
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Iain Bell, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Amy Wilson, National Records of Scotland (NRS)
Siobhan Carey, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
(by email)

29 March 2019

Dear all

NATIONAL POPULATION PROJECTIONS

I am writing to you following our recent review against [the Code of Practice for Statistics](#) of the three National Population Projections published by ONS, NRS and NISRA:

- [National Population Projections](#)
- [Population Projections of Scotland](#)
- [Population Projections for Northern Ireland](#)

I am pleased to be able to confirm that the National Population Projections should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

In considering the statistics against the three pillars of the Code – Trustworthiness, Quality and Value – we found many encouraging behaviours and practices, which help to ensure that these statistics serve the needs of users. Across the three producer teams, we have been impressed by the commitment and professionalism of the statisticians and analysts that we have spoken to. We particularly welcome the collaborative working of the teams through the National Population Projections Committee and the involvement of subject experts when agreeing on methods and assumptions. We also found some common areas where we consider that improvements should be made to better support users:

- Be transparent about your planned developments for the projections, your approach to public engagement with users and your progress towards meeting your set priorities and objectives
- Consider, in conjunction with users, how some additional key information on quality, rationale for methods, limitations and the uses of statistics might be helpfully brought forward into the main bulletin to further add value
- Consider how to balance possible user interest in a wider range of variants to enhance value, with the need to provide appropriate caveating to help ensure informed and appropriate use.

Each producer has different strengths and areas where they might make improvements. Through working together to share good practice, expertise and resource, your teams could provide a more common and enhanced user experience across the three National Population Projections.

ONS's National Population Projections bulletin is readable and concise with a range of supporting documents for users to draw on. ONS told us about plans to develop a new tool to allow the production of tailored variant projections to meet the needs of expert users; this reflects the team's motivation to improve the statistics and recognise users' needs. The decisions on methods and

assumptions are informed by subject experts, consulted on, and agreed in conjunction with the other producers; this ensures the projections are underpinned by sound methods, and the approach taken is considered and reviewed by ONS. Information on the approach to agree the assumptions is published in supporting documentation; this could helpfully be supplemented by a high-level summary which would be beneficial for users. Also, the rationale behind the assumptions could be more prominently presented in the bulletin to avoid users having to delve into the detail to understand them. ONS produces a wide range of good information on the quality of the statistics. However, there is a lot of material and some documents are not straightforward to access. ONS could improve and add value by reviewing the range and accessibility of the supporting information on quality and methods to make it easier for users to find the information they need.

NRS's National Population Projections are accessibly presented in a variety of formats. The main bulletin presents findings structured as responses to a series of topic-based questions; this presentation is one example of the way the team has produced engaging and accessible content with users in mind. NRS has strong links with a core user group and supports users' needs for additional statistics such as supplementary variant projections. NRS could refresh and strengthen some of its supporting information on the quality of the statistics including providing explanations of quality matters in the Scottish context and making clearer reference to materials published by ONS. In doing so NRS would provide users with the appropriate quality information to support their use of these statistics.

NISRA's National Population Projections are presented as a comprehensive package and the users are given a good sense of the value of the statistics through broad use cases included in the bulletin and supporting information. NISRA has produced and published comprehensive documentation on the quality assurance of administrative data; it is clear the team has carefully considered potential data quality issues. NISRA could improve the accessibility of the bulletin by reviewing its readability and the level of insight contained within the narrative. Improving the clarity and insight of the bulletin will help users better engage with the information and support their understanding of the statistics.

We have shared more-detailed comments and findings from our review with your teams. We recommend that you consider our findings and how you will address these areas ahead of the next publication of each of your national projections. We also recommend that you consider whether similar improvements may also be applicable to your subnational population projections. Our population domain leads will continue to engage with your teams over the coming months to discuss progress and provide support as appropriate ahead of the next publication of the national projections.

I am copying this letter to Andrew Nash (ONS), Denise Patrick (NRS) and Jonathan Harvey (NISRA), the lead statisticians.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead