



Quality Assessment of Administrative Data used in -

Annual Publications in Northern Ireland:

- (i) Raw Disease Prevalence**

- (ii) Quality & Outcomes Framework**

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Introduction

Official Statistics on raw disease prevalence and the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) published by Project Support Analysis Branch (PSAB), Department of Health (DoH) are based on data extracted from GP practices and other organisations' administrative or management systems. By using data which are already available within administrative or management systems, rather than collecting data afresh, this limits the overall burden placed on data providers and also avoids the cost of implementing dedicated data collection exercises. In addition, the information extracted from such systems often has the advantage of being more timely than statistical data and, when compared with data collected directly from GP surgeries for example, can also deliver data with a greater breadth of coverage.

This report documents the data source utilised in the production of the QOF and prevalence statistics. It provides information on the data supplier, the supply and communication arrangements with that supplier, and the quality assurance and audit arrangements for the administrative data source. The report also assesses the risk of data quality concerns and the public interest profile of these statistics. The report also documents the results of the quality management actions that have been undertaken for assuring the suitability of the data sources for this purpose.

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics provides the framework to ensure that statistics are trustworthy, good quality and are valuable. The Quality Pillar of the Code contains 3 principles:

- 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.
- Sound methods - Producers of statistics and data should use the best available methods and recognised standards and be open about their decisions.
- Assured quality - Producers of statistics and data should explain clearly how they assure themselves that statistics and data are accurate, reliable, coherent and timely.

In addition, the UK Statistics Authority issued a statement in January 2015 informing statistics producers that a Regulatory Standard for the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data had been published in response to concerns

about the quality of administrative data that emerged during its assessments of statistics on police recorded crime. The Standard recognises the increasing role that administrative data are playing in the production of Official Statistics and clarifies the Authority's expectations for what producers of Official Statistics should do to assure themselves of the quality of these data. The standard is supported with an Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit, which provides helpful guidance to statistical producers about the practices they can adopt to assure the quality of the data they utilise.

The information collated in this report also reflects the most recent review of data by considering the UK Statistics Authority's toolkit. Annex A reflects the results of applying the toolkit risk/profile matrix to the data source. Given that changes to data sources are inevitable, this report will be periodically updated to reflect the outcomes of ongoing reviews.

Background

Official Statistics produced by PSAB are widely used in healthcare policy development and the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) in particular is a fundamental part of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, introduced in 2004. QOF is a system designed to remunerate general practices for providing good quality care to their patients, and to help fund work to further improve the quality of health care delivered. QOF statistics and data are also used to contribute to major exercises such as reporting on the performance of the HSC system, other comparative performance exercises, target setting and monitoring, development of service frameworks as well as policy formulation and evaluation. In addition, the information is used in response to a significantly high volume of Assembly questions and ad-hoc queries each year.

The Official statistics produced by PSAB are widely used by the Assembly's Health Committee, Professional Advisory Groups, policy branches within the DoH, other Health organisations, academia, private sector organisations, charity/voluntary organisations as well as the general public.

As a means of stabilising GMS, QOF was suspended for payment purposes for the 2023/24 year, with no financial detriment to general practices. Although QOF was suspended, disease registers are still maintained by general practices, allowing prevalence data to continue to be collected. The DoH prevalence release for 2023/24 will therefore proceed as normal. However, there will not be a QOF achievement publication for 2023/24. Information relating to QOF achievement in this QAAD is still relevant for previous releases.

Quality and Outcomes Framework

The QOF contains groups of indicators, against which practices score points according to their level of achievement. QOF awards general practices achievement points for (i) managing some of the most common chronic diseases e.g. asthma, diabetes; (ii) how well the practice is organised; (iii) improving quality and productivity in other parts of the health service such as secondary care and (iv) the amount of extra services offered such as cervical screening. An integral part of the QOF is the collection of prevalence data to allow practices to case find those patients that require specific management. Prevalence data within the QOF are collected in the form of practice disease "registers".

The QOF gives an indication of the overall achievement of a practice through a points system. Practices aim to deliver high quality care across a range of areas, for which they score points. Put simply, the higher the score, the higher the financial reward for the practice.

The QOF includes the concept of Exception Reporting, which was introduced to allow practices to pursue the quality improvement agenda and not be penalised where, for example, patients do not attend for review, or where a medication cannot be prescribed due to a contra-indication or side-effect. Patients are not excepted from disease register counts, but they can be excepted from the denominator of subsequent indicators in each clinical area.

PSAB publishes:

(i) Annual raw disease prevalence (including a report, a spreadsheet and an interactive tool). This publication presents disease register sizes and raw disease prevalence rates per 1,000 list population; broken down to LCG, GP Federation and general practice level.

(ii) A QOF annual report which presents both achievement data and exceptions reporting statistics; this includes a statistical report, online data tables and an interactive tool. This publication presents QOF achievement data by clinical indicator and domains. A 5-year trend series is also presented. The data is published at GP practice, GP Federation, LCG and NI level. Exception reporting statistics are presented by clinical indicator and broken down to LCG, GP Federation and general practice level.

The table at Annex A details the outcome of our assessment of the QOF statistical series using the matrix assessment toolkit, in terms of data quality concern and public interest.

Data Supplier: General Practices, via the General Practice Intelligence Platform (GPIP)/QOF. GPIP/QOF is a joint undertaking between the Strategic Planning and Performance Group*, Department of Health (DoH) and the Business Services Organisation (BSO) as an internal solution to replace the Payment Calculation Analysis System (better known as PCAS). GPIP/QOF came into effect on 1st July 2022.

*The regional Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) officially closed on 31 March 2022; responsibility for its functions transferred to the Strategic Planning & Performance Group (SPPG) within DoH.

Supplier Information: GPIP/QOF is a joint undertaking between the Strategic Planning and Performance Group, DoH and the BSO.

SPPG plans and oversees the delivery of health and social care services for the population of Northern Ireland. The Group has responsibility for the functions of the former regional HSCB.

The BSO provides a broad range of regional business support functions and specialist professional services to the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

Data Type: Aggregated GP practice level data (QOF achievement and disease register sizes).

Data Content: The Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) is a system designed to remunerate general practices for providing good quality care to their patients and to help fund work to further improve the quality of health care delivered. GP practice level achievement figures for QOF indicators are downloaded from GPIP/QOF, for calculation of points achieved and payment purposes. Disease register data (which is used to calculate Adjusted Practice Disease Factors for payment purposes) is also downloaded and is used to produce disease prevalence statistics.

Supply Schedule: Annually

Use of Data:

PSAB use the data to carry out a quality assurance exercise and verify the calculation of register sizes and Adjusted Practice Disease Factors (APDFs); which are used within the GPIP/QOF payment system.

PSAB produce a raw disease prevalence annual publication for Northern Ireland. The publication presents raw disease prevalence data at GP Federation, LCG and Northern Ireland levels. Time series data is presented for Northern Ireland, with LCG and GP federation data given for the current year, for each of the 14 registers which count patients with specific conditions or diseases as covered by the Quality and Outcomes Framework. A comprehensive excel spreadsheet, which also includes GP practice level data, and an interactive tool accompany the report.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/prevalence-statistics>

QOF achievement statistics are presented in an annual report, published online in conjunction with QOF achievement data online tables, broken down by clinical indicator and domains. The clinical domain is further presented by disease groups. The data is published at GP practice, GP Federation, LCG and NI level. Exception reporting statistics are also published in the annual report and again are accompanied by online tables and an interactive tool. The data is again published at GP practice, GP Federation, LCG and NI level.

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/quality-and-outcomes-framework-qof-statistics-annual-report>

Data Source Information:

The data that supplies the GPIP/QOF system is an aggregated accredited extract from each General Practice in Northern Ireland. It is the responsibility of the clinical systems suppliers to ensure that they adhere to the accreditation process.

Data Supply & Communication:

There is a strict year-end process for practices to submit both achievement and exception reporting data (the raw disease prevalence data forms part of this year-end submission process). The data is validated by the SPPG and there is an appeals process, allowing liaison between the SPPG and practices to arrive at final agreed figures. The appeals process ends on the 30th June each year and PSAB can then download the data immediately after this process.

Communication between all parties (practices, SPPG, DoH and GPC) is considered good. There is an operational group, comprising representatives from SPPG, DoH and GPC. The remit of this group is to ensure that GPIP/QOF is operational and fit for purpose. This group is the forum where any issues can be discussed and resolved.

Quality Awareness carried out by Data Supplier:

The SPPG carry out internal quality assurance and validate the figures as submitted by each general practice into the GPIP/QOF system.

PSAB Quality Assurance:

Some of the figures required to keep GPIP/QOF operational are calculated by PSAB and our own internal quality assurance procedures are used here. PSAB carries out quality assurance of those figures which are automatically calculated within the GPIP/QOF system. Further historical trend data is examined, particularly in relation to disease register sizes. Any issues are raised with the SPPG.

Strengths of Data Source:

GPIP/QOF is a principal source of disease prevalence data and comprehensive trend data is available. It is also the only source of monitoring GP quality of patient care.

Weaknesses of Data Source:

Aggregated information does not provide a detailed breakdown of age and gender, in terms of disease registers. This information is not required for QOF payment purposes. Sometimes there is an expectation of the amount of secondary analysis that can be carried out on the data, however, this is not what the system is primarily designed for and so the system is fit for purpose as a payment system.

Assessment of Level of Assurance Requirements:

PSAB assess that the level of risk of quality is low and the public interest is also low. This suggests that the appropriate level of assurance required for these statistics is A1.

PSAB Assessment of User Needs:

PSAB ensures that these statistical publications remain relevant to users in a number of ways; the Operational Group exists to ensure that the requirements of users are met.

The publications are primarily used by researchers and in our correspondence with them, we take on board their comments and feedback. The publications are also used by a variety of other users for a range of purposes, such as the Northern Ireland Assembly devolved administration and by the DoH (statutory users) in responding to Assembly Questions and Freedom of Information requests.

As there is an equivalent framework in England, PSAB are mindful of their publication, monitoring any changes or developments and if necessary, take on board such changes to improve our publication.

Note, QOF was removed from the GP contract in Scotland following the 2015/16 QOF publication.

Note, the Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF) was introduced as part of contract reform in 2019 in Wales and replaced the Quality and Outcome Framework (QOF), which was originally introduced as part of the new GMS contract in 2004.

Annex A

Risk / Quality Matrix:

Level of risk of quality concerns	Public interest profile		
	Lower	Medium	Higher
Low	Statistics of lower quality concern and lower public interest [A1]	Statistics of low quality concern and medium public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of low quality concern and higher public interest [A1/A2]
Medium	Statistics of medium quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and medium public interest [A2]	Statistics of medium quality concern and higher public interest [A2/A3]
High	Statistics of higher quality concern and lower public interest [A1/A2/A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and medium public interest [A3]	Statistics of higher quality concern and higher public interest [A3]

The risk of data quality concerns and the public interest profile of these statistics are assessed as A1: 'Statistics of lower quality concern and lower public interest'.