

1 Name of the survey or output being evaluated

Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI) 2010

2 Date when review was begun

March 2012

3 Name of the person completing this
Recommended level is Grade 7 or experienced SEO
If filled in by other grade state name of person completing it and the grade 7 who signed it off

Robin Griffith (Assistant Statistician) - Completed the review
Deborah Lyness - (Grade 7) - Signed off the Review

4 Which department/organisation do you work for?

Department of Finance and Personnel - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency - Department of Economics and Labour Market Statistics

5 Your contact details

Email

Telephone

6 If this survey/output is produced jointly with another department or organisation please state which other department(s)/ organisation(s) this is

Key facts

7 When did the survey being reviewed commence?

Between 1998 and 2001 the NIABI was run as a component of the national ABI survey by the ONS. In 2002, independently of ONS, DETI introduced a processing system to run and produce NI level results at local unit (LU) level.

8 Is the survey statutory or voluntary?

Statutory (Please state under which law/ act the survey is statutory)
Voluntary

The Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988

9 What is the periodicity of the survey?

Monthly
Quarterly
Annual
Ad hoc
Other (Please specify below)

10 Please give a summary of the information that the survey collects.

The Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI) collects both financial and employment information from businesses and other establishments and covers about two thirds of the economy. The results provide information on the value of the economic activity that businesses generate and associated expenditure across the main industrial sectors in Northern Ireland. The NIABI also provides estimates of employment to enable per head calculations to be made.

11 What is the target population of the survey?

The results for 2010 cover most sectors within the NI economy. This includes the Production, Construction, Distribution and Service industries in Northern Ireland but excludes public sector activity for the most part. Coverage also includes Agriculture (support activities), Hunting, Forestry and Fishing. In line with improvements made to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Annual Business Survey, data for groups 65.1 (Insurance) and 65.2 (Reinsurance) within Financial and Insurance Activities are included for the first time, though the rest of this sector continues to be excluded. The other main areas that are excluded are Public Administration and Defence (section 0) while Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (section A) excludes farming (groups 01.1, 01.2, 01.3, 01.4 and 01.5). Local authority whose primary activity is in public administration and central Government bodies in Education (section P) and Human Health and Social Work Activities (section Q) have also been excluded from this publication, as has 86.2 (Medical and Dental Practice Activities) within section Q.

12 What is the sample size of the survey?

The survey sample is approximately 5,000. This is scheduled to increase to roughly 9,000 for the 2011 survey following consultation with users.

13 Which sampling frame is used for the survey?

- Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR)
- Pay As You Earn (PAYE)
- Postcode Address File
- Electoral Register
- Experian
- Reference list
- Another survey's sample (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

14 What are the anticipated and achieved response rates for the latest period for the survey?

Anticipated: 83%
Achieved: 79.6%

15 Who are the users of the survey?

There are a variety of users of the NIABI data – Economists and policy colleagues (primarily within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, DARD and Invest NI), ONS, academics and students, banking sector analysts, economic analysts and consultants as well as the general public.

16 What are the key publications that the survey contributes to?

Annual Business Survey
UK Regional Accounts
UK National Accounts
European Regional Yearbooks
Size and Performance of the Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Sector - DARD
Creative Industries Economic Estimates for Northern Ireland - DCAL
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) Economic Commentary

17 What is the cost to business of the survey?

(This information is the same as question 57 in the Burden and Respondents section of this tab)

The estimated respondent burden for 2010 is £280,637.

18 What is the cost to government of the survey?

The costs associated with producing the NIABI amount to £141,561 of which seven tenths is accounted for in-house and relates to staff costs. The remaining costs are the result of outsourced work related to the survey.

Background and progress since the last review

This section gives some background to the survey and states the progress made in improving the survey since the last review.

19

Brief history of the survey

Up to and including the 2001 survey year the Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI) was managed as part of a UK survey. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collected and processed returns from businesses in Great Britain (GB), while the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment in Northern Ireland (DETI) collected the ABI data for NI businesses. The NI returns were then forwarded to ONS for processing. The GB and NI data were then processed together by ONS to produce UK results.

There was a change in the ABI 2002 survey year when DETI introduced a processing system to run and produce NI level results at local unit (LU) level. This enabled DETI to produce earlier LU based results for Northern Ireland than from ONS, whose UK regional results were published to a later timetable. DETI passes a file of returned records to ONS for processing through the ONS system.

This meant that ONS was publishing RU results for the UK, whereas DETI published LU results for NI at approximately the same time. As part of a Quality Assurance Fund project, DETI also moved to producing RU results at approximately the same time as ONS published its UK level (RU) results. This was designed to improve comparability of NI results with those of the UK. Responsibility for the production of economic and labour market statistics (including the ABI) moved from DETI to DFP (NISRA) on 1st April 2011 as a result of the Transfer of Functions (Northern Ireland) Order (2011). NISRA has been working with ONS to improve further the harmonisation of NISRA and ONS processing and results system, with the advent of the new NISRA Integrated Business Survey System (currently underway).

20

What was the date of the last published survey review?

The NIABI has never been formally reviewed, though in practice DETI followed ONS developments. The most recent relevant ONS review of the UK ABI was published in 2004. Please note that points raised in 21 and 22 are sourced from the UK ONS ABI quinquennial review 2004.

21

What were the recommendations from the last review?

1. Investigate the possibilities of expanding the coverage of the ABI to cover the whole economy.
2. Review the current percentage of long forms included in the stratum.
3. Investigate the possibilities of expanding the detail of purchases across sectors not already covered.
4. Improve definitions which accompany the purchases of energy products.
5. Liaise with ABI/1 with a view to releasing Gross Value Added (GVA) per head data.
6. Review the current quality assurance process.
7. Investigate whether it is feasible to increase the number of variables currently included on the inquiry form.

These may include:

Turnover by product
Purchases of goods and services by product
Taxes and subsidies by type and gross fixed capital formation by asset type
Changes in inventories by asset type
Percentage between sales to households and sales to businesses
Value of exports
Retail turnover broken down by commodity

22

Have all the recommendations been implemented?

Yes

No (Please explain why & give details of progress made)

All the above have been investigated from the previous Quinquennial review with the outcomes stated below:

1. At present the coverage of the ABI remains very similar to the last review. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development still collect a vast majority of the agricultural SIC's as they are better placed to do this. This is mainly because the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) coverage for the agricultural sector is relatively poor. One area where we have improved coverage is within the financial sector. We now go out to SIC's; 65.11 - Life Insurance, 65.12 - Non-Life Insurance and 65.2 - Reinsurance. The reason for this improved coverage is the European (SBS) regulation which now requires these SIC's to be covered.
2. The proportion of long forms have been relatively constant in recent years and with the compliance constraints we feel we are asking our optimal amount.
- 3 & 4. DFP are currently considering using administrative sources for this data however if ONS proceed with the 2012 Purchases Inquiry DFP would be willing to participate.
5. The most recent ABI publication includes both financial and employment information.
6. With the development of the new IBSS we are reviewing quality assurance processes.
7. Based on user requirement some of these changes have been implemented.

23

Have other changes been made to the methodology of the survey since the last review?

Yes (Please describe changes including the impact on respondent burden)
 No

- We are now required, by both National Accounts requirements and European SBS Regulation, to collect our data under the new Standard Industry Classification (SIC07). This is a change from collecting the data on the SIC03.
 - To maximise survey precision, the Neyman allocation approach to sampling was utilised. The survey universe was stratified by 2 digit SIC code and employee size band, and all businesses with 50+ employees, or 20+ employees and more than one local unit, were fully enumerated. Businesses falling below the threshold of complete enumeration are selected on a random stratified basis to achieve specified levels of precision (relating to turnover in survey reference year 2011).
 - ABI is also currently reviewing its validation processes. As a result of this project there are ongoing investigations into how the selective editing process can be improved. Implementation is expected in the near future.
 - The Purchases Inquiry has been suspended since the last Quinquennial Review. However a project has been set up to explore the possibility of this being reinstated. At present no decision has been made as to whether it will go ahead although progress has been made in developing a detailed specification for the project for the data requirements.
 - In conjunction with ONS' Quality Improvement Fund improvements were made to ABI results from 2008 onwards including improvements to:

- Outlier detection;
- Editing and imputation;
- Grossing and estimation - including the calculation of confidence intervals and publication of coefficients of variation.

The modelling of earlier results using the new calibration system has shown that these produce more robust estimates.

24

Do National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), in other countries run a survey similar to this one?

Yes (Please give brief details below)
 No (Please go to question 26)

NSIs in other countries do run inquiries similar to the ABI. This is especially the case for EU Member States who must have an inquiry which collects financial data to meet the requirements of the Structural Business Statistics Regulation (SBSR). This is required under regulation No 295/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The purpose of the Regulation is to specifically look at:

- The structure and the activities of business.
- The factors of production used and other elements allowing business activity, competitiveness and performance to be measured.
- The regional, national, community and international development of businesses and markets.
- Business conduct.
- Small and medium sized enterprises.
- Specific characteristics of enterprises related to particular breakdown of activities.

25

How far does your survey adhere to the same broad principles and standards as the other NSIs' surveys? Include any key differences.

The ABI follows principles and standards common to other NSIs' surveys. This is mainly because within the SBSR there are detailed areas and topics to which the survey must adhere. This, therefore, means other EU Member states inquiries will be working on similar values and standards.

These include:

- The collection modules within the Regulation. These clearly set out what needs collecting and when.
- Accuracy of the data. The Regulation states Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the data transmitted reflect the structure of the population of the statistical units.
- Comparability of the data. The Regulation states Member States shall produce comparable results following the breakdown stipulated for each module and their respective annexes.
- Transmission of the data. The Regulation states Member states shall transmit the results collected through the regulation, including confidential information, to Eurostat in accordance with the existing community provisions on transmission of data and subject to statistical confidentiality.

26

Are there any lessons that can be learnt from other countries? Include any areas where further harmonisation would provide benefits.

One area that can be further developed is the use of administrative data within the inquiry. We know countries such as the Republic of Ireland are also running a project regarding the use of administrative data to supplement their data collection. At present there is a major initiative within the ONS, which will feed into the ABI in due course, to pursue the use of administrative data. Northern Ireland may have to address legislative constraints if it cannot also be passed (e.g.) HMRC data from ONS.

Users and uses

This section investigates the uses of the survey and user views.

27 **What is the objective for the survey that justifies its existence?**

Used to produce information needed for:

making key national or local government decisions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
monitoring national or local government issues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
delivery of public services	<input type="checkbox"/>
satisfying EU regulations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
European decision-making or monitoring requirements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
another purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> (Please specify below)

Please tick all that apply

The ABI feeds into the UK Annual Business Survey (ABS). The ABS is the primary source of data used in the compilation of the Input-Output Annual Supply and Use tables for National Accounts. ABS also provides a major contribution to the Blue Book which is produced by National Accounts. It is also the main collection module so that ONS can meet its legal obligation to Eurostat (The European Union statistical body) in collecting and providing data under the Structural Business Statistics Regulation (SBSR). It finally provides a key benchmarking source for short term inquiries.

28 **Are you able to justify the periodicity of the survey?**

Yes, we have confirmed recently that users/sponsors have a specific need for data at this periodicity

Not really, but the reasons we collect the data this frequently are given below (Please specify below)

No

Don't know

National Accounts and Eurostat regulatory requirements drive the periodicity.

29 **Are you able to justify the presence of every question asked?**

Yes, users have a specific need for every question asked

Yes, but some data are needed purely to verify other data

Yes, but some questions are there only to improve questionnaire focus and flow

No, and have no current plans to address this

Don't know

No, but are aware some data may not be needed (Please specify below which questions are not required)

Within Northern Ireland the majority of questions have specific user needs. This information feeds into the ABS for which each question, if not covered via Eurostat regulation, has a specific sponsor. All questions were comprehensively reviewed during 2010.

30 **Where do you hold the information on justification for questions?**

In a database or registered file

Somewhere other than a database or registered file

Nowhere

Questions are justified through consultation with our users. User group minutes are stored on our internal filing system as well as on the DETI website at:
<http://www.deti.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-national-statistics/user-consultation-and-information.htm>

31

Have other existing sources of similar information, including administrative or management data, been examined to ensure that the survey is still required?

- Yes - in the last five years (Please give approximate date below)
Yes, but not in the last five years (Please say below if you have any plans to do this)
No
Don't know

Although administrative data covering components of the ABI is collected by HMRC among others, this data is not freely and legally available for use in statistics. Furthermore, the data are not always sufficiently timely or may not include all the information required for statistical purposes.

32

If other sources have been considered what were they and why were they unsuitable?

There are both legal and technical barriers which prevent more widespread use of HMRC data for official statistics purposes. The ONS is currently investigating the potential to introduce legislation to improve this position, particularly with regard to accessing VAT expenditure data. It will likely be necessary to introduce equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, subject to HMRC consent. NISRA will examine this option when the form of the UK legislation becomes clear.

33

What do each of the users of the survey need the data for?

Comment on all user groups

Government users

DETI: The data is used by DETI economists for a wide variety of analysis conducted on the Northern Irish economy and feeds into their regular Economic Commentary publication.

DARD: ABI provides data for the publication 'Size and Performance of the Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Sector'.

DOE: To inform DOE waste strategy development and to enhance waste communications messaging.

DCAL: ABI data feeds into the 'Creative Industries Economic Estimates for Northern Ireland' publication.

ONS: The ABI data is used to complement the UK ABS and create national estimates. It is used for the calculation of National and Regional accounts. The NIABI is the main source of data for the Northern Irish GVA

The results of the ABI allow the measurement of several of the goals established in the Programme for Government 2011-2015 and Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.

Non-government users

InterTradeIreland: Used to inform internal research

Ulster Bank: Used by Ulster bank economists for internal research and to inform their economic commentary.

ERINI: Data linking to create single time-series dataset containing variables from each of the survey data requested.

Agri-food and Biosciences Institute: Updating the AFBI 2002 IO model for 2005, which may help identify and reconcile difference between NI ABI and AFBI estimates.

34

How many users from each main user group did you approach for this review?

The review was distributed to approximately 50 respondents

35

How many responses did you receive to the user questionnaire for this review?

The review was completed by 5 respondents, a response rate of 10%

36

When invited to comment on the survey, what points did your users make?

Users requested a greater level of reporting detail; this included reporting by additional industry clusters (i.e. Green), company size and sub-regional analysis

User responses:

- Analysis by size of firm should be published
- Sub-regional data would be very useful for us – for example the sectoral make-up of counties adjoining the border with Ireland.
- I am not sure if this already exists but there is increasing talk of the green economy and I was wondering if elements of relevant business could be grouped into "green" economy. From my waste perspective this would include not only the recycling sector but the increasing reuse/preparing for reuse sector – mainly micro businesses, social enterprises and charities.

37

Specifically, what were the users' main points on the acceptability of the survey's quality when considered against the European Statistical System (ESS) dimensions of output quality?

Accuracy: 4.0

Relevance: 3.8

Timeliness: 4.6

Coherence: 4.2

Comparability: 3.8

Accessibility: 4.6

38

What are the minimum acceptable coefficients of variation (CV's)?

If these vary by domains please state range

The agreed quality measurement of the coefficients of variation are:

CV	Description
<5%	Precise
5% to 10%	Reasonably Precise
10% to 20%	Acceptable
20% or over	Unreliable

39

Are the achieved CV's close to the minimum acceptable level specified?

- Yes, for all or most domains
- No, typically larger than required
- No, typically smaller than required
- None calculated

40

What steps could be taken outside of this review to improve understanding of users' needs or reduce burden on respondents by reducing requirements?

Currently outside of this quinquennial review we undertake a variety of steps to improve the understanding of user's needs. These include:

- Participating in the ABS user group twice a year in Newport. This is a whole day meeting whereby ONS invite the main users of the inquiry to participate in discussions about developments in the ABS. The main users who regularly attend are National Accounts, Regional Accounts, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Finance and Personnel (NI), the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly of Wales. The thinking behind this is to, keep the line of communication between ourselves and our users open and to encourage feedback and advice as to the progress we make within the inquiry.
- In order to ensure that the statistics produced meet the needs of data users and, where possible, to identify any gaps in data provision, DFP statisticians meet periodically with customers and data users. Details and minutes from the meetings can be found on the DETI website at the following address:
<http://www.deti.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-national-statistics/user-consultation-and-information.htm>
- Cooperating with the Statistics Advisory Committee to ensure that any changes in the survey meet user needs.
- The objective of the new IBSS is to develop an IT system that can achieve a more flexible, timely, congruent means of obtaining business survey data, with reduced burden on business. This offers opportunities for change in capture, edit, validation procedures and ELMS branch organisational structure.

41

What recommendations could be made based on the comments of users?

Following the most recent user group meeting (November 2011) the following recommendations could be made:

- Increase the sample size from 5,000 to 8,000. This has been implemented with an sample increase to 9,000.
- Research the possibility of including a question on the debt burden arising from earlier property investment.

The following recommendations are based on the feedback from ABI users from the recent user questionnaire:

- Research the possibility of extending the reporting to include sub-regional analysis. This was mentioned in the user questionnaire feedback, however it was seen as a lower priority than having the flexibility to boost the sample to allow the potential to have greater accuracy in topical industry in the user group feedback.
- The relatively small volume of user feedback has indicated that there are specific areas for development within our publication that might be of interest to our users. However, these would need to be explored further at our next user group meeting.

Sample Design

This section investigates the sample design of the survey in more detail focusing on the impact of the design on respondents.

42

Please summarise the main characteristics of the sample design.

The sample design for the ABI is based on a stratified random sample. The strata are defined by SIC07 classification and employment sizeband. The sample is optimised using the Neyman allocation ensuring it provides as true a reflection of the population as possible.

For the 2011 ABI sample:

The employee bands are 0, 1-5, 6-9, 10-19, 20-49, 50-99, 100-249 and 250. All cells with 50 or more employees and all reporting units (RU's) with greater than or equal to 20 employees and more than one local unit are fully enumerated. For the 2011 survey and reflecting the merging of the ABI and MSES sample all businesses with 6 or more employees within manufacturing have been sampled. This is in line with the requirement for the Business Register Employment Survey (BRES).

The survey universe has been stratified by the SIC2007 classification at section level and then, using a Neyman Allocation, apportioned at the 2 digit level by the size bands detailed above. Once the primary selection was drawn, a small boost was carried out to ensure a specified level of precision and robust expansion estimators.

For this sample design, sample allocations have been calculated that minimise the variance of turnover held on the IDBR for the businesses in the universe. The variances and standard deviations were calculated using SPSS and the sample allocations were calculated within an excel spreadsheet which implements the Neyman allocation.

Small businesses are more likely to receive short form types thereby reducing the burden imposed upon them.

43

Are you aware of errors in the sampling frame?

Please tick all that apply

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yes, in the coverage | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes, commonly occurring errors in unit details | <input type="checkbox"/> (Please specify below) |
| Yes, other errors | <input type="checkbox"/> (Please specify below) |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> (Please say below when you last examined this) |

The sample frame used is the Inter Departmental Business Register. We are therefore reliant on the IDBR receiving regular updates and providing an accurate reflection of the business population of Northern Ireland. Businesses not registered for either Pay As You Earn or VAT are excluded from the frame.

44

What steps have you taken to minimise the burden on small businesses specifically ?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Survey holidays applied to businesses in line with osmotherly rules | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Reduced sampling fractions for small businesses | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of estimation in place of sampling | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (Please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No feasible steps taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- The ABI employs long and short forms. By using averages from those who responded to the long forms to estimate responses for short forms the burden on a substantial portion of the sample is reduced.
- Businesses will be rotated off the sample, this means that companies shouldn't find themselves receiving the ABI form in perpetuity. Please see point 42 for further detail.

45

What steps have you taken to minimise the burden on individual respondents more generally while ensuring users' needs will be met?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Clear quality requirements established up-front | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Appropriate use made of results | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rotation of respondents | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of efficient sample design | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (Please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No feasible steps taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |

We have short and long versions of questionnaires for most of the sectors. On the smaller sizebands we select more on the short questionnaires in order to reduce their burden. The short questionnaires only ask for totals, whereas the long questionnaires ask for a more detailed breakdown. We continually strive to improve the standard of the questionnaires. Please see point 42 for further detail.

46

When did you last review the sample allocation?

Please give approximate date

March 2012

47

What recommendations could be made for changes to the sample design to improve quality or reduce burden on respondents?

The sample design has recently undergone a period of review and reform. This process included user consultation. The result of this has been an increase in the ABI sample from 5,000 to approximately 9,000.

Data collection

This section investigates in more detail how the data is collected and validated on the survey

48 What is/are the mode(s) of data collection for the survey?

Paper self-completion questionnaire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Computer-assisted self-completion interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer-assisted personal interviewing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paper-based personal interviewing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer-assisted telephone interviewing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electronic collection (e.g. web, email or spreadsheet)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone Data Entry	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Please specify below)

49 Has the questionnaire been reviewed by someone with specialist knowledge in questionnaire design in the last three years?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	(Please give details below of the last expert review)
No, but we review the questionnaire ourselves at least every five years	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Not to our knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	

As part of the move to the IBSS the ABI team has reviewed the questionnaire and notes (2011/12) and followed ONS developments.

50 At which stage does validation of data items occur?

At point of entry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Within ten calendar days	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Longer than ten days	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No validation takes place	<input type="checkbox"/>	(please give reasons why not)

51 What proportion of respondents are re-contacted to check data items?

None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than 5%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between 5% and 10%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between 11% and 20%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 20%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment if you wish	

Estimated 75% re-contact rate (ONS 3.7%)

52

How do the systems you use minimise the burden on individual respondents due to validation of data?

- Use of checks to identify large changes (e.g.. validation gates)
- Automatic edits made for common adjustable errors
- Only re-contact on errors that have the largest impact on quality (selective editing)
- Imputation of missing or suspect data items
- Provided respondents with opportunity to explain unusual values during survey
- Use of a system to share information on changes to businesses
- Other (please specify)
- No feasible steps taken (please state why)

Please state how these systems have reduced burden

Cross branch data sharing - allows us to access financial data from other financial surveys in branch

53

What recommendations could be made for changes to the data collection and validation methods to improve quality or reduce burden on respondents?

NISRA is currently involved in developing a new Integrated Business Survey System. This is designed to improve the quality and timeliness of official economic statistics, while minimising the burden on businesses, where possible. NISRA is seeking to integrate surveys, reduce the number of contacts with businesses and potentially offer businesses the facility to make returns electronically. The new system will also be designed to utilise administrative sources, when these become available for statistical purposes.

ELMS continues to support the development of the IBSS system through the integration of validations and auto-correction techniques. This will reduce the need to contact businesses after receipt of their forms.

Burden and respondents

This section investigates respondents' views and how the cost to respondents is justified by the needs of users.

54

What was the selected sample size for the respondent survey for this review?

Please also state what proportion of the main sample was selected for the respondent survey

Survey distributed to 459 contacts representing 9% of the total NIABI sample.

55

What was the response rate for the respondent survey for this review?

Received 112 responses equating to a response rate of 24%.

56

When invited to comment on the survey, what points did your respondents make?

The primary themes emerging from respondent's comments include the survey's timeliness, respondent's concerns that they were merely duplicating information already publicly available as well as issues surrounding the difficulty in acquiring some of the required information.

Comments received from respondents include:

Timeliness

- Questionnaire is completed after preparation of annual financial accounts.
- Year end is 31/03/11 so a lot of the information requested is not yet available.
- Deadline for return of questionnaire is before deadline for submission of accounts so it makes it a time consuming separate exercise to gather information. Change the deadline until after account submission deadline.

Requires additional research

- The data requested was not available. My estimate of 3 hours may be too low. This is difficult work that I could do without! Our systems do not give us this data. We run special reports and have to make judgements on the data.
- Analysis of costs not readily available even though we have a very detailed costing system. E.g.. fuel can be across many contracts and overhead codes and we have to add them all up.
- Our NI work includes lots of central costs which proved difficult to split out.

Duplication of information

- Waste of time spent providing meaningless info that nobody looks at and distraction away from the more pressing task of try to run business in very difficult economic times - just like many other DETI surveys - duplicity of info to keep people in jobs.
- Extra cost burden on business for a non productive exercise, which during the current difficult economic period could be done without. Have had too many different surveys to complete over several years.
- Business relatively the same year to year... few changes.

57

Based on replies from respondents, what have you estimated the cost to respondents to be?

(This information is the same as question 17)

The estimated respondent burden for 2010 is £280,637.

58

Did you assume actual response when calculating respondents' costs?

- Yes, only actual respondents costs/time assumed
- No, assumed 100% response rate but with lower cost/time for non-respondents
- No, assumed 100% response rate with no differentiation between respondents' and non-respondents' cost/time

59

Which method did you use to calculate the cost to survey respondents?

Please also provide a breakdown of the calculation, to show how you arrived at the total cost.

Compliance costs are estimated in line with Office for National Statistics (ONS) practices. The calculation of costs is based on the length of time taken to complete a form which is recorded as part of the questionnaire response, the number of forms completed and average hourly rates for the relevant managerial level inter alia.

The method used is the same as that used to calculate compliance costings for the survey. This separates the questionnaires into four employment sizebands (0-24, 25-99, 100-249, 250+). To produce a cost per sizeband we calculate a median time based on sizeband and multiply that by the cost per hour for a middle manager.

60

Did you find that the benefits justified the cost to respondents?

Yes
No

(Please give an outline of the benefits justifying the cost, in the 'Yes' set of boxes below)
(Please explain, in the single 'No' box below, why you are going ahead with collecting the extra information)

Yes:

Type of user	Justification of the cost to respondents
Government users	Please see summary of government users of data above
Respondent users	We have a wide variety of users who access our data. These range from academics and researchers to businesses. We also analyse the data and provide extracts of data, which respondents specifically need and request in order to assist their work.
Other users - please specify here	

No:

61

Do you have a policy on the procedures for dealing with day-to-day complaints from both suppliers and users of information?

Please tick all that apply

Yes - for complaints from suppliers
Yes - for complaints from users
No

62

What are the main causes of complaints and what action have you taken to make improvements in response to these complaints?

Users - Inadequate level of detail - sub regional
Suppliers - Complaints about having to complete the survey however the survey is compulsory and designed to minimise the burden on small businesses.

63

What recommendations could be made based on the comments of respondents?

- Research whether it's possible to simplify the questionnaire to more closely align with the data created during financial reporting
- Continuously assess the relevance of questions asked on the ABI form to the groups they are asked
- Continue to emphasise the fact that respondents can simply submit their financial statements as a proxy
- Make available assistance to respondents who would otherwise have required external assistance in completing their form
- Review definitions and terminology to keep requirement for technical ability to a minimum

Recommendations

Each of the previous sections concluded with a description of potential improvements to the survey. This section draws together those potential changes to make recommendations arising from this review along with an action plan for implementing them. Those changes that are more ambitious or cannot be implemented at this time are also described.

64

Based on the information supplied above, list the recommendations for aspects of the survey that need further improvement or investigation and your action plan for doing this work prior to the next review.

Recommendations

- A focus on maintaining a low burden on business.
- Review the validation process to ensure the re-contact rate is kept to a minimum.
- Increase the sample size and build in a degree of flexibility to allow for ad hoc targeting of specific industries.
- Continually improve our ability to handle respondent queries and provide all necessary assistance to those completing the questionnaire

Action plan

The ABI is currently undertaking a large change project aimed at developing an Integrated Business Survey System (IBSS). The objective of the IBSS is to develop an IT system that can achieve a more flexible, timely, congruent means of obtaining business survey data, with reduced burden on business. This involves a significant change in capture, edit, validation procedures and ELMS branch organisational structure.

DFP is conscious of the burden on business arising from government surveys, and if an integrated business survey processing system was developed it would minimise contact with businesses since the data would be captured once but used many times.

Benefits of this approach include but are not limited to:

- Improved consistency of variables common to multiple surveys, thusly improving user-confidence in the information that was being provided;
- Reduced burden on business; and
- Reduced cost to government through efficiencies, resulting in a retargeting of resources based on changing user needs.

In light of the user preference to boost the sample size of the ABI, and a developing need by policy-makers to expand upon export statistics, ELMS have used the opportunity presented by the IBSS to merge the ABI and MSES surveys. For ABI/MSES 2011, one joint questionnaire has issued to just over nine thousand businesses. While this is slightly higher than the combined number of forms that issued separately to those businesses sampled by the ABI and MSES, it should provide substantially more robust financial estimates but minimise additional burden on business and, for the first time, a comprehensive picture of exports across the economy. The merging of the questionnaires should also provide more consistent measures of common variable and hence improve user-confidence in the statistics that are being produced.

65

Please list any improvements to the survey that are not possible at this time including the barriers to implementation.

Although administrative data covering components of the ABI is collected by HMRC among others, this data is not freely and legally available for use in statistics. Furthermore, the data are not always sufficiently timely or may not include all the information required for statistical purposes.

We have limited scope to make changes to the questionnaire or timetable as they must align with both the ONS and EU standards.

All changes to the survey must be made following consultation with our user group and the statistics advisory committee to ensure both their relevance and appropriateness.