



Background Quality Report: “Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” Assessment by the author

Author: Community Information Branch, Information Analysis Directorate,
Department of Health Northern Ireland

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Summary:

The following Background Quality Report sets out the ways in which these Official Statistics releases produced by Community Information Branch comply with the pillars and principles contained in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The Pillars are [Trustworthiness](#), [Quality](#) and [Value](#), and the meaning behind each pillar and their underlying statements are included.

Abbreviations:

CIB – Community Information Branch

DoH – Department of Health

HSC – Health and Social Care

HSCB – Health and Social Care Board

CIG – Community Information Group

Trustworthiness

“Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisations that enable and support the production of statistics and data.

Trustworthiness comes from the organisation that produces statistics and data being well led, well managed and open, and the people who work there being impartial and skilled in what they do.”

T1: Honesty and integrity

“People in organisations that release statistics should be truthful, impartial and independent, and meet consistent standards of behaviour that reflect the wider public good.”

Statisticians in Community Information Branch (CIB) produce, manage and disseminate statistics for the maximum benefit, in an impartial manner that is free of political or personal interests and they adhere to the values expressed in the code of practice that, additionally, align to those of the wider NISRA community.

T2: Independent decision making and leadership

“Organisations should assign a Chief Statistician/Head of Profession for Statistics who upholds and advocates the standards of the Code, strives to improve statistics and data for the public good, and challenges their inappropriate use.”

Community Information Branch sits within the Information Analysis Directorate (IAD), headed up by the Head of Profession for Statistics within Department of Health (DoH) NI. The Head of Profession is ultimately responsible for the statistics produced by the department and that it complies with the standards of the Code.

T3: Orderly release

“Organisations should commit to releasing their statistics in an open and transparent manner that promotes public confidence.”

“Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” is published quarterly with a 6-8 week lag from the period end.

The Minister, limited, relevant policy officials and the press office have 24 hours pre-release access to the reports prior to publication. A list of all officials receiving pre-release access is published alongside the reports.

T4: Transparent processes and management

“Organisations should have effective business processes and appropriate resources to support their statistical functions and be open about their plans, priorities and progress.”

The Adult Direct Payments statistical information return used to produce the published data tables is collated monthly by HSC Trusts and sent to the HSCB.

Dates for submission of this return are agreed in advance between HSC Trusts and HSCB, with the information then supplied to CIB on a quarterly basis. Delayed submissions are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues within HSC Trusts.

On receipt of the Adult Direct Payments return, further quality assurance checks are undertaken by statisticians in the DoH who will follow up with HSCB if there are any discrepancies.

“Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” is published quarterly with a 6-8 week lag from the period end.

T5: Professional capability

“People producing statistics should be appropriately skilled, trained and supported in their roles and professional development.”

All CIB staff go through a lengthy induction programme to ensure they are skilled and gain the appropriate knowledge of their role. NISRA corporate functions provide additional oversight, ensuring staff are fully trained on the relevant procedures, legislation and regulations as well as best practice methods.

T6: Data governance

“Organisations should look after people’s information securely and manage data in ways that are consistent with relevant legislation and serve the public good.”

The Adult Statistical Payments statistical information return used by HSCB is a pre-defined MS Excel templates which collects aggregate information and therefore does not include personal information.

Data is held on a network that is only accessible to the statisticians who need access.

CIB’s “Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality” can be found in the [Statistics Charter](#).

Quality

“Quality means that statistics fit their intended uses, are based on appropriate data and methods, and are not materially misleading.

Quality requires skilled professional judgement about collecting, preparing, analysing and publishing statistics and data in ways that meet the needs of people who want to use the statistics.”

Q1: Suitable data sources

“Statistics should be based on the most appropriate data to meet intended uses. The impact of any data limitations for use should be assessed, minimised and explained.”

All of the information presented in “Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” data tables derives from the monthly Adult Direct Payments statistical information return collated by the five HSC Trusts. This is provided quarterly by the HSCB, for each of the HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, to CIB in the DoH.

The Adult Direct Payments return is an aggregated statistical count which monitors information on the number of clients, and the amount paid to them, in receipt of direct payments. This includes the number that are in effect, and that commenced or ceased during the month. The return collects information by client group of the service user and also for carers who are in receipt of a direct payment.

HSC Trusts are allowed several weeks to update relevant internal and management information systems, from which the Adult Direct Payments return is produced.

HSC Trusts are then required to submit the completed excel return to information staff in the HSCB who will validation the returns and raise any queries with HSC Trusts. The finalised returns are forwarded to statisticians in CIB in accordance with an agreed schedule of returns.

On receipt of the Adult Direct Payments return, further quality assurance checks are undertaken by statisticians in the DoH who will follow up with the HSCB if there are any discrepancies.

Q2: Sound methods

“Producers of statistics and data should use the best available methods and recognised standards, and be open about their decisions.”

“Direct Payments Statistics for Northern Ireland” contain key quality information in respect of the specific content of the statistical output. Numerous footnotes/ caveats and annexes are provided in the publication which cover a range of explanatory information; including data quality e.g. sources, missing data.

Q3: Assured quality

“Producers of statistics and data should explain clearly how they assure themselves that statistics and data are accurate, reliable, coherent and timely.”

The Adult Direct Payments statistical information return used in the production of the data tables is a census of the cohort involved, and as such, coverage is inclusive of all adults 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 allowed several weeks to update relevant internal financial and management information systems, from which the Adult Direct Payments is produced.

HSC Trusts are then required to submit the completed excel return to information staff in the HSCB who will validate the returns and raise any queries with HSC Trusts. The finalised returns are forwarded to statisticians in CIB in accordance with an agreed schedule of returns.

On receipt of the Adult Direct Payments return, further quality assurance checks are undertaken by statisticians in the DoH who will follow up with the HSCB if there are any discrepancies.

Previous direct payments data are revised if necessary and appropriate. All revisions are conducted in line with [DoH's Statistics Charter](#).

Value

“Value means that the statistics and data are useful, easy to access, remain relevant, and support understanding of important issues.

Value includes improving existing statistics and creating new ones through discussion and collaboration with stakeholders, and being responsible and efficient in the collection, sharing and use of statistical information.”

V1: Relevance to users

“Users of statistics and data should be at the centre of statistical production; their needs should be understood, their views sought and acted on, and their use of statistics supported.”

CIB ensures that “Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” remains relevant to users in a number of ways; a Regional Information Group exists to ensure that the requirements of statutory users are met; feedback received from readers help to shape the information collected and the published output. In this way the needs of user communities are continuously monitored, and if appropriate and practical, acted upon.

Information from “Direct Payment Statistics for Northern Ireland” is used by a 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 monitoring of related policy, to inform the HSC Commissioning Plan Direction and associated targets and to respond to Private Office enquiries and Parliamentary/Assembly questions. It is used by the HSCB for strategic organisational planning and for benchmarking performance and characteristics within and between HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland.

Private companies may use it to monitor and target social and personal care service, academics for research, and other government Departments and Agencies to inform cross-cutting policy and strategy development.

V2: Accessibility

“Statistics and data should be equally available to all, not given to some people before others. They should be published at a sufficient level of detail and remain publicly available.”

The Minister, limited, relevant policy officials and the press office have 24 hours pre-release access to the reports prior to publication. A list of all officials receiving pre-release access is published alongside the reports.

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

The publications are published in accordance to best practice for Accessibility.

V3: Clarity and insight

“Statistics and data should be presented clearly, explained meaningfully and provide authoritative insights that serve the public good.”

A copy of the information return, including guidance is available on request from CIB or the HSCB. The statistical tables are available to download free of charge in Excel format at the [Department of Health website](#).

The information contained in the excel report is also available in a non-proprietary open format as a CSV file. The publication tables are also accessible through the [UK National Statistics Publication Hub](#).

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

There is currently no other official source of direct payment statistics in Northern Ireland. However, where appropriate, CIB compare their data to external sources to ensure HSC Trusts are providing reliable and robust data.

All data submitted by the five HSC Trusts for this publication are comparable. Comparisons can be made over time and information is available from 2007 onwards. However, prior to quarter ending 31 December 2015, information was sourced from the CC8 community information return. This has led to differences when comparing the breakdown of figures as they are now recorded by client group as opposed to programme of care. This has not affected the comparison of overall figures. Inter-country comparisons are difficult as social care operates within different legislative frameworks across devolved administrations.

V4: Innovation and improvement

“Statistics producers should be creative and motivated to improve statistics and data, recognising the potential to harness technological advances for the development of all parts of the production and dissemination process.”

The DSF returns that these publications are based on, have historically been manual returns. The project “Children’s Return Project” was established in 2019 to assess the possibility of enhancing the HSC Trust administrative systems to enable more returns to be captured electronically without the need for manual counts or manipulations. Findings from this work will be implemented with the rollout of Encompass as new overarching HSC Trust administrative system for Northern Ireland.

V5: Efficiency and proportionality

“Statistics and data should be published in forms that enable their reuse. Producers should use existing data wherever possible and only ask for more where justified.”

Currently CIB do not have access to HSC Trust information systems therefore Information Officers working in HSC Trusts must provide CIB with the data requested. All of the information is submitted electronically.

The returns are also used for internal management information and regional commissioning monitoring, and would be produced whether requested by CIB or not.