

Summary of User Engagement Event: Population Estimates and Projections for Northern Ireland



Thursday 21st January 2016
Boardroom McAuley House, Belfast

Attendees:

Attendees at the event comprised representatives from Northern Ireland Government Departments, local government, other public bodies, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector. The attendees included those with an interest in health, education, equality and migration.

Event Overview

Mrs McGeown (NISRA) outlined the agenda for the morning. It was highlighted that the focus of the event was to seek feedback from users of population statistics for Northern Ireland. An organisation chart for the Population Statistics team was provided.

Summary of 2015/16 Work Programme

Mrs McGeown outlined the key publications which were released during the financial year 2015/16. It was stated that these publications were published in line with the 2015/16 work plan which was published in April 2015. It was noted that there was one outstanding report - the 2014-based Population Projections for areas within Northern Ireland. Mrs McGeown confirmed that this release was planned for spring 2016 and the initial hope was that this would be published in March 2016 but given staffing changes and the purdah period prior to the May election (during which non-standard statistical releases cannot be published) the plan is now to release this report in May 2016 - precise timings to be confirmed nearer to publication date.

Mrs McGeown informed attendees about the work ongoing with the UK Statistics Authority and noted that the population statistics produced by NISRA would be redesignated as National Statistics subject to six specific requirements being met. Work on the requirements and suggestions made by the UK Statistics Authority is ongoing.

Users were asked if they had any questions on the work programme for 2015/16; the group were content with the overview provided and had no major issues to raise.

User Engagement Strategy

Mrs McGeown discussed the User Engagement Strategy published in December 2015 by the Population Statistics Team. The link to this was included in the invitation to the event and hard copies were made available. Mrs McGeown emphasised that as statisticians they must engage effectively with users. The strategy outlines the Population Statistics Team's commitment to users, how NISRA will maintain contact with users and how users can access and avail of the statistics and services of the Population Statistics Team. The document outlines how NISRA will consult with users on any major changes to statistical releases. It was noted that the Revision Policy for Population Statistics is available online. The Population Statistics Team proposed to hold a user engagement event at least every other year – looking back on the past year and looking forward to the year ahead.

Attendees were asked for feedback on the strategy and whether they were content for a biennial event. Users welcomed the invitation to the User Engagement Event and were delighted to have the opportunity to contribute; the helpfulness of the Population Statistics team over the telephone was noted. The group were content with the proposal to have a biennial user engagement event in the understanding that if there were any significant issues impacting users in the interim that a user engagement event could be convened.

ACTION 1: Make a biennial User Engagement Event part of the regular Population Statistics work programme.

2016/17 Work Programme

Mrs McGeown informed the users that a 2016/17 work plan had been drafted and that user input was welcome. Mrs McGeown displayed a copy of the draft and discussed the detail around the timing of key releases. Users were asked for

feedback on the draft work plan and it was noted that the work plan which remains a 'live' document will be published on the NISRA website. Users were reminded that final publication dates were always announced at least 4 weeks in advance of publication on the Statistics Release calendar of the www.gov.uk website – there is a link to this on the NISRA website homepage.

Mrs McGeown also noted some additional work the Population Statistics team may be involved in during 2016/17 – this is linked to the review of Geography and Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures being undertaken by NISRA.

Mrs McGeown went on to say that there was also an action in the 2015/16 work plan to consider the publication of population estimates for the reviewed settlement classifications subject to the availability of look up tables. As the geographic tools are currently not available, this work has been carried forward into the work programme for 2016/17.

Users were asked for their views on the proposed work programme. Users welcomed the fact that a review of the NISRA website was underway and that as data publishers we were considering where and how we hosted the data on websites. Users would like the names/links on the website to be clearer (e.g. use areas within NI rather than sub-national) to help users understand what information is accessed via the web page. Also, it was suggested that the new LGD population figures could be displayed more prominently on the NISRA website, and that clearer terms are used throughout (for example, instead of an overall term like Demography, refer to Population, Births, Deaths etc). Consistency in the name of publications across the UK countries was considered to be desirable.

ACTION 2: Consider ease of readability of terms used on the website during the NISRA website review.

Some users welcomed the publication of mid-year estimates in early June, if possible, but definitely by the end of June for example for budgeting work in the local councils and the Registrar General's Annual Report.

There was a lot of interest in the production of household projections e.g. for planning waste management services, forecasting. There was some feeling that these were not as straightforward to work with compared to other reports e.g. for looking at historical data and trends over time. It was noted that this would be

considered in future publications. The availability of data down to the local council level was welcomed.

Local council staff expressed an interest in having further discussions on the availability of data and Mrs McGeown suggested that a NINIS seminar/training event may also be useful for some users. Users were encouraged to complete the ongoing NISRA website feedback survey on the NISRA website, and informed that suggestions on how to improve the NISRA website were welcomed on this survey.

There was support for the ongoing meetings and collaboration between NI and colleagues in the UK.

Users expressed an interest in the migration statistics e.g. for equality monitoring purposes.

There was a demand for population estimates to be produced for the new settlement classifications when the geographic tools become available.

Other factors mentioned included the introduction of the new Education Authority, and the NISRA Geography consultation which is due to commence in the coming weeks. The group were encouraged to respond to this if it impacted their work area.

Overall, there was agreement on the proposed work plan for 2016/17.

Statistical Releases

Mid-Year Population Estimates (MYE)

Cara Feeney (NISRA) outlined background information on the MYE publications and elaborated on the affects of the 2011 rebasing of the estimates back to 2001. She then outlined proposed changes to the publishing schedule of the MYE, specifically to publish estimates down to Super Output Area level in one release in June in time for the RG's report. A second publication, to be called 'Population Estimates for Small Areas', was also proposed for release in November, to include in tabular format estimates for Census Small Areas and Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

Attendees were asked if they were content with these proposals. The group agreed with the approach and changes proposed. Some users indicated that they mainly downloaded the tables and put less focus on the statistical bulletins. Questions were asked about the availability of SOA data for specific age bands, users were informed

that some bespoke tables may be produced in response to queries and these may then be published on the website. The Population Statistics team were happy to work with customers on this as it was important to get the balance between quality information which is fit for purpose and user need.

ACTION 3: NISRA to take forward the agreed changes by publishing in tabular format Population Estimates for Small Areas in November each year.

When asked if there were plans to publish population estimates for the new wards, the population team noted that they were awaiting the outcome of the geography consultation but that there had been some interest from users in statistics for District Electoral Areas.

Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over (85+)

Cara Feeney outlined background information on the 85+ publication. She then discussed the maintaining the name of the publication despite single year of age of the population up to 89 (with age band 90+) now available in the MYE since the rebasing. Reasons for keeping the title the same were stated and attendees were asked if they were content with keeping the title the same. The group broadly agreed with keeping the name consistent with the historical reports but suggested that we could make links to the equivalent information in the UK countries more prominent in the statistical bulletin. This is something NISRA intend to take forward for the next release.

ACTION 4: Retain the title 'Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over' but make links to the equivalent information in the UK countries more prominent in the statistical bulletin.

Cara Feeney then informed attendees of improvements that had been made to the latest 85+ publication in line with the UKSA's requirement 4 to add more quality data.

Users expressed an interest in the detailed population estimates for the older age bands being made available at local council level. There was then a discussion about small numbers, reliability of the information and the need to ensure the data are robust. With the ageing profile of the NI population, this will be kept in mind for the future. Users also questioned whether these estimates for the 85+ population could be incorporated into the June release. It was stated that the quality assurance following the 2011 Census of the mid-year population estimates for geographies

down to Local Government Districts found that estimates were robust for single year of age to 89 and for the age group 90 and over. Accordingly a separate methodology (the recognised Kannisto-Thatcher approach) is needed to estimate the older population and therefore this information would need to come later to ensure the delivery of the mid-year estimates in June. It was noted that this methodology was widely used and was the approach taken across the UK. The Population Statistics team will consider if further information on those aged less than 85 should be added to the publication in June to make it more user friendly. It was proposed that linking the single year of age for the older population estimates, when they are released, to the mid-year estimates released in June to make one large file with single year of age 0-104 may be a helpful dataset for users.

ACTION 5: To consider production of a large single year of age data file to age 104 after the release of Estimates of the Population aged 85 and over.

Migration Statistics

Cara Feeney outlined background information on the two publications of migration statistics released throughout a given year (migration estimates released in June as part of the MYE, and the Long-Term International Migration publication released in August). She informed that no changes were proposed for the Migration Statistics releases.

There was an expression of interest for migration statistics at ward level. It was noted that migration is the most difficult component of the population estimates to measure. While there are unlikely to be official migration statistics at this level, some of the administrative data used in the production/quality assurance of migration may perhaps be available at lower geographies. The population statistics team are happy to liaise with data suppliers or pass on the relevant contact details to those interested in this type of information.

Following this there was a specific request about secondary migration and a migration flow picture for NI. This would need to be discussed with the UK Working Group on Migration and the Population Statistics team would need to look at this more closely but the team are happy to liaise directly with the customer on this.

ACTION 6: Liaise with customer on the issue of possible migration flow picture for NI.

Population Projections

Cara Feeney outlined background information on Projections publications. She then informed attendees that ONS have begun to consult on the sub-national population projections (SNPP) for England, and if anyone was interested in further details regarding this to contact us or ONS directly. Cara Feeney then informed them that ONS were also consulting on whether to release National Population Projections (NPP) every three years, rather than the current biennial release. She mentioned that this would then affect the release of SNPPs and household projections, which are linked to the release of the NPP. She advised anyone with any concerns to contact either NISRA or ONS directly before the deadline of 8th February.

The feeling of the Group was that they were not content to support a proposal to move to a three year cycle of reporting on projections. There was a discussion around these being less reliable looking further ahead; one organisations had noticed a substantial change in their financial model when moving from one set of projections to another simply because of a change in the number of older people. Given the ageing profile of NI and wider migration changes, the group did not support the move to a three-year cycle, indeed the view was expressed that such statistics should be updated annually. Users were informed that NISRA were responding to the consultation and the views expressed at the event would be summarised but users were encouraged to respond directly to ONS if this had a significant impact in their work area.

ACTION 7: NISRA to respond to ONS consultation to reflect the views expressed by users.

Further discussion related to a request for an updated Geography page on the NISRA website with more clarity and visibility for all look-up tables. Users were informed that there is now a member of staff working on Geography as part of the deprivation review; the geography webpage would now therefore be maintained. Users were also advised that look-up tables are available on NINIS under the People and Places theme. Some users expressed a desire to be able to find specific spreadsheets more easily. NISRA noted that there is a spreadsheet containing all NINIS datasets available on the NINIS FAQ page, and a request was made to make this more prominent on NINIS website.

ACTION 8: NINIS team to highlight link to spreadsheet listing all available datasets.

Summary and Close

Mrs McGeown thanked attendees for their time and valued feedback.

Users were reminded that the Customer Survey is ongoing if they have additional input to provide.

It was noted that the 2016/17 work plan will be published on the NISRA website as well as a summary note of the User Engagement Event.

Contact Details for NISRA were provided.

List of Actions

ACTION 1 Make a biennial User Engagement Event part of the regular Population Statistics work programme.

ACTION 2 Consider ease of readability of terms used on the website during the NISRA website review.

ACTION 3 NISRA to take forward the agreed changes by publishing in tabular format Population Estimates for Small Areas in November each year.

ACTION 4 Retain the title 'Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over' but make links to the equivalent information in the UK countries more prominent in the statistical bulletin.

ACTION 5 To consider production of a large single year of age data file to age 104 after the release of Estimates of the Population aged 85 and over.

ACTION 6 Liaise with customer on the issue of possible migration flow picture for NI.

ACTION 7 NISRA to respond to ONS consultation to reflect the views expressed by users.

ACTION 8 NINIS team to highlight link to spreadsheet listing all available datasets.