

## BACKGROUND QUALITY REPORT: NORTHERN IRELAND WAITING TIME STATISTICS: OUTPATIENT WAITING TIMES

Dimension	Assessment by the author
<p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b><i>Context for the quality report.</i></b></p> <p>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 Ministerial waiting time target.</p> <p>Hospital Information Branch (HIB) introduced methodology for the collection of outpatient waiting time information at the beginning of 2008/09.</p> <p>The Code of Practice for 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: <a href="https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/">https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/</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>
<p><b>Relevance</b></p>	<p><b><i>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</i></b></p> <p>The HSC Business Services Organisation has developed a specific universe for outpatient data on the HSC Data</p>

Warehouse, populated with data on patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment. HIB use a Business Objects query, agreed with HSC Trusts, to extract anonymous patient level data from this universe on the Monday after the third Friday of the month following the end of each quarter.

This information is exported, cleansed and analysed to ensure that only patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment that meet agreed criteria are included.

The majority of information presented in 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times' derives from patient level downloads from the data warehouse and supplementary aggregated returns provided by each Health & Social Care (HSC) Trust on a quarterly basis.

Both of these sources are used to produce counts of the number patients waiting for a first consultant led outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, broken down by HSC Trust, specialty and how long they have been waiting. This data is used to assess Trust's performance against the ministerial targets.

Trusts submit quarterly aggregate returns for outpatient activity and the Health and Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) submit quarterly returns of outpatient independent sector activity. These are used to provide the number of first consultant led outpatient appointments that have taken place during the quarter.

In addition to outpatient waits, the number of completed waits data are also included in this publication, both in health service hospitals and within the independent sector.

Data contained in this release are published primarily to provide an indication of HSC performance. They allow the general public and the DoH Health Committee to assess the performance of the DoH, SPPG and HSC Trusts in providing timely access to hospital services in Northern Ireland. These data also provide policy makers with the necessary information to formulate and evaluate health

	<p>services and are helpful in assessing the effectiveness of resource allocation in providing services that are fully responsive to patient needs.</p> <p>HIB ensures that the ‘Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times’ statistical report remains relevant to users in a number of ways, including; openly welcoming feedback from known users upon issuing each quarter’s publication, providing contact details publicly so that other users can easily get in touch and undertaking national statistics consultations as necessary. In this way the needs of users are continuously monitored, and if appropriate and practical, acted upon.</p>
<p><b>Accuracy and Reliability</b></p>	<p><b><i>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</i></b></p> <p>Data providers are supplied with technical guidance outlining the methodologies to be used in the collection, reporting and validation of outpatient waits and activity.</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/outpatient-waitingtimes-supporting-documentation">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/outpatient-waitingtimes-supporting-documentation</a></p> <p>A submission timetable is agreed with Trusts quarterly and indicates when the data downloads will be taken each quarter and the dates on which returns and validations should be submitted to HIB.</p> <p>Downloads will be taken on the Monday after the third Friday of the month following the end of each quarter. HSC Trusts and the Board submit their supplementary returns in line with a pre-agreed quarterly submission timetable. Further quality assurance checks are undertaken by both HSC Trust providers and by statisticians in the DoH. Validation checks are conducted in conjunction with HSC Trusts, with amendments made to data as required, to help improve the accuracy and reliability.</p>

All waiting time information presented in this bulletin has been validated and quality assured by HSC Trusts prior to publication.

Data is validated via circulated excel workbooks outlining:

- Total number of patients awaiting a first consultant led outpatient appointment at end of quarter for confirmation.
- Number of patients waiting by specialty and length of time waiting (in time bands), for confirmation.
- A list of noted irregularities in waiting time position within each specialty, as compared to previous quarters and years.
- A breakdown of all patients recorded as having breached PfA maximum waiting time targets for confirmation.
- A list of potential duplicate records is provided. HSC Trusts indicate whether these records should be removed.
- Cases where erroneous dates are recorded for either date of birth or date of decision to admit are detailed for correction.
- In some cases, patients may be recorded under one HSC Trust but are being treated in another HSC Trust's facilities or at a Regional Assessment and Surgical Centre (RASC). These patients' waiting times should be reported under the HSC Trust or RASC where treatment is provided. Details of cases to be reallocated are therefore sent to both relevant HSC Trusts for confirmation.

Any irregularities identified are queried with the HSC Trust. The HSC Trust are asked to provide a response on the query and confirm if the data is correct. If not correct, they should firstly indicate the correct information and an explanation for the error, update their system and submit an amended information return to HIB. HIB will then amend their final data for outpatient waits.

A number of patients waiting for outpatient appointments are not recorded on the Patient Administration System (PAS). HSC Trusts

	<p>submit an aggregate return of these patients to supplement the download.</p> <p>Previous data are also revised if necessary. All revisions are conducted in line with HIB's Revisions Policy which can be found in the Statistics Charter online at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/doh-statisticscharter">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/doh-statisticscharter</a></p>
<p><b>Timeliness and Punctuality</b></p>	<p><b><i>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</i></b></p> <p>The downloads used to produce this publication refer to the three months of the most recent quarter. Downloads are taken within four weeks of the end of the quarter for breast cancer figures and within two months for the rest of the figures (this is to allow HSC Trusts enough time to update the information). HIB publish a 'Submission Timetable' quarterly to notify HSC Trust and Health and Social Care Board staff of the download dates and validation return dates. Delayed validation responses are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues within HSC Trusts, however, all data is typically submitted in time for inclusion in publications.</p> <p>'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Cancer Waiting Times is published on the last Thursday of the month that is three months after the end of the quarter, i.e. for the quarter ending 30th June, the report will be published on the last Thursday in September. However, for the quarter ending 30th September, the report will be published at the beginning of January due to the Christmas holidays.</p> <p>The 'Schedule of Publications', which provides twelve months advance notice of releases, is available at: <a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releasescalendar">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-releasescalendar</a></p>

	<p>In the majority of cases, the target publication deadlines are met. However, in the event of a change to a pre-announced release date, the delay is announced, explained and updated regularly.</p>
<p><b>Accessibility and Clarity</b></p>	<p><b><i>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.</i></b></p> <p>The annual ‘Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times’ Official Statistics publication includes data visualisations, tabular data and commentary. In addition to this, all data tables are published in Open Data Spreadsheet formats.</p> <p>The report includes notes for readers which cover: guidance on using the data, important links to additional guidance for readers on: the data collection, provision of data, data quality, contextual information, security and confidentiality and additional guidance on important terms and phrases.</p> <p>‘Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times’ publications are currently produced in HTML format and available to view / download on the Department’s website (link below):</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times</a></p> <p>The publication is also accessible through the UK National Statistics Publication Hub at:</p> <p><a href="http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html">http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html</a></p>
<p><b>Coherence and Comparability</b></p>	<p><b><i>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.</i></b></p> <p>There is currently no other official source of outpatient waits statistics in Northern Ireland. However, HSC Trusts and associated agencies have their own internal quality assurance checks.</p>

Performance & Information Teams carry out data validation checks to ensure consistency in the data produced by HIB and the HSC Trusts or SPPG. Any data quality issues which arise are dealt with reactively and resolved as they arise. HSC Trust have dedicated data quality resources to proactively manage data quality challenges across the organisations.

Users may misinterpret waiting time data as the average time patients wait within each specialty. Documentation provided clarifies that data refers to the length of time patients were waiting at a specific point in time. Patients included within this data may have only recently been added to the waiting list. Thus, waiting times reported may not correlate with the total expected wait for any given specialty.

Between 2008 and 2016, various banding has been utilised to group patients waiting into timebands, noted in the downloadable datafile. These include:

- For the quarters ending June 2008 to March 2011 all patients waiting over 26 weeks have been included in the '>26 week' timeband.
- From the quarter ending June 2011 to March 2015, all patients waiting over 18 weeks have included in the '>18 week' timeband.
- From the quarter ending June 2015, patients waiting over 18 weeks have been split into the timebands '>18 - 26 weeks', '>26-39 weeks', '>39-52 weeks', '>52-65 weeks', '65-78 weeks', '>78-91 weeks', '>91-104 weeks' and '> 104 weeks'.

Whilst this affects the comparability of individual timebands across a time series, the number of patients breaching targets in each period is clearly reported and remains comparable across all reported quarters.

While it is our intention to direct users to waiting time information elsewhere in the UK, users should be aware that hospital waiting

	<p>times in other administrations are not always measured in a comparable manner to those in Northern Ireland. Details of the hospital waiting times published elsewhere in the UK can be found as detailed below.</p> <p>England: <a href="http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/rtt-waiting-times/">http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/rtt-waiting-times/</a>  Scotland: <a href="http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/">http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/</a>  Wales:  <a href="https://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus/nhswaitingtimes/">https://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus/nhswaitingtimes/</a></p> <p>Statisticians in all four home nations have collaborated as part of the 'UK Comparative Waiting Times Group'. Technical documents are available from the Governmental Statistical Service (GSS) at:  <a href="https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/user-facing-pages/health-andcare-statistics/health-waiting-time-statistics/">https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/user-facing-pages/health-andcare-statistics/health-waiting-time-statistics/</a></p>
<p><b>Trade-offs between Output Quality Components</b></p>	<p><b><i>Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</i></b></p> <p>None</p>
<p><b>Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions</b></p>	<p><b><i>The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</i></b></p> <p>Data presented in this publication helps to meet the information needs of a wide range of internal and external users.</p> <p>Within DoH, the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times' statistical publication is used by policy officials to monitor and report the details of outpatient waits – how long patients have been waiting and under which specialties, for corporate monitoring, to inform and monitor adherence to draft ministerial targets and related policy, 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.</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-andresearch/official-statistics-and-user-engagement#toc-4">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/doh-statistics-andresearch/official-statistics-and-user-engagement#toc-4</a></p> <p>We gain awareness of users of our data from ad hoc requests for information and from the receipt of invitations to relevant meetings and conferences.</p> <p>Users' needs are prioritised, taking account of the resources available.</p>
<p><b>Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden</b></p>	<p><b><i>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.</i></b></p> <p>Currently HIB do not have access to a small proportion of the outpatient waits data and therefore HSC Trust staff must provide HIB with the additional data requested. This information is submitted electronically.</p> <p>The information collected by HSC Trusts for this publication is not collected specifically for HIB and would be produced whether requested by HIB or not.</p> <p>On receipt of the initial and validated information returns from HSC Trusts, the statistics team require approximately four weeks to produce the final outputs, plus a small amount of senior staff oversight.</p>
<p><b>Confidentiality, Transparency and Security</b></p>	<p><b><i>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</i></b></p> <p>Some of the information used to produce this publication is submitted to HIB using excel templates that are provided. As it is</p>

	<p>aggregate information it does not include personal information and thus is submitted without password protection.</p> <p>Data that are submitted or downloaded are held on a network that is only accessible to the statisticians who need access. Data are published in such a way that individuals cannot be identified.</p> <p>DoH's Data Protection policy statement can be found at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/dhssps-data-protectionpolicy-statement">https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/dhssps-data-protectionpolicy-statement</a></p>
--	---