

Vital Statistics User Group

Issues Raised

November 2021

This paper documents issues and questions raised at the Vital Statistics User Event that took place on 10 November 2021. The event consisted of opportunities for discussion and questions as well as a facility for providing feedback via mentimeter.

Questions & Answers

The following reflects the areas in which questions were raised and the relevant responses.

How NI deaths are coded

All coding for cause of death data in NI is completed by ONS. There are a number of reasons that it isn't completed in-house in NISRA. Firstly, the ONS had an already established team of experienced coders and the capacity to take on the coding for NI which was much more efficient and cost effective than new staff in NI being employed and trained, and the appropriate software acquired. Secondly, by ONS completing the coding it ensures processes consistent with England and Wales.

Use of other data for suicide statistics such as suspected suicides

Vital Statistics Unit work with registration data captured by the General Registry Office. NISRA does not get access to anything on suspected suicides or homicides as captured by PSNI. There are established processes in place for different types of deaths, including suspected suicides which are always referred to the Coroner's Office for Northern Ireland. A number of factors impact the length of time between date of death and date of registration but the majority are investigated and registered within 12 months. However, lengthy inquests, workloads, evidence etc all mean that the time taken for the Coroner's Office to make a decision about the death is very much on a case-by-case basis.

There are plans to begin releasing suicide statistics by the date of occurrence, which may be useful for research purposes and, to a degree, mitigate this issue.

Definition of alcohol-related deaths

Definitions of alcohol-related death and alcohol specific deaths are available from the NISRA website on the alcohol deaths page and information paper written to explain the change in definition from alcohol-related deaths to alcohol-specific deaths

[Alcohol Deaths | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

[Alcohol-Specific Deaths, Northern Ireland: Information Paper | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

Working relationship with the Central Statistical Office in Ireland and potential for all-island statistics

NISRA are very happy to work with counterparts in CSO where possible, however, death coding and, in particular, the processing and registration of deaths and suicides are not on a consistent basis with GRO, therefore the data is not comparable and we cannot produce all-Island data at this point.

Progress of the review of suicide statistics in Northern Ireland

The presentation covered the progress of the review of suicide statistics and the latest update is available from the Guidance note on the NISRA website.

[Guidance note to Users on Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

Availability of data for 'old' boundary geographies

When there is a change in boundaries of geographies output for both the new and old boundaries are routinely produced for a period of time (until the new geographies have embedded). VSU produced outputs based on the 26 Local Government Districts (LGDs) up to last year, following the change in boundaries to the 11 LGDs in 2014. However, data for the 'old' council areas is still available on request.

Will any NISRA table builders take lessons from NOMIS?

There is a separate NISRA team responsible for producing the new table builder but they are aware the NOMIS tool and that it is currently in the process of being replaced. The development work on the NISRA tool is relatively advanced and is based on the same platform that the Central Statistics Office in Ireland now use on their website for disseminating outputs (<https://data.cso.ie/#>).

Introduction of ICD 11

It is planned that the move to ICD 11 will happen in 2025. As ONS will be leading the transition and the timing of it as they carry out the coding of cause of death information. As part of the transition, ONS will complete a bridge coding exercise whereby they will code deaths using both ICD 10 and ICD 11 for a time to identify any impacts from moving to the new version.

Timetable for release of drug death statistics

The next update of drug death tables will be announced after the review of suicide statistics has been completed. The reason for this is that the tables contain information on ICD code which may be impacted by the review (although the overall number of drug deaths will not).

Impact of the review of suicide statistics in existing research

Unfortunately, it will mean that revisions may need to be made, just as with our own outputs. It is not an ideal situation but in order to ensure the quality of data it is a necessary exercise.

Information on a series break in suicide statistics

With a break in the series between 2014 and 2015 it means the time series will only be available from 2015 for the full definition of suicide deaths. However, the alternative NISRA has been suggesting for users to look at is the number of intention self-harm deaths which should remain relatively unchanged by the review and should still provide an accurate longer time series for users to look at.

Link to published guidance note on suicide statistics in NI

The guidance note on suicide deaths and the review of suicide death statistics is available at the link below:

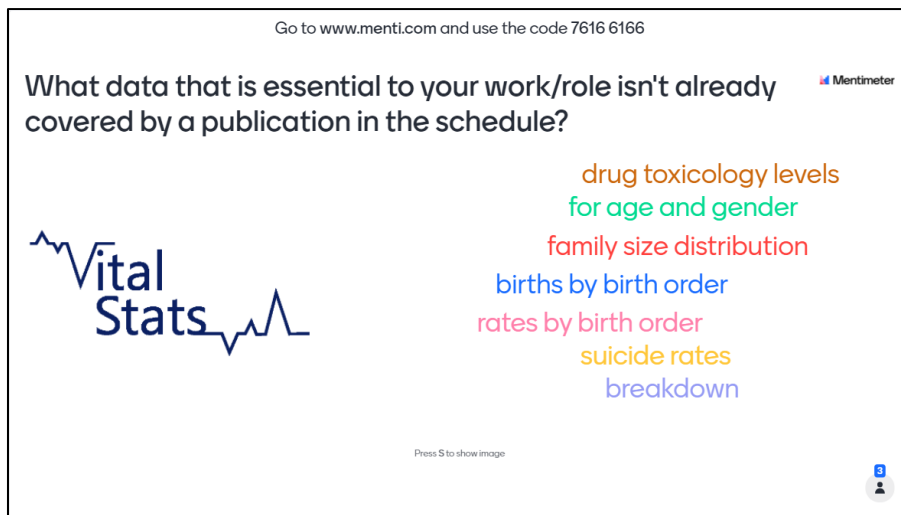
[Guidance note to Users on Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/guidance-note-to-users-on-suicide-statistics-in-northern-ireland)

Mentimeter

Attendees at the User Group were asked to give their views via some interactive questions on mentimeter. The following summarises the input given.

Publications/Outputs

1. With current publications generally in mind, the attendees were asked to consider what data was not already covered that would help them in their roles.



In addition to what is shown in the slide it was also stated that suicide rates for age and sex, as well as numbers would be useful.

Response:

Drug toxicology level - We will continue to work with the Coroner's Office for Northern Ireland and maintain what has now become a close working relationship. Hopefully, this means that in the future we can explore what additional data may be shared with Vital Statistics Unit, if possible.

More births data – it is clear that the focus has been (necessarily) more so on deaths and cause of deaths analysis in the last 2 years. A refocus on what additional births analysis may be possible can be introduced to the work plan. VSU can confirm that birth order analysis is possible so the best mode for sharing that information can be examined.

Suicide rates - The suicide tables that NISRA update annually contain numbers by age and sex but there is only a breakdown of rates by sex currently. VSU will look into the feasibility of producing rates to accompany numbers in the future.

There will be a focus in the future to include age standardised mortality rates for various causes of death and the feasibility of this for suicides will be explored.

2. In order to identify what users find most helpful, attendees were asked to state what VSU currently do that they would like to see more of.

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 9838 6274

What do we currently do that you like?

Mentimeter



Including substances I ask about.

The baby name dashboard is fantastic!

We use for postcode details linked to Trusts

The timeliness of publications (at least on births) - quicker than ONSClarity of website - it seems easier to find things on NISRA website than other statistical offices

Liked the use of infographics for the most recent RG report thought the layout was really good in conveying the headline statistics (eg Births, Deaths) and its use in social media, good for sharing!

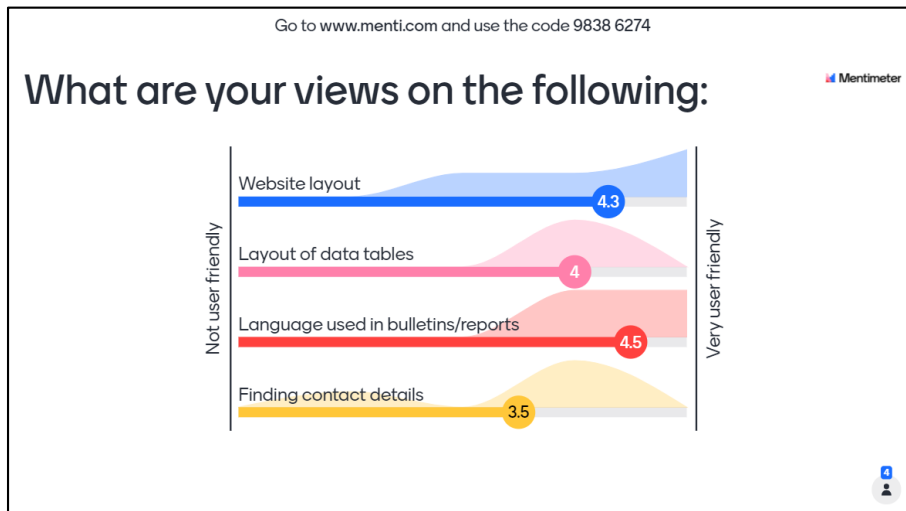
Press S to show image

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Response:

VSU will continue to make use of infographics and social media as much as possible when outputs are released. We also plan to look at the possibility of creating additional interactive dashboards for other outputs.

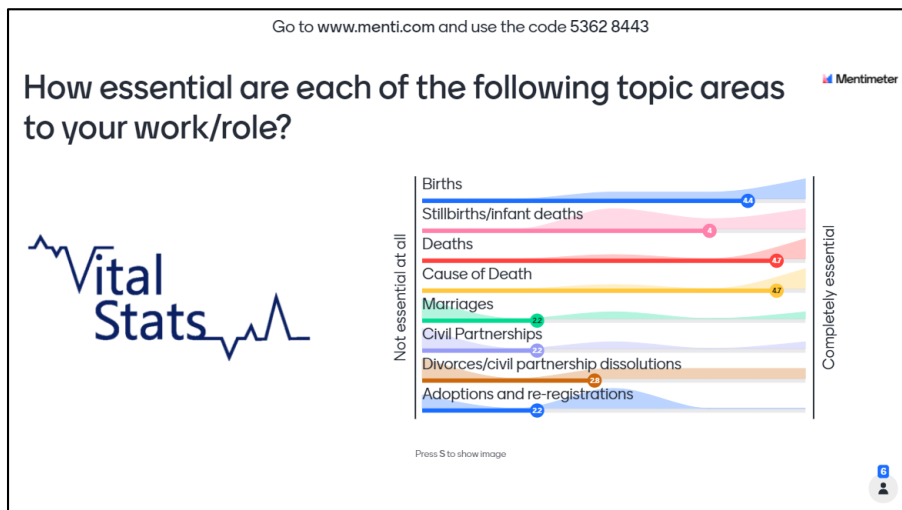
3. Attendees were asked their opinions on how user friendly they found each of the items listed in the slide.



Response:

Clearly improvements can always be made in any areas, but we will specifically aim to make contact information more visible in tables, reports and on the website.

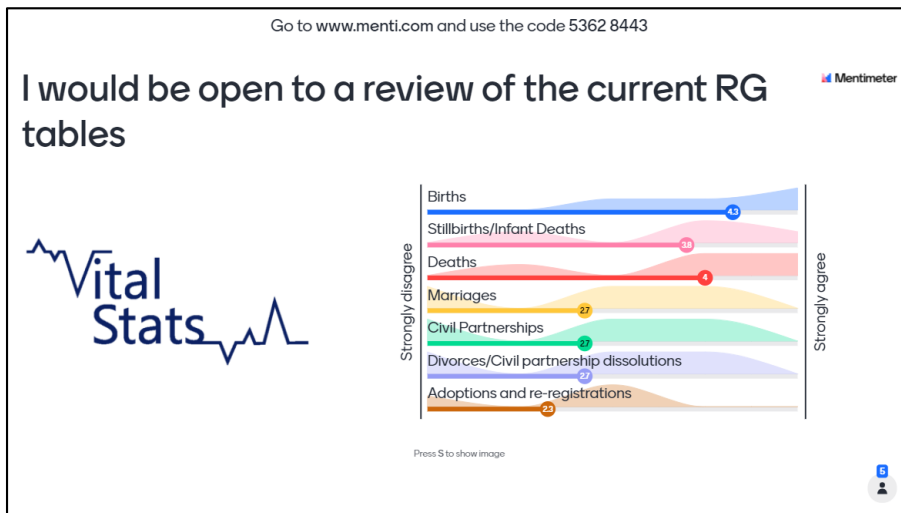
4. With the Annual RG report specifically in mind, attendees were asked how essential each of the topic areas were in their particular work/role



Response:

Clearly the areas of greater importance are all related to births and deaths. This is actually already reflected in terms of the current focus and work priorities within VSU which is reassuring to know.

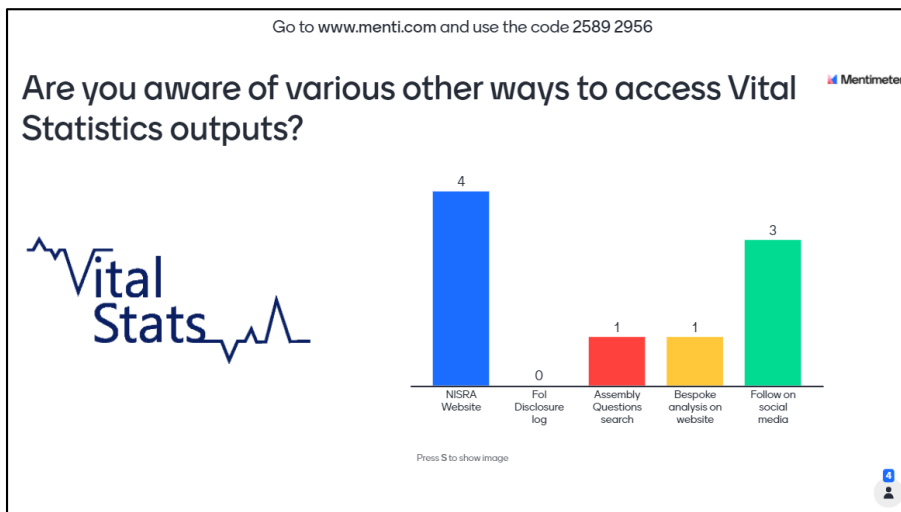
5. VSU explained to attendees that they hope to refresh the tables that accompany the RG report, so with this in mind attendees were asked to indicate how open they were to a refresh.



Response:

This input is very valuable in directing the focus of VSU. Clearly there is a need to rethink tables relating to births, stillbirths and infant deaths, and all deaths so VSU can focus efforts on these areas to improve the range of data available.

6. VSU data make its way in the public domain in a variety of ways, some not directly via NISRA. Users were asked about their awareness of the various ways vital events data can be accessed



Response:

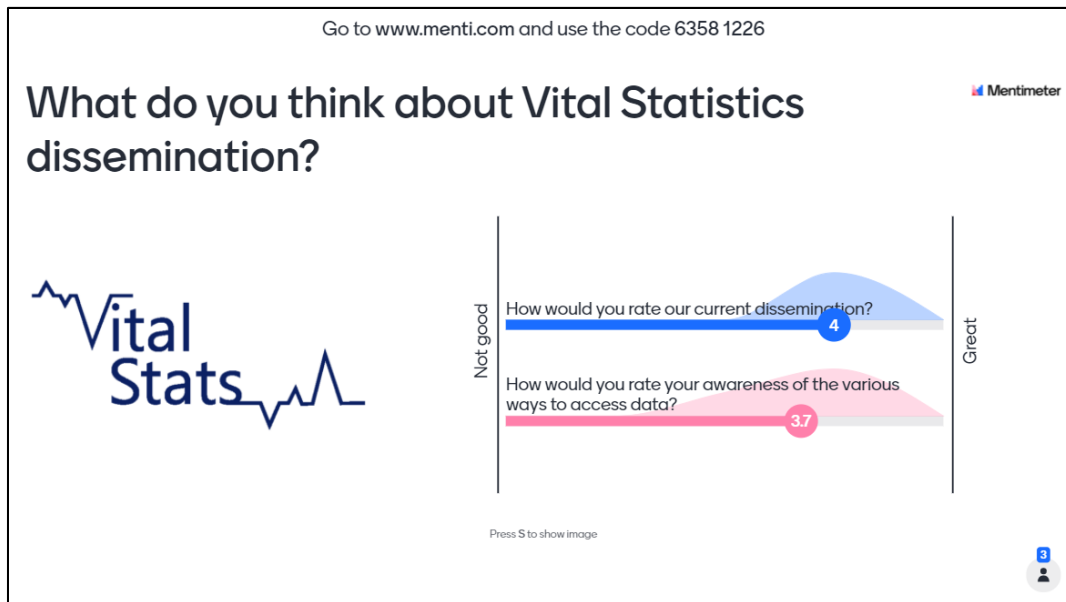
There was a lack of awareness of responses to freedom of information requests and assembly questions being published on the web. Following the meeting VSU have circulated links to where this information can be accessed, but for convenience they are included below:

FOI Disclosure Log: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/foi-disclosure-log-0>

Assembly Question Search: <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/search.aspx>

Vital Statistics Bespoke analysis: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/births-deaths-and-marriages/user-requested-dataDissemination>

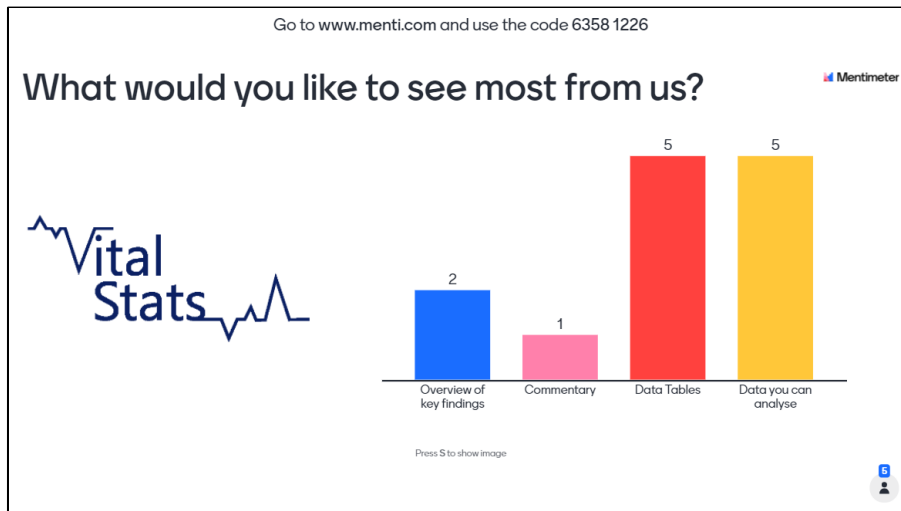
7. VSU use social media, the web, and email to make users aware of data and ensure it is available in various forms (such as reports, tables, dashboards, infographics etc.). Users were asked about their views on how VSU currently disseminate data



Response:

Vital Statistics Unit will continue to focus on promoting the data is that is in the public domain and how it can be accessed.

8. So that VSU can focus on areas of most need, users were asked what they would like to see more of in terms of outputs on vital events.

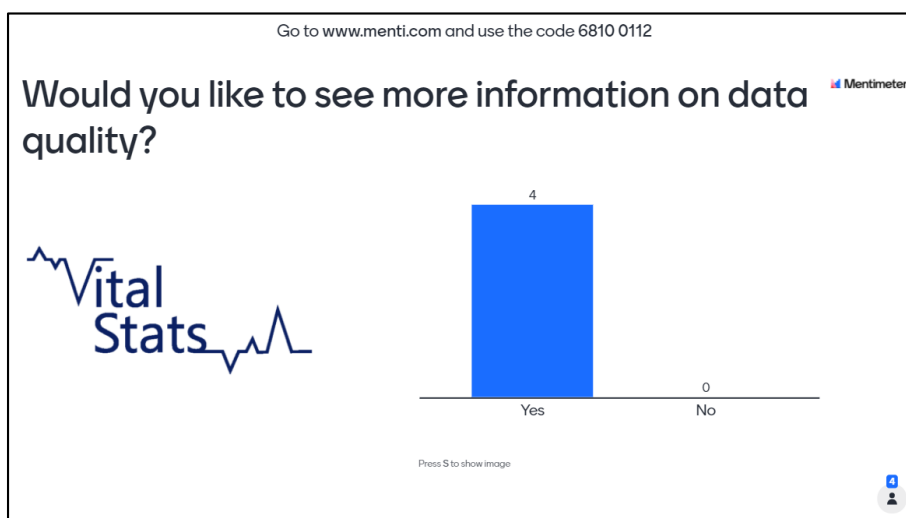
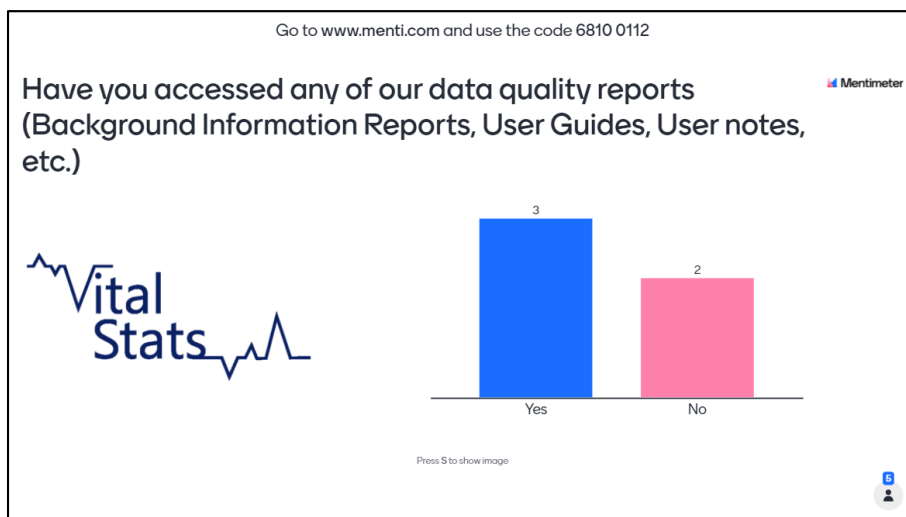


Response:

The attendees at the user group gave a clear indication that more data tables and access to data that can be analysed or interrogated would be welcome. On this note NISRA is in the process of creating a new facility for all outputs whereby users can build their own tables. VSU are working with the relevant NISRA branch to ensure that vital statistics data is included in the table builder, however it will take some time to build up the data available on it. The table builder is scheduled for release in early 2022.

Data Quality

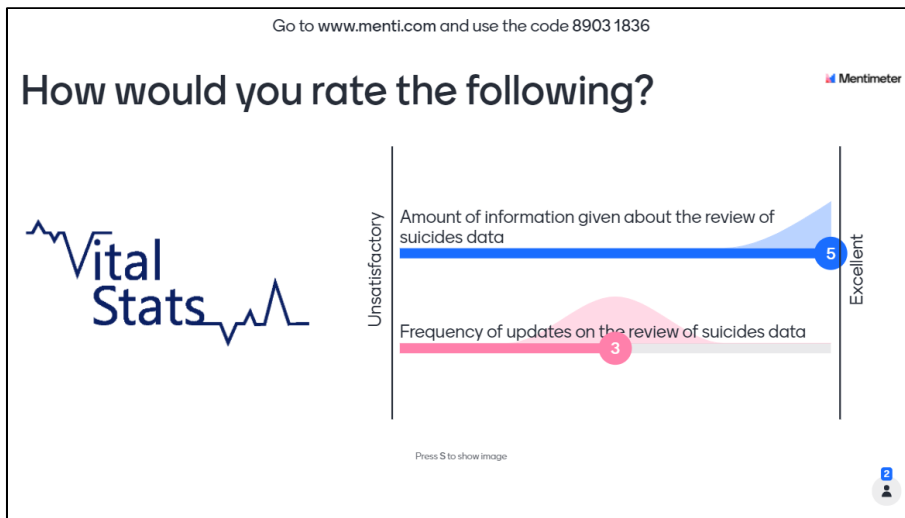
9. Users were asked a couple of questions in relation to data quality and their knowledge of it.



Response:

Not all mentimeter participants had accessed the existing background quality reports (available here: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/births-deaths-and-marriages/vital-statistics-documentation>) but there was very much a view that people would like to see more information on data quality. To this end, links to the Vital Statistics Documentation (including background quality reports) were circulated after the user group) and the group informed about the detailed QAAD (Quality Assurance of Administrative Data) for deaths that is in production.

10. With suicide data specifically in mind and the current review of suicides to improve the quality of the data, users were asked about their views on how they have been updated on this exercise:



Response:

This information is valuable to VSU in terms of the provision of updates and the detail being given. We were very happy to see that users were content with the amount of information being provided on the review of suicide deaths in Northern Ireland.

Other feedback

User commented positively on the cooperation they have had from NISRA in accommodating specific requests for data (specifically on births and drug-related deaths), and also showed an interest in participating in topic specific user groups in the future.