

Outcome of User Consultation on ‘Northern Ireland Statistical Surveys - Assessment of burden on businesses, households and individuals’ publications

Background

On 21 December 2022, NISRA Statistical Support Branch launched an [online consultation](#) on the content and future of the [Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys report](#) and the [Burden to Households & Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys report](#). Both these reports took considerable resource to produce, in terms of data collection from all NI Government Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies (co-ordinated locally by statisticians within each NI Government Department), quality assurance checks (following up on missing data and inconsistencies within the data and between years) and the production of the reports. There was also no identified user base for the Burden on Households and Individuals report and the user base for the Cost to Business report was small. It was therefore proposed to discontinue the Burden on Households and Individuals report, and streamline the Cost to Business report. The downloadable data would still be made available alongside the Cost to Business report, enabling users to replicate the missing analysis.

A more detailed outline of these proposals and the rationale behind them is provided in the [User Engagement on Survey Burden Reports](#) document.

Consultation

The consultation sought feedback from respondents on; which reports were used; how the reports were used; which analyses included in the reports were useful; and how the proposed changes would affect them. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any further comments about the reports and the proposals.

Details of the consultation were emailed to known users, with a request to cascade further, and the consultation was publicised on NISRA’s Twitter and Facebook pages. A news article was added to the NISRA website homepage, and a link to the consultation was added to the main Survey Burden webpage and the previous year’s publication pages. The consultation appeared on the DoF Consultation page and the cross-government NI Direct Consultation page.

The consultation period ran from 21 December 2022 to 15 February 2023.

Responses

Nine responses were received during the eight-week consultation. Of these, three respondents were from NISRA branches; one was from a NI Government Body or Organisation that was not a Department/ALB (such as a Council); one was from academia; and one used the material for personal

use. One respondent did not fall into any of the categories listed, and the other two respondents did not answer this question.

Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys

One respondent, who was from a NI Government Body or Organisation that was not a Department/ALB (such as a Council), indicated that they used the 'Cost to Business' report. They did not include any further details on what they used the report for or which parts of the report they used. They noted however that the proposals would not impact their use of the report, and that continuing to release the underlying data would be sufficient to meet their needs.

Burden to Households & Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys report

One respondent, who did not specify their organisation, indicated that they used the 'Burden to Households & Individuals' report. They did not provide any further information on what they used the report for. When asked which parts of the report they used, they noted that they used the 'total number of surveys' (NI level) but did not use any other NI analyses or the additional information provided on the uses of surveys, measures taken to reduce burden, or the case study. They categorised their use of this analysis as 'interesting but not essential'. The user indicated that discontinuing the report would not impact them, and added that they thought that the report "should be discontinued, the report is extremely limited in its usefulness and there is next to no audience for it. Ironically it applies a severe burden on those who put it together and there is zero demand."

Further comments

There were two additional comments from respondents who were not users of the reports. Both were supportive of the proposal to reduce/discontinue these reports. One respondent cited the disproportionate resource and effort that goes into creating the reports, compared to the audience the reports have. The other respondent questioned whether the 'Cost to Business' report should be reduced further in scope, i.e. the surveys it covers, or discontinued. This respondent also noted that:

"I think it is useful for NISRA to publish the methodology for calculating the cost to business and households. This methodology should be used by Departments when producing business cases for new surveys or ad-hoc surveys. Statistical teams should also use this in their Background Quality Reports (BQRs) and the calculation of the burden/costs should be included in BQR templates."

Outcome and Way Forward

The responses from this consultation showed low usage of the reports and no negative impact from the proposals. Respondents were also supportive of the proposals. This is in line with the feedback received from other user engagement.

The proposed changes will be implemented prior to the next release to the reports. The Burden to Households and Individuals report will be discontinued and the Cost of Business 2021/22 report (published in Spring 2023) will be reduced to focus on analysis at the Northern Ireland level, with a single breakdown by Department.

The consultation and, in particular, other user engagement has demonstrated an ongoing user need for the 'Cost to Business' report. Therefore, there are no current plans to discontinue this report. The user need for the publication, burden on data suppliers and efficient use of resources will be kept under review in line with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Currently, the methodology for calculating the burden on businesses, households and individuals is included in the appendices to the Survey Burden reports. We will consider whether this should be published as a separate document.

The Background Quality Report (BQR) template currently provided to NISRA branches has a section on 'The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output' and recommends including 'Annual respondent burden in financial terms and/or hours'.

Contact

For any further queries, please contact the Lead Statistician:

Garbhan McKeivitt
Survey Control Unit
NISRA Statistical Support Branch
Colby House
Stranmillis Court
Belfast
BT9 5RR

Tel: 028 9038 8459

Email: Garbhan.McKeivitt@nisra.gov.uk