



## **BACKGROUND QUALITY REPORT: Complaints and Compliments Received by Health & Social Care (HSC) Trusts**

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| <b>Introduction</b>             | <p>Principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics states that statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.</p> <p>The full text of the Code is available at:<br/><a href="http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-ofpractice/index.html">http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-ofpractice/index.html</a></p> <p>Each Official and National Statistics output produced by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) within the Department of Health (DoH) contains key quality information in respect of the specific content of the statistical output. This information is provided in the definitions, notes to tables or notes to editors.</p> |
| <b>Publication</b>              | Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland   |
| <b>Department responsible</b>   | Department of Health  |
| <b>Release Date</b>             | Annual  |
| <b>Web Link to Publications</b> | <a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-statistics">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-statistics</a>   |
| <b>Background</b>               | <p>This publication monitors and reports the number of HSC Trust complaint issues received, by the programme of care, category, subject and specialty of the complaint issue, as well as demographic information and the time taken to provide a substantive response to complaints received. It also includes information on compliments received by HSC Trusts regarding the services they provide.</p> <p>The information on complaints is sourced from the HSC Trusts including the NI Ambulance Service (NIAS), with data being provided at patient level on complaint issues received during the financial year. Aggregate information is also received from the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) on family practitioner service (FPS) complaints. The information on</p>  |

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|  | <p>compliments is also sourced from the HSC Trusts, including the NIAS, and takes the form of an aggregated return.</p> <p>Data providers are supplied with technical guidance outlining the methodologies to be used in the collection, reporting and validation of complaints and compliments, which can be accessed at the links below:</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-complaints-form-ch8">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-complaints-form-ch8</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-compliments-form-cp1">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-compliments-form-cp1</a></p> |
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## Dimensions of Quality

| Dimension        | Assessment  |
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| <b>Relevance</b> | <p><b>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</b></p> <p>The information presented is in the public interest of having an open and transparent complaints process and along with the compliments information is available to inform patient choice.</p> <p>The feedback in the form of the complaints and compliments collected is a useful means of identifying issues and areas in need of change within the Northern Ireland health service and equally areas where things are going well.</p> <p>The main customers of complaints and compliments statistics are policy officials in the Department of Health's Safety, Quality and Standards Directorate.</p> <p>Other potential users include health care professionals, academics, Health &amp; Social Care stakeholders, media and the general public.</p> |

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| <b>Accuracy and Reliability</b> | <p><b>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</b></p> <p>All six HSC Trusts are obligated to complete the complaints information return and therefore provides a complete picture for recorded formal complaints.</p> <p>The compliments information return was introduced in December 2017 and has taken some time to embed, with compliments data being published for the first time in the 2018/19 report. Information for two of the six Trusts had to be estimated as they were only able to provide a partial return for the year because their monitoring systems had not been fully implemented. Comprehensive and consistent information on compliments was published in 2019/20, and subsequent years.</p> |
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The data providers are provided with detailed data definitions and regional guidance to assist in the data collection process to ensure information is recorded meaningfully and consistently, the forms for returns and guidance documents can be accessed at the links below:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-complaints-form-ch8>

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-compliments-form-cp1>

This guidance indicates that information should be returned quarterly by Trusts in respect of services for which they have responsibility.

HIB will then liaise with each HSC Trust regarding any queries which result from validation of the data.

HIB validates complaints and compliments information by:

- Performing trend analysis on previous quarter's/year's data; and,
- Identifying outlying data on the number of complaints/compliments.
- Identification of complaints outside the reference period.

Any irregularities identified are queried with the relevant HSC Trust or SPPG for response. The HSC Trust or SPPG are asked to provide a response to the query and confirm if the data is correct. If not correct, the HSC Trust will indicate the correct information and an explanation for the error, then update their system and submit an amended information return to HIB.

When necessary there is also the opportunity for HIB staff to meet Trust complaints managers through the Complaints Forum and the Compliments Monitoring Group to discuss issues regarding collection, definitions, data quality or any other relevant matters.

In addition to this, HSC Trusts have their own internal quality assurance checks. Performance and Information Teams carry out validation checks to ensure consistency in the data produced by HIB, HSC Trusts and SPPG. Any data quality issues are dealt with reactively and resolved as they arise. HSC Trusts have dedicated data quality resources to proactively manage data quality challenges across the organisations.

There is the potential for administrative errors as some fields in the complaints systems are free text; although, these should be picked up through routine data quality checks within HSC Trusts and the SPPG.

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| <p><b>Timeliness and Punctuality</b></p> | <p><b>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</b></p> <p>Patient complaint information is submitted for quarter 1,2 and 3 of the financial year, by HSC Trusts along with an annual return submitted during May/June following the end of the year in March to enable any amendments to be taken into account before data processing and validation commences.</p> <p>Four quarterly returns on compliments with information supplied at Trust level and quarterly aggregate information from the SPPG on FPS complaints are also used within the publication, these are combined to cover the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. HIB publish a ‘Submission Timetable’ quarterly to notify HSC Trust staff of the submission deadlines for each return. Delayed submissions are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues within HSC Trusts.</p> <p>The report ‘Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland’ is normally published within 4 months of the reference period to which the complaints and compliments data refer.</p> <p>As per the requirements of the UK Statistics Authority the month of publication is announced a year in advance and the day of publication one month in advance of publication (available on <a href="https://www.gov.uk/">https://www.gov.uk/</a>).</p> <p>Also on the Department of Health website the ‘Statistical Release Calendar’, provides twelve months advance notice of releases;<br/><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releases-calendar">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releases-calendar</a></p> <p>In the majority of cases, the target publication date is met. However, in the event of a change to a pre-announced release date, the publication calendar is amended as soon as possible.</p> |
| <p><b>Accessibility and Clarity</b></p>  | <p><b>Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</b></p> <p>The annual ‘Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland’ Official Statistics publication is available in pdf format. An infographic providing summary information is also available, both are published on the Department of Health website at the following link:<br/><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-statistics">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-statistics</a></p>   |

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|   | <p>Once published, a web-link to the annual publication is circulated to relevant colleagues across the HSC Trusts/SPPG and to those named on our circulation lists.</p> <p>The appendices in the report includes guidance on using the data and provides definitions on important terms and phrases. Also within the report there are a number of explanatory footnotes to provide clarity.</p>   |
| <p><b>Coherence and Comparability</b></p> | <p><b>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</b></p> <p>Complaints data from previous years is available in the tables to allow trend analysis, however, when interpreting the data, care should be taken as an increase in complaints does not necessarily indicate a reduction in healthcare quality. Other factors need to be considered i.e. the degree to which complaints processes are highlighted by HSC Trusts and FPS; the likelihood of potential complaints being resolved before they escalate to a formal complaint; and organisational changes that may affect complaints data.</p> <p>All data submitted by the HSC Trusts for this publication are collected in a comparable manner, however, not all Trusts offer the same services or serve equal catchment areas/populations therefore caution should be applied with comparisons across Trusts. For example, the South Eastern HSC Trust is the sole provider of Prison Healthcare in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Each HSC Trust reports annually on complaints, with the DoH presenting a regional picture in the 'Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland' publication. There are some variations in the data presented which may be expected from data being extracted at different time points from live systems that are updated and amended on a regular basis.</p> <p>Complaints data is routinely collected and published for other UK jurisdictions, however, caution should be applied when making comparisons. Comparability is limited by the variation in recording practices and due to the manner in which health and social care are integrated in Northern Ireland such that complaints regarding social care/work are included unlike data from Scotland and England.</p> <p>A standardised approach to reporting compliments was adopted by all HSC Trusts in December 2017 to ensure regional consistency and eventually enable broad comparisons to be made across HSC Trusts (see note below in Trade-offs between output quality components). Data on compliments was first published in the 2018/19 report.</p> |

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| <p><b>Trade-offs between Output Quality Components</b></p> | <p><b>Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</b></p> <p>Figures on compliments are reported at Northern Ireland level as the data quality is not of a sufficient standard across all HSC Trusts to meaningfully present at HSC Trust level.</p>  |
| <p><b>Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions</b></p>     | <p><b>The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</b></p> <p>Whilst it is acknowledged that the quantitative nature of the complaints and compliments data may be viewed to some extent as a simplistic measure of organisational performance, it does have it is uses in identifying broad problem areas and need for service improvement. To this end the ‘Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland’ statistical publication is used by DoH policy officials for corporate monitoring and to inform and monitor related policy. In addition, the information is used for Ministerial briefing and to respond to Private Office enquiries and parliamentary/ assembly questions.</p> <p>It is also used by researchers looking at HSC Trust performance and by service users and other members of the general public to hold HSC Trusts and government to account. The data in past reports have been used in newspaper articles as a matter of public interest.</p> <p>User feedback is invited in this publication. Readers are provided with contact details for the relevant statistician. Further details are placed on the statistics website:</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research/official-statistics-and-user-engagement">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-and-research/official-statistics-and-user-engagement</a></p> |
| <p><b>Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden</b></p>      | <p>Currently HIB do not have access to HSC Trust information systems therefore HSC Trust staff must provide HIB with the data requested. All of the information is submitted electronically. The CH8 collection for complaints requires HSC Trusts to provide data they already collect. It is extracted from existing administrative systems with minimal burden. It also means that HIB avoid the costs of implementing dedicated data collection exercises.</p> <p>Data undergo considerable validation prior to publication, which is a time consuming exercise for statistical staff.</p>   |
| <p><b>Confidentiality, Transparency and Security</b></p>   | <p><b>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</b></p> <p>The compliments information is collected at HSC Trust level and as such does not include personal data. Likewise the complaints information on FPS is aggregated for each type of practice (general practitioners, dental practitioners, pharmacists and optometrists) and therefore does not include personal data. These Excel returns are submitted by e-mail to the Department and held on a secure drive before being processed and validated.</p>   |

The complaints information return records patient level data on complaint issues received by Trusts during the year. Unnecessary personal identifiers are stripped from the data prior to it being emailed via a password protected Excel return to DoH, where it is then stored on a secure drive.

All statistics produced are aggregated to a non-disclosive level to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

HIB's 'Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality' can be found in the Statistics Charter at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/doh-statistics-charter>