NISRA Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch

User Group meeting

20th January 2022

10:00am – 12:45pm

Via MS Teams

Attendees:

49 participants on the call from a range of organisations including:

1. Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
2. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
3. Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland
4. Department for Agriculture Economy and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
5. Department for Communities (DFC)
6. Department for the Economy (DFE)
7. Ernst and Young
8. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
9. InterTrade Ireland
10. Manufacturing NI
11. NISRA
12. Office for National Statistics (ONS)
13. Queens University Belfast
14. Strategic Investment Board (SIB)
15. University of Ulster
16. Independent researchers

The agenda for the meeting is embedded below.

NISRA Economic &
Labour Market Stati

The slides presented can be found on the NISRA website.

Statistical protocols and compliance | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

A summary of the key points from the meeting is presented below.

1. **Annual Business Inquiry (ABI)**

A detailed presentation was provided on the background to the ABI, the sample size, methodology for survey design, our outputs and uses of the ABI data.

There was a discussion around the size of the NISRA team compared to the equivalent in ONS and it was recognised that for a small team there is a lot of output.

It was noted that the timescales for the ABI are currently back to what they were before the pandemic which is testament to commitment of the NISRA team to meet users' needs.

There was also a discussion around the number of form types (#37) on the ABI survey and the fact that this does cause issues in terms of the administration of the survey, updating/amending questionnaires etc.

NISRA noted that there is currently a programme of work underway to review the form types and preliminary investigations have identified that we could potentially reduce this to around 18 or 19 form types going forward.

It was acknowledged by users that the ABI is a rich dataset and is used by users for a range of very different, yet important work areas. For example, it was noted that the ABI data was invaluable to the Department for the Economy (DFE) during the Covid-19 pandemic in providing information to inform the development and roll out of a range of Covid Business Support Schemes.

2. **Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics**

A thorough presentation was provided to provide users with a better understanding of the background to and development of the BESES. This included the fact that it is collected via the ABI and has the associated benefits attached such as the huge sample size, strong confidence intervals, and the fact that the trade variables produced on a fully comparable basis so the ABI variables so they can be analysed alongside each other.

Details were provided of the findings of our user consultation exercise and our responses to this. NISRA also provided an overview of the findings of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)

assessment of the BESES statistics and our plans to address the two requirements stipulated for a National Statistics accreditation to be granted.

Users had no issues with our proposed plans, and welcomed the fact that the imports publication would be published on a more timely basis.

There was a discussion around the timeframes required to produce the statistics and plans were proposed as to how we intend to improve the timeliness of the release of the statistics. Users welcomed these plans and agreed it was a positive development. Users also welcomed the investigations around adding new imports questions to the ABI form and it was noted that there is growing demand for more imports information.

Timeliness and frequency of data was discussed. It was acknowledged by users that some may confuse more timely data to mean more frequent data. NISRA reaffirmed that the BESES is an annual dataset and would not be the vehicle for example quarterly data. Something different would be required to produce that data. There was agreement by users that they understand this situation.

There was also a discussion around the possibility of adding additional questions to the survey form to garner new information on topics such as e-commerce. NISRA noted that we have done bespoke surveys in the past to address data gaps to inform EU Exit work (Cross Border Supply Chain Report | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)). So if something bespoke was needed, or new questions were to be added to the ABI survey, there would need to be a policy need and support for this, along with resources to be made available.

That said, NISRA informed users that we are currently investigating the potential of adding additional imports questions to the survey form to garner more detailed information on the country of origin of imports. We are getting this costed by our system provider and depending on costs and how feasible this might be, it is something that could be actioned this year.

Users noted that the BESES data is deemed critical for a number of important work areas including monitoring North-South trade. Any improvements on timeliness and additional imports information are all welcomed.

A further suggestion was that it would be useful to have information on what is **not** possible with the BESES data and what it does not cover etc. NISRA noted that this came up in the OSR report to us and we have addressed this by publishing a one page quick reference guide which includes details of the limitations of the survey. It was noted that this will be a live document and updated as appropriate based on feedback from users.

No users had any issues with our proposed plans for future development and a number commented that what was outlined were welcome developments and they were supportive of what is suggested.

3. Supply-Use Tables & Input-Output Tables

A presentation was provided to give users a high level overview of the Supply-Use and Input-Output framework. These are a niche area that NISRA has been developing over recent years with the goal of providing a comprehensive dataset that facilitates additional economic analyses that were not previously possible.

Details were provided on the amount of data required to produce these tables and the work involved in doing so. This included a discussion around the inclusion of NI specific data from the ONS Annual Purchases Survey (APS), the UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM) survey and HMRC microdata.

It was agreed that the development of the SUTs and IOTs for NI has been a successful project and provided invaluable inputs to a range of projects that are being taken forward by users (AFBI, DFE SIB) which would not have been possible without the NISRA SUTs and IOTs. They thanked the Economic Accounts team for their work and support with their projects.

There was a discussion around the importance of educating users about what is available and how to use the information available in the SUTs and IOTs. It was mentioned that a good avenue to promote this type of work could potentially be via the Universities and this is something that will be explored.

NISRA noted that there are conversations underway with colleagues in DFE to organise some expert training in this sphere and it is something that will hopefully be rolled out in the next year.

There was also a discussion around future work plans and it was identified that the development of Type II multipliers would be a great development that would be welcomed by users. NISRA

confirmed that this is on our work plan to investigate what is possible and if feasible is something that we will produce.

4. Development of Quarterly Gross Domestic Product

An overview to the development of quarterly GDP for Northern Ireland was provided to users. This included details of a review of the Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index (NICEI) methodology by the Office for National Statistics Methodology Advice Service. The review identified a number of areas for improvement in the measurement of public sector output for NI. This has been the focus of the development work over recent years.

Users were informed that NISRA has developed a methodology, sourced data and built a system to calculate more robust measures of output for the public sector sub-sectors of Health, education, Justice and Social Care. The result being that the reliance on public sector jobs as a proxy for output will decrease from representing 22% of the NI economy to around 7%.

Documentation around the methodology and data sources used for the education sub-sector has been produced and shared with colleagues in the Department for the Economy and Department of Education for feedback. We will incorporate their feedback and make amendments where appropriate once all feedback has been received. A similar approach is being taken with the Health sub-sector. Together, health and education account for around two-thirds of the public sector output measure.

The plan is to then update our documentation and share with experts in ONS and the Scottish Government to ensure consistency of approach. It is envisaged that NISRA will have an output that can be shared publicly for feedback during 2022.

Users welcomed the development and nobody had any issues with the approach outlined in the presentation.

In the Q&A session, users asked:

- How far back will the new series be able to go? NISRA stated that this depends on the availability of data and is subject to the ongoing consultations with stakeholders, but may only be from 2010 onwards.

- Will the first QGDP publication be suitable to use to in ONS estimates/models? The QGDP is not yet finalised yet, but we will be in close contact with ONS and other stakeholders over the next few months. That question would be easier to answer then and we will

work with ONS to ensure that where possible we can provide data to facilitate the continued development of their models.

5. Research & Development Survey

A overview of the Research and Development survey was provided to users. This included details of the background to the survey and an overview of the most recent results available.

A presentation was also provided on a number of new outputs produced by the R&D team to aid user accessibility to a range of economic and labour market statistics.

NISRA provided a demonstration of the interactive economic overview dashboard and interactive economic output dashboard.

Very positive feedback was provided on the dashboards with users commenting that they were a great resource which users have found really useful. There was also a discussion that they could be useful tools in educational settings for example A-level economics or maths classes to show real life examples of economic/maths in practice.

6. AOB

The meeting came to a close with users agreeing that it was a very informative and useful session. Users reiterated their support for the work of the various teams and urged them to continue the great work and to keep building on it. All of the statistics discussed at the event are relied upon by users and form important input to their work areas, and provide evidence for policy work and other work areas. It was acknowledged that the outputs produced have developed significantly over recent years which is commendable and very welcome by users.

END

NISRA ELMS User Group meeting 20th January 2022 - Agenda