

**From the Interim Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Our Ref: SINV-0064-2026

Date: 26 March 2026

Dear Daniel

Thank you for your correspondence of 25th March requesting additional information in advance of my appearance before the Committee tomorrow regarding the Memorandum of Reply to the PAC's report on 'Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland'. I have addressed each of the queries raised by the Committee below in turn.

1) *Workforce data already collected* - *the workforce information gathered through the Northern Ireland Contract Assurance Framework (NICAF) for 2024-25 and 2025-26 on the number of GPs working in Practices, including where possible whole-time equivalent or sessions worked.*

The Department of Health undertook two workforce surveys through the 2024/25 Northern Ireland Contract Assurance Framework (NICAF) to ascertain current Primary Care workforce levels:

1. Doctors Working Practice Survey.
2. Workforce survey for clinical and administration staff (excluding Doctors).

The Doctors Working Practice Survey gathers data and information on the Doctors working in Practice and includes the total number of clinical and administration sessions, not whole-time equivalent. The Workforce Survey gathers data on Practice

staff including other clinical staff such as Advance Nurse Practitioners, Practice Nurses, Counsellors, Health Care Assistants, Practice Managers, finance managers and all other administrative staff and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) staff. The table below provides the data collected for the 307 practices in 2024/25:

Doctors Working Practice Survey				Workforce Survey		
Total GP headcount (exc locums)	Total no. of clinical sessions (total per 1k patients)	Total no. of admin sessions	Total no. of locum sessions	Total no. of staff	Total hours per week	
1446	8390.7 (1247.51)	1011.55	774	5706	123381.85	

The 2025/26 workforce surveys are due to be completed by 30 April 2026. Practices responses will then be collated and analysed, enabling the Department to strengthen the evidence base through ongoing baselining, analysis and identification of trends over time.

2) Data on the wider GP workforce - what data the Department holds, or can access, on GPs on the NI Performers Framework who are not working substantively in Practices, for example locums, out-of-hours GPs or those working in urgent care settings and; whether the Department holds or uses data or any other source to understand the wider workforce.

The total number of GPs working in practices in NI is published by BSO and is available at [General Medical Services Statistics - Business Services Organisation \(BSO\) Website](#).

Most recent figures for Q3 2025 are provided below

Contract type	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Principal	1,181	1,180	1,175	1,129	1,104
Salaried GP	205	225	261	314	348
Retainer	24	14	12	11	16
Total (ex Locums)	1,410	1,419	1,448	1,454	1,468
Locum	538	614	508	540	575

The Department does not hold data on GPs employed elsewhere eg urgent care settings.

Each year the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) produces an appraisal report which summarises the key data collected from the 'Registration and Declaration' (R & D) forms which are submitted by GPs each year to initiate the process of booking an appraisal. The intended purpose of the R&D form is to provide a self-declaration describing current working roles and some personal demographic data, in order to ensure that the applicant is eligible for a GP appraisal with NIMDTA.

The 2024/25 appraisal report estimates that there were a total of 80 solely OOH GPs in 2024/25. That said, **it is important to note that this is not formally collected workforce data**, rather it is based on GP's self-reported information collected for a different purpose (booking appraisal) and cannot be validated.

3) *Trust-run versus independent contractor practices - any analysis the Department holds on comparative costs of Trust-run, and independent contractor models.*

The Department does not currently hold any analysis on comparative costs of Trust managed practices and independent contractor models. A full evaluation of the Trust-run practices in Western Trust will be completed in by the end of the year.

I hope this information is helpful and I am happy to discuss these issues further with members at the session today.

Yours sincerely



MIKE FARRAR