

# Background Quality Report – Complaints and Compliments Received by Health & Social Care (HSC) Trusts

This report provides information on the quality of the data used to produce the official statistics: Statistics on Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/complaints-and-compliments-statistics>.

It informs users about the quality of the information upon which they may be drawing conclusions and making decisions.

The report is structured around the five quality dimensions for statistical outputs (from the [European Statistics Code of Practice, PDF \(458 KB\)](#)). The UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) requires that:

**Q3.3** *The quality of the statistics and data, including their accuracy and reliability, coherence and comparability, and timeliness and punctuality, should be monitored and reported regularly.*

## Introduction

Context for the quality report.

Publications in this series contain key quality information in respect of the specific content of the statistical output. This information is provided in the definitions, notes to tables and metadata.

## Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

The publication series is the source of official statistics on complaints and compliments received by HSC trusts in Northern Ireland.

The data is supplied by the HSC Trusts and also from Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) on family practitioner service (FPS) complaints.

This publication reports the number of HSC Trust complaint issues received, by the programme of care, category, subject and specialty of the complaint issue, as well as demographic information and the time taken to provide a substantive response to complaints received. It also includes information on compliments received by HSC Trusts regarding the services they provide.

Feedback in the form of the complaints and compliments collected is a useful means of identifying issues and areas in need of change within the Northern Ireland health service and equally areas where things are going well. The information presented in the publication is in the public interest of having an open and transparent complaints process.

The main customers of complaints and compliments statistics are policy officials in the Department of Health's Quality, Safety and Improvement Directorate.

Other potential users include health care professionals, academics, Health & Social Care stakeholders, media and the general public.

## Accuracy and Reliability

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

### Validation

All six HSC Trusts are obligated to complete the complaints information return and therefore provides a complete picture for recorded formal complaints.

The compliments information return was introduced in December 2017 and took some time to embed, with compliments data being published for the first time in the 2018/19 report. Information for two of the six Trusts had to be estimated as they were only able to provide a partial return for the year because their monitoring systems had not been fully implemented. Comprehensive and consistent information on compliments was published in 2019/20, and subsequent years.

The data providers are provided with detailed data definitions and regional guidance to assist in the data collection process to ensure information is recorded meaningfully and consistently, the forms for returns and guidance documents can be accessed at the links below:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-complaints-form-ch8>

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/trust-compliments-form-cp1>

This guidance indicates that information should be returned quarterly by Trusts in respect of services for which they have responsibility.

IAD will then liaise with each HSC Trust regarding any queries which result from validation of the data.

IAD validates complaints and compliments information by:

- Performing trend analysis on previous quarter's/year's data
- Identifying outlying data on the number of complaints/compliments
- Identification of complaints outside the reference period and potential duplicate records

Any irregularities identified are queried with the relevant HSC Trust or SPPG for response. The HSC Trust or SPPG are asked to provide a response to the query and confirm if the data is correct. If not correct, the HSC Trust will indicate the correct information and an explanation for the error, then update their system and submit an amended information return to IAD.

When necessary, there is also the opportunity for IAD staff to meet Trust complaints managers to discuss issues regarding collection, definitions, data quality or any other relevant matters. As part of this engagement, the coding and definitions used are monitored and revised as appropriate. Meetings are held on a regular basis throughout the year.

In addition to this, HSC Trusts have their own internal quality assurance checks. Performance and Information Teams carry out validation checks to ensure consistency in the data produced by IAD, HSC Trusts and SPPG. Any data quality issues are dealt with reactively and resolved as they arise. HSC Trusts have dedicated data quality resources to proactively manage data quality challenges across the organisations.

### Error

There is the potential for administrative errors as some fields in the complaints systems are free text; although, these should be picked up through routine data quality checks within HSC Trusts and the SPPG.

HSC Trusts use separate recording systems and decision making; whilst the definitions and guidance notes and the forum for regular discussion on any identified issues should mitigate against inconsistencies in recording, there is the potential for error.

## **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.

Patient complaint information is submitted for quarter 1,2 and 3 of the financial year, by HSC Trusts along with an annual return submitted during May/June following the end of the year in March to enable any amendments to be taken into account before data processing and validation commences.

Four quarterly returns on compliments with information supplied at Trust level and aggregate information from the SPPG on FPS complaints are also used within the publication. These are combined to cover the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. IAD publish a 'Submission Timetable' quarterly to notify HSC Trust staff of the submission deadlines for each return. Delayed submissions are normally due to a lack of resources or validation issues within HSC Trusts.

The report 'Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland' is normally published within 4 months of the reference period to which the complaints and compliments data refer.

The date is pre-announced on the gov.uk website and the IAD statistical release calendar: [Information Analysis Directorate statistical releases calendar](#).

In the majority of cases, the target publication date is met. In the event of a change to a pre-announced date, the publication calendar is amended as soon as possible.

## **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 DoH website is the primary vehicle for release of the annual publication. A combination of commentary, charts and infographics are included in the annual report with downloadable Excel tables also available.

The appendices in the report includes guidance on using the data and provides definitions on important terms and phrases. Also, within the report there are a number of explanatory footnotes to provide clarity.

Once published, a web link to the annual publication is circulated to relevant colleagues across the HSC and to those named on our circulation lists.

Additional ad-hoc analysis is provided as appropriate on request.

## 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.

Complaints data from previous years is available in the tables to allow trend analysis, however, when interpreting the data, care should be taken as an increase in complaints does not necessarily indicate a reduction in healthcare quality. Other factors need to be considered i.e. the degree to which complaints processes are highlighted by HSC Trusts and FPS; the likelihood of potential complaints being resolved before they escalate to a formal complaint; and organisational changes that may affect complaints data.

All data submitted by the HSC Trusts for this publication are collected in a comparable manner, however, not all Trusts offer the same services or serve equal catchment areas/populations therefore caution should be applied with comparisons across Trusts. For example, the South Eastern HSC Trust is the sole provider of Prison Healthcare in Northern Ireland.

Each HSC Trust reports annually on complaints, with the DoH presenting a regional picture in the 'Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland' publication. There are some variations in the data presented which may be expected from data being extracted at different time points from live systems that are updated and amended on a regular basis.

Complaints data is routinely collected and published for other UK jurisdictions, however, caution should be applied when making comparisons. Comparability is limited by the variation in recording practices and due to the manner in which health and social care are integrated in Northern Ireland such that complaints regarding social care/work are included unlike data from Scotland and England.

A standardised approach to reporting compliments was adopted by all HSC Trusts in December 2017 to ensure regional consistency and eventually enable broad comparisons to be made across HSC Trusts (see note below in Trade-offs between output quality components). Data on compliments was first published in the 2018/19 report.

## Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other. None.

## Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.

The 'Complaints and Compliments Received by HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland' statistical publication is used by DoH policy officials for corporate monitoring and to inform and monitor related policy. In addition, the information is used for Ministerial briefing and to respond to Private Office enquiries and parliamentary/ assembly questions.

Awareness of users of our data is furthered from ad hoc requests for information.

User feedback is invited in the publication.

## **Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden**

The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.

IAD do not have access to HSC Trust information systems therefore HSC Trust staff must provide IAD with the data requested. All of the information is submitted electronically. The CH8 collection for complaints requires HSC Trusts to provide data they already collect. It is extracted from existing administrative systems.

Data undergo considerable validation prior to publication, which is a time-consuming exercise for statistical staff.

The production of the annual report has been streamlined wherever possible and is reviewed regularly for efficiency.

## **Confidentiality, Transparency and Security**

The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

The compliments information is collected at HSC Trust level and as such does not include personal data. Likewise, the complaints information on FPS is aggregated for each type of practice (general practitioners, dental practitioners, pharmacists and optometrists) and therefore does not include personal data. These Excel returns are submitted by e-mail to the Department and held on a secure drive before being processed and validated.

The complaints information return records patient level data on complaint issues received by Trusts during the year. Unnecessary personal identifiers are stripped from the data prior to it being emailed via a password protected Excel return to DoH, where it is then stored on a secure drive.

All statistics produced are aggregated to a non-disclosive level to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

The DoH Statistical Charter contains a 'Statement on Confidentiality and Security': [Department of Health statistics charter](#)