



Framework Document

March 2015

CONTENTS

Minister's Foreword	3
1. Status, Vision, Aims and Functions	4
2. Responsibilities	7
3. Accountability	10
4. Finance, Planning and Control	11
5. People	13
6. Review and Publication	16
Annex 1 - Legislative Framework	17
Annex 2 - NISRA's Corporate Governance	20

FOREWORD

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which incorporates the General Register Office (GRO), is an executive agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel. It has been in existence since April 1996.

The principal aims of the Agency are three-fold i.e. to provide a statistical and research service to support decision making by Northern Ireland Ministers and Departments; to inform elected representatives and the public through the dissemination of reliable official statistics; and to administer the marriage laws and provide a system for the civil registration of births, marriages, civil partnerships, adoptions and deaths in Northern Ireland.

In delivering this service NISRA's statistics and research services are afforded to a wide range of Government Departments to assist the policy process and the delivery of their objectives and actions.

The purpose of the Framework Document is to set down relationships between the Minister, the Agency and its parent Department, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). The Framework Document describes the status of the Agency and its functions. It also identifies the Agency's aims, vision, mission and key target areas. The roles of the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and the Chief Executive, together with their respective responsibilities and lines of accountability are set out in the document. Relationships with the rest of the UK statistical system are also defined.

The document has been reviewed by the Department and the Agency in accordance with DFP guidance on Framework Documents.

Performance targets are set annually to measure the Agency's effectiveness within a framework of efficiency and economy, and are published annually in the Agency's Business Plan. Performance is measured against these targets and reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts.

Over the years the Agency has shown its ability to respond to a constantly changing operating environment. Its structures, processes and systems position it to meet the demands and expectations placed on it.

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

Simon Hamilton
Minister for Finance and Personnel

SECTION 1 – Status, Vision, Aims and Functions

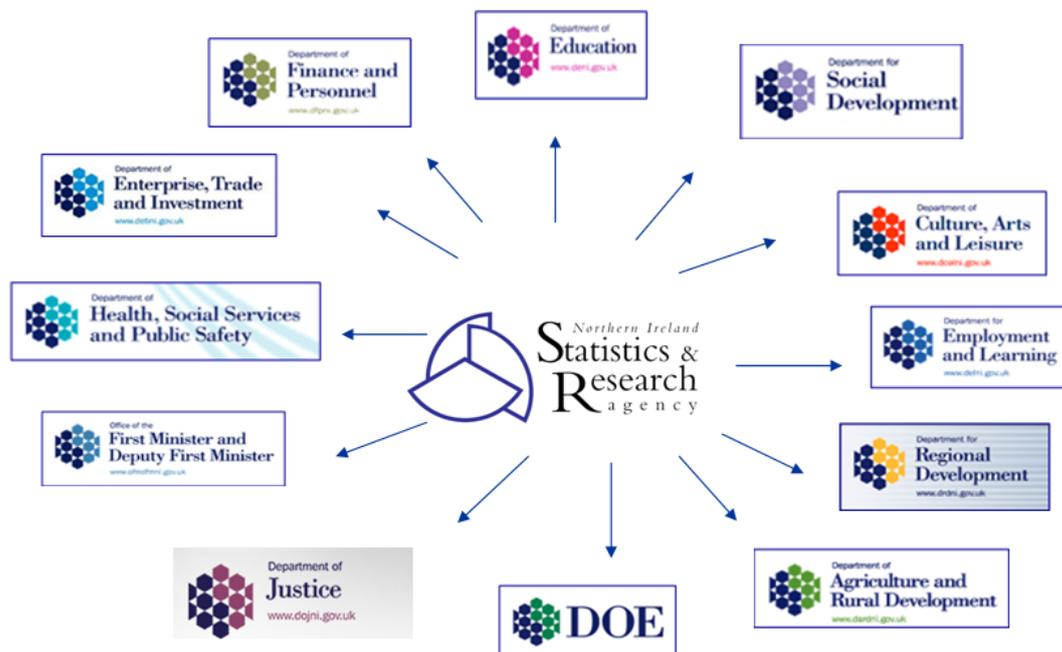
1.1 Status

NISRA is the principal source of official information on Northern Ireland's population and socio-economic conditions. The statistics produced by the Agency not only inform the policy process within Government, but also academic and private sector research and they contribute to debate in the wider community.

The Agency incorporates the General Register Office (GRO) for Northern Ireland, which provides a civil registration service allowing the production of summary statistics relating to life events.

NISRA's statistics and research services are afforded to a wide range of government Departments and Agencies to assist the policy process and delivery of their objectives and actions as well as being the main source of official statistics for the general public and businesses.

NISRA is required to adhere to the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official 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 NISRA's role to ensure that statistical outputs are fit for purpose and that users have a high degree of confidence in them.



1.2 Vision and Mission

NISRA's Vision is:

Trusted statistics and research for a better society.

The Agency's Mission is:

- To produce and disseminate high quality, trusted and meaningful statistics and research to inform decisions and improve understanding; and
- To provide a high quality and cost effective civil registration service to meet users needs.

1.3 Aims

The corporate aims of NISRA are as follows:

- (i) to provide a statistical and research service to support decision making by Northern Ireland Ministers and Departments;
- (ii) to inform elected representatives and the public through the dissemination of reliable official statistics; and
- (iii) to administer the marriage laws and provide a system for the civil registration of births, marriages, civil partnerships, adoptions and deaths in Northern Ireland.

1.4 Functions

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 Northern Ireland 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 which describe Northern Ireland's society, 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 Northern Ireland statistics required for the United Kingdom, European Union 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 in Northern Ireland.

1.4 Key Target Areas

NISRA has used the balanced scorecard approach to provide a business focus for both the short- and the long-term and which can help to put meaningful performance measurements in place. The Agency has four key target areas.

These are:

- Business Results/ Impact;
- Users/Trust;
- Internal Processes/Governance; and
- Organisation and People/Quality.

The Department consults with the Agency on the development of key targets in these four areas. These key targets are supplemented by a suite of Chief Executive targets all of which are detailed in the Agency's annual Business Plan.

SECTION 2 - Responsibilities

The Agency is subject to the overall direction and control of the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Minister is responsible to the NI Assembly for the working of the Agency.

2.1 Minister

The Minister of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) 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 targets, determines the resources to be made available to the Agency and holds the Agency to account in terms of delivering against its targets.

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

2.2 The Agency Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is the Minister's principal advisor on statistical and social research issues in Northern Ireland. The Chief Executive is directly responsible to the DFP Minister for the management of the Agency's performance and operations and is consulted by 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 targets;
- achieving the Agency's key performance targets;
- managing the Agency's resources efficiently, effectively, economically and equitably;
- continuously reviewing the 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 NI 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;
- 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 NISRA externally, in the UK and internationally.

The Chief Executive, as Registrar General for Northern Ireland, is also responsible for civil registration and census work.

Chief Executive duties with regard to Official Statistics

For Official Statistics produced by or for the Northern Ireland administration, the NISRA Chief Executive will carry out a number of functions similar to the National Statistician, but at the Northern Ireland level. He/She will, in consultation with senior statisticians in NI Departments and, where appropriate with the National Statistician:

- establish and maintain the Planning Framework for National Statistics for Northern Ireland;
- keep under review the organisation of statistical functions consistent with the objectives of Official Statistics;
- co-ordinate and promote UK Statistics Authority Official Statistics policies and procedures within Northern Ireland;
- maintain central responsibility for the development and deployment of statistical staff within Northern Ireland;
- establish and maintain mechanisms for taking account of the views of users and providers of data, including the maintenance of the Statistics Advisory Committee;
- promote and advise on adherence to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and its associated standards; and seek to resolve any issues concerning interpretation of the Code in Northern Ireland;
- estimate the compliance costs to business and local authorities of responding to statistical enquiries and seek to minimise the burden on those who supply data for Official Statistics or other purposes;
- manage dissemination and marketing arrangements for NISRA products;
- 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 to maintain statistics required to be submitted on a UK basis to the EU and international bodies.

Under longstanding arrangements, responsibility for statistics produced by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development rests with the departmental Head of Profession, who is the Director of Policy and Economics Division.

2.3 Permanent Secretary

The Permanent Secretary is principal advisor to the Minister on policy as administrative head of the sponsor department and advises the Minister on the strategic direction of the Agency, its Corporate and Business Plans, the annual setting of targets and the resources needed to achieve them. As Principal 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.

SECTION 3 - Accountability

3.1 Accounting Officer Responsibilities

The Permanent Secretary is the principal Accounting Officer for the sponsor Department and as such is responsible for ensuring a high standard of financial management in the sponsor Department as a whole. The Permanent Secretary has designated the Chief Executive as 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 for, proper systems for this purpose, including internal audit arrangements. The Chief Executive ensures that the Agency observes any general guidance issued by DFP and puts into effect any recommendations by the Public Accounts Committee, other Assembly Select Committees or other authority, which the Executive has accepted.

3.2 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 DFP Assembly Section takes the lead in determining the most appropriate officials on a case by case basis.

3.3 Assembly Questions and Other Enquiries

Members of the NI Assembly, the UK Parliament, the European 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 DFP Minister can ask the Chief Executive to reply to Parliamentary and Assembly Questions about statistical matters. Other Ministers will similarly ask outposted statisticians to deal with statistical questions addressed to them. Replies will be published in the relevant Official Report.

3.4 Complaints Procedures

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

SECTION 4 – Finance, Planning and Control

4.1 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 services.

4.2 Corporate and Business Plans

The Agency Chief Executive prepares, for approval by the Minister, a Corporate Plan (normally covering a 3 year period) and a Business Plan which covers the forthcoming year.

Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan sets out:

- The Chief Executive's strategy for achieving the Agency's aims and objectives;
- The performance objectives;
- An assessment of the external factors which influence its activities and key planning assumptions;
- Resources; and
- Efficiency measures that will enable the Agency to live within its resources over the period of the Corporate Plan.

Business Plan

The Business Plan sets out in more detail the Agency's activities for the forthcoming year of the Corporate Plan period and includes:

- Key performance targets set by the Minister;
- Priorities and other targets, including how they will be measured;
- Budgets;
- The key assumptions, including those about resources, which underpin targets; and
- Efficiency measures that will enable the Agency to live within its resources over the period of the Business Plan.

Approval

The Minister approves the draft Corporate and Business Plans each year following consultation with the sponsor department by the Chief Executive. The approved plans are published.

4.3 Annual Reports and Accounts

Each year, the Chief Executive will prepare and publish an Annual Report and Accounts that include the Agency's financial performance and progress in meeting its objectives and targets for the previous year. It will be prepared, audited and laid before the Summer Recess. The accounts will be prepared in a form to be approved by the Department that will be 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.

4.4 Control

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 will retain the right of access to the Agency in order to provide an independent assurance to the Principal Accounting Officer should this exceptionally be deemed necessary and, for those few occasions where it might be necessary, to complete enquiries relating to its audit of the Department's own systems.

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.

SECTION 5 – People

5.1 Staff

The number of staff in post at the 1st of January 2015 was 471, of whom 269 were located in DFP, 130 of whom were statisticians; 163 were statistical staff outposted to other government departments and 39 were statistical staff seconded to non-departmental public bodies and other organisations. In addition, NISRA employed a field-force of 230 fee-paid survey interviewers.

5.2 Status and Conditions of Service

The Agency's statistical and administrative staff are civil servants with Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions of service and are employees of the Department of Finance and Personnel. NISRA staff may be located in Government Departments, Agencies, or other 'host' organisations. Where there are specific arrangements in place locally with regard to health, safety, security (whether physical or information based) and fraud, NISRA staff will be afforded the same assurances and will be subject to the same scrutiny as the host organisation's indigenous staff. NISRA staff will be subject to any vetting procedures or security checks which are required for employment in the host organisation and they will be required to abide by the host organisations policies in respect of information management (DP/Fol/EIR/RecordsNI) in which training will be expected to be provided by the host organisation.

The Chief Executive, with the agreement of the Permanent Secretary, is responsible for the personnel management of Agency staff and may introduce such changes to personnel management methods, as he may consider necessary to maximise the Agency's efficiency and effectiveness. Such changes would be introduced in consultation with Corporate HR, Departmental HR, staff in the Agency and their representatives.

5.3 Pay and Grading

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.

5.4 Staffing Levels

Subject to Departmental ceilings, the Chief Executive is responsible for the creation, number, grading and loading of posts up to and including Grade 6. 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.

5.5 Recruitment

The Chief Executive has the authority to recruit casual, permanent and period appointment staff, subject to Departmental ceilings and NICS / HRConnect

procedures. NISRA is responsible for initiating and managing recruitment competitions to fill statistical vacancies and for the posting of successful candidates to their respective locations.

5.6 Promotion and Transfers

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

5.7 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 statistician in the performance management chain as Reporting Officer or Countersigning Officer) applies to all statistical staff and that the same arrangements for performance pay apply irrespective of staff location.

5.8 Training and Development

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring the provision of statistical training and development opportunities for Agency staff and the facilitation of non-DFP staff attendance. The Agency will make use of the Centre for Applied Learning for non-statistical training provision.

5.9 Grievance, Conduct and Discipline

Disciplinary procedures are the responsibility of DFP which will consult as appropriate with the NISRA Chief Executive and the relevant host organisation. NISRA members of staff have the right to appeal to the Chief Executive on all such matters. Permanent Staff who are dissatisfied on a personal matter retain the right of appeal to the Permanent Secretary. The Department is responsible for termination of employment of permanent staff on the recommendation of the Chief Executive.

5.10 Staff Relations

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.

The Agency recognises the benefit of keeping employees informed of the progress of the business and of involving them in the Agency's business

planning and management.

5.11 Equal Opportunities

NISRA adheres to and actively seeks to promote the Equal Opportunities policy of the Northern Ireland Civil Service as outlined below.

“The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to providing equality of opportunity. It is our policy that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the NICS on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work. Everyone has a right to equality of opportunity and to a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which all workers are encouraged to apply their diverse talents and in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated. This right is protected in many instances by legislation. In order to provide a high quality service to the people of Northern Ireland the NICS needs to recruit, retain and promote the best available people. Our equal opportunities policy is central to this strategy. We aim to foster a culture, which encourages every member of staff to develop his or her full potential, and which rewards achievement. Creating a working environment where individual differences are valued and respected enables all staff to give of their best and helps us to respond more effectively to the needs of the people we serve. The NICS seeks to maintain the confidence of the whole community. It will continue to promote equality of opportunity and fair participation within the framework of the law and will strive to achieve a workforce that is broadly representative of the society, which it serves.”

5.12 Health and Safety

The Agency is committed to complying with the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 and the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992. The Agency consults with staff and their representatives on health and safety matters.

5.13 Agency Staff in Northern Ireland Departments, Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies

The Agency outposts statistical staff on long-term loan to provide statistics and research services to Departments and second statistical staff to certain other ‘host’ organisations. Such staff are recruited, professionally overseen and career managed centrally by the Agency. Their work programmes are determined and managed on a day-to-day basis by the host organisation.

Concordats outlining the respective roles and responsibilities of the Agency and the host organisations in respect of the supply and professional management of outposted staff are agreed and reviewed every 3 years, or earlier in the event of any anticipated major change in the nature of the service provided.

SECTION 6 - Review and Publication

6.1 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.

6.2 Publication

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

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

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BELFAST
BT1 1SA

Tel: 028 9034 8102
Fax: 028 9034 8106

Email: norman.caven@dfpni.gov.uk



Legislative Framework

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 Northern Ireland 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.

The General Register Office (GRO)

GRO is responsible for the administration and control of the civil registration service in Northern Ireland. 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; and
- The Immigration Act 2014.

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.

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.

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union have made Regulations in respect of recent Censuses, specifying topics that should be covered and requiring that statistical returns be made. Regulations (EC) No 763/2008 and (EU) No 519/2010, implemented through (EU) No 1151/2010 covered the 2011 Census, and similar Regulations are expected with regard to a 2021 Census.

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 for Finance and Personnel. Statute lays out the ability for the Chief Executive of NISRA as a senior officer of the Department to carry out duties in respect of NISRA's statistics and research functions. These functions are also laid out in various statutes.

NISRA & European Statistical Law

Under various EC Regulations and Directives, the UK Government is required to supply information to the European Commission. Commission Regulation EC No 223/2009 provides the basic legal framework for European statistics and for the European Union's Statistical Institute, Eurostat. European statistics are determined by the 5-year European statistical programme and the corresponding annual work programme. As it is the National Statistical Institute, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) represents the UK views on these work programmes. NISRA provides Northern Ireland information to the European Commission both directly and through ONS.

NISRA & UK Statistical Law

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

NISRA & Data Sharing Legislation

Under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) NISRA has gained access to a suite of administrative data for population statistics and Census of Population purposes. These include;

- (i) the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (Disclosure of Social Security Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012;

(ii) the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (Disclosure of Pupil Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013; and
(iii) the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (Disclosure of Higher Education Student Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013.

In addition under section 4 of the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and section 98 of the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008, NISRA has access to the full electoral register for Northern Ireland.

Such data can only be used for statistical purposes and must be processed in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

NISRA & Confidentiality

Most information collected by NISRA is confidential and its disclosure prevented by statute. The Agency must ensure in all its activities that practices and procedures are such as to prevent any unauthorised disclosure of data. For example, information collected in household surveys is treated strictly in confidence with a guarantee given to respondents that no individual or household will be identifiable. The confidentiality guarantees are underpinned by the principles of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (2009), and are in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

NISRA & Economic and Labour Market Statistics

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

NISRA's Corporate Governance

NISRA is an executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel and as such consults and takes direction from the Departmental Minister. The Agency Chief Executive (CE) reports to the Minister about major issues affecting the Agency including actual and potential risks.

As Accounting Officer, the CE 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 the public funds and departmental assets for which he is responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. (www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance/afmd/afmd-key-guidance/afmd-mpmni)

The Governance Structure of NISRA

The Agency is directed by the CE with support from the Agency Board (AB), comprising 2 Grade 5 Statisticians and 10 Senior Principal Statisticians (Annex A). The AB is responsible for advising the CE on the strategic direction of the Agency by reviewing its aims and objectives, monitoring performance at corporate level and ensuring that adequate governance controls are in place.

Agency Board meets three times per year and considers the Agency's performance against Ministerial Targets and the Agency's Strategic Objectives. NISRA uses the balanced scorecard approach 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. This approach provides a business focus for both the short and long-term and puts meaningful measurements in place.

The Agency Board is presented with a Corporate Performance Report at each meeting which includes information relevant to the governance of the Agency. The report contains sections on:

- Business performance and risk management;
- Human resources;
- Financial management; and
- Other ad hoc issues relevant to the Agency governance.

The business performance and risk management section provides updates on performance against ministerial and chief executive targets and gives an update on the Agency's Risk Register.

The human resources section updates the Board with respect to staff numbers in the Agency, (including outposted and seconded staff), workforce planning and key sickness absence statistics.

The Financial Management report gives the current funding and budgetary results for the Agency and highlights pressures and easements to funding as they arise.

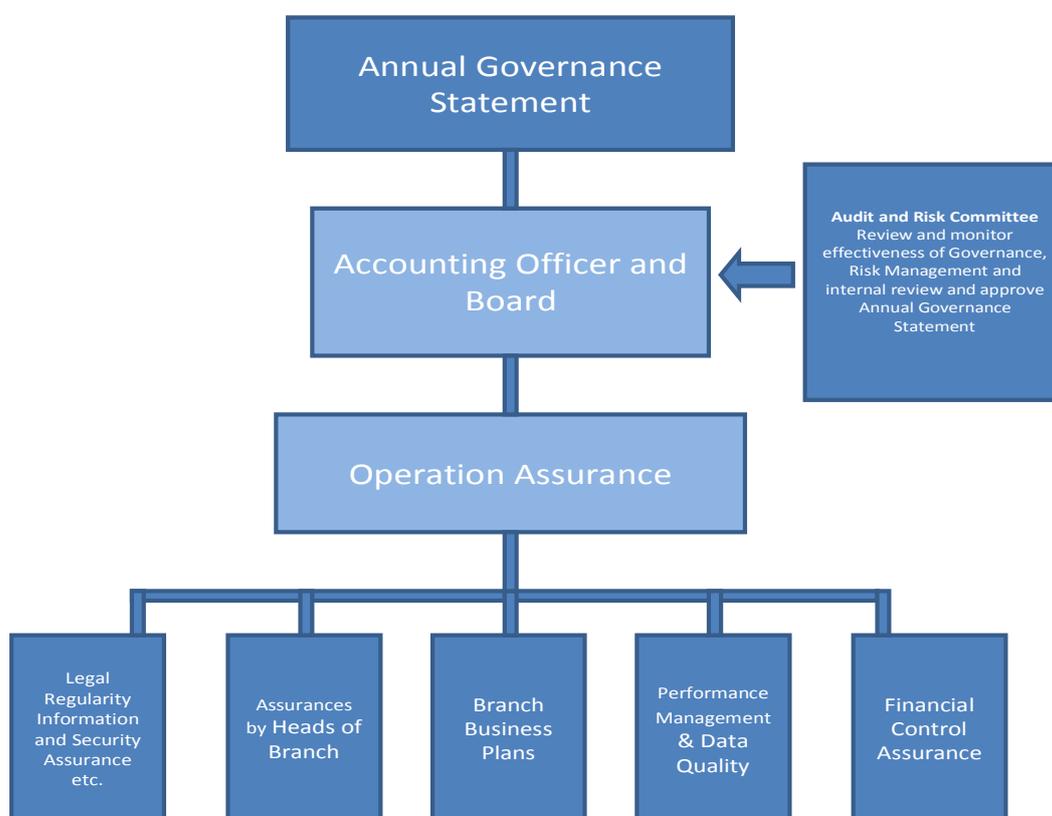
If required, the Agency Board make recommendations for corrective actions to any issues highlighted in the Corporate Performance Report.

The Board also receives details of Business Planning Updates, the Corporate Plan and other matters relevant to the strategic aims of the Agency.

Feedback on performance of the Board is recorded via staff attitude surveys and the Board reviews its operations on an annual basis.

The Agency requests Board members to make an annual declaration of interests to ensure potential conflicts of interest can be identified and addressed in advance of Board discussions. Where potential conflicts exist they are recorded in the Board minutes along with any appropriate action taken to address them.

Overview of Governance Structure



Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to support the 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.

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, along with representatives from NIAO, DFP Internal Audit and NISRA Corporate Services.

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

The remit of the Committee includes due consideration of the adequacy of risk management and internal control. The Committee focuses on the NISRA Business Risk Register and the stewardship statements provided to the Chief Executive by his 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 Committee members and attendees provide the challenge function.

In addition, the Committee is responsible for reviewing:

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

Consideration and review of these mechanisms enables the ARC to provide their assurance to the Chief Executive thus enabling the CE to provide a NISRA stewardship statement to the Departmental Accounting Officer.

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. The system of internal control 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 them efficiently, effectively and economically.

Risk Management Framework

The CE, as 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 a NISRA 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 Ministerial and CE targets which are articulated each year in the Agency's Business plan.

The Risk Register is managed in the first instance by AB, which reviews actions and considers appropriate future actions. Each Board member is responsible for managing risks within their areas of responsibility and for providing assurance to the CE that risks are being actively managed and minimised.

The AB 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 Board at the regular Board meetings during the year;
- The NISRA ARC formally reviews risks and controls on a regular basis;
- The Board 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 ;
- The Heads of Branches complete end-year Stewardship Statements at the end of each financial year;
- Department's policy on fraud and whistleblowing is adhered to;
- The Board receives periodic reports concerning internal control. 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 CE 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.

Information Management

All personal information within the Agency is managed in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Data Protection Policy Statement. The Agency is fully committed to complying with the eight principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. All staff undertake general data protection awareness training which is provided via a mandatory online training package.

Information Assurance is included in the Agency Risk Register. The Agency has prepared an Information Assurance Risk Schedule and Information Assurance Action Plan in response to the Department's objective to become fully compliant with the HM Government Information Assurance Maturity Model and Assessment Framework

Fraud prevention and awareness

The Agency adopts a zero tolerance approach to fraud, reporting instances of fraud to the PSNI if necessary. NISRA adheres to the DFP fraud 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.

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 DFP Internal Audit completes a review of 'Target Validation' in respect of Ministerial Targets to ensure that levels of performance against Ministerial targets have been accurately reported.

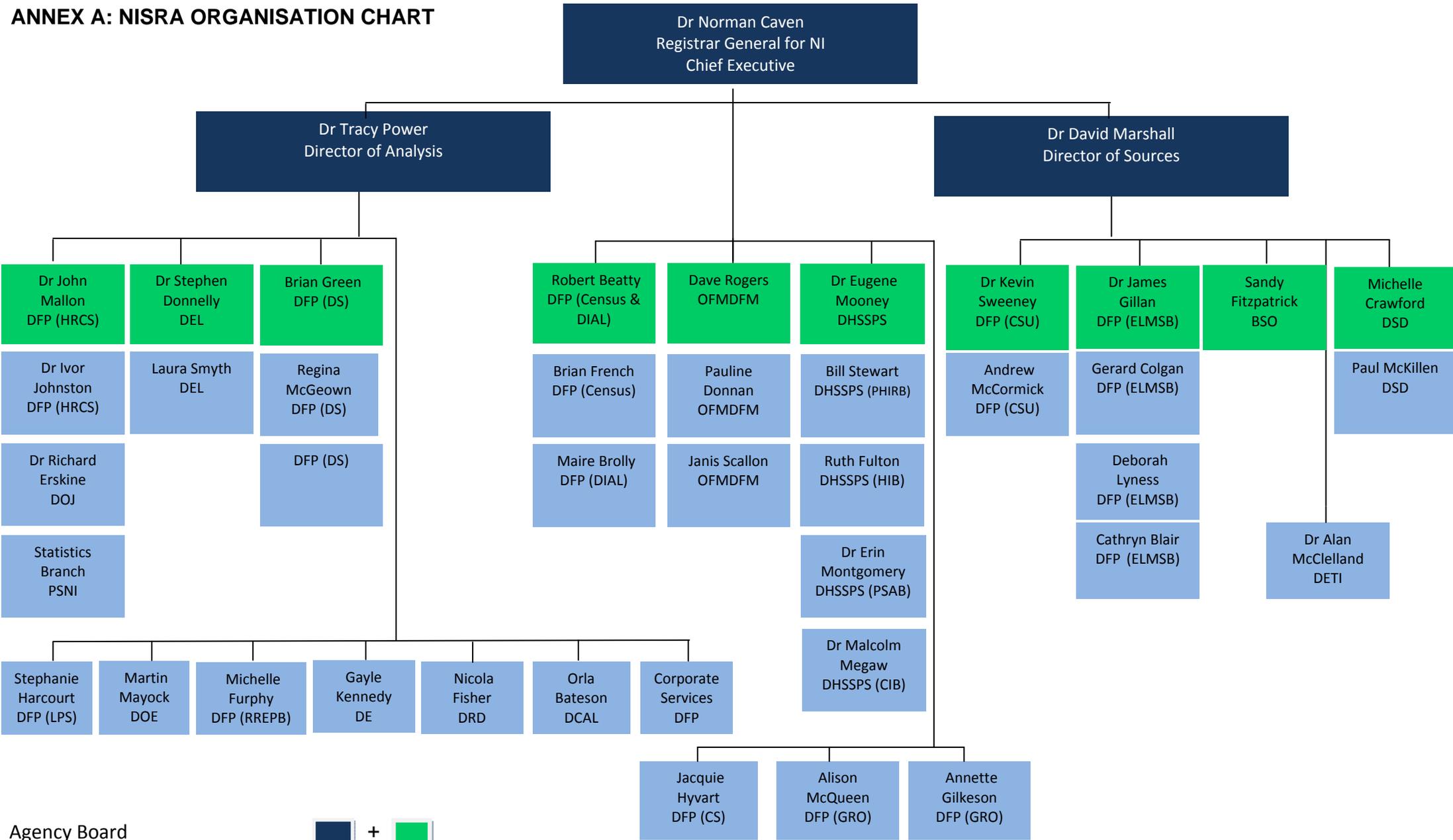
The UK Statistics Authority conducts assessments of key statistical outputs by the Agency for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This includes assessment of data quality, interpretation and evidence of user engagement. All assessments are published on the Authority's website

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

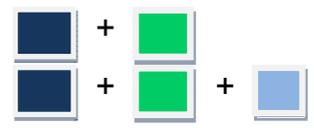
Review of Effectiveness

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

ANNEX A: NISRA ORGANISATION CHART



Agency Board



NISRA Senior Managers Forum