

Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments 2013/14

Coverage: Northern Ireland

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Theme: Government

Summary of Key Findings

- In 2013/14 the estimated cost to business in Northern Ireland (NI) of complying with government statistical surveys was just over £1.3 million. Over four fifths (84%) of this was attributable to statutory surveys.
- The compliance cost of running surveys in 2013/14 increased by £249,000 (24%) from 2012/13. This increase can in part be attributed to the biennial Census of Employment which cost £365,000 for 2013/14.
- There were 120 surveys in 2013/14, compared with 124 in 2012/13. There were 11 fewer voluntary surveys and 7 more statutory surveys.

Background

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics has a statutory basis¹ 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.

This report therefore fulfils the requirement by the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) that an estimated respondent burden cost to businesses be reported annually.

¹ Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

1. Introduction

This 2013/14 report is the latest in an annual series detailing the cost to businesses of complying with statutory and voluntary government statistical surveys. The report covers costs incurred in complying with regular and ad-hoc government surveys which have been conducted in the financial year ending 31st March 2014, or for fieldwork which began in this period. It provides information on the number of surveys carried out by each government department.

This is the second report in the series to present costs for a financial year, and also to calculate compliance costs using a new methodology. This new methodology was first implemented in the 2012/13 Annual Report. It is the first report in the series to detail information on the mode of data collection.

The compliance costs of a survey are defined as the financial cost incurred by that business from 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 rate² of the person completing the survey and any external costs such as accountancy fees.

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

The comparable report for England and Wales is produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)³.

² Hourly rates of pay are Hourly Gross (£) UK rates of pay, [ASHE 2013](#).

³ [2013/14 Annual Report on Government Statistical Surveys for Official Statistics of Businesses and Local Authorities](#).

2. Summary of Statistical Survey Compliance Costs, 2013/14

In 2013/14, 120 surveys of business were issued by government departments, of which 48 were statutory and 72 were voluntary. The total cost to business was just over £1.3 million, of which statutory compliance cost £1,092,000 (84%) and voluntary compliance cost £212,000 (16%).

Table 1: Compliance cost by NI department, 2013/14

Department	Number of Surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost (£ thousands)
DARD	16	20	154
DE	9	4	28
DEL	15	3	21
DETI	13	6	37
DFP	45	87	1,039
DOE	7	1	12
DRD	1	2	10
DSD	14	1	3
Total	120	124	1,304

Note:

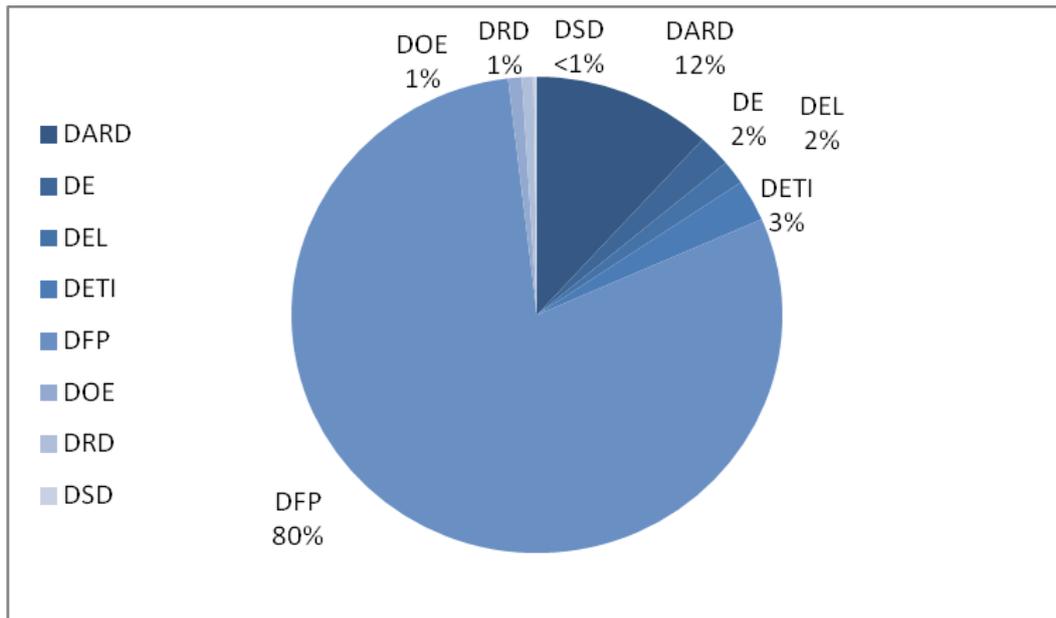
Number of forms returned and compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix A.

Of the £1.3 million total compliance cost, 80% is attributable to DFP and 12% to DARD (Figure 1).

Three quarters of the total compliance cost (£971,000) can be attributed to the Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) branch, within DFP. This equates to 93% of the DFP total.

The ONS surveys businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics. It should be noted that DFP compliance figures include the burden incurred in Northern Ireland as a result of economic surveys conducted by the ONS.

Figure 1: Percentage of total compliance cost by NI department, 2013/14.



[Download data](#) (CSV Format 11KB)

[Download charts](#) (Excel 83KB)

Table 2: Compliance cost for statutory and voluntary surveys by NI department, 2013/14

Department	Statutory		Voluntary	
	Number of surveys	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)	Number of surveys	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)
DARD	9	149	7	5
DE	1	0	8	28
DEL	1	1	14	20
DETI	0	-	13	37
DFP	32	923	13	116
DOE	4	9	3	3
DRD	1	10	0	-
DSD	0	-	14	3
Total	48	1,092	72	212

Note:

Compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest thousand pounds. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Compliance costs less than £500 are rounded to 0. Actual zero costs are indicated by a '-'. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix A.

Three fifths (60%) of the surveys issued were voluntary. However, they contributed to just under one sixth (16%) of the total compliance burden. The majority of the burden was incurred by statutory surveys which amounted to £1,092,000 (Table 2). Of the £1,039,000 burden attributable to DFP, 89% was incurred by statutory surveys. Of the £154,000 burden attributable to DARD, 97% was incurred as a result of the issue of statutory surveys to farms and businesses within the NI agricultural sector. All the surveys issued by DETI and DSD were voluntary.

The vast majority (94%) of compliance burden is due to surveys that contribute to official statistics (Table 3). Of these official statistics surveys, 88% of the burden was attributable to statutory surveys (Figure 2).

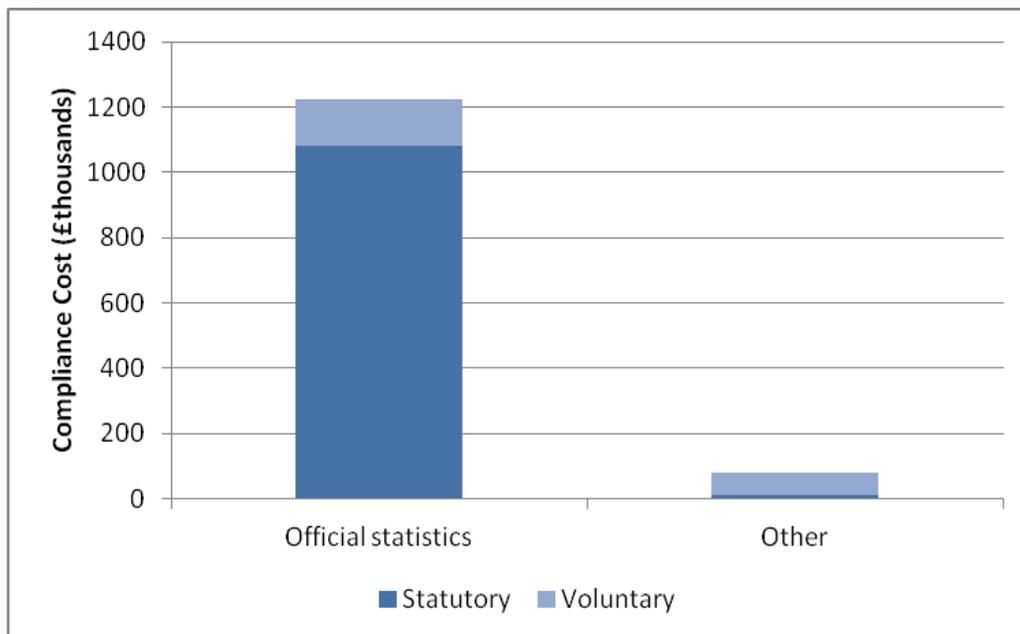
Table 3: Compliance cost for surveys that contribute to official statistics and for surveys that do not contribute to official statistics by NI department, 2013/14

Department	Official Statistics			Other Statistics		
	Number of surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)	Number of surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)
DARD	16	20	154	0	-	-
DE	3	3	20	6	1	8
DEL	0	-	-	15	3	21
DETI	0	-	-	13	6	37
DFP	38	86	1038	7	0	1
DOE	4	1	5	3	0	7
DRD	1	2	10	0	-	-
DSD	0	-	-	14	1	3
Total	62	112	1,227	58	12	77

Note:

Compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest thousand pounds. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Number of forms returned have been rounded to the nearest thousand forms. When rounded figures less than 500 are rounded to 0. Actual zeros are indicated by a '-'. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix A.

Figure 2: Compliance cost for official statistics surveys and other surveys by statutory and voluntary, 2013/14.



[Download data](#) (1KB)

Table 4: Survey mode of data collection by NI department, 2013/14

Department	Postal		Online/email		Telephone		Face to face		Other		Postal [#]		Total	
	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost
DARD	10	65	-	-	-	-	2	1	4	89	-	-	16	154
DE	4	2	5	27	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	28
DEL	1	1	2	0	8	20	-	-	4	1	-	-	15	21
DETI	-	-	2	3	10	33	1	1	-	-	-	-	13	37
DFP	33	868	5	24	1	0	-	-	1	29	5	118	45	1039
DOE	1	1	4	8	1	0	-	-	1	2	-	-	7	12
DRD	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	10
DSD	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	3	-	-	-	-	14	3
Total	50	946	18	62	20	53	17	4	10	121	5	118	120	1,304

Postal with online or Telephone Direct Entry

Note:

Compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest thousand pounds. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Number of forms returned have been rounded to the nearest thousand forms. When rounded figures less than 500 are rounded to 0. Actual zeros are indicated by a '-'.
Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix A.

Number of surveys is abbreviated as No.

Costs are in £ (thousands).

Almost half (42%) of the surveys completed by business were postal. This accounts for almost three quarters (73%), or £946,000, of the total compliance costs. There were also five postal surveys with an online or telephone data entry and these cost £118,000. Online/email cost £62,000 (less than 5% of total compliance costs), telephone surveys cost £53,000 and face-face-face surveys cost £4,000. Those that are classified as 'other' used a number of methods such as face to face and telephone, or online and telephone (for example the Quarterly Construction Enquiry was collected using forms and telephone and cost £24,000). These mixed method approaches accounted for ten of the surveys and cost £121,000 in total.

3. Changes to the Surveys Issued by Departments: 2012/13 to 2013/14.

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 Census of Employment which is a biennial survey. Also, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimise the financial burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

A summary of the major changes of the costs to businesses for completing surveys issued by NI departments is detailed below for the period 2012/13 to 2013/14 (see Table 1 above for 2013/14 figures).

DARD reported a compliance cost of £154,000 in 2013/14. This was down by £75,000 from the previous year. Part of the explanation for this is that there was an EU Structure Survey in 2012/13. This is a triennial survey and for 2012/13 cost £62,000. All of the surveys issued by DARD contribute to official statistics.

There were no surveys issued to business by DCAL in 2013/14. In 2012/13 DCAL issued one survey to business with a compliance cost of less than £1,000.

In 2013/14, DE carried out 9 surveys that incurred a burden of £28,000. This is 6 more than in 2012/13, when compliance costs were £15,000. Three of the surveys conducted in 2013/14 were of an ad hoc nature.

The total compliance cost for DEL in 2013/14 was £21,000, down from £50,000 the previous year. Although there were more surveys carried out in 2013/14 (15 as opposed to 10 in 2012/13), the Employers' Perspective Survey which had cost £46,000 in 2012/13 was not conducted.

DETI carried out 13 surveys in 2013/14 with a compliance cost of £37,000. This is down on the 23 surveys completed the previous year and which had cost businesses £76,000 in compliance costs. It should be noted that in 2012/13, DETI carried out 3 tourism surveys which cost £36,000 in total. These 3 surveys are now carried out by DFP and are discussed below.

In 2013/14 DFP carried out 45 surveys which resulted in 87,000 forms being returned and amounted to £1,039,000 in compliance costs. This is a 55% cost increase in burden from the previous year (£670,000). Part of this increase can be attributed to the transfer of tourism statistics from DETI to DFP. The compliance cost of three tourism surveys (£37,000) is included in the 2013/14 DFP total. However, by far the biggest factor in the increase was the completion of the biennial Census of Employment survey which in itself cost £365,000 in 2013/14.

There were 7 surveys completed for DOE in 2013/14 costing £12,000, up from £3,000 the previous year, though only 3 surveys were carried out in 2012/13.

DRD compliance costs amounted to £10,000 in 2013/14, similar to the 2012/13 figure of £8,000.

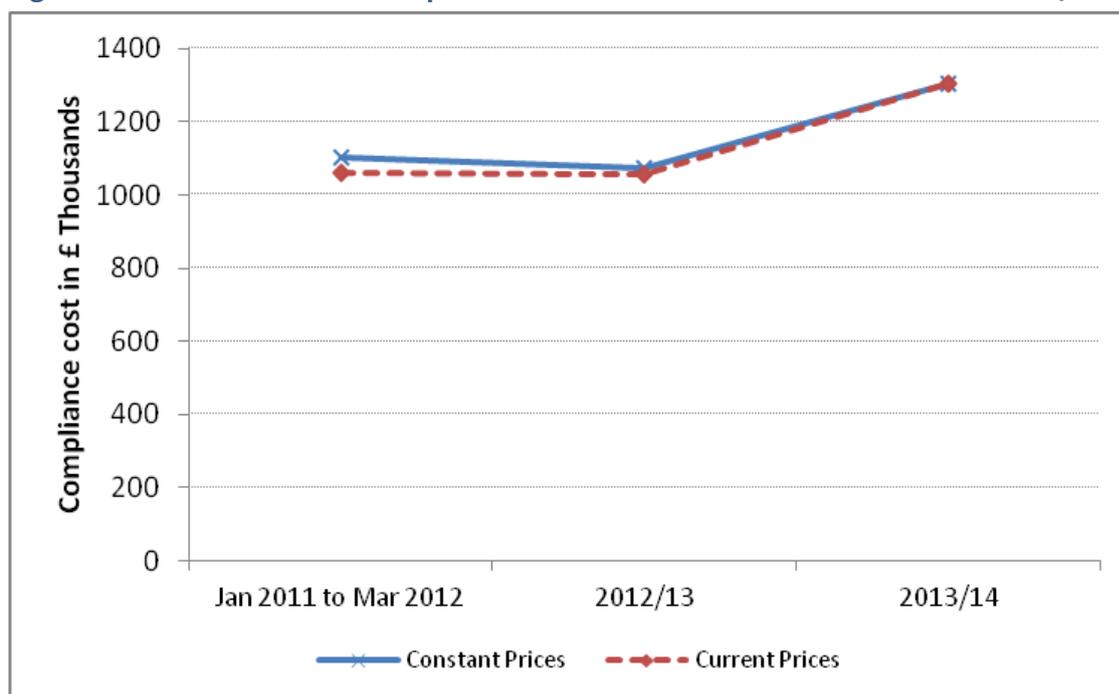
DSD completed 14 surveys in 2013/14, down from 27 the previous year. However the DSD surveys are relatively inexpensive in nature and amounted to £3,000.

4. An Examination of the Trend, January 2011 - March 2012 to 2013/14

Figure 3 illustrates the change in compliance costs reported in Northern Ireland from Jan 2011-Mar 2012 to 2013/14. The broken red line shows the cost in terms of current prices: that is, in terms of staff costs at the time the statistical surveys were run without allowing for the effects of inflation. The cost was £1.062 million in the 12 month estimate covering January 2011 to March 2012; it then fell slightly to just under £1.055 million in 2012/13 before increasing by 24% to £1.304 million for 2013/14.

However, it is useful to summarise the change over time at constant prices, which removes the effects of changes in staff costs. The base year being used is 2013/14⁴. The cost was £1.103 million in the 12 month estimate covering January 2011 to March 2012; it then fell slightly to £1.073 million in 2012/13 before increasing by 22% to £1.304 million for 2013/14. The constant prices and current price lines in figure 3 are close together over the reference period due to low pay rises in the last few years.

Figure 3: Northern Ireland compliance costs from Jan 2011 – Mar 2012 to 2012/13.



⁴ The equivalent hourly rates of pay for 2013/14 have been applied to 2011/12 and 2012/13.

5. Changes in 2014/15

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that an estimated cost burden on data suppliers is reported annually and that efforts are made to reduce this cost. This applies to surveys issued to businesses, households and individuals. As of the 1st April 2014, surveys to households and individuals are included in the scope of survey control within Northern Ireland. That is, more specifically, surveys whose fieldwork began on or after the 1st April 2014. As a consequence of this, the 2014/15 annual report will include for the first time the compliance burden to households and individuals.

The respondent burden for surveys of household and individuals is calculated on the basis of time taken and unlike the respondent burden to business which is reported on as the financial cost to businesses, will be reported on as the total compliance burden in time (hours and minutes). Further information on this will be provided in the next annual bulletin.

6. Measures being taken to Reduce Compliance Costs

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

Department	Name of Survey	Reduced compliance cost by:
DARD	Raw Milk Producer	Review of firms making milk purchases within NI milk market.
	Milk Utilisation Survey	Review of firms and their utilisation practices, effort to simplify form and reduce burden. Defra and other devolved administrations considering a merger between milk pricing and utilisation surveys
	Animal Feeding Stuffs	Move firms between strata depending on production level.
	Aquaculture Production Survey	Forms have been simplified for ease of completion.
	Pesticide Usage Survey	Telephone questionnaire for smaller holdings.
DE	School Omnibus Survey	Completed a new annual School Omnibus Survey aimed at collecting a range of data from schools using one questionnaire. This survey included 7 sections of questions thereby removing the requirement for 7 separate surveys.
DETI	Business Monitor	Reduce sample size from 2,000 to 1,500.
	Tourism Industry Barometer	Restrict number of questions to reduce completion time.
DEL	All surveys	Professional staff available to provide advice which reduces completion time.
DFP	Census of Employment	Largest companies offered spreadsheet return by email to aid in clarity and ease of return.
	ABI	Businesses advised will accept copy of accounts and ELSMs staff will incorporate into collection systems.
	Index of Services Index of Production Quarterly Employment Survey	These three surveys have adopted a new rotation policy whereby 10% of businesses are rotated off the survey at least every six months. This is aimed to introduce more frequent survey holidays for smaller businesses.

Appendix A: Departments and their abbreviations

Abbreviation	Department
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DOE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department of Social Development

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