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Summary of Key Findings

- In 2017/18 the estimated cost to business in Northern Ireland (NI) of complying with Government Statistical Surveys was just under £0.95 million¹.
- In total, 68% of the overall compliance burden (£638,900) can be attributed to surveys carried out by Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) Branch, in the Department of Finance, which also includes Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys of businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics.
- A total of 90% of the overall compliance burden was attributable to statutory surveys. These statutory surveys accounted for 41% of the total number of surveys carried out.
- 64 of the 128 surveys carried out (50%) were used to produce official statistics. These surveys accounted for 95% of the total compliance cost.
- Almost a third (31%) of all surveys used online/email as their primary method of data collection, with a fifth of all surveys being solely online/email and half of all surveys offering an online/email option.

¹ The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS was revised in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. This means that the 2017/18 data are not directly comparable with 2016/17, and earlier years. Further details are provided in Appendix A3.

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Background

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)² has a statutory basis³ 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 policy⁴.

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.

The burden to businesses due to statutory Government Statistical Surveys is monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)⁵. Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)⁶, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out any new statutory survey of businesses⁷.

1. Introduction

This 2017/18 report is the latest in an annual series detailing the cost to businesses of complying with statutory and voluntary Government Statistical Surveys in Northern Ireland. The report includes information on the number of surveys commissioned, or carried out, by Departments (including their Arm's Length Bodies) and the cost incurred by businesses in complying with regular and ad-hoc government surveys, conducted in the financial year ending 31st March 2018. Department's names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix C.

² <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

³ Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

⁴ Information on the purposes for which the data are used is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix D).

⁵ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

⁷ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

Useful Links:

- [Previous publications in this series](#)
- [Burden on Households and Individuals](#)
- [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- [NISRA publications and datasets](#)

- [Downloadable data](#)

The compliance cost of a survey is defined as the financial cost incurred by the business in responding to the survey. This is estimated using an agreed Government Statistical Service methodology and includes factors such as the time taken to complete the survey, hourly pay rate⁸ of the person completing the survey and any external costs such as accountancy fees.

Businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included within surveys to businesses.

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; 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.

The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by the ONS on behalf of ELMS was also revised in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. This has resulted in an increase in the estimated compliance costs for some surveys in 2016/17 and a smaller decrease in 2017/18 (see Appendix A3).

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 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.

⁸ Hourly rates of pay are (median) Hourly (£) UK rates of pay (excluding overtime), based on the provisional results of ASHE 2017. This ensures direct comparability with compliance cost published by other parts of the UK.

2. Compliance Cost to Business

In 2017/18, 128 surveys of business were issued by government departments, of which 52 were statutory and 76 were voluntary. The total cost to businesses was £945,400 of which statutory compliance costs were £849,000 (90%) and voluntary compliance costs were £96,500 (10%) (Table 2). Of the £945,400 total compliance cost, 74% was attributable to DoF and 15% to DAERA (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Over two-thirds (68%) of the total compliance cost (£638,900) can be attributed to Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) branch⁹ within DoF. In total, ELMS accounted for 91% of the total compliance cost within DoF.

The ONS surveys businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics. The ELMS figure includes the cost to business in Northern Ireland as a result of these economic surveys conducted by the ONS.

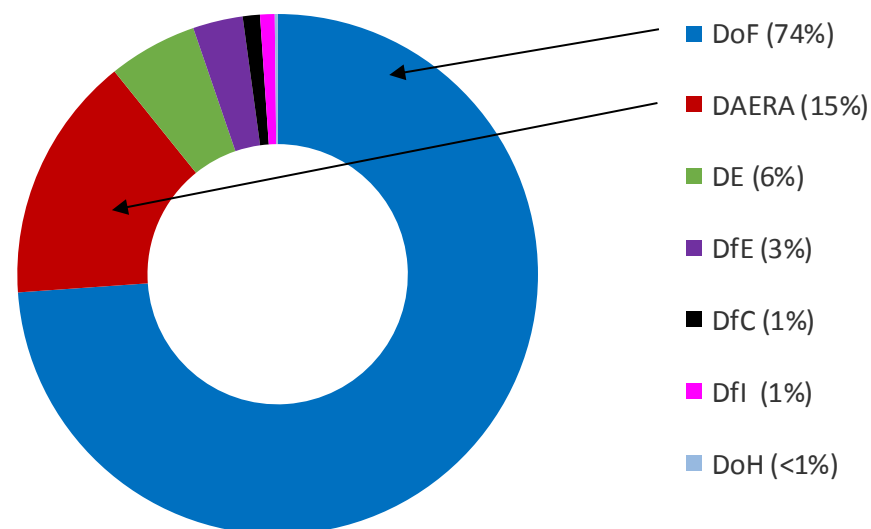
Of the £145,000 burden attributable to DAERA, 96% was incurred as a result of the issue of statutory surveys to farms and businesses within the Northern Ireland agricultural sector.

Similarly, 96% of the total burden attributable to DoF was incurred by statutory surveys.

Table 1: Compliance cost by NI department, 2017/18⁹

Department	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Total Returns
DAERA	17	145.0	20,669
DE	16	52.2	3,779
DfC	22	10.1	10,295
DfE	25	29.4	7,034
DfI	1	8.6	1,549
DoF	45	698.5	91,086
DoH	2	1.7	73
DOJ	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-
Total	128	945.4	134,485

Figure 1: Percentage of total compliance cost by NI Department 2017/18



⁹ Information on the cost attributable to each area within DoF is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix D).

While DAERA and DoF conducted more statutory than voluntary surveys; DE and DfE conducted more voluntary surveys, and DfC and DoH only conducted voluntary surveys. DfI conducted a single statutory survey of businesses¹⁰.

DfE conducted 24 voluntary surveys and only 1 statutory survey. The voluntary surveys accounted for £29,100 which was 99% of DfE’s compliance burden.

In contrast, the single statutory survey¹¹ conducted by DE accounted for 63% of DE’s compliance costs (£33,000) with the remaining 15 voluntary surveys contributing just 37% of DE’s compliance costs.

In total, just under three-fifths (59%) of the surveys issued were voluntary. However, they contributed only 10% of the total compliance burden (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Statutory surveys accounted for 90% of all compliance burden, but only 41% of the total number of surveys.

The vast majority (95%; £895,400) of compliance burden was due to surveys that contribute to official statistics (Figure 2 & Table 3).

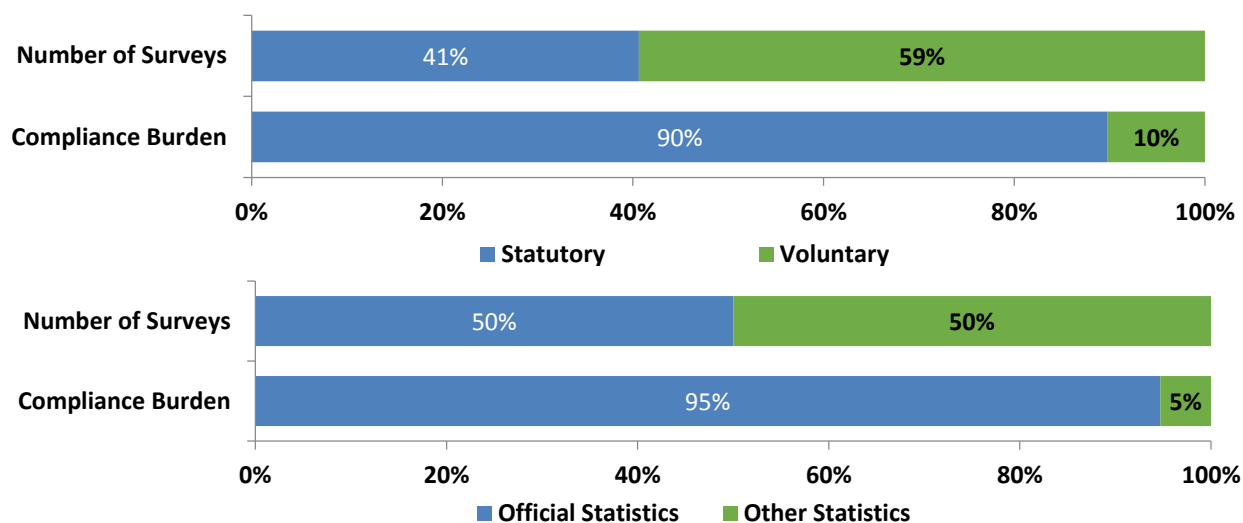
¹⁰ This is the *Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport, Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI)* survey.

¹¹ This is the part of the School Census that is still collected by a paper return and covers voluntary/private pre-school and independent school returns. The rest of the School Census is collected via an electronic return, facilitated by computerised school records using a standard system.

Table 2: Compliance cost for statutory and voluntary surveys by NI department, 2017/18

Department	Statutory		Voluntary	
	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	9	138.9	8	6.0
DE	1	33.0	15	19.2
DfC	-	-	22	10.1
DfE	1	0.3	24	29.1
DfI	1	8.6	-	-
DoF	40	668.2	5	30.4
DoH	-	-	2	1.7
DOJ	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-
Total	52	849.0	76	96.5

Figure 2: Percentage compliance cost for surveys which are statutory or voluntary and which contribute to official statistics



Of these surveys which contributed to official statistics, 95% (£848,700) of the overall burden was attributable to statutory surveys¹².

Table 3 shows the compliance cost for surveys used to produce official statistics, and other surveys by government department in 2017/18.

All 17 of the DAERA surveys, 44 of the 45 DoF surveys, 2 of the DE surveys and the single DfI survey contributed to official statistics.

In contrast, none of the DfC surveys (22), DfE surveys (25) or DoH surveys (2) were used to produce official statistics.

Only two of the 16 surveys of business conducted by DE are used in the production of official statistics. However, these 2 surveys accounted for 87% of the compliance burden attributed to DE.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of surveys and compliance cost by primary method of collection, i.e. the main method used, even if other methods were involved.

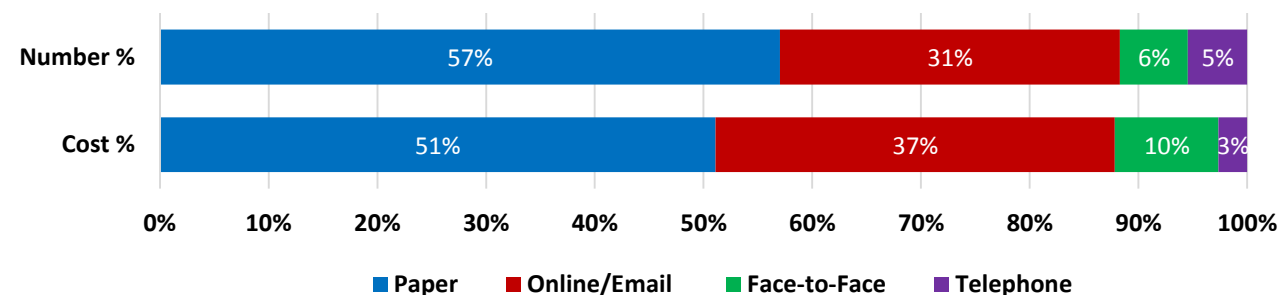
In 2017/18, almost a third of all surveys (31%) used online/email data collection as their primary method of data collection (Figure 3), with a fifth of all surveys (20%) being solely online/email and half of all surveys (50%) offering an online/email option (Table 4).

¹² Further information on individual surveys is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix D).

Table 3: Compliance cost for surveys that contribute to Official Statistics and for surveys that do not contribute to Official Statistics by NI department, 2017/18

Department	Official Statistics		Other Statistics	
	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	17	145.0	-	-
DE	2	45.4	14	6.9
DfC	-	-	22	10.1
DfE	-	-	25	29.4
DfI	1	8.6	-	-
DoF	44	696.5	1	2.1
DoH	-	-	2	1.69
DOJ	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-
Total	64	895.4	64	50.1

Figure 3: Number of Surveys and Compliance Cost by Collection Method (*Using Primary Method*)



Please note that any implied relationship between method of collection and compliance cost should be treated with caution as no account has been taken of the complexity and length of the surveys

Almost three-fifths (57%) of all surveys used a paper questionnaire as the primary method of data collection; with over a third (36%) using a paper questionnaire on its own, the highest of any data collection method used individually. The remaining surveys combined a paper questionnaire with online/email data collection (15%); telephone data entry (3%); or online/email and telephone methods (3%).

Table 4: Number of Surveys and Compliance Cost by Collection Method and Department 207/18

Department	Face to Face		Face to Face & Telephone		Paper Questionnaire		Paper & Telephone-Data-Entry ¹³		Paper & Online/Email		Paper, Online/Email & Telephone		Telephone	
	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)
DAERA	6	87.6	1	2.1	-	-	-	-	7	54.2	-	-	-	-
DE	-	-	-	-	1	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.3
DfC	-	-	-	-	20	1.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DfE	1	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.3	-	-	5	24.6
DfI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.6	-	-	-	-
DoF	-	-	-	-	23	156.8	4	44.7	10	156.2	4	57.5	-	-
DoH	-	-	-	-	2	1.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DOJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	87.9	1	2.1	46	161.6	4	44.7	19	219.2	4	57.5	6	24.9

Department	Telephone & Online/Email		Online/Email		Online/Email & Face to Face		Online/Email & Paper		Online/Email & Telephone		Online/Email, Paper & Face to Face		Total	
	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)	N	Cost (£000s)
DAERA	-	-	3	1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	145.0
DE	-	-	9	14.2	-	-	5	36.1	-	-	-	-	16	52.2
DfC	-	-	1	1.0	1	7.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	10.1
DfE	1	0.1	10	0.3	-	-	-	-	1	3.1	6	0.7	25	29.4
DfI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.6
DoF	-	-	2	2.1	-	-	2	281.3	-	-	-	-	45	698.5
DoH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.7
DOJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1	0.1	25	18.7	1	7.6	7	317.3	1	3.1	6	0.7	128	945.4

¹³ Telephone-data-entry (TDE) is a data collection method used for NI Government surveys of businesses that collect nine or less data items. The requested data is entered using the telephone key pad.

Around 1 in 20 surveys (6%) used face-to-face methods as the primary data collection method, with the majority of these surveys (7 out of 8) using only face-to-face methods. Telephone was used as the primary data collection method for 1 in 20 surveys (5%). Overall, 1 in 10 surveys (10%) collected data using telephone interviews¹⁴.

By department, DfE had the most surveys offering an online/email option, 19 in total, accounting for 76% of all surveys conducted by DfE. DoF offered online/email data collection in 18 surveys, with a further 4 offering telephone-data-entry; thus electronic options were available for 49% of all DoF surveys. DE used online/email data collection in 14 surveys (88% of all DE surveys), with DAERA using this method in 10 surveys (59% of all DAERA surveys); DfC used online/email data collection in 2 surveys (9% of DfC surveys) and DfI used this method in its one survey of businesses.

3. Changes to the Surveys Issued by Departments: 2013/14 to 2017/18

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 purpose¹⁵. Further details are provided in Appendix A3

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also carried out a review of its methodology in both 2016/17 and 2017/18, moving away from calculating stratified compliance costs based on business size in 2016/17; including an estimate of re-contact burden and reviewing median completion times in conjunction with survey managers. In 2017/18, there was a further review of median completion times (affecting ten surveys) and median re-contact times (which had been assumed to be equal to the median completion time) were revised. These changes in methodology have resulted in a large increase in compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS in 2016/17 and a smaller decrease in 2017/18. This impacts the compliance costs for DoF but not the number of surveys or number of responses. Further details are provided in Appendix A3.

Consequently, there is a discontinuity in the time series resulting in the year on year data not being directly comparable. As a result caution is urged when comparing the figures presented in Table 5.

¹⁴ Telephone data collection methods include telephone calls but not telephone data entry.

¹⁵ Further improvements were made in the 2017/18 data, but the impact is much less and limited to DE and DFE (see Appendix A3).

Due to the cyclical nature of some of the larger statutory surveys, compliance cost figures can fluctuate from one year to the next. An example of this is the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) carried out by ELMS, DoF, which alternates a large and smaller sample. In 2016/17, approximately 9,500 businesses were sampled (8,554 responses; £26,600 compliance costs), while in 2017/18 more than 33,000 businesses were sampled (25,235 responses; £62,600 compliance costs). The UK Innovation Survey¹⁶, carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS, and the School Omnibus¹⁷ carried out by DE, are examples of biennial surveys which took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18.

Additionally, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimising the financial burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Further details are provided in Section 5 and Appendix B.

Table 5: Number of surveys, forms returned & compliance cost by department, 2013/14 to 2017/18¹⁸

Dept	Number Surveys					Number Forms (000s)					Compliance Cost (£000s)				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
DAERA	20	19	19	17	17	20.4	24.7	30.6	21.0	20.7	156.8	151.8	199.3	141.8	145.0
DE ¹⁸	9	7	8	46	16	3.8	3.5	2.6	11.3	3.8	28.4	31.0	19.8	70.9	52.2
DfC ¹⁸	16	22	17	16	22	1.0	1.1	0.7	8.4	10.3	10.2	6.3	4.0	12.5	10.1
DfE ¹⁸	28	16	10	11	25	9.6	9.3	6.4	4.8	7.0	57.7	59.7	40.2	29.4	29.4
Dfi	2	1	3	1	1	2.0	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	12.1	8.2	9.7	8.2	8.6
DoF ¹⁸	45	38	47	43	45	86.7	87.7	112.9	73.5	91.1	1,039.1	875.6	828.9	841.7	698.5
DoH	-	1	-	2	2	-	0.1	-	0.2	0.1	-	1.6	-	2.6	1.7
DOJ	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	0.2	0.3	-	-	-	3.1	1.7	-
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total¹⁸	120	104	105	137	128	123.5	127.8	154.8	120.9	134.5	1,304.3	1,134.2	1,105.1	1,108.8	945.4

¹⁶ UK Innovation Survey (2016/17): 648 responses; £24,600 compliance costs

¹⁷ School Omnibus (2016/17): 442 responses; £5,400 compliance costs

¹⁸ There is a discontinuity in the time series affecting 2016/17 and 2017/18; this means that Totals for these years (and figures for DoF, DE, DfC & DfE) cannot be directly compared with each other, and with earlier years. This has been taken into account in the commentary and is further detailed in Appendix A3. The most affected figures are the Total compliances costs and compliance costs for DoF in both years (due to the ONS methodology change); the Totals and figures for DE & DfE in both years (due to the change in coverage) and the figures for DfC in 2016/17 (due to the change in coverage). DfC figures for 2017/18 can be compared with 2016/17.

DAERA

DAERA carried out the same number of surveys in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. The slight increase in compliance costs (£3,200) can be attributed almost entirely to the increase in the staff costs used to calculate compliance burden.

DE

DE carried out 16 surveys in 2017/18 compared to 46 in 2016/17. This decrease is partly due to the exclusion of surveys of teachers which were incorrectly included in the 2016/17 data¹⁹. It is estimated that these surveys, which were mostly ad-hoc, accounted for 18 surveys, 1274 responses and £2,100 of the compliance costs in 2016/17. The *Young Persons aged 9-13 survey*, which is a survey of individuals, was also misclassified as a business survey in 2016/17 (5,301 forms; £8,700 compliance costs).

The *School Omnibus* (a biennial survey), *Audit of the management of Health & Safety in schools* (a triennial survey) and *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study - PIRLS (School)* (every 5 years) took place in 2016/17 but not in 2017/18. These had compliance costs of £8,900 in 2016/17 (and 963 forms). There was also variation in ad-hoc surveys.

The big increase in the number of surveys conducted DE in 2016/17, compared to previous years, was due to the inclusion of surveys carried out by Arm's Length Bodies of DE (CCEA, CCMS, the Education Authority and NICIE)²⁰ which had not been previously included. The *School Census - voluntary/private pre-school and independent school returns* were also included for the first time in 2016/17. These forms, which contributed £33,900 to the compliance costs in 2017/18, are the only part of the School Census that is not obtained via an electronic download.

DfC

The number of surveys carried out by DfC increased from 16 to 22 primarily due to an increase in those surveys carried out 'to gauge perception of an area'. These small surveys of businesses, usually linked to revitalisation projects, had compliance costs of £800 in 2016/17 (15 surveys; 457 responses) and £1,500 in 2017/18 (20 surveys; 836 responses).

¹⁹ Surveys of employees of NI Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies are excluded; 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.

²⁰ CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments); CCMS (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools); NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education)

The decrease in the compliance costs between 2016/17 and 2017/18 reflects an improvement in the estimation of compliance cost due to the *Ulster University House Price Index*, which took account of the different methods of data collection. This was partially offset by an increase in sample size from 7900 to 8900. The *Quarterly House Price Index* carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) was not included prior to 2016/17.

There was also a new irregular survey introduced in 2017/18: the *Employer Experience Survey* (559 forms; £1,000 compliance costs).

DfE

DfE conducted 25 surveys in 2017/18 compared with 11 surveys in 2016/17. This increase was primarily due to the inclusion of Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB NI) surveys for the first time. CITB NI conducted 13 surveys of businesses which accounted for 235 forms and compliance costs of £1,600.

The *Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey* carried out by InvestNI was discontinued in 2017/18 (420 forms; £3,400 compliance costs) and the median completion time for the *Quarterly Customer Satisfaction Survey* was re-estimated, reducing the compliance cost for this survey by around £3,500. The compliance costs for the *All-Island Business Monitor survey* were also re-estimated for 2017/18, as previous returns had only included a single quarter, and staff costs were reviewed. This resulted in an additional 2,250 forms and £4,800 compliance costs.

DfI

DfI carried out one survey of businesses in 2016/17 and 2017/18, the *Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport, Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI)*. The increase in compliance costs is mostly due to the increase in staff costs used to calculate compliance burden.

DoF

DoF carried out two more surveys in 2017/18 than in 2016/17. This can be attributed to the inclusion of four UK Surveys, carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS, which were not previously included: *Monthly Survey for Index Numbers of Export Prices*, *Recruitment for Monthly Survey for Index Number of Export Prices*, *Recruitment Survey for Services Producer Price Indices* and *Environmental Protection Expenditure Survey*. There was also a new survey: *Antibiotic Prescribing in Primary Care* a small one-off survey carried out by the Innovation Lab in 2017/18 (137 forms; £2,100 compliance costs). The *Quarterly Survey into Electricity Generated* carried out by BEIS on behalf of ELMS, which had been omitted in 2016/17 was included in 2017/18. Three UK Surveys: *Domestic Mergers and Acquisitions*, *Inward Mergers and Acquisitions* and *Outward Mergers and Acquisitions* did not sample any Northern Ireland businesses in 2017/18. The biennial *UK Innovation Survey* took place in 2016/17 with compliance costs of £24,600 (648 forms) but not in 2017/18.

The *Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)* alternates between a larger and smaller sample. In 2016/17, approximately 9,500 businesses were sampled, with 8,554 responses and compliance costs of £26,600, while in 2017/18 more than 33,000 businesses were sampled with 25,235 responses and compliance costs of £62,600. This accounts for the increase in the number of forms between 2016/17 and 2017/18. This was partly offset by a drop in the response rate for the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* which had 431 fewer responses and £4,300 lower compliance costs in 2017/18. Additionally, the *Survey of Research and Development (R&D) within Northern Ireland* had 110 fewer responses and £2,400 lower compliance costs in 2017/18.

Between 2016/17 and 2017/18, there were improvements to the form for the *Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Survey*, making it simpler and less time-consuming to complete. Consequently, despite an increase in the number of responses (from 288 to 429) there was a 48% reduction in compliance costs for this survey (from £11,400 to £5,900).

Due to further improvements in the methodology used by ONS to estimate compliance costs, there has been a decrease in the estimated compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS (DoF) in Northern Ireland. This decrease in compliance costs offsets some of the increase seen for these surveys between 2015/16 and 2016/17 and is the main reason for the overall reduction in compliance costs for surveys conducted by DoF between 2016/17 and 2017/18. See Appendix A3 for further details.

DoH

Of the surveys conducted out by DoH, the *Pharmaceutical Margin Survey* carried out by Business Services Organisation (BSO) took place in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. The compliance costs were similar in both years. Surveys carried out by BSO were not included prior to 2016/17.

DOJ

DOJ carries out very few and quite infrequent surveys of businesses. The *Access NI Customer Survey*, included on in 2016/17, was excluded in 2017/18 as it mainly surveys government organisations²¹.

TEO & PPS

Neither TEO nor PPS conducted any surveys of businesses during the period presented in Table 5.

²¹ Surveys of NI Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies are excluded.

4. An Examination of the Trend, 2012/13 to 2017/18

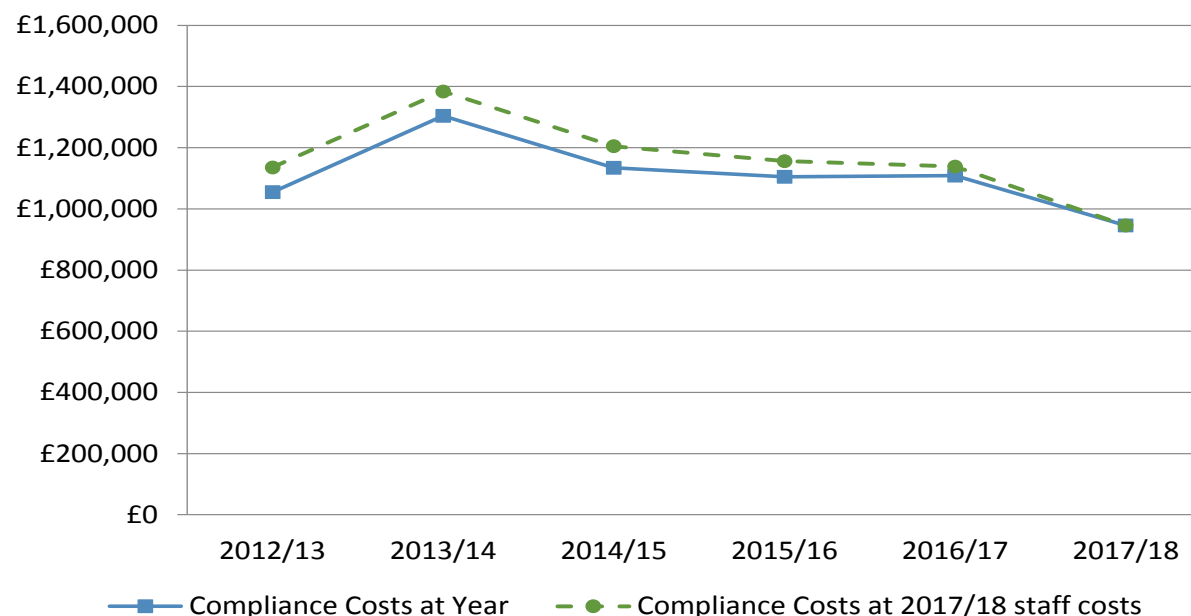
Figure 4 illustrates the change in the estimated cost to business of complying with Government Statistical Surveys from 2012/13 to 2017/18²². The blue line shows the cost in terms of raw or current prices: that is, in terms of staff cost at the time of the survey without allowing for the effects of changes to levels of pay; while the green line shows the cost after wage growth has been taken into account. External costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted. The base staff cost are the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) costs used for 2017/18.

The cost peaked in 2013/14 at £1.30 million, from £1.06 million in 2012/13; an increase of nearly a quarter (24%). Since 2013/14 the cost has gradually decreased. Compared to 2013/14 the compliance cost decreased to £1.13 million in 2014/15; to £1.11 million in 2015/16; where it remained in 2016/17; and to £0.95 million in 2017/18. This equates to a 28% reduction in raw compliance costs between 2013/14 and 2017/18.

The absence of a decrease between 2015/16 and 2016/17 was due to the discontinuity in the time series, i.e. the inclusion of surveys which would

²² The figures in this time series have not been adjusted for the discontinuity. See Appendix A3.

Figure 4: NI compliance cost from 2012/13 to 2017/18²²



not previously have been included; and changes in the methodology used by ONS to estimate compliance costs which resulted in significantly increased costs. There was also a discontinuity in the time series between 2016/17 and 2017/18 which reduced some of the increase seen in 2016/17 (see Appendix A3).

The overall downward trend is clearer when the effects of changes in staff costs are removed, i.e. the compliance costs are calculated based on 2017/18 staff costs, with the cost peaking in 2013/14 at £1.38 million, decreasing to £1.20 million in 2014/15, £1.16 million in 2015/16, £1.14 million in 2016/17 and £0.95 million in 2017/18.

Between 2013/14 and 2017/18, this represents a 32% decrease in compliance costs adjusted to 2017/18 prices. Much of this reduction is due to the effort across NI Departments to reduce compliance burden through more efficient methods of data collection, the use of administrative data sources, reduced sample sizes and shorter and simpler surveys. More detail on this is provided in the next section.

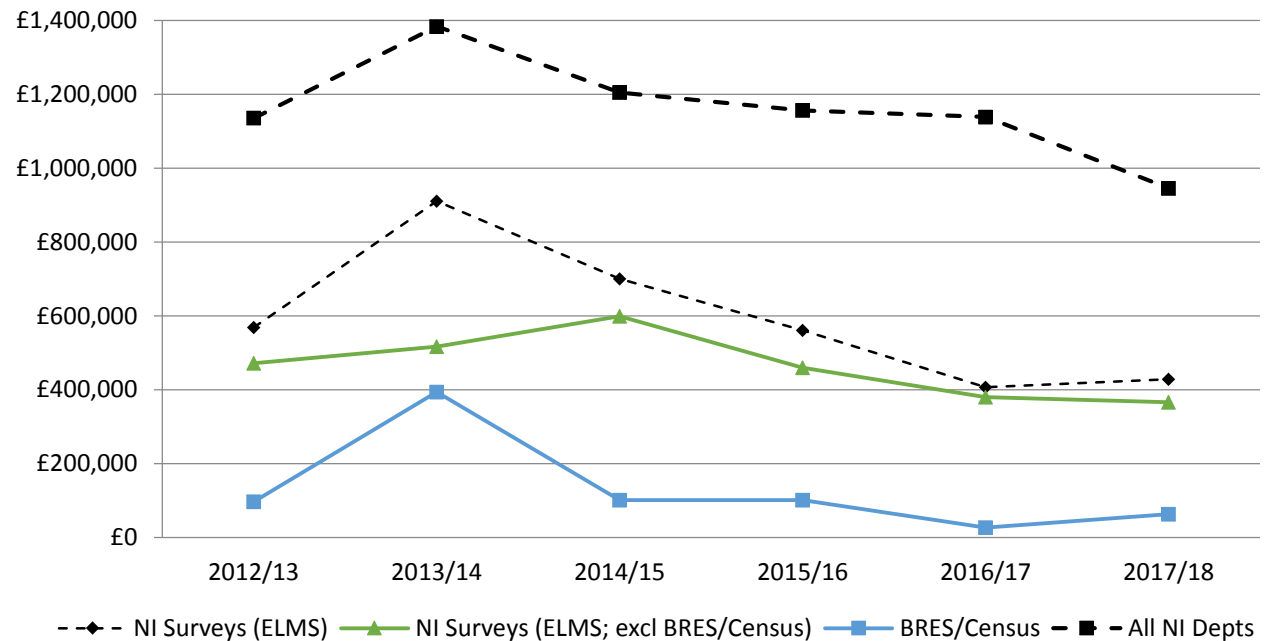
5. Measures being taken to Reduce Compliance Cost

Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS), a NISRA branch within DoF, conducts the majority of statutory surveys of business in Northern Ireland and is responsible for around 70-75% of the compliance burden on business due to statistical surveys. Some of these surveys are UK Surveys of NI Businesses and are carried out by ONS, DEFRA or BEIS²³ on behalf of ELMS. The remaining surveys are carried out by ELMS directly and account for 80-90% of the forms issued by ELMS, and a substantial proportion of the compliance costs (61% of the costs attributed to ELMS in 2017/18). Over recent years ELMS has taken forward a number of initiatives with the aim of reducing burden. These include amalgamating surveys, rotating businesses out of the sample, reducing the overall sample size, accepting telephone responses, use of tailored spreadsheets for large businesses, accepting financial accounts (and keying the information locally) and most significantly introducing an e-form option across all surveys.

The impact on compliance costs can be seen in Figure 5²². To improve comparability over time, the costs have been recalculated based on 2017/18 salaries. The Census of Employment, and the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)²⁴ have been shown separately as the surveys have large and small samples in alternate years and this variation would mask the overall pattern.

More information on the different initiatives, including the impact of mode switch (i.e. the introduction of e-forms) on business burden can be found in Appendix B. This looks at the benefits for businesses and the production teams and discusses the next steps in continuing to reduce the burden on business.

Figure 5: Selected compliance costs from 2012/13 to 2017/18 (at 2017/18 salaries)²²



²³ ONS (Office for National Statistics); DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs); BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy).

²⁴ The Census of Employment took place in 2013/14 and 2015/16, and the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) took place in 2012/13, 2014/15, 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Other NI Departments, and branches within DoF, have also taken steps to try to reduce the compliance burden on businesses. A few of the specific initiatives employed by departments in 2017/18 include:

Department ²⁵	Name of Survey	Measures taken to reduce compliance costs
DAERA	December Agricultural & Horticulture survey	Encouraged more people to use the online system; use of administrative sources.
	Horticultural Surveys	Redesign of online survey to reduce the length of the survey; encouraged more people to use the online system.
	June Agricultural & Horticulture Census	
	Potato Merchants	Movement from weekly to monthly returns.
	Survey of Fertiliser Deliveries	Smaller firms have moved to quarterly returns and now give a quarterly total rather than a breakdown by each month in the quarter.
DAERA (AFBI)	Pesticide Usage Survey	Telephone questionnaire for smaller holdings
DoF (CSU)	Quarterly Construction Enquiry	Merging with the Quarterly Business Survey and trying where possible to reduce telephone and second contacts by using e-forms
DoF (ELMS)	Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)	Increase usage of e-forms and continue to data share with the Quarterly Business Survey.
	Inter Departmental Business Register	Introduced email data collection, alongside postal returns.
	Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry	Survey respondents asked to complete the questionnaire electronically which routes through unnecessary questions thus easing burden.
	Quarterly Business Survey	Increase usage of e-forms and continue to data share with the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)
DoF (TSSSB)	Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Survey	Process made simpler for the respondent so it wouldn't take them as long to complete the form.

²⁵ AFBI (Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute); CSU (Central Survey Unit (NISRA branch)); ELMS (Economics and Labour Market Statistics (NISRA branch)); TSSSB (Tourism Statistics and Staff Surveys Branch (NISRA branch))

Appendix A: Methodology, Quality and Use of Publication

A1. Rationale for publication

The collection of data by government departments and their arm's length bodies (ALB's) causes a burden on data suppliers. It is important to keep this burden to a minimum and hence the practice of survey control has been developed and practiced within Northern Ireland since the 1980s.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)²⁶ 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 statutory Government Statistical Surveys is also monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)²⁷ (SAC). Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)²⁸, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses due to NI Government Statistical Surveys²⁹.

²⁶ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

²⁷ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

²⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

²⁹ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

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 the Government Statistical Surveys which their department/ organisation had commissioned or carried out in 2017/18. This information was returned to NISRA Survey Control Unit for quality assurance.

Coverage

All statistical surveys to businesses 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.

A separate [publication](#) is produced for surveys to households and individuals and is published alongside this publication. The scope of survey control was extended to households and individuals in 2014/15. For surveys of households and individuals, survey burden is calculated on the basis of time taken to respond to the survey.

Definition of Businesses

For Survey Control purposes, businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included under surveys to businesses.

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.

Compliance Cost

Compliance costs are the estimated financial burden placed on businesses as a result of completing government statistical surveys. Where actual or estimated completion times are not available for each business, an overall completion time for the survey is estimated using the median time to complete the questionnaire/ survey. The median time to complete the survey is estimated based on: information from the survey, paradata, historical data (within the last five years), a pilot survey, reviews or survey manager expertise. Only those completing the survey are included; non-response is assumed to place no burden on respondents. Any time spent on establishing eligibility for businesses that are subsequently deemed out of scope should be included.

Where a survey to businesses uses a number of different form types, or data collection methods e.g. electronic/postal, and these vary in terms of completion time then the calculations may be conducted separately for each form type/ data collection method and summed for an overall

compliance cost. Similarly, if there are different types of businesses with different completion times then the calculations for each type of business may be carried out separately and summed.

Validation procedures may require a re-contact with the business or local authority. The burden due to re-contact is also calculated. If actual or estimated re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full questionnaire may be substituted on the assumption that a respondent may need to review the entire questionnaire.

SCLOs are provided with a choice of five rates of pay taken from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).³⁰ SCLOs must select the most appropriate rate of pay for the person most likely to have completed the survey. The rates of pay used in compliance cost calculations are the UK median hourly pay (excluding overtime)³¹ for the following grades:

Grade	ASHE Code
Chief Executive and Senior Officials	1115
Managers and Senior Officials	1
Professional Occupations	2
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	3
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	4

External costs incurred by businesses (e.g. accountant's fees) when complying with government survey requests are also included in the calculation of compliance cost.

The Compliance Cost (£) is a simple **addition** of Response Cost (£), Re-contact Cost (£) and External Cost (£), which are calculated as:

Response Cost (£) = No. of responses x Median time (hrs) x Hourly rate (£/hr)

Recontact Cost (£) = No. recontacted x Median time (hrs) x Hourly rate (£/hr)

External Cost (£) = No. with external cost x Median external cost (£)

³⁰ The provisional 2017 ASHE results have been used for 2017/18. These figures have been used to ensure direct comparability with 2017/18 compliance costs published for other parts of the UK (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/regionbyoccupation4digitsoc2010ashtable15>).

³¹ Table 15.6a: Earnings and hours worked, region by occupation by four-digit SOC: Hourly pay - Excluding overtime 2017

If a survey is carried out on behalf of a number of government departments, then each government department will only include the compliance costs for the questions/ modules commissioned by them³².

Compliance costs at current year staff costs (constant prices)

The method used for calculating compliance costs at current year staff costs (or constant prices) is to use the rates of pay for the current, or base year, instead of the rates for previous years. This removes the effect of wage growth (changing staff costs) and adjusts the overall cost making it directly comparable to the current year. Any external costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted as these represent a small proportion of the overall total.

Grade ³³	2012 (for 2012/13)	2013(for 2013/14)	2014 (for 2014/15)	2015(for 2015/16)	2016(for 2016/17)	2017(for 2017/18)
Chief Executives and Senior Officials (1115)	£42.50	£43.17	£41.35	£42.42	£43.82	£45.83
Managers, directors and senior officials (1)	£18.57	£19.04	£19.25	£19.42	£19.71	£20.51
Professional occupations (2)	£18.99	£19.23	£19.31	£19.45	£19.71	£20.00
Associate professional and technical occupations (3)	£14.53	£14.74	£14.81	£15.00	£15.00	£15.33
Administrative and secretarial occupations (4)	£9.92	£10.00	£10.12	£10.28	£10.51	£10.71

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, for example, under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. The Code of Practice for Statistics encourages official statistics producers to seek voluntary participation in statistical data collection rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible.

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.

³² The number of forms however will be the same as for the complete survey, which means that these forms and surveys will be counted more than once in aggregated figures.

³³ Hourly rates of pay are (median) Hourly (£) UK rates of pay (excluding overtime).

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 diary³⁴; Telephone interview; Face-to-face interview; E-mail data collection; Online questionnaire/ data collection; Online/electronic diary³⁴; 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

In some tables the compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

A3. Discontinuity (affecting 2016/17 and 2017/18)

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.

The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by the ONS on behalf of ELMS was also revised in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. This has resulted in an increase in the estimated compliance costs for some surveys in 2016/17 and a smaller decrease in 2017/18.

This discontinuity is noted when presenting the between year comparisons and examining the trend over time.

Reason for Discontinuity – Improved Coverage

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. 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. These are primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose³⁵.

³⁴ 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)

³⁵ Further improvements were made in the 2017/18 data, but the impact is much less and limited to DE and DFE (see Appendix A3).

There is an impact on the total number of surveys, forms and compliance costs in both 2016/17 and 2017/18, although the impact is less in 2017/18 and only affects DfE and DE. For DE, the impact is a decrease which offsets some of the increase in 2016/17.

Assessment of Impact in 2016/17

For 2016/17, including those surveys and types of surveys that were not included in previous years potentially increased the number of surveys by 46, the number of forms by around 17,000 and the overall compliance burden by around £61,000.

The impact was most notable for DE where this potentially increased the number of surveys by 41, the number of forms by around 8,000 and the compliance burden by around £47,000. DfC was the next most affected department overall, where including these surveys potentially increased the number of surveys by one, the number of returns by 6,300 and the compliance burden by almost £12,000. There was also an impact in DfE, increasing the number of surveys by three. However, these were very small surveys with few returns and low levels of compliance burden.

While these figures gives an indication of the potential size of the discontinuity, it is difficult to say with certainty what surveys would have been included had the guidance not been reviewed and additional training provided.

Assessment of Impact in 2017/18

For 2017/18, the surveys and types of surveys introduced in 2016/17 continued to be included in the data aside from DE where surveys of teachers which had been incorrectly included in 2016/17 were removed.

There was a further impact for DfE, where Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB NI) and Insolvency Service surveys, were included for the first time. In 2017/18, CITB NI conducted 13 surveys of businesses in 2017/18 which accounted for 235 forms and compliance costs of £1,600; the Insolvency Service conducted a single survey which had 5 responses with a compliance cost of less than £1.

For DE, surveys of teachers carried out by CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments) were incorrectly included in the 2016/17 data. The majority of teachers are employees of the Education Authority or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) which are both ALBs of the Department of Education and surveys of government employees are excluded from survey control (see Section A2). These surveys, which were mostly ad-hoc training or event evaluation surveys, accounted for 18 of the additional 41 surveys in 2016/17; around 1300 of the additional forms and £2,100 of the increase in compliance costs³⁶.

³⁶ This is an estimated based on the information available for CCEA (and other DE) surveys in 2016/17.

Reason for Discontinuity – Change in Methodology used by ONS

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also carried out a major review of its methodology in 2016/17, with further improvements in 2017/18. This resulted in a large increase in compliance costs for ONS surveys in 2016/17 and a smaller decrease in 2017/18. This change in methodology impacts the compliance costs but not the number of surveys or number of responses.

In 2016/17, ONS moved away from calculating stratified compliance costs based on business size in 2016/17; included an estimate of re-contact burden and reviewed median completion times in conjunction with survey managers.

In 2017/18, median completion times were reviewed (for a further ten surveys) and median re-contact times which had been assumed to be equal to median completion times were revised. This assumption while permissible under the survey control methodology³⁷ (see Section A2) was one of the major shortcomings of the methodology introduced in 2016/17, and led to greatly increased estimates of compliance cost. The median re-contact times were revised based on recorded times (14 surveys) or estimates provided by survey managers (8 surveys).

Assessment of Impact in 2016/17

The change in the methodology used by ONS in 2016/17 resulted in a large increase in the compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS. While the total number of responses remained approximately constant, at around 12,000, for the 27 surveys carried out by ONS that were common to both 2015/16 and 2016/17, the compliance costs increased by 61% (from £213,100 to £342,600). Salary costs based on ASHE Code 1 (used for ONS surveys) increased by 1.5% between 2015/16 and 2016/17. It is not possible to say what proportion of the change is due to what part of the change in methodology.

Assessment of Impact in 2017/18

The impact of the change in the methodology used by ONS in 2017/18 has been assessed by applying the revised median completion times, and revised median re-contact times to the 2016/17 data and re-calculating the compliance costs for those surveys where comparable information is available for both years.

Applying the revised median re-contact times to the 2016/17 data, reduces the compliance costs by £81,900; this equates to 62% of the increase observed between 2015/16 and 2016/17 for these 22 surveys. While the analysis can only be carried out where information is available for both years, this provides an indication of how much of the change between 2015/16 and 2016/17 for ONS surveys may have been due to the assumption

³⁷ If actual or estimated re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full questionnaire may be substituted on the assumption that a respondent may need to review the entire questionnaire.

that median re-contact times were equal to median completion times. Any increase in the compliance costs, due to this assumption, has been removed from the 2017/18 data, as actual or estimated re-contact times have been used.

The review of median completion times affected ten surveys in 2017/18; this has improved the accuracy of the estimates for these surveys. Applying the revised medians to the 2016/17 data would have reduced the compliance costs in 2016/17 by £57,500 and reduced the compliance costs in 2017/18 by £59,300. This is primarily due to the estimated median completion time dropping significantly for the *Annual Purchases Survey*. This is a complex survey carried out by ONS in Northern Ireland which feeds into [Northern Ireland's Supply-Use tables](#)³⁸ and [UK National Accounts](#)³⁹

Other changes

There have also been some minor changes to the methods used by NI Government Departments to calculate compliance costs in 2016/17 and 2017/18 (e.g. use/non-use of strata, improved estimation of medians) but the overall impact of these changes is small. In addition, actual completion times (rather than estimated completion times based on the median) have been used where these are available.

A4. Main uses of data

The data are used by business and industry, by the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC), by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), by the media and by the general public. Under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult SAC before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses⁴⁰. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) also consults SAC before carrying out voluntary surveys of these businesses. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses of completing NI Government Statistical Surveys⁴¹.

Information in this publication has previously been used to investigate the cost to Northern Ireland businesses in completing government surveys, to respond to MLA questions, and to provide briefing for the Minister of Finance. The information has also been used by NISRA branches to identify their contribution to the overall burden on business, and to assess the impact of alternative methods of data collection on the compliance burden resulting from their surveys.

³⁸ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economy/economic-accounts-project>

³⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts>

⁴⁰ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

⁴¹ The most recent feedback from SAC indicates that the report meets their needs both in terms of coverage and content. In particular, the feedback from SAC identified that the breakdown of survey costs for statutory and voluntary surveys was particularly useful.

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.

Changes in the methodology used by ONS in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 (see section A3) - as well as the data quality improvements outlined above - have resulted in a discontinuity in the time series between 2015/16 and 2016/17, and also between 2016/17 and 2017/18. This is discussed in section A3 above.

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 e.g. referencing the Statistics Advisory Committee and Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. Further engagement with the Statistics Advisory Committee 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.

Appendix B: Case Study - Impact of Mode Switch on Business Burden (ELMS)

Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS), a NISRA branch within DoF, conducts the majority of statutory surveys of business in Northern Ireland. Some of these surveys are UK Surveys of NI Businesses and are carried out by ONS, DEFRA or BEIS on behalf of ELMS. The remaining ten surveys are carried out by ELMS directly:

- Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)
 - Index of Services (IOS)
 - Index of Production (IOP)
 - Quarterly Construction Enquiry (QCE)⁴²
 - Annual Business Inquiry (ABI)
 - Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)
 - Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)
 - Research and Development (R&D)
 - Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) proving
 - Coal Inquiry
- Quarterly Business Survey (QBS)
-

This equates to over 70,000 survey forms going to the businesses in Northern Ireland each year. There are approximately 75,000 businesses on the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) for Northern Ireland. Traditionally this was taken forward by posting survey forms to businesses. ELMS has now developed an Electronic Data Collection option for businesses to complete their business survey returns. This option is available across all surveys and has been welcomed by the business community.

Burden on Business

The cost to businesses in Northern Ireland of complying with government statistical surveys was just under £0.95 million in 2017/18. This represented 128 government statistical surveys. ELMS was responsible for the surveys above, aside from the QCE⁴², in terms of compliance as well as a further 33 surveys undertaken by ONS, DEFRA and BEIS under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. This amounts to a compliance burden of £638,900 for ELMS (68% of the overall total). The ten surveys above resulted in a compliance burden of £458,000 (48% of the overall total).

⁴² The Quarterly Construction Enquiry, while carried out by ELMS, was the responsibility of Central Survey Unit (CSU) until Autumn 2018 and thus appears in this report under CSU.

Reducing the Burden on Business

Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) has taken forward a number of initiatives in recent years with the aim of reducing burden. The quarterly surveys have been combined into the Quarterly Business Survey (QBS). The benefit of this is that a business that would have received a survey form asking for employment details and also received a second form asking for turnover details now receives one form asking for both. In addition, there was a refresh of the sample design in 2016 which reduced the number of businesses in the QBS across the year by 6,000. This is also helped by having 10% rotation in the sample ensuring that businesses in the sample element are removed from the survey after 2 years. This rotation is similar in the other surveys. Other initiatives include reducing the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) sample by almost 2,000 in recent years whilst reductions have also been made to the Research and Development (R&D) sample.

To further support businesses ELMS offer a number of alternative options for sending responses. For the public sector, ELMS send tailored spreadsheets for easy access and completion. This is also done for a number of the large businesses. For smaller businesses on the QBS information is also taken over the phone where it is a simpler way for the business to respond. In the ABI financial accounts are also accepted from businesses and ELMS key the data themselves to reduce some of the burden.

However, the biggest development over the last few years has been the establishment of the e-form option for businesses across all surveys.

E-form

In 2015 the branch took up an option in the Integrated Business Survey System (IBSS) contract to establish an e-form for each of the surveys. This was piloted in 2015 and rolled out across surveys during 2016, with 2017 being the first full year of all surveys having an e-form option. The results from 2016 to present are included in Table 6 below. Businesses received a letter in advance of each survey to advise them of the e-form option and how they could opt in for this service.

The process involves businesses receiving a PDF e-form instead of a paper form. The e-form can then be completed and if necessary passed on to others in the business to fill in further details before finally submitting the return through a link in the PDF. ELMS saw the e-form option as the optimal data collection vehicle as they were quicker to fill out, included in-built validation checks, removed the time wasted in sending survey forms in the post to/from businesses and reduced paper and postage costs. After the initial roll-out, the e-form uptake from business plateaued at 45% for quarterly surveys and 15% for the larger annual surveys.

In September 2017 a small trial took place where a selection of quarterly employment survey businesses were sent only an e-form (with the option to return to paper data collection if requested). This proved a successful trial of the operations required to obtain and clean email addresses and

switch paper respondents to e-forms on the data collection system. Following this successful operational trial, the process was rolled out to all Quarterly Employment Survey Businesses in the next quarter and finally to all of the Quarterly Business Survey in the first quarter of 2018. The result was that by the second quarter of 2018, 65% of all Quarterly Business Survey forms were returned electronically.

Table 6: Survey Responses (including e-forms)^{43,44}

Year	Survey	Sample	Returns	Response Rate	eForm Returns	eForms Response
2016	ABI	9,703	7,091	73.1%	0	0.0%
	ASHE	3,130	2,780	88.8%	422	15.2%
	BRES	12,331	8,553	69.4%	1,377	16.1%
	IDBRP	6,088	4,981	81.8%	0	0.0%
	QBS	34,902	27,415	78.5%	12,213	44.5%
	R&D	1,389	1,110	79.9%	195	17.6%
	Total	67,543	51,930	76.9%	14,207	27.4%
2017	ABI	8,890	6,222	70.0%	1,094	17.6%
	ASHE	3,118	2,768	88.8%	772	27.9%
	BRES	33,071	25,188	76.2%	3,769	15.0%
	IDBRP	6,250	4,551	72.8%	640	14.1%
	QBS	35,681	29,087	81.5%	13,972	48.0%
	R&D	1,398	1,120	80.1%	388	34.6%
	Total	88,408	68,936	78.0%	20,635	29.9%
2018	ABI	9,310	5,944	63.8%	3,167	53.3%
	ASHE	3,196	2,708	84.7%	1,193	44.1%
	BRES	12,556	9,372	74.6%	5,071	54.1%
	IDBRP	6,049	4,770	78.9%	955	20.0%
	QBS	35,680	28,945	81.1%	16,533	57.1%
	R&D	1,320	962	72.9%	414	43.0%
	Total	68,111	52,701	77.4%	27,333	51.9%

⁴³ ABI (Annual Business Inquiry); ASHE (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings); BRES (Business Register and Employment Survey); IDBRP (Inter-Departmental Business Register Proving); QBS (Quarterly Business Survey, including Quarterly Construction Enquiry); R&D (Research & Development Survey).

⁴⁴ The figures for the QBS in this table include all four surveys (QES, IOS, IOP & QCE) and therefore differ from those used in this report and in the downloadable data. As there is some overlap between the QBS (QES, IOS, IOP) and QCE forms, the figures in the downloadable data cannot be added directly to get these totals.

The survey leads within the branch discussed how to implement the methods trialled by the quarterly surveys into the larger annual surveys. Refining the process by improving the literature provided to businesses based on feedback from the data collection teams and developing SAS code to identify common errors in email addresses resulted in a successful roll-out to the larger annual surveys.

Table 6 shows that the amount of survey e-form returns increased from 27% of the total returns in 2016 to almost 52% of returns in 2018. This improvement can be partially attributed to opting in businesses with email contact details rather than waiting for businesses to confirm.

Feedback from businesses has been very positive. Businesses that use the e-form option find it easier to complete and return. The main reason for this is that the form has help features built into the questions to support the forms completion. In addition, the e-form has routed questions and some in-built validation. This has been important in the improved uptake of the e-form option for ABI and BRES in 2018. The key benefit is that the amount of validation failures have been reduced since the e-form introduction which has resulted in less follow up contact with businesses. In addition, it means less work for the data collection team in ELMS. The e-form option also means that returns are made more quickly than for paper forms and this reduces the need for follow up contact to seek a return.

Table 7 shows that form validation failures have decreased by 27% from 2016 to 2018. The amount of validation failures has decreased across all surveys in the same period.

Table 7 – Validation Failures

Validation Failures	
2016	38,449
2017	36,700
2018	28,070

Environmental and Financial Impacts

The move to e-forms has also had a significant impact on the amount of paper used in the collection of surveys. By the end of 2018 there will have been a reduction of approximately 120,000 A4 pages since the e-form option began which equates to 15 trees saved.

In addition, the reduction in the need for paper has also meant less need for envelopes and reduced our postage costs. The stationery costs have been reduced by approximately £5,000 whilst the postage costs have been reduced by approximately £25,000 since the e-form option began.

Contact with Businesses

One key outcome with the e-form development has been the increased engagement with business. This has been essential in highlighting issues with e-forms (or forms in general) as well as getting positive feedback on things that work well. This has helped us strategize more about how we collect data and deal with businesses. It is difficult to drive improvements in data collection in isolation so this engagement has been a positive development.

Future Improvements

The e-form option has been successful but has some limitations. The PDF form is not compatible with all businesses IT solutions so this has restricted its use for some and on how they complete the form – smartphones and tablets are not really an option. Generally this is a relatively small issue in feedback from businesses but will become more prominent as technology moves forward. This is something ELMS are investigating.

The optimal solution for business surveys going forward is an online platform where all surveys could be hosted, accessed and completed. This would enable businesses to see what surveys they have been selected for and when completion is required. It gives businesses more control over how they complete the forms and provides better options for help and the routing of questions. ELMS are working with Central Survey Unit (CSU) to see what this looks like and what options are available.

Other developments include working with ONS on their data collection transformation programme (DCTP) to work out how the data collection and delivery of UK business surveys will look for Northern Ireland in the future and how this model could work for NI with other surveys in terms of reducing the burden on business by removing any duplication.

Appendix C: 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 D: Further Information

Downloadable data

The data used in this report can be downloaded from the 'NI Statistical Surveys - Assessment of Cost Burden to Business 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 cost, 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 Burden on Households and Individuals can accessed at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

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