

Quality Report for Children's statistics

1 Introduction

This report details the quality assurance procedures adopted for Children's Statistics collected and published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Northern Ireland (DHSSPS).

This report relates to the Children Order Statistical Tables and Trends, Children in Care in NI, NI Care Leavers aged 16-18, NI Care Leavers aged 19 and Children Adopted from care in NI.

2 Summary of Quality

2.1 Relevance

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

1. The 'Children Order Statistical Tables' and 'Children Order Statistical Trends';

These publications provide statistical information covering children's social care, including child protection, looked after children, children in need and day care facilities for children. The publication is based on the children order statistical returns introduced in December 1998, which are provided by Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts) to the DHSSPS.

2. The 'Children in Care in Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin';

This presents information on children and young people looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September each year, gathered from Health & Social Care Trusts. It details findings from the annual OC2 survey of information on the educational achievements of these young people at Key Stage Assessments, and GCSE/GNVQ.

3. The 'NI Care Leavers aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin';

This presents summary information on young people aged 16-18 years who left care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March. The information, on which this report is based, derives from the annual OC1 survey, introduced in Northern Ireland in 2002, and completed by each HSC Trust. The survey collects data on the educational attainment and economic activity of young people leaving care, their age, religion, ethnic group, disability, length of time in care, and latest care placement.

4. The 'NI Care Leavers aged 19 Statistical Bulletin';

This presents information from the OC3 survey of former care leavers at their 19th birthday. The OC3 survey collects data on the economic activity, contact with social services and living accommodation of young people who have left care. It also includes information on their age and gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, length of last placement in care, legal status and last placement in care.

5. The 'Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin';

This provides information on children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March. It presents a range of information relating to children

adopted from care, including gender and age, and the durations between different stages in the adoption process.

Data from these publications meet the information needs of a wide range of internal and external users. Within DHSSPS the figures from the Children Order publications are used by policy officials to monitor the volume of activity, Inter Agency working and reasons for referrals and to compare characteristics of children in need, looked after children and children on the child protection register, monitor any increase in the children in need population and monitor the impact of policy and to report on achievement against targets.

Similarly 'Children in Care in Northern Ireland', 'NI Care Leavers aged 16-18' and 'NI Care Leavers aged 19' Statistical Bulletins are used to develop and monitor policy objectives for children leaving care and living independently and to inform outcomes for children in terms of education, employment independent living etc.

Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin is used to inform policy and legislation on the adoption process and services

Outside government, the information is used by a number of charities, including advocacy groups and Children's Commissioner, Regulators, Adoption and Fostering agencies, voluntary organisations, researchers and the general public.

These data are published on the Community Information Branch's website and can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib-3/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics.htm

2.2 Accuracy

The closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) true value.

Each of the surveys covered by this Quality report are censuses of the cohort involved, and as such, coverage is inclusive of all children involved. Subsequently, there are no requirements for confidence intervals.

Each of the Children's statistical reports are published within a year of the reference period and where necessary previous data are revised if necessary and appropriate. All revisions are conducted in line with CIB's Revisions policy which can be accessed at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/cib_revisions_policy.pdf

2.3 Timeliness and Punctuality

Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication.

The CIB publications release calendar is available on the Information and Analysis Directorate's website and provides twelve months advance notice of releases. In the majority of cases, the Children's publications meet the target publication deadlines. In the event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention is drawn to the change and the reasons for the change explained fully at the same time, as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

The time lag between publication and the reference period to which the data refer are as follows.

- Children Order Statistical Tables and Children Order Statistical Trends publications- 8 months after the reference period.
- Children in Care in Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin- 9 months after the reference period.
- NI Care Leavers aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin- 11 months after the reference period.
- NI Care Leavers aged 19 Statistical Bulletin- 12 months after the reference period.
- Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin- 9 months after the reference period.

2.4 Accessibility and Clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format(s) 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.

Each of the Children's statistical reports are published on CIB's website and are available through the Publication Hub. The guidance used by HSC Trusts to complete the surveys are available on the CIB website which details coverage, definitions and instructions on how to complete the returns. A copy of the returns (where relevant) is also provided which informs users of all the information collected.

Additional ad-hoc analysis, where appropriate, can be provided when requested.

Publications are available to download free of charge from the above websites and if requested, CIB will provide the reports in hard copy and other suitable media.

Further information and analysis can be obtained from CIB by contacting Manny Fitzpatrick on 02890 520727 or by emailing Manny.Fitzpatrick@dhsspsni.gov.uk

2.5 Comparability

The degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

The Children's publications cover all Looked after children and Children in Need. Comparisons of the data can be made over time and are available for the following years

- Children Order Statistical Tables and Children Order Statistical Trends publications- 2001/02 onwards
- Children in Care in Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin- 2002 onwards
- NI Care Leavers aged 16-18 statistical bulletin- 2001/02 onwards
- NI Care Leavers aged 19 statistical bulletin- 2003/04 onwards
- Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin- 2002/03 onwards

As part of the UKSA assessment process, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government and DHSSPS carried out a scoping exercise for the feasibility of a comparable data subset of Looked after Children. These regional comparisons have demonstrated that a comparable subset of Looked after Children data for the UK is not feasible due to legislative and definitional differences that exist.

Similarly legislative and definitional differences exist between the UK regions in relation to the other children's data.

2.6 Coherence

The degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but which refer to the same phenomenon, are similar.

There is currently no other official source of Looked after children, Children in Need or Children adopted from Care. However, where appropriate, CIB compare their data to external sources to ensure HSC Trusts are providing reliable and robust data to different organisations. Information is provided to CIB by the five HSC trusts. All data provided by HSC Trust staff for CIB publications are comparable. CIB provide HSC Trust staff with guidelines, definitions and operating manuals on the completion of information returns and have regular Community Liaison Group meetings with HSC Trust staff to discuss coherence and validation issues. This ensures consistent recording, coverage and timeframes of data between HSC Trust areas and with previous year's figures.

3 Summary of Methods Used to Compile the Output

Coverage

- Children Order Statistical Tables and Children Order Statistical Trends publications-
This covers
 - (i) Child Protection Register,
 - (ii) Children in Need
 - (iii) Looked after Children
 - (iv) Day Care for children under 12.
- Children in Care in Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin- covers all children in Northern Ireland who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September of the reporting year. The survey excludes children looked after under an agreed series of respite placements during the period specified.
- NI Care Leavers aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin- care leavers had to be aged 16-18 years and left care during the period 1 April to 31 March of the reporting year. The information collected related to the last period in care. The survey excludes children looked after under an agreed series of respite placements during the period specified.
- NI Care Leavers aged 19 Statistical Bulletin- includes data on all former care leavers at their 19th birthday, who had been looked after on 1st April, 3 years previously.
- Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin- covers all children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2008.

Sample

These surveys are a census of all children in the relevant cohorts.

Method

Children Order Statistical Tables and Trends publications- data are provided via aggregate tables that the HSC Trusts submit via pre-defined templates.

Children in Care in Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin, NI Care Leavers aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin, NI Care Leavers aged 19 Statistical Bulletin and Children Adopted from Care in NI Statistical Bulletin-The surveys used to collect this information are at individual level, with one record for each young person included in the survey. The surveys are

completed online by nominated HSC Trust staff using a secure web-based survey returns application. All records are anonymised to protect the confidentiality of these young people.

Statistical Disclosure

Data are published in such a way that individuals cannot be identified. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and specifically Principle 5: Confidentiality, set out practices for how we protect data from being disclosed. The Principle includes a guarantee to respondents to "ensure that official statistics do not reveal the identity of an individual or organisation, or any private information relating to them". CIB's 'Statistical Policy Statement on Confidentiality' can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/cib_confidentiality_statement.pdf