

NISRA Framework Document



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1 NISRA's Functions

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), incorporating the General Register Office (GRO), is an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance (DoF) and was established on 1 April 1996.

The Agency is the principal source of official statistics and social research that not only informs public policy but also academic and private sector research, and contributes to debate in the wider community. The Agency provides 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 business objectives.

The General Register Office is responsible for the administration of the marriage and civil partnership laws, along with the registration of births, deaths, marriages, adoptions and gender recognition. GRO is also responsible for the maintenance of registration records and the production of certificates in relation to these life events.

The Agency conducts the Census of Population every 10 years which every household must complete by law. It is used by central and local government, health authorities and other organisations to plan and provide future services.

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

The principal functions of the Agency are:

- to provide and co-ordinate professional statistics and research services, and to be the principal advisory body on statistics and social research for Departments, Agencies and Non-Departmental Bodies;
- to carry out the Census of Population and provide high quality demographic information to enable the number and the condition of the population to be monitored and changes over time to be identified;
- to collect, analyse and make available official statistics on society, the economy and public services;
- to ensure that statistical and research standards are adhered to and that the best appropriate methodological practice is employed in official statistics, social research and policy evaluation;
- to provide statistics required for the United Kingdom and international statistical series; and
- to administer the marriage laws and provide an efficient and effective system for the registration of births, marriages, civil partnerships, adoptions and deaths.

2 Purpose of the Framework Document

The purpose of the Framework Document is to set out the relationships between the Agency and its parent Department (the Department of Finance – DoF) and the Minister for Finance.

The roles of the Agency's Chief Executive, the DoF Permanent Secretary and the Minister, together with their respective responsibilities and lines of accountability are set out in this document. Relationships with outposted / seconded staff and the rest of the UK statistical system are also defined.

This Framework Document will be subject to review after 5 years.

3 Corporate Governance

3.1 Purpose

To 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 through GRO.

3.2 Responsibilities

The Agency is subject to the overall direction of the Minister of Finance. The Minister is accountable to the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly for the appropriate operation of the Agency.

3.3 The Agency Chief Executive

The Agency Chief Executive is the Chief Statistician and principal advisor to the Executive and government bodies on statistical and social research issues.

The Chief Executive is directly responsible to the DoF Minister for the management of the Agency's performance and operations and must consult with the Department before any proposals significantly affecting the work of the Agency are put to the Minister.

The Chief Executive's responsibilities include:

- preparing draft Corporate and Business Plans, including approved key objective/s which feed into the DoF process;
- achieving the Agency's performance objectives;
- managing the Agency's resources efficiently, effectively, economically and equitably;
- continuously reviewing the functions, structures, staffing levels, business processes and support services for the Agency as a whole;
- providing the Minister with such information as is required to enable the Agency's performance to be monitored; and
- laying an Annual Report and Accounts before the Assembly.

The Chief Executive is Head of Profession for the Statisticians' Group within the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and has responsibility for:

- promoting the provision across government of co-ordinated, high quality, cost effective and easily accessible statistics and research;
- setting professional standards for the Group;
- giving overall strategic direction and leadership to staff;
- promoting the integrity and validity of official statistics and social research; and
- resolving interdepartmental disputes over statistical or social research matters and representing the Agency locally, in the UK and internationally.

The Chief Executive, as Registrar General, is also responsible for civil registration and conducting the census and related activities.

3.4 Chief Executive Duties with regard to official statistics

The Agency's Chief Executive will carry out a number of functions similar to the UK Government's National Statistician. In consultation with senior statisticians in Departments and lead officials for statistics in other government bodies, and where appropriate with the National Statistician, the Chief Executive will:

- oversee the development and maintenance of official statistics (including those statistics designated as National Statistics) for Northern Ireland;
- advise Ministers and other senior officials across government on the production, dissemination and use of official statistics;
- promote and advise on adherence to the Code of Practice for Statistics;
- support Agency staff and other officials within government to comply with the Code and its interpretation and seek to resolve any issues concerning interpretation in Northern Ireland.
- maintain central responsibility for the development and deployment of Agency staff in other public sector host organisations;
- keep under review the organisation of statistical functions consistent with the pillars and principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics;
- establish and maintain mechanisms for taking account of the views of users and providers of data, including constitution of the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC);
- manage dissemination and marketing arrangements for NISRA products;
- estimate the compliance costs to business of responding to statistical enquiries and seek to minimise the burden on those who supply data for official statistics or other purposes;
- co-ordinate and promote official statistics policies and procedures across government;
- make available to the UK Statistics Authority such information as it requires to perform its duties; and
- work with the National Statistician and counterparts in Scotland and Wales to promote comparable statistics across the UK and maintain statistics required to be submitted on a UK basis and
- work with the Central Statistics Office in order to share best practice and promote comparable statistics.

3.5 Permanent Secretary

As administrative head of the parent Department, the Permanent Secretary advises the Minister on policy and the strategic direction of the Agency, its Corporate and Business Plans, the annual setting of objectives and the resources needed to achieve them. As Departmental Accounting Officer, the Permanent Secretary must be satisfied that the Agency has adequate financial systems and procedures in place to promote the efficient and economical conduct of its business and to safeguard financial propriety and regularity.

3.6 Minister

The Minister of Finance determines the policy framework within which the Agency operates and the scope of its activities. The Minister agrees the terms of the Framework Document, sets key objective/s, and holds the Agency to account in terms of delivering against its objectives.

The Minister does not normally become involved in the day-to-day operations of the Agency but will be consulted by the Chief Executive on the handling of operational matters which could give rise to significant public or political concern.

4 Accountability

4.1 Accounting Officer Responsibilities

The Permanent Secretary is the Accounting Officer for the parent Department and as such is responsible for ensuring a high standard of financial management in the Department as a whole. The Chief Executive is the designated Agency Accounting Officer.

The Chief Executive is responsible to the Minister and accountable to the NI Assembly for the Agency's use of resources in carrying out its functions. The Chief Executive is responsible for the propriety and regularity of the Agency's expenditure, for ensuring that the requirement of Government accounting standards and practice are met and for establishing or arranging proper systems for this purpose, including internal audit. 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.

4.2 Northern Ireland Assembly Committees

The Agency Accounting Officer may be required to appear before the Public Accounts Committee at hearings related to the Agency. Where an Assembly Committee's interest is in the day-to-day operations of the Agency, the Chief Executive may appear on behalf of the Minister. Other officials from across the Agency may also appear at Departmental Committees as required. The DoF Assembly Section takes the lead in determining the most appropriate officials on a case by case basis.

4.3 Assembly Questions and Other Enquiries

Members of the NI Assembly, the UK Parliament, public representatives and the general public are encouraged to deal directly with the Chief Executive or other Agency managers on matters which are the responsibility of the Agency. The DoF Minister can ask the Chief Executive to reply to Parliamentary and Assembly Questions about statistical matters. Ministers of other Departments will similarly ask the NISRA staff outposted to their Departments to deal with statistical questions addressed to them. Replies will be published in the relevant Official Report.

4.4 Complaints Procedures

The Agency operates in accordance with its published complaints procedure and its activities fall within the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. The Permanent Secretary has delegated to the Chief Executive, responsibility for replying where a complaint relates to matters within the Chief Executive's area of authority.

5 Finance, Planning and Control

5.1 Funding

The Agency's resource requirements are considered as a part of the Department's inputs to the Northern Ireland Budget Process with Agency expenditure subject to gross running costs control. The Agency will be subject to the normal Public Expenditure controls and will make full use of the AccountNI system and any successor shared service(s).

5.2 Corporate and Business Plans

The Agency Chief Executive prepares, for approval by the Minister, a Corporate Plan (the current one covers a 5 year period) and a Business Plan which covers the forthcoming financial year. The annual Business Plan sets out the actions the Agency will take over a 12 month period to meet Departmental and Agency objectives and make progress against those longer term priorities as described in the NISRA Corporate Plan. It also sets out the Agency's overall financial resources for the upcoming year.

The Minister approves the draft Corporate and Business Plans following consultation with the parent Department by the Chief Executive. The approved plans are published on [Agency website](#).

5.3 Annual Reports and Accounts

Each financial year, the Chief Executive prepares and publishes an Annual Report and Accounts that includes the Agency's financial performance and progress in meeting its objectives. The accounts are prepared in a form approved by the Department and are formally recorded by an Accounts Direction. The Annual Report and Accounts are required to be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and laid before the NI Assembly.

5.4 Control

5.4.1 Internal Audit

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that adequate arrangements exist for the provision of internal audit services that operate in accordance with the standards of Government Internal Audit. The Department's Internal Audit Unit retains the right of access to the Agency in order to provide an independent assurance to the Departmental Accounting Officer and, for those few occasions where it might be necessary to complete enquiries relating to audits of the Department's own systems.

5.4.2 External Audit

The Agency is subject to external audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland. Annex 2 details the Corporate Governance/ Risk Management arrangements in place within the Agency.

6 People

6.1 Conditions of Service (Concordat)

A key function of the Agency is to supply and support NISRA staff in Government Departments, non-Departmental Public Bodies (i.e. BSO, PSNI, and OPONI etc.), and Local Government Districts. Regardless of their location, the Agency's specialist analytical and administrative staff remain Civil Servants and enjoy Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions of service and are employees of the Department of Finance. The Agency operates a Concordat with its host organisations which outlines the arrangements for the supply of specialist analytical staff, the responsibilities of the Agency and NICS HR with respect to the filling of the posts, the service provided by outposted Agency staff, and the career development opportunities afforded to them in post.

It is the responsibility of the Agency to provide a complement of staff with the analytical skill sets needed to provide the range of agreed analytical services required by a host organisation. It is a requirement of the Agency that such staff work to the standards outlined in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

The number and grading of NISRA staff supplied is determined by the Agency, in consultation with the host organisation, and may be subject to review as business needs dictate, taking into account Agency and NICS workforce planning objectives and budgets. It is for the Agency to determine the best fit skill set(s) for the post(s) in question and the mechanism for filling those posts, in line with its internal Vacancy Management Policy and the management of the professional cohort.

The Agency is responsible for the career management and support of its outposted staff, and for the quality assurance of the professional services provided to the host organisation, for which a commensurate charge is applied to the cost of the overall provision. A member of the Agency's Board will liaise with the host organisation to ensure that the work undertaken by its NISRA staff continues to be aligned with the scope and scale of the activities for which they were originally assigned.

6.1.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The NICS People Strategy 2018-21 places diversity and inclusion at its centre and includes a range of actions that will help accelerate the NICS ambition to be a service that reflects the society the Agency serve.

6.1.2 Health and safety

DoF has a Health and Safety Policy which complies with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulation (NI) 2000, and all other relevant legislation. The Agency, as part of DoF, regards it as an integral part of its duties and objectives to ensure, so far as is reasonable practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work and of all other persons who may be affected by the Agency's business activities.

6.1.3 Employee Consultation and Trade Union Relationships

DoF is responsible for the NICS Industrial Relations Policy. The centralised human resource function, NICSHR, consults on HR policy with all recognised Trade Unions and local Departmental arrangements are in place to enable consultation on matters specific to a Department or individual business area. The Chief Executive is responsible for industrial relations within the Agency and recognises the importance of good relations to the achievement of the Agency's objectives. The Chief Executive is therefore committed to effective communication and consultation with staff and their representatives.

6.1.4 Pay policy

Under the Civil Service (NI) Order 1999, the Department of Finance is responsible for the pay arrangements of NICS civil servants. Subject to Departmental agreement, the Chief Executive will ensure through formal review, that the Agency's grading structure, pay arrangements and working patterns best meet the business needs of the Agency.

6.2 Staffing Levels

The Chief Executive will determine the level of staffing necessary to fully deliver the agreed functions of the Agency, as set out in 3.4 above, within agreed budgetary limits. New or regraded posts will only be considered once all alternative options have been exhausted and a proportionate business case has been approved. The Chief Executive may also introduce changes to personnel management methods as are considered necessary to maximise the Agency's efficiency and effectiveness. The Chief Executive will consult with the Permanent Secretary on the creation or suppression of posts that lie within the Department's Senior Civil Service complement.

6.3 Recruitment

The Chief Executive has the authority to recruit casual, permanent and period appointment staff, subject to Departmental ceilings and NICSHR / HRConnect procedures. The Agency is responsible for initiating and managing recruitment competitions to fill specialist analytical vacancies and for the posting of successful candidates to their respective locations.

6.4 Promotion and Transfers

The Chief Executive is responsible for the assignment or transfer of staff to posts both within the Agency and within host organisations. The Chief Executive has full responsibility for all promotion arrangements for the Agency's analytical staff and may organise and conduct promotion and trawl boards for these groups subject to HRConnect procedures. All analytical staff will be boarded within their parent Department. Agency Staff in the general service grades come within DoF's arrangements for internal promotion boards, trawls and related processes. The Chief Executive and the Department will make arrangements for the transfer of staff out of the Agency for career development purposes.

6.5 Staff Appraisal

In order to achieve consistency in the treatment of Agency staff, the Chief Executive will ensure that a uniform system of annual performance appraisal (which includes at least one specialist analytical staff member, in the performance management chain as Reporting Officer or Countersigning Officer) applies to all analytical staff.

6.6 Training and Development

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring the provision of specialist training and development opportunities for Agency staff and the facilitation of non-DoF staff attendance. Host departments are responsible for anything that is specific to their requirements.

The Agency will make use of the Centre for Applied Learning for non-specialist training provision.

6.7 Grievance, Conduct and Discipline

The Agency will consult with host organisations as necessary and appropriate and in compliance with current DoF/NICS HR policy on matters relating to grievance, conduct and discipline. Agency members of staff have the right to appeal to the Chief Executive on all such matters. The Department is responsible for termination of employment of permanent staff on the recommendation of the Chief Executive and NICS HR.

6.8 Staff Relations

In all other respects, Agency staff will be subject to and treated in accordance with any other reasonable policy or procedure that also applies to staff in the host organisation, unless or until such policy or procedure conflicts with the terms and conditions of the parent Department (DoF), the NISRA Concordat, or runs contrary to the Code of Practice for Statistics.

6.9 Data Protection / GDPR

The Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) requires organisations that process personal data to meet certain legal obligations. Within the meaning of the DPA Act 2018, DoF is the organisational Data Controller for the Agency.

Agency staff outposted to host organisations carry out a range of data processing tasks and therefore fall into the category of Data Processor. Host organisations are the Data Controllers and must ensure there is a lawful basis for collecting and processing personal data. Data Protection Guidance Note DPGN 01/19 provides guidance on identifying and documenting Data Controller and Processor roles within the NICS.

As Data Processors Agency staff outposted to other Government Departments and those seconded to non-Departmental Public Bodies and other organisations, together with their contractors will:

- a. process personal data only on behalf of the Data Controller and in compliance with its written instructions (unless required by law to act without such instructions);
- b. be subject to a duty of confidence when processing of data;
- c. take appropriate measures to ensure the security of data processing whilst that data is in their possession or they have access to it;
- d. keep records of processing activities in accordance with GDPR / DPA requirements; only engage sub-processors with the prior consent of the Data Controller and under written contract;
- e. assist the data controller in providing subject access and allowing data subjects to exercise their rights under the GDPR / DPA 2018;
- f. assist the data controller in meeting its GDPR and DPA obligations in relation to the security of processing, the notification of personal data breaches and data protection impact assessments; delete or return all personal data to the controller as requested at the end of the agreement;
- g. submit to audits and inspections and provide the Data Controller with whatever information it needs to ensure that it and NISRA Data Processors are meeting GDPR and DPA requirements; and
- h. co-operate with supervisory authorities, such as the Information Commissioner, in accordance with GDPR regulations as required.

All data generated by the host organisation or obtained by the host organisation as part of its business, through whatever means, is the property of the host organisation. As such, the host organisation is the data controller for all such data and is responsible for the implementation and management of a suitable infrastructure to ensure its security. The management of the host organisations data not specifically collected by embedded Agency staff, for statistical or research purposes, is the responsibility of the host with the appropriate deployment of necessary support staff to manage its maintenance and deployment.

7 Review and Publication

7.1 Review Arrangements

A review of this document is to be undertaken by the Minister within 5 years of its publication.

The Chief Executive and / or the Minister may at any time propose changes to this Framework Document in the light of the Agency's operational experience or any change of circumstances. Such proposals will be subject to appropriate consultation with the Department. Any proposed amendment will be subject to the approval of the Minister. Any amendments to the Framework Document will be announced and published.

7.2 Publication

Copies of the Framework Document and any subsequent amendments will be placed in the library of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Any queries about the Agency or the contents of the document should be addressed to:

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8 ANNEX 1: Legislative Framework

8.1 The Registrar General for Northern Ireland

The function of the Census Office and the General Register Office (GRO) are defined in statute and are the direct responsibility of the Registrar General for Northern Ireland. A Registrar General is appointed by the Department under the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. The Registrar General also has statutory responsibilities with regard to the Census of Population set out in the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. The Registrar General is appointed in accordance with these statutes.

Statute assigns these responsibilities to the Registrar General whose independence in these matters must be safeguarded and who is statutorily responsible for this work. The Registrar General's functions are carried out through two main offices namely the General Register Office and the Census Office. The legislative framework for each is set out below.

8.1.1 The General Register Office (GRO)

GRO is responsible for the administration and control of the civil registration service. The service is in practice a partnership between GRO and each local district council. The main statutes that govern the legal functions of GRO are:

- The Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976;
- The Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987;
- The Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003;
- Civil Partnership Act 2004;
- Gender Recognition Act 2004;
- Presumption of Death Act (Northern Ireland) 2009;
- Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011;
- The Immigration Act 2014;
- The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019;
- The Marriage (Same-sex Couples) and Civil Partnership (Opposite-sex Couples) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2019, and
- any relevant emergency legislation i.e. Coronavirus Act 2020.

In addition GRO is responsible for the collation of vital statistics, maintenance of historic records of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, adoptions, gender recognition and presumption of death and for the provision and sale of certified copies from these records.

8.1.2 Census Office

The Census of Population is taken under the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, which provides for the:

- making of an Order to direct the taking of a census;
- making of Regulations with respect to the detailed arrangements;
- Department to superintend the taking of census; and

- Registrar General to make necessary arrangements for the taking of censuses.

The confidentiality of census data is protected by the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 as amended by the Census (Confidentiality) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 which makes provision with respect to the unlawful disclosure of information acquired in connection with the discharge of the functions under the Act.

8.2 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Registrar General for Northern Ireland is also Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency - an Agency of the Department of Finance. Statute lays out the ability for the Chief Executive as a senior officer of the Department to carry out duties in respect of the Agency's statistics and research functions. These functions are also laid out in various statutes.

8.3 NISRA & UK Statistical Law

Under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) the Agency is required to work under the scrutiny of the UK Statistics Authority. The UK Statistics Authority sets out the Code of Practice for Statistics and also lays an annual report before the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Chief Executive is required to supply information to the Authority and to work within this statutory framework.

The Agency is required to adhere to the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for statistics, which sets out the principles and practices by which Government statistics should be produced. Part of the Code is compliance with the Pre-Release Access to official statistics Order (NI) 2009 which sets out the rules under which privileged pre-release access to official statistics before their publication can be granted. It is the Agency's role to ensure that statistical outputs are fit for purpose and that users have a high degree of confidence in them.

As the UK leaves the EU, it is important that UK statistics continue to be of high quality and are internationally comparable. During the transition period, those NI statistics that align with EU practice and rules will continue to do so in the same way as before 31 January 2020. After the transition period, NISRA will continue to produce statistics in line with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics and in accordance with internationally agreed statistical guidance and standards.

8.3.1 Data Sharing Legislation

The Statistics and Registration Act provides gateways to share and link data for the production of statistics. Alongside this the Representation of the People (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and Regulations 2008, allows NISRA access to the full electoral register and under the terms of the Census Act (1969) the Registrar General can process personal data for statistical purposes.

The Digital Economy Act (2017) also allows NISRA and other accredited bodies to share and process data for research purposes. Analytical research is also possible under the terms of the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, the Statistics of Trade

and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 and the Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Data held by NISRA under these rules are only used for statistical and research purposes and must be processed in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics. In addition these gateways are all subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which places duties on Data Controllers to be transparent about what they do with data and to protect it.

8.3.2 NISRA & Confidentiality

The Agency must ensure in all its activities that practices and procedures are such as to prevent any unauthorised disclosure of data. These requirements are outlined in the data governance principle (T6) of the Code of Practice for Statistics (2018), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

8.3.3 NISRA & Economic and Labour Market Statistics

Under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 the Agency can undertake various mandatory surveys and a Census of local businesses. Under this law it is illegal for the Agency to reveal the identity of and data relating to individual businesses.

9 ANNEX 2: NISRA's Corporate Governance

The Agency (incorporating the General Register Office) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance and, as such, consults and takes direction from the Minister for Finance. The Agency Chief Executive reports to the Minister about major issues affecting the Agency including actual and potential risks.

As Agency Accounting Officer, the Chief Executive has responsibility for maintaining effective governance and a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of the Agency's policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding public funds and Departmental assets for which she is responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned in [Managing Public Money Northern Ireland](#) (opens webpage in new window).

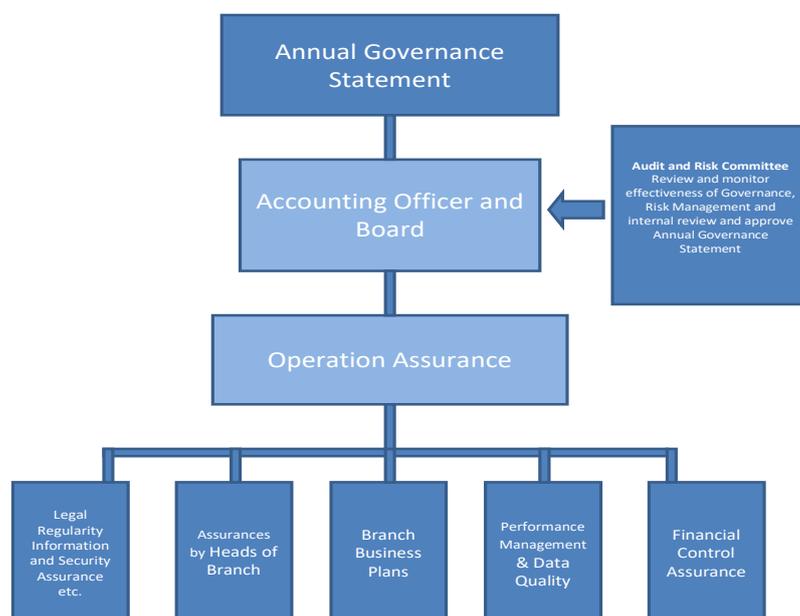
9.1 The Governance Structure of NISRA

The Agency is directed by the Chief Executive with support from the Senior Management Team and the Agency Board. NISRA uses a balanced scorecard to bring a broad perspective and balance to the work of the Agency in terms of the way in which its strategic goals are delivered.

The Agency complies with all DoF and wider NICS policy and best practice to ensure responsible governance of all of its activities. This includes the operation of an Agency Audit and Risk Committee (ARC), the membership of which includes the NI Audit Office and DoF Internal Audit. This provides the Chief Executive as Agency Accounting Officer with assurance that appropriate controls are in place and effective.

The Agency publishes its Annual Report and Accounts following scrutiny by ARC and these are laid at the Assembly. NISRA requires Agency Board members to make an annual declaration of interests to ensure potential conflicts of interest can be identified and addressed, supporting the Chief Executive's Annual Assurance Statement to DoF.

Overview of Governance Structure



9.2 Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

The purpose of the ARC is to support the Agency Accounting Officer in monitoring risk, control and governance systems within the Agency. The Committee has responsibility for assessing the adequacy of audit arrangements (internal and external) and assessing the implications of assurances provided in respect of risk and control across the Agency.

The ARC meets three times annually. The Committee comprises three independent non-executive members including the Chair of the Committee. The Committee membership and its Terms of Reference have been approved by the Minister. Meetings are attended by the three members, the Chief Executive and Agency Business Manager, along with representatives from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and DoF Internal Audit

The ARC reports directly to the Departmental Audit and Risk Committee (DARC) and attends its meetings.

The remit of the ARC includes due consideration of the adequacy of risk management and internal control. The ARC also focuses on the Agency Corporate Risk Register and the stewardship statements provided to the Chief Executive by the senior management team. Any significant control failings or weaknesses identified are discussed, including the impact that they have had, could have had, or may have and the actions being taken to rectify them. Other ARC members and attendees provide the challenge function.

In addition, the ARC is responsible for reviewing the:

- mechanisms for the assessment and management of risk;
- planned activity of external audit;
- results of external audit activity;
- adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit;
- arrangements made for co-operation between internal audit, external audit and other review bodies; and
- activity assurances relating to the corporate governance requirements for the Agency

Consideration and review of these mechanisms enables the ARC to provide their assurance to the Chief Executive thus enabling the provision of an Agency stewardship statement to the Departmental Accounting Officer.

9.3 Risk assessment and the System of Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. It is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Agency's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage mitigating actions efficiently, effectively and economically.

9.4 Risk Management Framework

The Chief Executive, as Agency Accounting Officer, takes the lead in the continued development of a risk management framework. The Agency identifies all significant risks to its business and develops an Agency Risk Register. The Risk Register complements the Agency's Corporate Plan, Business Plan, Balanced Scorecard and financial management, and together these provide the systems to manage the Agency's resources whilst minimising the risks to achieving business outputs. The main risks identified within the Risk Register relate to failure to achieve Agency objectives, articulated each year in the Agency's Business plan.

The Risk Register is managed in the first instance by the Senior Management Team, which reviews actions and considers appropriate future actions. Each member of the senior team is responsible for managing risks within their areas of responsibility and for providing assurance to the Chief Executive that mitigating actions are being actively managed and potential impacts minimised.

The Senior Management Team ensures risk management and internal controls are regularly reviewed and reported on in the following manner:

- business areas use pre-determined weightings and a standardised approach to risk management;
- risks included on the Risk Register are reviewed on a formal basis by the Senior Management Team on a monthly basis throughout the year;
- the NISRA ARC formally reviews risks and controls on a regular basis;
- the Senior Management Team and the ARC assess the continued appropriateness of the respective risks and the means by which they are managed - the need to add, delete, delegate or promote risks is also determined in order to reflect the current business environment;
- Heads of Branches complete mid-year and end year Stewardship Statements in each financial year;
- the DoF Raising Concerns Policy is promoted and applied;
- the Senior Management Team receives periodic reports concerning internal controls and appropriate steps are taken as indicated in the Risk Registers to manage risks in significant areas of responsibility and to monitor progress reports on key risks; and
- twice annually, the Chief Executive provides the Departmental Accounting Officer with a written 'Stewardship Statement' confirming that the risks remain appropriate and that controls identified are adequate, effective and have operated throughout the period.

9.5 Information Management

The Agency's Information Assets are recorded and published on the DoF Information Asset Register. The Agency complies with DoF processes for completing Data Protection Impact Assessments and Data Sharing Agreements and DoF Information Assurance Policy.

All personal information within the Agency is managed in accordance with the DoF policies, to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 / GDPR. All

Agency staff permanent and temporary undertake on-line Data Protection training, together with branch specific awareness sessions. The Agency has prepared an Information Assurance Risk Schedule and an Information Assurance Action Plan is produced annually.

9.6 Fraud prevention and awareness

The Agency adopts a zero tolerance approach to fraud and adheres to the DoF Raising Concerns Policy that sets out staff responsibilities with regard to the prevention of fraud. Whistleblowing arrangements are in place and can be used to raise concerns about alleged impropriety, wrongdoing, corruption fraud or malpractice.

Where instances of fraud are identified these are investigated, appropriate action taken and additional controls are put in place to reduce the risk of a re-occurrence.

9.7 Other assurances

Internal Audit completes audits across business areas on an ongoing basis. Where control weaknesses are identified these are addressed by the Agency. Each year DoF Internal Audit completes a review of 'Objective Validation' in respect of DoF Agency Objectives to ensure that levels of performance against Departmental objectives have been accurately reported.

The UK Statistics Authority conducts assessments of statistical outputs produced by the Agency for compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. This includes assessment of data quality, interpretation and evidence of user engagement against the Code core pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. All assessments are published on the Authority's website

The Competence Framework contains reference to the ongoing need for staff to receive Risk Assessment training and recommends the development of risk assessment as a specific staff competence.

9.8 Review of Effectiveness

As Agency Accounting Officer, the Chief Executive has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal governance and control within the Agency. This review is informed by the work of the internal auditors and senior managers within the Agency who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework, and in responding to comments made by the external auditors in their 'Report to those charged with Governance' and other reports. The Chief Executive is advised on the implications of the result of this review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control by the Senior Management Team and the Audit and Risk Committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is put in place.