

CHILDREN IN CARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2024/25 Guidance notes and definitions for statistical return OC2
--

FOR HELP AND INFORMATION:

Tel: 02890 522342

E-mail: cib@health-ni.gov.uk

PURPOSE OF THIS COLLECTION

This collection will provide essential information on the educational attainment of looked after children and on other aspects of their progress.

Please note that Department of Health has Data Sharing Agreements in place with all HSC Trusts in relation to the collection, storage, usage and retention of all personal identifiable information collected in this return.

COMPLETING THIS RETURN

Please enter a response **for all questions which apply** to each individual child or young person. Unless otherwise instructed in these notes, leave blank any boxes which do not apply. If you do not answer an applicable, required question you may have to provide explanations before your return can be authorised. Some of the questions will allow a 'Don't Know' answer but these should only be used on rare occasions. Please make every attempt to determine the answers to questions where at all possible.

Much of the information requested relates to school attendance and examination results. We appreciate that this information is sometimes difficult to obtain from schools. However, the information cannot be obtained directly from the Department of Education, as they do not hold children's names on their databases. Circular 1999/17 from the Department of Education outlines the rights of all those with parental authority to receive information regarding children's progress. For those children for whom the Trust does not have parental authority, it may be necessary to seek information from parents, or in the case of young people aged 16 and over, from the young people themselves. Social workers should be aware of the educational progress of children in their care. Please inform us of any cases where schools fail to cooperate in releasing this information to Trusts.

This return only applies to children who were looked after (as defined in Article 25 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995) at 30 September of the year in question and who had been looked after continuously by your Trust for at least a year. The relevant 'school year' is that which largely overlaps with this period, for example,

For the 2024/25 return: include children who were looked after from 1 October 2024 until 30 September 2025 or later. **The relevant school year is September 2024 - June 2025**

- **Exclude children looked after at any point in the year in question under an agreed series of short-term arrangements.** (These are defined as children who are accommodated under the provisions of Reg. 13 of the Arrangements for Placement of Children [General] Regulations (NI), 1996.)

- **Include 'missing' children** - Children who are missing from their agreed placement, and have not returned to Trust care, should be regarded as remaining in care until their 18th birthday (regardless of legal status) and a form should be completed for them accordingly.

- **Include children placed for adoption** - Children placed for adoption are still looked after until the adoption order is granted and so should be included in these returns until such time as an adoption is made.

INDIVIDUAL NUMBERED QUESTIONS ON FORM

Dates

Dates can be entered manually (E.g. dd/mm/yyyy) or by using the calendar icon. Click on the heading of the calendar to move between years.

Q4 & Q5 – School reference

This information is required to allow the linking of data that is covered in the cross departmental data sharing agreement. This information should be provided by the school attended by the looked after child in the previous school year. The school's reference number (DENI number) has seven digits and no letters. The composition of the child's Admission Number is unique to the school the child is attending and can be a mix of both letters and numbers.

If the child is not yet of school age this question does not need to be completed. If the child is not attending school in Northern Ireland or is attending a Regional College this question does not need to be answered but an explanation should be provided in the comment box at the end of the questionnaire.

Please note, the reference numbers should relate to the school the child attended in the completed school year 2023/24

Q6, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14:

These questions are included in order to satisfy the Department's commitment to equality monitoring.

Q7 & Q8: Postcodes

Postcode is requested to enable the level of area deprivation and rural proofing to be estimated. The individual postcode will only be used as an aggregated measure and never on its own.

Q12 & Q13: Disability

This is the informal definition of disability as given for the register of children with a disability. The formal definition is as follows: A child/young person has a disability if he/she has a significant impairment, and, without the provision of additional assistance resources or information, would be disadvantaged/restricted in, or prevented from participating in, the life of the community, both in the manner which might reasonably be expected and in comparison to other children of similar age, respecting individual culture and circumstances.

Q14: Dependants

This item was included as it was thought that some young people might have a child or children while being looked after, and that this could affect educational outcomes. For those young people who have dependants, please enter the number of dependants.

Q15: Date of Start of Last Period of Care

Enter the date relating to the last period of care. '**Period of care**' means a continuous period of being looked after, which may include several different '**episodes**' of care in succession.

When a child starts to be looked after, both the ‘**episode**’ and the ‘**period**’ of care begin. When a child ceases to be looked after, both the ‘**episode**’ and the ‘**period**’ of care end. An ‘**episode**’ of care begins and ends with a change of legal status or placement. However, when the ‘**episode**’ ends, the period of care may well continue. It is the ‘**period**’ of care to which these questions relate.

Date of birth and date of start of latest period of care cannot be after: **30 September 2024 for the 2024/25 return**

Q16: Current placement start date

This relates to the placement of the child/young person on 30 September 2025. Please add the date the child was initially placed, and not the date the child returned from a short break while in this placement.

Q19-Q23: Placement change during the year

If the child’s placement changed during the year, enter the total number of times it changed, regardless of the length or location of each placement. Do not include placement changes that were due to short breaks.

Remember that children looked after at any point in the relevant year, under an agreed series of short-term arrangements should be excluded from this collection.

Q25-Q28: Statutory reviews

Enter the method of participation of the child or young person in the review

Q29: Expelled/permanently excluded from school at any time during the school year?

Answer ‘Yes’ for any who were expelled from school at any time during the school year. Do not answer yes for children who were expelled before the start of the year and remained expelled when the year commenced – the question refers only to expulsions which occurred during the school year in question. Do not include suspensions.

Q30 & Q31: Change of schools

Answer ‘Yes’ for any child who changed schools during the relevant school year. Do not answer ‘Yes’ for those moving from Primary to Secondary School. Enter the number of times the child changed schools.

Q32 & Q33: EOTAS

Please answer ‘Yes’ both if the child was continuously OR for only a duration in EOTAS or other relevant setting during the relevant school year.

Q34 & Q35: GCSEs

Please answer these questions for all children, and select the appropriate reason if the child was not assessed for GCSE exams. For most children this will be “Young person was not in Year 12”.

*Please make sure you enter information relevant to the **completed** school year 2024/25 only.*

Q36: GCSE Qualifications

Record number of GCSE qualifications obtained in Year 12 only.

GCSE Qualifications English and Maths

If a young person, in Year 12, achieved 5 or more GCSEs at level A*-C, please indicate if this included GCSE English and GCSE Maths.

- Select 'Yes' ONLY if the young person obtained 5 or more A*-C and this included BOTH GCSE English and GCSE Maths.
- Select 'No' if the young person obtained 5 or more A*-C but these did not include both GCSE English and GCSE Maths.
- Select 'N/A' if the young person did not obtain 5 or more GCSE at A*-C

Q37 & Q38: NVQs

The school will be able to advise what level the NVQ relates to, but a general description can be found here <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/qualifications-what-different-levels-mean>.

Q39: Pre-school provision

This question should be answered for all children who were, or should have been in Primary 1 at 30 September of the relevant year, i.e.: **For the 2024/25 return, those with dates of birth in the range 02/07/2020 – 01/07/2021 inclusive.** Answer 'Yes' for those who had a free pre-school place during the year before entering Primary 1.

Q40 & Q41: Personal Education Plans

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a continuous running record of the child/young person's school history and identifies what needs to happen for Looked After Children/Young People to fulfil their potential by planning and establishing clear targets for the child/young person relating to learning achievements.

All Looked After Children/Young People of statutory school age, including children/young people in secure accommodation and in custody should have a PEP. A PEP should be completed for all Looked After Children/Young People admitted to care at the 3 month Looked After Children Review, 6 month Looked After Children Review, and at 6 monthly intervals thereafter to coincide with Looked After Children Reviews.

Q42 & Q43: HCHF Development and Statutory Health Reviews for under 5's.

NOTE: Wording in these questions have been amended from 'Development Assessment' to 'HCHF Development Review' and 'Health Assessment' to 'Statutory Health Review'.

These questions should be answered for all children aged 4 years or younger at 30 September of the relevant year, i.e. **For the 2024/25 return, those with dates of birth on or after 01/10/2020** (For children aged 5 years and older, Q57 applies).

HCHF Development reviews: answer 'Yes' for children whose development reviews were up to date at 30 September of the relevant year, i.e. **30 September 2025 for the 2024/25 return.**

These are reviews covered by the under the Healthy Child Healthy Future framework, under which children should be assessed at approximately the following ages: 8 weeks, 7 months, 18 months, 30 months, and 4 years. Answer 'Yes' for children who missed earlier assessments, providing they received their later assessments. A child is considered up-to-date if assessments have taken place by the dates shown above, even if they took place later than they should have done. If a child has missed all their development assessments except the most recent, they should still be counted as up-to-date.

Health assessments: Answer 'Yes' for those children who had their 6-monthly Statutory health review from a doctor, or other suitably qualified health professional, during the previous 6 months, i.e. **Between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2025 for the 2024/25 return**, (See Regulation 6 of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations, (NI) 1996.)

Q44: Statutory Health Review for children aged 5 years and over

NOTE: Wording in this question has been amended 'Health Assessment' to 'Statutory Health Review'.

This question should be answered only for children and young people aged 5 years or older at 30 September of the relevant year i.e.: **For the 2024/25 return, those with dates of birth on or before 30/09/2020.**

Answer 'Yes' for those young people who had their annual statutory health review from a doctor, or other suitably qualified health professional during the relevant year, i.e.: **Between 1 October 2024 and 30 September 2025 for the 2024/25 return.** (See Regulation 6 of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations, (NI) 1996.)

Q45: Immunisations

This question applies to all children and young people. Answer 'Yes' for children whose immunisations were up to date. This question relates to all children, not just those with immunisations due during the year. This question is not restricted to immunisations due while the child was looked after. It includes immunisations which should have been given before the child was looked after. In cases where children have not received their immunisations because of parental refusal or for health reasons, they should be treated as not being up-to-date.

A child is considered up-to-date if the immunisations have been given by 30 September of the relevant year, i.e.: **30 September 2025 for the 2024/25 return** even if they were given late according to the immunisations timetable. However, for the purpose of OC2, the opinion of a doctor or practice nurse that a child's immunisations are up-to-date is sufficient (a timetable for some childhood immunisations can be found at: [Childhood immunisation programme | nidirect](#)).

Q46: Dental Checks

This question applies to all children and young people. Answer 'Yes' for those children who had their teeth checked by a dentist during the relevant year. For very young children, the examination does not have to be undertaken by a dentist, and an examination by a paediatrician or other healthcare professional which included an oral examination may be counted.

Q47-Q49: Substance misuse

This question has been introduced to the OC2 collection because looked after children have been identified as a high risk group with increased vulnerability to developing substance misuse problems. Some studies have indicated that looked after young people are four times more likely than those living in private households to smoke, drink and take drugs

For the purposes of the OC2 collection, the term 'drug' is used to refer to any psychotropic substance, including illegal drugs, illicit use of prescription drugs and volatile substances. Young people's drug taking is often inextricably linked with the consumption of alcohol. Therefore the term 'substance' refers to both drugs and alcohol, but not tobacco.

The fact that a young person has taken a substance should not automatically lead to reporting of substance misuse. The definition to be used for the purpose of this collection is 'Substance taking which harms health or social functioning' -substance misuse may be dependency (physical or psychological) or substance taking that is part of a wider spectrum of problematic or harmful behaviour.

Intervention can include such activities as drug education/harm reduction information, one to one support, therapeutic counselling, and targeted support including support with a range of problems which are causing the young person difficulties and may be exacerbating the young person's drug misuse i.e. family contact, placement stability, school attendance and emotional and mental health problems.

Q50: Offending

This question applies to **children aged 10 and over at 30 September** of the relevant year i.e.: **For the 2024/25 return those with dates of birth on or before 30/09/2015.**

Answer 'Yes' for young people who, during the relevant year 1 October 2024 – 30 September 2025 inclusive, were convicted of an offence or cautioned. Include offences committed before the start of the year if they were committed while the young person was looked after. Do not include offences committed while the child was not looked after.

Q51: Life Story work

This work can be undertaken by both statutory and voluntary agencies.

Appendix 1

OC2 return 2024/25		
Definitions of the groups of children covered by each data item		
Data item on OC2	Subject	Which children are included?
	Scope of OC2	All children who were looked after on 30 September 2025 and on that date had been looked after continuously for at least a year.
	Compulsory school age	Children whose birth dates are between 02/07/2008 and 01/07/2020 inclusive.
39	Pre-school provision	Children whose dates of birth are in the range 02/07/2020– 01/07/2021.
43 & 44	HCHF development reviews and 6 monthly statutory health reviews	Children aged 4 years or younger at 30 September 2025, i.e. whose dates of birth are 01/10/2020 or later.
42	Annual statutory health review	Children aged 5 years and over at 30 September 2025, i.e. children whose date of birth is 30/09/2020 or earlier.
50	Offending	Children aged 10 and over at 30 September 2025, i.e. whose date of birth is 30/09/2015 or earlier.