

February 2025

Northern Ireland Research and Development User Consultation: Results

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

Theme: Economy

Frequency: Ad hoc

Introduction

A user consultation survey was set up on the NI Direct website via Citizen Space, which sought feedback from users on the Northern Ireland Research and Development (R&D) statistics. Users were invited to provide their views and feedback from 16th August 2024 until 27th September 2024. In total 5 users responded to the survey. This paper provides a summary of user feedback to the consultation along with our proposed response for the future development of Northern Ireland R&D statistics.

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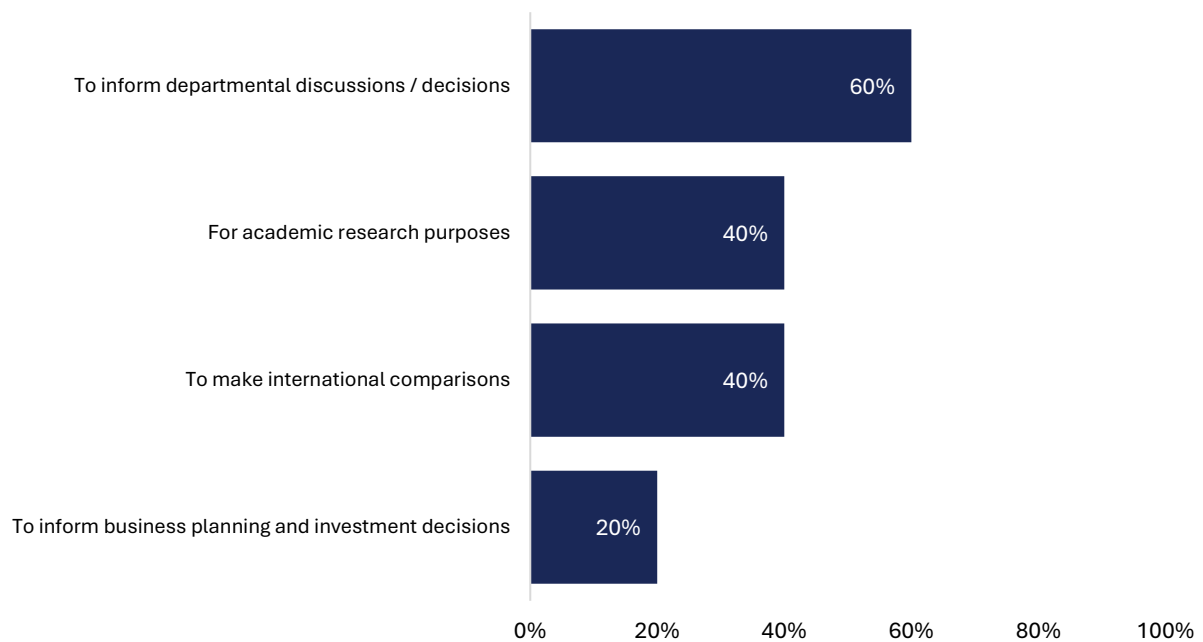
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Findings

Uses of the NISRA R&D publication

Respondents used the R&D publication for a variety of purposes as shown in Figure 1 below. The most popular use selected by 60% of respondent was to inform departmental discussions / decisions. This was followed by academic research purposes and making international comparisons, both of which were selected by 40% of respondents. Twenty percent of users also stated that they used the NI R&D publication to inform business planning and investment decisions.

Figure 1: For which purpose does your organisation use the NI R&D publication?



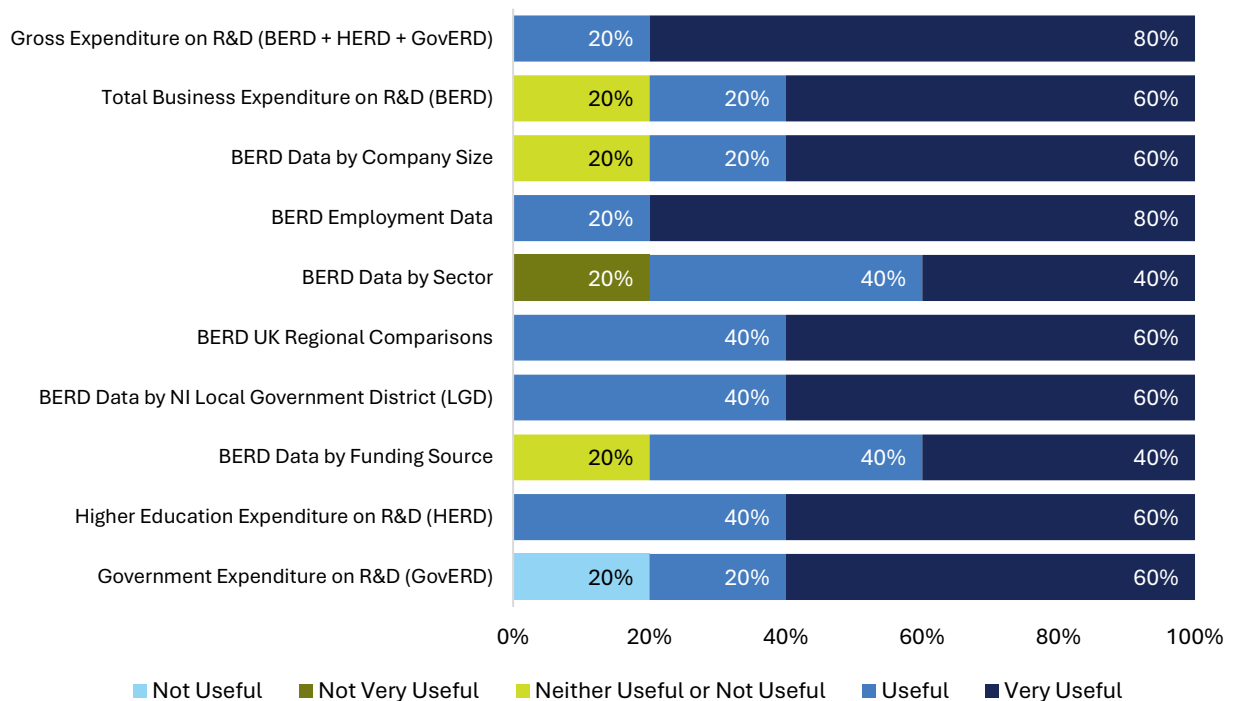
How well the NISRA R&D publication meets users' needs

The majority of respondents stated that the NI R&D publication sufficiently meets their organisation's needs. Two users stated that the publication didn't meet their organisation's needs and made suggestions of additional breakdowns that could be provided.

Usefulness of specific R&D analysis

Users were then asked, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not useful and 5 is very useful, how useful they found the different analyses contained within the NISRA R&D publication. As per Figure 2 below, overall responses were positive with at least 80% of respondents stating that each analysis was either useful (4) or very useful (5).

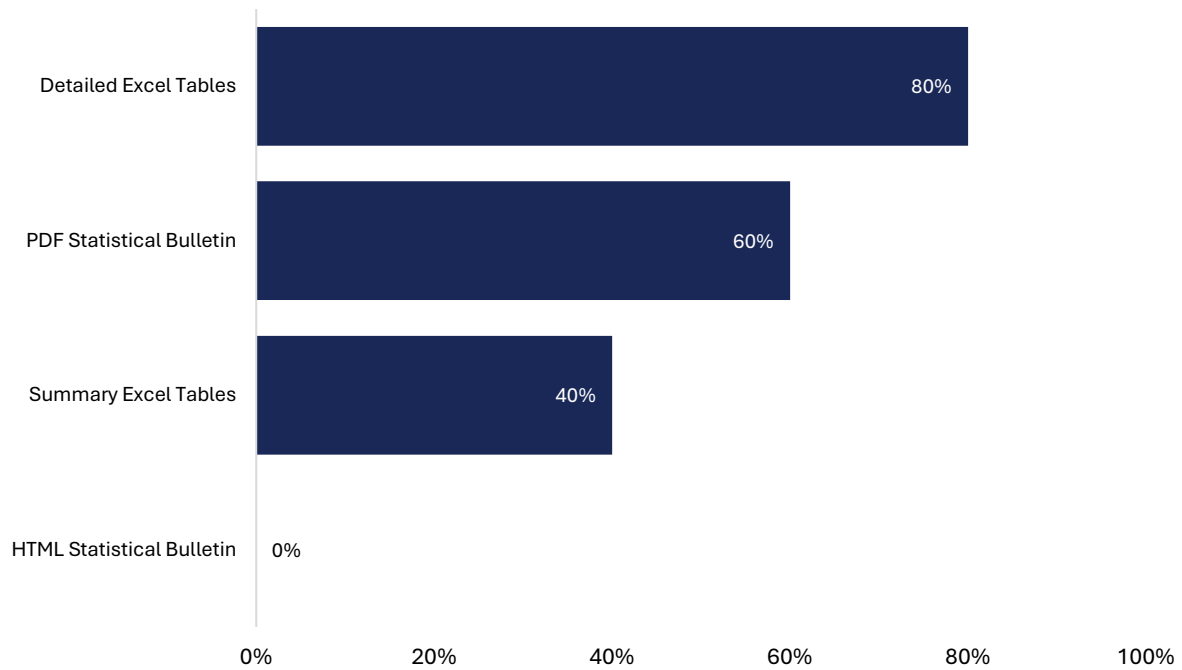
Figure 2: How useful users find each of the analyses found in the NISRA publication.



User perceptions of the different publication formats

Users were asked which publication format they found most useful. Figure 3 below shows that users found the detailed Excel tables the most useful part of the release for the NI R&D data, with 80% of respondents selecting this option. Sixty percent of respondents stated that the PDF bulletin was useful and 40% also stated the summary Excel tables were useful. Users were asked if it would be useful to include the R&D data on [NISRA's Data Portal](#), all respondents stated that this would be useful.

Figure 3: Usefulness of each R&D publication format released by NISRA



Users understanding of recent methodological changes to the NI R&D data

The uplift factor approach produced estimates for the period 2018 through to 2021 and figures based on the revised sampling methodology were published for both 2022 and 2023 survey periods. Users have identified a need for a consistent time series going back a number of years to allow for longer term analysis of the BERD data. 60% of respondents stated their organisation would be interested in seeing revised data for the period before 2018.

In recent years there have been changes made to the BERD survey methodology, including changes to sampling methods and revisions made to previous years data. Users were asked if they understood the drivers to these revisions and of the respondents that answered this question all stated they did understand the drivers of these revisions. 75% of respondents stated there was sufficient information regarding the uncertainty of the new revised estimates. One user answered “No” to this question, but in a comment stated “generally there is sufficient information but it would be useful to include the confidence intervals within the Excel tables”.

Users were asked how clear advice from NISRA about the strengths and limitations of the NI R&D data is. 75% of respondents that answered this question stated the advice was “clear” while 25% stated it is “not very clear”.

[NISRA has published a development plan](#) for the NI R&D survey, this sets out the progress made by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in developing Northern Ireland Research & Development statistics over the last two years along with providing an overview of the plans for the next year. Users were asked if there were any other priority areas that should be added into the development plan, 60% of respondents stated “No”. One respondent, who stated “Yes”, mentioned requiring indicators that were directly comparable with international databases, for example OECD and Eurostat.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from the consultation have been very positive and encouraging to the NISRA R&D team. The majority of users who responded indicated that the publication meets their needs and only minor changes are needed in order to meet the needs of the other respondents. Users find all the analyses in the publication useful, with at least 80% responding that each analysis was “useful” or “very useful”.

Next Steps

The results of this consultation have highlighted some areas where NISRA could improve the NI R&D publication to further meet user needs, these are as follows:

Confidence intervals

- Two users mentioned having measures of uncertainty for the data would be useful. NISRA will investigate developing confidence intervals for the data in order to give users a better understanding of the level of confidence in the data.

International comparisons and additional breakdowns

- Users mentioned different breakdowns of the data would be useful to have, including tables that allow for comparisons to international databases. NISRA will investigate the appropriateness of these breakdowns and seek to publish them in the next release if possible.

Back series

- The majority of respondents, 60%, stated that they would be interested in seeing revised R&D data prior to 2018. NISRA are working alongside colleagues in ONS on this and revised data will be published in due course.

Data portal

- All respondents stated they would like to see the NI R&D data included on NISRA’s Data Portal. NISRA will seek to include the NI R&D data on the Data Portal before the next publication date.

Quality Report

- In response to 25% of respondents explaining that they think advice from NISRA regarding the strengths and limitations of the NI R&D data is “not very clear”, NISRA has published an updated February 2025 edition of the NI R&D Statistics Quality Report. This report can be accessed in the [R&D Archive Publications section of the NISRA website here](#).