

# Assessment Action Plan



## Population Estimates and Projections for Northern Ireland

Assessment Report 312

### 1. Background

On 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015, the UK Statistics Authority published a report on the *Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics for Population Estimates and Projections for Northern Ireland* ([Assessment report 312](#)). This report forms part of a broader assessment of population statistics across the UK that are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS); the Welsh Government; National Records of Scotland (NRS) and NISRA. The previous assessment of these sets of statistics was included in [Assessment report 124](#).

The UK Statistics Authority confirms that the population statistics for Northern Ireland are designated as National Statistics, subject to NISRA implementing six specific requirements. This Action Plan outlines how and when NISRA will address each of these Requirements. The UK Statistics Authority also made six suggestions and this paper details how NISRA will take on board these suggestions.

### 2. UK Statistics Authority Requirements: NISRA Actions

#### Finding:

**NISRA did not consult users about the decision to stop producing *Small Area Population Estimates*.**

#### Requirement 1a):

Consult users from a broad spectrum of sectors about the future of Small Area Population Estimates and the decision to subsume this report into Population and Migration Estimates Northern Ireland and publish the results of this consultation, the actions to be taken and a timetable for implementation.

**Deadline:** *March 2016*

#### Action:

A Population Statistics User Engagement Event will be held in NISRA headquarters in early 2016. The subsuming of the Small Area Population Estimates (SAPE) into the Population and Migration Estimates Report will be included as an item on the agenda. Known users of population statistics will be invited to this event which will be promoted online and via social media in order to attract users from a broad spectrum of sectors. A note summarising discussions at this event will be prepared and published on the Demography section of the NISRA website by the end of March 2016. The Small Area Population Estimates section of the website will be updated to include the results of this consultation, any actions to be taken and a timetable for implementation.

**Planned Completion Date:** March 2016

#### Requirement 1b):

Produce and publish documentation about how it will consult users about future changes to methodology or dissemination that are likely to significantly affect the use of the statistics.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

#### Action:

A Population Statistics User Engagement Strategy will be published on the NISRA website by December 2015 and users will be encouraged to share any observations/views they may have. This strategy, including any comments received, will be discussed at the user engagement event in early 2016 and the strategy will be revised, if required, to take account of user feedback.

**Planned Completion Date:** *January 2016*

#### Finding:

**NISRA has not published documentation about the consultation on the statistics work programme, or on how users' views are being taken forward through its statistical planning, and the priorities for individual sets of statistics or how these are set.**

#### Requirement 2:

Improve published documentation about statistical planning ensuring it:

- a) Is up-to-date
- b) Takes full account of user needs
- c) Is transparent about priority setting and the reasons that particular choices are made
- d) Reflects the obligation to serve the public good.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

#### Action:

A summary of user needs, emerging from the following events will be published:

- User Engagement Event;
- Department of Education meeting(s);
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety meeting(s)
- Neighbourhood Statistics User Group; and
- Other user working groups including Demographic Statistics Advisory Group and Statistics Advisory Committee.

These user needs will be considered when developing and agreeing (in conjunction with the other statistics organisations within the UK) the 2016/17 Population Work Plan. The work plan will be published on the NISRA website and will include a section detailing the review of user needs against the setting of priorities and how these ultimately improve the statistics for the public good. NISRA will note, however, that the work plan is to a large extent dictated by UK wide coordinated population releases: dates for population estimates (around June), migration statistics (August), older population (September) and national projections (October). Other outputs are organised around/between these dates, and are generally planned based on the availability of both data and resources.

**Planned Completion Date:** *January 2016*

**Finding:**

NISRA has not sufficiently identified or explained the assurance arrangements undertaken for source data, its own assurance procedures for migration data, or the role of external bodies in inspecting or auditing the data collecting organisations; accordingly it has not communicated this information in an accessible way to users. NISRA has not fully updated its *Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS)* which lists the administrative data sources used to produce the population estimates and projections statistics and other documentation is inconsistent with the SoAS.

**Requirement 3a):**

Update its SoAS to ensure that all the data sources are included and the information about them, including the statistical products to which they contribute, is accurate.

Deadline: *January 2016*

**Action:**

An updated [SoAs](#) was published in September on the NISRA website.

Planned Completion Date: *October 2015*

**Requirement 3b):**

Ensure that data sources are named consistently across publications, or refer to the different names and explain in the publications the reasons for those differences

Deadline: *January 2016*

**Action:**

Data sources are now being named consistently across publications. In instances where a different named is being used in more recent reports a footnote has been added to the report – see for example footnote 7 on page 20 of the [Population and Migration Estimates Northern Ireland \(2014\)](#) report.

Planned Completion Date: *Ongoing*

**Requirement 3c):**

Publish an appropriate level of detail to inform users about the data assurance and audit arrangements for all the administrative data sources used in the production of the population estimates and projections publications, taking into consideration the Authority's *Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit*.

Deadline: *January 2016*

**Action:**

The data assurance and audit arrangements for all the administrative data sources used in the production of the population estimates and projections publications will be collated into one document which will be published on the NISRA website. As part of this process, consideration will be given to the Authority's *Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit*.

Planned Completion Date: *January 2016*

**Finding:**

**Population Aged 85 and Over, Northern Ireland does not contain any information about the quality of the statistics or what quality assurance processes have been taken.**

**Requirement 4:**

Publish information about the quality of the data in *Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over, Northern Ireland*, and the quality assurance measures that are taken.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

**Action:**

The [2014 Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over, Northern Ireland](#) report was published on 30th September 2015. This report includes information about the quality of the data and the quality assurance measures that were taken.

**Planned Completion Date:** *September 2015*

**Finding:**

**Documents that compare the population estimates produced in all countries in the UK have not been updated since their publication.**

**Requirement 5a):**

Ensure that the remaining comparison documents on the population estimates and projections produced in all countries in the UK are updated and published as planned.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

**Action:**

Comparison papers for mid-year population estimates were published by ONS on 25 June 2015, alongside the E&W and UK estimates. An updated comparison paper on the sub national population projections was published in July 2015. The data and methods for estimates of the older population are very similar across countries; hence a comparison paper was not previously published. ONS are taking the lead in creating a short paper to state this high level of similarity; this will be published alongside the 2014 *Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over, Northern Ireland* report in September 2015 . A report on Small Area Population Estimates (SAPE) is likely to be released when all four countries have published their 2014 SAPE – NISRA are taking the lead on this with the aim to publish in November/December 2015. NISRA contribute to each of these reports and any information relating to Northern Ireland is cleared by NISRA prior to publication. NISRA will continue to work with colleagues in the WG, NRS and ONS.

**Planned Completion Date:** *January 2016*

**Requirement 5b):**

Carry out, and publish, a review of the methodological and comparability differences and, based on knowledge of the uses of the statistics and expert input, evaluate whether the differences are justifiable. As part of meeting this Requirement, NISRA should work together with the Welsh Government, NRS and ONS.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

**Action:**

NISRA will work with colleagues in the WG, NRS and ONS to ensure any differences in data sources or methods are reviewed routinely and continue to be justified. These issues will also be addressed in the comparison papers discussed under Requirement 5a.

**Planned Completion Date:** *January 2016*

**Requirement 6:**

Review and improve, where relevant, the signposting and navigation from the population section of NISRA's website by referencing, and linking to, relevant documentation from previous censuses and the 2021 Census Planning section of NISRA's website.

**Deadline:** *January 2016*

**Action:**

NISRA has already made improvements to the NISRA website with the introduction of a '[Supporting Documentation](#)' page and additional explanatory text. Links have been added to user survey results and information on the Censuses, past and future. NISRA will continue to update the website with relevant documentation and supporting text as appropriate.

**Planned Completion Date:** *Ongoing*

### **3. UK Statistics Authority Suggestions: NISRA Actions**

**Suggestion 1:**

**Ensure that CAG takes the actions agreed at its February 2015 meeting.**

**Action:**

NISRA Population Statistics section has written to the Head of Census/Chair of CAG to take forward the following recommendations:

- the CAG (or something similar) should be retained in an advisory and methodology quality assurance role;
- the ToR should be reviewed, brought up to date, and widened to include demographic statistics;
- if the remit is widened the CAG should be renamed – Demographic Statistics Advisory Group;
- the current membership should be retained, to maintain the level of expertise and experience that they bring to the group, and could be widened, if necessary; and
- meetings should be twice a year, where possible.

**Suggestion 2:**

**Monitor the resources allocated to the production of these statistics to ensure that they continue to be sufficient to meet the standards of the *Code of Practice* and the obligation within it to serve the public good.**

## Action:

NISRA will review internally the resources allocated to the production of these statistics. NISRA note that since the previous assessment a full-time assistant statistician has been employed in the section along with a Grade 7 whose span of responsibility includes Population Statistics.

**Suggestion 3:**

**Work closely with colleagues within NISRA and statistical producers in ONS, Welsh Government and NRS to clarify data assurance arrangements for administrative data.**

## Action:

NISRA will continue to sit on the UK wide Population Working Groups and work with the relevant statistics organisations to clarify data assurance arrangements for administrative data and ensure that they are i) fit for purpose from a Population Estimates/Projections perspective and ii) communicated effectively to users.

**Suggestion 4:**

**Review its published process map for accuracy and consistency.**

## Action:

A [revised process map](#) was published in July 2015 and this will be kept under review.

**Suggestion 5:**

**Add a link to *UK Population Revisions Policy* from all of its population estimates and projections statistical reports.**

## Action:

This process has commenced and is ongoing – for example a link was added to the [Long-term International Migration Statistics for Northern Ireland \(2014\)](#) report which was published in August 2015.

**Suggestion 6:**

**Consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2 in order to enhance the statistical reports.**

## Action:

NISRA strives to continuously improve publications and the points highlighted will be considered in future publications.

#### **4. Further information**

Further information on this Action Plan or on Population and Migration Statistics can be obtained from NISRA Customer Services:

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Responsible Statistician: Brian Green

**NISRA**

**October 2015**