



Background Quality Report:

Northern Ireland Care Leavers

Assessment by the author

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Abbreviations:

CIB – Community Information Branch

IAD – Information Analysis Directorate

HSC – Health and Social Care

DoH – Department of Health

NISRA – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

OC1 – Annual individual level return for care leavers aged 16-18

OC3 – Annual individual level return for care leavers aged 19

DSF – Delegated Statutory Functions

Summary:

This report provides information on the quality of the data used to produce the official statistics: Northern Ireland Care Leavers. It informs users about the quality of the information upon which they may be drawing conclusions and making decisions.

The report is structured around the five quality dimensions for statistical outputs (from the [European Statistics Code of Practice, PDF \(458 KB\)](#)). The UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) requires that:

Q3.3 The quality of the statistics and data, including their accuracy and reliability, coherence and comparability, and timeliness and punctuality, should be monitored and reported regularly.

Introduction

Context for the quality report.

The 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' publication aims to provide information on outcomes for young people who have left care in Northern Ireland. It is publically available on the Department of Health (DoH) website: [Care leavers | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#). Data from this report is used to monitor the delivery of services to children and young people, to help assess Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust performance, corporate monitoring, to inform and monitor related policy, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions.

The 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' was initially published as two separate bulletins 'Care leavers Aged 16-18 in Northern Ireland' (first published in 2002) and 'Care Leavers Aged 19 in Northern Ireland' (first published in 2004). These were respectively based on the data collections OC1 (care leavers aged 16 to 18) and OC3 (care leavers aged 19) and were based on returns developed by Department of Education in England. Due to the similarities of topic and to allow for better use of resources producing the publications, these two publications were merged to the bulletin '**Northern Ireland Care Leavers**' in 2014.

The community information returns OC1 and OC3 have been designed to monitor and assess outcomes for young people after they leave care. The OC1 return collects information on educational attainment of care leavers aged 16 to 18, and the OC3 return collects information on the economic activity of care leavers aged 19, for the year ending 31 March. These are collected electronically for each individual care leaver by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts on a secure SharePoint site hosted and maintained by statisticians in the DoH.

The information from both collections are validated and analysed by Community Information Branch (CIB). The report is published on the DoH website, and announced on the Stats Hub. DoH publicises the report through a press release, on their web site and Twitter. Furthermore, information emails are sent to contacts within the statistical and HSC community.

Each Official and National Statistics output produced by CIB 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.

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

Information presented in the 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' statistical bulletin derives from the annual OC1 and OC3 statistical surveys, provided by each of the five HSC Trusts to CIB in the DoH.

These returns are longitudinal with one record for each young person fitting the parameters of the collection. They collect a range of information on care leavers including educational achievement, economic activity, sex, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, length of time in care and placement prior to leaving care.

Information from 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' is used by a wide variety of users for a range of purposes. The Northern Ireland Assembly devolved administration and the DoH (statutory users) use the information to support the formulation and evaluation of children's social care policy. The data is used in the development and to monitor Commissioning Plan Direction Targets and Indicators, to benchmark performance within and between HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, for Ministerial Briefing and to respond to Private Office enquiries and parliamentary/assembly questions.

Private companies may use these publications to monitor and target social care services for children, academics for research, and other government Departments and Agencies to inform cross-cutting policy and strategy development.

CIB ensures that 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' remains relevant to users in a number of ways. The main stakeholder, the Department of Health's policy section, is consulted with annually prior to the returns being issued, to ensure they are up to date and cover all relevant policy areas, within the remit of the collection. Furthermore, throughout the year, policy colleagues are consulted with and feedback is received in regards to changes and needs.

Outside the department, a regional Community Information Group and other data and information specific groups exist, hosted by HSC Board and HSC Trusts to ensure that the requirements of statutory users can be met.

Feedback received through readership and online user satisfaction surveys, help to shape the information collected and the content of the publication. In this way, the needs of the user communities are continuously monitored, and if appropriate and practical, acted upon.

Accuracy and Reliability

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

The statistical surveys used in the production of this publication are a census of the cohort involved, and as such, coverage is inclusive of all children and young people involved.

As a census rather than a survey, no estimates are produced, and issues of sampling error and confidence intervals are not relevant.

HSC Trusts are required to submit the OC1 and OC3 statistical returns via an online form on the DoH SharePoint site. Each HSC Trust has nominated Data Entry Users and Data Manager who have access to these returns on this site. The menu toolbar of the SharePoint site contains options which should be consulted by Data Entry Users and Data Managers to aid with the completion of the return;

- (i) A 'How-to guide' link contains a separate guidance manual for Data Entry Users and Data Managers on how to use the system and complete the online forms.
- (ii) A 'Guidance' section provides the guidance note on the information to be included in the return, as well as the form in Word format.

The online form has some validation checks pre-programmed in terms of data entry, and provides a free-text box at the end of the form for users to make reference to questions that could not be answered. The Data Manager has the responsibility for quality assuring the data and authorising its submission to the Community Information Branch.

Statisticians within CIB perform further checks, using historical data to monitor annual variations and emerging trends. A set of validation checks are provided by CIB to help improve the accuracy and reliability of the return.

Previous data are revised if necessary and appropriate. All revisions are conducted in line with the 'Statement on Revisions and Errors' found in the DoH Statistics Charter.

[Official statistics and user engagement | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

Timeliness and Punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period.

Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The returns used to produce this publication are submitted annually by HSC Trusts. Annual returns refer to year ending 31 March. Delayed submissions by HSC Trusts are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues.

'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' is always published within a year of the reference period. In relation to the 2020/21 reports the time lag between publication and the reference period to which the data refer was eleven months.

The 'CIB Schedule of Publications', which provides twelve months advance notice of releases, is available at: [Statistical releases calendar | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

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 new date is announced, explained and updated regularly.

Accessibility and Clarity

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.

The OC1 and OC3 returns and respective guidance documents detailing coverage, definitions, completion instructions, and validations to enable HSC Trusts to complete the statistical information returns are available on the DoH website [Care leavers returns and quality reports | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

The statistical publication is published on the DoH website and is available to download free of charge in an accessible PDF format together with accompanying MS Excel tables: [Children's services statistics | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

There are numerous footnotes/caveats and annexes provided in the publication and tables covering a range of explanatory information.

The publication contains contact details for further information. Additional ad-hoc analysis, where appropriate, is provided on request.

Coherence and Comparability

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.

Information on young people subject to the Care Leaving Act is collected by HSC Board from the HSC Trusts through the Delegated Statutory Functions (DSF) returns. Although this relates to a slightly different cohort of people, the information covers similar areas. Work has been progressing to ensure that data categories and definitions used are the same to allow better comparisons, but also to ease the burden on the data collector (the HSC Trusts) so they only have to relate to one set of definitions.

This work further envisages, with the introduction of encompass, to create some system generated tables that can be applied to the different cohorts covered by the DSF and the OC1/OC3 collections.

CIB communicate regularly with HSC Trust staff to discuss guidelines and data validation issues which aims to ensure consistent recording, coverage, and timeframes of data collection between HSC Trust areas, and with previous years/quarters figures.

All data submitted by HSC Trusts are comparable. Comparisons can be made over time and publications are available from year ending 31 March 2002 onwards. Where possible comparisons have been made with the general population. Inter country comparisons are difficult as social care operates within different legislative frameworks across the devolved administrations.

Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

None.

Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.

Data presented in these publications help to meet the information needs of a wide range of internal and external users.

Within DoH figures from 'Northern Ireland Care Leavers' are used by policy officials to monitor the delivery of social care services to children, to help assess Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, to inform and monitor related policy and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. Furthermore, the policy section is consulted with annually prior to the returns being issued, to ensure they are up to date and cover all relevant policy areas, within the remit of the collection.

Outside government, the information in these statistical publications is used by a number of charities and voluntary organisations, as they lobby government, organisations to use these figures include VOYPIC (Voice of Young People in Care) and Kinship Care NI. The statistics in these publications are also used by academic researchers interested in children's social care for example Queens University Belfast.

We gain awareness of users of our data from ad hoc requests for information and from the receipt of invitations to relevant meetings, working groups and conferences.

User's needs are prioritised, taking account of the resources available.

In terms of accessibility, the use of tables, infographics, and alternative text have been considered and applied where appropriate in accordance with accessibility guidelines.

Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.

Currently CIB do not have access to HSC Trust information systems or reports generated from them, therefore Information Officers working in HSC Trusts must provide CIB with the data requested. All of the information is collated manually and submitted electronically. It is envisaged that with the introduction of encompass, some system generated tables will be

created that can be applied to the OC1/OC3 cohorts remove the need for manually input of information.

Meetings act as a forum to discuss any difficulties or burdens HSC Trust staff may be experiencing. HSC Trust staff who attend these meetings are required to liaise with Social Workers working in their HSC Trust areas.

On receipt of the statistical information returns from Information Officers, the data require approximately six weeks of working time from statistical staff to validate, analyse and produce the report, plus a small amount of time of senior staff oversight.

Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

The OC1 and OC3 returns are predefined templates collecting information about individual young people fitting the parameters of the collection. The pseudoanonymisation of all records protects the identity and confidentiality of the young people involved, in line with the Data Access Agreement with the HSC Trusts. The returns are hosted on the DoH SharePoint site and available only to approved users. Data is submitted via this system, which provides a secure link between HSC Trusts and the DoH. The online survey is password protected with only nominated users from within the Trusts given access to the system. CIB maintain and manage the site, providing technical support and online help to nominated users of this system e.g. following up on access requests.

Statisticians in CIB extract the data from SharePoint. Following this, it is held on a network that is only accessible to the statisticians who need access.

The DoH Statistical Charter contains a 'Statement on Confidentiality and Security.'

[Official statistics and user engagement | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/about-us/official-statistics-and-user-engagement)