



Department for

Communities

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Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Survey 2024

Technical Notes

(including Background Quality Report)

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Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency

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1. Introduction

This paper contains the technical notes for the published 2024 Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Survey. The 2024 survey is the third survey of its kind to be carried out in Northern Ireland, following the 2010 and 2016 Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Surveys.

The Department for Communities (DfC) has strategic responsibility for, amongst other areas, the development of policy and legislation on the regulation of the gambling industry in Northern Ireland. The gambling industry in Northern Ireland is currently regulated by the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

The survey was commissioned by the Department for Communities (DfC) to inform gambling policy and provide a baseline for future monitoring.

The main report can be accessed on the Department for Communities website.

[Social policy statistics | Department for Communities](#)

These technical notes summarise methodological aspects of the survey, including information on sampling, questionnaires, data collection and weighting.

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2. Sample and fieldwork

The 2024 Gambling Prevalence Survey was undertaken by interviewing 2000 adults, aged 16 and over, who reside in Northern Ireland. The interviews were carried out face-to-face in the respondent’s home using computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) in conjunction with CASI (Computer-Aided Self Interviewing).

Sampling design

The population sampling frame was individuals, aged 16 and over, living in households in Northern Ireland. The sample for the survey was a systematic random sample of addresses, selected by Central Survey Unit in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), from the NISRA Address Register (NAR). The NAR is developed within NISRA and is primarily based on the Land and Property Services (LPS) [Pointer](#) database. The complete list of residential addresses in Northern Ireland was stratified into three regions: Belfast (Belfast City Council only), East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland. The number of addresses drawn from each region was proportional to the number of addresses in the region. The sample is therefore equivalent to a simple random sample of all private addresses in Northern Ireland. A total of 6,000 addresses were selected. The sample was split into a main, reserve and contingency sample, each having 2,000 addresses and reflecting the composition of the overall sample. Reserve addresses were only to be used when replacing refusals or ineligible addresses in the main sample, while the contingency sample was not required.

The “next birthday method” for respondent selection was applied in households with multiple residents who were aged 16 and over. When contact was made with a household, a list was taken of all aged 16 and over within the household and the dates of their birthdays. The person with the next birthday, at the time of the first call, was the person with whom the interview was to be conducted. Where the selected respondent was not available, an appointment was made to call back to interview them at a more suitable time.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire used in this study was broadly similar to the questionnaire used for the 2010 and 2016 Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Surveys and consisted of a number of topics relating to gambling:

Section 1	Types of gambling
Sections A-M	Questions in relation to individual types of gambling
Section N	Betting on a Sunday
Section O	Attitude statements
Section P	Advertising

Section Q	Effects of gambling (self-completion)
Section R	Further effects of gambling (self-completion)
Section S	Equality/Demographics information

Prior to finalising the questionnaire, a pilot study was undertaken. The aim of piloting the questionnaire was to identify any ambiguities in the questions, ensure that the questionnaire flowed and that the questions and language used were easily understood. The pilot was also used to time how long it took to complete the questionnaire as this could impact response rates. The pilot was conducted with 20 respondents between 18 and 22 March 2024 and detailed feedback was provided to the project team. The questionnaire was revised based on this feedback.

Data collection

Fieldwork was carried out by Perceptive Insight between April and October 2024. CAPI (Computer-Aided Personal Interviewing) in conjunction with CASI (Computer- Aided Self Interviewing) was chosen as the preferred approach for this survey, allowing for self-completion of sensitive questions.

An advance letter was issued by Perceptive Insight to all selected addresses in advance to inform the resident(s) that their address had been chosen, provided them with some brief information about the project and informed them that an interviewer would be visiting their address to undertake the survey.

At each household, interviewers attempted a face-to-face interview with the selected household member. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions in relation to problem gambling, this part of the survey was administered using self completion (CASI). Self-completion increases the likelihood of candid and full responses, as respondents do not have to verbally communicate the information to an interviewer, negating any concerns regarding reproach, disapproval or recrimination based on their responses.

Response Rate

A total of 3,705 addresses were issued for the survey, of which 273 were found to be ineligible, i.e. they were vacant, derelict, commercial addresses. Of the remaining 3,432 addresses, 817 chose not to participate in the survey and there were 615 where no contact could be made with the householder. With 2,000 successful survey responses, the overall response rate was 58%.

Bias

As with all surveys, there is the potential for bias to be introduced by the method of collection. This can include non-response bias (due to varying participation rates in the sub-sections of society). It can also include social acceptability bias; respondents answering as they think they should and not as they actually think. The survey is also limited to households, which naturally excludes sections of the population such as the homeless and those in prison.

To try to overcome some of these biases, a number of methods were used. In the case of questions relating to problem gambling, the questionnaire was given to the respondent for self-completion to encourage honesty. Stratification was used in selecting the sample to increase the efficiency of the sample in choosing a broad range of addresses. Also, the final sample was weighted to account for differences in the sample profile compared to population estimates from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

To reduce the impact of non-response bias the following steps were taken:

- if someone was not available at the time of the call, arrangements were made to call back at a later stage in the fieldwork;
- scheduling calls and appointments in the evening and at weekends to facilitate those who were working;
- providing an advance letter, ID, and appointment cards to reassure potential respondents of the legitimacy of the study;
- providing a free phone contact number for Perceptive Insight; and
- arranging the questionnaire content so that the most important questions were at the start

Quality Controls

The interviewing team in Perceptive Insight were trained to the standards of the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) and undergo a programme of regular appraisal, accompaniments and back-checks to ensure the quality of their work. Interviewers receive two formal appraisals per year, are accompanied at least once every six months and have in excess of 10% of all their interviews back-checked. As part of their training, which is conducted both in-house and in-field, interviewers are provided with hints and demonstrations on how to be sensitive to the concerns of respondents and the use of language in persuading potential respondents to participate in the survey. Interviewers are also provided with an interviewer training manual for their reference.

As part of the survey, interviewers asked respondents for contact telephone numbers for back-checking purposes. Where these are available, back-checking was undertaken by telephone. Postal back-checking was undertaken with those addresses where a telephone number was not provided. Perceptive Insight also selected 10% of addresses where an interview has not been undertaken and conducts a postal or personal back-check on these. In addition, a programme of field accompaniments of interviewers took place throughout the survey as part of the on-going professional development of the interviewer team. The supervisor who conducts the back-checks selected a number of factual questions from the questionnaire to re-check with the respondent to ensure that the responses are consistent with the submitted questionnaire. Back-checks were conducted within two weeks of the interview taking place.

Data Cleaning

All data from the 2024 survey was subject to an extensive range of inter- and intra-variable logic checks by Perceptive Insight before exporting and sharing the clean survey results with Analytics Division. Further logic checks and data cleansing were performed by Analytics Division before performing analysis.

3. Data analysis

Weighting

Weighting was carried out using a cell-based weighting technique which adjusts the sample so that the data is made more representative of the population. A chi square goodness-of-fit test showed that the sample was not representative of the population by age and sex combined and by age when compared with the 2023 Mid Year Estimates for Northern Ireland. As a result, weights were produced for age and age and sex combined.

There were nine respondents who refused to provide either their sex or their age in the 2024 survey. Since weights could not be produced for these respondents, they were removed from the analysis. The final dataset used for the analysis, therefore, contained 1,991 responses.

Statistical significance

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups such as gender, age etc., are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance.

Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100 or the smaller the variance in scores, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and has not just arisen by chance.

4. Scoring the attitudes to gambling scale

The scale to measure overall attitudes to gambling in the 2024 Gambling Prevalence Survey repeats that used in the 2010 and 2016 Northern Ireland Gambling Prevalence Surveys. Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with eight attitudinal statements about gambling. The eight attitudinal statements are scored as outlined below.

Attitudinal Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
People should have the right to gamble whenever they want	5	4	3	2	1
There are too many opportunities for gambling nowadays	1	2	3	4	5
Gambling should be discouraged	1	2	3	4	5
Most people who gamble do so sensibly	5	4	3	2	1
Gambling is dangerous for family life	1	2	3	4	5
On balance gambling is good for society	5	4	3	2	1
Gambling livens up life	5	4	3	2	1
It would be better if gambling was banned altogether	1	2	3	4	5

The midpoint, indicating neither agreement nor disagreement achieved a score of three; scores above three indicated an attitude favourable to gambling; scores below three indicated an attitude unfavourable to gambling. A total attitude to gambling score, based on responses to the questions was calculated.

A score of 24 shows a neutral attitude towards gambling, a score greater than 24 shows a favourable attitude and a score less than 24 shows an unfavourable attitude (Table 5.2).

Attitude Score	Attitude Category
8-23	Unfavourable attitude
24	Neutral Attitude
25-40	Favourable Attitude

There were 18 interviews where the respondent had refused to answer at least one of the eight attitudinal questions. These responses were removed from any analysis on attitudes to gambling.

5. Problem Gambling Severity Index

The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was developed over a three-year period by Ferris and Wynne¹ as a means of measuring rates of problem, at-risk and non-problem gambling. It was developed, tested and validated within a general population survey and, as such, is specifically for use among the general population.

The instrument itself has been subject to critical evaluation and has been used in a range of other national prevalence surveys globally, including other parts of the UK. The PGSI consists of nine questions on areas such as betting more than can be afforded, “chasing losses”, financial difficulties caused by gambling and associated health problems. The exact questions are:

Thinking about the last 12 months...

- 1 Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?
- 2 Have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
- 3 When you gamble, do you ever go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
- 4 Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?
- 5 Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
- 6 Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?
- 7 Have people criticized your gambling or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?
- 8 Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?
- 9 Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

Each question is assessed on a four-point scale: ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘most of the time’, ‘almost always’. Responses to question are scored from zero to three.

Response	Score
Never	0
Rarely	1
Most of the time	2
Almost Always	3

¹ Ferris, J., & Wynne, H. (2001). The Canadian Problem Gambling Index (Final report). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. [https://www.greo.ca/Modules/EvidenceCentre/files/Ferris%20et%20al\(2001\)The_Canadian_Problem_Gambling_Index.pdf](https://www.greo.ca/Modules/EvidenceCentre/files/Ferris%20et%20al(2001)The_Canadian_Problem_Gambling_Index.pdf)

When scores to each question are summed, a total score ranging from zero to 27 is possible. The total score determines which PGSI group an individual is classified as belonging to.

Total Score	Group	Interpretation
0	Non-problem gambler	No identified consequences
1-2	Low risk gambler	Low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences
3-7	Moderate risk gambler	Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences
8 or more	Problem Gambler	Problem gambling with negative consequences and a possible loss of

In 2024, there were seven interviews where the respondent had refused at least one of the nine PGSI questions. These respondents were removed from any analysis involving PGSI.

6. Estimating weekly spend

Weekly spend was estimated for each gambling type by substituting the midpoint of each spending band as a numeric value and using this value to calculate the overall money spent for each activity. The total weekly spend, estimated as the sum of the responses for each activity, was then placed back into the banded categories.

An example of how banded response categories for spending presented in the questionnaire were substituted with numeric values is given below.

Response	Amount spent
Nothing within past 7 days	£0
Less than £5	£2.50
£5 - £10	£7.50
£10.01 - £20	£15.00
£20.01 - £50	£35.00
£50.01 - £100	£75.00
More than £100	£100.00

It is important to note that since expenditure is estimated from banded (rather than numeric) data they should not be viewed as exact figures. Moreover, the maximum possible value is simply taken as the highest response category (i.e. £100) and any outlying high values are not taken into account.

7. Background Quality Report

Context

This report has been produced by Analytics Division of the Department for Communities (DfC).

The 2024 Gambling Prevalence Survey is the third survey of its kind in Northern Ireland, following similar surveys in 2010 and 2016. The purpose of this survey was to gain an up-to-date view of the level of gambling participation, attitudes to gambling and the levels of problem gambling in Northern Ireland.

The population surveyed were individuals, aged 16 and over, living in households in Northern Ireland. Respondents were selected from the Pointer database, the address database for Northern Ireland created and maintained by Land and Property Services. The Pointer database is the most up-to-date listing of households in Northern Ireland.

Relevance

This data is of interest to anyone with an interest in gambling prevalence and attitudes in Northern Ireland. This includes policy officials, academics, the media, support groups, voluntary organisations, charities and the general public. Results produced will be of particular interest to senior management within the Department for Communities to advise on gambling policy in Northern Ireland.

Accuracy and reliability

The population sampling frame was individuals, aged 16 and over, living in households in Northern Ireland. Respondents were selected from the Pointer database using a stratified random sample approach in order to ensure that the study was representative of the adult population living in Northern Ireland. The complete list of residential addresses in Northern Ireland was stratified into three regions: Belfast (Belfast City Council only), East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland. The number of addresses drawn from each region was proportional to the number of addresses in the region. The sample is therefore equivalent to a simple random sample of all private addresses in Northern Ireland. A stratified random sample approach was used in order to ensure that the study was representative of the adult population living across the whole of Northern Ireland.

A letter was sent to all selected addresses in advance to inform the resident that their address had been chosen, provide them with some brief information about the project and inform them that an interviewer would be visiting their address to undertake the survey.

The “next birthday method” for respondent selection was applied in households with multiple residents who were 16 and over. When contact was made with a household, a list was taken of all aged 16 and over within the household and the dates of their birthdays. The person whose birthday occurred next was selected for interview.

Surveys were carried out by an external provider, Perceptive Insight. Fieldwork was conducted between April and October 2024

CAPI (Computer-Aided Personal Interviewing) in conjunction with CASI (Computer-Aided Self Interviewing) was chosen as the preferred approach for this survey, allowing for self-completion of sensitive questions on problem gambling.

At each household, interviewers attempted a face-to-face interview with the selected household member. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions in relation to problem gambling, this part of the survey was administered using self-completion (CASI). Self-completion increases the likelihood of candid and full responses, as respondents do not have to verbally communicate the information to an interviewer, negating any concerns regarding reproach, disapproval or recrimination based on their responses.

The survey questionnaire was piloted initially. The aim of piloting this questionnaire was to identify any ambiguities in the questions, ensure that the questionnaire flowed and that the questions and language used were easily understood. The pilot was also used to time how long it took to complete the questionnaire as this may impact response rates. Twenty pilot interviews were carried out and respondents were asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire and their views on participating in the study.

After the pilot phase, the final version of the questionnaire was agreed with Analytics Division in advance of the fieldwork commencing.

The interviewing team in Perceptive Insight were trained to the standards of the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) and undergo a programme of regular appraisal, accompaniments and back-checks to ensure the quality of their work. Interviewers receive two formal appraisals per year, are accompanied at least once every six months and have in excess of 10% of all their interviews back-checked. As part of their training, which is conducted both in-house and in-field, interviewers are provided with hints and demonstrations on how to be sensitive to the concerns of respondents and the use of language in persuading potential respondents to participate in the survey. Interviewers are also provided with an interviewer training manual for their reference.

All data from the 2024 survey was subject to an extensive range of inter- and intra-variable logic checks by Perceptive Insight before exporting and sharing the survey results with Analytics Division. Further logic checks were performed by Analytics Division before performing analysis.

Weighting was carried out using a cell-based weighting technique which adjusts the sample so that the data is made more representative of the population. In this instance the data were weighted to calibrate the achieved household sample so that the distributions for age and age and sex matched the 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimates produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Timeliness

Surveys were carried out by an external provider, Perceptive Insight. Fieldwork was conducted between April and October 2024.

The final survey data was received by Analytics Division in December 2024 after quality and logic checks were undertaken by Perceptive Insight.

The report was published on the Wednesday 30 April 2025, six months after collection ceased.

Accessibility and Clarity

The report is published in HTML format on the Department for Communities website on the pre-announced publication date in line with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. The report is also available in alternative formats on request.

Within the report, a number of charts have been provided with titles, axis names and footnotes added to help clarify certain information where applicable. Additionally, the report includes an annex which provides summary background information and methodological explanations. Accompanying data tables, in Open Document format, are also available on the Department for Communities' website, as well as separate Technical Notes and a copy of the questionnaire used.

Coherence and Comparability

The 2024 Gambling Survey was a modified version of the questionnaire used in the 2010 and 2016 Gambling Prevalence Surveys. The questions asked in the survey were developed by Analytics Division in conjunction with Social Policy Unit (SPU) in DfC.

The data collection methodology used in 2024 followed the same approach to that in 2010 and 2016 and so comparisons can be made across the three survey datasets.

While the questionnaire used for the 2024 Gambling Prevalence Survey in Northern Ireland is similar to that used in Great Britain, the data collection methodology differs (Northern Ireland: face-to-face and self-completion; Great Britain: online). As a result, figures for Northern Ireland and Great Britain are not directly comparable.