

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Community Care for Adults in Northern Ireland

*(produced by the Department of Health, Social
Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality.

Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland*⁴ (*Adult Community Statistics*) produced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland (DHSSPS).
- 1.1.2 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality⁵. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland* are designated as National Statistics, subject to DHSSPS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by October 2012.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 DHSSPS has published a comprehensive set of information about these statistics, including information about the uses of the statistics, a user engagement plan and information about users’ experiences of using the statistics. It has also published information about how the statistics have been

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/adult_statistics/statistics_and_research-cib-community_statistics.htm

⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

produced, the quality of the statistics, and the processes for validating and assuring the quality of the data used to produce the statistics.

1.3.2 *Adult Community Statistics* does not provide commentary or analysis to accompany the statistics presented on each of the main programmes of care covered in the release. DHSSPS introduced a new executive summary to *Adult Community Statistics* for 2010-2011 which provides an overview of recent trends in the number of people receiving support from the different programmes of care. This summary provides a useful starting point for improving the commentary and analysis in the release.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DHSSPS could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

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| Requirement 1 | Improve the commentary in <i>Adult Community Statistics</i> so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.6). |
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2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Adult Community Statistics for Northern Ireland (Adult Community Statistics)* is an annual statistical publication about social care services provided for adults by Northern Ireland's five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts⁶. The release presents statistics on five main programmes of community care for the most recent financial year: elderly care; mental health; learning disability; physical and sensory disability; and primary health and adult community. It also presents some trends in these programmes of care for the most recent five years.
- 2.2 DHSSPS uses these statistics to develop its policies on social care for adults and to monitor the performance of HSC Trusts. The HSC Board⁷ uses these statistics to monitor the performance of the HSC Trusts. The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland uses these statistics to monitor trends in the provision of health and social care services to older people. The statistics are also used by voluntary organisations and care providers who are interested in trends in the provision of social care services. Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and the general public use these statistics to hold the government and HSC Trusts to account for the provision of social care services in the community.
- 2.3 DHSSPS publishes additional statistical releases about other adult social care services, including *Domiciliary Care Services for Adults in Northern Ireland*⁸ and *Hearing Aid Assessments and Re-assessments*⁹. These are not National Statistics publications and have not been included within the scope of this assessment.
- 2.4 DHSSPS produces the *Adult Community Statistics* using data provided by the HSC Trusts. The data are supplied via annual and quarterly aggregate statistical returns. DHSSPS told us that there have been no changes to the methods or classifications used for the adult community information statistical returns since they were first collected in 1988.
- 2.5 DHSSPS has established a Regional Information Group¹⁰ (RIG), to facilitate access to information provided by the HSC Trusts, and other relevant bodies, to meet the needs of the Department and its Minister. Membership of RIG includes HSC Trusts, the Public Health Agency¹¹ and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority¹². The work programme, overseen by RIG, aims to ensure that information is provided to agreed standards of timeliness and quality and that arrangements for data collection are sufficient to enable DHSSPS to meet its statutory obligations under the *Statistics and Registration*

⁶ <http://www.n-i.nhs.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.hscni.net/index.php?link=boards>

⁸ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/adult_statistics/statistics_and_research-dom_care_services.htm

⁹ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/adult_statistics/statistics_and_research-hearing_aid_assessments_reassessments.htm

¹⁰ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/cib_stakeholder_board_tor.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>

¹² <http://www.rqia.org.uk/home/index.cfm>

Service Act 2007. A sub-group of RIG will oversee a comprehensive review of all the data returns provided by the HSC Trusts to DHSSPS to develop more efficient processes for data supply, and to reduce the burden on the Trusts.

- 2.6 DHSSPS told us that it costs around £10,000 per annum to collect and validate the data used to produce these statistics and to publish *Adult Community Statistics*.

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 DHSSPS Community Information Branch (CIB) engages with users of these statistics within the Department through RIG, which meets quarterly. CIB engages with users outside DHSSPS through the Community Liaison Group¹³ (CLG) which meets twice a year. DHSSPS has published some information about these meetings on its website¹⁴. CLG largely comprises data suppliers and users in the HSC Trusts. DHSSPS has less engagement with users in charities, voluntary organisations and in the research and academic communities. DHSSPS has published a user engagement plan¹⁵ which describes how it engages with users of these statistics. DHSSPS invited a wider range of users to a CLG meeting in March although few extra people attended. We suggest that DHSSPS consider taking additional steps to engage with a wider range of users of these statistics.
- 3.2 DHSSPS has published a statement¹⁶ about the uses made of these statistics. The statement refers to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*¹⁷. DHSSPS has published information¹⁸ about the feedback that it received from users through an online questionnaire, although it has not published any information about how it plans to respond to the views expressed. DHSSPS has also published the findings¹⁹ from a survey of users of all the statistics produced by CIB. The results for 2011 show high levels of satisfaction amongst the (eight) people who responded. We suggest that DHSSPS publish information about how it plans to respond to the findings from the survey of users of these statistics.
- 3.3 DHSSPS has published a quality report²⁰ which provides information about how the statistics have been produced and about their quality. The quality report provides a link to information about how the data are collected from the HSC Trusts, and the processes that DHSSPS follows to validate and assure the quality of the data. *Adult Community Statistics* provides a short description of these processes. DHSSPS told us that in future it will draw attention to the quality report in the statistical release.
- 3.4 *Adult Community Statistics* provides links to publications that present similar statistics for England, Wales and Scotland. DHSSPS told us that inter-country comparisons are difficult as social care operates within different legislative frameworks across the different administrations of the UK. We suggest that DHSSPS provide additional information in *Adult Community Statistics* about the comparability of social care statistics for different parts of the UK.
- 3.5 DHSSPS told us that a sub-group of RIG will oversee a comprehensive review of all the data returns provided by the HSC Trusts to DHSSPS. The review will

¹³ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-user_engagement.htm

¹⁴ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/clg_14.11.11_-_summary_for_internet.pdf

¹⁵ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/cib_user_engagement_plan-2.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/the_uses_made_of_adult_community_statistics_for_northern_ireland.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/index.html>

¹⁸ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/user_feedback_for_adult_community_statistics_for_northern_ireland_2010_-_2011_4_.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/nisra_customer_survey_2011_-_cib_summary_2_.pdf

²⁰ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_cib_quality_report_-_adult_community_statistics_for_northern_ireland.pdf

consider whether there are clear user needs for statistics based on all the data that are collected. It will also consider options to develop more efficient processes for data supply, to reduce the burden on the HSC Trusts. We suggest that DHSSPS publish information about the findings from the review of data supplied by HSC Trusts, once the review has been completed.

- 3.6 *Adult Community Statistics* presents a range of tables on each of the five programmes of care covered, but does not provide any commentary or analysis to accompany the information being presented. DHSSPS introduced a new executive summary to *Adult Community Statistics* for 2010-2011 which provides an overview of recent trends in the volume of people benefiting from the different programmes of care. This provides a useful starting point for improving the commentary and analysis in the release. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DHSSPS should improve the commentary in *Adult Community Statistics* so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics²¹ (Requirement 1). We suggest that in meeting this requirement DHSSPS should consider the points detailed in annex 2.

²¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DHSSPS's Adult Community Care statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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| Suggestion 1 | Consider taking additional steps to engage with a wider range of users of these statistics (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish information about how DHSSPS plans to respond to the findings from the survey of users of these statistics (para 3.2). |
| Suggestion 3 | Provide additional information in <i>Adult Community Statistics</i> about the comparability of social care statistics for different parts of the UK (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish information about the findings from the review of data supplied by HSC Trusts, once the review has been completed (para 3.5). |
| Suggestion 5 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve <i>Adult Community Statistics</i> (para 3.6). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*²². While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with community care for adults, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 The title does not make clear that the release presents statistics about community care services. The title includes the year to which the latest statistics relate, and it can easily be inferred that it is an annual release. The release uses standard headings, formattings and logos. It includes the name of the originating department and provides the name and contact details for the responsible statistician.
- A2.4 *Adult Community Statistics* could provide additional contextual information about all the programmes of care that are funded by DHSSPS; explain why statistics on five particular programmes of care have been brought together in *Adult Community Statistics*; and provide information about where statistics can be found about the other programmes of care, not covered in this release.

Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

- A2.5 *Adult Community Statistics* for 2010-2011 includes a new executive summary that provides an overview of recent trends in community care services. This provides a useful starting point for improving the commentary and analysis in the release. The release does not explain certain terms in the text, for example, care packages. The release includes an appendix that provides definitions for some of the main terms used.
- A2.6 *Adult Community Statistics* presents a range of tables on each of the five programmes of care covered, but does not provide any commentary or analysis to accompany the information being presented. For example, *Adult Community Statistics* for 2010-2011 shows that there has been a notable decline in residential places available for mentally ill people over the last five years. DHSSPS told us that the decline was due to a classification change, although this is not explained in the release. The figures in the tables are not presented per head of population. The same release shows a notable decline in residential places available for persons with a learning disability in the most recent year, although there is no commentary about this development.

²² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.7 *Adult Community Statistics* uses impartial language and avoids statements of opinion.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.8 DHSSPS has published a statement about the uses made of these statistics. It has also included a brief statement about the main uses of the statistics in *Adult Community Statistics*. This information could be used as a basis for developing commentary and analysis about the statistics that will be of most relevance to users.

A2.9 *Adult Community Statistics* provides a different section on each of five programmes of care covered, and an additional section that presents statistics on all five programmes of care. Each section would benefit from an introduction that provides some additional information about the programme of care and about any recent developments that may be of interest. The release provides information about the number of people receiving support from the different programmes of care, but does not provide any wider contextual information; for example, about the level of expenditure on each programme.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.10 *Adult Community Statistics* includes appendices that provide a range of reference information about the statistics. These include information about the programmes of care; definitions of terms used; information about the returns used to collect data from the HSC Trusts and the guidance that accompanies these returns. *Adult Community Statistics* also provides links to publications that present similar statistics for England, Wales and Scotland.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from December 2011 to May 2012.
- A3.2 The Assessment team – Neil Jackson and Emily Gleeson – agreed the scope of, and timetable for, this assessment with representatives of DHSSPS in December. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 8 March and 13 April. The Assessment team subsequently discussed the evidence with DHSSPS in May to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.
- A3.4 The Assessment team received three responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Regulatory body | 1 |
| HSC Trust | 1 |
| DHSSPS | 1 |
- A3.5 Users were generally satisfied with the accessibility and presentation of the statistics. The statistics are used for general monitoring of trends; informing responses to Assembly questions and media requests; and for benchmarking for HSC Trusts. Some users noted that certain aspects of the data are limited and do not reflect current service provision, and that the returns could usefully be updated.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

