

## Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments 2016/17

### Lead Statistician

Alexandra Pauley

Statistical Support and Business Planning Branch,  
NISRA

Colby House, Stranmillis Court  
Belfast, BT9 5RR

 02890 388463

 [Alexandra.Pauley@NISRA.gov.uk](mailto:Alexandra.Pauley@NISRA.gov.uk)

Published: 28th June 2018

Frequency: Annual

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Theme: Government

### Summary of Key Findings

- In 2016/17 the estimated cost to business in Northern Ireland (NI) of complying with the 137 Government Statistical Surveys was just over £1.1million<sup>1</sup>.
- In total, 76% of the overall compliance burden (£841,700) can be attributed to the Department of Finance (DoF). 93% of the DoF total can be attributed to surveys carried out by Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) Branch, which also includes Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys of businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics.
- A of total 87% of the overall compliance burden was attributable to statutory surveys. These statutory surveys accounted for 36% of the total number of surveys carried out.
- 47% of the surveys carried out are used to produce official statistics, however these surveys accounted for 94% of the total compliance cost.
- Postal data collection methods accounted for 61% of the surveys carried out and 79% of the compliance costs, while online surveys accounted for 24% of the surveys carried out and 10% of the compliance costs.

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<sup>1</sup> The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the series, as surveys which were previously excluded have now been included. The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by the ONS on behalf of ELMS was also revised in 2016/17. This means that the 2016/17 data are not directly comparable with previous years. Further details are provided in Appendix A.

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## Background

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)<sup>2</sup> has a statutory basis<sup>3</sup> and recognises the importance of monitoring and reducing respondent burden, balanced with the need to produce official statistics that are fundamental to good government and provide a good evidence base to inform public policy<sup>4</sup>.

*V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics*

The burden to businesses due to statutory Government Statistical Surveys is also monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)<sup>5</sup>. Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)<sup>6</sup>, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses<sup>7</sup>.

## 1. Introduction

This 2016/17 report is the latest in an annual series detailing the cost to businesses of complying with statutory and voluntary Government Statistical Surveys in Northern Ireland. The report includes information on the number of surveys commissioned, or carried out, by Departments (including their Arm's Length Bodies) and the cost incurred by businesses in complying with regular and ad-hoc government surveys, conducted in the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. Department's names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

<sup>4</sup> Information on the purposes for which the data are used is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

## Useful Links:

- [Previous publications in this series](#)
- [Burden on Households and Individuals](#)
- [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- [NISRA publications and datasets](#)
  
- [Downloadable data](#)

The compliance cost of a survey is defined as the financial cost incurred by the business in responding to the survey. This is estimated using an agreed Government Statistical Service methodology and includes factors such as the time taken to complete the survey, hourly pay rate<sup>8</sup> of the person completing the survey and any external costs such as accountancy fees.

The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection, resulting in training for Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs)<sup>9</sup> and improved guidance being produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the time series as some surveys, and types of surveys, which were excluded in years prior to 2016/17 are now included; specifically surveys carried out by Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and some surveys which were omitted due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service. Examples are participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose. Further details are provided in Appendix A.

The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by the ONS on behalf of ELMS was also revised in 2016/17. This has resulted in an increase in the estimated compliance costs for these surveys (see Appendix A).

In this report, surveys that contribute to national or official statistics are referred to as 'official statistics' surveys, and surveys that do not contribute to national or official statistics are referred to as 'other statistics' surveys.

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Quality Centre, Office for National Statistics (ONS), no longer produces a comparable report for England and Wales. Instead it produces an [On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys](#)<sup>10,11</sup>. Information on Northern Ireland business surveys is available within this list.

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<sup>8</sup> Hourly rates of pay are Hourly Gross (£) UK rates of pay, based on the provisional results of ASHE 2016. This ensures direct comparability with compliance cost published by other parts of the UK.

<sup>9</sup> Each NI Government Department has at least one Survey Control Liaison Officer who is responsible for that Government department and its Arm's Length Bodies.

<sup>10</sup> <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/quality/compliance/#online-list-of-government-statistical-surveys-olgss->

<sup>11</sup> The On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys (OLGSS) is currently being reviewed. Therefore the latest available data are currently for 2015/16. These data may be updated once the review is complete.

## 2. Compliance Cost to Business

In 2016/17, 137 surveys of business were issued by government departments, of which 50 were statutory and 87 were voluntary. The total cost to businesses was £1.1million of which statutory compliance costs were £959,100 (87%) and voluntary compliance costs were £149,700 (13%) (Table 2). Of the £1.1million total compliance cost, 76% was attributable to DoF and 13% to DAERA (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Over two-thirds (70%) of the total compliance cost (£779,600) can be attributed to Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) branch<sup>15</sup>, within DoF. This equates to 93% of the DoF total.

The ONS surveys businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics. The ELMS figure includes the cost to business in Northern Ireland as a result of these economic surveys conducted by the ONS.

Of the £141,800 burden attributable to DAERA, 96% was incurred as a result of the issue of statutory surveys to farms and businesses within the Northern Ireland agricultural sector.

<sup>12</sup> No surveys to businesses were conducted by TEO, DOJ and PPS in 2016/17.

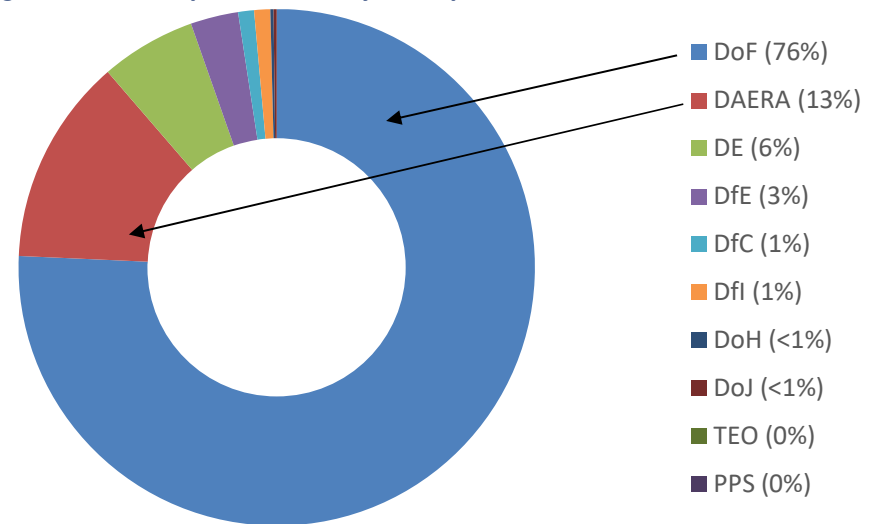
<sup>13</sup> DE return for 2016/17 included for the first time information from the Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments (CCEA); the Education Authority (EA); the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); and, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE).

<sup>14</sup> Previously PPS returns were included with DoJ.

**Table 1: Compliance cost by NI department, 2016/17**

Department <sup>12</sup>	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Total Returns
DAERA	17	141.8	20,960
DE <sup>13</sup>	46	70.9	11,299
DfC	16	12.5	8,357
DfE	11	29.4	4,779
DfI	1	8.2	1,510
DoF	43	841.7	73,487
DoH	2	2.6	164
DoJ	1	1.7	340
TEO	-	-	-
PPS <sup>14</sup>	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>1,108.8</b>	<b>120,896</b>

**Figure 1: Percentage of total compliance cost by NI Department 2016/17**



<sup>15</sup> Information on the cost attributable to each area within DoF is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

Of the £841,700 total burden attributable to DoF, 93% was incurred by statutory surveys.

While DAERA and DoF are the Departments that conduct more statutory than voluntary surveys, DE and DfE conduct more voluntary surveys of business than statutory. DfC, DoH and DoJ only conduct voluntary surveys.

DE conducts 45 voluntary surveys and only 1 statutory survey. The voluntary surveys account for 56% of the compliance burden attributed to DE, while 44% of DE's compliance burden can be attributed to its sole statutory survey in 2016/17<sup>16</sup>.

In contrast, 99% of DfE's compliance burden can be attributed to the voluntary surveys it conducts while only 1% can be attributed to its sole statutory survey.

In total, over two-fifths (64%) of the surveys issued were voluntary. However, they contributed only 13% of the total compliance burden (Figure 2 & Table 2).

In total, statutory surveys accounted for 87% of all compliance burden while accounting for only 36% of the total number of surveys.

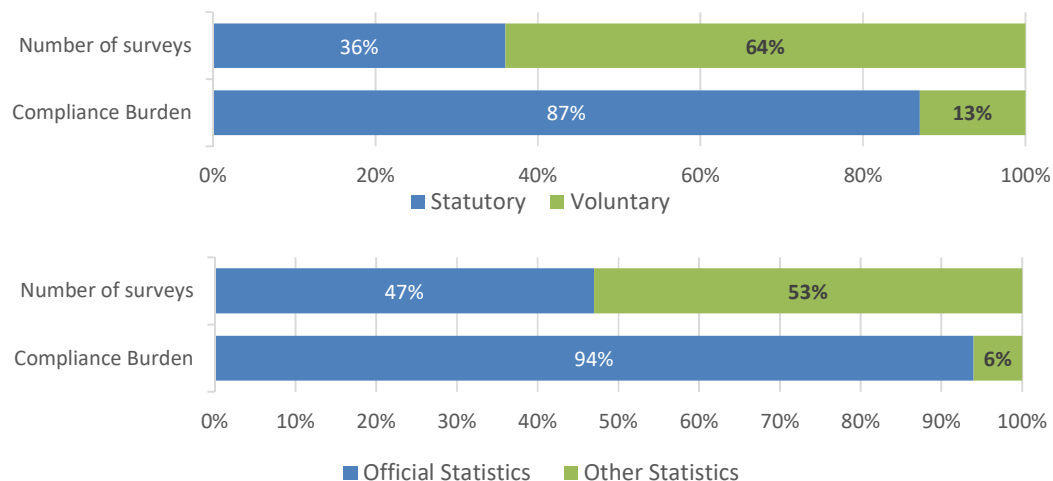
The vast majority (94%; £1.04 million) of compliance burden is due to surveys that contribute to official statistics (Figure 2 & Table 3).

<sup>16</sup> This is the part of the School Census that is still collected by a paper return and covers voluntary/private pre-school and independent school returns. The rest of the School Census is collected via an electronic return, facilitated through computerised school records using a standard system.

**Table 2: Compliance cost for statutory and voluntary surveys by NI department, 2016/17**

Department	Statutory		Voluntary	
	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	9	135.6	8	6.2
DE	1	31.3	45	39.6
DfC	-	-	16	12.5
DfE	1	0.3	10	29.1
DfI	1	8.2	-	-
DoF	38	783.7	5	58.0
DoH	-	-	2	2.6
DoJ	-	-	1	1.7
TEO	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>959.1</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>149.7</b>

**Figure 2: Percentage compliance cost for surveys which are statutory or voluntary and which contribute to official statistics**



Of these official statistics surveys, 92% (£958,800) of the overall burden was attributable to statutory surveys.

Table 3 shows the compliance cost for surveys that contribute to official statistics, and non-official statistics by NI Government Departments in 2016/17.

The compliance cost of all 43 DoF surveys and 17 DAERA surveys is attributed to the production of official statistics. In contrast, none of the 16 DfC surveys or 11 DfE surveys which place a burden on business are used to produce official statistics.

It is only DE which conducts both surveys of business to produce official statistics and non-official statistics. Approximately 7% of the surveys of business conducted by DE are used in the production of official statistics. However, this 7% of DE surveys accounts for 69% of the compliance burden attributed to DE.

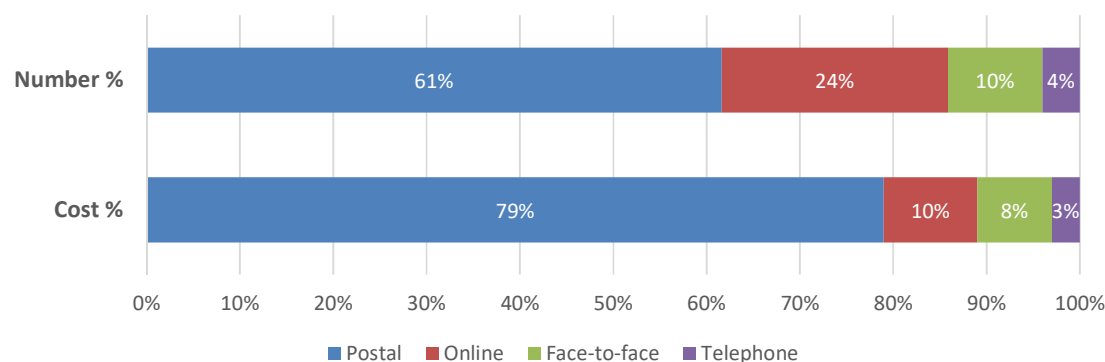
Figure 3 shows the percentage of surveys and compliance cost by method of collection, using the primary collection method (main method used, even if other methods were involved.)

In 2016/17, 61% of surveys used post as their primary method of data collection (Figure 3). Of all surveys, over two-fifths (41%) were solely postal, the highest of any data collection method used individually. The remaining postal surveys used postal methods combined with face-to-face, online or telephone methods (Table 4).

**Table 3: Compliance cost for surveys that contribute to Official Statistics and for surveys that do not contribute to Official Statistics by NI department, 2016/17**

Department	Official Statistics		Other Statistics	
	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	17	141.8	-	-
DE	3	49.0	43	21.9
DfC	-	-	16	12.5
DfE	-	-	11	29.4
Dfi	1	8.2	-	-
DoF	43	841.7	-	-
DoH	-	-	2	2.6
DoJ	1	1.7	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1,042.4</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>66.4</b>

**Figure 3: Number of Surveys and Compliance Cost by Collection Method (Using Primary Method)**



*Please note that any implied relationship between method of collection and compliance cost should be treated with caution as no account has been taken of the complexity and length of the surveys.*

Face to face methods were used as the primary data collection method for 10% of all surveys. Surveys which used online / email as the primary data collection represented 24% of surveys, with a total of 19% of all surveys being solely online / email. Surveys which used telephone methods as their primary (and sole) data collection method made up 4% of all surveys (Figure 3). In total, 42% of surveys used online methods and 11% of surveys used telephone methods as part of their data collection methods (Table 4).

**Table 4: Number of Surveys and Compliance Cost by Collection Method and Department 2016/17<sup>17</sup>**

Department	Face to face		Postal		Telephone		Online/ Email		Face to face & Postal		Face to face & Telephone		Face to face & Online	
	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)
DAERA	6	85.8	-	-	-	-	3	1.2	-	-	1	1.7	-	-
DE	5	0.2	14	1.3	-	-	18	27.3	3	0.7	-	-	1	0.2
DfC	-	-	15	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	11.7
DfE	-	-	2	0.5	5	25.7	3	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
DfI	-	-	1	8.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoF	-	-	23	310.9	-	-	1	<0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoH	-	-	1	1.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>86.0</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>323.3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11.9</b>

Department	Postal & Online		Postal & Telephone-data-entry <sup>18</sup>		Telephone & Online		Postal, Online & Telephone		Postal, Online & Telephone-data-entry		Total	
	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)
DAERA	7	53.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	141.8
DE	5	41.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46	70.9
DfC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	12.5
DfE	-	-	-	-	1	3.0	-	-	-	-	11	29.4
DfI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.2
DoF	11	421.8	4	46.9	-	-	2	30.8	2	31.2	43	841.7
DoH	1	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2.6
DoJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.7
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>516.9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>46.9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>1,108.8</b>

<sup>17</sup> A more detailed breakdown by method of data collection can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

<sup>18</sup> In Telephone-data-entry (TDE) is a data collection method used for NI Government surveys of businesses that collect nine or less data items. The requested data is entered using the telephone key pad.

By department, DE had the most surveys offering an online option, 24 in total, accounting for 52% of all surveys issued by DE. DoF had the second highest number of surveys offering an online option, 16 in total, with a further 4 offering a telephone-data-entry option and thus electronic return options were available in 47% of all DoF surveys. DAERA had 10 surveys using online methods (59% of all DAERA surveys), while DfE had 4 (36% of all DfE surveys), and DoH had 1 (50% of DoH surveys).

### **3. Changes to the Surveys Issued by Departments: 2013/14 to 2016/17**

Prior to the 2016/17 survey burden data collection exercise, a review was conducted of the guidance provided to Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys conducted by NI Government Departments, Arm's Length Bodies and other public sector organisations that place a burden on businesses. As a result of this review, a number of surveys conducted by Arm's Length Bodies that were not included in previous years were included in departmental returns. In addition, some surveys and types of surveys which in previous years were excluded due to their being considered part of the operational management of a public service were included this year due to the clarification of the criteria. These are primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose. Consequently, there is a discontinuity in the time series resulting in the year on year data not being directly comparable<sup>19</sup>. As a result caution is urged when comparing the figures presented in Table 5.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has also carried out a review of its methodology prior to 2016/17, moving away from calculating stratified compliance costs based on business size, adopting a single salary cost for all surveys (ASHE Code 1) and reviewing median completion times in conjunction with survey managers. This change in methodology has resulted in an increase in the estimated compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS. This will impact the compliance costs attributed to DoF but not the number of surveys or number of responses<sup>19</sup>.

Due to the cyclical nature of some of the larger statutory surveys, compliance cost figures can fluctuate from one year to the next. An example of this is the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES), a biennial survey carried out by DoF, which took place in 2016/17 (achieved sample = 8,554; compliance cost = £26,600) or the Census of Employment (Northern Ireland), also a biennial survey carried out by DoF, which took place in 2015/16 but not in 2016/17 (achieved sample = 42,220; compliance cost = £98,600). This resulted in an approximately £52,000 variation in the annual costs.

Additionally, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimising the financial burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

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<sup>19</sup> Further details are provided in Appendix A.



A summary of the cost to business of completing statistical surveys issued by NI departments for the period 2013/14 to 2016/17 is detailed in Table 5. These data have not been adjusted for the discontinuity.

**Table 5: Number of surveys, forms returned & compliance cost by department, 2013/14 to 2016/17**

Dept	Number Surveys				Number Forms (000s)				Compliance Cost (£000s)			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
DAERA	20	19	19	17	20.4	24.7	30.6	21.0	156.8	151.8	199.3	141.8
DE	9	7	8	46	3.8	3.5	2.6	11.3	28.4	31.0	19.8	70.9
DfC	16	22	17	16	1.0	1.1	0.7	8.4	10.2	6.3	4.0	12.5
DfE	28	16	10	11	9.6	9.3	6.4	4.8	57.7	59.7	40.2	29.4
DfI	2	1	3	1	2.0	1.3	1.5	1.5	12.1	8.2	9.7	8.2
DoF	45	38	47	43	86.7	87.7	112.9	73.5	1,039.1	875.6	828.9	841.7
DoH	-	1	-	2	-	0.1	-	0.2	-	1.6	-	2.6
DoJ	-	-	1	1	-	-	0.2	0.3	-	-	3.1	1.7
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	120	104	105	137	123.5	127.8	154.8	120.9	1,304.3	1,134.2	1,105.1	1,108.8

## DAERA

DAERA carried out two fewer surveys in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. This is due to the triennial nature of the *Farm Structure Survey* and the *Fixed Penalty Notices for Clean Neighbourhoods Offences (Litter & Dog Fouling)* survey being discontinued as there was no statutory requirement to collect the data. The overall reduction in the number of forms and compliance costs can almost entirely be attributed to the *Farm Structure Survey* not being conducted in 2016/17.

## DE

DE carried out 46 surveys in 2016/17 compared to eight in 2015/16. This increase can be attributed to the inclusion of the 39 surveys carried out by CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments), CCMS (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools), the Education Authority, and NICIE

(Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education) which contributed £18,100 of the burden and 8,765 responses; and the inclusion of the *School Census - voluntary/private pre-school and independent school returns*. These postal returns which contributed £31,300 of the total compliance burden had previously been excluded with the rest of the School Census and are the only part of the School Census that is not obtained via an electronic download. There were also increases in the compliance costs for the *School Omnibus* and *School Meals Census*. The latter was due to a re-estimation of the median completion time based on more up-to-date data.

## **DfC**

There has been a reduction in the number of surveys conducted by DfC from 17 in 2015/16 to 16 in 2016/17. This is due to the *Prompt Payments Survey* moving from a survey to administrative data and annual variation in the number of revitalisation / public realm surveys. Any decrease in compliance burden due to the cessation of the *Prompt Payments Survey* (around £2,000) has been offset by the inclusion of the *Quarterly House Price Index* carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) which had 7,900 responses and a compliance burden of £11,700 in 2016/17. Surveys carried out by the NIHE had not been included in previous returns.

## **DfE**

DfE conducted 11 surveys in 2016/17 compared to 10 in 2015/16. This change was due to the inclusion of two Labour Relations Agency surveys which were not previously included, a decrease in the number of ad-hoc surveys carried out by DfE and the biennial *UKCES Employer Skills Survey* which took place in 2015/16 but not in 2016/17. The decrease in compliance costs and the number of forms is primarily due to the biennial *UKCES Employer Skills Survey*.

## **DfI**

DfI conducted only one survey of businesses in 2016/17, the *Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport, Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI)*, compared to three surveys of businesses in 2015/16. This reduction is a result of the triennial frequency of the *TNICU Customer Satisfaction Survey* and the ad-hoc nature of the *DVA Bus Operator Compliance Audit Survey*. These surveys are quite small surveys which explains the lack of change in the number of forms returned. The reason for the reduction in the compliance costs can be attributed to a change in the salary code attributed to the person completing the remaining survey.

## DoF

DoF carried out four fewer surveys in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. Some of this reduction can be attributed to the merger of the *Index of Production (IOP)*, *Index of Services (IOS)* and *Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)* to form the *Quarterly Business Survey* which reduced the number of responses by 6,600 and the compliance burden by £5,700. The remainder of the reduction (in the number of surveys) can be attributed to the cessation of the *Labour Disputes Survey* and *Consumer Credit Grantors Register Update*. These surveys accounted 110 responses and £3,400 of the compliance burden in 2015/16.

The biennial nature of some of the surveys conducted by DoF results in substantial year on year variation. The *Census of Employment* conducted in 2015/16 had an achieved sample of 42,220 and a compliance burden of £98,600, whereas the smaller *Business Register and Employment Survey* conducted in 2016/17 had an achieved sample of 8,554 and a compliance burden of £26,600. The biennial *Services Turnover Survey* (a small survey with 130 responses and a compliance burden of £500) took place in 2015/16 but not 2016/17, whereas the much larger *UK Innovation Survey* (with an achieved sample of 648 and a compliance burden of £24,600) took place in 2016/17 but not 2015/16. These biennial surveys contributed to an overall reduction of 33,100 in the number of responses and a reduction of £47,900 in the compliance burden.

A reduction in the sample size and response rate for the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* in 2016/17 resulted in 851 fewer responses and a reduction of £46,200 in the overall compliance burden. Similarly, a reduction in the sample size and response rate for the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)* resulted in 511 fewer responses and a reduction of £9,400 in the overall compliance burden. Although the sample size was increased for the *Quarterly Construction Survey* resulting in 1,771 more responses, the median completion time decreased resulting in a reduction of £2,400 in the overall compliance burden.

Due to changes in the methodology used by ONS to estimate compliance costs, and the re-estimation of median completion times for ONS surveys, there has however been an increase in the total compliance burden attributed to surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS (DoF) in Northern Ireland (see Appendix A). This increase in the estimated compliance costs has offset the decreases outlined above and has resulted in an overall increase of £12,800 in the compliance burden attributed to DoF.

### **DoH and DoJ**

Both these departments carry out very few and quite infrequent surveys of businesses. DoH carried out the triennial Sight Test Survey in 2014 and 2017. Due to a reduction in the issued (and achieved) sample and a shorter median completion time the compliance cost for this survey halved between 2014/15 and 2016/17. The higher compliance costs for DoH in 2016/17 were due to the inclusion of the *Pharmaceutical Margin Survey* carried out by the Business Services Organisation (BSO) which had previously been excluded from the return.

DoJ carried out a single survey of businesses in 2015/16 and in 2016/17. It should be noted that these were different surveys.

### **TEO & PPS**

Neither TEO nor PPS have conducted any surveys of businesses over the period of the analysis presented in Table 5.

#### 4. An Examination of the Trend, 2012/13 to 2015/16

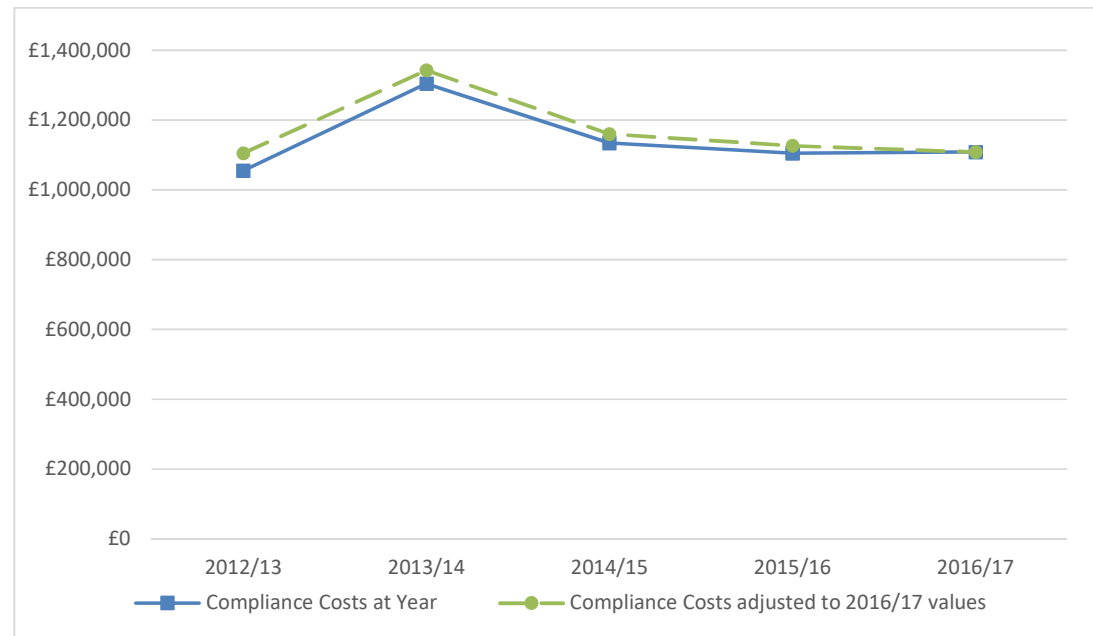
Figure 4 illustrates the change in the estimated cost to business of complying with Government Statistical Surveys from 2012/13 to 2016/17<sup>20</sup>. The blue line shows the cost in terms of raw or current prices: that is, in terms of staff cost at the time of the survey without allowing for the effects of changes to levels of pay; while the green line shows the cost after wage growth has been taken into account. External costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted. The base staff cost are the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) costs for 2016/17.

The cost peaked in 2013/14 at £1.30 million, from £1.06 million in 2012/13; an increase of nearly a quarter (24%). Compared to 2013/14 the compliance cost decreased to £1.13 million in 2014/15, to £1.11 million in 2015/16 with a small increase of around £1,400 in 2016/17 and the overall total remaining around £1.11 million. This equates to a 15% reduction in the raw compliance costs between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

The pattern was similar for the change over time at constant prices (removing the effects of changes in staff cost), with the cost peaking in 2013/14 at £1.34 million, decreasing to £1.16 million in 2014/15, £1.13 million in 2015/16.

<sup>20</sup> The figures in this time series have not been adjusted for the discontinuity. See Appendix A.

Figure 4: NI compliance cost from 2012/13 to 2016/17<sup>20</sup>



Unlike the raw figures, those at constant costs show a small decrease between 2015/16 (£1.13 million) and 2016/17 (£1.11 million).

The reduction in adjusted costs from the peak of £1.34 million in 2013/14 to £1.11 million in 2016/17 represents a 17% decrease in compliance costs adjusted to 2016/17 prices. Much of this reduction is due to the cyclical nature of some of the bigger surveys across Government and the effort across NI Government Departments to reduce compliance burden through smaller sample sizes and shorter surveys. More detail on this is provided in the next section.

The similarities between the constant price and current price lines in figure 4 are due to low pay rises in the last few years. (See Appendix A).

## 5. Measures being taken to Reduce Compliance Cost

A few of the specific initiatives employed by departments in trying to reduce respondent burden include:

Department	Name of Survey	Measures taken to reduce compliance costs
DAERA	Agricultural & Horticulture survey	Use of a sample survey, use of administrative sources, and encouraging online returns.
	Hatcheries survey	Reduction in firms surveyed.
	Horticultural surveys	Encouraging online returns.
	Milk utilisation survey	Small operators are only surveyed annually. Some consolidation within the sector resulting in a reduction in firms reporting.
	Potato merchants	Review of companies included in the survey.
	Potato yields survey	Reduction in sample size.
	Raw milk producer price survey	Small operators are only surveyed annually. Some consolidation within the sector resulting in a reduction in firms reporting.
	Survey of Compound Animal Feedstuffs Production and Usage of Raw Materials for Feedstuffs	Review of blending firms included in survey.
	Survey of fertiliser deliveries	All returns received by e-mail. Review of registered companies delivering fertiliser into NI.
DAERA (AFBI) <sup>21</sup>	Pesticide usage survey	Telephone questionnaire for smaller farms.
DE	School Census – voluntary / private pre-school and independent school returns	Moved to an online survey (with a few paper questionnaires by exception) with validation routines built in.
	School Omnibus	Survey moved from an annual basis to a biennial basis. A commitment was also given to review the questionnaire before the next round of the Omnibus in 2018.
DE (EA) <sup>22</sup>	Getting Ready to Learn	Simplified questionnaire and produced online survey as an alternative to the paper questionnaire.

<sup>21</sup> Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute.

<sup>22</sup> Education Authority.

<b>DfC</b>	Prompt payments	This was a survey of Local Councils which examined how quickly their invoices were paid. This survey was replaced by administrative data in 2016/17 to reduce survey burden and also to increase the accuracy and timeliness of prompt payment data.
<b>DoF (ELMS)<sup>23</sup></b>	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings	Improvements in sample design.
	Business Register and Employment Survey	Reduction in sample size combined with increased usage of e-forms. Data sharing with quarterly employment survey.
	Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry	Reduction in sample size.
	Quarterly Business Survey	The Index of Production, Index of Services and Quarterly Employment Survey were merged to become the Quarterly Business Survey. The combined survey still allowed three separate outputs to be published, but resulted in 18% less forms issued to businesses over the year and less re-contacts as a result (7400 forms). Increased built in validations, and the option to take figures over the phone, also reduced the number of re-contacts for validation.
	Survey of Research and Development (R&D) within Northern Ireland (annual)	Reduction in sample size as companies consistently reporting no R&D were removed.
<b>DoH</b>	2017 Northern Ireland Sight Test and Ophthalmic Public Health Survey	Moved from a paper survey (in previous years) to an online survey.

<sup>23</sup> Economic and Labour Market Statistics (NISRA branch).

## Appendix A: Methodology, Quality and Use of Publication

### Rationale for publication

The collection of data by government departments and their arm's length bodies (ALB's) causes a burden on data suppliers. It is important to keep this burden to a minimum and hence the practice of survey control has been developed and practiced within Northern Ireland since the 1980s.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)<sup>24</sup> recognises the importance of monitoring and reducing respondent burden, balanced with the need to produce official statistics that are fundamental to good government and provide a good evidence base to inform public policy. It emphasises the importance of **transparency**, ensuring respondent **burden is proportionate to benefits** and making **use of existing data** before undertaking a new data collection:

*V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.*

*V5.3 The suitability of existing data, including administrative, open and privately-held data, should be assessed before undertaking a new data collection.*

*V5.1 Opportunities for data sharing, data linkage, cross-analysis of sources, and the reuse of data should be taken wherever feasible. Recognised standards, classifications, definitions, and methods should be applied to data wherever possible.*

*V5.6 Statistics producers should analyse the impact of new data requirements or extending existing collections on those involved in the collection, recording and supply of data, against the potential value of the statistics in serving the public good.*

The burden to businesses due to statutory Government Statistical Surveys is also monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)<sup>25</sup>. Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)<sup>26</sup>, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses due to NI Government Statistical Surveys<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.



## **Methodology**

### **Data collection**

Data were requested from Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) in each of the Northern Ireland departments, as well as from officials in Arm's Length Bodies (ALBS). Respondents were provided with guidance notes and asked to provide details on the Government Statistical Surveys which their department / organisation had commissioned or carried out in 2016/17. This information was returned to NISRA Statistical Support and Business Planning Branch for quality assurance.

### **Coverage**

All statistical surveys to businesses carried out by, or on behalf of, Northern Ireland Government Departments (including Arm's Length Bodies) are included, as well as statistical surveys carried out by NI Departments (or ALBs) on behalf of GB Government Departments (or ALBs) where the data are used directly by the NI Department (or ALB) or feed into UK Statistics.

A separate [publication](#) is produced for surveys to households and individuals and is published alongside this publication. The scope of survey control was extended to households and individuals from 1st April 2014. Survey burden is calculated on the basis of time taken for surveys to households and individuals.

### **Definition of Businesses**

For Survey Control purposes, businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included under surveys to businesses.

### **Definition of Statistical Survey**

A statistical survey is any structured inquiry designed to obtain aggregated data (which may be qualitative or quantitative) where the individual or corporate identities of the respondents are in themselves of little significance.

This includes both regular and ad hoc surveys; both voluntary and statutory surveys that may be required to determine, evaluate or monitor policy and / or action, provide social or economic indicators or measure customer satisfaction. Statistical surveys conducted by, or on behalf of, non-departmental public bodies are also covered. Arm's length bodies are included under their parent departments.

Statistical surveys in scope are not limited to those conducted by statistics branches and include all modes of data collection: completion of a questionnaire; telephone data entry; face-to-face interview; online, etc.

Surveys that contribute to official statistics and those that do not are both in the scope of survey control.

The following are examples of statistical surveys **covered** by these controls:

- Surveys designed to obtain aggregated data;
- Surveys where responses are solicited by means of a direct approach to potential respondents;
- Surveys carried out for departmental sponsors by consultants or private organisations;
- Customer satisfaction surveys designed to identify overall success of a product or service.

The following are examples of surveys **excluded** from survey control:

- Surveys where there is no direct approach made and where respondents clearly select themselves (e.g. web sites, readership surveys, some types of consultation exercises where there is an invitation to comment);
- Where information is required as an integral part of the operational management of a public service. Such returns will often be regulated under specific departmental controls;
- Surveys relating to the contractual obligations of potential respondents to the department or agency concerned;
- Surveys to respondents in central government and its agencies.

Where part of a survey falls outside scope, the part of the survey within scope has been included where possible.

### **Compliance Cost**

Compliance costs are the estimated financial burden placed on businesses as a result of completing government statistical surveys. Where actual or estimated completion times are not available for each business, an overall completion time for the survey is estimated using the median time to complete the questionnaire / survey. The median time to complete the survey is estimated based on a pilot survey, historical data, reviews, paradata or survey manager expertise. Only those completing the survey are included; non-response is assumed to place no burden on respondents. Any time spent on establishing eligibility for businesses that are subsequently deemed out of scope should be included.

Where a survey to businesses uses a number of different form types, or data collection methods e.g. electronic / postal, and these vary in terms of completion time then the calculations may be conducted separately for each form type / data collection method and summed for an overall compliance cost. Similarly, if there are different types of businesses with different completion times then the calculations for each type of business may be carried out separately and summed.

Validation procedures may require a re-contact with the business or local authority. The burden due to re-contact is also calculated. If actual or estimated re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full questionnaire may be substituted on the assumption that a respondent may need to review the entire questionnaire.

Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) are provided with a choice of 5 rates of pay taken from the appropriate Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).<sup>28</sup> SCLOs must select the most appropriate rate of pay for the person most likely to have completed the survey. The rates of pay used in compliance cost calculations are the median, hourly, gross ASHE rates for the following grades:

Grade	ASHE Code
Chief Executive and Senior Officials	1115
Professional Occupations	2
Managers and Senior Officials	1
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	3
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	4

External cost incurred by businesses (e.g. accountant's fees) when complying with government survey requests are also included in the calculation of compliance cost.

The Compliance Cost (£) is a simple **addition** of Response Cost (£), Re-contact Cost (£) and External Cost (£), which are calculated as:

*Response Cost (£) = No. of responses x Median time (hrs) x Hourly rate (£/hr)*

*Recontact Cost (£) = No. recontacted x Median time (hrs) x Hourly rate (£/hr)*

*External Cost (£) = No. with external cost x Median external cost (£)*

<sup>28</sup> The provisional 2016 ASHE results have been used for 2016/17. These figures have been used to ensure direct comparability with 2016/17 compliance cost published for other parts of the UK (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/previousReleases>).

If a survey is carried out on behalf of a number of government departments, then each government department will only include the compliance costs for the questions / modules commissioned by them<sup>29</sup>.

### Constant prices

The method used for calculating constant prices (to remove the effect of changing staff costs) is to use the rates of pay for the current, or base year, instead of the rates for previous years. This adjusts the overall cost making it directly comparable to the current year. Any external costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted as these represent a small proportion of the overall total.

Grade <sup>30</sup>	2012 (for 2012/13)	2013(for 2013/14)	2014 (for 2014/15)	2015(for 2015/16)	2016(for 2016/17)
Chief Executives and Senior Officials (1115)	£42.50	£43.17	£41.35	£42.42	£43.82
Managers, directors and senior officials (1)	£18.57	£19.04	£19.25	£19.42	£19.71
Professional occupations (2)	£18.99	£19.23	£19.31	£19.45	£19.71
Associate professional and technical occupations (3)	£14.53	£14.74	£14.81	£15.00	£15.00
Administrative and secretarial occupations (4)	£9.92	£10.00	£10.12	£10.28	£10.51
All employees	£11.21	£11.56	£11.54	£11.75	£12.10

### Rounding

In some tables the compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

### Review of Methodology & Discontinuity

Prior to the 2016/17 data collection exercise, the guidance provided to Survey Control Liaison Officers was reviewed, to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys conducted by NI Government Departments, Arm's Length Bodies and other public sector organisations. Any areas of ambiguity were also clarified and mandatory training was provided to all SCLOs. As a result of this review, a number of surveys conducted by Arm's Length Bodies that were not included in previous years were included in departmental returns.

<sup>29</sup> The number of respondents however will be the same as for the complete survey, which means that these respondents and surveys will be counted more than once in aggregated figures.

<sup>30</sup> Hourly rates of pay are Hourly Gross (£) UK rates of pay.

In addition, some surveys and types of surveys which in previous years had been excluded due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service were included in this year's return due to the clarification of the inclusion criteria. These are primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose.

This discontinuity is noted in Sections 3 & 4 when presenting the between year comparisons and examining the trend over time. While this information has been included for completeness we would advise caution when drawing conclusions based on these data.

Excluding from the 2016/17 return, those surveys and types of surveys that were not included in previous years would potentially have the effect of reducing the number of surveys by 46, reducing the number of forms by around 17,000 and the overall compliance burden by around £61,000. The effect of this discontinuity is most notable for DE where this would potentially reduce the number of surveys by 41, the number of forms by around 8,000 and the compliance burden by around £47,000. DfC would be the next most affected department overall. Excluding these surveys and types of surveys from the DfC return would reduce the number of surveys included by one, reduce the number of returns by 6,300 and reduce the compliance burden by almost £12,000. There would also be an impact in DfE, reducing the number of surveys by three. However, these are very small surveys with few returns and low levels of compliance burden. While these figures give an indication of the potential size of the discontinuity, it is difficult to say with certainty what surveys would have been included in the 2016/17 return had the guidance not been reviewed and additional training provided.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has also carried out a major review of its methodology between 2015/16 and 2016/17, moving away from calculating stratified compliance costs based on business size, adopting a single salary cost for all surveys (ASHE Code 1) and reviewing median completion times in conjunction with survey managers. This has resulted in a significant change in the estimated compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS. While the total number of responses has stayed approximately constant at around 12,200, for the 28 surveys carried out by ONS that are common to both 2015/16 and 2016/17, the compliance costs have increased by 61% (from £213,600 to £342,900). Salary costs based on ASHE Code 1 have increased by 1.5%. It is not possible to say what proportion of this change is due to what part of the change in methodology.

There have also been some minor changes to the methods used by NI Government Departments to calculate compliance costs (e.g. use / non-use of strata, improved estimation of medians) but the overall impact of these changes is small. In addition, actual completion times (rather than estimated completion times based on the median) have been used where these are available.

## Data collection method

In previous returns, SCLOs were asked to write-in the data collection method(s) used for each survey. This meant that there was substantial variation in the descriptions used and it was not always easy to identify the primary data collection method and group the methods used. In 2016/17, this was replaced with a drop-down menu<sup>31</sup> and SCLOs were asked to identify the primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. method of data collection. As a result, groupings and analysis from previous years will be less accurate than for 2016/17.

## Main uses of data

The data are used by business and industry, by the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC), by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), by the media and by the general public. Under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult SAC before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) also consults SAC before carrying out voluntary surveys of these businesses<sup>32</sup>. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses of completing NI Government Statistical Surveys<sup>33</sup>.

Information in this publication has previously been used to investigate the cost to Northern Ireland businesses in completing government surveys, to respond to MLA questions, and to provide briefing to the Minister for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

## Data quality

Data are derived from returns provided by other government departments and ALBs. Although the compliance cost is an estimate, the quality of the underlying data is considered to be reasonable.

The data collection process means that individual SCLOs are the key decision makers in terms of including or excluding surveys from the returns. While there is communication between SCLOs and NISRA Survey Control Unit to clarify any queries, there is the potential for individual interpretations of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to lead to small inconsistencies in individual returns.

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<sup>31</sup> Paper questionnaire; Telephone interview; Face-to-face interview; E-mail data collection; Online questionnaire/ data collection; Telephone data entry; and Digital Voice Recognition Survey.

<sup>32</sup> Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

<sup>33</sup> The most recent feedback from SAC indicates that the report meets their needs both in terms of coverage and content. In particular, the feedback from SAC identified that the breakdown of survey costs for statutory and voluntary surveys was particularly useful.

The quality assurance checks focus on ensuring that the data returned are complete and internally consistent for the current year, and also consistent with returns from previous years. Where data are missing or there are large changes or inconsistencies explanations are sought from the data supplier, and if necessary the data are re-supplied.

## **User Engagement**

User engagement is on-going between the publication of one report and the production of the next. Following the review of the guidance and methodology (prior to the 2016/17 publications) a specific programme of engagement is planned in advance of the 2017/18 publications.

We would welcome your feedback, on what you use the report for, any tables / charts or commentary you find particularly helpful and any additional analysis you would like to see. Feedback can be provided via the [online questionnaire](#) or by emailing [Alexandra.Pauley@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:Alexandra.Pauley@nisra.gov.uk)

## Appendix B: Departments and their abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Department</b>
<b>DAERA</b>	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
<b>DE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DfC</b>	Department of Communities
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Enterprise
<b>Dfi</b>	Department for Infrastructure
<b>DoF</b>	Department of Finance
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>DOJ</b>	Department of Justice
<b>TEO</b>	The Executive Office
<b>PPS</b>	Public Prosecution Service



## **Appendix C: Further Information**

Access to all the data contained in this report can be found at:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

For further details regarding this publication contact:

**Alexandra Pauley**  
**Statistical Support and Business Planning Branch**  
**Colby House**  
**Stranmillis Court**  
**Belfast**  
**BT9 5RR**

**Tel: 02890 388463**

**Email: [Alexandra.Pauley@NISRA.gov.uk](mailto:Alexandra.Pauley@NISRA.gov.uk)**

For information on the On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys (OLGSS) contact:

**Hannah Brunning**  
**Survey Control and Compliance Unit**  
**Office for National Statistics**

**Email: [compliance@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:compliance@statistics.gov.uk)**