

## **Background Quality Report for ‘Employment in the NICS’**

### **Introduction – Context for the quality report**

This publication is the latest in a quarterly series which began in July 2011. It was designed to provide easy access to summary information on Northern Ireland Civil Service employees, provide trend data and compare figures with contextual information on the Northern Ireland public sector and Civil Service employees in Great Britain, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government.

NICS staff figures are compiled from two sources – HRConnect, the human resources service for the NICS, and Compass, the system used by Northern Ireland Prison Service. Databases are compiled and analysis produced, with publication of figures relating to the first day of the quarter typically in the middle of the quarter on a pre-announced date. A set of open source downloadable tables and a graph are produced. Further details are available in the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) report](#).

### **Relevance - *The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.***

Consultation with key stakeholders indicated that both the coverage and content are appropriate to the needs of users. The September 2023 user survey indicated that the report is mainly used to facilitate research, policy making/monitoring and to aid decision making on resource allocation.

### **Accuracy and Reliability - *The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.***

Coverage of staff is 100%. The main computer system from which the data are extracted is also used to pay staff. The two main potential sources of bias and error are in terms of department, which is derived from the organisation name and if incorrectly recorded could be omitted from a department's figures; and in terms of analogous grade – in a small minority of cases when an employee is on temporary promotion, substantive grade information is missing and the employee could be assigned the wrong analogous grade. However these potential sources of error are not likely to impact the overall figures and are likely to have a very small impact on the accuracy of the department and analogous grade figures.

### **Timeliness and Punctuality - *Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.***

The publication relates to the first day of the quarter, and the report is published around 6 weeks after this date. This publication schedule was reviewed in November 2020 and brought the publication forward by at least five weeks. To ensure the data are as complete and accurate as possible, the databases are extracted with a 3 week time lag, allowing time for staff to update HRConnect with staff movements during the reporting period. The publication date allows for validation and quality assurance of the NICS figures to be undertaken. The publication schedule

allows for more timely availability of NICS figures, but means that comparison with contextual information on the Northern Ireland public sector and Civil Service employees in Great Britain, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government is made with a lag of one quarter. All publications have been published on the planned date.

**Accessibility and Clarity - *Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.***

The open source tables and graph are published on the NISRA website. It contains a description of the staff covered, and definitions of the terms used. Checks have been carried out to ensure compliance with accessibility requirements.

Following User Consultation, the written report was suspended for the 1 October 2023 publication. HRCS is currently collecting user feedback on the tabular output to assess clarity.

**Coherence and Comparability - *Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.***

The annual NISRA report 'Personnel Statistics for the NICS' uses the same staff basis as the April report, while the annual 'Equality Statistics for the NICS' report uses the same staff basis as the January report.

A section on discontinuities is included in the report, providing details of groups of staff moving in and out of the NICS to help with trend comparisons.

**Trade-offs between Output Quality Components - *Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.***

There is a trade-off between the timeliness of the report and its accuracy and reliability, with accuracy and reliability deemed more important.

There is also a trade-off between the timeliness of the report and coherence with other sources – to enable more timely NICS data, comparison with GS, Scotland, Wales and NI Public Sector is based on the latest available figures relating to a quarter earlier than the NICS figures.

**Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions - *The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.***

Staff involved in the production of the publication regularly meet with the key users of their statistics throughout the year, typically with specialist staff within NICS HR who have responsibility for the relevant work area. In addition to these meetings, HRCS staff would also have regular telephone and email contact with key users.

**Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden - *The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.***

The operational cost (staff time) of producing each issue of the publication is approximately £3300. There is no respondent burden, since the data are held on an administrative system.

**Confidentiality, Transparency and Security - *The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.***

Data are held on a network that is only accessible to the few statisticians who need access. While there are no confidentiality issues in relation to the variables used to construct the report, the variables are held alongside other personal information variables so access is restricted. A description of the inclusions in the report is provided in the "Background" and "Definitions" section, with more detailed information on the processes used to produce the database and output are outlined in the QAAD.

**Last Updated: 22 May 2024.**