

## MEETING OF THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

### In attendance

Mr Edgar Jardine	Chair	Ms Cathryn Blair	NISRA
Dr Danielle Blaylock	Member	Ms Siobhan Carey	NISRA
Mr Derek Bond	Member	Mr Gerard Colgan	NISRA
Mr John Compton	Member	Mr Brian Green	NISRA
Mrs Sharon McNicholl	Member	Ms Carole-Ann McKay	NISRA
Dr Chris Morris	Member	Mr Brendan Morgan	NISRA
Dr Kieran Payne	Member	Dr Tracy Power	NISRA
Mr Richard Ramsey	Member	Dr Arlene Connolly	NISRA (Secretariat)
Dr Bernie Stuart	Member		
Dr Athanasia Xenaki	Member		

Item No.	Subject	Action
1.	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b></p> <p>Mr Jardine welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that no apologies had been received.</p> <p>As this was the first meeting with the newly reconstituted membership the chair, Mr Jardine, asked for all those in attendance to introduce themselves. New members were welcomed.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Minutes and Matters Arising</b></p> <p>Minutes of the previous meeting (29th November 2019) had been circulated. It was agreed, by those in attendance at that meeting, that the minutes were an accurate account.</p> <p>Dr Connolly provided an update on the actions from the November 2019 meeting. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review of UK Standard Occupational Classification codes conducted by the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University in conjunction with ONS completed in February 2020. A link to the new codes would be sent to members.</li> <li>Mr Ed Humpherson, Director General of the Office for Statistics Regulation will be invited to the next meeting of SAC to speak to the committee on official statistics.</li> </ul>	<p>1. Secretary to issue a link to the SOC 2020 codes to members.</p> <p>2. Secretary to liaise with NISRA's Statistical Support Branch to secure Mr Humpherson's attendance at the next meeting.</p>
3.	<p><b>SAC Terms of Reference</b></p> <p>The chair spoke to the committee on the need to review the Statistics Advisory Committee's Terms of Reference (ToR).</p> <p>It was noted that the current SAC ToR were specified under Section 6 of <a href="#">The Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988</a>. Members agreed that a</p>	<p>3. SAC members to email comments on proposed changes to the ToR to the secretary on or before 4<sup>th</sup> June.</p>

	<p>review of the terms was appropriate to clarify the groups remit. The review would be conducted via correspondence with the secretary and the new draft ToR presented to the members at the next meeting.</p>	<p>4. Draft ToR to be presented to the committee at the next meeting.</p>
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Update on Economic and Labour Market Statistics Statutory and non-statutory matters</b></p> <p>Mr Colgan provided the following update on actions from the November 2019 meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investigations continue on the potential use of date of birth data from Company's House. A stakeholder event was due to take place in June but was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.</li> <li>- A decision has yet to be taken on changes to the wording on survey forms as a result of the new rules regarding prosecutions. The decision was taken to suspend prosecutions as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses.</li> </ul> <p>Mr Colgan presented the following paper to the committee: Developments in NISRA Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) (SAC 01/2020). The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr Colgan reported that COVID -19 had a substantial impact on Business Survey work in Northern Ireland. A lack of laptops and remote access to survey processing systems reduced quality assurance and response chasing. Online guidance documents were produced to support businesses, however response rates for business surveys were down across the board.</li> <li>• Members were informed that a furlough question had been added to the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) and that the ONS Business Impact of Coronavirus Survey (BICS) had received a boost of 1,300 NI businesses.</li> <li>• Members expressed interest in understanding more about the prosecution of businesses that fail to respond to statutory surveys. Mr Colgan informed the group that 2 businesses had been fined (£500 and £800) for failure to comply in 2019 and a further 3 cases were ongoing with the PPS. An update on the prosecution process within ELMSB is to be provided at the next meeting.</li> <li>• Mr Colgan had worked closely with his devolved counterparts, via weekly Devolved Economic Statistics Coordination (DESC) meetings to try and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on statistical output. It was acknowledged that low response rates presented methodological problems for staff and that the impact on the quality of output had yet to be quantified. The quality of data and any restriction on its use would be communicated to users in the statistical reports. Mr Colgan acknowledged the contribution that this group made to ELMSB acquiring VAT turnover data, which has been particularly helpful to a number of work areas in the branch.</li> </ul> <p>Following Mr Colgan's update a discussion was had on how members could support work within ELMSB to improve response rates. Members agreed to support the circulation of any media message the branch may issue and it was also agreed that an engagement event with business bodies would be extremely useful. Other sources of data were also discussed. Dr Payne suggested that government pay loan data may provide an early indicator for the impact of COVID-19 and Ms Stuart asked if the number of pupils engaging online could be used as a proxy measure to school attendance. Dr Power informed the group that the Department of Education collated statistics on the number of pupils of key workers attending</p>	<p>5. An update on prosecutions to be provided at the next meeting by Mr Colgan.</p> <p>6. ELMSB to seek the support of SAC with circulation of media messages, as required.</p> <p>7. Secretary to enquire of the Department of Education about the use of online access data in pupil attendance statistics.</p>

	<p>school and asked the secretary to enquire of the department if use was made of online access data in relation to pupil attendance. Ms Carey led a further discussion around the need to start planning how revisions are to be made as we start to look backwards on this period. Members agreed that it was necessary to begin planning how back series would be revised as restrictions for COVID-19 are eased but acknowledged that strenuous efforts had been made to meet the high demand for statistics over this challenging period.</p>	
<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Official Statistics</b></p> <p>Dr Power provided a brief background on official statistics for the benefit of the new members with the expectation that Mr Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, would provide more detail at the next meeting. In the interim, the secretary would circulate the Code of Practice for Statistics.</p> <p>Dr Power continued to present the paper: Official Statistics Update (SAC 02/2020). The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2019/20, 12 breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics had occurred. Dr Morris commented that of these 12 breaches a disproportionate number occurred in the Department of Justice (DoJ). Dr Power explained that there had been changes to the DoJ board members and that a plan was in place to engage with DoJ staff on official statistics matters in order to help reduce the risk of further breaches. There had been one further breach in 2020, within the 2020/21 financial year.</li> <li>• SAC members were informed of the development of a UK wide user engagement strategy by the ONS. Members were asked to support this work by participating in a telephone interview or completing a short questionnaire. Those interested were to contact the secretary for further details.</li> </ul> <p>Dr Power spoke to her paper on the impact that COVID-19 had on official statistics (SAC 03/2020).</p> <p>Of particular note was the work carried out by Vital Statistics Branch in providing weekly death statistics, including the numbers of COVID-19 and other respiratory related deaths. Statisticians worked hard to meet the information needs of the public and the report evolved over time to include location of deaths, in particular, deaths in care homes. A dashboard, presenting some of the key weekly deaths statistics was first released on 17<sup>th</sup> April, and has been updated weekly. The release of these high profile statistics was accompanied by media briefings to ensure that reporters and journalists understood the key facts and reported them correctly. Dr Power continued to list some of the official statistics produced by NISRA in response to the data needs presented by the pandemic. These included a weekly release of Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland, weekly management information on domestic abuse calls, Universal Credit Claimants, Payments and Advances (including a dashboard to be used internally within DfC). Despite the extensive list of new COVID-19 related outputs, Dr Power stressed that not all data requests were met. NISRA adhered to the three pillars of the <a href="#">Code of Practice of Statistics: Trustworthiness, Quality and Value</a> in its consideration of all data requests.</p> <p>Discussions were held on the value of the media briefings. Mr Compton suggested that the briefings provided NISRA with an opportunity to build on the NISRA brand. It was agreed that a subgroup of SAC members and invited NISRA staff should</p>	<p>8. Secretary is issue a link to the CoP to all members.</p> <p>9. Members interested in contributing to the development of the UK user engagement strategy to contact the secretary for further details.</p> <p>10. Members interested in joining the branding subgroup to inform the secretary.</p> <p>11. Secretary to remind those drafting papers for SAC meeting to explain acronyms.</p>

	<p>meet to consider the advancement of the NISRA brand. Those members that wished to take part in the NISRA branding subgroup were asked to inform the secretary.</p> <p>Ms Carey noted that NISRA papers contained a lot of acronyms which would cause particular difficulty for new members. The secretary would ask those drafting papers for the next meeting to explain all acronyms.</p>	
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>COVID-19 Impact on Social Surveys</b></p> <p>Mr Morgan spoke to his paper: Social Surveys Update in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic (SAC 04/2020). The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NISRA’s social survey face-to-face operations were suspended on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 in line with government advice. This action had minimal impact on the 2019-20 survey cycle as most surveys in the field had reached or surpassed their target for the period. However, the data collection for Wave 1 of the Labour Force Survey was impacted significantly with Waves 2-5 less so as they are more dependent on telephone contacts.</li> <li>• Following the suspension of face-to-face survey operations data collection moved to telephone mode. Questionnaires and interviewer instructions were quickly modified and became operational in April. Discussions were had with departmental customers throughout this transition period. Response rates across social surveys in NI were much lower than expected (15%- 20%). Ms Carey and Dr Xenaki noted the need to return to these datasets in the future with the aim of improving their quality retrospectively.</li> <li>• Central Survey Unit (CSU) have taken a number of actions in order to improve response rates, including: issuing reminder letters, use of NISRA’s media platforms to promote NISRA’s surveys, and use of incentives. The committee agreed that improved public awareness of NISRA during this period would help with uptake. Discussions were had on how best to increase the profile of NISRA and it was agreed that the branding subgroup would consider these matters separately.</li> </ul>	
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>Chair’s Business</b></p> <p>Mr Jardine asked Mr Ramsey if he would be content to present on the Purchasing Managers Index survey at the next meeting. Mr Ramsey agreed to do so.</p>	12. Mr Ramsey to present details of PMI at the next SAC meeting.
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>The Chair suggested that a subgroup to consider the format for a future Business Bodies meeting should be established. The committee agreed to the formation of this subgroup and to forward their name on to the secretary if they wished to join.</p>	13. Members interested in joining the business bodies subgroup to inform the secretary
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Date of next meeting</b></p> <p>It was agreed that the next meeting should be held in September or October 2020</p>	14. Secretariat to arrange the next meeting in September or October 2020

## Summary of Actions

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>
1	Secretary to issue a link to the SOC 2020 codes to members.
2	Secretary to liaise with NISRA's Statistical Support Branch to secure Mr Humpherson's attendance at the next meeting.
3	SAC members to email comments on proposed changes to the ToR to the secretary on or before 4 <sup>th</sup> June.
4	Draft ToR to be presented to the committee at the next meeting.
5	An update on prosecutions to be provided at the next meeting by Mr Colgan.
6	ELMSB to seek the support of SAC with circulation of media messages, as required.
7	Secretary to enquire of the Department of Education about use of online access data in pupil attendance statistics.
8	Secretary is issue a link to the CoP to all members.
9	Members interested in contributing to the development of the UK User Engagement Strategy to contact the secretary for further details.
10	Members interested in joining the branding subgroup to inform the secretary.
11	Secretary to remind those drafting papers for SAC meeting to explain acronyms.
12	Mr Ramsey to present details of PMI at the next SAC meeting.
13	Members interested in joining the business bodies subgroup to inform the secretary.
14	Secretariat to arrange the next meeting in Sept/Oct 2020.