

INFORMATION  
ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE



# Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Outpatient Waiting Times Quarter Ending December 2016

# Reader Information

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**Purpose:** 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 2016/17 Ministerial waiting time target which states that:

*“By March 2017, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment; with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.”*

This statistical release details information on the number of patients waiting, and length of time waiting, for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in HSC Trusts at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016. It also includes activity for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during the quarter ending December 2016. Data are presented by HSC Trust, specialty and time band. Information on Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) waiting times are available in the accompanying CSV file.

**Statistical Quality:** The ‘*Outpatient Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*’ booklet details the technical guidance, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-december-2016>

**Internet:** <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times>

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**Target audience:** Department of Health (DoH), Chief Executives of the HSC Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, health care professionals, Health & Social Care stakeholders, academics, the media and the general public.

**Price:** Free

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**By March 2017, 50% of patients should wait no longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, and no patient should wait longer than 52 weeks.**

## Total number of patients waiting at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016

There were  
**246,198 patients**  
waiting for a first outpatient  
appointment in Northern  
Ireland



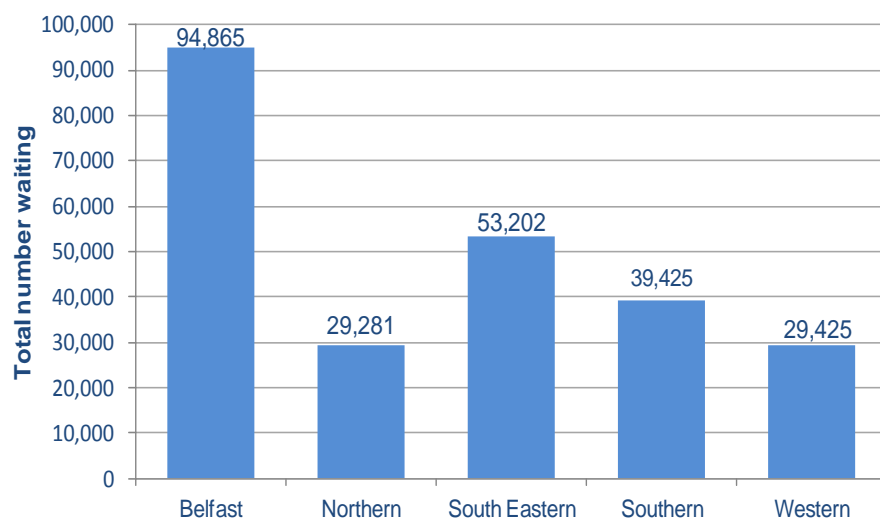
An **increase** of 1.3% on  
the previous quarter



An **increase** of 4.6% on  
the same quarter last year

Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, a total of 246,198 patients were waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, 1.3% (3,057) more than at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 (243,141) and 4.6% (10,833) more than at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 (235,365) (Table 1).



A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. As patients are reported against the HSC Trust responsible for the service to which the patient has been referred, users should be cautious in how they use these data (see explanatory note 9).

Source: CH3 Return

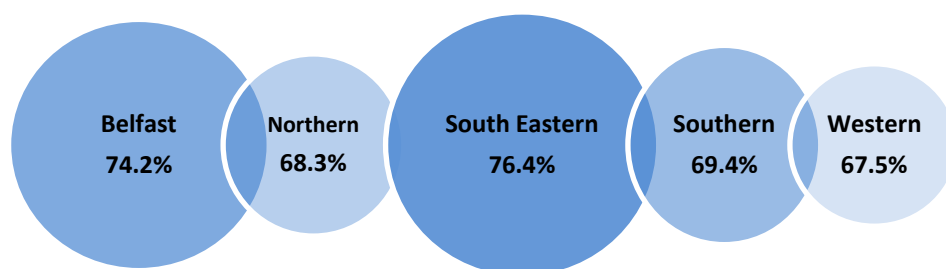
Almost two fifths (38.5%) of those waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a further 21.6% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 16.0% in the Southern HSC Trust, 12.0% in the Western HSC Trust and 11.9% in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2a).

Nearly two thirds (63.1%, 155,352) of the 246,198 patients were waiting for a first outpatient appointment in one of the following specialties: Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery (31,101); Ear, Nose and Throat (30,853); General Surgery (28,951); Ophthalmology (22,992); Gynaecology (15,140); General Medicine (13,555) and Neurology (12,760) (Table 3a).

## Patients waiting more than 9 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**72.4%**  
of patients  
were waiting longer  
than 9 weeks



### Percentage waiting over 9 weeks

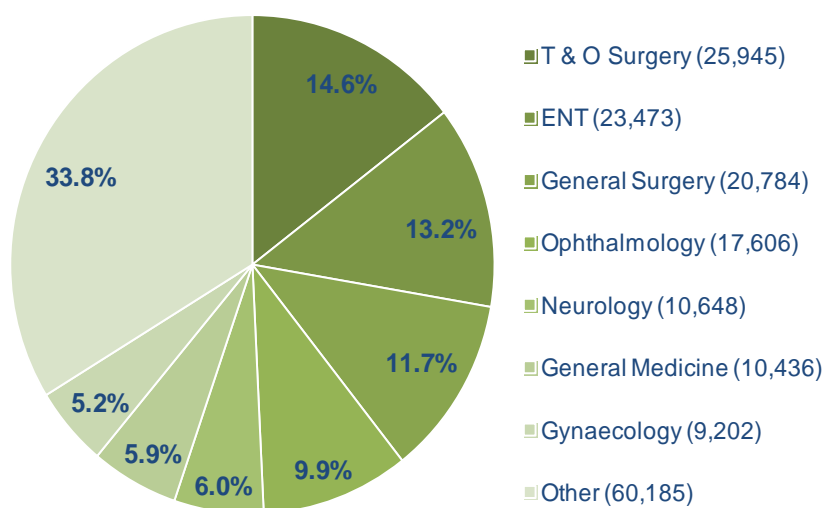
Source: CH3 Return

Achievement of the 9 week target requires that less than 50% of patients should be waiting over 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment.

Almost three quarters (72.4%, 178,279) of patients were waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, compared with 68.8% (167,250) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and 70.0% (164,638) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, the 9 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that some outpatient services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

### Patients waiting more than 9 weeks by specialty



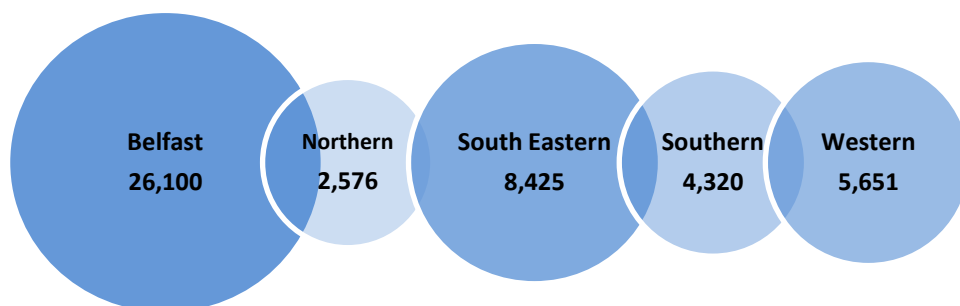
Just under two-thirds (66.2%, 118,094) of the 178,279 patients waiting more than 9 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 were in one of the following specialties: Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT); General Surgery; Ophthalmology; Neurology; General Medicine and Gynaecology (Table 3a).

Source: CH3 Return

## Patients waiting more than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016

This element was **not achieved** by Northern Ireland as a whole

**47,072**  
patients  
were waiting longer  
than 52 weeks



### Number waiting over 52 weeks

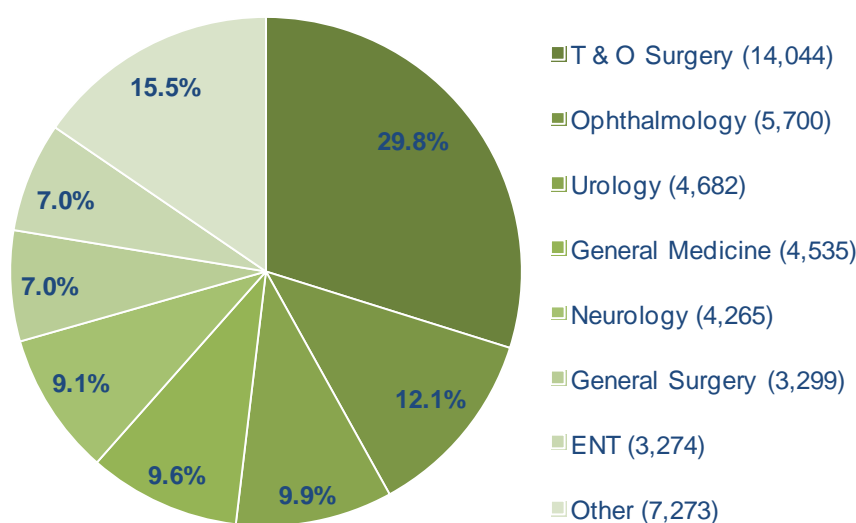
Source: CH3 Return

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, 19.1% (47,072) of patients were waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, compared with 16.3% (39,557) at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016, and 13.8% (32,544) at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 (Table 1).

At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, the 52 week element of the target was not achieved by Northern Ireland as a whole or by any individual HSC Trust (Table 2a). Data users should be aware that some outpatient services are not provided at every HSC Trust (see explanatory note 9).

More than a quarter (27.5%, 26,100) of patients in the Belfast HSC Trust were waiting longer than 52 weeks at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, 19.2% (5,651) in the Western HSC Trust, 15.8% (8,425) in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 11.0% (4,320) in the Southern HSC Trust and 8.8% (2,576) in the Northern HSC Trust (Table 2a).

### Patients waiting more than 52 weeks by speciality



A total of 84.5% (39,799) of the 47,072 patients waiting more than 52 weeks for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment were in one of the following specialties: Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery; Ophthalmology; Urology; General Medicine; Neurology; General Surgery and Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) (Table 3a).

Source: CH3 Return

## Completed waits for a first outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service during quarter ending December 2016

There were  
**117,309 first outpatient attendances**

commissioned by the Health Service



An **increase of 2.9%** on the previous quarter

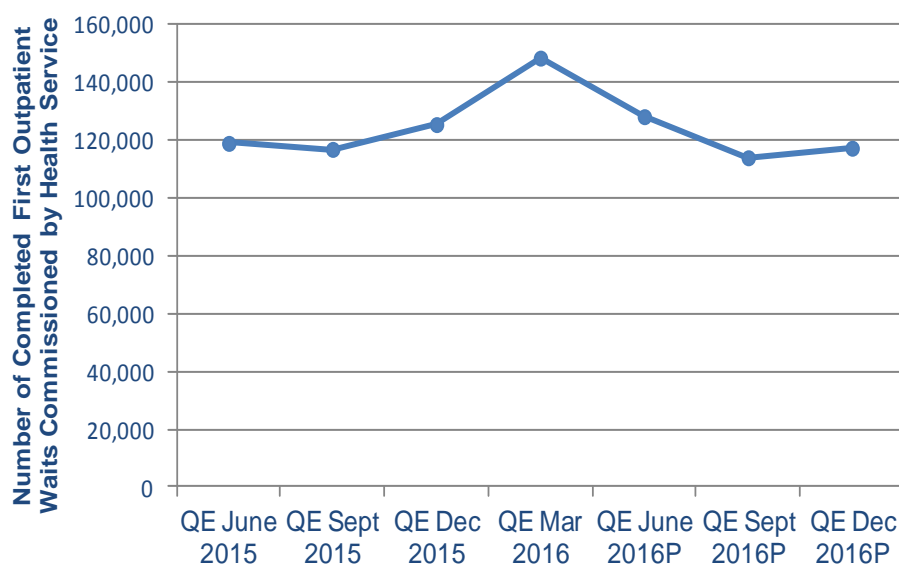


A **decrease of 6.5%** on the same quarter last year

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

Although the number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment increased between the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, there were 116,623 attendances for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland during the quarter ending December 2016, 2.8% (3,177) more than during the quarter ending September 2016 (113,446), but 6.5% (8,072) less than during the quarter ending December 2015 (124,695) (Table 4).

During the quarter ending December 2016, 686 Health Service patients attended a first outpatient appointment within the Independent Sector. This is a 22.5% increase on the quarter ending September 2016 (560) but a 13.1% decrease on the same quarter last year (789) (Table 4).



Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

<sup>P</sup>Data is provisional

When the number of attendances commissioned by the Health Service, within the Independent Sector, during the quarter ending December 2016 (686) is combined with that for outpatients attending a first outpatient appointment in Health Service hospitals during the same period (116,623), provisional figures indicate that 117,309 outpatients attended a first appointment in Northern Ireland commissioned by the Health Service (Table 4). This is an increase of 2.9% (3,303)

on the number seen during the quarter ending September 2016 (114,006), and 6.5% (8,175) less than during the quarter ending December 2015 (125,484).

## Appendix 1: Tables

**Table 1: Quarterly outpatient waiting lists – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016<sup>1</sup>**

First Consultant-Led Outpatient Appointment	Current Quarter (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2016)	Previous Quarter (30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2016)	Same Quarter Last Year (31 <sup>st</sup> Dec 2015)
Total Patients Waiting	246,198	243,141	235,365
Number waiting over 9 weeks	178,279	167,250	164,638
<i>Percentage waiting over 9 weeks</i>	72.4%	68.8%	70.0%
Number waiting over 52 weeks	47,072	39,557	32,544

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–9 & 12-13

**Table 2a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
Belfast	17,664	6,796	5,295	4,483	3,763	30,764	26,100	94,865
Northern	6,700	2,571	2,194	1,974	1,643	11,623	2,576	29,281
South Eastern	8,863	3,697	3,388	3,163	2,672	22,994	8,425	53,202
Southern	8,546	3,507	3,159	2,436	2,212	15,245	4,320	39,425
Western	7,155	2,420	2,074	1,690	1,291	9,144	5,651	29,425
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,928</b>	<b>18,991</b>	<b>16,110</b>	<b>13,746</b>	<b>11,581</b>	<b>89,770</b>	<b>47,072</b>	<b>246,198</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–9 & 12-13

**Table 2b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by HSC Trust and weeks waiting – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016<sup>1</sup>**

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52
Belfast	18.6%	7.2%	5.6%	4.7%	4.0%	32.4%	27.5%
Northern	22.9%	8.8%	7.5%	6.7%	5.6%	39.7%	8.8%
South Eastern	16.7%	6.9%	6.4%	5.9%	5.0%	43.2%	15.8%
Southern	21.7%	8.9%	8.0%	6.2%	5.6%	38.7%	11.0%
Western	24.3%	8.2%	7.0%	5.7%	4.4%	31.1%	19.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>19.1%</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–9 & 12-13



**Table 3a: Number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting							Total Waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52	
T & O Surgery	3,795	1,361	1,169	943	861	8,928	14,044	<b>31,101</b>
ENT	5,080	2,300	2,026	1,900	1,649	14,624	3,274	<b>30,853</b>
General Surgery	5,968	2,199	2,030	1,922	1,679	11,854	3,299	<b>28,951</b>
Ophthalmology	3,888	1,498	1,308	1,164	913	8,521	5,700	<b>22,992</b>
Gynaecology	4,238	1,700	1,343	1,265	964	5,434	196	<b>15,140</b>
General Medicine	2,331	788	741	568	450	4,142	4,535	<b>13,555</b>
Neurology	1,470	642	607	620	526	4,630	4,265	<b>12,760</b>
Urology	1,549	451	345	300	272	3,116	4,682	<b>10,715</b>
Dermatology	3,437	1,398	975	707	709	3,129	21	<b>10,376</b>
Rheumatology	1,423	609	612	444	380	3,618	2,207	<b>9,293</b>
Paediatrics	2,822	1,128	772	613	441	2,184	737	<b>8,697</b>
Gastroenterology	1,451	567	581	461	402	3,467	1,590	<b>8,519</b>
Cardiology	2,705	946	718	433	327	2,499	363	<b>7,991</b>
Oral Surgery	1,230	570	568	455	414	3,408	810	<b>7,455</b>
Thoracic Medicine	1,297	536	490	448	371	3,067	204	<b>6,413</b>
Pain Management	1,011	461	477	445	414	3,263	285	<b>6,356</b>
Plastic Surgery	563	239	248	248	171	1,712	192	<b>3,373</b>
Geriatric Medicine	693	221	143	124	138	491	47	<b>1,857</b>
Restorative Dentistry	316	151	134	86	95	568	325	<b>1,675</b>
Other	3,661	1,226	823	600	405	1,115	296	<b>8,126</b>
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>48,928</b>	<b>18,991</b>	<b>16,110</b>	<b>13,746</b>	<b>11,581</b>	<b>89,770</b>	<b>47,072</b>	<b>246,198</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–9 & 12-13

**Table 3b: Percentage of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment by weeks waiting and specialty – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016<sup>1</sup>**

Specialty	Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment, by weeks waiting						
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	>52
T & O Surgery	12.2%	4.4%	3.8%	3.0%	2.8%	28.7%	45.2%
ENT	16.5%	7.5%	6.6%	6.2%	5.3%	47.4%	10.6%
General Surgery	20.6%	7.6%	7.0%	6.6%	5.8%	40.9%	11.4%
Ophthalmology	16.9%	6.5%	5.7%	5.1%	4.0%	37.1%	24.8%
Gynaecology	28.0%	11.2%	8.9%	8.4%	6.4%	35.9%	1.3%
General Medicine	17.2%	5.8%	5.5%	4.2%	3.3%	30.6%	33.5%
Neurology	11.5%	5.0%	4.8%	4.9%	4.1%	36.3%	33.4%
Urology	14.5%	4.2%	3.2%	2.8%	2.5%	29.1%	43.7%
Dermatology	33.1%	13.5%	9.4%	6.8%	6.8%	30.2%	0.2%
Rheumatology	15.3%	6.6%	6.6%	4.8%	4.1%	38.9%	23.7%
Paediatrics	32.4%	13.0%	8.9%	7.0%	5.1%	25.1%	8.5%
Gastroenterology	17.0%	6.7%	6.8%	5.4%	4.7%	40.7%	18.7%
Cardiology	33.9%	11.8%	9.0%	5.4%	4.1%	31.3%	4.5%
Oral Surgery	16.5%	7.6%	7.6%	6.1%	5.6%	45.7%	10.9%
Thoracic Medicine	20.2%	8.4%	7.6%	7.0%	5.8%	47.8%	3.2%
Pain Management	15.9%	7.3%	7.5%	7.0%	6.5%	51.3%	4.5%
Plastic Surgery	16.7%	7.1%	7.4%	7.4%	5.1%	50.8%	5.7%
Geriatric Medicine	37.3%	11.9%	7.7%	6.7%	7.4%	26.4%	2.5%
Restorative Dentistry	18.9%	9.0%	8.0%	5.1%	5.7%	33.9%	19.4%
Other	45.1%	15.1%	10.1%	7.4%	5.0%	13.7%	3.6%
<b>All Specialties</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>4.7%</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>19.1%</b>

Source: CH3 Return

<sup>1</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1–9 & 12-13

**Table 4: Number of completed waits for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment commissioned by the Health Service: QE September 2014 - QE December 2016<sup>2</sup>**

Quarter Ending	Number of Completed First Outpatient Waits		
	Within Health Service Hospitals	Independent Sector*	Total Commissioned by Health Service
QE June 2015	118,739	251	118,990
QE Sept 2015	116,659	248	116,907
QE Dec 2015	124,695	789	125,484
QE Mar 2016	124,713	23,763	148,476
QE June 2016 <sup>P</sup>	127,082	1,137	128,219
QE Sept 2016 <sup>P</sup>	113,446	560	114,006
QE Dec 2016 <sup>P</sup>	116,623	686	117,309

Source: QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns

<sup>P</sup> Data are currently provisional

\* Not National Statistics

<sup>2</sup>Refer to Explanatory Notes 1-2, 4 & 10–11

## Appendix 2: Explanatory Notes

1. The sources for the data contained in this release are the DoH CH3, QOAR and IS1 Part 1 Returns. These returns collect information from Health and Social Care Trusts on a quarterly basis.
2. The '*Outpatient Waiting Times Publication – Supporting Documentation*' booklet details the technical guidance, definitions, as well as notes on how to use the data contained within this statistical release. This booklet is available to view or download from the following link:  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-waiting-time-statistics-outpatient-waiting-times-december-2016>
3. All of the data contained in the tables are available on a quarterly basis and can be supplied by individual specialty or Provider HSC Trust if this level of detail is required. In addition, quarterly data relating to waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment have been published in spreadsheet format (CSV), split by HSC Trust, Specialty and Programme of Care, in order to aid secondary analysis. These data are available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times>
4. Information includes patients living outside Northern Ireland and privately funded patients waiting for treatment in Health Service hospitals in Northern Ireland.
5. Outpatient waiters are defined as patients still waiting for their first outpatient appointment at the end of the quarter, including those who have cancelled or missed a previous appointment. An outpatient appointment is to enable a patient to see a consultant, a member of their team or locum for such a member, in respect of one referral. Waiting time for a first outpatient appointment begins on the date the HSC Trust receives a referral for a first outpatient appointment and ends on the date a patient attends a first outpatient appointment. Patients who cannot attend (CNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date they informed the HSC Trust they could not attend, while patients who do not attend (DNA) have their waiting time adjusted to commence on the date of their DNA.
6. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, Oral Surgery services undertaken by consultants contracted to the South Eastern HSC Trust were centralized, meaning that records for patients waiting for this service in both the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts are now held and managed in the South Eastern HSC Trust. A breakdown of the waiting times for these patients broken down by HSC Trust has been provided in the spreadsheet located at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times>

7. Each outpatient waiting time band relates to the number of completed weeks a patient has been waiting for outpatient assessment. For example, a patient waiting exactly 6 weeks would be included in the 0-6 week time band and a patient waiting 6 weeks and 1 day would be included in the >6-9 (greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks) time band.
8. The Ministerial target, for outpatient waiting times, as set out in the Health and Social Care (Commissioning Plan) Direction states that by March 2017, 50% of patients should wait no longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, with no patient waiting longer than 52 weeks.
9. A number of outpatient services may not be provided at a patient's local HSC Trust or at each of the five HSC Trusts, and instead are provided at a single regional centre for Northern Ireland. In such circumstances, patients from one HSC Trust area will be waiting to be seen at a service provided at another HSC Trust. In some cases a consultant from one HSC Trust may provide a 'visiting' service at another HSC Trust, and so the patient may not be reported at the HSC Trust at which they attend. Users should therefore be cautious in how they use these data. For example, they should not be used to calculate the total number of patients waiting per head of the population residing within each Trust area, as HSC Trusts that provide services for the whole of Northern Ireland will have a higher number of patients waiting per head of the population than those that provide more localised services. Neither should the actual number of patients waiting longer than the recommended waiting time be used as indicator of poor performance within an individual HSC Trust. Users who require an indication of the latter are advised to refer to the commentary section of the publication which provides an indication of the percentage of total waiters that have been waiting over the maximum recommended waiting times, within each HSC Trust.
10. The total number of completed outpatient waits each quarter, within HSC hospitals, is derived as the total number of attendances at a first outpatient appointment from the Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR).
11. The number of patients that received an outpatient assessment, commissioned by the Health Service, in the Independent Sector is collected on the IS1 Part 1. These figures are provided by the HSC Board. They are published for each transferring Health and Social Care Trust (Trust responsible for the patient's waiting time). They are not National Statistics and they have not been validated by the Department; however, they have been included to provide users with a comprehensive view of completed outpatient waits during each quarter.
12. HIB surveyed data providers during 2011/12 to ascertain the cost of producing, validating and submitting the information required for this publication. This relates to the time taken to generate,

validate and submit data, over and above what is already required by their organisation for internal performance management purposes. The cost to data providers of compliance within HIB's requirements for this publication, based on HSC salary costs, was £3,110.

13. Figures relating to outpatient waiting times for the quarter ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 will be released on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

**Further information on Outpatient Waiting Times in Northern Ireland is available from:**

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Internet address: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/statisticalreports>