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Burden to Households & Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments, 2017/18

Statistics Bulletin

Summary of Key Findings

- There were 134 surveys or parts of surveys¹, issued to Households and Individuals by Northern Ireland Government Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) in 2017/18, and 262,841 responses were received.
- The total burden to NI Households and Individuals in 2017/18 was 38,465 hours, or 1,603 days. The Department of Finance (DoF) was the Department responsible for the single highest proportion of this burden (27%) and face-to-face methods accounted for the highest proportion of burden by data collection method (42%).
- In 2017/18, the average time taken to complete a survey, or part of a survey, was 9 minutes². However, there was a wide variance in completion times across surveys, with the shortest survey taking on average less than half a minute to complete, and the longest survey taking on average just under five and a half hours per respondent³.
- There were two surveys in 2017/18 with a compliance burden of over 3,000 hours. Together, these surveys were responsible for 17% of the total compliance burden. These surveys were: the *Health Survey Northern Ireland* (DoH) and *Labour Force Survey* (DoF). Both these surveys contributed to Official Statistics.

¹ When several NI Government Departments share a survey, such as the NI Omnibus Survey or the Continuous Household Survey, each module (or part of the survey) is counted separately. This means that these surveys, and the respondents to these surveys, will be counted more than once. The compliance burden however, is based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

² The average time taken to complete a survey has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the total number of responses.

³ The longest survey (*National Diet & Nutrition Survey*) includes the time taken by respondents to participate in a face-to-face interview and complete a paper diary.

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1. Background

This 2017/18 report is the third in an annual series detailing the burden to Households and Individuals of completing Government Statistical Surveys in Northern Ireland; the first report covered both 2015/16 and 2014/15. This report complements the more established annual report on the Cost to Business of complying with NI Government Statistical surveys⁴.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)⁵ has a statutory basis⁶ 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:

V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

It is on this basis that NISRA produces an annual report detailing the burden placed on Households and Individuals as a result of completing statistical surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments.

This report includes information on the number of surveys, or parts of surveys, issued by NI Departments (including their Arm's Length Bodies) in the financial year ending 31st March 2018, and the time spent by Households and Individuals in complying with these regular and ad-hoc Government surveys. Department's names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the time series as some surveys, and types of surveys, which were excluded prior to 2016/17 are now included; specifically surveys carried out by Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), and some participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose. Further details are provided in Appendix A3.

⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

⁵ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

⁶ Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

Useful Links:

- [Previous publications in this series](#)
- [Cost to Business publications](#)
- [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- [NISRA publications and datasets](#)

- [Downloadable data](#)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS), no longer produces a report or comparable data for England and Wales, although some Government Departments publish information for their own department.

2. Definitions

In this report a survey refers to a single survey, or part of a survey, carried out by or on behalf of a NI Government Department. When a survey is shared by a number of Departments, each part of the survey will be treated as a separate survey. This means a survey could be counted multiple times.

The number of responses is based on the achieved sample for the survey, or part of the survey. When a survey is shared by more than one Department, each single respondent will be counted as a response to each part of the survey. Thus when responses are aggregated across Departments, some respondents will be counted multiple times.

The compliance burden due to a survey is defined as the **time spent** by the Household or Individual in responding to the survey, or part of the survey⁷.

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

The average time to complete a survey has been calculated as the total compliance burden for the group of surveys (or parts of surveys) divided by the total number of responses for the group of surveys (or parts of surveys).

⁷ While the survey and respondents to the survey, will be counted more than once, the compliance burden is calculated based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

3. Compliance burden to households & individuals

In 2017/18, there were 134 surveys, or parts of surveys⁸, issued to households and individuals by NI Government Departments. The total compliance burden to Households and Individuals was 38,465 hours or 1,603 days.

In this report a survey refers to a single survey or part of a survey, carried out by or on behalf of a NI Government Department. A survey which is shared by a number of different Government Departments will be counted multiple times.

Just over one third of all surveys were conducted by DfC (34%). The remaining departments were each responsible for around one tenth or fewer of surveys to households and individuals. DAERA and PPS each carried out just one survey to households and individuals.

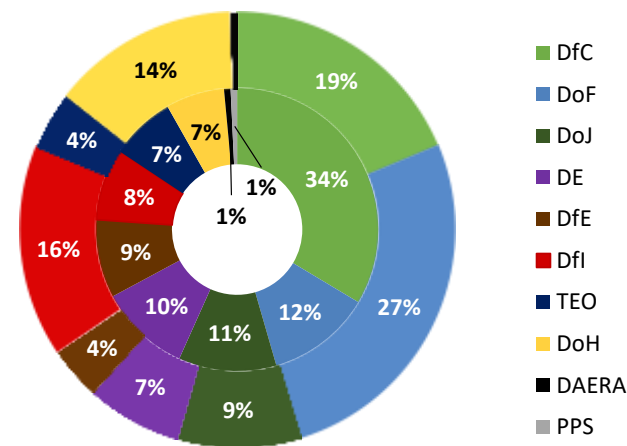
Over a quarter (27%) of the compliance burden can be attributed to DoF surveys, while just under one fifth (19%) can be attributed to DfC surveys. DfI was responsible for 16% of the total burden, while DoH was responsible for 14% (Table 1 and Figure 1).

While DfC accounted for over a third (34%) of all surveys, only 19% of the compliance burden was attributable to DfC. In contrast, over one quarter (27%) of the compliance burden was attributable to DoF, but only 12% of all surveys.

Table 1: Number and Burden (Hours) for Surveys by Department⁹

Department	Number of Surveys ¹⁰	Percentage of Surveys	Compliance Burden (hours)	Percentage of Burden
DAERA	1	0.7%	184	0.5%
DE	14	10.4%	2,738	7.1%
DfC	45	33.6%	7,194	18.7%
DfE	12	9.0%	1,512	3.9%
DfI	11	8.2%	6,035	15.7%
DoF	16	11.9%	10,227	26.6%
DoH	9	6.7%	5,336	13.9%
DOJ	15	11.2%	3,531	9.2%
TEO	10	7.5%	1,677	4.4%
PPS	1	0.7%	30	0.1%
Total	134	100.0%	38,465	100.0%

Figure 1: Percentage of Surveys (Inner) & Percentage of Burden (Outer) by Department



⁸ When several NI Government Departments share a survey, such as the NI Omnibus Survey or the Continuous Household Survey, each module (or part of the survey) is counted separately. This means that these surveys, and respondents to these surveys, will be counted more than once. The compliance burden however, is based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

⁹ Information on the surveys carried out by each Department is available in the downloadable data (see Appendix C).

¹⁰ This includes 16 modules within 2 runs of the NI Omnibus; 7 in the Continuous Household Survey; 4 in the NI Life & Times survey; 5 in the Young Life & Times and 2 in the Kids' Life & Times. Each of these modules is counted separately.

A relatively small number of surveys were responsible for a disproportionate amount of the overall compliance burden to Households and Individuals. Figure 2 groups surveys by their compliance burden. The blue bars show the percentage of surveys in each category and the green bars show the percentage of the overall compliance burden due to those surveys.

Figure 2 illustrates that although only 14% of surveys had a total survey burden of over 500 hours, these surveys were responsible for 73% of the total burden. In contrast, 45% of surveys had a burden of 49 hours or less and contributed only 3% of the total burden to Households and Individuals.

In 2017/18, two surveys had a compliance burden of 3,000 hours or more. Together, these surveys were responsible for almost one fifth (17%) of the total compliance burden. These surveys were: the *Health Survey Northern Ireland* (DoH) and *Labour Force Survey* (DoF) and are highlighted in red in Figure 3.

A further four surveys had a compliance burden of 1,800 hours or more, accounting for a further 23% of the total compliance burden. These surveys were: *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey* (DfI); *Family Resources Survey* (DfC); *Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey* (DfC); and *Continuous Household Survey - CSU Core Questions* (DoF).

Figure 2: Number of Surveys by Compliance Burden, and Contribution to Overall Compliance Burden

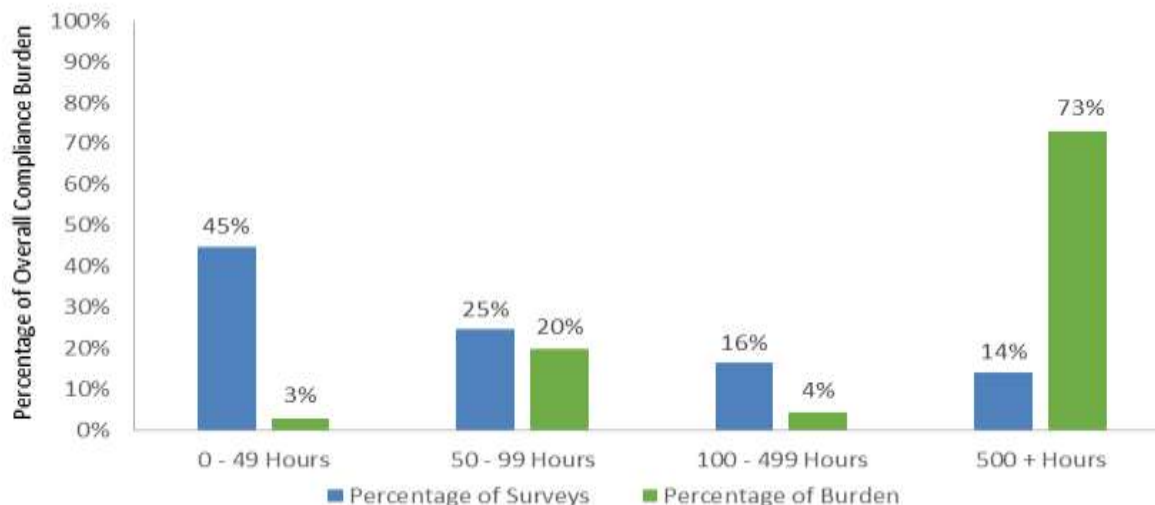
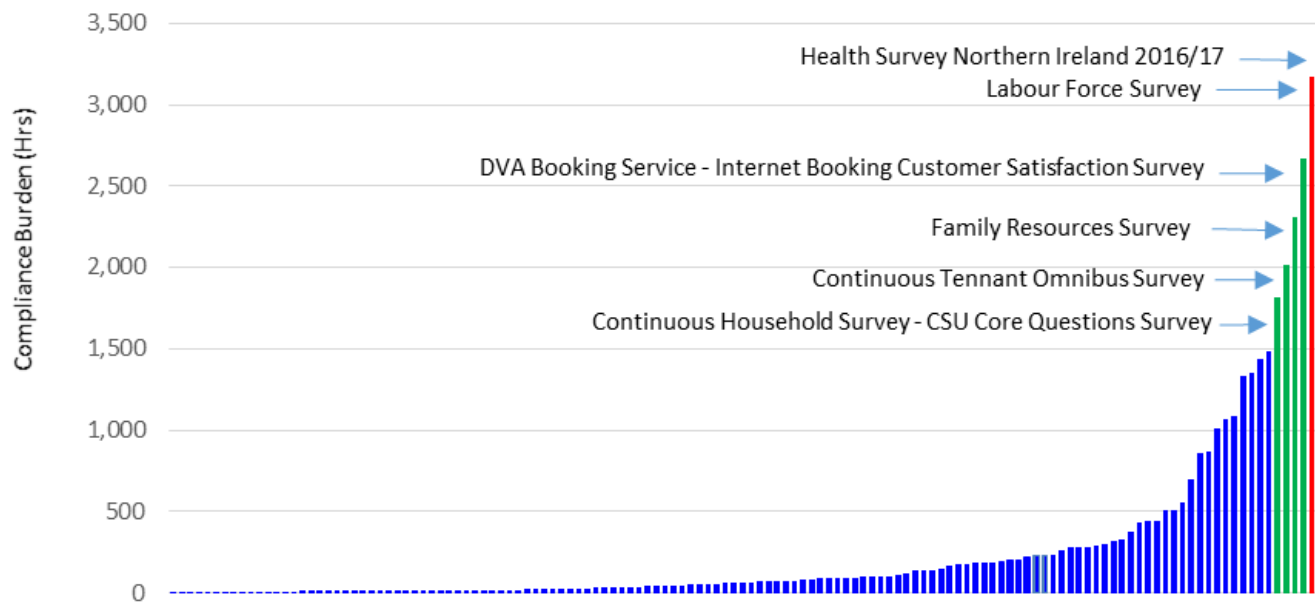


Figure 3: Distribution of surveys by total compliance burden



These four surveys are highlighted in green in Figure 3.

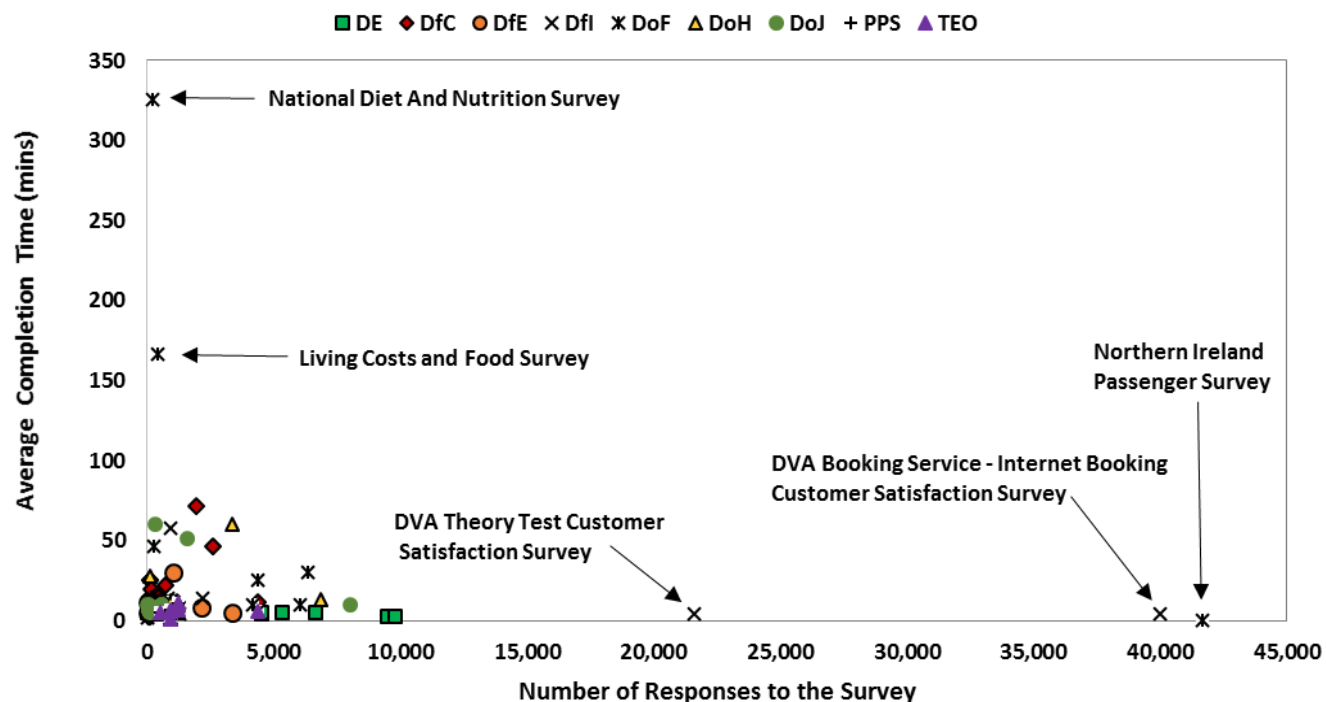
Four of the six surveys, with a compliance burden greater than 1,800 hours, contributed to official statistics. These four surveys accounted for 47% of the burden attributable to 'official statistics' surveys, while the other two surveys contributed 29% of the burden due to 'other surveys'¹¹.

The total burden due to each survey will depend on both the number of Households and Individuals responding and the time taken to complete the survey, or part of the survey. Figure 4 shows the relationship between these two factors.

There were three outliers in terms of a high number of responses with low average completion times. The *NI Passenger Survey* (DoF) had 41,646 responses and an average completion time of 24 seconds. The *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey* (DfI) obtained 40,009 responses and had an average completion time of four minutes. Likewise, the *DVA Theory Test Customer Satisfaction Survey* (DfI) had 21,612 responses and an average completion time of four minutes.

In contrast, the *National Diet & Nutrition Survey* (DoF) obtained 197 responses, but had an average completion time of 326 minutes.

Figure 4: Average Completion Time¹² by Number of Responses to the Survey



Additionally, the *Living Costs & Food Survey* (DoF) obtained 392 responses and had an average of 165 minutes. Both these surveys collected data using a face-to-face interview and required respondents to keep a paper diary.

Table 2 shows the average completion time 'per response' by NI Government Department, alongside the total number of responses and total compliance burden.

Overall the average completion time 'per response' was just under 9 minutes. However, there was a wide variance in completion times across surveys, with the shortest survey taking on average less than half a minute (24 seconds) to complete (the *Northern Ireland Passenger Survey*) and the longest

¹¹ Further information on the compliance burden for individual surveys can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

¹² The average completion time has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the number of responses.

survey (the *National Diet and Nutrition Survey*) taking on average almost five and half hours (326 minutes) per respondent¹¹.

The average completion time ‘per response’ was highest for DoH at just under 22 minutes, closely followed by DfC, where the average completion time was 21.5 minutes.

For DoH, the high average completion time ‘per response’ reflects the *Health Survey, Northern Ireland* which had an average completion time of 60 minutes (and 3,355 responses). The *Inpatient Patient Experience Survey*, with 6,868 responses, had a much shorter average completion time of just 13 minutes.

DfC carried out two large surveys which had high average completion times; these were the *Family Resources Survey* (70 minutes; 1,941 responses) and the *Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey* (45 minutes; 2,600 responses). The other surveys carried out by DfC were much shorter with average completion times of 25 minutes or less.

DE had a low average completion time ‘per response’ of 3.7 minutes. This reflects the two large *Getting Ready to Learn – Parental Surveys* (with over 9,500 responses each) which had an average completion time of just 2 minutes each. Of the other large surveys carried out by DE,

Table 2: Average Completion Time¹², Number of Responses¹³ and Burden by Department

Department	Number of Surveys	Average Time to Complete Surveys (mins)	Number of Responses	Compliance Burden (hours)
DAERA	1	5.0	2,204	184
DE	14	3.7	44,055	2,738
DfC	45	21.5	20,048	7,194
DfE	12	10.0	9,110	1,512
DfI	11	5.2	70,070	6,035
DoF	16	8.4	72,802	10,227
DoH	9	21.9	14,620	5,336
DOJ	15	13.8	15,360	3,531
TEO	10	7.4	13,661	1,677
PPS	1	2.0	911	30
Total	134	8.8	262,841	38,465

three had an average completion times of 5 minutes, with the fourth having an average completion of 4 minutes. These four surveys had between 4505 and 6636 responses each.

PPS only conducted one survey, *Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service - NI Omnibus (Spring 17)*. This had an average completion time ‘per response’ of 2 minutes.

DoF conducted both the shortest (*Northern Ireland Passenger Survey*) and the two longest surveys (the *National Diet and Nutrition Survey* and *Living costs and Food Survey*). The relatively low average completion time ‘per response’ for DoF is due to the size of the *Northern Ireland Passenger Survey*, which accounts for almost three-fifths (57%) of all the responses received by DoF.

¹³ When several NI Government Departments share a survey, such as the NI Omnibus Survey or the Continuous Household Survey, each module (or part of the survey) is counted separately. This means that these surveys, and respondents to these surveys, will be counted more than once. The compliance burden however, is based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

4. Official Statistics & Other Surveys

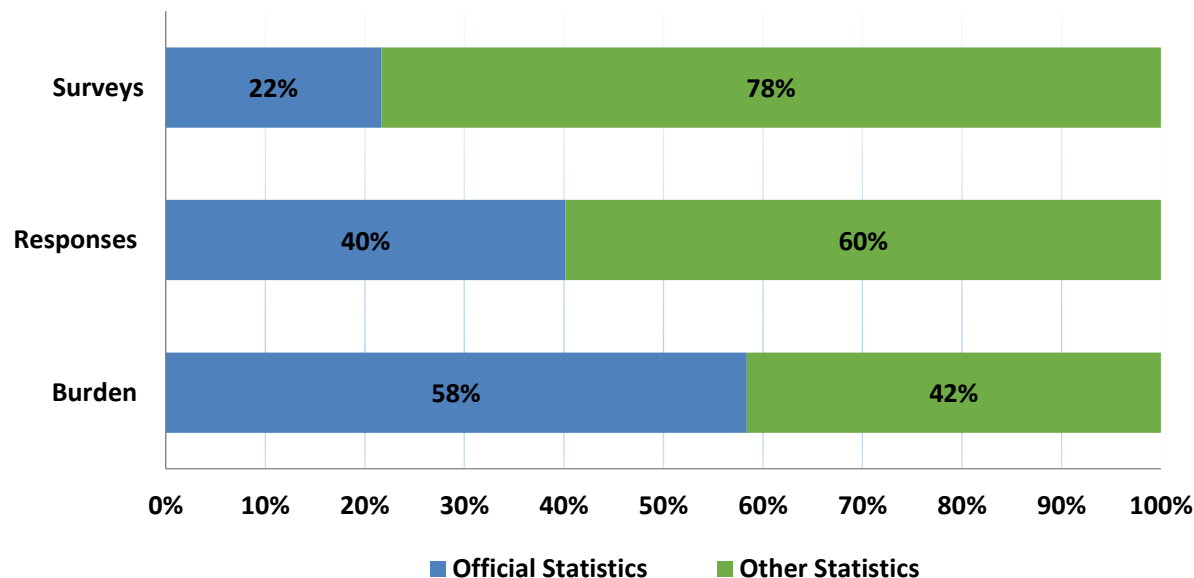
In 2017/18, just over a fifth (22%) of surveys of Household and Individuals contributed towards Official Statistics (see Figure 5). Some of the surveys which did not contribute to Official Statistics contributed to research publications; others were used for the evaluation of schemes and programmes.

Surveys which contributed to Official Statistics made up 40% of all survey responses and 58% of the total compliance burden.

DoF conducted the highest number of surveys which contributed to Official Statistics (10). These accounted for 44% of the overall burden due to Official Statistics surveys (Table 3). DoH conducted two Official Statistics surveys which accounted for 22% of the burden due to Official Statistics surveys, while DfC conducted four Official Statistics surveys which accounted for 16% of the burden due to Official Statistics surveys.

DfC conducted the highest number of surveys which did not contribute to Official Statistics (41). These accounted for 23% of the overall burden due to 'Other Statistics' surveys. Dfl was responsible for the highest proportion of the burden due to 'Other Statistics' surveys. The nine surveys carried out by Dfl, which did not contribute to Official Statistics, accounted for

Figure 5: Percentage of Surveys, Responses and Compliance Burden by Whether Surveys Contribute to Official Statistics



29% of the burden due to 'Other Statistics' surveys and over two-fifths (43%) of the responses for these surveys.

Of the 10,227 hours compliance burden attributable to DoF, 97% of this was incurred by Official Statistics surveys. Similarly, of the 5,336 hours compliance burden attributable to DoH, 91% of this was as a result of Official Statistics surveys.

In contrast, of the 1,512 hours of compliance burden attributable to DfE, 100% of this was as a result of 'Other Statistics' surveys. Likewise, of the 2,738 hours compliance burden attributable to DE, 98% was incurred by 'Other Statistics' surveys.

The burden due to surveys carried out by DfC, DOJ and TEO was much more evenly split between Official and Other Statistics surveys. 49% of the burden attributed to DfC was due to Official Statistics surveys; 46% of the burden attributed to DOJ was due to Official Statistics surveys and 51% of the burden attributed to TEO was due to Official Statistics surveys.

Table 3 shows that average¹⁴ completion times tend to be much higher for surveys which contribute to Official Statistics.

Table 3: Compliance Burden by Official Statistics and Other Statistics, by NI Department

Department	Official Statistics							Other Statistics						
	Number of Surveys		Number of Responses		Compliance Burden		Average Time to Complete Survey	Number of Surveys		Number of Responses		Compliance Burden		Average Time to Complete Survey
	N	%	N	%	Hours	%	Minutes	N	%	N	%	Hours	%	Minutes
DAERA	1	3.4%	2,204	2.1%	184	0.8%	5.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DE	1	3.4%	662	0.6%	44	0.2%	4.00	13	12.4%	43,393	27.6%	2,694	16.8%	3.73
DfC	4	13.8%	8,152	7.7%	3,525	15.7%	25.94	41	39.0%	11,896	7.6%	3,669	22.9%	18.51
DfE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	11.4%	9,110	5.8%	1,512	9.4%	9.96
DfI	2	6.9%	3,052	2.9%	1,364	6.1%	26.81	9	8.6%	67,018	42.6%	4,671	29.2%	4.18
DoF	10	34.5%	68,696	65.0%	9,966	44.4%	8.70	6	5.7%	4,106	2.6%	262	1.6%	3.82
DoH	2	6.9%	10,223	9.7%	4,843	21.6%	28.42	7	6.7%	4,397	2.8%	493	3.1%	6.72
DOJ	5	17.2%	4,948	4.7%	1,635	7.3%	19.83	10	9.5%	10,412	6.6%	1,896	11.8%	10.93
TEO	3	10.3%	6,763	6.4%	860	3.8%	7.63	7	6.7%	6,898	4.4%	818	5.1%	7.11
PPS	1	3.4%	911	0.9%	30	0.1%	2.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	29	100.0%	105,611	100.0%	22,451	100.0%	12.75	105	100.0%	157,230	100.0%	16,014	100.0%	6.11

5. Statutory & Voluntary Surveys

All Statistical Surveys of Households and Individuals carried out by NI Government Departments in 2017/18 were Voluntary Surveys¹⁵.

The use of Voluntary Surveys for Official Statistics reflects the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) which states that:

V5.4 Voluntary participation in statistical data collection should be sought, rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible

¹⁴ The average completion time has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the number of responses.

¹⁵ Although completion of the survey is voluntary, there may be a regulatory requirement for the Department to carry out such a survey.

6. Data Collection Methods

Face-to-face surveys (including face-to-face plus a diary) remained the most popular method of data collection, making up 46% of all surveys, 37% of all responses and 42% of the total compliance burden (see Figure 6).

Mixed methods was the next most popular approach making up 19% of all surveys, 19% of the responses and 29% of the compliance burden. These mixed method surveys primarily used online data collection combined with a paper questionnaire (11 surveys) or online data collection combined with paper questionnaires and telephone interviews (5 surveys). The remaining surveys used Face-to-face and telephone (3 surveys); Face-to-face and online/email (3 surveys); Telephone and email (1 survey); or Paper and telephone (1 survey).

Online/email surveys were the third most popular approach making up 14% of all surveys, 26% of responses and 13% of compliance burden. This was followed by paper based surveys which made up 11% of surveys, 13% of responses and 8% of the burden. Finally, telephone surveys were the least popular, making up 10% of all surveys, 6% of responses and 8% of total compliance burden.

The difference between the number of surveys, number of responses and higher levels of

Figure 6: Percentage of Total Surveys, Responses and Compliance Burden by Method of Collection¹⁶

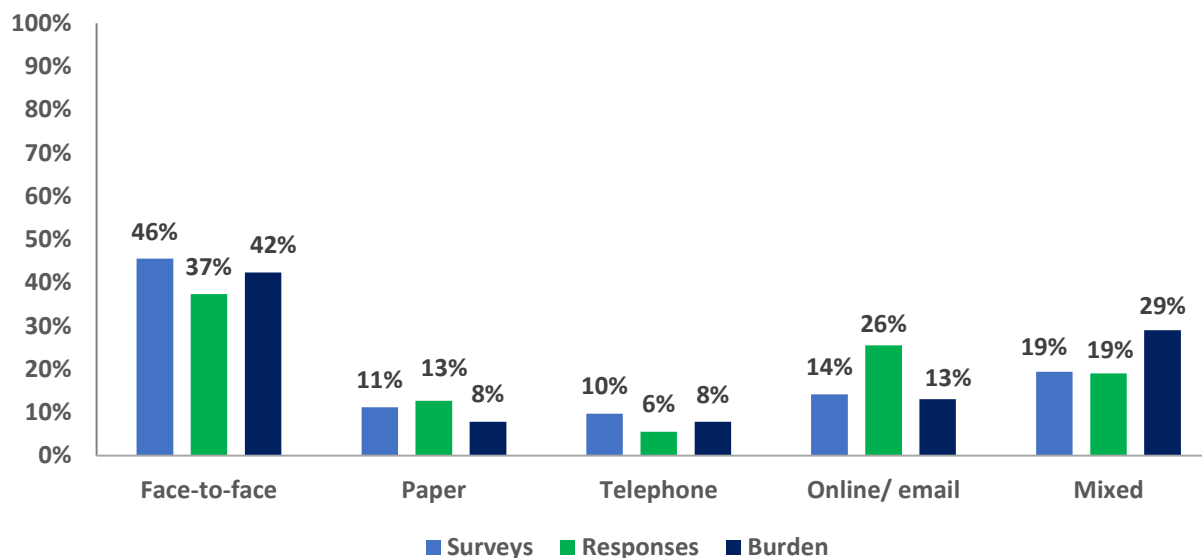


Table 4: Issued sample size, achieved sample size, response rate and average completion time by data collection method

Method	Number of surveys	Issued sample size (average)	Achieved sample size (average)	Response rate (average) ¹⁷	Average completion time (mins)
Face-to-face	61	2,610	1,608	68%	10.0
Paper	15	4,726	2,216	41%	5.4
Telephone	13	3,564	1,116	47%	12.4
Online/email	19	50,093	3,529	49%	4.5
Mixed	26	5,632	1,920	45%	13.4
Total	134	10,258	1,962	56%	8.8

¹⁶ Further information on individual surveys can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

¹⁷ The 'response rate (average)' has been calculated as the average of the response rates for all surveys using that method. This means that each survey has equal weight.

compliance burden (e.g. mixed methods) or lower levels of compliance burden (e.g. online/email) can be explained by differences in the average survey completion times (see Table 4).

Table 4 also shows that online/email surveys tended to be used for the largest surveys. This was followed by mixed methods, paper, telephone, and face-to-face surveys.

Face-to-face surveys were used for almost half of all surveys of household and individuals (46%) and had the highest average response rate (68%), which was 19 percentage points higher than the next most effective data collection method.

Telephone surveys were the least used data collection method, although telephone interviews were often combined with other methods in surveys using mixed methods.

Online/ email data collection methods had the lowest average completion time at 4.5 minutes, followed by paper questionnaires which had an average completion time of 5.4 minutes.

While the average response rate overall was similar for different data collection methods, there was wide variation across surveys¹⁸.

¹⁸ Further information on individual surveys can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

Table 5 below shows how different NI Government Departments used the various data collection methods to conduct surveys.

DfC conducts the most surveys of households and individuals overall and almost two thirds (64%) were conducted using face-to-face methods; DoF used face-to-face methods for almost three-fifths (57%) of its surveys. While TEO only carried out 10 surveys, seven of these (70%) used face-to-face methods. DfE conducted the most solely online/email surveys (58% of all surveys conducted by DfE) while DE carried out the highest number of mixed method surveys (71% of all the surveys carried out by DE). DfC conducted the most telephone surveys (16% of all the surveys carried out by DfC).

Table 5: Collection Methods for Surveys by Department: Number of Surveys and Compliance Burden (hours)

Dept	Face-to-Face		Postal		Telephone		Online/ Email		Multiple	
	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden
DAERA	1	184	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DE	1	44	2	644	0	0	1	2	10	2,048
DfC	29	6,006	5	361	7	770	3	28	1	30
DfE	2	462	2	282	1	506	7	262	0	0
DfI	4	1,491	2	72	2	278	2	4,108	1	85
DoF	9	5,150	1	28	2	102	1	70	3	4,877
DoH	1	15	1	1,488	0	0	3	238	4	3,594
DOJ	6	1,683	1	97	1	1,333	2	299	5	119
TEO	7	1,234	1	45	-	-	-	-	2	399
PPS	1	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	61	16,300	15	3,016	13	2,990	19	5,007	26	11,152

7. Between Year Comparisons

Due to the biennial, triennial or quinquennial nature of several of the surveys¹⁹, as well as the large number of ad-hoc and programme-specific surveys, the number of surveys and resultant compliance burden fluctuates from one year to the next. Additionally, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimising the burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics – see Section 8.

There is a discontinuity in the series between 2015/16 and 2016/17, indicated by the black line in Table 6. Prior to the 2016/17 data collection exercise, a review was conducted of the guidance provided to data suppliers to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys. As a result of this review, a number of surveys that were not included in previous years have been included in departmental returns for 2016/17 and 2017/18, specifically surveys carried out by Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and some surveys which were omitted due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service. Examples are participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose²⁰. As a result caution is urged when comparing the figures presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Changes between 2014/15 and 2017/18

Dept	Number of surveys				Number of responses				Compliance burden (hours)			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
DAERA	2	1	1	1	2,549	2,495	2,532	2,204	153	124	295	184
DE	6	6	24	14	7,562	19,023	31,477	44,055	932	4,881	8,816	2,738
DfC	29	26	40	45	13,865	18,365	33,984	20,048	4,784	4,544	10,706	7,194
DfE	9	9	16	12	14,077	6,519	13,112	9,110	3,156	1,330	2,020	1,511
DfI	15	12	13	11	70,513	16,096	81,540	70,070	5,665	2,096	7,944	6,034
DoF	12	8	18	16	66,859	64,675	74,603	72,802	7,073	6,548	8,494	10,227
DoH	4	4	3	9	15,963	5,343	11,262	14,620	7,470	3,916	5,938	5,335
DOJ	16	27	31	15	18,645	14,018	9,354	15,360	3,693	3,473	2,399	3,531
TEO	8	8	10	10	12,116	10,067	18,801	13,661	1,374	1,902	1,685	1,677
PPS	1	-	2	1	1,114	-	1,863	911	105	-	346	30
Total	102	101	158	135	223,263	156,601	278,528	262,841	34,409	28,819	48,647	38,464

¹⁹ There were nine biennial, seven triennial and three quinquennial surveys, or parts of surveys, carried out in 2016/17; this compares to six biennial surveys, or parts of surveys, in 2017/18. The triennial Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, carried out in 2016/17, had 7,000 responses and was split across six NI Departments, contributing 42,000 responses in 2016/17. The total compliance burden (across all Departments) for this survey was 4,083 hours.

²⁰ Further details are provided in Appendix A3.

DAERA

DAERA ran a module in the *Continuous Household Survey* in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. The DAERA question set was slightly shorter in 2017/18 resulting in a reduction in the overall compliance burden.

DE

The number of surveys carried out by DE increased from 6 in 2015/16 to 24 in 2016/17, before dropping to 14 in 2017/18. The historical increase between 2015/16 to 2016/17 was a result of the inclusion of surveys conducted by CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments), the Education Authority, and the Teachers Pay Team. These surveys accounted for the increase in the number of forms and over a third of the increase in compliance burden. The decrease between 2016/17 and 2017/18 was driven primarily by year-to-year variation in biennial, triennial and quinquennial surveys, and variation in ad-hoc surveys carried out by DE. There was also a small impact due to the exclusion of surveys of teachers from the 2017/18 data²¹.

The *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey - DE questions* (triennial) and *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study's - PIRLS 2016 Surveys* (Parent, Pupil & Teacher) (every 5 years) took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. These four surveys had 12,685 responses and a burden of 7,397 hours in 2016/17. In 2017/18, DE ran modules on *Shared Education/Community Relations, Equality and Diversity* and *Bullying in school* in the *Kids' Life & Times Survey* and *Young Life & Times Survey*. These four biennial modules had 10,208 responses and a burden of 875 hours. The *Shared Education/Community Relations, Equality and Diversity* module also ran in the *Young Life & Times Survey* in 2016/17 with 1,009 responses and a burden of 135 hours.

There were two new annual *Getting Ready to Learn* surveys in 2017/18 (*Parental Baseline Survey* and *Parental Baseline Follow-up Survey*) which had 19,329 responses and a burden of 644 hours. These large surveys followed on from a smaller survey (of schools) in 2016/17 and ran alongside three school-based surveys²² in 2017/18. The *Young Persons Aged 9-13 Survey* (5,303 responses; 442 hours in 2017/18) which had been misclassified as a business survey in 2016/17 was included in the household & individual data in 2017/18.

²¹ Surveys of employees of NI Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies are excluded from the calculation of survey burden; the majority of teachers are employees of the Education Authority or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) which are all ALBs of the Department of Education. These surveys had been incorrectly included in the 2016/17 data along with surveys carried out by ALBs and branches within DE. They have been excluded from the 2017/18 data. This includes the two annual Customer Satisfaction surveys carried out by the Teachers Pay Team (147 responses; 12 hours in 2016/17) and most likely one or more ad-hoc survey carried out by CCEA (1,504 responses; 125 hours in 2016/17).

²² Surveys of schools are included within the Burden to Business report.

DfC

The compliance burden attributed to surveys carried out by DfC decreased from 10,706 hours in 2016/17 to 7,194 hours in 2017/18 (with the number of responses decreasing from 33,984 to 20,048). This decrease resulted from several large surveys which took place in 2016/17 not taking place in 2017/18.

These surveys included:

- the quinquennial *House condition survey* (2,023 responses; 2,385 hours in 2016/17);
- the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes survey - DfC questions* (7,000 responses; 817 hours in 2016/17)
- the biennial *Liofa's Participant Survey* (533 responses; 178 hours in 2016/17)
- SportNI: *Young Life & Times* and *Kids' Life & Times – Sports modules* (6,182 responses; 254 hours) which did not run in 2017/18
- Arts Council: *NI Omnibus module 'Attendance, participation and attitudes towards Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland'* (1,020 responses; 34 hours) which did not run in 2017/18
- the discontinued *NI Omnibus module 'Volunteering: Attitudes & Behaviours'* (946 responses; 32 hours)

There was also substantial variation in the ad-hoc and irregular surveys carried out by DfC. These included surveys linked to welfare reform and service delivery (impact assessment, customer experience, public attitudes); surveys linked to regeneration 'to gauge perception of an area'; event evaluation surveys carried out by National Museums NI; and the *Financial capability - NI Omnibus (Autumn 17)* module.

DfE

DfE conducted 12 surveys in 2017/18 compared to 16 in 2016/17. This was mostly due to the discontinuation of the *Consumerline customer satisfaction survey/ trading standards follow up satisfaction survey*; the *Tourism NI consumer barometer - survey of individuals* and *Labour Relations Agency Mediation Services Survey – Individual* not taking place in 2017/18; and the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey - DfE questions* taking place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. These four surveys contributed 8,155 responses and a burden of 365 hours in 2016/17. There were also fewer ad-hoc surveys carried out by DfE in 2017/18 than in 2016/17.

The Labour Relations Agency *Advisory Services events evaluation survey* had 2,421 more responses in 2017/18, resulting in 202 more hours of compliance burden. Conversely, the Careers Service *Young Person Satisfaction Survey* and *Adult Satisfaction Questionnaire* surveys combined had 763 fewer responses in 2017/18 which reduced the compliance burden by 64 hours. This was due to a change in methodology to reduce response bias. Tourism NI conducted two surveys in 2017/18 which had not taken place over the last few years: *Tourism NI - Evaluation of International Events* and *Evaluation of Tourism NI Promotional Campaigns - survey of individuals*. These surveys had 3,158 responses in total and a compliance burden of 462 hours. The *Global*

Entrepreneurship Monitor Survey, carried out by Invest NI, had 363 hours less burden and 726 fewer responses in 2017/18. The *Insolvency Service customer satisfaction survey* (49 responses; 4 hours) was included for the first time in 2017/18.

Dfi

Dfi conducted 11 surveys in 2017/18 compared to 13 surveys in 2016/17. The main reason for the decrease was the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey - Dfi Questions* (7,000 responses; 490 hours) which took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. Northern Ireland Water discontinued two²³ of its three customer satisfaction surveys in 2017/18. These surveys accounted for 1,500 responses and a compliance burden of 115 hours. A new one-off survey was conducted by Northern Ireland Water in 2017/18: *Kantar Millward Brown - PC15 Interim Customer Views Research* (1,276 responses; 85 hours).

The biennial *DVA Customer Satisfaction Survey* (1,565 responses; 261 hours) took place in 2016/17. A much smaller biennial survey: *Belfast Bike Life* took place in 2017/18, with 367 responses and 92 hours compliance burden (this is the proportion which belongs to Dfi).

Between 2016/17 and 2017/18 there was a reduction of nearly a fifth (19%) in the compliance burden due to the *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey*, despite a small increase in responses (541). There was also a 31% reduction in the compliance burden due to the *DVA Theory Test Customer Satisfaction Survey* which was accompanied by a 14% reduction in responses. The reduction in compliance burden for these surveys is due to a reduction in the time taken to complete the survey.

DoF

DoF conducted two fewer surveys in 2017/18 than in 2016/17. This was mostly due to three biennial surveys that took place in 2016/17, but not in 2017/18 (*European Social Survey (NI element)*, *NISRA Customer satisfaction* and *Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics*) and an ad-hoc survey (*Northern Ireland Omnibus - ONS Questions on Raw drinking milk*) which ran in 2016/17. These surveys had 2,124 responses and a compliance burden of 175 hours in 2016/17. Land and Property Services (LPS) carried out two ad-hoc customer satisfaction surveys in 2017/18: *LPS Customer Survey (Citizen Space)* and *Customer Information Centre Survey* which contributed 1,174 responses and a compliance burden of 98 hours.

The *Northern Ireland Passenger Survey* had 10,354 less responses in 2017/18 and 69 hours less compliance burden. This was due to a reduction in the sample size so as not to impede passenger flow. In 2017/18, Census Office carried out *Quantitative research on data quality and non-response for Gender*

²³ *Millward Brown - Customer Experience and Satisfaction Study Domestic (Omnibus) & Non-Domestic (Customer Satisfaction)* and *McCallum Layton - Northern Ireland Consumer Satisfaction Survey OPA Survey Fieldwork*

Identity (4,183 responses; 697 hours) as well as the *2017 Census Test* (6,038 responses; 1,006 hours). These were much larger surveys than the two ad-hoc surveys carried out by Census Office in 2016/17 (*Public Acceptability Research – Language* (946 responses; 79 hours) and *Public Acceptability Research - Questions on Gender Identity and Sexual Identity* (2,012 responses; 671 hours)) It is these two larger surveys that account for most of the increase in the compliance burden attributable to DoF. The decrease in the number of responses for DoF is due to the reduction in the sample size for the *Northern Ireland Passenger Survey*.

DoH

DoH conducted nine surveys in 2017/18 compared to three in 2016/17. This increase in surveys was primarily due to the inclusion of Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) surveys which had not previously been included. These surveys contributed 3,300 responses and had a compliance burden of 465 hours.

DoH carried out a large ad-hoc survey in 2017/18, *Inpatient Patient Experience Survey*, which had 6,868 responses and a compliance burden of 1,488 hours. This balanced the decrease due to triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey - Health Modules* (7,000 responses; 1,878 hours) which took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. The Patient and Client Council had a module in the NI Omnibus in 2017/18: *Patient and Client Council Module - NI Omnibus (Spring 17)*, which had 911 responses and a compliance burden of 15 hours.

DOJ

The number of surveys conducted by DOJ has halved (from 31 in 2016/17 to 15 in 2017/18). This decrease is primarily due to year-to-year variation in the number of ad-hoc surveys carried out by DOJ, and in particular programme evaluation surveys carried out by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). In 2016/17, there were 5 ad-hoc surveys related to the Reset programme and 6 ad-hoc surveys related to the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO) programme. These 11 surveys, which contributed 125 responses and 71 hours of compliance burden in 2016/17, were not repeated in 2017/18, nor were there equivalent surveys linked to a different programme. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) also carried out 3 ad-hoc surveys in 2016/17 looking at confidence in policing, which had 23 responses and a compliance burden of 69 hours.

The biennial NI Omnibus module *Public perceptions of the road safety partnership* and triennial *Northern Ireland Omnibus - PBNI Module* took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. These surveys contributed 1,892 responses and 63 hours of burden in 2016/17. Additionally, the figures for the (PSNI) *Victim Satisfaction Survey* were revised in 2017/18 as previously monthly rather than annual totals had been provided; this increased the responses by 7,400 and the compliance burden by 1,233. There was a new annual survey conducted out by DOJ in 2017/18: *NI Life & Times Survey - Community Safety and Perceptions of Paramilitary Influence module* which had 1,203 responses and 134 hours of burden.

TEO

TEO carried out ten surveys in both 2017/18 and 2016/17 (10). There were two new ad-hoc surveys in 2017/18: *The Commission for Victims and Survivors module - NI Omnibus (Autumn 17)* and the *Individual Needs Programme Feedback Survey* carried out by the Victims & Survivors Service (VSS). These two surveys combined had 1,472 responses and a compliance burden of 138 hours.

The *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey - TEO questions* (7,000 responses; 204 hours) which is a triennial survey took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. Moreover, responsibility for the NI Omnibus module *Perceptions of disability and attitudes towards disability* (946 responses; 15 hours) moved from TEO to DfC in 2017/18.

PPS

PPS carried out one survey in 2017/18 compared to two surveys 2016/17. This was due to the biennial *Northern Ireland Victims and Witnesses Survey (NIVAWS)* which took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18.

8. Measures to Reduce Compliance Burden

A few of the specific initiatives employed by NI Government Departments in 2017/18 to reduce respondent burden include:

Department ²⁴	Name of Survey	Measures taken to reduce respondent burden
DfC	Continuous Household Survey (DfC section)	The questions are reviewed on an annual basis to try to minimise respondent burden. In addition, some questions are only asked in alternate years.
	Attitudes to Social Welfare and Reform - NI Omnibus (Spring 17)	Questions reduced from 16/17 survey.
	Attitudes to Social Welfare and Reform - NI Omnibus (Autumn 17)	
DfC (NIHE)	Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey	The survey form is reviewed by a Project Advisory Group on an annual basis to ensure that the burden on respondents is minimised, within the parameters of the survey.
DfI	Cycling Proficiency Scheme	Previously pupils completed an individual paper survey. Teachers then had to input all results in to one overall class sheet. In 2017/18, teachers conducted a face-to-face "hands up" exercise, which made it a lot easier for a class return to be made.
DfI (DVA)	DVA Theory Test Customer Satisfaction Survey	Reduction in time taken to complete survey.
	DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey	
DoF (TSSSB)	Northern Ireland Passenger Survey	Reduced sample size, so as not to impede passenger flow
DoH	Health Survey Northern Ireland	Ongoing review of questionnaire design and content to maximise the volume and quality of information collected whilst paying due cognisance to the length of the questionnaire and the resultant burden on respondents.
DOJ	Organised Crime and Human Trafficking - NI Omnibus (Autumn 17)	Reduction in number of questions.
TEO	Continuous Household Survey (TEO section)	Reduced number of questions hence shorter completion time.

²⁴ NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive); DVA (Driver & Vehicle Agency); TSSSB (Tourism Statistics and Staff Surveys Branch (NISRA branch))

Department	Name of Survey	Measures taken to reduce respondent burden
TEO	Social Investment Fund module - NI Omnibus (Spring 17)	Questions are checked annually to ensure continued need
	Young Life & Times Survey: Minority Ethnic Groups module	
	Young Life & Times Survey: Good Relations module	
	NI Life & Times Survey: Minority Ethnic Groups module	
	NI Life & Times Survey: Community Relations module	

Appendix A: Methodology, Quality and Use of Publication

A1. Rationale for publication

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)²⁵ 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. It emphasises the importance of **transparency**, ensuring respondent **burden is proportionate to benefits** and making **use of existing data** before undertaking a new data collection:

V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

V5.3 The suitability of existing data, including administrative, open and privately-held data, should be assessed before undertaking a new data collection.

V5.1 Opportunities for data sharing, data linkage, cross-analysis of sources, and the reuse of data should be taken wherever feasible. Recognised standards, classifications, definitions, and methods should be applied to data wherever possible.

V5.6 Statistics producers should analyse the impact of new data requirements or extending existing collections on those involved in the collection, recording and supply of data, against the potential value of the statistics in serving the public good.

V5.4 Voluntary participation in statistical data collection should be sought, rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible.

The burden to businesses due to surveys conducted by government departments and their arm's length bodies (ALB's) has been monitored within Northern Ireland since the 1980s. As of the 1st April 2014, surveys to Households and Individuals were included within the scope of Survey Control and this information is now published alongside the [Survey Burden on Business information](#)²⁶.

²⁵ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

²⁶ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

A2. Methodology

Data Collection

Data were requested from Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) in each of the Northern Ireland departments, as well as from officials in Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). Respondents were provided with guidance notes and asked to provide details on Government Statistical Surveys of Households and/or Individuals which their department/ organisation had commissioned or carried out in 2017/18. When surveys are shared by more than one Department, Arm's Length Body, or NISRA branch within DoF, the relevant survey is included on each return and the respondent burden for the survey is proportionately split across the Departments/ ALBs/ branches.

Surveys are included under the commissioning department(s)/ ALB(s) which may not be the same as the department or branch which carried out the survey. Any surveys carried out by NI departments/ ALBs, on behalf of GB departments/ ALBs, where the data are only collected to facilitate the production of UK statistics (and not used by any NI government department) are included under the department or branch carrying out the survey.

Coverage

All statistical surveys to households and/or individuals carried out by, or on behalf of, Northern Ireland Government Departments (including Arm's Length Bodies) are included, as well as statistical surveys carried out by NI Departments (or ALBs) on behalf of GB Government Departments (or ALBs) where the data are used directly by the NI Department (or ALB) or feed into UK Statistics.

Definition of Statistical Survey

A statistical survey is any structured inquiry designed to obtain aggregated data (which may be qualitative or quantitative) where the individual or corporate identities of the respondents are in themselves of little significance.

This includes both regular and ad hoc surveys; both voluntary and statutory surveys that may be required to determine, evaluate or monitor policy and/or action, provide social or economic indicators or measure customer satisfaction. Statistical surveys conducted by, or on behalf of, non-departmental public bodies are also covered. Arm's length bodies are included under their parent departments.

Statistical surveys in scope are not limited to those conducted by statistics branches and include all modes of data collection: completion of a questionnaire; telephone data entry; face-to-face interview; online, etc.

Surveys that contribute to official statistics and those that do not are both in the scope of survey control.

The following are examples of statistical surveys **covered** by these controls:

- Surveys designed to obtain aggregated data;
- Surveys where responses are solicited by means of a direct approach to potential respondents;
- Surveys carried out for departmental sponsors by consultants or private organisations;
- Customer satisfaction surveys designed to identify overall success of a product or service.

The following are examples of surveys **excluded** from survey control:

- Surveys where there is no direct approach made and where respondents clearly select themselves (e.g. web sites, readership surveys, some types of consultation exercises where there is an invitation to comment);
- Where information is required as an integral part of the operational management of a public service. Such returns will often be regulated under specific departmental controls;
- Surveys relating to the contractual obligations of potential respondents to the department or agency concerned;
- Surveys to respondents in central government and its agencies.

Where part of a survey falls outside scope, the part of the survey within scope has been included where possible.

Respondent Burden

For surveys of Households and Individuals, respondent burden is calculated on the basis of time taken for each respondent to complete the survey (or part of the survey). Where a Households or Individual is re-contacted as part of the validation or quality assurance procedures, the burden due to re-contact is also included. The time taken to complete the survey includes any time taken to establish eligibility (e.g. time spent by the interviewer on the doorstep determining household eligibility). Total compliance burden will also include time taken to establish non-eligibility for respondents or households that are subsequently deemed out of scope. Only those responding to the survey are included; non-response is assumed to have zero burden.

If actual survey completion times (and re-contact times) are available then these are used. Otherwise estimated median completion times (and estimated median re-contact times) are used. These estimated median times may be based on information from the survey, paradata, historical data (within the last 5 years), a pilot survey, reviews or survey manager expertise.

The calculation of compliance burden requires the following:

- Number of responses to the survey (include full/partial and invalid)
- Number of respondents re-contacted (if applicable)
- (Actual or) Median time to complete the survey (or part thereof)
- (Actual or) Median re-contact time for validation purposes (or part thereof)

If estimated median re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full survey will be used on the assumption that a respondent may need to review their entire response.

The Compliance Burden (mins) is a simple **addition** of Response Burden (mins), and where applicable, Re-contact Burden (mins)

$$\text{Response Burden (mins)} = \text{No. of responses} \times \text{Median time (mins)}$$

$$\text{Recontact Burden (mins)} = \text{No. recontacted} \times \text{Median time (mins)}$$

Compliance Burden is calculated in minutes but has been changed to hours (or days) in this report.

The calculation of compliance burden will include all questionnaire or interview types. If different questionnaires or interviews are used (and these vary in terms of completion time), then the compliance burden may be estimated separately for each questionnaire/interview type and then summed for an overall compliance burden. Similarly, if there are different groups of respondents with different completion times (e.g. main and proxy respondents) then the calculations for each subgroup may be carried out separately and summed.

Shared Surveys

For those surveys which are commissioned by several branches within DoF/ Departments/ ALBs, each part of the survey is treated as a separate survey. The compliance burden for each part of the survey (or module) is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey. The number of responses is the same as for the complete survey (unless those questions were only asked of a subgroup of respondents).

This approach allows the burden for individual Departments, ALBs (or branches) to be calculated, but means that some surveys and respondents will appear more than once when the 'number of surveys' and 'number of responses' is calculated across branches / Departments / ALBs. For this reason, the number of responses is not a good proxy for the number of respondents (or Households and Individuals responding to NI Government Statistical

Surveys). In addition, some Households and Individuals may also respond to more than one NI Government Statistical Survey. As the compliance burden has been apportioned based on the time taken to answer each part of the survey, there is no ‘double counting’ of compliance burden.

The use of an existing or combined survey (such as the *NI Omnibus Survey*, the *Continuous Household Survey* or one of the *Life & Times Surveys*) is an effective way of reducing respondent burden as the overall contextual questions don’t need to be repeated for each module, and the initial stages/ survey introductions only need to be carried out once.

Average completion time (or average burden per response)

This has been calculated as the total compliance burden (for the group of surveys or parts of surveys) divided by the total number of responses (for the group of surveys or parts of surveys). This may differ from the median completion time.

Official Statistics and Other Statistics surveys

Surveys that contribute to National or official statistics are referred to as ‘official statistics’ surveys, and surveys that do not contribute to National or official statistics are referred to as ‘other statistics’ surveys.

Statutory and Voluntary surveys

Where the status of a survey is statutory there is legal obligation on respondents to provide the information that will be collected.

Data collection method

The data collection method is recorded for each survey. Prior to 2016/17 SCLOs were asked to write-in the data collection method(s) used for each survey. This meant that there was substantial variation in the descriptions used and it was not always easy to identify the primary data collection method. In 2016/17, this was replaced with a drop-down menu (Paper questionnaire; Paper diary²⁷; Telephone interview; Face-to-face interview; E-mail data collection; Online questionnaire/ data collection; Online/electronic diary²⁷; Telephone data entry; and Digital Voice Recognition Survey). SCLOs were asked to identify the primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. method of data collection. As a result, groupings and analysis from 2016/17 onwards will be more accurate than in previous years.

Rounding

Please note that figures for compliance burden (hours) have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures for average completion time (minutes) and percentages have been rounded to one decimal place. Figures may not add exactly to totals due to rounding.

²⁷ This option was first introduced in 2017/18. As paper diaries usually accompany face-to-face interviews, these have been grouped with face-to-face interviews in the analysis (which also maintains consistency with what was done in 2016/17 and earlier years) ; Online/electronic diaries have been grouped with online questionnaire/ data collection)

A3. Review of Methodology & Discontinuity (between 2016/17 and earlier years)

The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance was produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the time series as some surveys, and types of surveys, which were excluded prior to 2016/17 are now included.

Reason for discontinuity

Prior to the 2016/17 data collection exercise, a review was conducted of the guidance provided to Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys. Any areas of ambiguity were also clarified and mandatory training was provided to all SCLOs. As a result of this review, a number of surveys that were not included in previous years have been included in departmental returns for 2016/17 and 2017/18, specifically surveys carried out by Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and some surveys which were omitted due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service. Examples are participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose.

Assessment of impact

For 2016/17, including those surveys and types of surveys that were not included in previous years potentially increased the number of surveys by 40, the number of forms by around 27,000 and the overall compliance burden by around 7,000 hours. The impact was most notable for DE and DfC who provided returns for Arm's Length Bodies that had not previously been included, and for DfE where a number of surveys were included that would previously have been considered to be part of the operational management of a public service.

Other improvements

There have been some other improvements to the methods used by individual branches to calculate compliance burden (e.g. more accurate allocation of burden to departments for split surveys, use/non-use of strata and improved estimation of medians). In addition, actual completion times (rather than estimated completion times based on the median) are also used where these are available.

A4. Main uses of data

The data are used by NI Government Departments, by the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC), by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), by the media and by the general public. Information can be used to investigate the burden on Households and Individuals resulting from Government Statistical Surveys, to monitor changes over time, to respond to MLA questions, and to provide briefing to Ministers.

A5. Data quality

Data are derived from returns provided by other government departments and ALBs. Although the compliance cost is an estimate, the quality of the underlying data has improved greatly over the last couple of years, and is now considered to be reasonable. These improvements include:

- Improved coverage of non-NISRA branches within Departments; and improved coverage of ALBs.
- Better application of the criteria to determine whether surveys should be included or excluded from the return.
- Better estimation of median completion times, re-contacts and median re-contact times.
- More use of separate calculations for different subgroups where the compliance costs vary across different modes of data collection and/or type of business.
- Improved quality assurance, with the introduction of local quality assurance by SCLOs

There have also been improvements in the coherence and comparability of the returned data, both within and between departments, due to improved and expanded SCLO guidance, annual training for SCLOs and an improved data collection workbook, including standardised options for e.g. data collection methods; automatic calculation of compliance costs; built-in guidance and basic validation checks. These changes should result in improved comparability over time once the other improvements have stabilised.

The data collection process means that individual SCLOs are the key decision makers in terms of including or excluding surveys from the returns. While there is communication between SCLOs and NISRA Survey Control Unit to clarify any queries, there is the potential for individual interpretations of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to lead to small inconsistencies in individual returns.

The quality assurance checks carried out by Survey Control Unit focus on ensuring that the data returned are complete and internally consistent for the current year, and also consistent with returns from previous years. Where data are missing or there are large changes or inconsistencies explanations are sought from the data supplier, and if necessary the data are re-supplied.

A6. User Engagement

User engagement is on-going between the publication of one report and the production of the next. Following the review of the guidance and methodology (prior to the 2016/17 publications) a specific programme of engagement was carried out. This has resulted in some minor changes to the publication. Further engagement with the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)²⁸ is planned for Autumn 2019.

We would welcome your feedback, on what you use the report for, any tables/charts or commentary you find particularly helpful and any additional analysis you would like to see. Feedback can be provided by emailing Ruth.Fulton@nisra.gov.uk

²⁸ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

Appendix B: Departments and their abbreviations

Abbreviation	Department
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DE	Department of Education
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for Enterprise
DfI	Department for Infrastructure
DoF	Department of Finance
DoH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
TEO	The Executive Office
PPS	Public Prosecution Service

Appendix C: Further Information

Downloadable data

The data used in this report can be downloaded from the 'NI Statistical Surveys - Burden to Households and Individuals 2017-18' page, which can be accessed from <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>.

Information is provided for each individual survey, including the name, purpose of the survey, frequency, statutory/voluntary status, official statistics status, data collection methods (primary, secondary etc.), issued sample, achieved sample, compliance burden, burden per response, department and ALB/branch. The survey contact and a link to the published statistics (or survey) is also included. This allows more detailed analysis to be carried out for individual surveys and/or additional information sought.

Other linked publications

Previous publications in this series, and the equivalent publications for the Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys can accessed at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

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