

Statistics from the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme: 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006

This bulletin summarises information on people visiting the Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme and relates to the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2006. It is the fifth bulletin reporting on information collected on the operation of the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES), which began operation in April 2001.

Summary

In Northern Ireland during the twelve month period ending 31 March 2006:

- There were 8,797 visits to participating pharmacies by users of the scheme. This is an increase of 18% (1,357 visits) on the 2004/05 figure (7,440 visits).
- The proportion of visits involving the return of used equipment fell in 2005/06 to 44% from 54% in 2004/05.
- There were 65,111 needles issued (a decrease of 18% on 2004/05) and 85,801 syringes issued (a decrease of 0.3% on 2004/05).
- Almost nine in ten visits (87%) were made by male clients.
- Just over half (52%) of all visits were made by clients aged 31 and over.
- One in twenty-five visits (4%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES.
- Seventeen (0.2%) visits were by clients reporting that they were currently sharing needles.

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1. Background

1.1 Needle Exchange Schemes are a service for injecting drug users, targeted as a harm reduction measure to help limit the spread of blood borne viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

1.2 In 2000 funding was made available to develop a free needle and syringe exchange scheme in community pharmacies in Northern Ireland. With input from community pharmacists and other expert advisors, and taking account of models of best practice developed elsewhere, the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES) was introduced in April 2001.

1.3 Initially five pharmacies were involved in the scheme; by the end of 2005/06 there were nine pharmacies offering needle and syringe exchange. Pharmacies were chosen based on their willingness to participate, their location, and the assessed need for needle exchange in the locality.

2. Data Collection

2.1 Information on transactions involving needles and syringes is collected from participating pharmacies. Administrative input from pharmacy staff is kept to a minimum and statistics are collected at the end of each month. The information is collated within the Department of Health, Social Services, and Public Safety by the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (DAIRU). Prior to January 2003, this function was performed by the Drug and Alcohol Strategy Team (DAST) in the Department.

2.2 Information is collected on the number of visits by clients undertaking a NSES transaction; numbers of needles and syringes issued; returns of used equipment; and age and gender of the client. As data

are collected in an anonymised form – to help underscore confidentiality and thus underpin confidence in the scheme – it is not possible to report directly on the number of individuals using the NSES during the year.

3. Number of Visits

3.1 There were 8,797 visits to Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme in 2005/06 (Table 1), an increase of 18% (1,357) on the number of visits in 2004/05 (7,440). The vast majority of visits (91%) took place at pharmacies based within the Eastern and Northern Health and Social Services Board areas. The breakdown for the four HSSB areas is as follows:

HSSB Area	Visits (%)
Northern HSSB	5,082 (57.8%)
Eastern HSSB	2,936 (33.4%)
Western HSSB	761 (8.7%)
Southern HSSB	18 (0.2%)

4. Rates of Return

4.1 Just over four in every ten (44%) of the 8,797 visits that were made in 2005/06 were exchanges, whereby a client returned a sealed bin containing used equipment (Table 3).

4.2 Rates of return varied across Health and Social Services Boards (HSSB). The highest return rate was 76% in the Western HSSB, followed by 52% in Eastern HSSB, 44% in the Southern HSSB, and 35% in the Northern HSSB (Table 4).

5. Number of Needles and Syringes Issued

Needles

5.1 The number of needles issued in 2005/06 was 65,111 (Table 5). The breakdown by HSSB area are as follows:

HSSB Area	Needles (%)
Northern HSSB	45,689 (70.2)
Eastern HSSB	13,838 (21.3)
Western HSSB	5,349 (8.2)
Southern HSSB	235 (0.4)

Syringes

5.2 There were 85,801 syringes issued in 2005/06 (Table 5). The number of syringes issued was highest within the Northern HSSB area. The figures for HSSB areas are as follows:

HSSB Area	Syringes (%)
Northern HSSB	46,233 (53.9)
Eastern HSSB	27,785 (32.4)
Western HSSB	11,613 (13.5)
Southern HSSB	170 (0.2)

Needle and Syringes Issued at Exchange Visits

5.3 Two thirds of both needles (66%) and syringes (68%) issued were distributed at visits where a client returned a sealed bin containing used equipment.

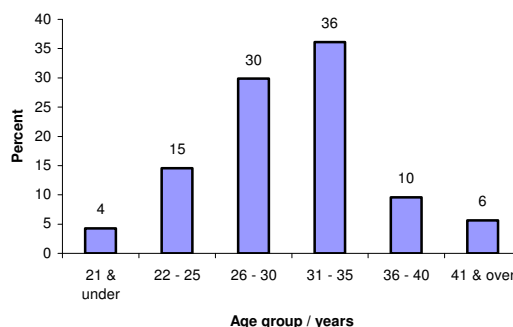
6. Profile of Service Users

Age and Gender

6.1 Almost nine in every ten visits (87%) were made by male clients (Table 6).

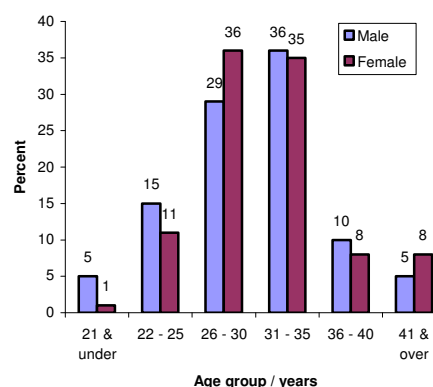
6.2 The mean age of clients using the NSES was 31 years, with just over half (52%) of all visits made by clients aged 31 and over. The modal age group was 31 - 35, with over one third (36%) of visits made by this age group (Figure 1; Table 7).

Figure 1. Age of Client at Each Visit: 2005/06



6.3 The age profile for visits by males and females was fairly similar. There were more male than female visits in the under 25 age groups, 20% males compared to 12% females. The highest proportion of visits made by male and female clients were aged between 26-35. Of all visits 65% of males and 71% of females were aged within this combined age group. While in the over 36 age groups the proportion of male to female visits is very similar with 15% of male visits and 16% of female visits. (Figure 2; Table 8).

Figure 2. Age and Gender of Clients at Each Visit: 2005/06



New Clients

6.4 One in twenty-five visits (4%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES (Table 9).

Reported Sharing Behaviour

6.5 Seventeen (0.2%) visits were by clients reporting that they have currently shared equipment (Table 10). This level of sharing is considerably lower than estimates derived from other sources, for example from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database which reports on drug users presenting for treatment, and is therefore likely to be an underestimate.

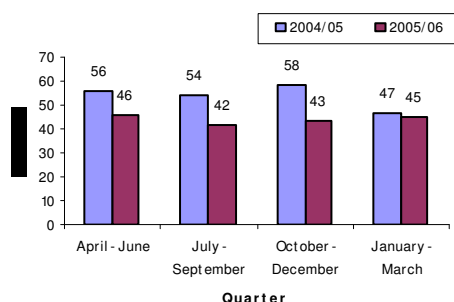
7. Comparisons: 2004/05 and 2005/06

Number of Visits

7.1 There were 18% (1,357) more visits in 2005/06 than in 2004/05 (8,797 in 2005/06 compared to 7,440 in 2004/05) (Table 11).

7.2 The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2005/06 to 44% compared to 54% in the previous year. In 2005/06, the highest return rate was 46% in the April to June quarter, while the lowest rate was 42% between July and September (Figure 3; Table 12). In comparison, the 2004/05 return rates ranged from 58% in October to December to 47% between January and March.

Figure 3. Proportion of Visits Where a Return Has Been Made: 2004/05 and 2005/06



Needles

7.3 There was an 18% decrease in the number of needles issued, from 79,489 in 2004/05 to 65,111 in 2005/06 (Table 13).

Syringes

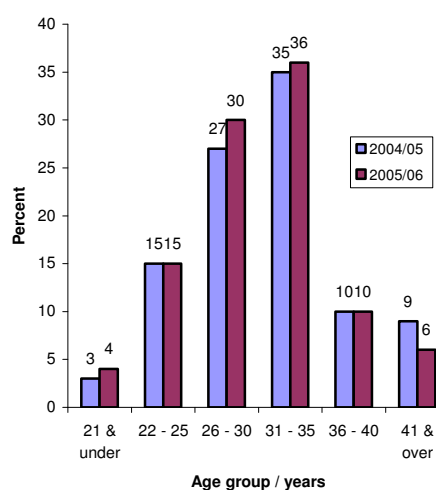
7.4 The number of syringes issued fell by 0.3%, from 86,056 in 2004/05 to 85,801 in 2005/06 (Table 13).

Age and Gender

7.5 The proportion of visits by both male and female clients was similar in 2005/06 and 2004/05. In 2005/06, 87% of the visits were by males and 13% by females compared to 89% and 11% respectively in 2004/05 (Table 14).

7.6 The age profile of clients using the NSES in 2005/06 was very similar to those who used it in 2004/05, age groups 22 to 25 and 36 to 40 have the same proportion of clients in both years. The 2005/06 users had a slightly younger profile in general (Figure 4; Table 15).

Figure 4. Age of Client at Each Visit: 2004/05 and 2005/06



New Clients

7.7 There were 318 visits by clients reporting themselves as new clients. This is the same proportion as in 2004/05. (Table 16).

Reported Sharing Behaviour

7.8 Seventeen visits were for clients who reported that they were currently sharing equipment (Table 17).

8. Acknowledgements

DAIRU would like to thank the community pharmacists and their staff, the Pharmaceutical Directors within the four HSSB areas and the local Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinators for ensuring the provision of the data reported in this bulletin.

9. Editorial Notes

Percentages may not always add to 100 due to rounding.

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9.1 Further copies of this publication can be obtained from the above address, or on-line at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-pubs.htm

Many other statistical and research reports from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Information and Analysis Directorate, in which DAIRU is located, are available at this web address.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

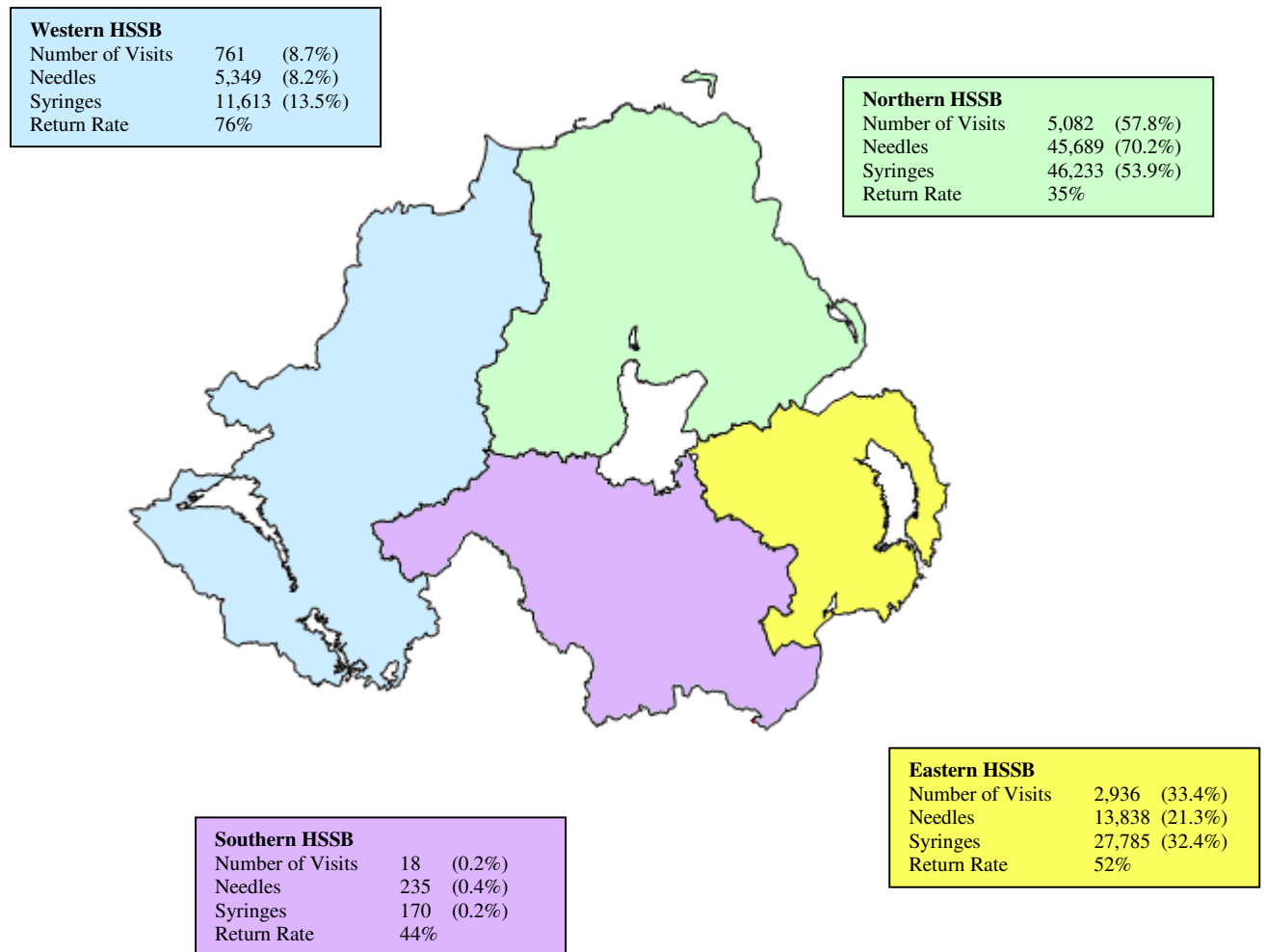
The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is the principal source of official statistical information about Northern Ireland. Further information is available from the NISRA website at www.nisra.gov.uk or via e-mail at info.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk.

Future publications

This NSES publication will be updated on an annual basis. The next NSES annual bulletin will be published on Tuesday 11 September 2007.

Annex A, Map 1

Total Number of Needles and Syringes Issued and Return Rate¹ by Health & Social Services Board



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¹ Return Rate is the percentage of visits involving the return of used equipment.

Annex B – Tables: 2005/06

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Table 2	Number of Visits Involving the Return of Used Equipment: 2005/06	10
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Table 1. Number of Visits: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2005	2,072	24
July - September 2005	2,302	26
October - December 2005	2,187	25
January - March 2006	2,236	25
TOTAL	8,797	100

Table 2. Number of Visits Involving the Return of Used Equipment: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2005	960	25
July - September 2005	968	25
October - December 2005	940	24
January - March 2006	1,004	26
TOTAL	3,872	100

Table 3. Number of Visits Involving the Return of Used Equipment as a Percentage of the Total Number of Visits: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2005	2,072	960	46
July - September 2005	2,302	968	42
October - December 2005	2,187	940	43
January - March 2006	2,236	1,004	45
TOTAL	8,797	3,872	44

Table 4. Number of Visits Involving the Return of Used Equipment as a Percentage of the Total Number of Visits in Each HSSB area: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
Northern	5,082	1,760	35
Eastern	2,936	1,529	52
Western	761	575	76
Southern	18	8	44
TOTAL	8,797	3,872	44

Table 5. Number of Needles and Syringes Issued: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Needles issued	Syringes issued
April - June 2005	15,474	20,256
July - September 2005	16,220	21,247
October - December 2005	16,483	21,707
January - March 2006	16,934	22,591
TOTAL	65,111 ⁽¹⁾	85,801 ⁽²⁾

Percentages

April - June 2005	24	24
July - September 2005	25	25
October - December 2005	25	25
January - March 2006	26	26
TOTAL	100	100

⁽¹⁾ 66% of these 65,111 needles were issued at a return visit.

⁽²⁾ 68% of these 85,801 syringes were issued at a return visit.

Table 6. Gender of Clients at Each Visit: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Males	Females	TOTAL
April - June 2005	1,822	250	2,072
July - September 2005	2,041	260	2,301
October - December 2005	1,884	302	2,186
January - March 2006	1,899	333	2,232
TOTAL	7,646	1,145	8,791 ⁽¹⁾

Percentages

April - June 2005	88	12	100
July - September 2005	89	11	100
October - December 2005	86	14	100
January - March 2006	85	15	100
TOTAL	87	13	100

⁽¹⁾ This figure excludes 6 visits at which the client's gender was not recorded.

Table 7. Age of Clients at Each Visit: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Quarter	21 & Under	22-25 Years	26-30 Years	31-35 Years	36-40 Years	41 & over	All Ages
April - June 2005	87	329	635	760	176	84	2,071
July - September 2005	87	361	628	883	231	106	2,296
October - December 2005	103	298	643	785	192	154	2,175
January - March 2006	97	288	716	742	239	149	2,231
TOTAL	374	1,276	2,622	3,170	838	493	8,773 ^{(1) (2)}

Percentages

April - June 2005	4	16	31	37	8	4	100
July - September 2005	4	16	27	38	10	5	100
October - December 2005	5	14	30	36	9	7	100
January - March 2006	4	13	32	33	11	7	100
TOTAL	4	15	30	36	10	6	100

⁽¹⁾ This figure excludes 24 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

⁽²⁾ 31 was the mean age of clients using the Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme.

Table 8. Age and Gender of Clients at Each Visit: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Age group	Male	Female	TOTAL
21 & under	359	15	374
22-25	1,153	122	1,275
26-30	2,207	415	2,622
31-35	2,766	404	3,170
36-40	746	91	837
41 & over	395	97	492
ALL AGES	7,626	1,144	8,770 ⁽¹⁾

Percentages

21 & under	5	1	4
22-25	15	11	15
26-30	29	36	30
31-35	36	35	36
36-40	10	8	10
41 & over	5	8	6
ALL AGES	100	100	100

⁽¹⁾ This figure excludes 27 visits at which the client's date of birth or/and gender was not recorded.

Table 9. Number of Visits by New Clients: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
New Client	318	4
Client Used Scheme Before	8,479	96
TOTAL	8,797	100

Table 10. Number of Visits Where Currently Sharing Equipment was Reported: 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
Reported Sharing Equipment	17	0.2
Reported Not Sharing Equipment	8,780	99.8
TOTAL	8,797	100

Annex C – Comparative Tables 2004/05 and 2005/06

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Table 11. Number of Visits: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2004/05	2005/06
April - June	1,863	2,072
July - September	1,916	2,302
October - December	1,799	2,187
January - March	1,862	2,236
TOTAL	7,440	8,797

Percentages

April - June	25	24
July - September	26	26
October - December	24	25
January - March	25	25
TOTAL	100	100

Table 12. Number of Visits Involving the Return of Used Equipment as a Percentage of the Total Number of Visits: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2004/05		2005/06	
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Number of visits	Number of return visits
April - June	1,863	1,052	2,072	960
July - September	1,916	1,039	2,302	968
October - December	1,799	1,043	2,187	940
January - March	1,862	876	2,236	1,004
TOTAL	7,440	4,010	8,797	3,872

Percentages

April - June	100	56	100	46
July - September	100	54	100	42
October - December	100	58	100	43
January - March	100	47	100	45
TOTAL	100	54	100	44

Table 13. Needles and Syringes Issued: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	2004/05	2005/06
Needles	79,489	65,111
Syringes	86,056	85,801

Table 14. Gender of Clients at Each Visit: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Gender	2004/05	2005/06
Males	6,649	7,646
Females	791	1,145
Total	7,440	8,791 ⁽¹⁾

Percentages

Males	89	87
Females	11	13
Total	100	100

⁽¹⁾ This figure excludes 6 visits at which the client's gender was not recorded.

Table 15. Age of Clients at Each Visit: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

Age group	2004/05 ⁽¹⁾	2005/06 ⁽²⁾
21 & under	248	374
22-25	1,142	1,276
26-30	2,037	2,622
31-35	2,613	3,170
36-40	722	838
41 & over	669	493
ALL AGES	7,431 ⁽³⁾	8,773 ⁽⁴⁾

Percentages

21 & under	3	4
22-25	15	15
26-30	27	30
31-35	35	36
36-40	10	10
41 & over	9	6
ALL AGES	100	100

⁽¹⁾ Ages in 2004/05 were rounded (decimal points greater or equal than .5 were rounded up).

⁽²⁾ Ages in 2005/06 were truncated (decimal points removed).

⁽³⁾ This figure excludes 9 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

⁽⁴⁾ This figure excludes 24 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

Table 16. Number of Visits by New Clients: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	2004/05	2005/06
New Client	320	318
Client Used Scheme Before	7,120	8,479
Total	7,440	8,797

Percentages

New Client	4	4
Client Used Scheme Before	96	96
Total	100	100

Table 17. Number of Visits Where Currently Sharing Equipment was Reported: 2004/05 and 2005/06

numbers and percentages

	2004/05	2005/06
Reported Sharing Equipment	12	17
Reported Not Sharing Equipment	7,428	8,780
Total	7,440	8,797

Percentages

Reported Sharing Equipment	0.2	0.2
Reported Not Sharing Equipment	99.8	99.8
Total	100	100

Recent and Future Publications from the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit

Statistical Bulletins

Number	Title	Provisional Publication Date
1/2006	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index 2005	March 2006
3/2006	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Substitute Prescribing Database: 31 st March 2006	September 2006
4/2006	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database: 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006	October 2006

Results from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey

Published jointly with the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, Ireland

Number	Title	Publication Date
Bulletin 3	Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: Cannabis Results	October 2005
Bulletin 4	Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: Cocaine Results	January 2006
Bulletin 5	All Ireland Drug Prevalence Survey 2002/2003: Technical Report	February 2006

Research Reports

Title	Publication Date
Estimating the Prevalence of Problem Opiate and Problem Cocaine Use in Northern Ireland. <i>The Centre for Drug Misuse Research, University of Glasgow</i>	April 2006
Secondary Analysis of the 2003 Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (Drugs, Solvents, Alcohol). <i>Social and Market Research</i>	November 2005

Copies of these publications can be obtained on-line at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-pubs.htm