

MEETING OF THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
16th June 2022

In attendance

Mr Edgar Jardine	Chair	Ms Cathryn Blair	NISRA
Ms Siobhan Carey	NISRA	Mr Chris Ganley	NISRA
Dr Danielle Blaylock	Member	Ms Carole-Anne McKay	NISRA
Mr John Compton	Member	Mr Brian Green	NISRA
Mrs Sharon McNicholl	Member	Dr David Marshall	NISRA
Dr Chris Morris	Member	Ms Ruth Fulton	NISRA
Dr Kieran Payne	Member	Mr Garbhan McKeivitt	NISRA
Mr Richard Ramsey	Member	Ms Pauline Donnan	DoE
Dr Bernie Stuart	Member	Mr Trevor Campbell	DoE
Dr Athanasia Xenaki	Member	Mr Aaron Maguire	NISRA (Secretary)

Item No.	Subject	Action
1.	<p>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies (14:00-14:05)</p> <p>Mr Jardine welcomed members and officials to the meeting.</p> <p>Mr Jardine paid tribute to the late Professor Derek Bond, who sadly passed away on 26th November last year, and his active involvement in and contribution to the work of the committee. Mr Jardine discussed Professor Bond’s in-depth knowledge of economic statistics based on a lifetime of professional engagement in both government and academia and the considerable value this brought to the committee.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising (14:05-14:10)</p> <p>Small changes were requested to the minutes of the previous meeting (19th November 2021). It was agreed that the secretary will send out a revised copy of these minutes to members following the meeting.</p> <p>All action points arising from previous meeting were addressed.</p>	
3.	<p>DE presentation – An overview of the statistics available to assess performance in the NI education system (14:10-14:30)</p> <p>Ms Donnan introduced the slides “An overview of the statistics available to assess performance in the NI education system”.</p> <p>Ms Donnan discussed the purpose of educational outcome measures which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are an evidence base to inform policy areas aimed at raising standards and tackling educational underachievement; • They help monitor policies, for example the literacy and numeracy strategy; and 	<p>1. Secretary to obtain the link to the Rapid Evidence Review undertaken by Queen’s University Belfast for DoE to share with members.</p>

- They measure progress to achieving the Program for Government outcome to give every child the best start in life.

Ms Donnan discussed Programme for Government Indicator 11 – the percentage of school leavers achieving at level two or above including English and Maths. Ms Donnan noted the percentage change in proportion of school leavers achieving these grades in the 2018-2019 – 2019-2020 period.

Ms Donnan also discussed Programme for Government Indicator 12 – the gap between the percentage of non-FSME school leavers and the percentage of FSME school leavers achieving level 2 or above including English and Maths. Ms Donnan noted the gap between those who do and don't receive free school meals has reduced in recent years.

Mr Campbell then discussed the various data sources which help assess performance in the NI education system.

Mr Campbell went through some key elements of the School Leavers Survey including how it:

- It is an annual data collection;
- Provides data for Program for Government Indicators 11 and 12;
- Takes administrative data directly from the Schools Information Management System;
- Collects qualifications obtained and main destinations of pupils leaving the school system; and
- Provides breakdowns by gender, religion, FSME status, school type etc.

Mr Campbell then discussed other DE data sources including:

- The Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER) which uses annual data and validates cohorts and results with schools; and
- The Exams Database from 2018-2019 academic year onwards which collects pupil examination results as part of the school census and is used for subject level benchmarking internally by schools.

Mr Campbell detailed some pros and cons of the data sources:

- The School Leavers Survey – pros included how it is appropriate for monitoring long term trends of the impact of the NI school system; cons included how it is not appropriate for assessing the impact of specific examination years.
- SAER – it is the most appropriate source for analysis of specific academic years, however it uses school level summary data only.
- Exams Database – This is appropriate for analysing subject level attainment levels and while validation is undertaken this is not signed off by schools.

Mr Campbell discussed the impact of the pandemic on the educational system, for example how remote learning became a major component of the education process and that the increase in attainment may not reflect a real improvement in standards.

Ms Donnan then discussed recent developments:

- The Education Outcomes Linkage Project which involves working with NISRA statisticians to link together the School Leavers Survey, the School Census and the Exams Database at a pupil level. Ms Donnan described how the team are linking pre pandemic data (2018-2019) with post pandemic data to compare the situation.

	<p>Ms Donnan detailed how governments shouldn't be relying solely on educational attainment, rather there needs to be a broader framework in mind. Indicators already identified to help broaden the approach include pupil well-being, quality of education in school and workforce indicators. Work is ongoing to develop a prototype for this framework.</p> <p>Finally, Ms Donnan discussed the Rapid Evidence Review undertaken by Queen's University Belfast which looked at published and unpublished research across the globe to investigate the impact of the pandemic. Queens have since produced three research summaries of the findings. Ms Donnan stated that she will share a link to the Rapid Evidence Review with Mr Maguire to share with members.</p> <p>Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Jardine commended Ms Donnan and Mr Campbell on the presentation and statistics discussed and asked if the work the department is doing will take them into a similar sphere as English research of educational attainment. Ms Donnan confirmed that it will. • Ms Donnan confirmed to Dr Blaylock that the Rapid Evidence Review work is on-going and that the academic researchers will continue to add to it as they discover more. • Mr Green asked if the examination bodies have adjusted their approach to reflect the time spent in school over the pandemic. Mr Campbell confirmed that educational systems have, for example by creating a shorter curriculum where appropriate to account for the loss of time. Mr Campbell continued that the plan is to take the level of attainment slowly back down to pre pandemic standing. 	
4.	<p>Census Presentation – Update on progress and the ongoing outputs consultation (14:30-14:50)</p> <p>Dr Marshall spoke to his slides 'Census 2021' and passed on apologies to members from Mr McConville who was unable to attend.</p> <p>Dr Marshall discussed what the Census 2021 results are used for including: To allocate billions of pounds of public funds; and For policy development, operational planning & equality monitoring.</p> <p>Dr Marshall noted the strong return rate to the 2021 census (97% with 80+% online); how results have been confirmed as National Statistics; and that the first results were released on 24th May 2022. Dr Marshall highlighted that the census data processing was and continues to be done entirely in NI.</p> <p>Dr Marshall then drew attention to some important headline figures of the 2021 census including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the first time that NI has a population over 1.9million; • An overview of the census trend since 1851; and • The population of NI is up 90,000 (5%) since 2011; 60% of the increase is among those over 65 years. <p>Dr Marshall described the differences between the population pyramids for 1926 and 2021 - namely, that there is an ageing population.</p> <p>Dr Marshall provided an overview of the census findings for under 15s and over 65s. The closing gap between the two age groups will continue to get smaller and it</p>	<p>2. Secretary to obtain the Census 2021 Assembly Laid Report, the Census 2021 Statistical Bulletin, and the Census summer 2022 SAC presentation to share with members.</p> <p>3. An update on Census 2021 outputs with a focus on the new census table builder was requested for the next SAC meeting.</p>

	<p>is predicted that the number of over 65s will exceed the number of under 15s in the next ten years.</p> <p>Dr Marshall described how the key message to take from these results (from a policy perspective) is the growth of the older population, which needs to be prepared for.</p> <p>Dr Marshall then discussed what is next for the census outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase A which includes results for religion, ethnic group, nationality etc. are due out in the autumn; • Phases B & C which includes results for health conditions, disability, sexual orientation, veterans (data to be linked with MOD veteran data) etc.; and • All results are due to be published by summer 2023. <p>Dr Marshall provided an overview of the new statistical geographies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were 890 Super Output Areas used in the 2001 & 2011 Census which are now considered no longer “fit for purpose”. • The new areas now include c850 units which will link to LGDs and have around 2,000 people in each. Dr Marshall gave a preview of the new super output areas on an NI map, focusing in on Belfast and other notable towns and cities. <p>Dr Marshall discussed the longer term plan for the 2021 census which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding value through linkage with other surveys, for example the Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings; and • Production of Census 2021 outputs running through to 2023/4. <p>Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Payne commended the presentation and is hopeful that it will go towards future planning. • Mr Jardine echoed Dr Marshall’s point that ensuring the integrity and accuracy of data is critical. • Mr Compton thanked Dr Marshall for the presentation and asked to what extent can the census influence policy for the reforming of health services and education. Dr Marshall noted that when DoH are planning future services they will need to plan for the increased demand which will come with an ageing population and emphasised that this is the sort of work the census should be used for. Dr Marshall also noted that with a falling birth rate there will be impacts on primary school numbers and provision. • Dr Morris asked with new output areas having around 2000 people each, what variation is expected? Dr Marshall explained that the units will allow the team to get a more even spread of the population than the previous output areas. • Ms Carey commended Dr Marshall and the team for their work on the census. • Mr Green emphasised that recent changes in key dependency ratios (e.g. those aged 65+ to those of working age) in NI is quite stark and will be important to consider from a policy perspective. • Ms Blair asked if the age of 65+ needs changed as a reference age for the older population. Dr Marshall explained that they held 65+ as this is still representative of the real retirement age. 	
5.	Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch Update (14:50-15:10)	

Ms Blair provided an overview of the SAC ELMS paper which was circulated to attendees prior to the meeting, highlighting that ELMS is leading or a key stakeholder in five major transformation projects.

Ms Blair discussed some Statutory and Non-Statutory issues including:

- The wider uses of the Statistics of Trade and Employment Order 1988 (STEO) that are now included in the update paper - prosecutions for failure to return forms, provision of microdata, and microdata research projects in collaboration with NISRA's Research Support Unit;
- The NI business survey response and coverage rates, drawing particular attention to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings response rates in comparison to previous years that has resulted from a move to almost 100% online survey;
- The data collection initiatives that have happened and are on-going within the ELMS branch including the drive to improve online response rates;
- The development of a data collection strategy – the overall goals of which are to increase response rates, increase online responses and improve the timeliness of data collection; and
- The development of a new integrated business survey system which is currently underway.

Ms Blair brought attendees' attention to the vast list of publications that have been released by ELMS since the last SAC meeting, drawing attention to the improvements in BESES timeliness and National Statistics accreditation, the publication of the Retail Sales Index for NI and the furlough analysis based on the Quarterly Employment Survey. She praised the branch for their work and on-going effort to ensure the timeliness and quality of these publications.

Discussion

- Dr Stuart queried if there is more scope for the integration of administrative data for economic analysis? Ms Blair explained that the branch is looking into linking in administrative data with the new data collection system. Ms Blair continued that the hope is in the future the branch will have access to better administrative data from HMRC. However, to date this has proven difficult to obtain.
- Mr Compton followed on from Dr Stuart's point regarding administrative data. Mr Compton discussed how the Fiscal Commission have been working to develop hard tax numbers which are dependent on administrative data (primarily HMRC and treasury data). Mr Compton recalled that HMRC acknowledged they would have to produce administrative data to calculate corporation tax due and wondered whether it would be worthwhile for ELMS to follow up with the Fiscal Commission and query if they have moved forward with HMRC to increase access to administrative data. Ms Carey noted that the new Chair of the UK Statistics Authority is trying to make progress on data sharing and speed it up. Ms Carey mentioned that there is a particular interest in HMRC data and progress has been made which has resulted in data now being provided to ONS. Ms Carey advised that the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority does have a priority to provide access to administrative data for everyone, beyond ONS.
- Mr Jardine commended Ms Blair on the on-going work within in ELMS. This was followed by a discussion between Mr Jardine and Ms Blair on the increased demand for economic data due to factors including the pandemic, the NI Protocol and Brexit.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Blair again commended the various teams within ELMS for their work on developing the outputs to improve economic statistics in NI. Mr Green echoed Ms Blair’s point and praised ELMS staff for the relentless work and commitment they have shown through particularly challenging times. 	
6.	<p>Survey Burden Update - A review on the questions posed to the business and household survey burden team during the SAC autumn 2021 meeting (15:10-15:40)</p> <p>Ms Fulton spoke to her slides ‘Update on: Raising the profile of the <i>Cost to Business of Government Statistical Surveys</i> report’.</p> <p>Ms Fulton described how the team want to increase awareness of outputs and reach users they aren’t currently reaching and to engage with users.</p> <p>Ms Fulton provided an overview of the issues raised in the last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How SAC have no early access to the report which delayed the press release. It was clarified that the report cannot be provided to SAC in advance of the publication going live. However, the team did look at the issue of dissemination and are now able to get the report to SAC sooner. The team considered the length of the report as a potential cause of minimal interest. The team considered the focus of the report and whether the message should be linked more with the trust and usefulness of statistics. In summary, Ms Fulton explained that the report cannot be repackaged as the usefulness of surveys as that is not what the statistics are about. The team explained how the narrative around the report should communicate that as the number of forms increases, so too does the reliability of statistics. While the name of the report cannot be changed, Ms Fulton agreed that “burden” can create an impression and therefore communication and language surrounding the release are important. <p>Ms Fulton explained how the team are considering further steps to increase the visibility of the report and how to make the report more relevant to current events (for example, the impact of COVID-19) within its existing structure. Ms Fulton discussed how depending on the outcome of the work, the team would revisit the need to balance user need against the resource required to produce the reports.</p> <p>Ms Fulton provided an overview of how the team increased the visibility of the report released on 10th June 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report was published on the NISRA website; Pre-announced on GOV.UK; Infographics were released; SAC, NISRA business bodies representatives and NISRA heads of branches were emailed the reports; A SAC statement was published on the NISRA website by midday on publication date with the assistance of Mr Jardine and Mr Compton; The webpages for the two reports were cross linked; and A NISRA website news article was published which directed users to the reports. <p>Ms Fulton provided an overview of the locations of the reports on the NISRA website and where the SAC statement was signposted (Twitter and the NISRA website).</p>	

Ms Fulton explained how the team worked to increase the interest and relevance of the reports:

- The uses section in the report was expanded;
- A section on the impact of COVID-19 on the surveys was included – the team provided this information to SAC in advance of their statement; and
- The team are planning to put the datasets in open data which will give readers another version of the data to use.

Ms Fulton talked of an engagement exercise planned for Summer/Autumn 2022 which will look at the content of the reports.

Ms Fulton discussed some proposed changes to the Business report which included:

- To reduce the length of the report by removing detailed analysis by department;
- Retain the steps taken to reduce burden section;
- Include a relevant case study on the use of a specific subset of surveys;
- Reduce the methodology section; and
- The accompanying dataset for reports will be retained so users can carry out more detailed analysis if they wish to do so.

Ms Fulton noted that there is an identified user need for the business report – reducing the volume of ‘burden’ analysis within the report, while retaining the ‘steps taken to reduce burden’ sections and introducing ‘case studies’ should produce a more balanced report.

Ms Fulton discussed some proposed changes to the Household and Individuals report which included:

- There is a proposal to discontinue the report if the consultation suggests this is the best option;
- If a user need is identified through the consultation then changes will be similar to those made in the business report; and
- There are plans to revisit and restructure the webpage by providing links to case studies and methodology etc.

Ms Fulton explained that there is no identified user need for this report and how it creates a burden on the data suppliers and for SSB.

Discussion

- Mr Jardine thanked Ms Fulton for the presentation and for the work the team undertook since the last SAC meeting.
- Mrs McNicholl and Mr Compton also thanked Ms Fulton for the presentation.
- Mrs McNicholl questioned whether a statistical press release was not published due to the potential negative reaction to the terms used to describe the report e.g. ‘burden’. Ms Fulton explained that while releasing the SAC statement allowed for opinions to be put into the public domain, if the team themselves published a statistical press release the headline figure would have had to reiterate the cost of surveys to businesses. Ms Fulton further explained the Press Office advised that publishing a press release which highlighted the burden figure may have given the wrong impression and potentially led to journalists focussing too heavily on the headline figure without looking at the bigger picture. Ms Fulton also clarified that while the headline figure was not kept hidden (for example, social media posts were released which included the figure), they didn’t

	<p>think publishing a statistical press release was the right avenue to promote the wider integrity and value of the statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Compton suggested that a more considered view of what happens with the reports next year is needed. Considerations to be aware of moving forward include - what resources are available, what resources are needed and how can work with the Press Office be improved to promote the organisation and the reports. Mr Compton suggested that as the data is well trusted, this could be a starting point for the reports moving forward. • Mr Compton then discussed ideas for how to turn the trust in data into data stories which are equally as trusted and help reinforce the credibility of the organisation. Mr Compton highlighted examples of how the data could be marketed, for example in relation to COVID-19 or Program for Government material and how the data relates to targets. 	
7.	<p>Official Statistics Update (15:40-16:00)</p> <p>Ms Fulton provided an overview of the SAC ELMS paper which was circulated to attendees prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Ms Fulton discussed the Assessment of Official Statistics and provided an update on statistics that have been designated National Statistics status since the last SAC meeting. These statistics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay in the NICS • Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics • Family Practitioner Services Statistics • 2021 Census <p>Ms Fulton updated attendees on ongoing or completed Compliance Checks since the last SAC meeting. For example, how ONS is in the process of improving labour market statistics through survey transformation and increasing the use of administrative data and other data sources.</p> <p>Ms Fulton discussed reported breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Three breaches have been noted since the last SAC meeting, all of which were minor. Ms Fulton explained that it is unlikely data was accessed in any of the breaches.</p> <p>Ms Fulton provided an overview of the Revised Process for Reporting ‘Concerns’ under the Code of Practice. In summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a concern is major, it is to be reported to the OSR; and • If a concern is minor, it is to be dealt with in-house. <p>No major concerns have been reported under the Code of Practice since the new guidance came into effect, resulting in zero for 2022/23.</p> <p>Ms Fulton discussed the OSR Review of the 9:30am Release Time. She highlighted that OSR took note of responses from SAC and others. In terms of pre-release the code now states that both regular and ad hoc official statistics should be pre-announced through a 12-month release calendar, giving specific release dates and times at least four weeks in advance. Ms Fulton explained that while OSR did receive some objections to the early release time of 7am, this time remains for select publications.</p> <p>Ms Fulton outlined where the OSR Review of National Statistics Designation has got to. Specifically, OSR want to move away from the term National Statistics and badging as it is creating an artificial distinction between Official and National Statistics. In addition, OSR are considering implementing a quicker assessment process and working out the pros and cons of keeping distinctions.</p>	

Ms Fulton highlighted that there is a New Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Robert Chote.

Discussion

- Dr Stuart noted that it is useful to know there is a certain degree of rigour with statistics and queried – if OSR do remove the distinction from statistics will there still be quality control between official statistics and other statistics. Ms Fulton confirmed that when official statistics are released there will be some indication that they are monitored by OSR and have been assessed for compliance against the code.
- Mr Compton discussed the OSR assessment of Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES). Mr Green explained that the OSR assessment of the BESES report resulted in two recommendations being put forward to the team. The team reviewed the two recommendations and completed all tasks required which in turn resulted in the BESES achieving National Statistics Designation.
- Mr Green noted how the BESES team did bring the publication forward by 2 months and how the report, which now includes both imports and exports in a single publication, usefully highlights the balance of trade. It was also noted that the most recent BESES publication was accompanied by over 600 data tables, 40+ of which were new this year as a result of developments made by the team.
- Mr Ganley explained how the team has set up a monthly dashboard of trade data provided by Eurostat. To assist the development and accessibility of this dashboard a user group was conducted. Mr Green commended Mr Ganley and the BESES team for all of the work they had done in this space, which was extremely customer orientated.
- Mr Ganley continued stating that the decision to bring forward and blend the three previous publications into two publications was welcomed by users. Further methods being considered to improve the timeliness of trade data include increasing response rates and investigating if the database can be closed earlier to release results a bit earlier. Mr Ganley did explain however, that the data is collected via the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) which is a large, annual survey where data is available around 12 months after the statistical reference period. Mr Ganley noted the timeliness of the ABI in comparison to other annual publications and explained that as the BESES report is also an annual release, only a certain amount of elements can be shortened/taken out to improve timeliness.
- Mr Ganley then discussed the new table builder being developed in collaboration with NISRA's dissemination branch which includes BESES data. User engagement is planned to assist users with how to use the table builder and to outline what data is likely to be available.
- Mr Green noted current ABI developments which will improve BESES outputs: For online only forms import questions have been amended to mirror export questions so as to gather equivalent data for the two trade flows. Mr Ganley explained that this was in response to user feedback looking more equivalent imports data.
- Ms Carey echoed previous points – While survey data collection processes can be sped up, ultimately the timeliness of the BESES publication is determined by the nature of it being an annual survey.
- Mr Ramsey highlighted how attention may have been brought to the timeliness of NI trade data in response to CSOs monthly trade data release. A discussion followed focussing on how increasing the timeliness of data may impact the accuracy of data.

<p>8.</p>	<p>AOB (16:00-close)</p> <p>Mr Jardine’s internet connection went down and Mr Green assumed the Chair. Mr Green closed the meeting and mentioned that a presentation from Victor Dukelow (DfE) on the metrics DfE plan to employ to monitor progress on the 10X Economic Strategy is planned for the next SAC meeting.</p> <p>Ms Carey notified attendees of Dr Power’s retirement and both the chair and members acknowledged the valuable contribution that she had made to the work of the committee over a number of years.</p> <p>Mr Green discussed the possibility of a presentation from NISRA Vital Statistics on the ‘Review of Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland’ report for the next SAC meeting.</p>	<p>4. A presentation from Victor Dukelow (DfE) on the metrics DfE plan to employ to monitor progress on the 10X Economic Strategy is planned for the next meeting.</p> <p>5. A presentation from NISRA Vital Statistics on the ‘Review of Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland’ report was suggested for the next meeting.</p>
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Summary of Actions

Action	Subject
1.	Secretary to obtain the link to the Rapid Evidence Review undertaken by Queen’s University Belfast for DoE to share with members.
2.	Secretary to obtain the Census 2021 Assembly Laid Report, the Census 2021 Statistical Bulletin, and the Census summer 2022 SAC presentation to share with members.
3.	An update on Census 2021 outputs with a focus on the new census table builder was requested for the next SAC meeting.
4.	A presentation from Victor Dukelow (DfE) on the metrics DfE plan to employ to monitor progress on the 10X Economic Strategy is planned for the next meeting.
5.	A presentation from NISRA Vital Statistics on the ‘Review of Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland’ report was suggested for the next meeting.
6.	Secretary to arrange the next meeting in Autumn/Winter 2022.