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Statistics on People with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland

1 Introduction

The following paper identifies and discusses publically available statistics on people with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland. It provides data on prevalence of learning disabilities in Northern Ireland, Higher Education and Further Education participation of people with learning disabilities and people with learning disabilities in employment.

This paper forms part of the Committee for Employment and Learnings Inquiry into post-secondary support for people with learning disabilities and Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland.

2 Prevalence Statistics

This section of the paper focuses on identifying statistics on the prevalence of people with learning disabilities (LD) in Northern Ireland. It uses a variety of sources including the 2011 census, international estimates and various surveys.

2.1 2011 Census

On Census Day 2011 (27 March), a total of 40,177 usual residents were reported to have a “*learning difficulty, an intellectual difficulty, or a social or behavioural difficulty*” which had lasted, or was expected to last, at least 12 months. This figure accounts for 2.22 per cent of the resident population.¹

This provides a headline figure for people with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland as at Census Day (which operates as a snapshot of the population on the 27 March 2011). It should be noted that this figure is likely to be higher than the actual figure for the number of people with LD as it includes those with social or behavioural difficulties. It is not possible to disaggregate these figures as a result of the method of data collection.

The data is sourced via Question 23 in the 2011 Census which has twelve separate categories of which having a “learning difficulty, an intellectual difficulty, or a social or behavioural difficulty” is one category.

2.2 Bamford Review

The Bamford Review cited a study which estimated the prevalence of LD in Northern Ireland.

McConkey et al (2003) used information from the Health and Social Services Trusts to estimate learning disability prevalence rates in Northern Ireland. Table 1 below details the study’s findings.²

Table 1: Learning disability prevalence rates

Age Bands	Mild/moderate	Severe/Profound	Total
0-19	6,432	1,718	8,150
20-34	2,504	1,047	3,551
35-49	1,489	949	2,438
50+	1,473	753	2,226
Totals	11,898	4,468	16,366

The Bamford Action Plan 2009-2011 itself estimated that there were 26,500 people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland. Clarification from the DHSSPSNI identified that:³

¹ NINIS, NISRA (2012). Table KS302, Type of Long-term condition, Census 2011

² Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, September 2005, Equal Lives: Review of policy and services for people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland, the study cited is McConkey et al, Administrative Prevalence of Learning Disability in Northern Ireland, 2003

³ Correspondence with DHSSPSNI

This figure was estimated by taking an accepted prevalence rate from national and international studies – which varies from 1% to 2% of the population.

The figure of 26,500 was based on a median percentage of 1.5%. Using this estimation method and the population figures for the 2001 and 2011 censuses, table 2 below details the range for these estimations.

Table 2: Estimation of Learning Disability prevalence based on census data⁴

	2001	2011
Population	1,685,267	1,810,863
1 per cent	16,853	18,109
1.5 per cent	25,279	27,163
2 per cent	33,705	36,217

As can be seen in table 2, there is a great deal of difference in the estimates. For the 2011 Census there is a difference of 18,108 people between the 1 and 2% estimates.

These estimates fall within the number of usual residents reported to have a “*learning difficulty, an intellectual difficulty, or a social or behavioural difficulty*” in the 2011 Census.

2.3 HSC Trusts

The DHSSPSNI was contacted and asked for figures on the number of people with learning disabilities who have had contact with the HSC Trusts.

Table 3 details this information.⁵

Table 3: Learning disabled persons with whom HSC Trusts had contact in 2012/13

HSC Trust	0-4	5-15	16-24	25-44	45-64	65-74	75 and Over	Unknown	All Ages
Belfast	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,824	1,824
Northern	60	265	295	609	615	150	57	0	2,051
South Eastern	79	300	297	595	452	121	46	0	1,890
Southern	74	352	250	421	413	85	32	0	1,627
Western	12	281	343	558	430	115	61	0	1,800
Northern Ireland	225	1,198	1,185	2,183	1,910	471	196	1,824	9,192

In total for 2012/13 the HSC Trusts had contact with 9,192 people with learning disabilities.

⁴ Calculation carried out by RaISe

⁵ Statistics taken from “Statistics on Community Care for Adults in Northern Ireland 2012/13

A request was made to the DHSSPSNI regarding the lack of age data from the Belfast Trust. The following response was received:⁶

The Trust is currently working on unifying its information systems but the roll out of the implementation programme is not yet complete which is causing problems with data collection. It is hoped that the new system will allow us to provide more detailed information in future.

In Northern Ireland GP practices can undertake Directed Enhanced Services (DES) for people with learning disabilities. As part of this, GPs must provide a return to the HSC Board of DES uptake.⁷

For 2012/13 the following data was returned:

Table 4: The number of people with learning disability on participating practice lists across Trusts in 2012/13⁸

	Belfast Trust	Northern Trust	South Eastern Trust	Southern Trust	Western Trust	NI Total
Adult population of Trust	198,119	268,698	203,794	210,587	176,799	1,057,997
Number patients LD on GP register in 2013 return	1,187	1,714	1,200	1,529	1,568	7,198

As stated by McConkey (2013):⁹

These figures probably offer the most accurate record of the number of adult persons with a learning disability in each Trust.

2.4 Special Education Need (SEN) Figures

In Northern Ireland, children and young people are assessed for SEN based on the SEN Code of Practice. This has five stages of need in recognition that SEN operates along a continuum of ability. Stages 1, 2 and 3 are school based, with stages 4 and 5 dealt with by the relevant Education and Library Board.¹⁰

Please see NIAR 937-2013 for further information.

Table 5 following details the number of pupils with SEN in Northern Ireland in Primary and Post-Primary schools.

⁶ Correspondence from the DHSSPSNI, quote sourced from the Belfast HSC Trust

⁷ McConkey, R October 2013, Evaluation of the enhanced service specialising in health care for adults with a learning disability provided by GMS practices and of health facilitators provided by five HSC Trusts

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Contact a family, <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/380065/senni.pdf>

Table 5: Pupils with SEN 2006-2012¹¹

Year	Primary			Post Primary		
	Total Number of Pupils	SEN Pupils (1-5)	% of SEN pupils	Total Number of Pupils	SEN Pupils (1-5)	% of SEN pupils
2012	168,035	33,990	20.2	145,660	28,695	19.7
2011	164,745	34,205	20.8	146,745	26,710	18.2
2010	163,380	33,880	20.7	147,900	24,765	16.7
2009	163,695	33,450	20.4	147,760	23,540	15.9
2008	164,780	32,325	19.6	147,985	22,090	14.9
2007	166,585	31,665	19.0	147,940	21,060	14.2

As can be seen, the number of Primary school children with SEN has remained relatively static over the last six years whilst Post Primary School pupils have seen a steady rise from 14.2% in 2007 to 19.7% in 2012.

Using these figures, it would indicate that in 2012 there were at least 62,685 pupils with SEN. Of these, 10,005 were statemented pupils (SEN Level 5).

This figure is significantly higher than the estimated prevalence of people with learning disabilities in the Bamford Action Plan and those calculated by RaISe. However, it should be noted that:

Many children will have special needs of some kind at some time during their education¹²

In addition, the SEN register can include children with very mild “learning difficulties” which may improve / or not require the level of support that is often necessary when a formal “learning disability” diagnosis is made and whereby children are more likely to be officially known to services (e.g. health and social services etc).

A child can also be removed from the register when progress is no longer a cause for concern.¹³

The variation in figures available regarding the prevalence of SEN and learning disabilities in Northern Ireland highlights the findings of the Bamford Review which also found it difficult to secure accurate information.¹⁴

¹¹ Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS), Children Education and Skills – Primary Pupils and Post primary Pupils (Administrative Areas), <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx>

¹² NI Direct, What are special educational needs? <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/parents/schools-learning-and-development/special-educational-needs/what-are-special-educational-needs.htm>

¹³ Department of Education, Special Education Needs Code of Practice, http://www.deni.gov.uk/the_code_of_practice.pdf

¹⁴ Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, Equal Lives, September 2005

2.5 Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitation and Disability (2007)

The Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitation and Disability (NISALD) looked at the experiences and lifestyles of disabled people in Northern Ireland. The survey includes both adults and children in households and in communal establishments such as residential homes and long stay wards.¹⁵

The NISALD carried out over 4,000 interviews, with 3,543 completed. The study noted that there was “*no comprehensive register of people with disabilities*”.¹⁶

In 2007 a report was produced on its private household survey which identified that 18% of the NI population are “limited in their daily activities for reasons associated with a disability or long-term condition.” The study also found that:

- 21% of adults have at least one disability; and
- 6% of children have at least one disability.

The NISALD breaks down the prevalence of disability by type and found that 1% of adults and 3% of children have a learning disability; with less than 0.5% of adults have an intellectual disability and 1% of children.¹⁷ It should be noted that only one statistical bulletin (that discussed above) was released.¹⁸

2.6 Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

The NIHE published a report in March 2012 on mapping disability amongst its tenants. It considered a number of data points, including the main reasons for Disability Living Allowance Payments, which identified that 0.8% of claimant’s cited learning difficulties. The report cited data from its Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey which identified the following figures for tenants with learning disabilities:¹⁹

Table 6: Tenants with Learning Disabilities

Area	Number of People
Belfast	1,116
South East	606
South	543
North East	291
West	85
Northern Ireland	2,641

¹⁵ DHSSPSNI/NISRA , 2007, Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitation and Disability, The Prevalence of Disability and Activity Limitations amongst adults and children living in private households in Northern Ireland, <http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/NISALD%20Household%20Prevalence%20Report.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ OFMDFM, February 2013, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Disability Strategy 2012-2015: Baseline Indicator Set, <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/baseline-indicators-disability-strategy>

¹⁹ Northern Ireland Housing Executive, March 2012, Disability Mapping Pilot Report, http://www.nihe.gov.uk/disability_mapping_pilot_report_2012.pdf

2.7 Department for Social Development FOI request

In August 2012, the Department for Social Development provided a response to an FOI. It states that in April 2010 there were 183,513 DLA claimants in NI.

The FOI goes on to provide details of the Main Disabling Condition (MDC) for these claimants. It lists 24 conditions including learning difficulties. Of the 183,513 people claiming DLA, 12,486 (or 6.8%) listed their MDC as learning difficulties.²⁰

3 Further and Higher Education

This section of the paper discusses participation of people with learning disabilities in further and higher education.

3.1 Further Education

DEL gathers some data on disability as part of its monitoring of equality issues in FE Colleges. The most recent data available is provided in table 7.

Table 7: Professional and Technical Enrolments at NI Further Education Institutions by Disability²¹

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Disabled	5,606	6,165	7,887	9,285	7,987
% Disabled	3.7	4.3	5.5	5.7	5.1
Not disabled/not known	145,680	135,935	134,599	154,065	147,438
% Not disabled/not known	96.3	95.7	94.5	94.3	94.9
Total	151,286	142,100	142,486	163,350	155,425

In 2010/11 5.1% of students in NI FE Institutions had stated they had a disability.

A request was made to the Department for Employment and Learning for data on disabled students enrolled in the Regional Colleges. The Department provided the available data. It should be noted that:²²

Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's own self assessment. Students are not obliged to report a disability, therefore the figures reported based upon disability analyses may not be representative of the total student population.

²⁰ Department for Social Development, 24 August 2012, FOI reference DSD/2012-0163, http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/depro_foi_disclosure_log-2012-0163-anonymised_response.pdf

²¹ Department for Employment and Learning, 13 September 2012, Professional and Technical Enrolments at NI Further Education Institutions by available equality categories <http://www.delni.gov.uk/equality-enrolments-fe-institutions-2006-2011.pdf>

²² Correspondence from the Department for Employment Learning

The information provided by the Department covered academic years 2010/11 to 2012/13 and listed nine disability types.

Using the data provided, the table below was developed. Please note, the table provides information for those with a specific learning disability only. This is a result of the data collection method. A category is included for those with special needs not listed in the other disability types but the data also includes medical conditions and disabilities not included in the other categories. As it is not possible to disaggregate this data, the information is not included.

Table 8 below provides data on students with specific learning disabilities enrolled in Northern Ireland's Regional Colleges in 2012/13.

Table 8: Students with Specific Learning Disability Enrolments in NI Regional Colleges by Age-group and Attendance – 2012/13

Disability	19 & Under			20 to 24			25 & over*			Total		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
BMC	125	480	605	45	155	200	15	240	255	185	875	1,060
NRC	140	775	915	20	85	105	10	80	85	170	940	1,110
SERC	300	1,165	1,465	40	130	170	25	175	195	365	1,470	1,835
SRC	215	650	865	35	105	140	5	140	145	255	895	1,150
SWC	175	770	945	25	185	210	5	165	170	200	1,120	1,325
NWRC	170	405	580	40	70	110	15	105	120	225	585	810
Total	1,125	4,245	5,375	205	730	935	75	905	970	1,400	5,885	7,290

3.2 Higher Education

A request was made to the Department for Employment and Learning for data on disabled students enrolled in NI's Higher Education Institutions. The Department provided the available data. It should be noted that:²³

Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's own self-assessment. Students are not obliged to report a disability, therefore the figures reported based upon disability analyses may not be representative of the total student population.

The information provided by the Department covered academic years 2010/11 to 2012/13 and listed nine disability types.

Using the data provided, the table below was developed. Please note, the table provides information for those with a specific learning disability only. This is a result of the data collection method. A category is included for those with special needs not listed in the other disability types but the data also includes medical conditions and

²³ Correspondence from the Department for Employment Learning

disabilities not included in the other categories. As it is not possible to disaggregate this data, the information is not included.

Table9: Enrolments at the QUB and UU who have specific learning disabilities by Age Group and Mode of Study 2012/13

Disability	20 and under			21 to 24 inclusive			25 and over			Total		
	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total
Queen's University Belfast	170	5	175	90	5	95	30	5	35	290	15	305
University of Ulster	285	15	305	250	50	305	140	125	260	675	190	870
Total	455	20	480	340	55	400	170	130	295	965	205	1175

DEL also provided data on students with a disability in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance. Table 10 below details this information for those with specific learning disabilities (for the reasons previously discussed).²⁴

Table 10: Enrolments at QUB and UU who have a disability and are in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance by Age Group and Mode of Study 2012/13

Disability	20 and under			21 to 24 inclusive			25 and over			Total		
	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total	Full-time and Sandwich	Part-time and Other	Total
Queen's University Belfast	125	5	130	70	5	70	30	0	30	220	10	230
University of Ulster	180	10	190	185	25	210	80	35	115	445	70	520
Total	305	15	320	255	30	280	110	35	145	665	80	750

Information was also provided by the Department on enrolments at Stranmillis and St. Mary's of those with a disability and those in receipt of DSA.²⁵ The table is replicated in full on the page following.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

Table 11: Enrolments at Stranmillis and St Mary's, who have a disability and those in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Stranmillis	Disabled	60	60	50
	DSA	30	30	30
	All students	1,300	1,340	1,460
St Marys	Disabled	55	45	50
	DSA	25	30	30
	All students	985	1020	1100

Table 12 following details information supplied to the Committee for Employment and Learning's Inquiry by the Open University.²⁶

Table 12: Students with Disabilities studying via the Open University

Disability (Category)	Number of students in NI Population with Disabilities
Sight	41
Hearing	37
Mobility	140
Manual Skills	80
Speech	19
Dyslexia	80
Mental Health	204
Personal Care	45
FATIGUE/Pain	213
Other	50
Unseen Disability	111
Autism Spectrum Disorder	7
Total	1,027

4 Training Programmes

In a response to an Assembly Question, the Department for Employment and Learning provided the following table which details individuals with special needs²⁷ aged 19 or over on DEL Training Programmes.²⁸

²⁶ Open University submission to the Committee for Employment and Learning's Inquiry on post-secondary school support for people with learning disabilities/special education needs.

²⁷ Special needs has been defined for the purposes of the responses as the number of students aged 19 and over who have reported a disability.

Table 13: Occupancy on DEL Training Programmes for quarter ending October 2012

Supplier	Number
A4e	39
BCW Training Ltd	*
Belfast Central Training Limited	7
Belfast College of Training + Education	*
Belfast Metropolitan College	24
Bombardier-Shorts	8
Craft Recruitment	*
Customized Training Services Ltd	6
Dairy FARM People First (Belfast)	16
Engineering Training Council (NI)	*
First4skills	26
Impact Training (NI) Ltd	7
Jennymount Training Services/Hair Academy	8
Loughview Training College	*
North City Training Ltd	*
North Down Training Ltd	*
North West Regional College (Training Direct)	*
Northern Ireland Electricity Plc	*
NRC	*
Oriel Training Services	*
Paragon Training NI (Ltd)	18
Plumbing and Mechanical Services Training (NI)	*
RT Resources	*
Rutledge Joblink	60
Seven Towers Training Ltd (Antrim)	*
South Eastern Regional College	12
South West College	*
Southern Regional College	6
Springvale Training	18

²⁸ NI Assembly Questions, 9 May 2013, AQW 22317/11-15, accessible as a deposited paper at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Deposited-Papers/2013/dp1143.pdf>

Supplier	Number
Swann Training Services	*
Transport Training Services	6
VT Training	25
Youth Action NI	*
Total	321

It should be noted that cells marked with a * have been suppressed because they contain small numbers which otherwise could allow the identification of individuals.²⁹

5 Employment

The October to December 2013 Labour Force Survey states that 20.1% of people aged 16-64 describe themselves as having a current long-term disability, 1.4% higher than the figure for the UK.

It should be noted that in the LFS Questionnaire there is a question listed (HEAL) which asks participants to state what type of disability they have, including “severe of specific learning difficulties”.

A request was made to the Department for Finance and Personnel (as the Department responsible for NISRA, and therefore for the survey) regarding whether it would be possible to get a breakdown of the data provided via HEAL. The Department responded that:³⁰

...the OD13 figures for those with “severe or specific learning difficulties” using HEAL01-17 fall below the threshold of reliability. This is because the Labour Force Survey is a sample survey and because the number of respondents is so small and the associated confidence intervals are so large.

7 Conclusion

As can be seen above there are multiple sources of data on the prevalence of learning disabilities in Northern Ireland. However, none of them can be considered definitive.

Research carried out by Queen’s University Belfast found that there continues to be a lack of appropriate data in regards NI. It stated that:³¹

Data collected needs to be disaggregated by age, gender, type of disability, place of residence, and cultural background.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Correspondence with the Department for Finance and Personnel

³¹ Queen’s University Belfast, Disability policies and programmes: How does Northern Ireland measure up?
<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Presentations/Expert-Seminar-ppt-21-Feb-14-QUB.pptx>

It should also be noted that none of the data sources discussed could be considered a comprehensive source of data on the prevalence of learning disabilities in Northern Ireland and rather offer snapshots of activity at specific institutions (such as the Higher Education Institutions) or participation on programmes (such as DEL training programmes).