

Introduction

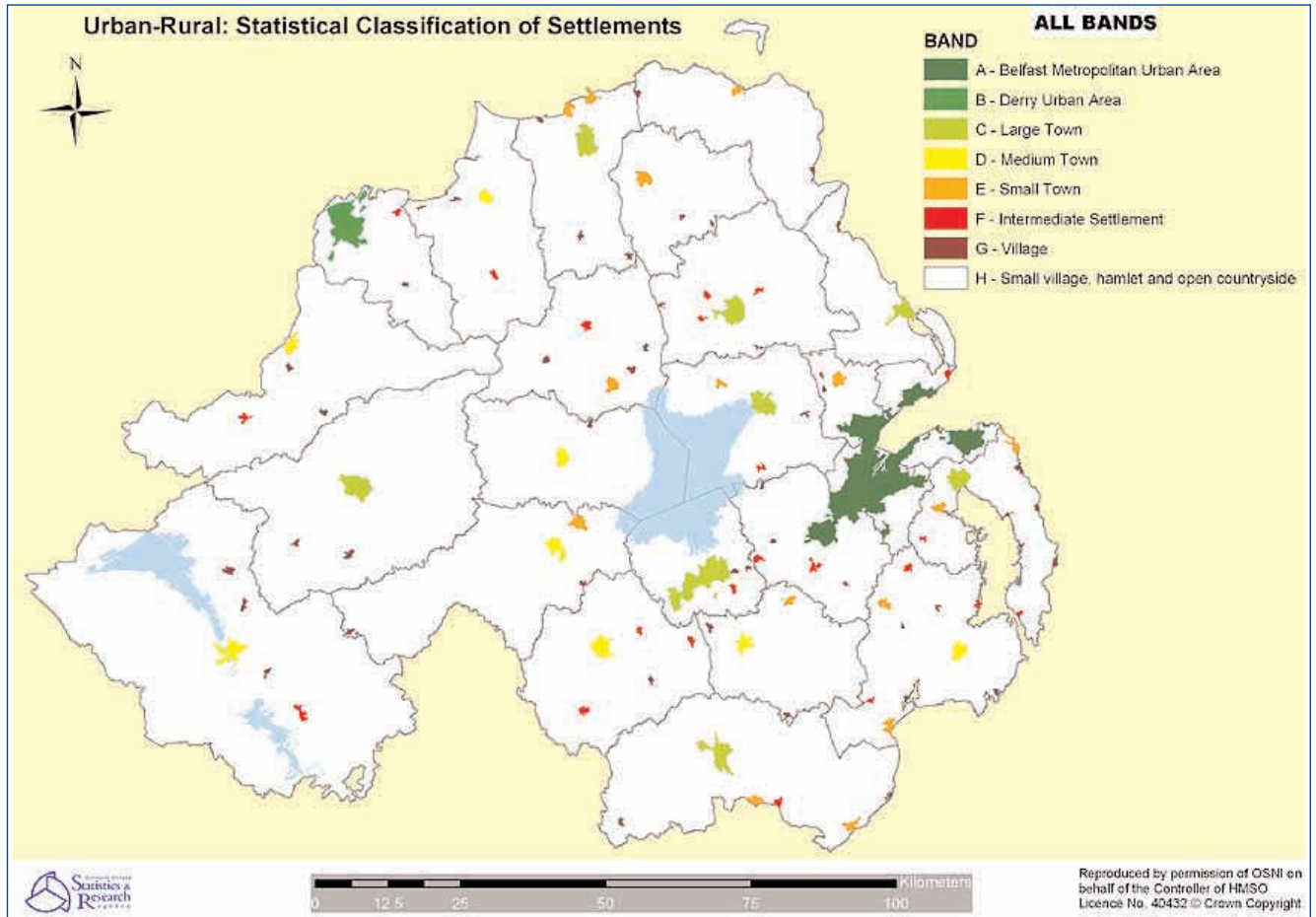
1. Urban and rural issues are of some considerable importance for government. The European Union pays grants for urban and rural development. Rurality is a factor in allocation of health and social care funding; housing, roads, water and sewerage and the provision and maintenance of schools all present different issues in urban and rural areas. Employment in rural areas has its own distinctive features, and urban and rural leisure facilities are often quite dissimilar.
2. In Northern Ireland, there is a Department with specific responsibility for rural development, and another with responsibility for urban regeneration, whilst none of the other Departments can ignore the issue, as “rural-proofing” of policies is in place.
3. Although urban and rural issues are recognised as important, within government there is an absence of any generally accepted definition of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’. Annex A summarises departmental responses to a series of Assembly questions regarding the definition of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’. The Urban-Rural Definition Group was set up to examine this issue. Annex B provides the terms of reference of the group. The group has undertaken a formal consultation on an interim version of this report and this publication is the culmination of the first phase of the work. Annex C summarises the analysis and conclusions of the interim report and the responses to the consultation on the interim report.
4. The distinction between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ is not clear-cut. Annex D provides a historical perspective to the issue and discusses some conceptual issues relating to urban and rural settlements. From the outset of the research, three criteria were identified as relevant in ascribing urban characteristics to settlements: population size, population density and service provision. The issue of service provision is discussed in more detail in Annex E, which concludes with recommendations for further work in this area. It was recognised that none of these criteria, in isolation, is sufficient and that a combination of criteria are required to classify settlements.
5. In contrast rural areas are characterised more by a dispersed population, agricultural or other extensive land use and distance from major urban centres. Annex F discusses accessibility in more detail.
6. Ideally, settlements should be delineated from the study of built-up areas using large scale maps or ariel photographs. This is discussed in Annex G. For the purpose of this study, statutory settlement development limits provided by the DOE Planning Service as of March 2004 have been used as the best geographical delineation for defining settlements. The naming of settlements used in this report also follows that used by the Planning Service. It should be noted that settlement development limits are designated by Planning Service in order to protect the character of settlements and prevent urban sprawl into the surrounding countryside whilst providing for future

development needs. Their purpose is not solely to define settlements geographically. Furthermore, Area Plans are updated and replaced through an ongoing programme by Planning Service. Details are available on the Planning Service website (www.planningni.gov.uk).

7. Attention was focused on larger settlements with a population of 1,000 or more. The approximately 100 settlements so identified are very disparate in character. The Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (roughly 580,000 population) and Derry Urban Area (roughly 91,000 population) are plainly urban by any criterion of population size, population density or service provision. They are sufficiently different from each other and from other settlements to warrant unique statistical classification.
8. The Group looked at one particular service provision facility namely the provision of a post office. The group ascertained that no settlement with a population of 2,250 or more lacked a post office - one significant indicator of service function. A statistical classification of settlements above this limit was identified using rank-population size and a limited analysis of service criteria. The table and map below details the final statistical classification of settlements.

Table: Statistical classification of settlements

Label	Name	Settlement population size (2001 Census)
Band A:	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA)	c580,000
Band B:	Derry Urban Area (DUA)	c90,000
Band C:	Large town	18,000 or more and under 75,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)
Band D:	Medium town	10,000 or more and under 18,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)
Band E:	Small town	4,500 or more and under 10,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)
Band F:	Intermediate settlement	2,250 or more and under 4,500 (outside BMUA and DUA)
Band G:	Village	1,000 or more and under 2,250 (outside BMUA and DUA)
Band H:	Small village, hamlet and open countryside	Settlements of less than 1,000 people and open countryside (outside BMUA and DUA)



(c) Crown Copyright Licence No: 40432

Statistical classification of settlements in Northern Ireland

9. The full final statistical classification of settlements in bands A-G is also summarised in the attached gazetteer. Information is also presented on population and household statistics from the 2001 Census. More detailed 2001 Census data, presenting Census Key Statistics for these settlements, are being published concurrently with this report.

A default urban-rural definition

10. The Group recommend that government departments and other users should consider defining 'urban' and 'rural' areas in ways which are appropriate for different programmes and projects. Thus as an example, a settlement such as Castleterragh or Keady may be eligible for certain rural programmes because such settlements provide services for rural hinterlands. However such settlements are likely to have housing or commercial areas that have urban characteristics, and therefore may also validly be eligible for certain urban programmes. It follows that different definitions of urban and rural are appropriate on different occasions. However, the group recognises the value of a commonly agreed default definition of urban-rural, not least for the purpose of answering general queries such as estimating the number of people living in 'urban' or 'rural' areas.

11. In the absence of a programme-specific definition, Bands A-E can be defined as urban and Bands F-H as rural. This reflects the broad consensus of past departmental usage that the divide between urban and rural lies among settlements whose populations are between 3,000 and 5,000. Under this definition, approximately 65 per cent of the Northern Ireland population live in urban areas and 35 per cent in rural areas. It is stressed that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and policy-makers will need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies.
12. Similar reports classifying settlements in England & Wales and Scotland were published in 2004, including a multi-level classification of settlements. The England and Wales report includes an urban-rural break-point at a settlement population of 10,000 people. The Scotland report includes a settlement break-point at 10,000 population. Northern Ireland statistics can be presented on a common GB break-point at the 10,000 population level. For further details of the England & Wales and Scotland definitions see Annex H.

Areas for further work

13. There is limited readily available information on private sector services and employment in settlements of different size. Data on public sector service provision is more readily available through the NI Neighbourhood Statistics System www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk, but this still requires development and analysis.
14. The Group recommends that a project be set up to estimate levels of public, private, community and voluntary sector service provision and employment availability in settlements. This would assist with the monitoring of the health of settlements in Northern Ireland and of urban/rural development, as well as in refining urban/rural classifications.
15. The use made of services is not governed simply by their presence or absence. It is necessary for users to reach those services, and for many purposes, remote areas should be distinguished from more accessible areas. Work is ongoing in this area within the review of measures of spatial deprivation in Northern Ireland. The Group recommend that the results of this work be taken forward to provide detailed statistics on access to services at the individual settlement level, taking account of public and private transport availability.
16. The Group recommends that an inter-Departmental Group manage the work on service provision and service access and when this work is completed the gazetteer of settlements should be reviewed to encompass service provision and accessibility. It is noted that, on the basis of the recommendations in the Group's interim report, work on service provision and access has already commenced.
17. Finally the Group notes that population and service provision change over time and that the work should be revised and updated on a regular basis.

February 2005

Inter Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group