Economic and Labour Market Statistics User Group Meeting: Feedback

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Theme: Economy
Frequency: Ad Hoc

Background

On 20th January 2022 NISRA's Economic and Labour Market (ELMS) branch carried out a User Group meeting via Microsoft Teams to gain feedback from users in relation to the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) alongside the following outputs produced by the branch:

- Annual Business Inquiry (ABI)
- Economic Accounts
- Quarterly Gross Domestic Product (QGDP)
- Research and Development Survey (R&D)
- Interactive Dashboards and Overview Slide Packs

In total, 49 users attended the meeting from a range of organisations. The agenda, minutes and presentation slides from this meeting are available via the NISRA website.

Users were then invited to provide additional feedback on the topics discussed via a short survey on Citizen Space which generated 15 responses. This paper summarises the results of this survey in regards to the BESES.

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Results

Almost all (93%) respondents agreed that the BESES presentation provided useful information to help them better understand the statistics.

During the meeting users were taken through plans set out for the future development of the BESES as outlined in the 2021 User Consultation and assessment conducted by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR).

As can be seen by Figure 1, the majority of respondents were supportive of all eight plans, although the plan to investigate the development of flash estimates was the least supported, albeit still with 73% of respondents supporting their development. Some users expressed concerns, similar to those held by the BESES team, surrounding the reliability of the estimates, the need for almost immediate revisions and the ultimate usefulness of the flash estimates. Other users found their potential to be interesting, rather than useful. Comments included:
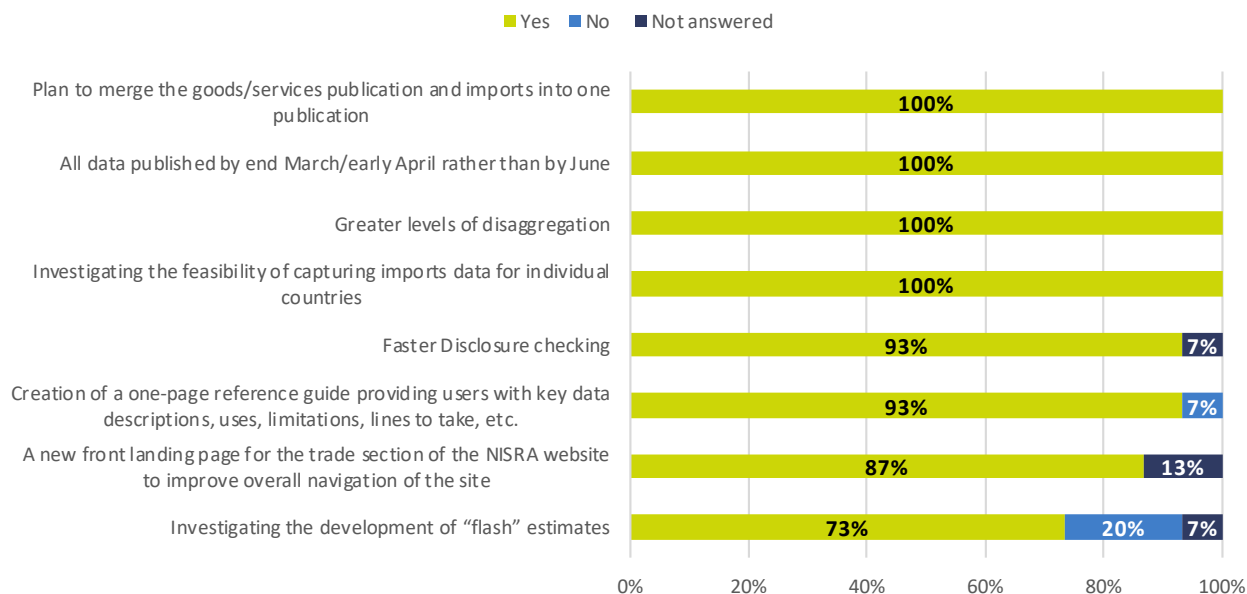
> *"Flash estimates likely useful in short-term due to Brexit, and would be interesting, but unlikely to be used…"*

> *"…inevitable risk of sizeable revisions…"*

> *"The danger is that an 'incorrect' "flash" generates (particularly in a heated context) a policy reaction which is later proven to be misled…"*

However 100% of users were content that, overall, NISRA's plans for the development of BESES were sensible.

Figure 1: NISRA presented details of actions to be taken or already taken in response to user feedback coming out of both the 2021 User Consultation and the assessment conducted by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). Please indicate below if you are supportive of these plans for the BESES

All respondents (100%) were also content that NISRA was transparent about the limitations of the BESES survey and the timelines involved in capturing the data and producing the BESES results. The recently published Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics Quick Reference Guide was well received and respondents appreciated the discussion around timeliness as it provided insight into the processes involved in producing high quality data.

One user stated:

> *"The explanation of the timelines for the collection, processing and release of BSES data was helpful as it illustrated the layers of complexity in managing the data and the attention that is devoted to providing reliable data."*

Respondents noted that they used the BESES for a variety of purposes including incorporation into other statistical publications, research projects such as cross-border trade and economic models around EU Exit.

Conclusion

Overall, feedback on the BESES from the ELMS User Group Meeting was overwhelmingly positive with almost all respondents agreeing that the meeting helped them to better understand the statistics. Reassuringly, all users were supportive of our plans for the future development of the BESES agreeing that what we have proposed is sensible.

The meeting helped clarify the limitations of the BESES survey and the timelines involved in capturing the data and producing the BESES results which users appreciated. Concerns around the development of "flash" estimates will be taken into consideration by the BESES team and NISRA will continue to engage with users to ensure statistics are produced to the highest quality and meet user needs.