

## Business Services Organisation

# STATISTICS CHARTER

**The Family Practitioner Services Information Unit** (simply referred to as Information Unit) is based in the Business Services Organisation (BSO). BSO was established to provide a broad range of regional businesses support functions and specialist professional services to the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. The Information Unit aims to provide analytical support, information and advice to both internal and external customers in relation to the provision of General Medical, Dental, Ophthalmic and Pharmaceutical services. It also has responsibility for publishing Official Statistics relating to service provision and activity across each of these areas of primary care.

Our statistics are produced in accordance with the principles and protocols set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). There are three pillars and principles of the Code:

1. Trustworthiness – confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data;
2. Quality – data and methods that produce assured statistics;
3. Value – statistics that support society's needs for information.

The following policy statements set out the ways in which Official Statistics produced by Information Unit comply with the principles and protocols contained in the Code. In compendium form the statements form a charter between the Information Unit and the users of our statistics.

- **Statement of Integrity and Impartiality**
- **Statement on Quality Control and Methodology**
- **Statement on Accessibility and Dissemination**
- **Statement on Revisions and Errors**
- **Statement on Confidentiality and Security**
- **Statement on Customer Service**
- **Addressing User Needs**
- **Complaints Procedures**
- **Head of Profession and Data Managers**

# Integrity and Impartiality

## Introduction

Our commitment is to produce, manage and disseminate statistics for the maximum benefit, in an impartial manner that is free of political or personal interests. This relates to Pillar 1 of the Code of Practice for Statistics *Trustworthiness*, and in particular:

Principle 1: Honesty and integrity – People in organisations that release statistics should be truthful, impartial and independent, and meet consistent standards of behaviours that reflect the wider public good;

Principle 2: Independent decision making and leadership – Information Unit has a Senior Statistician who upholds and advocates the standards of the Code.

- **Independence**

The Senior Statistician in BSO has sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. Statistical outputs are always released separately from and before any political statement or comment. All statistical staff working on Official Statistics within BSO are independent statisticians on secondment from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

- **Pre-release access**

Pre-release access to Official Statistics is limited to specified outputs and post-holders within BSO, the Department of Health (DoH), and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group of the Department of Health (previously the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)). Details of the publications and the posts concerned are published on our website.

- **Conflict of interest**

All staff working on the production of statistics must give notice of any potential conflict of interest and to demonstrate impartiality must not, without prior approval, engage in any activity, in a private capacity which could be considered to be a conflict of interest with official business.

- **Audit**

Any Official Statistics produced by Information Unit are subject to periodic assessment by the UK Statistics Authority (an independent body operating at arm's length from government) to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice. Additionally, the work carried out by the statistical teams based within Information Unit is subject to internal audit.

# Quality Control and Methodology

## Introduction

Our commitment is to provide sufficient information on quality to allow users to decide whether data meets their needs in adherence to Pillar 2 of the Code of Practice. It is achieved by:

- **Applying scientific methods**  
Scientific principles are applied to the production of statistics and reports are accompanied by statements providing information on methods and factors giving rise to bias where applicable. Statistics are based on the most appropriate data to meet intended uses and the impact of any data limitations are assessed, minimised and explained.
- **Performing quality assurance checks**  
Statistical products are regularly evaluated to ensure they are accurate, reliable, coherent and timely, and that they meet user requirements. In addition, a formal quality assurance sign-off process is in operation requiring a range of quality checks to be carried out and verified by staff and their statistical managers prior to outputs being released.
- **Training and guiding staff**  
BSO statistics are prepared by qualified staff trained in the production, management and dissemination of statistics. NISRA remains responsible for the ongoing professional development and core statistical training of its staff, including those embedded in BSO. Key processes are documented in standard operating procedures documents that are regularly reviewed and updated. Staff training needs are reviewed regularly through corporate governance procedures.
- **Continuous improvement**  
All statistics are subject to regular review, including consultation with users, to ensure outputs remain fit for purpose. When necessary, steps are taken to address weakness in design, production and dissemination and to fill information gaps in existing provision.
- **Promoting comparability**  
Comparability within the UK (and international contributions) will be explored wherever possible through the adoption of common standards, concepts, sampling methods, questions, definitions, statistical units and classifications. Where differences do exist these are identified and explained. This area will develop as our range of statistical publications grows.
- **Ensuring continuity**  
When changes are made to methodology or coverage, users will be informed and, whenever possible, contextual information will be added to minimise the effect of a break in data series.

# Accessibility and Dissemination of Statistics

## Introduction

Our commitment is to make our Official Statistics accessible to the widest possible audience and to maximise the use of our statistical information. This reflects Pillar 3 of the Code which relates to statistics that support society's needs for information, as well as elements of Pillar 1 which are in relation to the orderly release of statistics in an open and transparent manner. This is achieved by:

- **Relevance to users**  
The content of our resources and products, and the supporting information we provide, are informed by an understanding of our users' needs. This is achieved through formal user engagement, capturing and understanding ad hoc demands, networking and consultation to determine future information and service requests.
- **Accessibility**  
BSO statistics will be equally available to all and will be released at a pre-announced date and time. They will be published with sufficient level of detail to be accessible to as many as possible and they will remain publicly available on our website. Additional steps are taken to ensure that publications meet relevant standards, so that users of assistive technology have equal access to the statistics.
- **Clarity and insight**  
We will help users understand and make the best possible use of our outputs by publishing supporting and background material. Where possible, we will incorporate useful context into the supporting commentary.
- **Web focus**  
To promote the widest access, we use the Web as our main channel for the dissemination of statistics. This means all our outputs are made available both on the BSO website and via the Gov.UK release calendar.
- **Timing of releases**  
Release dates for BSO Official Statistics outputs are pre-announced via the Gov.UK website. This can be accessed directly or via a link from the BSO statistics website. In addition, a release calendar is published on the Information Unit's home page - [Info Unit Release Calendar](#)  
Statistical Press Releases for the annual publications (summarising key findings) are normally issued through the DoH Press Office at 9.30 on the day of publication when they are also posted on the Executive Information Service website.
- **Format of releases**  
The BSO Senior Statistician maintains responsibility for the content, format and timing of all statistical outputs. Statistical Press Releases, which accompany the main statistical outputs, are normally in the form of a short summary of the key information, intended primarily to help the media in reporting the results.

Statistical releases are always issued separately from any policy statement or comment about the figures by a Minister or Chief Executive. Typically, periodical publications retain core, standard tabulations, but content may vary to reflect needs of users and to allow proper presentation and analysis of new or particularly interesting results.

- **Pre-release access to statistics**

A statement of compliance sets out the principles, criteria and conditions under which the BSO permits pre-release access to specific outputs. It includes a list of the BSO, the Strategic Planning and Performance Group of the Department of Health (previously the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)) and DoH posts for which pre-release access is permitted and the outputs to which access is granted. See Statement of Compliance with the Pre-release to Official Statistics Order (NI) 2009 - [Statement of Compliance](#).

- **FOIA considerations**

Statistics being compiled by the BSO prior to the published release date cannot, subject to public interest considerations, be made available under the FOIA as they are still in the course of completion.

# Revisions to Published Statistics and the treatment of Errors

## Introduction

This statement is in relation to pillar 3 of the Code (section T3.9) which states that scheduled revisions or unscheduled corrections to the statistics and data should be released as soon as practicable and that the changes should be handled transparently in line with a published policy.

We endeavour to produce the best figures we can, in light of the available information and resources. However, improvements and consequential revisions can result as we continually strive to improve the methods and sources.

Some series are more subject to revisions, for example, when early or provisional estimates are produced. In such cases we will make it clear which Official Statistics are provisional and subject to a scheduled pattern of revision. Our methods will be kept under review to minimise the scale of revisions. Where there has been a revision to a table, this will be noted in that table with an 'r' in the appropriate column or row. Where a publication has been revised, only the most recent version will be available on the website and the title will indicate whether this is a revised publication.

## Correction of Errors

Many of the revisions we make are a normal, unremarkable and inevitable feature of statistical life and users are able to absorb and plan for those revisions accordingly. They reflect the receipt of fuller and more complete information. However, some revisions are 'unexpected' in the sense that they are the consequence of errors or weaknesses in procedures or systems, or are the result of errors in source material. Regardless of whether the responsibility is ours or others, we will follow the procedures described below.

## Announcement of impending corrections

We will be open and transparent about the need for any unscheduled corrections. Once the need for a correction that warrants customer notification is ascertained, we will announce our intention to issue corrections, and the planned date of issue.

## Dissemination of corrections

Decisions relating to the dissemination of unscheduled corrections will be made by the Senior Statistician within BSO for the affected statistical series. In general terms:

## Web versions of releases/publications/tables/articles/etc

As soon as possible after we ascertain that a correction is necessary and warranted, we will amend all current electronic versions of any release, publication, table, article, etc which contains the affected statistics or text, and re-populate the website as soon as possible with those amended versions. If the correction is minor, or insignificant, in the sense of being inconsequential and hardly noticeable, we will insert the necessary

changes without alerting anyone. Alternatively, we may accumulate minor corrections and make an update at the time of the next scheduled web publication to avoid making too many frequent but minor changes.

### **Paper versions of releases/publications/tables**

Whilst the default position for all publications is electronic release, there can be occasions where a user has requested a paper copy of a release. Unless there are compelling reasons, we will not attempt to recall/re-issue any paper versions of any release, publication or table etc. that contains the affected statistics or text if it has already been distributed. We will, of course, ensure that when further paper copies are issued, they will include any corrections that have been incorporated in the electronic versions.

However, if the error is substantial or significant, we will, where practicable, notify the recipients of paper versions by post, telephone or e-mail, and point them to the revised version available on the web.

### **Methodological and Reclassification Changes**

Where a substantial methodological change is planned or data are to be reclassified to a new definition, we will announce our intentions before the release of the statistics based on the new methods and/or definitions. For any key Official Statistics, we will provide background information and an explanation about the changes.

In the event of a methodological or reclassification change, BSO will:

- Publish a statement explaining that a reclassification has taken place and impacted upon statistical data.
- Produce and publish a statement on the BSO website, or in the affected publication, explaining any subsequent changes to methods and coverage.
- Produce and publish any impact analyses of the change to statistical data and make these available on the BSO website or in the affected publication. Sometimes, it can be some time before the full impact of a particular change can be fully quantified as it can require the collection and analysis of future data. In such cases, an attempt will still be made to give some guidance as to the likely impact of the change and this will be revisited as new data allows for further more detailed analysis.

# Confidentiality and Security

## Introduction

Information Unit is committed to protecting the security of our data and to uphold a guarantee that no statistics will be produced that are likely to identify any individual. This is in line with Principle T6 of the Code of Practice (Data Governance) which states that organisations should look after people's information securely and manage data in ways that are consistent with relevant legislation and serve the public good.

- **Arrangements for maintaining the confidentiality of statistical data**  
 The BSO has its own information security management systems that are subject to regular internal audit and its staff are governed by the 'Code of Practice on Protecting the Confidentiality of Service User Information' – [Confidentiality Code](#). Moreover, the general public are informed of how their data is used and protected via the BSO [Privacy Notice \(hscni.net\)](#)
- **Physical security**  
 All staff working in this organisation and all visitors to its sites require a pass to access the premises. There is no public access to any part of the organisation where confidential statistical data may be held apart from researcher access to Info Unit safe research havens. All researchers are escorted to/from safe havens when they have occasion to visit.
- **Staff training**  
 All statistical staff working in the Information Unit receive regular mandatory training on data protection.
- **Technical security**  
 Staff in HSCNI have access to the HSCNI private network (administered by BSO Information Technology Services (ITS)). HSCNI use Tier 3 data centres which have ISO27001 certification to store data and host applications. Business areas are able to store data on dedicated areas of the network; secure back-ups are taken on a daily basis, and access to the data is limited as required by the business area.

Staff gain access to the HSCNI network facilities using official desktops and laptop computers and individual network log-on accounts and passwords. Laptops and Iron key USB storage devices encrypted to UK Government security standards are deployed where necessary to provide additional protection to information and data. The use of any other unencrypted USB devices and the storage of official data on unapproved devices such as mobile phones, personal memory sticks, PDAs, digital cameras, memory cards, home computers is prohibited as per [BSO Use of ICT Equipment Policy](#).
- **Disclosure Security**  
 We use a combination of data manipulation and/or statistical disclosure techniques to meet Statistical Disclosure Control. A risk based approach has been adopted in line with [GSS Disclosure Control Guidance](#). This has given rise to the following general disclosure rules being applied in Information Unit



- Cell counts below 3 are suppressed (along with another value in row/column to avoid disclosing count in suppressed cell – typically, but not always, the next lowest) when the data relate to individuals such as patients or primary care contractors and is broken down by other attribute data.
  - Disclosure control is not generally applied to univariate item counts (drug products, dental procedures, etc) at higher geographical levels such as NI, Local Commissioning Group/Trust, or Local Government District as risk of individual identification is low.
  - For smaller geographies such as NI Super Data Zones (SDZs), and previously Super Output Areas (SOAs), cell counts of up to 10 can be suppressed, in either item or patient counts, dependent on the assessed level of disclosure risk.
  - Individual prescription item counts are published at GP practice level (for example, in open data) as risk of identification of a patient is assessed as low. This is because GP practice populations are (i) typically well dispersed with overlap of areas between practices; (ii) there is a lag between the prescription being issued, drug then being dispensed, and subsequent payment claim data published by BSO (iii) many drugs can have multiple therapeutic uses and (iv) for open data use, GP practice contractor codes are separated from the contractor details (name, address, etc) which minimises the risk of casual disclosure.
  - All HBS outputs are subject to a blanket cell count threshold of 10. This is because the volume and detail of such outputs prevent an individual risk based assessment being applied.
- **Arrangements for providing controlled access to data**  
The Honest Broker Service (HBS) makes available anonymised data for research purposes at a secure research environment which is based in Franklin Street (HBS safe havens). It also makes available anonymised, and in some cases pseudonymised, data to DoH and HSC staff for the purposes of service evaluations and clinical audits. Further details are available at the [Honest Broker Service - Business Services Organisation \(BSO\) Website](#).
  - **Requests for information**  
We deal with all requests for information in a timely manner. We treat all requests fairly and without prejudice taking into account the public interest and the need to maintain confidentiality by conforming to the General Data Protection Regulation and Freedom of Information Act. Guidance on the Freedom of Information Act can be found [here](#).
  - **Freedom of Information Act (FOI)**  
While we treat requests under FOI on a case-by-case basis, our presumption is that requests for individual statistical records will be rejected. Both pieces of legislation contain exemptions and processes that protect confidential information.



# Customer Service

## Introduction

Our commitment is to provide a high level of service to all our customers. More specifically we aim to meet the following standards of customer service:

- **Service to data suppliers**  
We endeavour to operate efficiently by placing the minimum load necessary on data providers and by integrating our statistical work with administrative systems where possible. We take responsible care of all the information provided to us and we respect the confidentiality of all identifying information in accordance with the accompanying Statement on Confidentiality.
- **Service to users**  
We will maintain the relevance of all our statistical outputs so that they meet the needs of all our users and, whenever possible, make sure that the information we provide is equally accessible to the whole community. We welcome all constructive feedback, recognising this will help improve the service we provide.
- **Requests for bespoke tabulations and analyses**  
The content of the BSO statistical publications is based on our understanding of user needs and covers a wide range of information. As much detailed information is made available as is reliable or practicable, subject to legal and confidentiality considerations. In addition, every effort is made to meet ad-hoc requests for special tabulations and analyses, subject to legal and confidentiality considerations and staff availability.
- **Service standards**  
If you get in touch with us, you can expect us to be polite, approachable and helpful, and to readily identify ourselves. We will make every reasonable effort to ensure that you are provided with information that is timely, relevant and accurate, and we will endeavour to meet the following standards.
  1. We will endeavour to respond to customer correspondence, whether in paper or electronic form, by the requested or mutually agreed date, if possible, otherwise within 10 working days commencing from the date when we receive your correspondence.
  2. Sometimes, our service delivery standards will be affected by circumstances beyond our control. We will keep you informed of progress and notify you at the earliest opportunity if it appears agreed response dates cannot be met and will then provide you with a revised timescale for response.
  3. If we make a mistake we will apologise and do everything we can to put things right. If you have a concern about the quality of our service, or the treatment you have received from us and you cannot resolve the problem with the person you have been dealing with, you can make a formal complaint. If you do decide to make a formal complaint, then please follow our complaints procedure details of which can be found under Complaints Procedures in this Charter.

# Addressing User Needs

## Introduction

User needs is at the core of the production of statistics. The statement is issued in accordance with the requirements set out in Principal 1 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

- We promote discussion with both data providers and our users on an ongoing basis
- We publish our statistical releases in accordance to the pre-release timetable.
- We respond to enquiries and queries in a timely and professional manner.
- We periodically undertake surveys on users' satisfaction with outputs.
- We undertake a rolling series of in-depth interviews with selected users (internal and external) on an annual basis.
- We invite comments from our user through our publications and our internet releases.
- We log users' feedback on our work and outputs.
- We recognise that different users have different needs and we try to accommodate the requirements of all our users.
- We undertake bespoke analyses to meet individual user needs and to maximise data use.

Details of our User Engagement activity can be found here [User Engagement Action Plans](#)

## Data Users

Our main data users are:

- Minister and policy/operational colleagues within BSO and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group of the Department of Health (previously the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB))
- Policy makers within other government departments
- Local government
- Political representatives (e.g., MPs, MLAs and MEPs)
- Special interest groups (e.g., voluntary bodies, pressure groups, health related charities)
- Industry (e.g. pharmaceuticals)
- Academics
- Students
- Media
- General public

## Data Uses

FPS statistics are used for a wide range of purposes. A primary use is to establish the activity throughout the health arena to better allocate resources for the commissioning of services. They are further used to monitor the performance of those service providers

enabling the appropriate level of corporate governance. This has been a particularly important use during the current Covid-19 pandemic providing policy makers and the public with a window on how services have been impacted and are rebuilding as the pandemic has progressed.

Data is also used to provide an evidence base for policy development and, as such, it is used to assess the outcomes and impacts of various policy options that are under consideration.

Prescribing data can be used for patient safety purposes such as the monitoring of female sodium valproate patients of child bearing age in line with Medicines and HealthCare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulations. See [here](#) for more detail of this specific use case.

Information can be used by professional bodies, lobby groups, the voluntary sector, and other pressure groups to better inform their needs and to hold government to account. Further breakdowns of published data are available via ad-hoc requests, Freedom of Information request (FOIs) and Assembly Questions (AQs).

The statistics are used by the HSC Board for monitoring performance across the Primary Care contractor base. In addition, and where applicable, trend information gives an insight into how services have changed/developed and allows the general public to see how the services available to them have performed over time.

Within BSO, the statistics are used as a measure of service delivery/performance and are included in public documents such as the BSO Annual Report.

# Complaints Procedures

This guide tells you how to make a formal complaint about the service you have received from BSO's Information Unit.

As a member of NISRA our complaints procedure is in line with that detailed on the NISRA website at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/complaints-handling-procedures>

## Branch commitment

The branch aims to deliver a high quality service, but recognise that things can sometimes go wrong. When this happens, we will do our best to put matters right quickly. We will listen to your complaint and:

- treat it seriously, and in confidence;
- investigate it thoroughly and fairly;
- resolve it promptly, and informally whenever possible; and
- learn from complaints to improve our services.

## What to do if you have a formal complaint

You can complain in writing, by e-mail, by telephone or in person (by appointment please). Please provide as much relevant information as possible so that your case can be dealt with promptly. In the first instance, the complaint should be directed to the branch. The relevant contact details are listed below.

Information Unit  
HSC Business Services Organisation  
Ground Floor  
2 Franklin Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8DQ

Email: [info.bso@hscni.net](mailto:info.bso@hscni.net)  
Telephone: 028 9536 3687

If you know which area of work is relevant to your complaint, or the name, or title of the appropriate member of staff, please make your complaint direct to them (referring to this complaints procedure would be helpful). If you do not have this information, please make contact and we will put you in touch with the most appropriate person.

If direct contact is not possible or if having done this, you remain dissatisfied, you should write to the Head of Branch:

Head of Information Unit  
HSC Business Services Organisation  
2 Franklin Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8DQ

All complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt, giving the name of the member of staff dealing with it. We will aim to issue a full response to your complaint within 10 working days of receiving it. If we cannot meet this response target, we will tell you why and let you know when you can expect to get a full reply. In order for us to deal with your complaint efficiently you should provide as much background information as possible.

#### Not satisfied

If you are not satisfied with the initial response you receive, or the way in which your complaint has been handled by the Head of Information Unit, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to the FPS Assistant Director of Operations, who has overall responsibility for the statistical function within BSO. You should write to:

FPS Assistant Director of Operations  
HSC Business Services Organisation  
2 Franklin Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8DQ

As a final resort, if you continue to be dissatisfied you may refer your complaint to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman for investigation. You will be expected to have already been through our formal complaints process, before taking up the matter with the Ombudsman. In such circumstances the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman will consider the facts of each case and decide if the complaint falls within the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is totally independent of Government and can be contacted for advice at:

Freepost NIPSO

or

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

Telephone: 028 9023 3821  
Text phone: 028 9089 7789  
FREEPHONE: 0800 343424

Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)  
Website: [nipso.org.uk](http://nipso.org.uk)