

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland

## Waiting Time Statistics:

### Outpatient Waiting Times

### Quarter Ending March 2018



Department of  
**Health**  
An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinnystrie O Poustie  
[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

# Reader Information

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**Purpose:** This statistical release presents information on waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts against the 2017/18 Ministerial waiting time target, which states that:

*“By March 2018, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment; with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.”*

This statistical release details information on the number of patients waiting, and length of time waiting, for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in HSC Trusts at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. It also includes activity for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during the quarter ending March 2018. Data are presented by HSC Trust, specialty and time band. Information on Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) waiting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

**Statistical Quality:** The ‘*Outpatient Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*’ booklet details the technical guidance and definitions used, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-march-2018>

**Internet:** <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times>

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**Target audience:** Department of Health (DoH), Chief Executives of the HSC Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, health care professionals, Health & Social Care stakeholders, academics, the media and the general public.

**Price:** Free

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**By March 2018, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, and no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks.**

## Total number of patients waiting at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

There were  
**269,834 patients**  
waiting for a first outpatient  
appointment in Northern  
Ireland



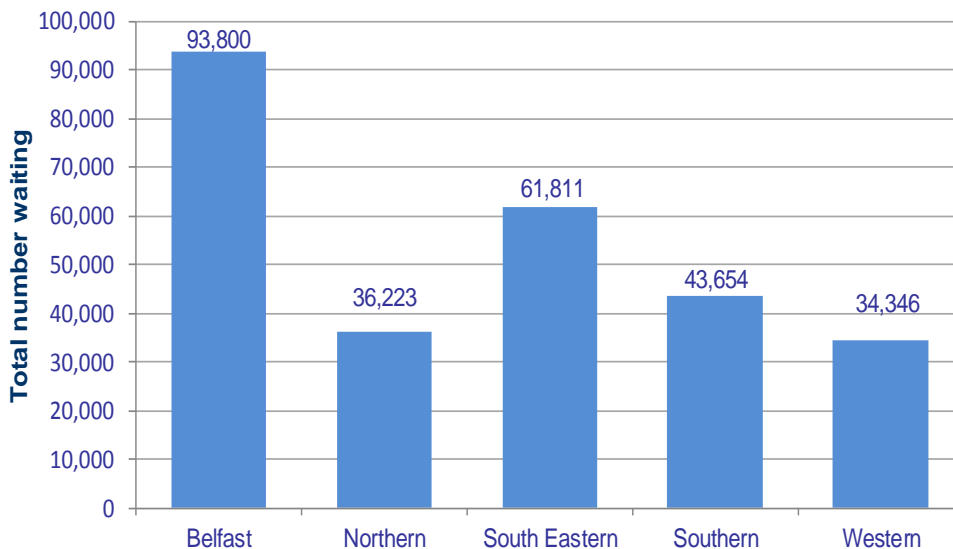
A **decrease of 0.6%** on  
the previous quarter



An **increase of 6.6%** on  
the same quarter last year

Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, a total of 269,834 patients were waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, 0.6% (1,719) less than at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 (271,553) and 6.6% (16,741) more than at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 (253,093) (Table 1).



Source: CH3 Return

A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. As patients are reported against the HSC Trust responsible for the service to which they have been referred, users should be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 9).

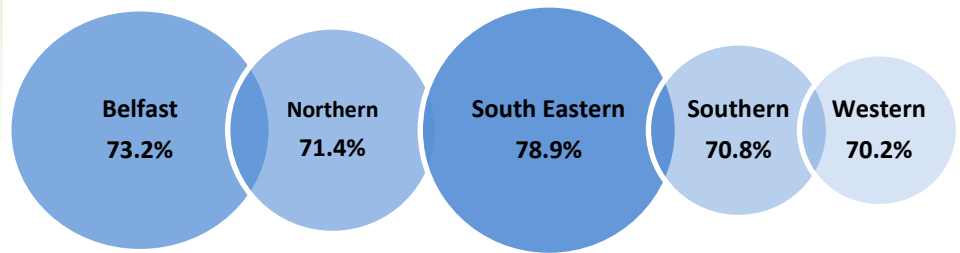
Over one third (34.8%) of those waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 22.9% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 16.2% in the Southern HSC Trust, 13.4% in the Northern HSC Trust and 12.7% in the Western HSC Trust (Table 2a).

Three fifths (60.7%, 163,770) of the 269,834 patients were waiting for a first outpatient appointment in one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) (35,405); Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery (30,310); General Surgery (26,600); Ophthalmology (23,506); Neurology (17,159); Gynaecology (15,886) and Dermatology (14,904) (Table 3a).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**73.5%**  
of patients  
were waiting longer  
than 9 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

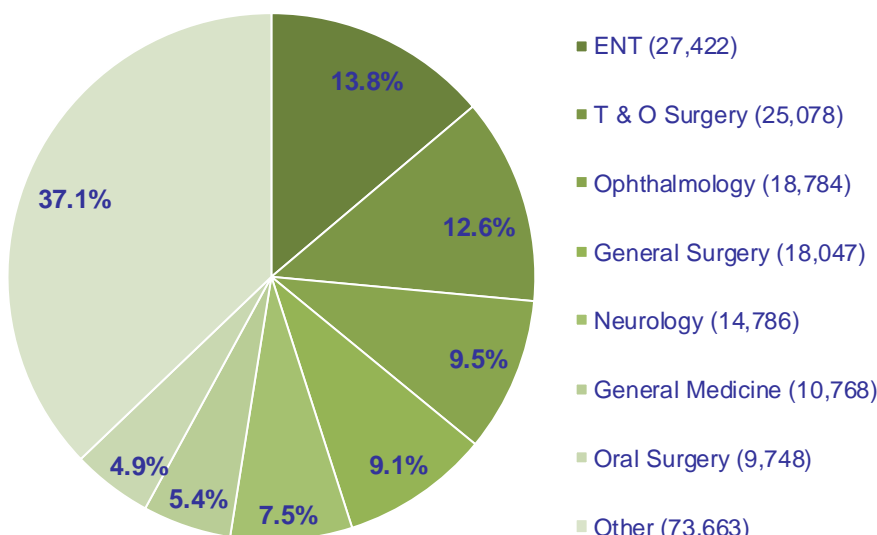
Source: CH3 Return

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 50% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment.

Almost three quarters (73.5%, 198,296) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, compared with 76.2% (206,983) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 and 69.6% (176,276) at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that some outpatient services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

### Patients waiting more than 9 weeks by specialty



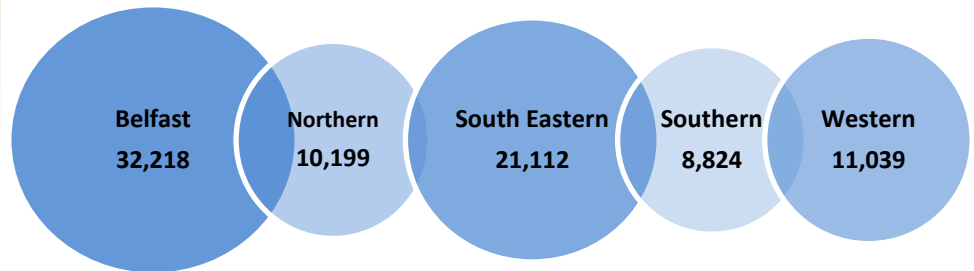
Source: CH3 Return

Just under two-thirds (62.9%, 124,633) of the 198,296 patients waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 were in one of the following specialties: Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ophthalmology; General Surgery; Neurology; General Medicine and Oral Surgery (Table 3a).

## Patients waiting more than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**83,392**  
patients  
were waiting longer  
than 52 weeks



### Number waiting over 52 weeks

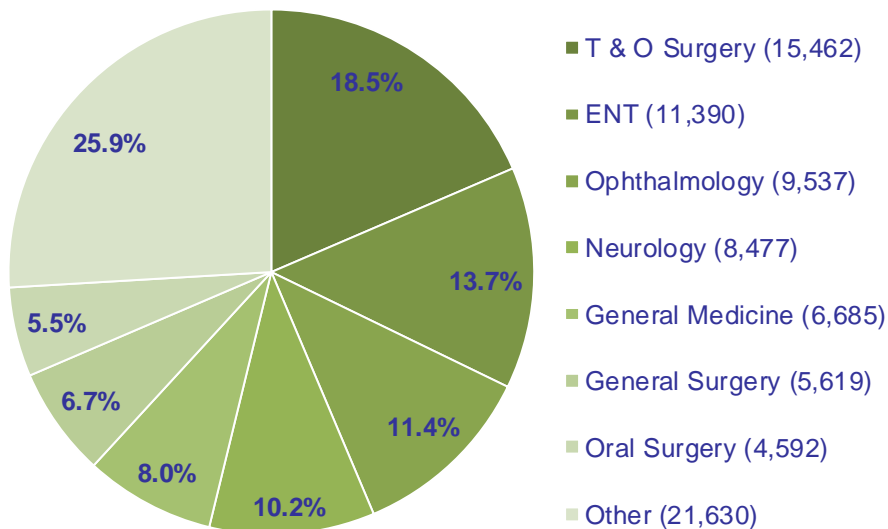
Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 30.9% (83,392) of patients were waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, compared with 29.7% (80,651) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017, and 21.0% (53,113) at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, the 52 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that some outpatient services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

Over a third (34.3%, 32,218) of patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 34.2% (21,112) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 32.1% (11,039) in the Western HSC Trust, 28.2% (10,199) in the Northern HSC Trust and 20.2% (8,824) in the Southern HSC Trust (Table 2a).

### Patients waiting more than 52 weeks by specialty



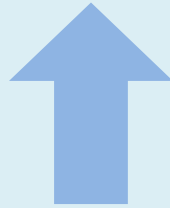
A total of 74.1% (61,762) of the 83,392 patients waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in one the following specialties: Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); Ophthalmology; Neurology; General Medicine; General Surgery and Oral Surgery (Table 3a).

Source: CH3 Return

## Completed waits for a first outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during quarter ending March 2018

There were  
**122,125**  
first outpatient  
attendances

commissioned by the Health  
Service



An **increase** of **3.0%** on  
the previous quarter

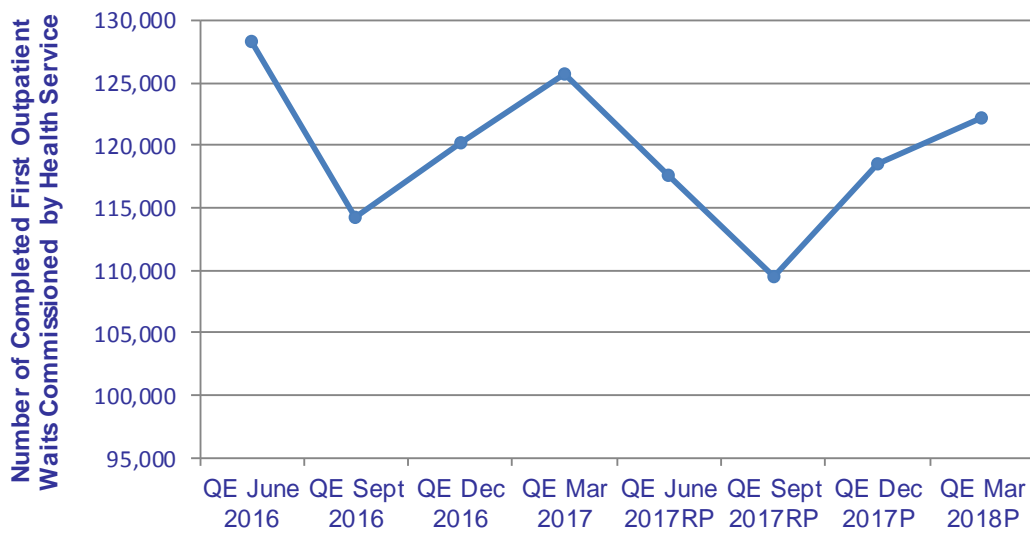


A **decrease** of **2.9%** on  
the same quarter last year

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

There were 119,798 attendances for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending March 2018. This was 1.8% (2,083) more than during the quarter ending December 2017 (117,715), and 3.4% (4,190) less than during the quarter ending March 2017 (123,988) (Table 4).

During the quarter ending March 2018, 2,327 Health Service patients attended a first outpatient appointment within the Independent Sector. This was more than double the number who attended during the quarter ending December 2017 (877), and 34.9% (602) more than the number who attended in the same quarter last year (1,725) (Table 4).



Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns  
PData is provisional

When the number of attendances commissioned by the Health Service, within the Independent Sector, during the quarter ending March 2018 (2,327) is combined with that for outpatients attending a first outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals during the same period (119,798), provisional

figures indicate that (122,125) outpatients attended a first appointment in Northern Ireland commissioned by the Health Service (Table 4). This is an increase of 3.0% (3,533) on the number seen during the quarter ending December 2017 (118,592), and 2.9% (3,588) less than during the quarter ending March 2017 (125,713).

## Appendix 1: Tables

**Table 1: Quarterly outpatient waiting lists – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>**

First Consultant-Led Outpatient Appointment	Current Quarter (31st Mar 2018)	Previous Quarter (31st Dec 2017)	Same Quarter Last Year (31st Mar 2017)
Total Patients Waiting	269,834	271,553	253,093
Number waiting over 9 weeks	198,296	206,983	176,276
<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	73.5%	76.2%	69.6%
Number waiting over 52 weeks	83,392	80,651	53,113

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 2a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
Belfast	18,753	6,395	4,559	2,450	3,371	26,054	32,218	93,800
Northern	7,882	2,475	1,857	1,087	1,432	11,291	10,199	36,223
South Eastern	9,833	3,238	2,589	1,606	2,478	20,955	21,112	61,811
Southern	9,506	3,238	2,567	1,420	2,050	16,049	8,824	43,654
Western	7,973	2,245	1,875	985	1,418	8,811	11,039	34,346
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,947</b>	<b>17,591</b>	<b>13,447</b>	<b>7,548</b>	<b>10,749</b>	<b>83,160</b>	<b>83,392</b>	<b>269,834</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 2b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
Belfast	20.0%	6.8%	4.9%	2.6%	3.6%	27.8%	34.3%	
Northern	21.8%	6.8%	5.1%	3.0%	4.0%	31.2%	28.2%	
South Eastern	15.9%	5.2%	4.2%	2.6%	4.0%	33.9%	34.2%	
Southern	21.8%	7.4%	5.9%	3.3%	4.7%	36.8%	20.2%	
Western	23.2%	6.5%	5.5%	2.9%	4.1%	25.7%	32.1%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14



**Table 3a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
ENT	5,849	2,134	1,719	1,017	1,471	11,825	11,390	<b>35,405</b>
T & O Surgery	3,929	1,303	976	578	851	7,211	15,462	<b>30,310</b>
General Surgery	6,628	1,925	1,576	843	1,136	8,873	5,619	<b>26,600</b>
Ophthalmology	3,440	1,282	961	490	874	6,922	9,537	<b>23,506</b>
Neurology	1,702	671	527	325	455	5,002	8,477	<b>17,159</b>
Gynaecology	5,017	1,662	915	416	669	4,246	2,961	<b>15,886</b>
Dermatology	3,959	1,218	984	500	732	5,713	1,798	<b>14,904</b>
General Medicine	2,147	579	451	275	351	3,006	6,685	<b>13,494</b>
Paediatrics	3,468	1,344	1,061	553	637	3,412	1,577	<b>12,052</b>
Rheumatology	1,566	550	456	261	405	3,808	4,515	<b>11,561</b>
Oral Surgery	1,110	440	414	283	439	4,020	4,592	<b>11,298</b>
Gastroenterology	1,404	516	466	310	354	3,296	2,907	<b>9,253</b>
Thoracic Medicine	1,499	610	504	301	400	3,072	1,750	<b>8,136</b>
Cardiology	3,471	820	621	301	393	1,934	232	<b>7,772</b>
Pain Management	1,126	461	367	255	352	3,569	1,570	<b>7,700</b>
Urology	1,888	438	333	214	306	2,176	1,874	<b>7,229</b>
Plastic Surgery	776	312	198	137	215	1,828	1,562	<b>5,028</b>
Geriatric Medicine	894	239	134	61	97	544	267	<b>2,236</b>
Restorative Dentistry	291	135	106	61	103	812	441	<b>1,949</b>
Other	3,783	952	678	367	509	1,891	176	<b>8,356</b>
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>53,947</b>	<b>17,591</b>	<b>13,447</b>	<b>7,548</b>	<b>10,749</b>	<b>83,160</b>	<b>83,392</b>	<b>269,834</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 3b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and speciality – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52
T & O Surgery	16.5%	6.0%	4.9%	2.9%	4.2%	33.4%	32.2%
ENT	13.0%	4.3%	3.2%	1.9%	2.8%	23.8%	51.0%
General Surgery	24.9%	7.2%	5.9%	3.2%	4.3%	33.4%	21.1%
Ophthalmology	14.6%	5.5%	4.1%	2.1%	3.7%	29.4%	40.6%
Gynaecology	9.9%	3.9%	3.1%	1.9%	2.7%	29.2%	49.4%
Neurology	31.6%	10.5%	5.8%	2.6%	4.2%	26.7%	18.6%
General Medicine	26.6%	8.2%	6.6%	3.4%	4.9%	38.3%	12.1%
Dermatology	15.9%	4.3%	3.3%	2.0%	2.6%	22.3%	49.5%
Urology	28.8%	11.2%	8.8%	4.6%	5.3%	28.3%	13.1%
Paediatrics	13.5%	4.8%	3.9%	2.3%	3.5%	32.9%	39.1%
Rheumatology	9.8%	3.9%	3.7%	2.5%	3.9%	35.6%	40.6%
Gastroenterology	15.2%	5.6%	5.0%	3.4%	3.8%	35.6%	31.4%
Oral Surgery	18.4%	7.5%	6.2%	3.7%	4.9%	37.8%	21.5%
Cardiology	44.7%	10.6%	8.0%	3.9%	5.1%	24.9%	3.0%
Pain Management	14.6%	6.0%	4.8%	3.3%	4.6%	46.4%	20.4%
Thoracic Medicine	26.1%	6.1%	4.6%	3.0%	4.2%	30.1%	25.9%
Plastic Surgery	15.4%	6.2%	3.9%	2.7%	4.3%	36.4%	31.1%
Geriatric Medicine	40.0%	10.7%	6.0%	2.7%	4.3%	24.3%	11.9%
Restorative Dentistry	14.9%	6.9%	5.4%	3.1%	5.3%	41.7%	22.6%
Other	45.3%	11.4%	8.1%	4.4%	6.1%	22.6%	2.1%
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–10 & 13-14

**Table 4: Number of completed waits for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service: QE March 2016 - QE March 2018<sup>2</sup>**

Quarter Ending	Number of Completed First Outpatient Waits		
	Within Health Service Hospitals	Independent Sector*	Total Commissioned by Health Service
QE Mar 2016	124,713	23,763	148,476
QE June 2016	127,223	1,133	128,356
QE Sept 2016	113,682	526	114,208
QE Dec 2016	119,587	673	120,260
QE Mar 2017	123,988	1,725	125,713
QE June 2017 <sup>RP</sup>	117,083	567	117,650
QE Sept 2017 <sup>RP</sup>	108,309	1,107	109,416
QE Dec 2017 <sup>P</sup>	117,715	877	118,592
QE Mar 2018 <sup>P</sup>	119,798	2,327	122,125

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

<sup>P</sup> Data are currently provisional

<sup>R</sup> Data has been revised

\* Not National Statistics

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4 & 11–12

## Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the DoH CH3, QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns. These returns collect information from Health and Social Care Trusts on a quarterly basis.
2. The '*Outpatient Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*' booklet details the technical guidance and definitions used, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from:  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-march-2018>.
3. All of the data contained in the tables are available on a quarterly basis and can be supplied by individual specialty or Provider HSC Trust if this level of detail is required. In addition, quarterly data relating to waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment have been published in spreadsheet format (CSV), split by HSC Trust, Specialty and Programme of Care, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times-march-2018>.
4. Information includes patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for treatment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
5. Outpatient waiters are defined as patients still waiting for their first outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, including those who have cancelled or missed a previous appointment. An outpatient appointment is to enable a patient to see a consultant, a member of their team or locum for such a member, in respect of one referral. Waiting time for a first outpatient appointment begins on the date the HSC Trust receives a referral for a first outpatient appointment and ends on the date a patient attends a first outpatient appointment. Patients who cannot attend (CNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date they informed the HSC Trust they could not attend, while patients who do not attend (DNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date of their DNA.
6. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, Oral Surgery services undertaken by consultants contracted to the South Eastern HSC Trust were centralised, meaning that records for patients waiting for this service in both the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts are now held and managed in the South Eastern HSC Trust. A breakdown of the waiting times for these patients broken down by HSC Trust has been provided in the spreadsheet located at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times-march-2018>.

7. Each outpatient waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for outpatient assessment. For example, a patient waiting exactly 6 weeks would be included in the 0-6 week time band and a patient waiting 6 weeks and 1 day would be included in the >6-9 (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2018, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.
8. Some people will be waiting on more than one waiting list or be on the waiting list for more than one outpatient appointment/admission/diagnostic test at the same time due to having more than one condition.
9. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2018, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.
10. A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust or at each of the five HSC Trusts, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. In such circumstances, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. In some cases a consultant from one HSC Trust may provide a 'visiting' service at another HSC Trust, and so the patient may not be reported at the HSC Trust at which they attend. Users should therefore be cautious in how they use these data. For example, they should not be used to calculate the total number of patients waiting per head of the population residing within each Trust area, as HSC Trusts that provide services for the whole of Northern Ireland will have a higher number of patients waiting per head of the population than those that provide more localised services. Neither should the actual number of patients waiting longer than the recommended waiting time be used as indicator of poor performance within an individual HSC Trust. Users who require an indication of the latter are advised to refer to the commentary section of the publication which provides an indication of the percentage of total waiters that have been waiting over the maximum recommended waiting times, within each HSC Trust.
11. The total number of completed outpatient waits each quarter, within HSC hospitals, is derived as the total number of attendances at a first outpatient appointment from the Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR).

12. The number of patients who received an outpatient assessment, commissioned by the Health Service, in the Independent Sector is collected on the IS1 Part 1 Return. These figures are provided by the HSC Board. They are published for each transferring Health and Social Care Trust (Trust responsible for the patient's waiting time). They are not National Statistics and they have not been validated by the Department; however, they have been included to provide users with a comprehensive view of completed outpatient waits during each quarter.
  
13. HIB surveyed data providers during 2011/12 to ascertain the cost of producing, validating and submitting the information required for this publication. This relates to the time taken to generate, validate and submit data, over and above what is already required by their organisation for internal performance management purposes. The cost to data providers of compliance within HIB's requirements for this publication, based on HSC salary costs, was £3,110.
  
14. Figures relating to outpatient waiting times for the quarter ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018 will be released on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

**Further information on Outpatient Waiting Times in Northern Ireland is available from:**

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<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/statisticalreports>