

Date: 13 June 2023

Time: 2.00pm – 4.00pm

Location: The Boardroom, Colby House, Belfast

Present	Dr David Marshall (Chair)	NISRA, Director of Census and Social Statistics
	Richard Elliott	NISRA, Head of Census
	Dr Daniel McConville	NISRA, Census Office
	Dr Eileen Byrne	NISRA, Census Office
	Caroline Anderson	NISRA, Census Office
	Dr Brian Foley	NISRA, Census Office
	Dr Ian Shuttleworth	School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University
	Tony Dignan	Economic Research and Evaluation
	Colin McIlheney	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
	Virtual Attendees	
	Michael Gallagher	Derry and Strabane Council
	Prof Dermot O'Reilly	Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, Queens University
	Dr John Power	Research and Information Service, NI Assembly
Prof Adele Marshall	School of Mathematics and Physics, Queens University	
Secretary	Mark Hunter	NISRA, Census Office
Apologies	Jahnet Brown	Northern Ireland Housing Executive

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Dr Marshall welcomed members and opened the meeting by inviting attendees to introduce themselves, given that some members were attending in person with others attending virtually. Apologies were received from Jahnet Brown. Dr Marshall informed members that Prof David Martin has resigned as a member of DSAG.

2. Minutes/Actions from previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2022 have already been published in draft form with the agreement of members. This draft publication took place given interest from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), who are the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. OSR are interested in the work of DSAG to support the 2021 Census and review the published minutes from DSAG meetings. These minutes were agreed without amendment and will now be published as the official minute of the meeting. There were no outstanding action points.

A [presentation \(PDF, 2.2 MB\)](#) based on the items in the agenda was prepared and circulated to members prior to the meeting.

3. Census 2021 Update (Presentation slides 3 to 9)

Dr McConville provided members with an outline of the Census 2021 publications to date and future release plans. Dr Byrne then gave an overview of the Census Office Microdata plans, explaining that it will not be possible to produce all microdata products at the same time and thus a prioritisation exercise has taken place in response to direct engagement with key microdata users in January 2023 to understand user need. A microdata strategy will be published as soon as possible and will provide more information on timing and delivery.

Dr McConville gave a demonstration of the Flexible Table Builder (FTB). Dr Shuttleworth asked if the FTB could be updated. In response, Dr McConville explained that whilst it was not straightforward, the FTB could be updated in future, taking user feedback into account.

Richard Elliott informed members that user guide videos and the list of disclosure control rules will be available. Richard reiterated that NISRA will look carefully at user feedback following go-live on 22 June 2023.

Dr Marshall brought this Agenda item to a close by stating that the FTB is new to NISRA as well as users and invited members to provide their views and feedback following its release.

4. Population Statistics Update (Presentation slides 10 to 15)

Caroline Anderson provided an update on this item which informed of work taking place during 2023 and the publication of a rebasing exercise on 29 June 2023. Caroline asked for feedback on a proposed 2022-based set of projections and the plan to publish 2022-based Sub-National projections in 2026.

Michael Gallagher, Tony Dignan and Dr Shuttleworth were all of the view that 2026 would be too late for the publication of 2022-based Sub-National projections. Dr Marshall acknowledged this and asked if possible, for Michael Gallagher to put these views in writing.

AP 1: Michael Gallagher to write to Dr Marshall regarding the proposal to publish 2022-based Sub-National projections from 2026.

Prof O'Reilly asked if activities such as younger males moving around are built into mid-year estimates. Dr Marshall replied that migration is built into the estimates and projections and that detailed administrative data is used to estimate this.

Dr Marshall concluded this section of the meeting by noting the importance of the population figures. As an example, he noted that the Northern Ireland 2021 rolled forward mid-year estimates (MYE) from the 2011 Census was 0.26% lower than Census 2021 based MYE. For England and Wales, the figure is 0.45% higher.

5. Census 2021 – Geography Update (Presentation slides 16 to 35)

Dr Foley explained why new statistical geographies were needed, what they look like and what they provide. Richard Elliott described the considerations in developing the Census 2021 grid-square product and an analysis of approximating geographies. New Data Zone (DZ) and Super Data Zone (SDZ) geography replaces Small Area (SA) and Super Output Area (SOA) geography and members were asked for feedback on this.

Tony Dignan expressed the view that there are too few DZs, and the changes present many problems for users using Electoral Wards and Output Areas over several years. Tony went on to say that there is a long way to go to make the new geography work for anyone who uses Electoral Wards for data and the utility of small areas was not considered when constructing DZs. He concluded by making the point that England and Wales have kept

their small areas with minor amendments and the change in Northern Ireland reduces Small Areas by 17% in number.

Richard Elliott made the point that the problem with introducing too many geographies is that a Geographic Information System (GIS) can be used to difference the geographies. This would allow the associated Census statistical information for very small areas to be disclosive. Richard also informed the group that outputs for electoral wards can be produced by approximating them from the Grid Square geography.

Michael Gallagher made the point that new geography was decided upon 4 years ago with a presentation given to Councils and whilst not ideal, Councils have accepted them.

Dr Marshall concluded the discussion by stating that NISRA will communicate the geography changes and associated approximation strategy in a policy document, and this was recorded as a formal action point.

AP 2: NISRA to produce a policy document regarding geography changes and associated approximation strategy.

6. Financial position

Dr Marshall explained that the financial pressures on Government Departments and NISRA were experiencing one of the most difficult financial settlements of his career. However, he noted that given the statutory nature of the Census funding was largely protected to deliver key outputs in 2023/24.

7. Update on ONS/CSO position for next census

Dr Marshall informed members that the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland are preparing for a Census in the Republic of Ireland in 2027. He added that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will shortly be publishing a document on the future of population statistics in England and Wales. He added that there is no certainty that a 2031 census will be proposed for England and Wales.

8. Future of DSAG

Richard Elliott explained that NISRA was experiencing significant change. He added that Professor Martin had stood down as a member of the Committee and Virginia McVea had left her position as Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland. He added that this was now an appropriate time to review the DSAG Terms of Reference (ToR) and refresh DSAG membership, with a focus on 2031. Richard informed members he would be in touch about future representation and membership once the ToR was reviewed.

Dr Marshall brought the meeting to a close by thanking members for their input and five years of personal support over the 2021 Census cycle.

Mark Hunter (Secretary)
