

Northern Ireland Gambling Licencing and Industry Data – Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD)¹

Background

Professional Services Unit (PSU) of the Department for Communities produces the publication *Northern Ireland Gambling Licencing and Industry Data*. The publication is produced on an annual basis and provides information on the following:

- The number of gaming machines in operation and the number of gaming machine permits;
- The number of amusement arcade permits;
- The number of track betting licences;
- The number of bingo clubs, bookmaking offices and bookmakers' licences;
- The number of registered gambling businesses;
- The number of people employed in the gambling industry;
- The volume of gambling turnover; and
- The volume of betting and gaming duty.

The publication is available to the general public. It is produced in response to a request from Social Policy Unit (SPU) of DfC to publish statistics in relation to gambling. It is anticipated that the data will help support policy development and will be of interest to other key stakeholders, including elected representatives.

An official statistics bulletin produced in order to address this policy need was published for the first time on 20 December 2023. It is anticipated that this accompanying QAAD, and the Background Quality Report, will continue to be developed over time.

¹ Date document last reviewed: 18/12/2023

Applying the Data Quality Assurance Toolkit to Gambling Statistics in NI

The UK Statistics Authority introduced QAAD guidance to help statistics producers review their quality assurance arrangements for the administrative data used to produce official statistics. The toolkit comprises –

- Quality Management actions;
- Quality Assurance Matrix;
- Risk/Profile Matrix.

The following report aims to apply the requirements of the UK Statistics Authority's Quality Assurance toolkit to the administrative data used by the Department for Communities to produce gambling-related statistics for Northern Ireland. The aim is to provide reassurance and transparency regarding the quality of the data underpinning these statistics and to give users a better understanding of their reliability and accuracy.

The QAAD toolkit states that the critical judgement about the suitability of the administrative data for use in producing official statistics should be pragmatic and proportionate, made in the light of an evaluation of the likelihood of quality issues arising in the data that may affect the quality of the statistics, and of the nature of the public interest served by the statistics. The UK Statistics Authority recommend that the matrix below is used by producers of statistics to assess the risk profile of the statistics they produce that are derived from administrative sources. The resultant rating then determines the level of assurance required for each of the four stages in the Quality Assurance framework.

Risk of Data Quality Concerns

Level of Risk	Concern
Low risk	The data may have a low risk of data quality concerns in situations in which there is a clear agreement about what data will be provided, when, how, and by whom; when there is a good appreciation of the context in which the data are collected, and the producer accepts that the quality standards being applied meet the statistical needs.
Medium risk	The data may be regarded as having a medium risk of data quality concerns when high risk factors have been moderated through the use of safeguards for example, integrated financial audit and operational checks, and effective communication arrangements. It is also appropriate to consider the extent of the contribution of the administrative data to the official statistics, for example, in cases where the statistics are produced in combination with other data types, such as survey or census data.
High risk	The data may have a high risk of data quality issues when there are many different data collection bodies, intermediary data supplier bodies, and complex data collection processes with limited independent verification or oversight.

Public Interest Profile

Level of public interest profile	Data Quality Assurance
Low profile	Politically neutral subject; interest limited to niche user base, and limited media interest.
Medium profile	Wider user and media interest, with moderate economic and/or political sensitivity.
High profile	Economically important, reflected in market sensitivity; high political sensitivity, reflected by Select Committee hearings; substantial media coverage of policies and statistics; important public health issues; collection required by legislation.

Risk /Profile Matrix

Level of risk of quality concerns	Public interest profile Lower	Public interest profile Medium	Public interest profile Higher
Low	Statistics of lower quality concern and lower public interest [A1]	Statistics of low quality concern and medium public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of low quality concern and higher public interest [A1/A2]
Medium	Statistics of medium quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and medium public interest [A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and higher public interest [A2/A3]
High	Statistics of higher quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2/A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and medium public interest [A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and higher public interest [A3]

Note: A0 = No assurance; A1 = Basic assurance; A2 = Enhanced assurance; A3 = Comprehensive assurance

The associated risk/profile of the liquor licensing statistics produced by Professional Services Unit, is highlighted in the table below.

Risk Profile of Liquor Licensing Statistics when QAAD toolkit applied

Gambling licensing statistic	Data Quality concern	Public interest	Risk Profile rating
1. Amusement permit and gaming machine statistics	Low	Medium	A2
2. Gambling licence statistics	Medium	Medium	A2

The reasoning behind the risk profile rating associated with each of the gambling licencing statistics is as follows.

1. Amusement permit statistics

The data quality for amusement permit statistics is considered to be of low risk. There is currently no formal arrangement with the data producers detailing the data requirements. The data are sourced from an annual return from each of the eleven Local Government District Councils to the Department for Communities (DfC). Data relates to a calendar year. Each council provides information in relation to the number of amusement permits and the number of gaming machines for their council area. The source administrative information is taken from electronic databases updated by council staff and may be subject to minor input errors. As more data becomes available over time, comparisons with previous returns will become possible as a further means of validating the data. PSU will work with councils to advise on improvements to their systems and processes that will enhance the quality of the data.

In terms of public interest, the public good represented by the statistics is that they inform the public of the number of amusement arcades and gaming machines in Northern Ireland. Members of the NI Assembly (MLAs), representatives of the gambling industry, and representatives in the voluntary and health-care sector will all have an interest in the statistics. As this is a new publication, PSU will be keen to welcome feedback from stakeholders and users of the data. This information will inform future development of the publication as well as this QAAD.

In terms of media coverage, it is anticipated that there may be some interest in the number of gambling licences held by bookmaking offices. As a consequence of this, reference may also be made to the number of amusement permits and gaming machines.

In consideration of the above, it is deemed that amusement permits and gaming machine statistics are of **medium** public interest. The overall risk profile rating attributed to the amusement permit and gaming machine statistics is therefore **A2 – Enhanced assurance**.

2. Gambling licence statistics

The data quality of the statistics in relation to gambling licences is considered to be of medium risk. There is no formal arrangement with the data producers detailing the data requirements. The data are sourced from physical records maintained by each courthouse. Data relates to a calendar year. Each courthouse completes a manual count for each type of gambling licence and returns this information to DfC in an excel spreadsheet. This exercise was carried out for the first time in 2023. Because the source administrative information is keyed into an excel-based database by NICTS staff it may be subject to minor input errors. As more data becomes available over time, comparisons with previous returns will become possible as a further means of validating the data. PSU will work with NICTS to advise on improvements to their systems and processes that will enhance the quality of the data.

In terms of public interest, the public good represented by the statistics is that they inform the public of the number of gambling licences in Northern Ireland. Members of the NI Assembly (MLAs), representatives of the gambling industry, and representatives in the voluntary and health-care sector will all have an interest in the statistics. As this is a new publication, PSU will be keen to welcome feedback from stakeholders and users of the data. This feedback will inform future development of the publication as well as this QAAD.

In terms of media coverage, it is anticipated that there may be some interest in the number and types of gambling licences held.

In consideration of the above, it is deemed that gambling licence statistics are of **medium** public interest. The overall risk profile rating attributed to the gambling licence statistics is therefore **A2 – Enhanced assurance**.

Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) Quality Assurance Matrix

Operational Context and administrative data collection

Amusement arcade permits and gaming machines

Data is sourced from each of the eleven councils. Amusement arcades must hold a valid amusement arcade licence in order to operate. An applicant must apply to the appropriate council in Northern Ireland for an amusement arcade licence. Amusement arcade licences are granted on a yearly basis. It is the responsibility of the amusement arcade licence holder to apply for a renewal licence. Council officials will carry out an annual inspection of the premises to ensure it is compliant with the terms of the licence.

PSU met with representatives from two of the eleven councils to gain a better understanding of the processes in place for applying for a licence, how data is collated, and how data is stored. PSU then contacted each of the other nine councils to confirm if they adopted similar approaches. All did, with the only minor differences being in relation to policies in relation to location and number permitted. Councils use various electronic databases for amusement arcade permit records, such as the IDOX system. Council staff have good knowledge and expertise in terms of the quality assurance and maintenance of these records. They would also be familiar with the number and location of such premises.

Gambling licences

Data is sourced from NICTS. Each courthouse was asked to provide data in relation to various types and aspects of gambling licences. Gambling licences are granted on a yearly basis and as such must be renewed each year. It is the responsibility of the licence holder to apply for a renewal licence.

Each court maintains a physical register of gambling licence holders. Staff in each courthouse would be familiar with the various licence-holders and any changes that might take place in terms of ownership. PSU will be working with NICTS to develop further quality checks, including comparisons with returns from previous years.

Communication with Data Suppliers

PSU staff have met both council and NICTS and discussed how they receive data, how they maintain it, and how it is prepared for extraction and onward transfer to the Department for Communities. This is the first time such data has been requested from either data provider, and it is anticipated that as mutual understanding of the various aspects of the data production process are developed improvements will be made to the quality of the data and how it is reported on by PSU. Further processes will be introduced, including improving understanding of need for the data and formalising arrangements between DfC and the data suppliers.

Quality Assurance Principles and checks with data suppliers

Data is collated by administrative staff within the councils and NICTS. This is taken from electronic systems for councils, and is a manual exercise for NICTS. The data is reviewed by staff before being sent to DfC.

PSU continues to work with councils and NICTS to improve this process and develop further checks.

Producer's Quality Assurance Investigations and documentation

PSU carry out a number of quality assurance checks on the data. Comparisons were made with the previous years' data, and year-on-year changes were discussed with the appropriate data provider. As more data becomes available, it will be possible to make comparisons across time as a further means of validating the data.

It is anticipated that as the production of the report becomes established, a better understanding of any potential data quality issues will be suitably addressed and that supporting documentation to help data users will be enhanced further.