

Uses of Business Surveys

This document is published alongside the [Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments](#) reports. Further information on the purpose of each survey is available in the downloadable data.

Introduction

Government surveys to Northern Ireland businesses play an important role in monitoring the performance of the Northern Ireland economy and labour market; informing government policies and programmes; and identifying the issues affecting UK businesses and the economy. Data from these surveys feed into key economic measures such as the measures of inflation.

The statistics produced from these surveys are used not only by government but also by businesses, universities, the media and the public to monitor the government's performance and gain a better understanding of the UK economy. From a business perspective they provide a vital source of information for identifying trends in the market, as a benchmark for company performance and as a guide to market developments.

Within government, data collected from surveys to Northern Ireland businesses are used for a range of purposes including the:

- production and development of official statistics;
- development, monitoring and evaluation of government policy;
- design, monitoring, refinement and evaluation of programmes;
- improvement and refinement of government services.

Some examples of how data and statistics from government surveys to Northern Ireland businesses¹ are currently used, and have been used in the past, are provided below.

Overview of the NI Economy

Analytical Services Division in the Department for the Economy (DfE) uses the wide range of [Economic Labour Market Statistics \(ELMS\) official statistics publications](#) to provide briefing and analysis on the local economy to a wide range of stakeholders. This includes a [monthly economic update](#) and a more detailed [economic commentary](#) produced three times per year, which are published on the DfE website and disseminated to the Minister for the Economy and senior departmental officials as well as a wide range of interested parties.

Figures from the [Quarterly Employment Survey](#), [Index of Production](#), [Index of Services](#) and [Quarterly Construction Enquiry](#) (collectively known as the Quarterly Business Survey), [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\)](#), [NI Composite Economic Index](#) and the [Labour Force Survey](#) (a household survey) are used to provide a regular overview of the local economy. Analytical Services Division also uses the findings from these surveys to brief the Minister and senior officials on the latest issues affecting the NI economy, providing them with the context required to put more informed policies in place.

The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) produce regular economic and labour market analyses which draw upon a range of economic, business and labour market statistics

¹ For Survey Burden purposes, businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included under surveys of businesses.

produced by Economic Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) using data from business surveys. The most recent [Spring Outlook 2023](#) published on the 23 May 2023 includes an analysis of NI business statistics sourced from the [Inter Departmental Business Register](#) which uses the *Business Register Inquiry (IDBR)*.

Decision making during the COVID-19 pandemic

To support decision-making during the pandemic, data from the [Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry \(NIABI\)](#), [Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\)](#), [Broad Economy Sales and Export Statistics \(BESES\)](#)², *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* and *Labour Force Survey* were used by Analytical Services Division in DfE to establish the potential scope and characteristics of the impacts of the March 2020 and October 2020 COVID-19 Regulations on those businesses and business activities impacted by the Regulations. In addition, business survey data have been used throughout the pandemic to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of a range of COVID-related business support schemes and the High Street Stimulus schemes. This includes data from those surveys listed above as well as data from the *Index of Services*, *Index of Production*, *Quarterly Construction Survey*, *Quarterly Employment Survey* (collectively known as the Quarterly Business Survey), [Farm Business Survey](#), *Potato merchants survey* and [Raw Milk Producer Price Survey](#). Other surveys such as the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\)](#), [Survey into the impact of COVID-19 on the NI Construction Industry](#) and *Legacy Report – COVID-19 survey* have captured businesses' and schools' experience during the pandemic, as well as the impact on them and their future needs. A detailed case study '[The use of government surveys of businesses to assess the impact of COVID-19 and inform decision-making](#)' is published alongside this document.

Informing decision-making around EU Exit, the NI Protocol and the Windsor Framework

Another important use of the [NI Economic Trade Statistics \(NIETS\)](#)² data formerly *Broad Economy Sales and Export Statistics (BESES)* has been to support and inform decision-making around EU Exit and understand the impact of the NI Protocol on the local economy. Data are collected on trade in both goods and services within NI, as well as trade between NI and GB, these data being the only source anywhere for this information. Exports data are also available from the survey for trade to each member state of the EU and to approximately 50 individual non-EU countries. These data have been an invaluable resource for government officials over the last number of years, whereby they have been used by departments to inform important and high level EU Exit policy documents and negotiations/discussions at the highest level. A detailed case study '[Use of Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics – informing EU Exit discussions and policy development](#)' taken from the 2019/20 Cost to Business report (released in August 2021) is published alongside this document.

More recently, in February 2023, HMRC have used *NI Economic Trade Statistics* data to inform developments around the Windsor Framework. HMRC required reliable NI trade data which they could use to support ongoing discussions with the EU over the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP). These data were also required to formulate public lines and inform Parliament and business groups of the impact of any potential outcomes on the NIP and Windsor Framework. In addition, the analysis were used to inform HMRC and HMT work to assess the impact of the Windsor Framework on internal staff resourcing. The *NI Economic Trade Statistics* data were invaluable for this work.

² These data are collected through the NI Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) survey

Informing the Energy Bill Relief Scheme

Data from the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry*, relating to businesses purchases of specific types of energy, were used by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), Department of Finance (DoF), DfE and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to inform the development of the [Energy Bill Relief Scheme](#).

Economic Impact of Geosciences 2018

ELMS also supplies bespoke analysis to DfE. One example from 2018/19 is the evidence base provided on the Geoscience Industry in Northern Ireland (using data from the *Annual Business Inquiry*, *Business Register and Employment Survey*, *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*, [Research and Development Survey](#) and *Broad Economy Sales and Exports Survey*). The subsequent report [Economic Impact of Geosciences 2018](#) highlighted the importance of the Geoscience sector in relation to other sectors and has been used to inform local councils as part of the local development plan process. This sets the economic context of the sector and informs both policy development regarding the use of our geological resources and the development of a Science Strategy for the Geological Survey of NI.

DfE Energy Strategy

Secondary analysis of the Energy purchases questions contained within the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* by DfE statisticians working with ELMS, has led to the successful development of a monitoring metric for inclusion in the [DfE Energy Strategy](#) relating to energy purchases as a proportion of turnover. This metric will enable the monitoring of change to input pressures faced by businesses represented by their energy expenditure.

A survey commissioned by DfE as part of [Research into the Future of Energy Efficiency Policy in NI](#) also informed development of the new DfE Energy Strategy. This survey provided understanding of stakeholder views on energy efficiency barriers, attained suggestions for future controls and targets and informed decision making on the funding and policies contributing to the UK target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

DfE 'A 10X Economy' economic vision

The survey and economic data produced by ELMS continues to provide core evidential material for DfE in informing the development and operationalisation of the [10X Economy economic vision](#) and for providing the means to track progress towards the ambitions outlined.

More recently, secondary analysis of the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* has focused on [Business Capital Expenditure](#), [Business Subsidies](#), and [Business Purchases](#). Analytical work related to profitability is ongoing and to be published during 2023.

UK National Accounts

The *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* provides a number of measures of economic activity, such as business turnover and the value of goods, materials and services covering the multiple industries (such as production and construction) and is used by government to monitor the progress of economic policy and assist in economic decision making.

Data from the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* is provided to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and feeds into the UK-wide [Annual Business Survey](#), which is the primary source of data used by the National Accounts team in ONS in the compilation of the [Blue Book](#), a compendium of trends and changes within the UK economy. A key output from the [UK National Accounts](#) is the production of [UK Supply-Use tables](#) (SUTs) which provide

balances showing the relationship between components of value added, industry inputs and outputs, and product supply and demand. These tables are a source for the data underlying the estimates of annual UK Gross Domestic Product. The SUTs are also the foundation for a number of other outputs including the UK Input-output analytical tables.

UK Regional Accounts

The ONS also produce [UK Regional Accounts](#), these are annual estimates of economic activity by UK country, region and local area using gross domestic product (GDP). The *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* (via the UK-wide *Annual Business Survey*) is an integral input dataset to producing these estimates. Estimates are available in current market prices and in chained volume measures and include a full industry breakdown of balanced regional gross value added (GVA(B)).

NI Composite Economic Index (NICEI)

The quarterly [NI Composite Economic Index \(NICEI\)](#) uses data from the *Index of Production*, *Index of Services*, *Quarterly Construction Enquiry* and *Quarterly Employment Survey* (collectively known as the *Quarterly Business Survey*) as well as data from the *Labour Force Survey* and unpublished agricultural output data from DAERA.

The NICEI is broadly equivalent to the output measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) produced by ONS and is used to measure the performance of the NI economy. It is used to help monitor progress of a range of key government strategies in NI, notably the [Industrial Strategy](#) and the [10X Economic Vision](#). The statistics are also used by a broad range of users with an interest in assessing and reporting on the level of economic activity in Northern Ireland such as ONS, economists in the public and private sector, academics, media and the general public.

NI Supply-Use tables

As part of the [NI Economic Accounts project](#), NISRA has developed [NI Supply-Use tables](#) (SUTs) which provide a picture of the flows of products and services in the NI economy for a single year and are used to set the level of annual current price Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They show the composition of uses and resources across institutional sectors and the inter-dependence of industries in order to reconcile the production, income and expenditure approaches to the measurement of GDP.

These tables use data from various business surveys, including the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry*, *NI Economic Trade Statistics* and *Quarterly Construction Enquiry* (part of the *Quarterly Business Survey*); the [Annual Purchases Survey \(APS\)](#) and [UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product \(PRODCOM\)](#) carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMSB; and the [June Agricultural & Horticulture Census](#) (which feeds into the [Aggregate Agriculture Accounts](#)) carried out by DAERA. The SUTs also use the Inter Departmental Business Register which uses the *Business Register Inquiry (IDBR)*.

NI Input-Output tables

The [NI Input-Output tables](#) (IOTs) are derived from the SUTs. These Input-Output Analytical tables provide a framework for modelling the impacts of changes to the domestic economy and are the pre-requisite for calculating a range of derived data such as multipliers used for economic planning, analysis and forecasting.

The calculation of these tables uses data from additional business surveys, including the *Quarterly Employment Survey* (part of the *Quarterly Business Survey*) and the *Business Register and Employment Survey*, both carried out by ELMS and the *Farm Business Survey*, carried out by DAERA.

The SUTs and IOTs form the input to a number of economic modelling tools developed by the DfE, namely a [Computable General Equilibrium \(CGE\)](#) model and a [Hypothetical Extraction Model \(HEM\)](#).

Circular Economy Strategy (CES)

During 2021 ELMS worked with DfE and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to support the development of a [strategic policy options framework for the Circular Economy](#) for NI. This is an alternative to a traditional linear economy model (take, make, use, dispose) in which resources are kept in use for as long as possible, maximum value is extracted from them whilst in use, then products and materials are recovered and regenerated at the end of each service life. To support this project, ELMS had to develop a bespoke set of Imports Input-Output tables as a key input dataset to support the model being developed. These tables which were new and niche were created using data from the *NI Economic Trade Statistics*, and the existing Input-Output tables from the Economic Accounts project. The [draft Circular Economy Strategy](#) was published in January 2023 for a consultation period through to March. This strategy sets out DfE's vision to create an innovative, inclusive and competitive economy where business, people and planet flourish, with responsible production and consumption at its core. A [Circular Economy](#) will be a key enabler of DfE's 10X Economic Vision for a decade of innovation.

Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing report

Data from the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* and *Northern Ireland Economic Trade Statistics* are provided to DAERA to facilitate production of their annual [Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing report](#). This provides details of the total sales and imports and exports of food and drinks processing businesses, alongside other information from the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry* such as gross value added and employment. The statistics assist businesses with benchmarking, and provide context for Government when preparing strategies.

DfC Town Centre database

Data from the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry*, Inter Departmental Business Register and *Business Register and Employment Survey* on estimated turnover, number of businesses and number of jobs within the town centre boundary by industrial sector are used to populate the [Town Centre database](#) published by the Department for Communities (DfC). This database aims to provide a clear, consistent set of statistics relating to the 41 urban towns and cities in Northern Ireland. Statistics include demography, crime, business data and information relating to non-domestic properties.

Low Pay Commission

Information from the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* is used by the Low Pay Commission as part of its evidence base for recommending to the Government the level of the national minimum wage.

Tourism Surveys

Data from tourism surveys (the Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey, Northern Ireland Occupancy Survey and Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Survey) are used to influence decision making for the tourism policy team in DfE and are also used by new businesses considering options to open in an area. Tourism surveys also help inform the value of tourism to the economy, which is useful for the tourism sector.