

Family Practitioner Services

General Medical Services

for Northern Ireland, Annual Statistics 2019/20



Published June 2020

Purpose This report contains high level summary information in relation to General Practitioners, GP Practices and Registered Patients including registration activity and payments processed by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) towards the overall cost of GP Services in Northern Ireland. Information is provided at NI level with further breakdowns presented at both Local Commissioning Group (LCG) and Local Government District (LGD) level. A number of UK comparisons are also included. Data detailed in this publication are also available in spreadsheet format (Microsoft Excel) to aid secondary analysis, at the following page/link: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3174.htm>.
[Click here to go directly to the file.](#)

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We want your feedback We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics, which can be provided by email to: Info.BSO@hscni.net

Additional information about these statistics is located at the back of this publication.

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Introduction

This publication provides a statistical overview of GP services in Northern Ireland between April 2019 and March 2020. It is based on patient registration records on the National Health Application and Infrastructure Services (NHAIS) system, the Common Practitioner Model (CPM) and payment claims submitted by GP Practices to Family Practitioner Services (FPS).

It does not contain data on the treatment of patients as individual GPs maintain their own clinical information systems.

This publication has been produced by independent statisticians within the FPS Information Unit. They are on secondment from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It has been compiled in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Further information about the work of FPS and the manner in which these statistics were produced can be found at the back of this publication.

Key Figures



- **Northern Ireland had 323 active GP Practices**
This was a reduction of 4 compared to 2019 and a reduction of 27 (8%) since 2014.
 - **There were 1,364 GPs (excluding Locums)**
Of these 58% were female and 42% were male, a notable shift in gender profile since 2014 (46% female, 54% male).
 - **A total of 2,003,000 individuals were registered with a GP Practice**
During 2019/20 there were over 50,000 new patient registrations and approximately 40,000 patients deducted.
 - **BSO processed £285.8m of payments towards overall cost of GP Services in Northern Ireland**
This was an average payment of £143 per registered patient.
-

1. GP Practices Statistics

This section contains basic summary statistics on GP Practices including number of practices and their distribution geographically and proximity for patients. Where a practice is split over more than one site the location of the Primary Practice is used for analysis.

1.1 Number of GP Practices

There were 323 GP Practices in Northern Ireland on 31st March 2020. This is a reduction of 4 practices since 2019 and a reduction of 27 (8%) since 2014. The change in the number of practices is as a result of closures, as well as mergers (where practices have combined).

Belfast Local Government District (LGD) has the largest number of GP Practices (76) while Antrim & Newtownabbey and Lisburn & Castlereagh LGDs have the smallest number (16).

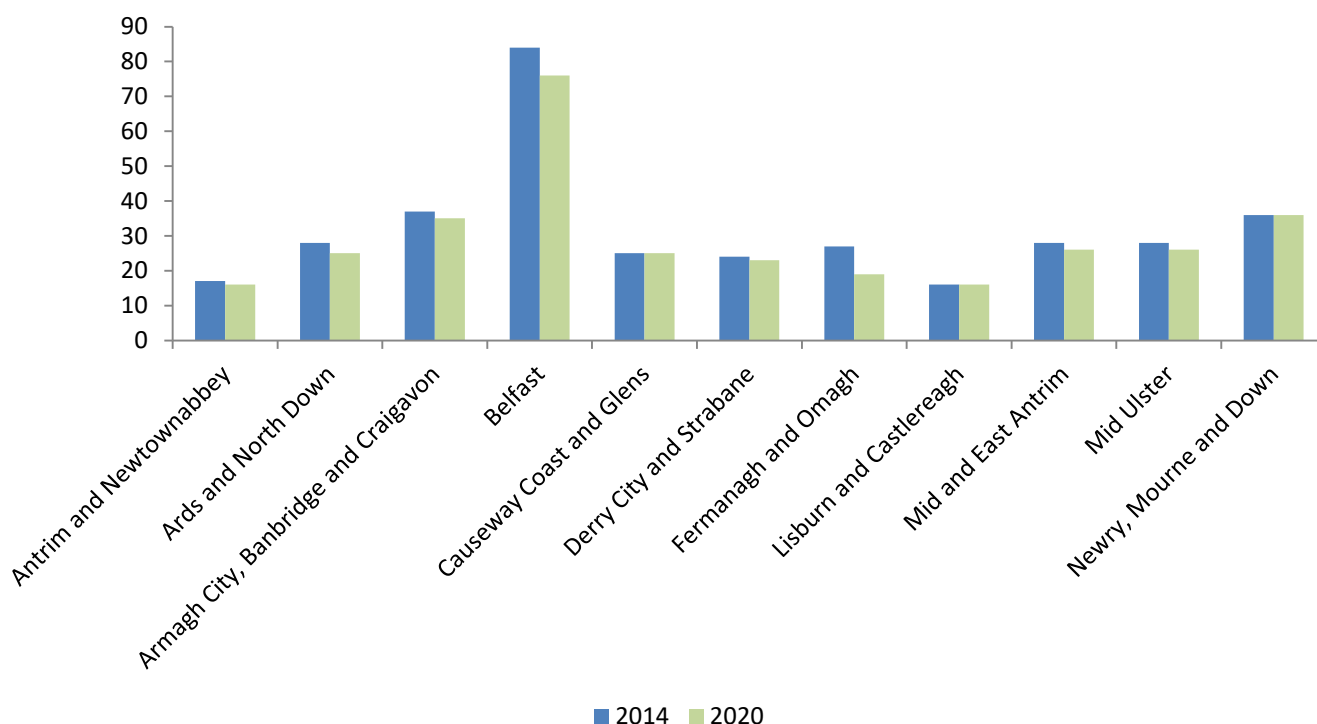


Figure 1.1: Number of GP Practices by Local Government District, 31st March 2014 and 31st March 2020

[See Annex Table 1.3b](#)

Only 3 LGDs have maintained their number of GP Practices since 2014 (Causeway Coast & Glens, Lisburn & Castlereagh, and Newry, Mourne & Down). The rest have shown a proportionate decrease ranging from 4% in Derry City & Strabane to 30% in Fermanagh & Omagh.

At Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust) level, Western shows the largest proportionate decrease in GP Practices between 2014 and 2020 (16%). The smallest decrease in GP Practices during this period is in the Southern Trust (4%). For further information see [Annex Table 1.3a](#)

1.2 GP Practices per head of population

Clearly the size of the registered population in any given LGD will have an influence on the service required. Fig 1.2 presents the number of GP Practices per 100,000 registered patients in order to provide a better indication of service provision. Note, however, this does not take account of the different age profiles or levels of morbidity across areas which will also impact on service requirements. It should also be noted that GP Practices vary in size and number of live GP contracts associated with them.

Local Government District	GP Practices per 100,000 population
Newry, Mourne & Down	18.9
Mid & East Antrim	18.1
Belfast	17.6
Mid Ulster	16.7
Causeway Coast & Glens	16.7
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	15.6
Ards & North Down	15.4
Fermanagh & Omagh	15.4
Lisburn & Castlereagh	13.5
Derry City & Strabane	13.3
Antrim & Newtownabbey	12.2
Northern Ireland	16.1

Figure 1.2: GP Practices per 100,000 registered patients, by Local Government District, 31st March 2020

[See Annex Table 1.5b](#)

Newry, Mourne & Down LGD has the highest number of GP Practices per 100,000 registered population (18.9), more than one and a half times the number in Antrim & Newtownabbey LGD (12.2). However, when considering number of GPs per 100,000 registered patients Newry, Mourne & Down has 62.0 compared with 62.3 in Antrim & Newtownabbey meaning that, in general, GP Practices in Antrim & Newtownabbey are larger and have more GPs operating out of them. For further information see [Annex Table 1.4b](#)

1.3 Distance to nearest GP Practice

At Northern Ireland level, 98% of the population¹ live within five miles of a GP Practice. At least 88% of the population live within a three mile radius of a GP Practice; with the more urban LGDs (Belfast, Antrim & Newtownabbey, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Ards & North Down) showing upwards of 92%.

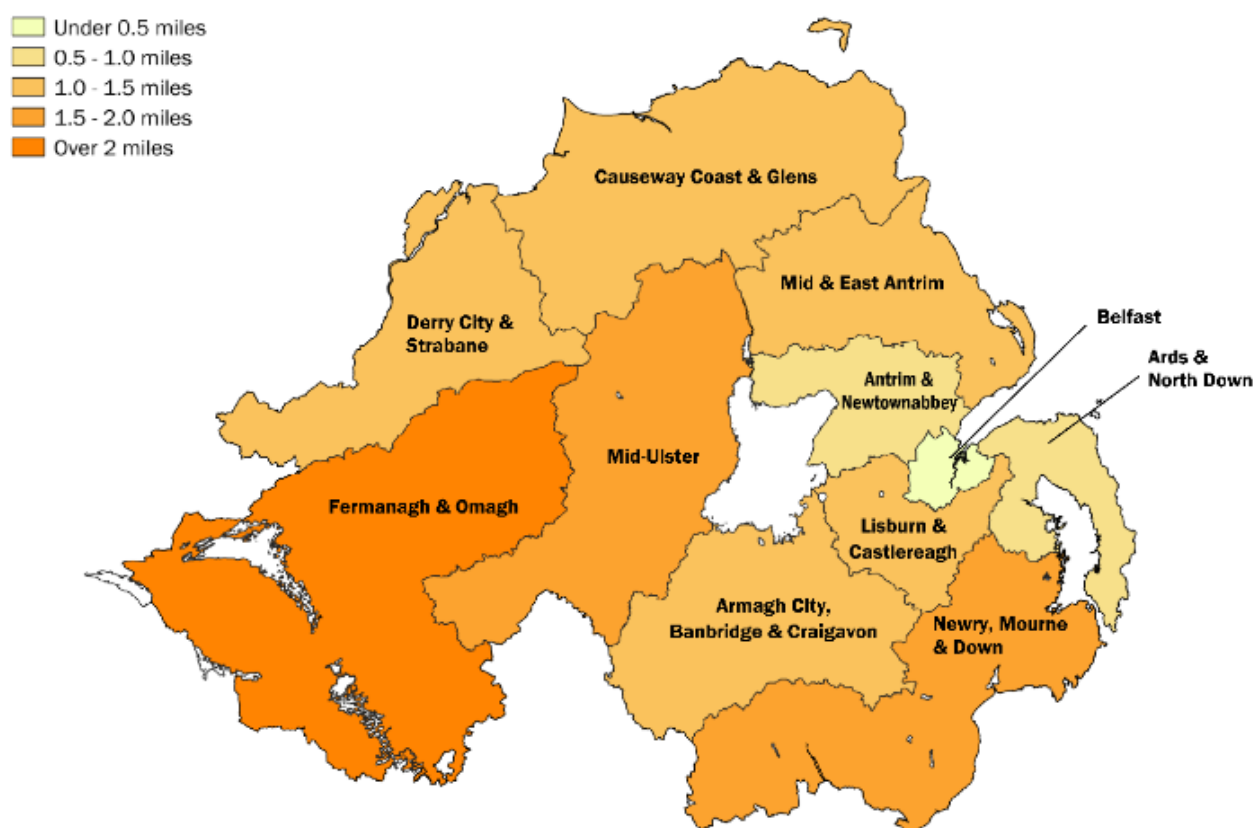


Figure 1.3: Average Distance to nearest GP Practice by Local Government District, 31st March 2020

[See Annex Table 1.7b](#)

¹ Population is defined as active GP registration person counts at postcode level at October 2019. Distance is calculated as the straight line distance between the centroids of the population home postcode to the postcode of the nearest GP Practice.

GP registration data were analysed using Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) quintiles where 1 represents the most deprived areas and 5 represents the least deprived areas.

Figure 1.4 shows that patients from the most deprived (0.8 miles) and least deprived (0.9 miles) deprivation quintiles lived closest to a GP Practice on average, while those in the middle quintile (1.8 miles) lived furthest on average. These findings may be influenced by the often urban location of GP Practices typically characterised by areas of high and low deprivation.

Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017	Average Distance (miles)
1 Most Deprived	0.8
2	1.5
3	1.8
4	1.5
5 Least Deprived	0.9
Northern Ireland	1.3

Figure 1.4: Population weighted average distance to nearest GP Practice, by Deprivation Quintile, 2020

For average distances to nearest GP Practice by Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust), Local Government District, and, Deprivation Quintile detail refer to [Annex Tables 1.7a, 1.7b and 1.7c](#)

2. GP Workforce

This section contains basic summary statistics on GP Practitioners (excluding Locums) including number, age and gender and patients per GP Practitioner. GP figures presented are headcount and do not reflect different working patterns individual GPs may operate.

2.1 GPs by Gender and Age Group

There were 1,364 active GPs (headcount) across Northern Ireland at 31st March 2020. This is a 2% increase in the number of GPs since 2019 and a 16% increase since 2014. It should be noted that not all GPs work full-time hours so changes in headcount may not always reflect the change in full time equivalent GPs.

In terms of gender profile of GPs, 58% are female and 42% are male. Fig 2.1 shows there has been a general downward trend in the number of male GPs and a corresponding increase in the number of female GPs. The number of female GPs surpassed the number of male GPs between 2015 and 2016.

Overall, the number of male GPs has decreased by 10% between 2014 and 2020, while the number of female GPs has increased by almost half (47%) during the same period.

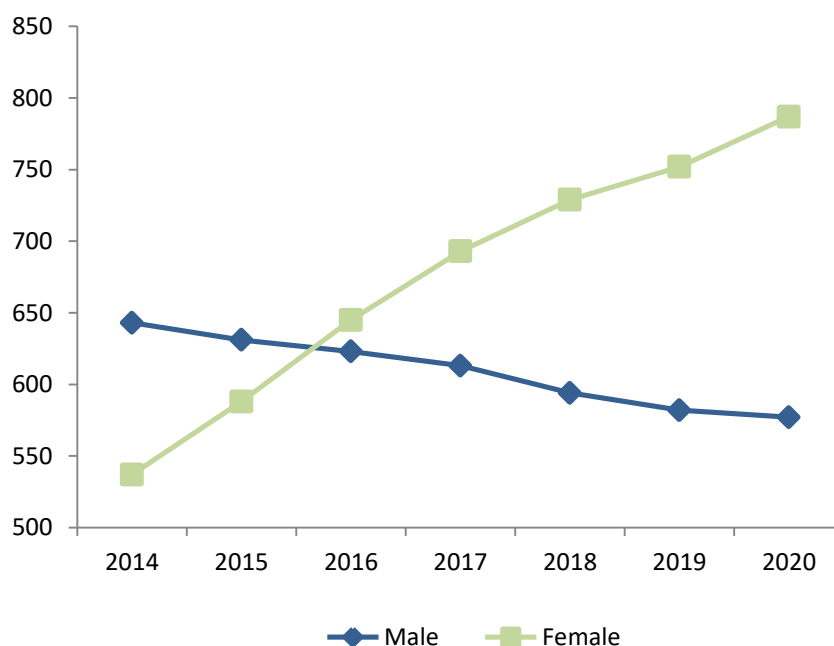


Figure 2.1: Number of GP Practitioners in NI by gender, 2014 to 2020

[See Annex Tables 1.2c](#)

The changing demographics of the GP workforce are reflected in Fig 2.2. Generally, the male workforce is ageing while there are more female GPs in the younger age groups.

Over two fifths of female GPs (42%) are in the 25-39 age band compared to just under a quarter of male GPs (23%). Conversely only 5% of female GPs are aged 60 and over compared to 12% of male GPs.

The 25-39 age band is made up of 29% male and 71% female GPs. As age increases, so does the percentage of male GPs until the oldest age bracket (60+) where the figures are almost reversed at 66% male and 34% female.

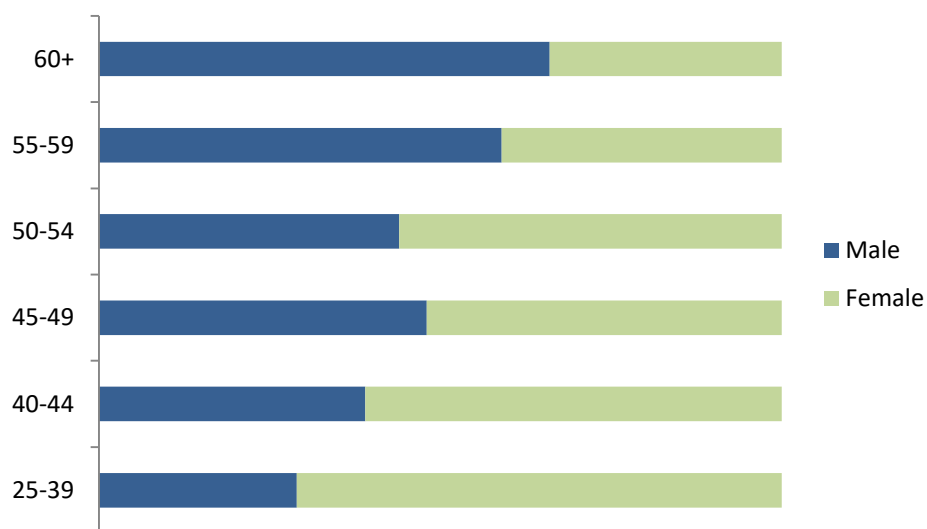


Figure 2.2: GP Practitioners in Northern Ireland by age and gender, 31st March 2020

[See Annex Tables 1.2c](#)

2.2 GPs per head of population

Belfast LGD also has the largest number of GPs (313) and registered patients² (431,000). Fermanagh & Omagh LGD has the smallest number of GPs (79) while Lisburn & Castlereagh LGD has the fewest registered patients (118,000). Fig 2.3 presents the number of GPs per 100,000 registered patients.

Mid & East Antrim LGD has the highest number of GPs per 100,000 registered population (73.8), almost 30% higher than the number in Mid Ulster LGD (57.3) which had the lowest. The Northern Ireland average is 68.1 GPs per 100,000 registered population (or 1 GP for every 1,468 registered patients).

Local Government District	GPs per 100,000 population
Mid & East Antrim	73.8
Belfast	72.7
Lisburn & Castlereagh	72.7
Ards & North Down	70.9
Causeway Coast & Glens	70.2
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	68.3
Derry City & Strabane	68.0
Fermanagh & Omagh	64.1
Antrim & Newtownabbey	62.3
Newry, Mourne & Down	62.0
Mid Ulster	57.3
Northern Ireland	68.1

Figure 2.3: GPs per 100,000 registered patients, by Local Government District, 31st March 2020

[See Annex Table 1.4b](#)

² Patients may not necessarily reside in the same LGD as the GP Practice to which they are registered.

3. GP Registered Patients

This section contains basic summary statistics on GP Registered Patients including new patient registrations during 2019/20.

3.1 Total Registered Patients³

There were 2,003,000 individuals on the index of patients registered with a GP Practice at 31st March 2020.

At 31st March 2020, Belfast Local Government District⁴ had the highest number of patients registered with GP Practices within its boundary (430,813) and is over 90% higher than the next highest LGD (Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon: 223,985). Lisburn & Castlereagh had the smallest number of GP Registered Patients (118,267).

Local Government District	Registered Patients
Belfast	430,813
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	223,985
Newry, Mourne & Down	190,330
Derry City & Strabane	173,412
Ards & North Down	162,171
Mid Ulster	155,454
Causeway Coast & Glens	149,657
Mid & East Antrim	143,727
Antrim & Newtownabbey	131,635
Fermanagh & Omagh	123,257
Lisburn & Castlereagh	118,267
Northern Ireland	2,002,708

Figure 3.1: GP Registered Patients, by Local Government District, 2019/20

[See Annex Table 1.1b](#)

³ There are differences between the figures for GP Registered Patients and the NI residential population. For more detail see Data Quality Summary in the Technical Notes section on page 19 of this report.

⁴ Patients may not necessarily reside in the same LGD as the GP Practice to which they are registered.

3.2 Patients Registering with a GP Practice during 2019/20

During 2019/2020, GP Practices in Northern Ireland registered 91,000 patients. This comprised of 50,000 new patients (first time registrations in NI) and 41,000 patients transferring from another Northern Ireland GP Practice.

Fig 3.2 shows trend in registrations over the last five financial years. While it would appear that registrations temporarily dropped in 2017/18 before increasing again in 2018/19, this may be explained by the introduction of a new registration form. Issues with this new form resulted in a backlog building up in 2017/18 that was relieved in 2018/19. As such, total registration counts have remained broadly stable over the five year period.

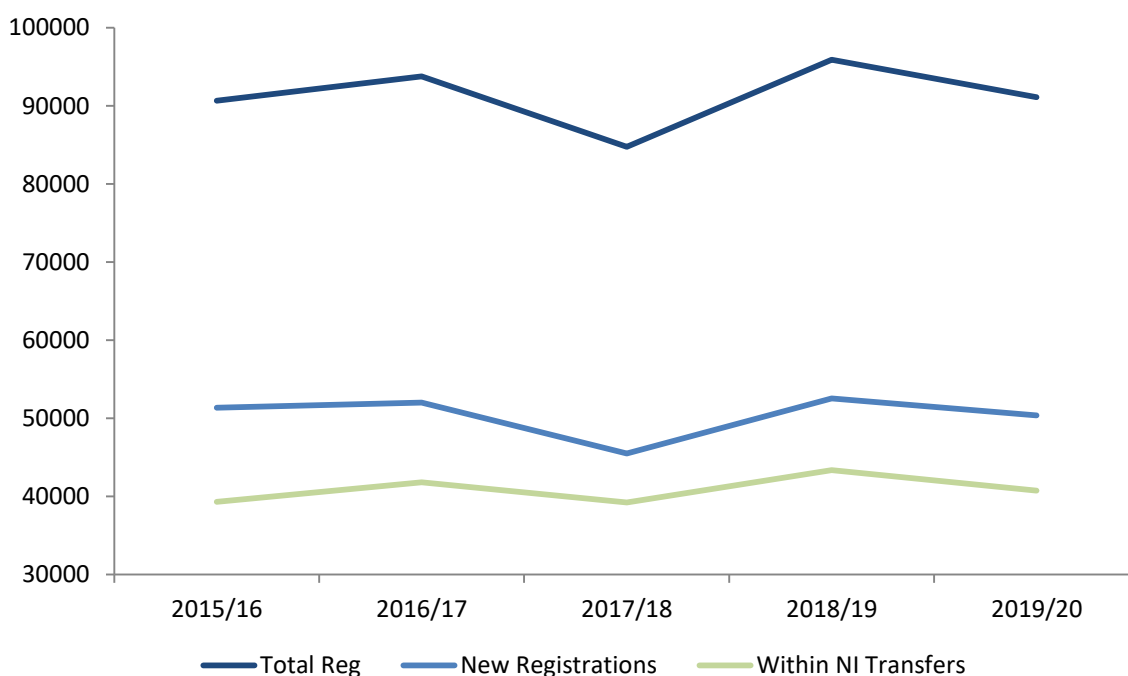


Figure 3.2: Total GP Registrations (new and within Northern Ireland transfers), 5 year trend

[See Annex Tables 1.1c](#)

3.3 Non-UK Nationals Registering with a GP Practice during 2019/20

At Northern Ireland level, almost three in every ten (28%) first time GP registrations in 2019/2020 were Non-UK Nationals. This is the same proportion as during 2018/19.

At Local Government District level, the proportion of Non-UK National first time registrations ranged from 42% in Belfast to 15% in Ards & North Down.

Local Government Districts that were above the Northern Ireland average in terms of proportion of Non-UK National first time registrations were Belfast; Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon; and Mid Ulster.

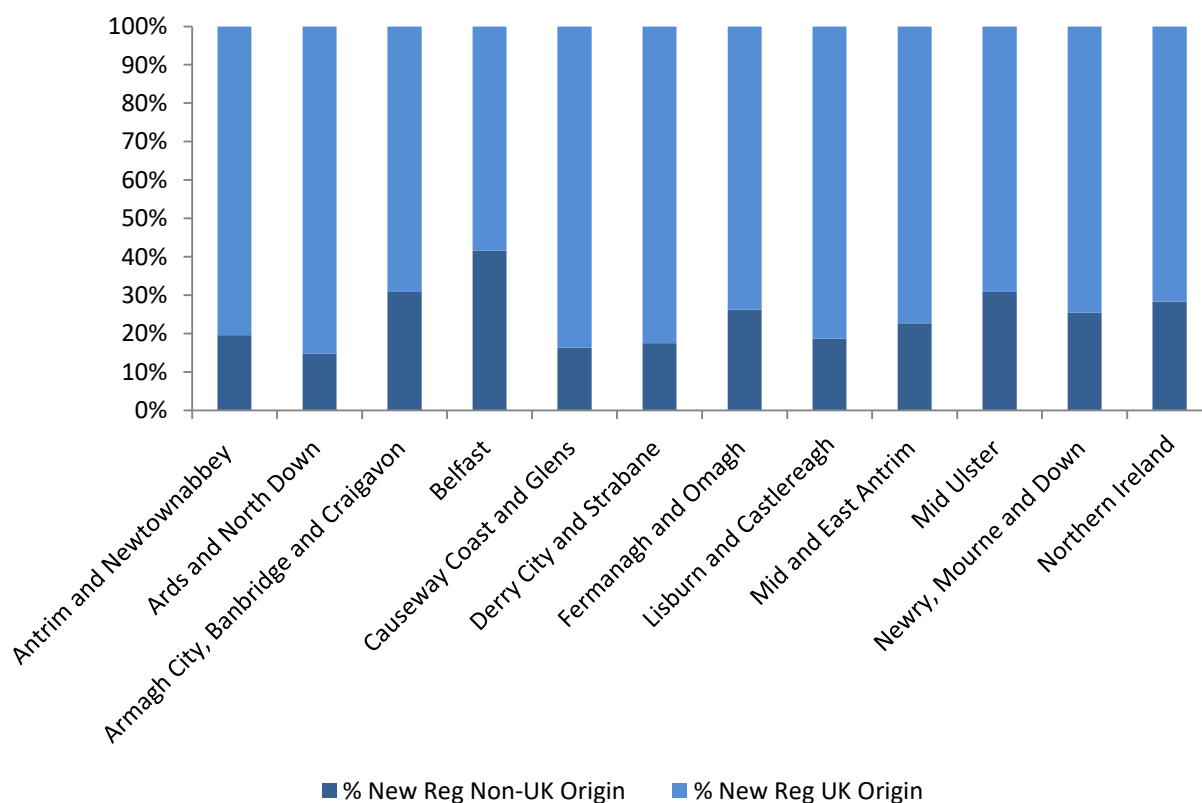


Figure 3.3: New (first time in NI) GP Registrations by UK Nationals and non-UK Nationals, by Local government District, 2019/20
[See Annex Tables 1.1d and 1.1f](#)

4. BSO Payments towards GP Services

This section contains basic summary statistics on payments processed by BSO towards the overall cost of GP Services in Northern Ireland.

4.1 BSO Payments by Local Commissioning group (Health Trust)

During 2019/20, BSO processed £285.8m of payments towards the overall cost of GP services in Northern Ireland.

Fig 4.1 presents BSO payment towards GP services by Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust). The Belfast and Northern Local Commissioning Groups received the highest payment towards GP services at £64.8 million and £64.7 million respectively. South Eastern received the lowest payment towards GP services (£46.1 million).

The average BSO payment towards GP services per registered patient for 2019/20 was £143, an increase of £13 per patient since 2018/19.

At Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust) level, the highest average payment towards GP services per registered patient was £157 in Western while the lowest was £136 in Northern. Over the last 3 years Western has consistently had the highest payment per patient while Northern has replaced Southern for receiving the lowest payment per patient in 2019/20.

Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust)	Payment towards GP services (£ m)	Average payment per patient (£)
Belfast	64.8	147
Northern	64.7	136
Southern	58.0	137
Western	52.1	157
South Eastern	46.1	139
Northern Ireland	285.8	143

Figure 4.1: BSO payments towards GP services, by Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust), 2019/20

[See Annex Table 1.6a](#)

Factors that can influence variation in payment towards GP services per patient include age profile of patients, additional services available, level of deprivation, rent and rates variation, locum use, trial programs etc.

4.2 BSO Payments by Local Government District

Fig 4.2 presents BSO payment towards GP services by Local Government District (LGD). Practices within the Belfast LGD, which contains more than one fifth of Northern Ireland's registered population, received the highest payment towards GP services (£63.5 million), more than twice the amount received by practices in the next highest LGDs (Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon: £30m). At £15.3m, practices within Lisburn & Castlereagh, the LGD with the smallest number of registered patients, received the lowest payment towards GP services.

In terms of payment per registered patient, the highest amount was £164 per registered patient in Derry City & Strabane LGD while the lowest was £128 in Antrim & Newtownabbey. Derry City & Strabane also saw the largest increase in payment per patient from 2018/19 (13.9%) while Antrim & Newtownabbey had the lowest increase (6.7%).

Local Government District	Payment towards GP services (£ m)	Average payment per patient (£)
Belfast	63.5	147
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	30.0	134
Newry, Mourne & Down	28.6	150
Derry City & Strabane	28.5	164
Causeway Coast & Glens	22.1	148
Ards & North Down	21.6	133
Mid Ulster	21.1	136
Mid & East Antrim	20.1	140
Fermanagh & Omagh	18.1	147
Antrim & Newtownabbey	16.8	128
Lisburn & Castlereagh	15.3	129
Northern Ireland	285.8	143

Figure 4.2: BSO payments towards GP services, by Local Government District, 2019/20

[See Annex Table 1.6b](#)

5. UK Comparisons

This section compares GP Practice, GP and Registered Patient data with other UK regions. As relevant Wales data for 2019/20 is not currently available, comparisons are presented for 2018/19. It is important to note that GP figures presented are headcount and do not reflect the different working patterns individual GPs may operate. Similarly GP Practices vary in size including the number of GPs operating out of them. As such caution should be exercised when making comparisons between regions.

5.1 GP Practices per head of population by UK region

For 2018/2019, Northern Ireland (16.4) and Scotland (16.5) compare favorably to both England (11.7) and Wales (13.4) in terms of number of GP Practices per 100,000 registered patients (Fig 5.1).

It should be noted that GP Practices will vary in size in terms of the number of GPs attached to each and this must be taken into account when considering these figures.

All countries have experienced reductions in their practice to patient ratios since 2016/17, ranging from an 8% reduction in England down to 3% in both Scotland and Wales. NI falls in between with a 5% decrease during the same period.

UK Region	GP Practices	Registered Population	GP Practices per 100,000 Population
Northern Ireland	327	1,989,605	16.4
England	7,012	59,692,240	11.7
Scotland	944	5,732,502	16.5
Wales	420	3,139,884	13.4

Figure 5.1: GP Practices per 100,000 registered population, by UK region, 2018/19

[See Annex Table 1.8c](#)

5.2 GPs per head of population by UK region

At 67.0, Northern Ireland had more GPs (headcount) per 100,000 registered patients than Wales (63.0) and England (57.9) but fewer than Scotland (77.3) in 2018/19 (Fig 5.2).

The number of GPs per head of population in Northern Ireland has risen by around 1% since 2016/17. This contrasts with Scotland which has remained the same while England (-2%) and Wales (-1%) have both shown small decreases.

Note, however, that GP figures presented are headcount and do not take account of different part-time/full-time working patterns which may exist between countries and which may impact on the observed trends.

UK Region	GPs (Headcount)	Registered Population	GPs per 100,000 Population
Northern Ireland	1,334	1,989,605	67.0
England	34,535	59,692,240	57.9
Scotland	4,430	5,732,502	77.3
Wales	1,978	3,139,884	63.0

Figure 5.2: GPs per 100,000 registered population, by UK region, 2018/19

[See Annex Table 1.8b](#)

Publication Notes

Family Practitioner Services

Family Practitioner Services (FPS) is part of the BSO's Operations Directorate. It provides a range of essential services to Health and Social Care organisations, primary care contractors and patients.

FPS calculates payments to health professionals in the dental, pharmacy, general practice and ophthalmic sectors through Northern Ireland. It also maintains the central register of patients registered with GP Practices in Northern Ireland, issuing medical cards and processing changes such as name, address and doctor.

It provides professional advice, support and information to customers and members of the public and maintains the pharmaceutical, dental and the Northern Ireland Primary Medical Performers lists. FPS also provides the call and recall services for breast, cervical and bowel cancer screening in Northern Ireland.

Next edition

This publication is issued annually. It is expected that the next edition shall be published in June 2021. In the interim, quarterly tables are published separately [here](#). The quarterly figures are provisional until the annual publication for that year issues, at which point they are finalised. The release calendar for future statistical publications is available on the [BSO website](#).

Technical Notes

Target Audience

The target audience for this publication has been defined as: the Department of Health, HSC Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, health professionals, academics, HSC Stakeholders, the media and the general public.

Main usages

This publication contains official statistics on General Medical Services for the most recent financial year (and earlier years where available on a comparable basis).

They can be used to monitor trends in General Medical Services over time and across Northern Ireland.

The information can be used to support decision making, inform policy, provide advice to ministers, answer a wide range of Assembly Questions and Freedom of Information requests, for national and local press articles and, where appropriate, for international comparison.

Data Quality Summary

Figures presented for GPs refer to Unrestricted Principals or Equivalent (UPEs) and Salaried GPs and do not include Locums. GP numbers are based on headcount and do not therefore reflect changes in working patterns. GP Practice characteristics vary in terms of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) number of GPs assigned to a practice, number of sites a practice operates from, and number of patients registered to a practice.

GP Registered Population is based on live registrations at the 31st March each year. There may be a lag between a patient presenting themselves at a GP Practice and completion of registration. This lag may be

greater for patients who have to provide additional documentation as proof of entitlement to services. Similarly for deductions, there may be a lag in removing individuals from the index of registered patients.

There are differences between the figures for GP Registered Patients and residential population. At 30th June 2019 the number of individuals on the index of registered patients was approximately 5% higher than the June 2019 Northern Ireland mid-year population estimate.

This discrepancy can arise from a number of factors, for example, time lags in removing patients from GP lists following death or emigration, Cross Border Workers registered with a Northern Ireland GP, or registered patients not completing the 2011 Census.

GP Registered Patient counts by Local Commissioning Group (Health Trust) and Local Government District are based on the location of the practice the patient is registered to as opposed to the patient's home address.

In cases where a GP Practice is split over more than one site it is only counted as one practice and data presented including average patient counts per practice and distance to nearest practice are based on the Primary Practice.

BSO Payment towards GP Services presented in this report refers to the payments that BSO has processed on behalf of Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) towards the overall cost of GP Services in Northern Ireland. This expenditure relates to payments processed in a given year and not the cost of the service provided in that year.

National/International comparisons

This publication contains comparisons between General Medical Services in Northern Ireland and other regions of the United Kingdom. The comparative data is available from the following sources:

England

Statistics on General Medical Services:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services>

Wales

Statistics on General Medical Services:

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/General-Medical-Services>

Scotland

Statistics on General Medical Services:

<https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/General-Practice/Publications/data-tables2017.asp?id=2311#2311>

Further Information

Further information about Northern Ireland and its health services, which may assist readers in interpreting this publication, is available from the following sources:

BSO Publish GP Prescribing data on the Open Data Northern Ireland website: <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/group/health>

BSO Publish data on Pharmacy Services on the HSC, BSO website: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1806.htm>

Department of Health publish information relating to Community Pharmacists on their website: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research/pharmacists-statistics>

BSO Publish Quarterly GP Practice List Sizes on the Open Data Northern Ireland website: <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/gp-practice-list-sizes>

NISRA publish demographic statistics on the population of Northern Ireland, including mid-year estimates and population projections: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population>

The Honest Broker Service Provide Access to Health Care Data to internal HSCNI and External Researchers: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2454.htm>

This statistical bulletin and other published by Information Unit within BSO are available to download from the BSO Internet site at:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1802.htm>