

Quality Assurance of Administrative Data

Administrative data from the Land & Property Services' rating system and aggregated data received from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is used in the Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) & Disabled Persons Allowance (DPA) Annual Publication

Background to Data

The Lone Pensioner Allowance and Disabled Persons Allowance Annual Publication measures a wide range of data in relation to both of these application based rate reliefs, including Number of Awards, Local District Council Breakdowns and Net totals of relief awarded. The publication includes the data from the 2010/11 Rating year through to the current Rating year to provide context on the current year's figures.

'The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, Section 30A – rate relief in respect of dwellings'

Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) is an application based rate relief, which provides a rates discount to people who pay rates on their home. To be eligible, a ratepayer must be over 70 years old, live alone and have rates to pay. The benefit is not means tested and recipients can receive a reduction of 20% of their rates bill.

'The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, Section 31A – rate rebates for hereditaments with special facilities for persons with a disability'

Disabled Persons Allowance (DPA) is an application based rate relief, which provides a rates discount to people who pay rates on their home. To be eligible, a ratepayer must occupy a property which has been suitably adapted, or has additional features to accommodate a disabled person's needs. The benefit is not means tested and recipients can receive a reduction of 25% of their rates bill.

This document will cover the data held and inputted by LPS staff into the LPS rating system - Assessment Billing Benefit and Collecting Update System (ABBACUS) in relation to LPA & DPA applications and awards as well as the aggregated information provided by NIHE.

All LPA and DPA applications contain some personal data which is uploaded to the ABBACUS system by LPS staff on a regular basis. As ABBACUS is a live operational system, all statistical analysis is based on a snapshot, at a 'point-in-time'. For the LPA & DPA publication, the date used is as at 31st March of the given Rating Year.

QA Level – A1: Basic Assurance

Risk Rationale

The production and publication of LPA & DPA statistics can be considered as **low profile**, in that there is low user/media interest in the results that are published, as it is a politically neutral subject. Errors in the construction and publication of the statistics would have no impact on the economy.

The data quality concern attached to the LPA & DPA Publications is considered a **low quality** concern, given that the raw data is collected by trained LPS staff and governed by processes and procedures in terms of the oversight and QA of the data entry into ABBACUS, thus allowing for errors to be identified and corrected.

The data for the publication is published on the Department of Finance website on an annual basis. Further detail is provided in each of the areas below to justify this assessment.

When taking into consideration the low public profile of the LPA DPA statistics, its potential impact and the level of quality concern from the provider, the level of assurance attached to the use of the ABBACUS data in the production of the LPA DPA Publication has been assessed as **A1: Basic Assurance**. As such, this Administrative data is deemed as being of low risk, and an enhanced level of quality assurance is not required.

Practice Area 1: Operational Context and Admin Data Collection

Land & Property Services (LPS) collect, process and manage land and property information, which underpins the collection of rates, in support of the Executive's commitment to economic and social development in Northern Ireland.

In relation to LPA, LPS is responsible for processing applications from ratepayers who own their own home, whilst the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is responsible for processing applications from ratepayers who rent their homes. Ratepayers who rent their homes can fall within the Private Rented Sector, NIHE, or Housing Association.

In relation to DPA, LPS is responsible for processing all applications from ratepayers.

Applications for LPA and DPA are received by the Application Based Rate Relief team (ABRR) within LPS or NIHE. There is no specific timeframe as to when applications for LPA or DPA need to be submitted by a ratepayer, so these are processed as they are received. A range of measures are used by the teams for sorting, processing, checking and inputting onto the ABBACUS system. All processes and procedures in relation to the above are governed by LPS Quality Assurance procedures which are regularly reviewed by senior management.

NIHE manage the LPA application process for the Private Rented sector. Applications are made directly to NIHE who process and award based on the same criteria as LPA for home owners.

The application forms for LPA & DPA can be found on the websites:
[NI Direct - LPA Website](#) and;
[NI Direct - DPA Website](#)

Practice Area 2: Communication with Data Supplier Partners

Data is held on the ABBACUS system managed by Equiniti. LPS Statistics branch has access to this data via the use of a data Diver programme which allows for the extraction of raw data based on parameters defined by the user. Whilst Equinity is responsible for the storage of the data, responsibility for the data input lies with LPS.

Statisticians are based within the same building and work alongside LPS Revenues and Benefits colleagues building a sound knowledge and understanding of the ABBACUS data

Specifications of data extracts and highlighting of errors and issues are usually communicated via e-mail, whereas discussions to aid understanding or ad-hoc questions regarding data may be discussed face-to-face or through online video meetings.

The ABRR team manager is part of the Quality Assurance team for the publication. Therefore, when the processing of data in relation to the production of the LPA/DPA publication is carried out by the responsible Statistician, any errors identified are fed back to the team manager so they can carry out checks and make corrections where appropriate.

Practice Area 3: QA Principles, Standards and Checks by Data Suppliers

The information published in the LPA & DPA Publications is based on the data collected and stored by LPS. LPS follows strict guidance on the processes and procedures used to collect, review and input data onto the ABBACUS system. There is a multi-tiered approach to the validation of the data and the quality assessment of the data which is regularly reviewed by the Senior Management Team within LPS.

There are several overarching LPS procedures manuals which govern how LPS staff manage their work. The most significant manual in terms of quality is the LPS Quality Assurance Procedures document, which contains detailed descriptions and procedure maps of how the Quality Assessments are carried out.

Quality Assurance checks on data inputted to ABBACUS are carried out using a 3 tier system; a Managerial check of 10% of all work completed, a Supervisory check of 5% of all Managerial checks, and a Compliance check of 5% of all Managerial checks. All Managers and Supervisors are provided with high quality training on Quality Assurance checks. Records of the Quality Assurance checks are kept on HPRM and are audited by departmental auditors annually.

LPS is audited by Departmental Auditors on an annual basis.

The highly robust level of quality assurance checks and procedures provides a high degree of assurance to LPS Statistics Branch that the data used for the LPA/DPA Publication is accurate and suitable to be used to publish official statistics.

As LPS has overall responsibility for the collection of rates within NI, the NIHE is required to use the same level of checks and quality assurance as LPS.

The details of any rate reliefs are provided on the annual rates bill sent to customers at the beginning of the financial year. Therefore LPA and DPA applicants have the ability to check the accuracy of their rate relief and contact LPS to highlight any issues with their request for LPA and DPA. In this regard, owner occupiers serve as good independent quality assurers of the data.

Practice Area 4: Producers' QA Investigations and Documentation

The production of the LPA/DPA annual publication is documented in HRPM Document FI1/20/594610. The working documents are stored in a folder on the secure LPS Statistics Branch drive and related communication is stored in HPRM container FI1-20-17324.

The publication includes metadata describing the strengths and limitations of the data used. This includes details on eligibility, details of the 'point-in-time' system used by LPS, and further details on what type of data is included in the statistics.

LPS Statistics Branch runs a monthly Management Information report on LPA and DPA for the ABRR team. This provides for ongoing assessment of the data throughout the year, allowing regular opportunities to QA the data before the data are extracted for the annual publication.

Further quality assurance takes place on a regular basis as a by-product of analysing the dataset to answer operational queries, ad-hoc queries, and assembly questions.

The lead statistician takes responsibility for these ongoing QA checks and the Head of Branch reviews the draft publication, looking for anomalies in the trends and significant changes in terms of percentages or absolute numbers. The latest figures are considered in the operational context which is understood from input from the ABRR team manager who is part of the QA team for the publication.

LPS statisticians, along with all LPS staff, are trained regularly in information assurance and adhere to the data protection principles to ensure that all data is protected appropriately and only non-disclosive data is released or published.