

NISRA Annual Business Plan 2021 - 2022



Chief Executive's Foreword

The single most significant issue to arise since the last NISRA Business Plan was published, was the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic. Although the majority of NICS staff have found themselves working in unusual circumstances this past year, few will have faced the truly unparalleled level of demand as those working in NISRA. Both in the Core Agency, (i.e. GRO, Vital Stats and the Central Survey Unit) and in outposted branches (i.e. Communities, Health and Economy), the demand for data, often requiring the development of new sources, and swift and insightful analysis has been relentless. Timely data has been crucial in guiding the government response to the pandemic, locally and nationally, and in informing the public's understanding of the need for that response.

NISRA moved swiftly to reshape how the work gets done, moving to remote working as well as responding to the numerous demands for new data. Crucially, measures were put in place to keep the vitally important registration service operating under these difficult conditions whilst business and social survey activity changed from face-to-face to telephone interviewing.

In addition, the Census Team successfully launched the Census in March 2021, the enumeration phase of which will not complete until May 2021. Although the predominantly online design was intended to generate a high return rate, it also supported the ongoing necessity to maintain a Covid-safe working environment and social distancing generally.

The response to the pandemic necessitated collaborative working and mutual support right across the Agency. Staff in all branches, grades and roles have gone above and beyond to meet ever changing requirements whether that be in providing registration services, making the premises Covid secure, putting in place the technology and policies for remote working or facilitating urgent needs for additional resource in other branches. The response was a real team effort enabling NISRA to respond to a fast-moving situation and ever-changing user needs.

The pandemic presented many challenges both on service delivery and on meeting new and unanticipated user needs. We also continue to take full advantage of the availability of new data sources, enabling legislation and technology, whilst maintaining quality and seeking to do this more quickly and cost effectively. Some of the lessons learned in the pandemic will change how we work going forward.

We have established the new Technology and Support Laboratory to progress, amongst other things:

- automation and/or optimisation of analytical code/ processes including implementation of Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP);
- redesign of 'old' data systems/ processes, particularly moving from Excel based processing;
- complex data management and metadata development;
- interrogation of multiple large datasets;
- data visualization including development of dashboards; and
- advanced data and business analysis.

A prioritised list of projects has already been identified and we all look forward to the results the Lab will deliver.

Our Corporate Plan has been designed to accommodate changing priorities whilst setting a clear direction of travel. The annual NISRA Business Plan contains the specific steps we will take as an organisation year on year to deliver on our operational tasks and the planned transformation activity contained in the NISRA INSIGHT Programme.

The choice of the acronym INSIGHT is not just novel shorthand, for it is derived from the very values NISRA staff identified for themselves. And by the same token, insight, is fundamentally what we provide to our customers and users.

Our Balanced Scorecard (BSC) continues to evolve and includes an Outcomes-based Accountability (OBA) element. The NI Executive and the NICS is committed to embedding the OBA approach and the Agency will continue to develop this aspect of the BSC going forward.

Once again I look forward with great anticipation to what will no doubt be another challenging year and another opportunity for NISRA staff to make a difference.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Siobhan Carey". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a period at the end.

SIOBHAN CAREY
Chief Executive & Registrar General

Our purpose

Support decision makers in the formulation of evidence-based policy and inform public debate, through the production and dissemination of high quality, trusted, meaningful analysis; facilitate research and deliver the decennial population census and cost effective civil registration services.

Our mission

Provide citizens and decision makers with trusted insight on life in Northern Ireland.

Our vision

We aspire to:

- be the go-to organisation for an accurate and insightful account of life in Northern Ireland, informing decision making and recognising our people are our strength;
- provide comprehensive registration and genealogy services that give our customers what they need; and
- be motivated and valued people doing excellent work together; innovating, growing, proud of our Agency and our impact.

Our values

Key to the Agency's future success will be the extent to which we live up to the standards we have set for ourselves, both individually and collectively. These are encapsulated within INSIGHT, the initiative we will use to give substance to our shared values, provide a focus for planned transformational activities and be a vehicle for the communication and exploration of organisational culture and the projection of leadership behaviours.

I	Investment	in people, technology and learning and development.
N	Network	of specialist staff across the public sector, working within a shared culture of collaboration, supportive team-working and effective communication.
S	Standards	of best practice, professionalism, personal integrity and respect, taking pride in all we do and delivering on our promises.
I	Improvement	through innovation and a challenge mind-set, supporting positive change and adding value in all we do to increase our efficiency, effectiveness and impact.
G	Good governance	of data and our corporate processes.
H	High quality	insight and analysis, outputs, publications and comprehensive service, engendering trust in what we say and the information that supports it.
T	Trust	extended as a sign of our shared responsibility, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

Strategic objectives

1. To deliver the enumeration phase of the 2021 Census by May 2021 to ensure government policies, plans and services are based on strong and accurate population evidence.
2. To maintain general registration services during the ongoing pandemic and develop and deliver essential changes flowing from the advent of same sex marriage legislation.

Key priorities

1. Continue to support the new outcome-based accountability PfG under the new Outcomes Delivery Report format and work collaboratively with departments to produce both population indicators and performance level report cards.
2. Continue to provide a social survey research service to NI government and the wider public sector and administer relevant business surveys to inform and monitor the performance of the NI and UK economies and labour markets.

Enablers

To help deliver our strategic outcomes the Agency Board has committed to implementing a Transformational Programme designed to produce the changes our customers, stakeholders and staff have asked for and that are demanded by the environment in which we now work. The Programme encompasses a range of activities grouped under the headings Culture, People, Structure, Collaboration, Data and Legislation.

Our organisation

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which incorporates the General Register Office (GRO), is an executive agency within the Department of Finance (NI) and was established on 1 April 1996. It currently employs some 481 staff split almost equally between its core operational headquarters and 19 outposted locations including all NICS Departments and has a net operating budget of circa £21.5m.

The administration of the marriage and civil partnership law in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of GRO, along with the registration of births, deaths, adoptions and gender recognition. GRO is also responsible for the maintenance of registration records and the production of certificates in relation to these events on request.

The Agency is the principal source of Official Statistics and social research on Northern Ireland. These statistics and research not only inform public policy but also academic and private sector research, and contribute to debate in the wider community. We provide our services to a wide range of Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, as well as Local Councils to assist the policy development process and the delivery of their business objectives.

NISRA conducts the Census of Population every 10 years which every household in Northern Ireland must complete by law. It is used by central and local government, health authorities and other organisations to plan and provide future services. The next Census takes place in March 2021.

Our statisticians also make an important contribution to the draft Programme for Government (PfG) providing the data underpinning the vast majority of the 49 Population Indicators and assisting policy colleagues and other stakeholders in developing a greater understanding of the data.

Governance arrangements

The Chief Executive is the designated Agency Accounting Officer and is responsible to the Finance Minister and accountable to the NI Assembly for the Agency's use of resources. The Chief Executive is also responsible for the propriety and regularity of the Agency's expenditure and for ensuring that the requirement of Government accounting standards and practice are met.

The Chief Executive ensures that the Agency observes any general guidance issued by DoF and puts into effect any recommendations by the Public Accounts Committee, other Assembly Select Committees or other relevant authority, which the Executive has accepted.

The Agency is subject to external audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland in concert with the Agency's own Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). ARC includes 3 non-executive directors (NEDs) one of whom also acts as Committee Chair. All three NEDs are also members of the DoF ARC, providing considerable continuity of approach and direct oversight of Agency level governance.

A Senior Management Team and a wider Agency Board assist the Chief Executive in the strategic management of the Agency and provide advice on major issues of policy.

Partners and ALBs

Nationally the Agency works in partnership with the UK Office for National Statistics, the Office for Statistics Regulation and the Government Statistical Service as well as collaboratively with the lead statisticians in the other regional administrations and the Republic of Ireland

Locally the Agency works in partnership with every district council in the delivery of registration services through the Local Register Offices.

In addition, NISRA considers the various NI business and industry sectors to be some of its most significant stakeholders, given the Agency's routine engagement with them in gathering economic data. Their views are represented specifically by the Statistical Advisory Committee (SAC), the Agency's only ALB, whose members are public appointees.

Balanced Scorecard 2021-22

The Balanced Scorecards sets out our objectives for the next 12 months, and the initiatives and measures that we will take towards achieving those outcomes

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Measure	PfG Contribution
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Agency will remain within allocated budget. The Agency will optimise its efficiency through revised working practices to meet customer demand. The Agency will deliver outputs and provide services that support customer business needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review organisational/ operational models. Increase Data Protection / GDPR awareness. FOI Compliance. DEA (Digital Economy Act) Compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underspend to be as close to budget as possible. Meetings schedule set for the year for Agency Board meetings. % customers indicating they have used NISRA statistics in the policy/ decision making process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> % customers, using NISRA information for Educational Purposes Academic Research Personnel research Business decision making Other % customers reporting satisfaction with NISRA outputs; and % reporting improved satisfaction. % general public that state they trust statistics produced by NISRA. Confirmed number of Breaches of DPA / GDPR. Subject Access Requests (SAR) processed on time (number / %). FOI requests processed on time (number / %). Confirmed number of Breaches of DEA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy. We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Measure	PfG Contribution
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Areas will be proactive in their engagement with customers and stakeholders in order to enhance the insight and understand the value derived from their services and releases. • The Agency will maintain or improve overall customer satisfaction with its services. • The Agency will seek to improve our level of brand recognition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish current/ future demand for NISRA products and services. • Undertake customer / stakeholder engagement initiatives. • Add value to statistical outputs, and ensure that accessibility regulations are considered for all outputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % customer satisfaction maintained or improved compared to last year. • Agree/ disagree ratings (%): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NISRA staff are knowledgeable. – NISRA staff respond to my query promptly. – NISRA staff are helpful. – It is easy to find/ locate NISRA report/ data. – NISRA reports are easy to understand. – NISRA staff are courteous and treat customers with respect. – In my dealings with NISRA I am made to feel valued. – I am satisfied with NISRA's level of user engagement. • Likelihood to recommend NISRA products and/ or services to colleagues. • % of awareness of NISRA amongst the general public. • Awareness of NISRA among customers (%). • NISRA staff will be proactive in engaging with their customers and stakeholders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of user engagement activities undertaken; and number of user engagement activities which are new/ revamped - Number of suggestions received from users; and number (i) implemented, (ii) considered for future implementation, and (iii) explanation provided where the suggestion could not be implemented. • NISRA releases will aim to enhance insight on Business areas, ensuring that releases comply with the new accessibility regulations / legislation rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential. • We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Measure	PfG Contribution
Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Agency will seek ways to innovate and improve its service delivery and optimise efficiently. • The Agency will be fully compliant with all relevant legislation, NICS and DoF policy and procedure and technical good practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online elements of NISRA recruitment process. • To optimise the opportunities for flexible working presented by the current home work arrangements. • Increase standardisation of NISRA's products & services. • Standardise the statistical toolset. • Further develop process and quality assurance documentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of approved staff vacancies filled within 6 months of activation (including temporary appointments). • Number of official statistics publications with corrections (including major corrections and minor errors). • Number of official statistics publications. • Number of national statistics publications. • Number of social science research reports published. • % of official statistical outputs with process documentation. • % of official statistical outputs with a documented quality assurance process. • Number of breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics (broken down by IT vs non-IT):- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential. • We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Measure	PfG Contribution
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will strive to improve the level of our wellbeing. All Agency staff will receive relevant, identified training and skills development commensurate with their role and development needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and increase opportunities for collaboration. Develop our approach to recognising & appreciating our people. Implement findings of cultural survey action plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of collaborative¹ projects ongoing in 2021/22. The number of working days lost due to sick absence per staff year. % Overall staff satisfaction. % Employee Engagement. % level of staff wellbeing % of staff receiving the identified approved technical training they need to carry out their jobs. % of all NISRA staff indicating they have deployed training in their day to day work. % staff with PPA / PDP completed on time. Development and delivery of related INSIGHT Project objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity. We have more people working in better jobs. We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.

¹ The definition of collaborative is a project involving a project with participants outside the branch / department; this includes inter-departmental collaboration and all policy analytical support.

Measuring Success

Our approach to performance measurement and improvement arrangements will ensure that we have an appropriately detailed picture of our progress on delivering the desired outcomes described above. The framework we will use throughout the Plan period is set out in Figure 1 below.



Fig 1: Performance measurement, management & improvement framework

Financial Resources

NISRA's opening net cash Resource Budget for the financial year (FY) 2021/22 is a flat baseline:

£'000	FY2021/22	FY2020/21
Net Cash	19,963	19,963
Non-cash	1,044	1,044
Ring-fenced:		
EU Exit costs	350	350
Covid	200	0

There is an additional Covid ring-fenced budget allocation of £200k for the year.

The Net Cash allocation continues to fund the Census 2021, which will continue into the 2021/22 financial year.

The opening capital budget allocation was:

£'000	FY2021/22	FY2020/21
Capital	2,346	1,193

The budget includes:

- £500k for Introduction of Irish Language registrations;
- £150k for continuing work on Economic Accounts;
- £500k for the Data Infrastructure project; and
- £300k IBSS replacement.

The Agency's funding position is monitored throughout the year and any emerging pressure or easement is considered at the monitoring rounds. The net Resource allocation includes estimated income totalling £17m which will be used to offset the Agency's expenditure.