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Published: 28 November 2017¹

Frequency: Periodic

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Theme: Government

¹ This release was originally published on 23 February 2017 with 2014 ONS data. It has now been updated with 2016 ONS data (published on 27 February 2017).

Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics, Northern Ireland 2016 (Updated with 2016 ONS data¹)

This report presents findings from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey on public awareness of NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) and trust in official statistics in Northern Ireland. The report also includes changes in attitudes to official statistics over time and comparisons with public attitudes to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), where it is appropriate to do so. The figures presented in this report were obtained from a sample of the population and are therefore estimates.

The key points are:

Awareness

- Public awareness of NISRA is low with one third of respondents indicating that they had heard of the Agency before being contacted about the survey.
- There has been no statistically significant change in public awareness of NISRA since data were first collected on this issue in 2009.

Trust

- Public trust in NISRA, as an institution, is high (78%). Of those that had heard of NISRA, 91% stated that they trusted the Agency.
- Public trust in the statistics produced by NISRA is also high (84%).

Value

- The statistics produced by NISRA are valued, with 88% of respondents agreeing that statistics produced by NISRA are important to understand Northern Ireland.

Political Interference

- Just over three quarters (77%) of respondents agreed that statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference.

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Useful Links:

- [Previous bulletins in this series](#)
- [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)
- [Public Confidence in Official Statistics \(ONS\) 2015](#)

1. Introduction

Official Statistics in Northern Ireland are produced by Government Departments, and in some cases Arms Length Bodies. The data collection, production, presentation and dissemination of official statistics are governed by the Principles within the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (the Code).

Observance of the Code, by all the public bodies that produce official statistics, is central to maintaining a unified statistical service that meets the needs of government and society and is both trustworthy and trusted.

Preamble, CoP

NISRA is an Agency within the Department of Finance and provides statistical services across government in Northern Ireland. NISRA has been measuring the levels of public confidence or trust in the Agency and in the statistics it produces since the Code was produced in 2009. These levels are monitored by the Agency and used to inform communication and marketing strategies.

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the largest producer of official statistics. Public trust in the ONS and the statistics it produces is also monitored and this report contains comparisons between NISRA and ONS. The ONS survey samples England, Scotland and Wales. The most recent ONS survey was conducted in 2016 and can be found [here](#).

2. Awareness

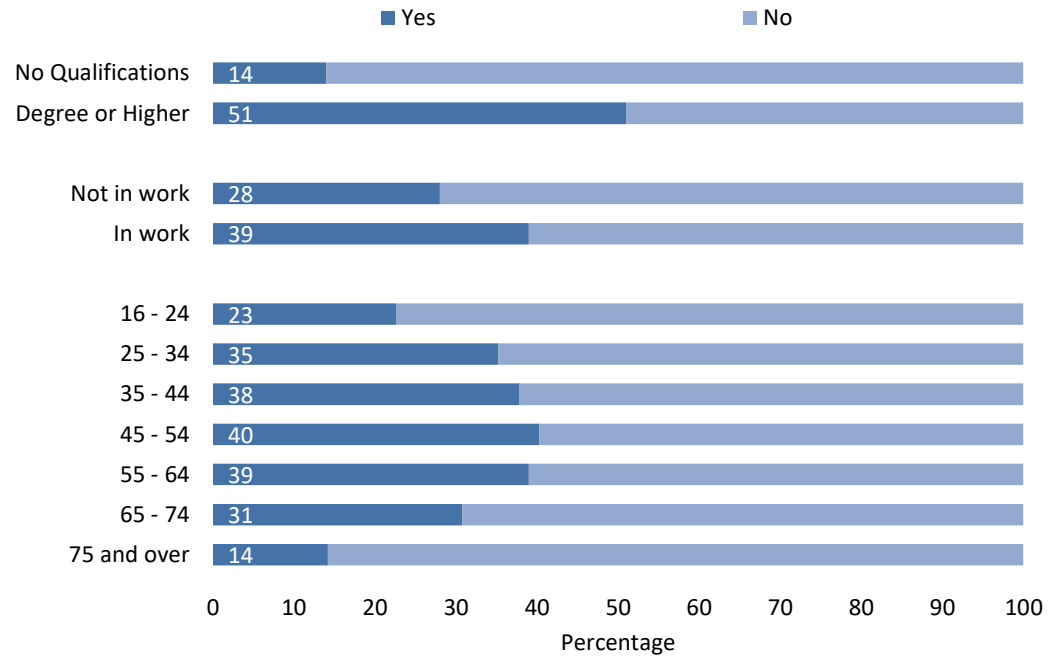
One third of respondents (33%) said they had heard of NISRA.

Awareness of NISRA tended to be lower among younger (16 – 24) and older people (75 and over).

Awareness levels were significantly higher among those with degree level education than those with no qualifications. The level of awareness was also higher among those in work compared to those not in work.



Chart 1: Awareness of NISRA by Age, Employment Status and Qualification of respondent

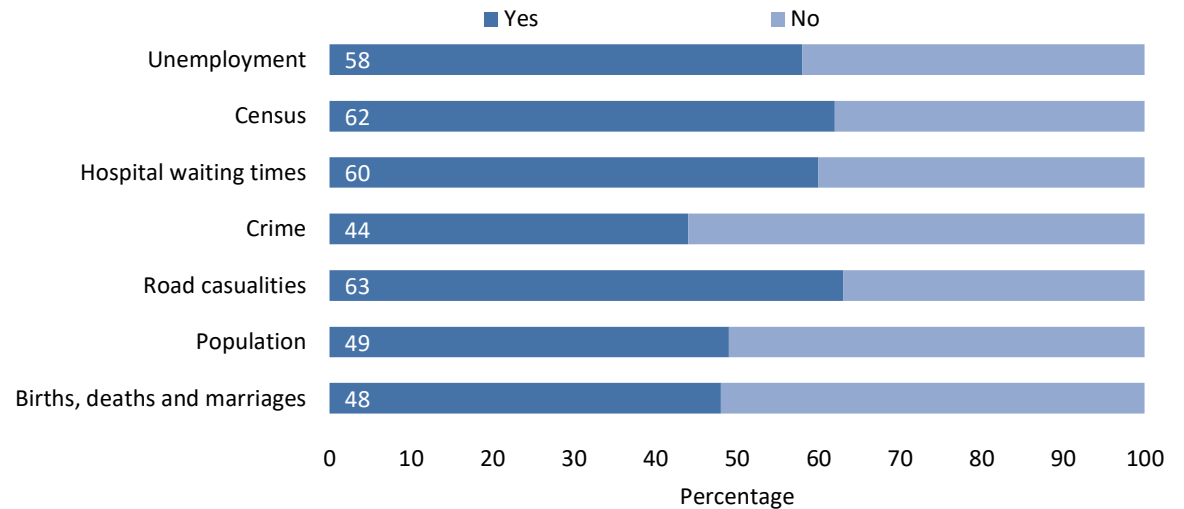


There has been no significant change in public awareness of NISRA since data were first collected in 2009 (30%).

Public awareness of NISRA is significantly lower than awareness of ONS, which was 71% in 2016.

Respondents were also asked whether they had heard of a range of NISRA statistics. The census, road casualty and hospital waiting time statistics were known by approximately three fifths of respondents.

Chart 2: Awareness of NISRA Statistics



3. Trust Institutions

Trust in NISRA as an institution is high, with 78% of respondents trusting it a great deal or tending to trust it.

More people stated that they didn't know if they trusted NISRA or not (17%) compared to any other institution.

Of those respondents that had heard of NISRA, 91% stated that they trusted or tended to trust the Agency.

The level of trust in NISRA is high when compared with other institutions. Across all institutions, the level of trust was lowest for the media and the NI Assembly.

There has been no significant change in the level of trust in NISRA since questions on trust were first collected in 2014.

Trust in NISRA (78%) is significantly higher than the trust levels for the ONS (69%).

Chart 3: Levels of trust in institutions

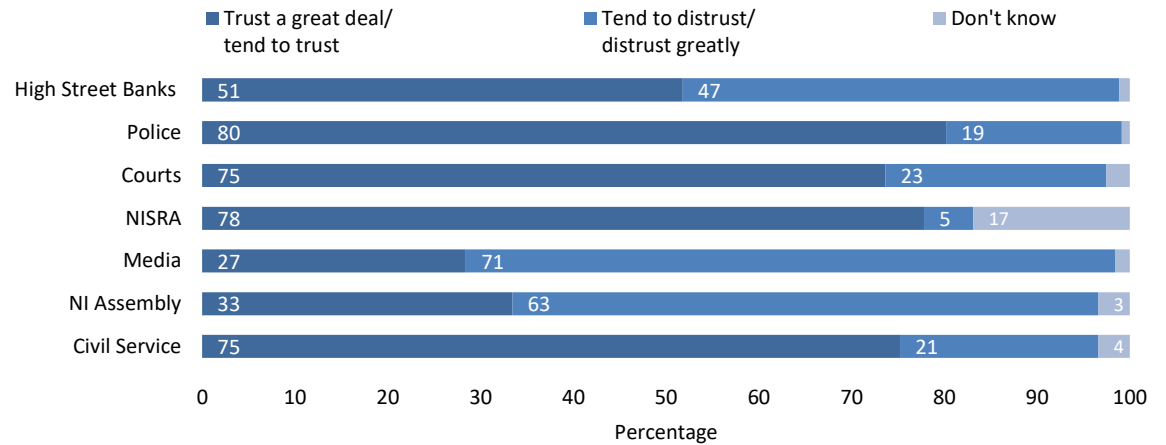
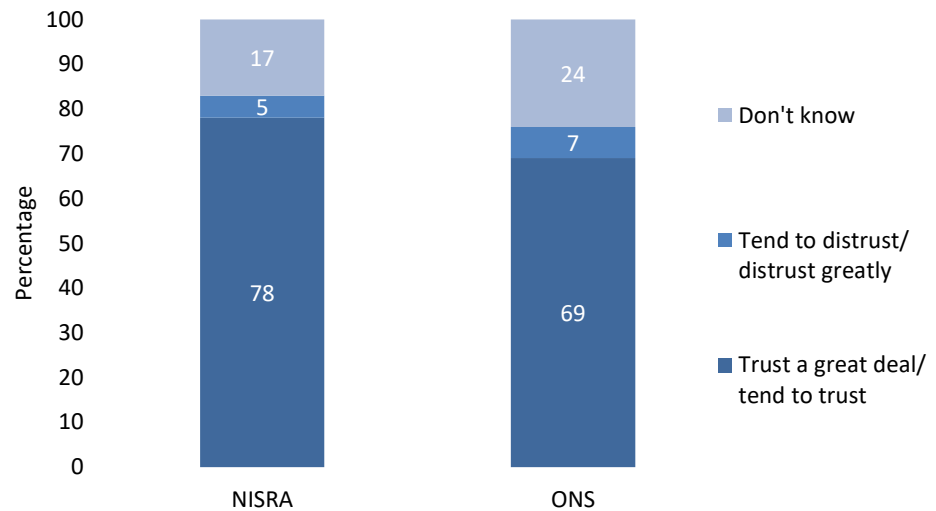


Chart 4: Trust in NISRA and ONS as institutions



Note: Percentages on trust in institutions exclude respondents that refused to provide an answer.

3. Trust – cont'd

Statistics

Respondents were also asked the extent to which they trusted the statistics produced by NISRA.

The majority of respondents (84%) trust NISRA statistics a great deal or tend to trust them. Trust levels in NISRA statistics are higher among those that had heard of NISRA (94%).

Trust in NISRA statistics is higher than trust in ONS statistics. (84% compared with 69%).

Respondents with a degree or higher have significantly higher levels of trust in NISRA statistics (93%) than those with no qualifications (73%).

Respondents aged 25-34 were more likely to trust NISRA statistics than those aged 16-24 and those aged 55 and over.

Accuracy was cited as the most common reason to trust NISRA statistics (47%). The Agency not having a vested interest in the results/ not manipulating the production or data collection was also a common reason for trust in NISRA statistics (37%).



Chart 5: Trust in the statistics produced by NISRA and ONS

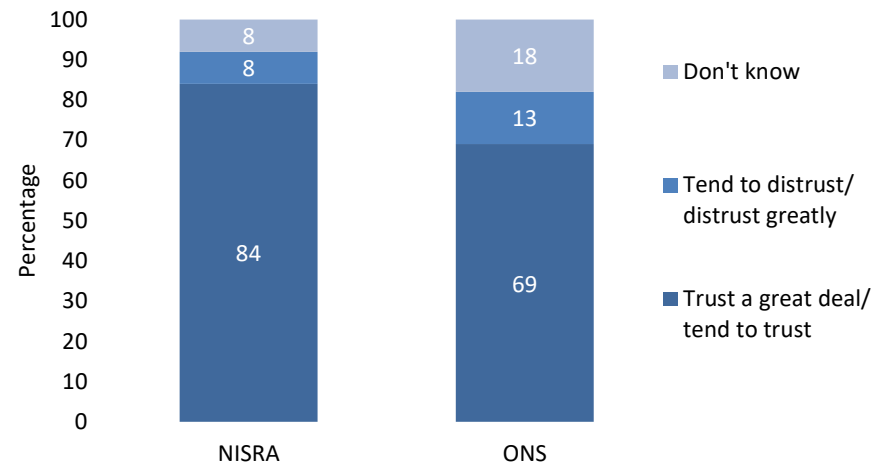
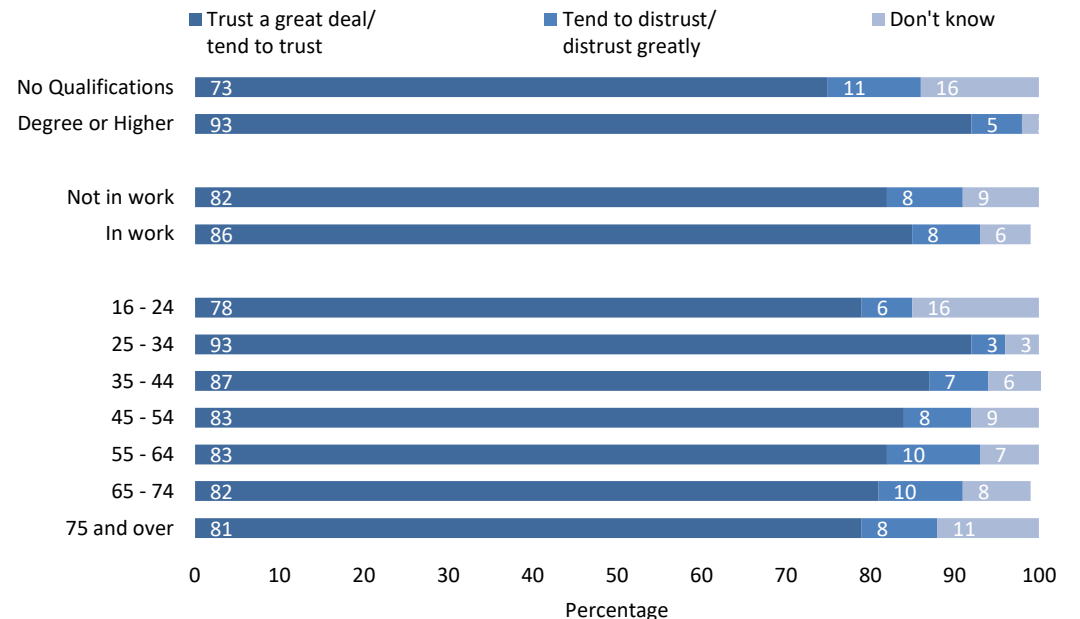


Chart 6: Trust in NISRA statistics by Age, Employment Status and Qualifications of Respondent



4. Value

The majority of respondents (88%) agreed that statistics produced by NISRA are important to understand Northern Ireland.

This is the first time that data have been collected on the value placed on NISRA statistics by the public. The question was asked because the Office of Statistics Regulation, in its review of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, aims to enhance the public value of official statistics. The perceived importance of official statistics produced by ONS was asked in 2016; 74% of respondents agree that statistics produced by ONS are important to understanding Britain.

5. Political Interference

Just over three quarters (77%) of respondents agreed that statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference. This figure has not changed since it was first measured in 2014.

A comparable figure for ONS statistics has not been produced.

6. Confidentiality

Almost nine in every ten persons that responded to the survey agreed that personal information provided to NISRA is kept confidential. This figure remains unchanged from the first time data on confidentiality were collected in Northern Ireland in 2014.

A comparable figure for ONS statistics has not been produced.

Appendix A: Methodology and Quality Information

This report presents the results of questions relating to public awareness and trust in official statistics in Northern Ireland that were included in the **October 2016 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey**. The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is a sample survey which is carried out on a regular basis by NISRA's Central Survey Unit. The survey is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of the people aged 16 and over in Northern Ireland. The survey comprises two distinct parts; core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances and a variety of questions commissioned by clients, which seek information on a range of issues. The awareness and trust in official statistics 2016 questions were commissioned by NISRA's Statistical Support and Business Planning Branch and are available in Appendix B of this report.

Sample

The sample for the October 2016 survey consisted of a systematic random sample of 2,200 addresses selected from the Pointer database of private addresses. This database provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but does not contain information about the number of households living at an address. Further selection stages were therefore required to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of households. A person aged 16 or over, in each household (the 'selected respondent') was chosen to complete the questionnaire. Of the 2,200 addresses selected for interview, 946 persons participated in the survey.

Confidence Intervals

Surveys gather information from a sample rather than from the whole population. Results from surveys are always estimates, not precise figures. This means that they have a margin of error which can have an impact on how changes in the numbers should be interpreted, especially in the short term. An estimate of the amount of error due to the sampling process can be calculated and used to produce an interval of values known as a confidence interval. The confidence intervals used in this report were calculated at the 95% level which means that if 100 samples of the same size were taken 95 of the estimate for the percentage value would lie within the interval.

Weighting

Selecting only one individual for interview at each sampled address means that the probability of selection for the survey is inversely related to the size of the household. Therefore, the data are weighted in relation to the number of eligible adults at each address. This weighting process adjusts the results to those that would have been achieved if the sample had been drawn as a random sample of adults rather than of addresses, thus allowing inferences to be made about the population.

The percentages given in the tables in this report are based on weighted data. The totals in the tables are not weighted.

Statistical significance

Significance tests were carried out to determine if there were differences in responses given by various respondent groups. The significance tests were carried out at 5% significance level and only differences which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) are included in this report. This means that there is at least a 95% probability that there is a genuine difference between responses given by, for example, males and females and the difference between the two genders is not simply explained by chance.

Further information on the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey can be found on NISRA's Central Survey Unit website [here](#).

Survey Questions

The questions for this report were based on those provided in a [Model Survey Questionnaire on How to Monitor Trust in Official Statistics](#) developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD). The use of these standard OECD questions has the advantage of allowing Northern Ireland results to be compared with relevant data collected for other National Statistics Institutions and in particular the ONS.

This is the fifth report in the series on the public's view of official statistic in Northern Ireland. Previous reports in the series can be viewed [here](#). The first three reports in the series were conducted in 2009, 2010 and 2012. These reports focused on public awareness of NISRA and the statistics it produces as well as public confidence in the accuracy of official statistics. The previous report in this series was published in 2014 with further analysis of the data published in 2015. This report considered awareness and accuracy, as in previous publications, but also included OECD questions on trust, confidentiality and political interference. The current publication is therefore the second in the series to consider trust in official statistics, the public's views on confidentiality and political interference. This report also includes, for the first time, an analysis of how valuable the public view statistics produced by NISRA.

Appendix B: Data Tables (including survey questions)

Awareness

Q: Before being contacted about his survey had you heard of NISRA, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency?

Table 1: Awareness of NISRA by Age Band

<i>Percentage</i>	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75 and over	Total
Yes	23	35	38	40	39	31	14	33
No	77	65	62	60	61	69	86	67
Number of Respondents	66	100	164	153	190	156	117	946

Table 2: Awareness of NISRA by Employment Status

<i>Percentage</i>	In Work	Not in Work
Yes	39	28
No	61	72
Number of Respondents	446	480

Note: Some respondents did not provide their employment status details and hence total percentages will not match those in other tables.

Table 3: Awareness of NISRA by Highest Educational Qualification

<i>Percentage</i>	Degree level or higher	Higher Education	A GCE Level	GCSE A-C or equivalent	GCSE D-G or equivalent	No Qualifications
Yes	51	43	45	29	25	14
No	49	57	55	71	75	86
Number of Respondents	160	145	131	172	79	259

Q: Can you tell me if you have heard about any of these sources of information all of which are produced by NISRA?

Table 4: Awareness of NISRA statistics.

<i>Percentage</i>	'Yes'
The number of births, deaths and marriages in NI each year	48
The size of the population of Northern Ireland	49
The number of casualties on NI roads	63
Recorded levels of crime in NI	44
Statistics on hospital waiting times in NI	60
The Census	62
The number of unemployed persons in NI	58
None of the above	12
Don't Know	1
Number of Respondents	946

Note: Respondents can answer 'yes' to more than one option.

Trust

Q: For each institution, please indicate whether you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.

Table 5: Trust in Institutions.

<i>Percentage</i>	Civil Service	NI Assembly	Media	NISRA	Courts	Police	High Street Banks
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	75	33	27	78	75	80	51
Tend to distrust/distrust greatly	21	63	71	5	23	19	47
Don't know	4	3	1	17	2	1	1
Number of Respondents	945	945	946	942	945	944	946

Q: Personally, how much trust do you have in the statistics produced by NISRA?

Table 6: Trust in NISRA Statistics by Age Band.

<i>Percentage</i>	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75 and over	Total
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	78	93	87	83	83	82	81	84
Tend to distrust/distrust greatly	6	3	7	8	10	10	8	8
Don't know	16	3	6	9	7	8	11	8
Number of Respondents	66	100	164	153	190	156	117	946

Table 7: Trust in NISRA Statistics by Employment Status.

<i>Percentage</i>	In work	Not in work
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	86	82
Tend to distrust/distrust greatly	8	8
Don't know	6	9
Number of Respondents	446	480

Table 8: Trust in NISRA Statistics by Highest Education Qualification.

<i>Percentage</i>	Degree level or higher	Higher Education	A GCE Level	GCSE A-C or equivalent	GCSE D-G or equivalent	No Qualifications
Trust a great deal/tend to trust	93	86	89	84	83	73
Tend to distrust/distrust greatly	5	8	3	9	12	11
Don't know	2	6	7	7	5	16
Number of Respondents	160	145	131	172	79	259

Value

Q: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Statistics produced by NISRA are important to understand Northern Ireland'.*

Table 9: Statistics produced by NISRA are important to understand Northern Ireland.

<i>Percentage</i>	Total
Strongly agree/tend to agree	88
Tend to disagree/strongly disagree	6
Don't know	6
Number of Respondents	946

Political Interference

Q: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I believe that the statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference'.*

Table 10: Statistics produced by NISRA are free from political interference.

<i>Percentage</i>	Total
Strongly agree/tend to agree	77
Tend to disagree/strongly disagree	12
Don't know	11
Number of Respondents	945

Confidentiality

Q: *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I believe that personal information that is provided to NISRA will be kept confidential'.*

Table 11: Personal information provided to NISRA will be kept confidential.

<i>Percentage</i>	Total
Strongly agree/tend to agree	89
Tend to disagree/strongly disagree	6
Don't know	5
Number of Respondents	946