

MEETING OF THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th March 2019
Ulster Bank, 11-16 Donegall Square East, Belfast BT1 5UB

In attendance

Mr Philip McDonagh (Chair)
 Ms Sharon McNicholl
 Dr Chris Morris
 Dr Bernie Stuart
 Mr John Compton
 Mr Derek Bond
 Dr Kieran Payne
 Mr Richard Ramsey
 Ms Siobhan Carey
 Mr Brian Green
 Dr Tracy Power
 Mr Gerard Colgan
 Mr Chris Ganley
 Ms Cathryn Blair
 Ms Deborah Lyness
 Mr William Dukelow
 Ms Amy Dunlop

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Miss Clare Kennedy

NISRA, Secretary

Item No.	Subject	Action
1.	<p>Welcome and apologies.</p> <p>Mr McDonagh welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that apologies had been received from Professor Jones. He thanked Mr Ramsey and Mr Payne for hosting the meeting and for the refreshments provided.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>Minutes from the previous meeting (May 2018) had been circulated and Mr McDonagh invited comments from the Committee, who were content that they provided an accurate account of the meeting. The chair then raised the actions from the previous meeting.</p> <p>Mr McDonagh commented that he had welcomed the opportunity to review the Business Burden report which was published on 28th June 2018 and he had issued a press release on behalf of the Committee, outlining that it was encouraging that the burden on businesses had not increased. He added that he was keen for the committee to have sight of such reports as early as possible, while recognising the need to adhere to the agreed pre-release access arrangements. It was agreed that all future reports would be disseminated to committee on the day of publication.</p> <p>Dr Power thanked the Committee for the work they had undertaken to review the last report, noting that the production team had found it very useful and had appreciated their insight. It was agreed that the production team would present the findings from the June 2019 report at the next meeting.</p>	<p>1. Business Burden report to be circulated when it is published.</p> <p>2. Ruth Fulton to present the findings of the Business Burden Report.</p>

	<p>The next actions raised were in relation to the additional questions in the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) and the ONS Retail Trade Statistics, which Mr Colgan outlined he planned to cover in the ELMS update later in the meeting. Mr Colgan added that the trade modelling work which colleagues from DfE were leading on would be brought to a future meeting once the work was sufficiently well advanced.</p> <p>Dr Power raised the point that there was an outstanding action in relation to sharing the work on NI:IN Profile with the business bodies and NICVA. She noted that this work had recently been updated and, as such, it would be an opportune time to share the latest results.</p> <p>Mr Compton added that he had shared some of the NI:IN Profile material with his PwC colleagues in London, and that he had been working on something similar. Mr Compton agreed to share his work in this area with the committee.</p>	<p>3. NISRA to share NI:IN Profile with business bodies and NICVA.</p> <p>4. Mr Compton to share the work that he had been leading in the production of key high profile statistics for NI.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Update on Membership Issues</p> <p>Mr Green provided an update on the work that had been undertaken, in the absence of a minister, to extend the membership of seven members through to December 2019. He expressed his thanks to the members concerned for their willingness to continue to support the important work of the committee and for responding so quickly to the information requests that were required for the necessary press release announcing the extensions. Mr Green added that a new competition would be initiated in the near future to reconstitute the committee which, in keeping with policy, would provide the opportunity to potentially increase the diversity of the group. It was agreed that members would be kept informed of progress via the chair. Mr McDonagh reminded NISRA of the need to take cognisance of the audit and associated recommendations that arose following the previous exercise to reconstitute the committee.</p> <p>The Chair extended his thanks to Mr Green and the secretary for their work to secure the extensions and the position reached to date. Ms Carey expressed her appreciation to the members for their continued support and their patience in relation to the extension process.</p>	<p>5. NISRA to keep the Committee informed with developments in relation to the recruitment competition via the Chair, Mr McDonagh.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Chair's Business</p> <p>Mr McDonagh briefed the meeting that he, along with some other members, had welcomed the opportunity to participate in the stakeholder engagement that had been organised to help inform the development of the forthcoming NISRA Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Ms Carey appraised the committee that the stakeholder engagement had been comprehensive and proved very helpful in terms of setting the strategic priorities and associated key short, medium and long-term areas of focus over the next few years. She acknowledged that delivery would however be challenging in the current financial climate</p> <p>It was agreed that it would be helpful for the Committee to be sighted on the NISRA Corporate Plan so that the work of the committee could be viewed in the wider context of the Agency. To this end, it was agreed that the forthcoming plan would be presented at the next meeting.</p>	<p>6. NISRA to present the Corporate Plan at the next meeting.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Update on Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMs)</p> <p>Mr Colgan provided the ELMS update, highlighting that as it had been a while since the previous meeting he would focus on the bigger items and that he would be happy to take questions.</p>	

	<p>Statutory There were no statutory items for the committee to consider.</p> <p>Non - Statutory Mr Colgan provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchases Survey • Northern Ireland Exports and Imports Statistics: Developments • Devolved Economic Statistics Co-ordination group (DESC) – One of the topics covered at the last meeting of the groups was in relation to the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCOE). Mr Colgan give a brief overview of some of the projects undertaken by the ESCOE and offered to circulate a link to the webpage which outlines each project. In particular Mr Colgan noted the project on Regional forecasting in the UK. <p>Ms Blair provided the update on the Labour Force Survey sample boost and the experimental claimant count. She informed the committee that due to the impact that Universal Credit (UC) was having on the claimant count (e.g. unreliable figures that would have required large revisions), it was necessary to temporarily suspend their National Statistics status. She added that DWP were undertaking modelling work to develop a claimant count back series that takes account of UC, which would include modelled results for NI and hopefully cast more light on the associated challenges going forward. Mr Compton raised his concerns over where modelling the claimant count takes us, noting that a lot of stakeholders rely more on claimant count than the LFS and that this change needs to be clearly communicated to avoid confusion.</p> <p>Mr Colgan updated the committee on the additional questions regarding vacancies and migrant workers that had been included in The Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) that closed on 25th January 2019. He noted that the early indications are that certain businesses have been able to provide some information on vacancies, albeit more robustly at reporting unit level (i.e. headquarters level) than local unit level. The information on migrant workers was noticeably more ‘patchy’ perhaps suggesting that a number of businesses don’t hold this information. Mr Colgan outlined the challenges associated with grossing the survey results up to population level and that we have been liaising with colleagues at the ONS to consider the associated methodological issues. The committee recognised the difficulties, with Mr Compton outlining difficulties he had experienced in a similar area. It was agreed that an update would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>Mr. Ganley provided an update on the Economic Accounts, noting that an expert user group meeting had been held on 15th February 2019 in relation to the production of 2016 SUTs. He highlighted that Mr McDonagh had attended and that he, along with the other expert users, were very supportive of the project. Mr McDonagh agreed that the user group meeting was very beneficial and posed the possibility of getting the business bodies involved in a similar meeting, in order for them to provide some feedback on multipliers based on their experience in different industries.</p> <p>Ms McNicholl enquired about sub regional economic strategies and whether this new data within the economic accounts workstream is being used at a sub-regional level. Mr Ganley explained that, at this stage in the process, the primary focus is on the production of the statistics at NI level. Mr Colgan added that City Deal regions are growing in prominence and that Greater London and Manchester local authorities are currently trying to produce their own input output tables. Mr Ganley added that the ONS plan to publish GVA at the Belfast City Region and Derry and Strabane City Region geographies, along with the already published local authority level data in the next Regional Accounts GVA publication scheduled for December 2019. Mr Compton also</p>	<p>7. Secretary to circulate link on Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence research projects.</p> <p>8. Mr. Colgan to provide update on the migrant and vacancy statistics at the next meeting.</p> <p>9. NISRA to explore the possibility of engaging with the business bodies in relation to their work on Economic Accounts.</p>
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	<p>noted that a lot of work is also being done in this area in relation to travel to work areas.</p> <p>Mr Colgan concluded the ELMS update noting that an overview of performance of the NI Economy is included in Annex A of the paper. He highlighted that an updated version of the ABI section was now available and would be distributed.</p>	<p>10. Secretary to issue an updated copy of ELMS update.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>EU Exit Update</p> <p>Mr Ganley provided the update on EU Exit, explaining that NISRA has been working collaboratively with policy colleagues leading on BREXIT, providing both statistical support and assistance with monitoring of the economy. He added that while the work continues to be manageable, it has resulted in a number of demands from different areas seeking to exploit the data available to NISRA. A number of research papers and slide packs have already been published to inform the debate, a link to which was included in the slides for the meeting and will be circulated after the meeting. Mr Ganley added that Department for Economy (DfE) have also published a series of research papers on EU Exit, and a link to these papers will also be circulated. Mr McDonagh remarked that it is worthwhile having a look at the papers in question as he found the research on cross border movements using mobile phone data fascinating.</p> <p>Aside from the EU Exit team, Mr Ganley highlighted that the Broad Economy Sales and Exports (BESES) team have received unprecedented volumes of data requests regarding trade figures. Helpfully, the next publication on BESES is scheduled for release on 21st March 2019.</p> <p>Mr Colgan updated the committee on work that is ongoing to consider what additional and regular information might be needed to help assess the impact that BREXIT was having on, for example, businesses. Ms Carey outlined that while the requirement wasn't as yet clear, preliminary work was underway to consider how a short (but repeatable) survey might be expedited with businesses to gather such information, which might have the added benefit of being able to counter fake news. She acknowledged that while any such activity was more likely to be reactive in nature, it was important to explore potential avenues in advance along with any 'branding' issues. Mr Compton suggested that a flash survey on a repeated sector basis might be appropriate, or alternatively collating such information through an agreed panel of representatives from each sector. He added that it would be important to have a robust sampling frame in place and an adequate software solution that could be readily deployed at short notice. Mr Ramsey raised the importance of being able to distinguish between 'Brexit' outcomes and 'other' outcomes in order to ensure that 'spurious' conclusions are not reached. Ms McNicholl cautioned that it would be important to be clear about the terminology used (e.g. the concept of coping) when seeking to assess impact as particular phrases could mean very different things to different people depending on the circumstances that they find themselves in. Ms Blair raised the point that any adhoc engagement with businesses of this nature could potentially have a detrimental impact on Statutory Surveys in terms of achieved response rates. Ms Carey reiterated that, as yet, no specific requirements have emerged and that the likelihood of something actually being required is arguably decreasing with time.</p> <p>Mr Green stressed that the team has been working hard to ensure that all the key economic and labour market information, that ELMS has access to, is readily accessible online and presented in a user friendly manner. He added that work was underway to develop an 'Economic' dashboard that would provide direct access to all of the key indicators produced by the branch. Mr Compton agreed that this would be essential in terms of directing customers to the web in the event of there being a surge in queries for such information.</p>	<p>11. Secretary to send link on NISRA EU Exit research papers and slide packs.</p> <p>12. Secretary to send link on DfE, EU Exit research papers and slide packs.</p> <p>13. NISRA to keep Committee informed of any possible survey or work being carried out in this area.</p>

	In conclusion, it was decided that the Committee would be kept informed of any progress or movement in this area.	
7.	<p>Census 2021 Update</p> <p>Mr. Dukelow provided the committee with an update on the Registrar General’s proposals for the 2021 census, noting that a detailed document would be published later in the month. He added that the document will set out the when, why, what and how of the 2021 Census along with plans for a full ‘end-to-end’ rehearsal in October 2019.</p> <p>One of the main design features of the census highlighted by Mr. Dukelow is the 60% target for online responses, in what is to be a digital-first census. He noted that the proposals had been underpinned by an extensive programme of consultation, research and testing – with some 52 consultation responses being submitted. In terms of the outputs, Mr Dukelow acknowledged that challenges remain in terms of deciding what the underlining geography will be, particularly given how existing geographical area have changed in size over time and forthcoming boundary reviews.</p> <p>Mr. Compton enquired about how the first contact with respondents would be made. Mr. Dukelow explained that approximately 90% of the general public will receive an invitation and associated unique internet access code to complete their Census form online. The remaining 10% in ‘hard to reach groups’ - who will be identified in advance - will receive a paper form along with the necessary unique online access code thus enabling them to avail of which ever options best meets their needs. Mr Green added that the target of achieving 60% online was important from an operational and logistical perspective, particularly given the relatively narrow window in which to complete the Census field work and the challenges & costs associated with processing higher than anticipated volumes of paper questionnaires.</p> <p>In response to a question from Mr Payne, Ms Carey confirmed that the online census form would be available on a variety of platforms, including mobile and tablet.</p> <p>Mr. Dukelow concluded his overview of the proposals by announcing that there would be a series of public engagement events commencing in early May. It was agreed that an invite would be sent to Committee members to the engagement events in May.</p>	<p>14. Secretary to circulate the link to Census proposals (to be published on 21st March)</p> <p>15. Secretary to send invite to census engagement events in May.</p>
8.	<p>Administrative Data Research Centre Phase II</p> <p>Ms Lyness provided the committee with an update on the Administrative Data Research Centre (ADRC). This included an overview of the work that had been undertaken during phase 1 (a 5 year period ending in October 2018), which secured agreement in principle from 12 data providers providing access to some 22 datasets.</p> <p>Ms Lyness added that the second phase, which was underway, has secured funding of some £5million for NI from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), split between NISRA (£2.65m) and the Universities (£2.35m). One of the major positives highlighted was the Digital Economy Act (DEA), which now provides a clearer legal framework for the provision and sharing of data for research purposes for all areas of Government except data from health organisations. Another feature of phase two is the emphasis on research projects that are aligned to strategic impact programmes under the key themes of Social Inclusion; Education and World of work and Rurality and Geography, all of which link through to the outcomes framework of the Programme for Government (PfG). An example of research carried out under each theme was shared with the committee.</p>	

	<p>Dr Stuart enquired about the projects carried out by the universities and whether details are recorded anywhere. Ms Lyness outlined that they will be recorded on the ADRC/ADRN Website and agreed to issue a link through to the website/ projects following the meeting. Mr Compton questioned the extent to which the policy outcomes defined by the PfG are scrutinised without a functioning executive. Dr Power responded by describing the Outcomes Delivery Plan process. She asked that members reflect on any big unanswered social questions that this type of research might usefully inform.</p> <p>Dr Stuart asked for clarification on the exclusion of health data from the DEA. Dr Power explained that in order for the health data to be shared and linked for research purposes it requires additional DoH legislation and the NI Executive to pass it. Ms Carey added that guidance has been issued on alternative pathways for health related research through, for example, the Honest Broker Service or the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study.</p> <p>Mr Bond noted that he was initially opposed to the ADRC, which he didn't consider represented good value for money. Ms Carey outlined that there is a real appetite to use administrative data for research, with a new focus from the ESRC. Dr Power committed to delivering on the SIPs and noted that this is an investment, as the future is tending towards making best use of administrative data.</p>	<p>16. Secretary to issue link of the ADRC website, where the details of the university projects are recorded.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Official Statistics Update</p> <p>Dr Power updated the committee on Official Statistics matters. The main areas covered included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ongoing National Statistics assessments and compliance checks in NISRA. 2. Reported breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics 3. Implementation of National Statistics Designation Date for National Statistics Outputs. 	
<p>10.</p>	<p>Links with Business Bodies</p> <p>Mr McDonagh suggested that the key business bodies provided a good avenue to gather intelligence that could assist the committee in discharging its statutory monitoring role. Equally it is important to share published data with the business bodies in return for the data inputs that their members provide to the various economic statistics series. He queried when (i) the next meeting with Business bodies should be held and (ii) what information they might usefully be able to provide to the committee.</p> <p>Mr Compton suggested that the answer to the second question should arguably inform the first in the context of the intended use of the information. He went on to highlight that he is constantly contending with 'fake news' presented to him by colleagues and journalists and queried if NISRA (or indeed Business Bodies) have a role to play in terms of challenging such misuses of statistics.</p> <p>Dr Power provided background on the role of Fact Check NI and outlined how NISRA works collaboratively with them to provide access to the information that they need to challenge what they suspect to be 'fake news'.</p> <p>Ms Carey outlined that work is currently being advanced ahead of BREXIT to pull all of the key Business related data together in the form of slide-packs, dashboards and crib sheets and to make them as readily available and easy to understand as possible in one location. Mr Compton suggested that infographics with key facts that are easy to understand can be really valuable for the general public as they can be tweeted, retweeted and downloaded. He added that these should all be branded with the NISRA</p>	<p>17. Secretary to issue doodle poll for the next business bodies meeting.</p> <p>18. NISRA to keep SAC apprised of any dissemination developments.</p>

	<p>source, thus providing assurance to the user that they are getting accurate and reliable information in an accessible format.</p> <p>Mr Green reiterated the work that was being advanced on the development of an Economics Dashboard which, on any given day/ day of the week, would provide access to the latest available information, while providing a Gateway through to all other published information. Mr Compton suggested that NISRA need to embrace and use their brand in the right way to promote this and secure the intended benefits.</p> <p>Mr McDonagh agreed that, when completed, the slide packs and dashboard would be useful in any future engagement with the business bodies. Mr McDonagh posed the question to the committee about having a special meeting of SAC before the next meeting to engage with business bodies? All in attendance were happy that this is a good idea and should go ahead.</p>	<p>19. NISRA to organise meeting with business bodies.</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p>AOB/ Dates and agenda items for next meeting</p> <p>Ms Carey agreed to provide a link through to Parliamentary Committee enquiry into the role and performance of the UK Statistics Authority.</p> <p>Mr Bond also requested that in future, when the papers are issued they are attached separately and not embedded in the agenda document.</p> <p>It was agreed the next meeting would be scheduled for early October and as Mr Colgan noted, this could tie in with the economic forum.</p>	<p>20. Secretary to issue link through to Parliamentary Committee enquiry into the role and performance of the UK Statistics Authority.</p> <p>21. Secretary to issue doodle poll for meeting in October.</p>