

**Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC)**  
**Coiste Comhairleach Staitisticí**

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Access to key business and economic information has never been more important as Northern Ireland seeks to grow markets and attract investment in increasingly volatile global conditions.

That's according to Edgar Jardine, chair of the Northern Ireland Statistics Advisory Committee, responding to today's publication of the latest NISRA official statistics - *Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments, 2021/22*.

“From providing companies with trade, employment, and market trends to informing government policy and benchmarking performance, the findings from these surveys and the official statistics based on them, lie at the heart of Northern Ireland's competitiveness.

“The potential impact and outcomes of EU exit, COVID-19, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and the Windsor Framework all rely heavily on these survey data provided by Northern Ireland businesses and undertakings.

“Unsurprisingly therefore, since 2020, NISRA has experienced an unprecedented demand for new data and market intelligence from business organisations, communities and government.

“These data must be accurate and timely, they must benefit the business community and the other stakeholders, but they must also represent value for money.

“We have identified an increase in the overall compliance cost to businesses for 2021/22 of around £113,000 as compared to 2020/21. However, while this reflects the extraordinary challenges of data collection associated with the pandemic, the total remains below the 2019/20 pre-pandemic total of £892,200.”

“Much of our focus on delivering stakeholder value is directed at steadily shifting from paper-based to online surveys which can be delivered at lower cost and with greater accuracy and speed.

“The percentage of surveys using online/email as their primary method of data collection increased from 24% in 2016/17 to 66% in 2020/21.

Due to the unique working conditions associated with the pandemic the percentage of surveys using online/ email as their primary data collection method decreased in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21.

“Overall however, both the number and proportion of online surveys remain higher than previous years and the trend towards online data capture is accelerating while continued investment in new technology has supported the advancement of more user-friendly methods of data analysis and presentation.”

The 2021/22 report is the tenth in this series of annual reviews of the cost to business of complying with statutory and voluntary government statistical surveys in Northern Ireland. The [Statistics Advisory Committee](#) (SAC) monitors the burden to businesses resulting from statutory Government Statistical Surveys. Northern Ireland Departments are required to consult the committee before carrying out any new statutory survey of businesses.

Edgar Jardine said NISRA’s use of business survey data was vital to support local businesses in benchmarking performance and also in highlighting market opportunities and measuring the delivery of government strategies.

“Exporters demand information on new markets and opportunities, while potential investors expect accurate information on labour market conditions, economic performance, and trade flows. Government also needs to understand the effectiveness of support programmes and economic and social policy delivery.

“None of this is possible without the ongoing survey programme, the support of business and communities and a continued commitment to deliver the information our stakeholders want in a manner that complements their various business models.

“The committee understands the challenges businesses face in complying with statutory and voluntary surveys and we thank them for their continued support.

“The committee also recognises NISRA’s ability to sustain a growing volume of data in an environment of severe cost pressures. We note the commitment of staff and officials in delivering more for less and the most recent *Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments, 2021/22* report reflects this commitment.”

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