MEETING OF THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
16th November 2022

In attendance

Mr Edgar Jardine	Chair	Ms Amanda Alexander	NISRA
Ms Siobhan Carey	NISRA	Mr Brian Green	NISRA
Mr John Compton	Member	Dr David Marshall	NISRA
Mrs Sharon McNicholl	Member	Mr Richard Elliott	NISRA
Dr Chris Morris	Member	Ms Carole-Anne McKay	NISRA
Dr Kieran Payne	Member	Ms Ruth Fulton	NISRA
Dr Bernie Stuart	Member	Mr Victor Dukelow	DfE
Dr Athanasia Xenaki	Member	Mr Aaron Maguire	NISRA
Mr Gerard Colgan	NISRA	Dr Michelle Leckey	NISRA

Item No.	Subject	Action
1.	**Welcome, Introductions and Apologies (10:00-10:05)** Mr Jardine welcomed members and officials to the meeting before short introductions were given from all attendees. Apologies were received from Mr Ramsey.	
2.	**Minutes and Matters Arising (10:05-10:10)** It was agreed that the minutes were an accurate account of the previous meeting (16th June 2022). All action points arising from the previous meeting were addressed.	
3.	**DfE presentation – The metrics DfE plan to employ to monitor progress on the 10X Economic Strategy (10:10-10:40)** Mr Dukelow introduced the slides "Measuring Success – 10X Metrics to Achieve a 10X Economy" and provided an overview of the 10X vision. His presentation covered: The three pillars which underpin the 10X strategy: • Innovation led growth; • Inclusivity; and • Sustainability. The three-tiered approach used for 10X measurement: • Tier 1 – International metrics including comparisons to elite, small, advanced economies; • Tier 2 – Underpinning metrics, linking programme-level objectives and overall 10X improvements the department wants to see; and • Tier 3 – Program-level/Policy metrics (the specific metrics of tier 3 are still to be established).	1. Secretary to send DfE ''Measuring Success – 10X Metrics to Achieve a 10X Economy'' presentation slides to SAC members.

Selection criteria for developing metrics has meant the metrics must be robust, accessible, timely, coherent, and where possible be internationally comparable to understand NI performance internationally.

A step-by-step overview of the departments approach to 10X measurement:
- Comparable small and advanced economies (16) were selected for measurement based on population size and competitive ranking (these countries include but are not limited to Scandinavia and New Zealand); and
- The team undertook a review of best practice approaches as well as seeking advice from experts and engaging with key stakeholders.

Key data sources which serve each of the three tiers of measurement:
- Innovation led growth – Gross Expenditure on R&D, Business Expenditure on R&D (Innovation statistics are being considered as an alternative to Business Expenditure on R&D), Educational attainment and Labour Productivity;
- Inclusivity – Educational Attainment, Employment Rate and Household Disposable Income; and
- Sustainability – Electricity from Renewable Sources and CO_2 emissions (more data sources are planned).

Further insights were provided for NI employment rate data including the impact COVID has had on employment and comparisons to other small, advanced economies.

Mr Dukelow requested that his slides be sent to all members following the meeting and provided a high-level overview of proposed tier 2 metrics for all three pillars. He also discussed 10X consultation responses to the question "Do you consider that these are the right metrics to monitor as we take forward 10X?" where just over half of responders replied "Agree". He explained that where respondents responded with ''I don't know'' they often brought forward alternative suggestions.

Mr Dukelow discussed next steps of the 10X project (which includes considering consultation feedback, developing, and finalising tier 2 and tier 3 metrics, and producing reports) and highlighted the key role NISRA plays in the 10X strategy through the provision of key data for tier 1 and tier 2 metrics.

Current 10X focus includes:
- Innovation pillar – The upward revision of R&D expenditure figures for the UK;
- Sustainability pillar – New data to better capture the pillar; and
- Inclusivity pillar disaggregation of data based on LGD/deprivation areas.

Mr Jardine thanked Mr Dukelow for his presentation and opened a discussion between attendees.

Discussion

- Dr Stuart queried, in relation to the sustainability pillar are the measures employed by the 10X strategy going to be taken from/influenced by the key Green Growth strategy? In addition, how does the 10X strategy link to the Green Growth strategy in terms of sustainability? Mr Dukelow confirmed that there is a close relationship between the two strategies. In particular, the Climate Change Act is an important element which will help define the 10X strategy pathway and action plans. Mr Dukelow continued, while sustainability measures are still to be set, work is on-going to identify

	sustainability targets, for example carbon emissions and industrial processes. • Mrs McNicholl asked, in terms of metrics how the outcomes of the innovation pillar connect to other strategies and outcome-based approaches. Mr Dukelow confirmed that the indicators are broadly aligned to Programme for Government. • Mrs McNicholl also asked if the 10X team are going to be looking into how individual sectors in NI compare to individual sectors in other comparable countries. Mr Dukelow confirmed that the team would like to split data down to sectoral level. • Mr Compton commended the 10X presentation for being comprehensive and noted how the proposed KPIs seemed sufficiently flexible to deliver meaningful metrics. Mr Compton asked if the KPI data could influence/ challenge the 10x objectives if it validated some consultation responses around the capacity for joined-up departmental processes, and if the 10X objectives and metrics focused on R&D spend rather than commercial outcomes or new high GVA jobs. Mr Dukelow stated there was confidence that the KPIs would be sufficiently robust to validate the 10x objectives but would also have flexibility to offer feedback as to how performance might be improved through keeping the strategy under review. There was an awareness that the consultation process had been conducted over a relatively short period which impacted on response numbers and content. Mr Dukelow agreed that there had been questions around joined-up departmental capacity and measuring how higher GVA employment could be directly attributed to R&D/Innovation. For that reason, he was confident that the three-tier approach to 10x measurement was robust, was internationally benchmarked and would be capable of driving behaviours and influencing the programme policies.	
4.	**Census Presentation – Next phases and a demonstration of the proposed new Table Builder Application (10:40-11:00)** Mr Elliott spoke to his slides 'Census Update' which provided an overview of publications that have been released, future plans, digital products, and the flexible table builder application. Mr Elliott asked that his slides be sent to all members following the meeting and provided an overview of the first census release which was published on 24th May 2022 and included estimates of the NI population (rounded). The data published included age bands and sex, residence, and household count and size. He then discussed main statistics that were published on 22nd September 2022, which included: • Unrounded estimates of NI and the 11 LGDs; • Country of birth; • Ethnic group; • Religion; • Language; and • National Identity. Mr Elliott went into further detail for some key statistics, namely noting the ageing population and how the population is becoming more diverse (% of population born outside UK and Ireland). Mr Elliott highlighted the vast media coverage that census statistics had received and outlined upcoming releases, emphasising how the new flexible table builder	2. Secretary to send Census ''November 2022 Update'' presentation slides to SAC members.

	will be a major release moving forward. In terms of releasing microdata, the plans for doing this are still being developed and the team is involved in consultations with academics to progress this. Mr Elliott brought attendees attention to the census area explorer and discussed examples of what can be done with it. For example, NI passport data can be broken down by LGD. He then gave a demonstration of the flexible table builder, using the table builder in development at ONS as an example of how the NISRA version will operate. He provided a step-by-step example of how to create custom tables based on individual user needs, explaining that once a user has generated their table of interest, they can either view the data on the table builder application or download it as a CSV file. Other features of the table builder were highlighted – for example, the application will inform users if any data they have selected does not pass confidentiality checks. If this occurs the application has the ability to indicate to users what data is missing and from where. Dr Marshall provided further information on when further results and the system table builder will be released/go live and delved further into the workings of the new table builder. Mr Jardine thanked Mr Elliott for his presentation and opened a discussion between attendees. **Discussion** - Mr Jardine asked is it possible to get comparable data between 2011 district councils and the new 2021 council areas. Mr Elliott explained that a fair amount of 2011 data has been released on the new 11 council areas. Work has also been done on reworking the geographies for the 2021 census and the team are aware of the need to maintain as much comparability between 2011 and 2021 as possible. - Mr Compton questioned the risk associated with the all the data being held under the table builder application. Ms Carey explained that the application has been put through several trials to ensure no risk is associated. Furthermore, while the application allows users to build their own tables it still maintains the same protection that the department would have during statistical processing. Dr Marshall echoed Ms Carey and explained that the application is going through diligent processes to ensure no data risk.	
5.	**Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch Update (11:00-11:30)** Mr Colgan provided an overview of the SAC ELMS paper which was circulated to attendees prior to the meeting. He discussed a number of statutory matters including: - ELMS business surveys - focussing on the improvement in response rates and coverage post-COVID for surveys; - Data collection initiatives that are on-going in the branch – for example, administrative staff have taken part in refusal training to assist them when dealing with difficult non-responders. This training has proved useful and helped bring the Quarterly Business Survey response rate above 70%; - The development of a new integrated business survey system – Mr Colgan gave an overview of current developments with this project and explained that the branch is hoping to implement a statistical production system in-house to go hand-in-hand with the data collection system;	3. A presentation on the progress of ELMS Quarterly GDP measure was requested for the next SAC meeting. 4. An update on the on-going work of NISRA's Tech Lab was requested for the next SAC meeting.

- An overview of recent changes made to the prosecutions procedures within ELMS;
- ELMS microdata requests; and
- NISRA data linkage projects using business survey data – A summary of the Business Data for Research database which contains ABI, BRES and ASHE data was provided.

Mr Colgan then discussed non-statutory issues. An overview of work and developments within the Labour Market Statistics team was provided, which included:
- Highlighting the Labour Market Statistics User Group which was held on 29th September 2022; and
- Bringing attention to both the new Labour Market Report format (now released in HTML format) and the Transformed Labour Force Survey which aims to use an online-first multi-mode collection approach.

An overview of work and developments within the NI Economic Accounts Project was also provided, which included:
- A summary of upcoming Supply-Use Tables releases; and
- Detail on the on-going work to develop a quarterly GDP output.

Recent changes to the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) results were discussed:
- How the publication has been refined;
- How timeliness and availability of datasets has been improved; and
- How the name of the BESES publication will be changed to "NI Economic Trade Statistics" moving forward to be more representative of the contents within the report i.e., both imports and exports data being published together.

Mr Colgan informed attendees that the Tourism Statistics team became part of the ELMS branch in August 2022.

In closing, Mr Colgan then brought attendees' attention to the vast list of publications that have been released by ELMS since the last SAC meeting.

Mr Jardine thanked Mr Colgan for the branch update and opened a discussion between attendees.

Discussion

- Mr Green commended the various teams within ELMS for their relentless work and the dedication & commitment they have shown to innovate and progress all projects, while continuing to deliver business as usual through challenging times.
- Mr Compton asked about the possibility of a presentation on the progress of ELMS Quarterly GDP measure. Mr Jardine echoed this request to include it as an agenda item at the next meeting.
- Dr Stuart queried whether NI tourism statistics, specifically occupancy at hotels, have been skewed by some hotels now being occupied by non-hotel guests and the recent influx of Ukrainian refugees. In response, Ms Carey explained how over last couple of months The Executive Office teams have been expanded to include a dedicated Ukrainian research workstream which works closely with The Home Office and departments in Scotland and Wales.

	• Dr Stuart asked about the rationale behind employing refusal training for administrative staff. Ms Carey explained that the methodology and thinking behind the work she previously did on refusal training for households helped inform the refusal training which took place among ELMS staff – for example, the need to correctly identify the problem, tailoring engagement, and ensuring it is evidence based. Mr Green highlighted that the refusal training has had a positive impact on the morale, confidence and engagement of administrative staff within the branch. • Mr Payne queried whether ELMS survey sample sizes have been constant over the past several years. Mr Colgan explained that that was generally the case but highlighted that the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) is unique in that it carries out a census sample on a rolling cyclical basis as considered prudent. • Mr Payne also queried whether the proposed new statistics platform will be built in house. Mr Colgan explained that the procurement is for a dedicated data collection system and that ELMS will be building a statistical platform which will be used for the harmonised processing of the information collected through the various statutory surveys. • Ms Carey explained how work in the NISRA Tech Lab is on-going. The Tech Lab is a resource which works with numerous business areas on transformation projects, for example in the development the new Labour Market HTML report. Mr Compton asked if members could get an update on the on-going work of NISRA's Tech Lab at the next SAC meeting. • Mr Jardine questioned the timeliness of the Supply-Use Tables and if a quicker turnaround is possible? Mr Colgan explained that within NISRA, ONS and the Blue Book the supply use tables always run a few years behind. Mr Green highlighted that while the tables do run a couple of years behind and that the NI SUTs rely on those produced by the ONS (and as such naturally lag behind), the team has carried out a raft of work to address the timeliness with the team aiming to release the 2019 SUTs in late spring 2023 with the 2020 SUTs planned for winter 2023.	
6.	**Official Statistics Update (11:30-11:50)** Ms Fulton provided an overview of the SAC Official Statistics Update paper which was circulated to attendees prior to the meeting, discussing the Assessment of Official Statistics and providing an update on ongoing National Statistics assessments since the last SAC meeting. These statistics include: • 2021 Census. She then updated attendees on other ongoing Compliance Checks since the last SAC meeting, including how ONS is in the process of improving labour market statistics. Ms Fulton also provided an overview of the revised process for reporting 'Concerns' under the Code of Practice and highlighted that NISRA have now implemented the new guidance. A total of two concerns have been reported to the Office for Statistics Regulation for the financial year 2022/23. These concerns were from: 1. Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics; and 2. COVID-19 Infection Survey: NI Weekly Report. With both concerns, corrective actions were quickly taken to rectify the issues and reduce the potential impacts. Mr Jardine thanked Ms Fulton for the update and opened a discussion between attendees.	

	Discussion	
	- Mr Jardine noted the lack of compliance issues since the last update. Ms Fulton explained the success of this is due to colleagues working to ensure this continues and how there are now procedures in place to prevent compliance issues, for example if IT fails there are other mechanisms of getting publications out. Ms Carey and Ms Fulton also discussed the processes that were put in place for publishing around Queen Elizabeth's death and funeral. - Ms Carey explained pre-release access has been cut back. Mr Compton agreed with this decision, particularly for census data considering the potential risk of misreporting. - Mr Green explained the changes occurring within the Labour Force Survey (LFS) transformation. He outlined that the team has been engaging with ONS (who are hoping to implement the transformed LFS by next autumn) on the project. However, he relayed that the Agency has raised concerns about moving to change the data collection and measurement process for key labour market indicators during a period of forecasted volatility in the labour market arising from the cost of living crisis. Accordingly, NISRA will continue to use the Labour Force Survey as its official source for such metrics until further notice. He commended the ONS for the work they have undertaken, which has been constructive in terms of the move to online data collection. - Mr Jardine questioned the LFS response rates. Mr Green explained that while response rates had fallen during the pandemic (as face-to-face had to cease with a switch to telephone interviewing) across the board, they were almost back to pre-pandemic levels. He emphasised the Central Survey Unit's knock-to-nudge strategy and the dedication and commitment of the office based staff and survey interviewers had been key in securing this. - Mr Jardine opened a discussion on the trust and awareness of NISRA. Ms Fulton explained that while there has been a dip in trust and awareness, the results from the recent publication are encouraging as there have been improvements in both variables across several years. Furthermore, the dip was expected given the news coverage over the pandemic and should be considered in context of the difficult environment the organisation was working in over recent years. - Mr Jardine highlighted how the media have started attributing more of the information that is released to NISRA. - Mr Compton, Ms Fulton and Ms Carey discussed the need to continue reinforcing the NISRA brand with media outlets to continue improving trust and awareness.	
7.	**AOB (11:50-close)** Mr Jardine notified attendees that Ms Leckey will be taking over as Secretary of SAC from Mr Maguire and thanked him for his efforts and support while acting as secretary. In closing the meeting Mr Jardine notified attendees of Ms Carey's retirement and acknowledged the valuable contribution that she has made as NISRAs Chief Executive and Registrar General for Northern Ireland during a period that saw NISRA's information and National Statistics underpinning government policy and decision making in particularly challenging times. Mr Jardine also applauded Ms Carey's inclusive, engaging and encouraging style of leadership which delivered	5. Secretary to arrange the next meeting in Spring/Summer 2023.

	unprecedented levels of collaboration, innovation and automation and had served to surface real talent across the Agency Mr Jardine closed by thanking Ms Carey for her contribution and valued support to SAC over recent years and, on behalf of the committee, passed on their best wishes for a long and happy retirement.	

Summary of Actions

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1.	Secretary to send DfE ''Measuring Success – 10X Metrics to Achieve a 10X Economy'' presentation slides to SAC members.
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4.	An update on the on-going work of NISRA's Tech Lab was requested for the next SAC meeting.
5.	Secretary to arrange the next meeting in Spring/Summer 2023.