Introduction

This report relates to the National Statistics[1] bulletin "Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland" and provides information on the quality of the data used to produce the report. The statistical report is produced by the Department of Education, Analytical Services Unit (ASU).

The objective of this quality report is to allow users to be informed about the quality of the information upon which they may be making inferences, conclusions and business decisions.

There are two frameworks in place that govern statistical quality:

- UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics Version 2[2]; and

- European Statistics Code of Practice[3].

The UK Statistics Authority requires official statistics producers to inform users about the quality of statistical outputs using the European Statistical System's Dimensions of Quality[4]. This is a requirement in the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics version 2 and this quality report meets this requirement for the National Statistics bulletin "Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland

Publication Name:	Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland
Department Responsible:	Department of Education (DE)
Release Date:	Annual
Web Link to Publications:	https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/pupil-attendance#toc-0

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[1] National Statistics, are a subset of official statistics which have been assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation as fully compliant with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

[2] The UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics Version 2 available at https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/

[3] The European Statistics Code of Practice available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-manuals-and-guidelines/-/KS-32-11-955

[4] The European Statistical System's Dimensions of Quality available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4392716/ESS-QAF-V1-2final.pdf/bbf5970c-1adf-46c8-afc3-58ce177a0646

Background

Information on pupil attendance is collected annually from schools in Northern Ireland as part of the School Census. The attendance data are collected on census day which is the Friday of the first full week in October each year and reports on the attendance of all pupils in the previous academic year which runs from September to June.

The collection of data for primary, post-primary and special schools is facilitated by C2k, who are responsible for the provision of ICT systems in schools. Each school submits an electronic return to the Department at an individual pupil level.

Dimensions of quality

Dimension	Assessment
Relevance	**The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.**
	The attendance publication disaggregates attendance data by school phase; primary; post-primary and special schools. Data are also disaggregated by Neighbourhood Renewal Area and a range of pupil level characteristics including gender; religion; ethnicity; looked after status; free school meal entitlement and newcomer status. Such disaggregation reflects the range of user needs regarding pupil attendance
	The main customer for attendance data are policy officials in the Department's, Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team which monitors non-attendance and provides guidance to schools in relation to attendance. In December 2016, the Department launched a new attendance strategy Miss School = Miss Out, which aims to reduce school absence levels by 2021. ASU engage on a regular basis with policy officials in the Department to ensure as far as possible the attendance information meets their policy needs.
	The Education Authority (EA) and the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) are also users of attendance data in their operational practices.
	Attendance data are also valuable to Northern Ireland Departments other than Education for example the Department of Finance use attendance data in the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure, Education Domain; recognising the link between pupils' attendance and academic attainment and future life chances.

	Attendance data are also of interest to the private sector for example journalists, academics and the general public. In recognition of the range of attendance data users, ASU undertook a public consultation on the attendance publications in September 2017. The result of the consultation was the cessation of an interim, summary attendance publication and a more concise format for the "Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary ad special schools in Northern Ireland". In addition to the National Statistics statistical bulletin ASU provide an additional analysis service on request by a web link on the ASU pages of the Department's website.
Accuracy and Reliability	**The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.** Attendance data are collected from 100 per cent of grant aided primary, post-primary and special schools. As this data collection represents a census of all pupils in these schools there is no error associated with statistical sampling techniques. However it is recognised that there is scope for process and / or measurement errors in the data. Attendance data for primary, special and post-primary schools are collected at pupil level. Returns are made electronically from the Schools Information Management System (SIMS) facilitated by C2k. C2K are responsible for all the technical aspects of the system. They resolve any problems with the technical operation of the system. They also provide a specific helpdesk service for schools which offers advice on request, for example, how to navigate the system, rectify errors etc. There are validations built into the system by C2K at data input stage to prevent errors. For example, schools will be alerted if there are any missing data which mean that some sessions have not been accounted for in terms of attendance. In addition, C2K send an end of year procedures document to schools to remind them to check all data including attendance are complete. Finally, the schools must check and sign off their summary attendance table prior to submitting the information. On receipt of the data, ASU run a series of data validations to ensure the data is accurate and complete. The first validation is of the attendance year group which is a free text field therefore the schools all enter the information in a different and inconsistent manner. For example, one school may enter P1; Y1; Primary 1 etc for pupils in Year 1. Syntax is written to recode these into numeric values only. A cross check is run to ensure that, where there is an attendance year group, there is a valid numerical value assigned. Frequencies are run on key variables such as religion, ethnicity and year group to ensure that all values entered are valid. This can

	indicate formatting issues in the original files, e.g. if a school enters two first names for a pupil, the data alignment is wrong and some data ends up in the wrong fields. In this case, the original file formatting is corrected in CSV and re-converted into SPSS.

Syntax is written to add the values for each individual attendance code, therefore creating the total number of sessions a child attends or is absent by reason. Each reason is categorised as an authorised or unauthorised absence, as outlined in DE circular 2017/15. Totals for present, absent, authorised absence and unauthorised absence are created and the following validations ran:
1. The sum of sessions for each individual attendance code must equal the total possible attendance variable in the system.
2. The sum of the present and absence variables must equal the total possible attendance variable.
3. The sum of authorised and unauthorised absence must equal the total absence variable.

The percentage of sessions for which a pupil was present, absent (broken down by authorised and unauthorised) is created using the new variables and validated to ensure that the present and absent totals 100% and the authorised and unauthorised adds up to the total absence percentage |
| **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.**

Attendance data relate to the previous academic year to the School Census. For example the School Census in October 2017 records pupil attendance for the academic year September 2016 to June 2017. Given the need to report on a completed academic year for pupil attendance and the level of validation on the data there is no scope to produce annual validated attendance data and information sooner than the current publication date.

As per the requirements of the UK Statistics Authority the month of publication is announced a year in advance and the day of publication one month in advance of publication. |
| **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 National Statistics bulletin "Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland" contains, data visualisations, tabular data and commentary. Complementing the |

	statistical bulletin are a set of school level attendance tables published in both Excel and Open Data Spreadsheet formats. The National Statistics bulletin contains a chapter titled "notes for readers" which covers background to National Statistics; attendance definitions / reasons; data quality and coverage; and uses and users of the data. This chapter also provides the reader with the details of the responsible statistician for the publication and the opportunity to provide feedback and / or request additional analysis. School level attendance data are also available via the Schools+ function accessible on the Department's website. Schools+ is entirely web based, therefore no additional software is required to access data this way. Attendance data are also available on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) under the Children Education and Skills theme and for a range of geographies including electoral ward, local government district, and neighbourhood renewal area.
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.** The School Census is the only source of attendance data. For all grant aided primary, post-primary and special schools attendance data are made by electronic returns; the SIMS Given this the coherence of the data is not a relevant issue. Comparability over time is dependent on the policy guidance provided by the Department annually in relation to attendance recording and enacted by the schools. The statistical bulletin informs the user of the use of attendance codes highlighting any changes. Historically, school attendance data was available in limited detail at school level for post-primary schools only. In 2004, the Northern Ireland Audit Office report 'Improving Pupil Attendance at School' emphasised the importance of using data to plan effective initiatives to deal with the problem of low attendance. In particular they felt that data at school level and on the type of absence was essential to identify patterns, trends and factors. School attendance statistics were collected at pupil level for the first time in the School Census in October 2008. The bulletin also informs users of the most robust level of comparison both overtime and countries of the UK; namely overall absence. Education is a devolved matter and countries of the UK enact different attendance policies. For example attendance data

	for England include study leave in authorised absence while the Department's statistics categorise it as present.
Trade-offs between Output Quality Components	**Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.** Attendance data are recorded in the annual School Census for the preceding full academic year. The School Census is the first opportunity to record a pupil's attendance over a full academic year. The validation of School Census data does not compromise accuracy over timeliness and the range of validation checks are reviewed. There is no scope to publish validated annual attendance data at an earlier date.
Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions	**The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.** The content of the School census is defined by the Department's information needs. The relevance of this is checked each year when users across branches of the Department and the Education Authority are consulted for additions and amendments for the following year. Departmental statisticians also meet several times per year with LMS (Local Management of Schools) officers from the EAs who give feedback on requirements. A second forum in which ASU participate is the C2k Liaison Group which captures formal feedback from C2k help teams (and indirectly schools) about the experiences of schools in providing census data.
Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden	As the infrastructure to collect the data already exists, and schools need to generate much of this data for their own management information purposes, the annual operational cost is minimal year on year. The Department collects a range of information from schools each year. To help minimise the burden on schools, information on enrolments and attendance is collected in one exercise, the annual school census. Respondent burden for the school census is measured annually via a sample survey of schools making data returns through the school census process. It found that the compliance costs for all schools and voluntary and private preschool centres in 2016/17 is estimated to cost around £195,963.55 of school staff's time. This cost includes all data collected in the school census, including attendance, and it is not possible to disaggregate this figure.

Confidentiality, Transparency and Security	**The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.**
	Data is transferred securely via the SIMS system to a secure web exchange. The data are then downloaded from the web exchange to a secure server, which only statistical staff have access to.
	The suppression of data based on a small number of pupils is undertaken to ensure as far as possible the confidentiality of individual pupils. Where the number of pupils is between one and four the number and any percentages derived from said number will be supressed. Counter suppression is also undertaken to ensure the confidentiality of the individual pupil.
	More information on confidentiality can be found in the DE Confidentiality and Access Statement at the following link: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Confidentiality%20and%20Access.pdf