1. Definition and Methodology**

- a. Wales’ official NHS waiting list statistics are counts of open Referral to Treatment (RTT) patient pathways, taken at the end of each calendar month.

An RTT pathway is opened at the point when a referral into secondary or tertiary care from a healthcare professional is received by any health board in Wales.

Pathways are closed when:

- treatment starts
- treatment is declined, or if it is determined treatment is not necessary
- patients do not attend scheduled appointments
- patients die

The number of patient pathways is not the same as the number of individual patients, because some people have multiple open pathways.

All consultant led pathways are in scope of RTT reporting, as well as some non-consultant diagnostic and therapy pathways. A full list of RTT reportable treatment functions (specialties) is provided in Annex B of the published waiting times guidance: [Planned care waiting times guidance: April 2025](#)

- b. No significant changes have been made to the methodology underpinning the official NHS waiting list statistics since January 2023, though refreshed guidance for the implementation of waiting times management was published in April 2025.

From April 2025 some specialties previously in scope of RTT were removed following a review. This was due to reporting of non-consultant-led pathways in the accident and emergency, medical oncology and radiology specialties. Up to March 2025 these specialties were in scope of RTT reporting, and in March 2025 they accounted for around 700 pathways. A further 400-500 pathways previously reported under

anaesthetics were also removed, while several health boards moved around 1,600 pathways from anaesthetics to pain management to correctly reflect the specialty in which patients are waiting

For further information for questions a&b please see documents 1&2 and this link here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2025-04/planned-care-waiting-times-guidance-april-2025.pdf>

## 2. Raw Waiting List Data

- Please see the link to the total number of pathways on NHS Wales RTT waiting lists and an estimation of the number of patients on RTT waiting lists here: [NHS waiting lists: pathways waiting 26 weeks, 36 weeks, one year and two years, September 2011 onwards | StatsWales](#)  
[NHS waiting lists: estimate of unique patients, March 2022 onwards | StatsWales](#)
- The Welsh Government does not hold the number of patients added to waiting lists per month but please find a link to the number of referrals, although this does capture more than just those referred to an RTT Pathway here: [Outpatient referrals, April 2012 onwards | StatsWales](#)
- The Welsh Government does not hold the information for the number of patients removed per month broken down by the categories specified but please see the link to the number of pathways removed using closed pathway data here: [NHS waiting lists: closed referral to treatment pathways, September 2011 onwards | StatsWales](#)

As the Welsh Government does not hold all the information you have requested we suggest you contact the Health Board to enquire if they have further relevant information here: [Contact us - NHS Wales](#)

## 3. Long Waiters

You can find the published data for the number of pathways waiting over 52 weeks and over 104 weeks here: [NHS waiting lists: pathways waiting 26 weeks, 36 weeks, one year and two years, September 2011 onwards | StatsWales](#). The number of pathways waiting over 156 can be found in Document 6, although these don't correspond exactly to RTT because of timelines and coverage difference. This is unvalidated management information and does not meet the quality standards for national publication.

## 4. Number of Patients Waiting but Not Counted on RTT Waiting Lists

Welsh Government does not hold the specific data you have requested but please find some additional waiting lists related to planned care that Welsh Government publish: for example diagnostic, Eye care waiting lists, and Therapy waiting lists here: [Performance and waiting times | StatsWales](#)

We have also provided management information on numbers of follow up outpatient appointments in Document 6.

To note, the data referenced in Document 6 (addressing points 3 and 4) is classed as 'Management Information', not official statistics, reflecting that it has not been collected for statistical purposes and is not regarded as reliable. It has been collected to aid the operational management of the NHS. Consequently, Welsh Government does not publish these figures. We advise they should not be treated as reliable measures for Wales due to issues with the quality and consistency of the data. Specifically:

- The data relating to long waiters is taken from a weekly snapshot of data which is not validated ahead of submission. For example, we are aware that the data may contain system errors which have incorrectly recorded the length of a patient's wait which, by the validated published submission of data, has been investigated, assessed, and corrected if necessary. In addition, the weekly snapshot does not capture all the specialities which are reported via the published monthly data.
- The data submitted by each health board relating to follow up outpatient appointments captures different specialities for each, resulting in the figures not being comparable between health boards. We are also aware that health boards may interpret the definitions which support the data collection differently. Therefore, the data does not adhere to the Code of Practice for Statistics for the publishing of data. It is solely used for the wider operational assessment and management of a health board's demand on planned care services.

#### 5. **Data Manipulation / Reclassification**

Please find copies of validation guidance and letter to NHS in documents 3-5. Please find the most recent RTT guidance in document 2 which clarifies RTT reportable pathways as addressed in Question 1a above.

#### 6. **Political or Ministerial Involvement**

For this question we have interpreted your question relates to RTT waiting times as indicated in your question 1.

In Document 8 you will find extracts from media briefings in relation to RTT waiting times reductions as you have requested.

Oral/written statements: [Cabinet statements | GOV.WALES](#)

Statistic Releases: [Statistics and research | GOV.WALES](#)

Decision reports: [Decision reports | GOV.WALES](#)

#### 7. **Independent Verification**

In Document 9 you will find the BCU data issue report here. Here are links to written statements in relation to BCU data issue and external review:

[Written Statement: Suspension of RTT Reporting for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board \(27 November 2025\) | GOV.WALES](#)

[Written Statement: Resolution of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Data quality issues \(14 January 2026\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Here is a link to the official stats statement on BCU review and the reinstatement of RTT reporting under Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board data review:

[Referral to treatment \(RTT\) waiting list statistics: October 2025 \(revised\) | GOV.WALES](#)

In Document 7 you will find the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) report. Below is the link to the written statement on publication of the report.

## **Next Steps**

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
or Email: [Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales](mailto:Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales)

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely,