

Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments 2014/15

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Date: 7 January 2016

Theme: Government

Summary of Key Findings

- In 2014/15 the estimated cost to business in Northern Ireland (NI) of complying with government statistical surveys was just over £1.1 million. Over three quarters (79%) of this was attributable to statutory surveys.
- The compliance cost of running surveys in 2014/15 decreased by £170,000 (13%) from 2013/14. This decrease can be attributed in part to the biennial Census of Employment not taking place in 2014/15.
- There were 104 surveys in 2014/15, compared with 120 in 2013/14. There were five fewer statutory surveys and 11 fewer voluntary surveys.

Background

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics has a statutory basis¹ and recognises the importance of monitoring and reducing respondent burden balanced with the need to produce official statistics that are fundamental to good government and provide a good evidence base to inform public policy.

This report therefore fulfils the requirement of the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)² that an estimated respondent burden cost to businesses be reported annually.

¹ Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/the-national-statistics-standard/code-of-practice/index.html>

1. Introduction

This 2014/15 report is the latest in an annual series detailing the cost to businesses of complying with statutory and voluntary government statistical surveys in Northern Ireland. The report covers costs incurred in complying with regular and ad-hoc government surveys which have been conducted in the financial year ending 31st March 2015. It provides information on the number of surveys carried out by each government department.

This is the third report in the series to present costs for a financial year, and also to calculate compliance costs using a new methodology.³ This new methodology was first implemented in the 2012/13 Annual Report. It is the second report in the series to detail information on the mode of data collection.

The compliance costs of a survey are defined as the financial cost incurred by that business from responding to the survey. This is estimated using an agreed Government Statistical Service methodology³ and includes factors such as the time taken to complete the survey, hourly pay rate⁴ of the person completing the survey and any external costs such as accountancy fees.

In this report, surveys that contribute to official statistics are referred to as 'official statistic' surveys and surveys that do not contribute to official statistics are referred to as 'other' surveys.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) no longer produces a comparable report for England and Wales. Instead they produce an On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys. Information on Northern Ireland surveys is also available on this list at the [GSS website](#)⁵. Scotland currently does not publish a report on or produce an On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys.

³ See appendix A for details of the methodology currently used to calculate compliance cost and http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Changes_to_Survey_Control_Methodology_2012_13.pdf for a comparison with the previous methodology.

⁴ Hourly rates of pay are Hourly Gross (£) UK rates of pay, [ASHE 2014](#).

⁵ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/survey-control-unit/online-list-of-government-statistical-surveys/>

2. Summary of Statistical Survey Compliance Costs, 2014/15

In 2014/15, 104 surveys of business were issued by government departments, of which 43 were statutory and 61 were voluntary. The total cost to business was just over £1.1 million, of which statutory compliance cost £895,900 (79%) and voluntary compliance cost £238,200 (21%).

Table 1: Compliance cost by NI department, 2014/15

Department	Number of Surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost (£ thousands)
DARD	17	24.6	150.7
DCAL	1	0.2	1.2
DE	7	3.5	31.0
DEL	6	2.6	19.3
DETI	10	6.8	40.4
DFP	38	87.7	875.6
DHSSPS	1	0.1	1.6
DOE	3	0.2	3.6
DRD	1	1.3	8.2
DSD	20	0.8	2.6
Total	104	127.8	1,134.2

Note:

Number of forms returned and compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

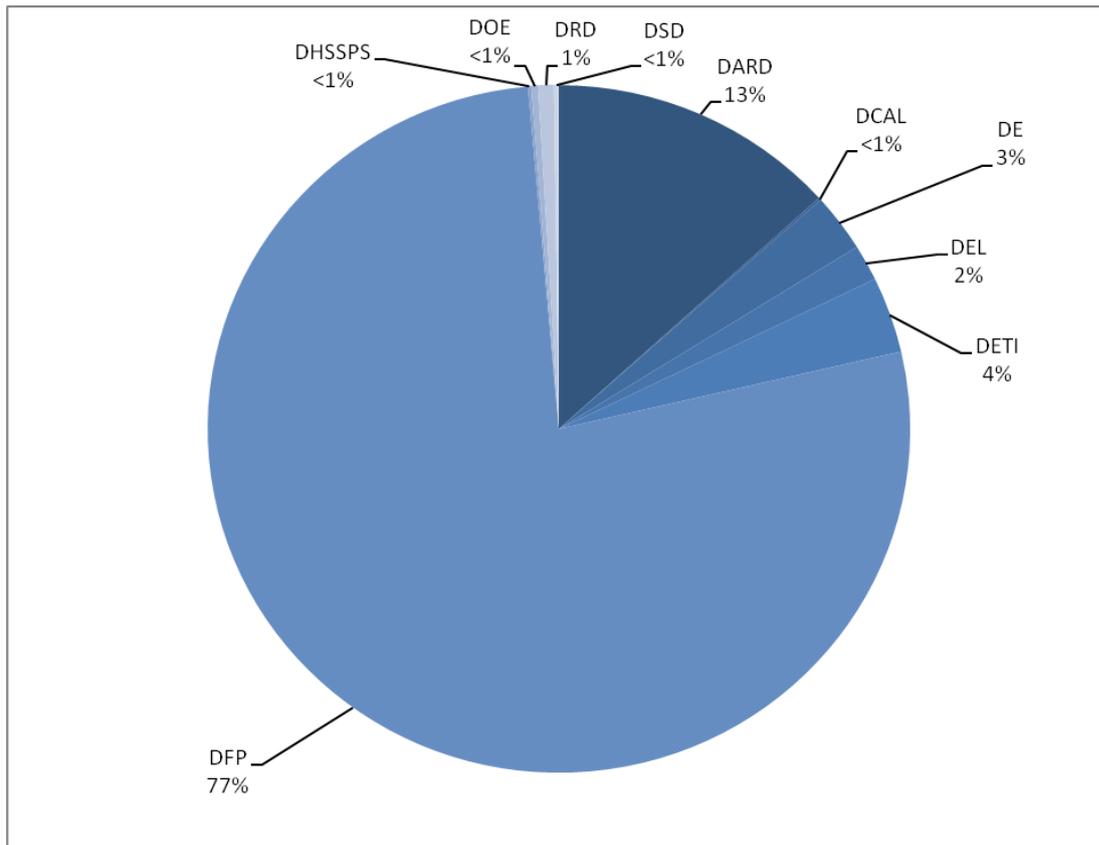
Of the £1.1 million total compliance cost, 77% is attributable to DFP and 13% to DARD (Figure 1).

71% of the total compliance cost (£810,500) can be attributed to the Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) branch⁶, within DFP. This equates to 93% of the DFP total.

The ONS surveys businesses in Northern Ireland to produce UK economic statistics. The DFP compliance figures include the burden incurred in Northern Ireland as a result of economic surveys conducted by the ONS.

⁶ Detailed information on the compliance cost attributable to each area within DFP is available in the downloadable data.

Figure 1: Percentage of total compliance cost by NI department, 2014/15.



[Download data](#) (CSV Format 11KB)

[Download tables and charts](#) (Excel 56KB)

Table 2: Compliance cost for statutory and voluntary surveys by NI department, 2014/15

Department	Statutory		Voluntary	
	Number of surveys	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)	Number of surveys	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)
DARD	9	132.5	8	18.2
DCAL	-	-	1	1.2
DE	1	1.2	6	29.7
DEL	-	-	6	19.3
DETI	-	-	10	40.4
DFP	31	751.5	7	124.1
DHSSPS	-	-	1	1.6
DOE	1	2.5	2	1.1
DRD	1	8.2	-	-
DSD	-	-	20	2.6
Total	43	895.9	61	238.2

Note:

Compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred pounds. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

Almost three fifths (59%) of the surveys issued were voluntary. However, they contributed to just over one fifth (21%) of the total compliance burden. The majority of the burden was incurred by statutory surveys which amounted to £895,900 (Table 2). Of the £875,600 total burden attributable to DFP, 86% was incurred by statutory surveys. Of the £150,700 burden attributable to DARD, 88% was incurred as a result of the issue of statutory surveys to farms and businesses within the NI agricultural sector. All the surveys issued by DEL, DETI, DHSSPSNI, DCAL and DSD were voluntary.

Table 3: Compliance cost for surveys that contribute to official statistics and for surveys that do not contribute to official statistics by NI department, 2014/15

Department	Official Statistics			Other Statistics		
	Number of surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)	Number of surveys	Number of forms returned (thousands)	Compliance cost to business (£ thousands)
DARD	16	20.4	138.2	1	4.2	12.4
DCAL	-	-	-	1	0.2	1.2
DE	4	2.9	20.7	3	0.6	10.3
DEL	-	-	-	6	2.6	19.3
DETI	-	-	-	10	6.8	40.4
DFP	37	87.5	874.0	1	0.2	1.6
DHSSPS	1	0.1	1.6	-	-	-
DOE	1	0.0	1.0	2	0.1	2.6
DRD	1	1.3	8.2	-	-	-
DSD	-	-	-	20	0.8	2.6
Total	60	112.3	1,043.8	44	15.5	90.4

Note:

Number of forms returned and compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

The vast majority (92%; £1.0 million) of compliance burden is due to surveys that contribute to official statistics (Table 3). Of these official statistics surveys, 85% (£890,600) of the burden was attributable to statutory surveys (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Compliance cost for official statistics surveys and other surveys by statutory and voluntary (£ thousands), 2014/15.

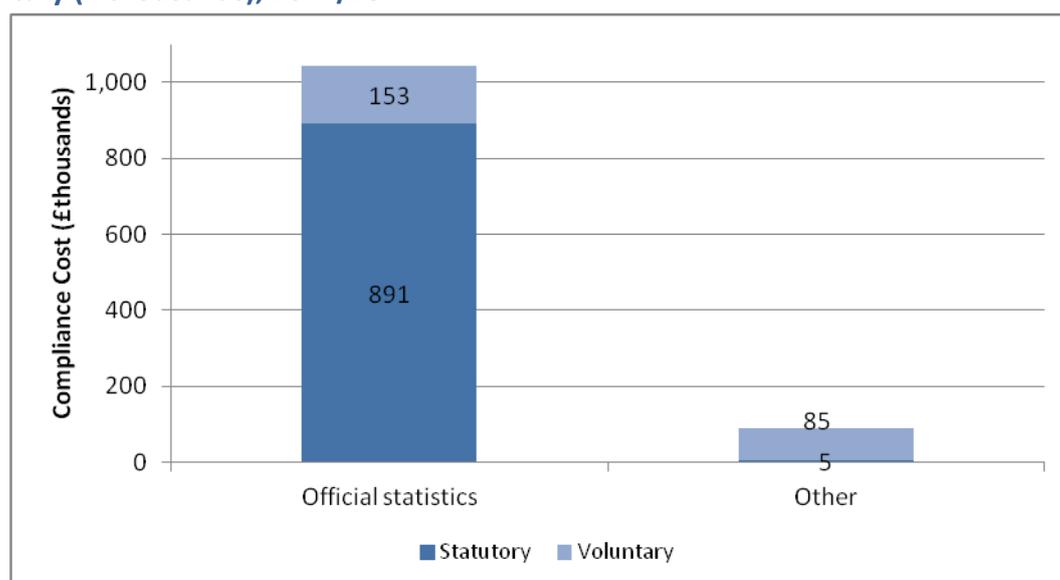


Table 4: Survey mode of data collection by NI department, 2014/15

Dept	Postal		Online/email		Telephone		Face to face		Other~		Postal [#]		Total	
	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost	No	Cost
DARD	13	66.5	-	-	-	-	1	0.2	3	83.9	-	-	17	150.7
DCAL	-	-	1	1.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.2
DE	1	1.2	4	22.2	1	6.0	1	1.5	-	-	-	-	7	31.0
DEL	-	-	1	0.4	4	18.7	-	-	1	0.2	-	-	6	19.3
DETI	2	1.1	2	3.5	6	35.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	40.4
DFP	30	631.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	29.6	7	214.1	38	875.6
DHSSPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.6	-	-	1	1.6
DOE	-	-	3	3.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3.6
DRD	1	8.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.2
DSD	-	-	1	0.3	-	-	19	2.3	-	-	-	-	20	2.6
Total	47	708.9	12	31.3	11	60.5	21	4.0	6	115.3	7	214.1	104	1,134.2

~ Other use a number of methods such as face to face and telephone, or online and telephone

Postal with online or Telephone Direct Entry

Note:

Compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred pounds. Costs are in £(thousands).

Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

Almost half (45%) of the surveys completed by business were postal. This accounts for just over three fifths (63%), or £708,900, of the total compliance costs. One fifth of surveys (20%) were face to face, with a relatively low compliance cost of £4,000. There were also seven postal surveys with an online or telephone data entry (less than 7% of surveys) and these cost £214,100. Online/email represented 12% of surveys and cost £31,300 (less than 3% of total compliance costs). Telephone surveys made up 11% of surveys and cost £60,500. Those that are classified as 'other' accounted for six of the surveys and cost £115,300 in total.

3. Changes to the Surveys Issued by Departments: 2013/14 to 2014/15.

Table 5: Number of surveys, forms returned and compliance cost by department, 2013/14 to 2014/15

Department	Number of Surveys		Number of forms returned (thousands)		Compliance cost (£ thousands)	
	2013/14	2014/15	2013/14	2014/15	2013/14	2014/15
DARD	16	17	20.1	24.6	153.8	150.7
DCAL	-	1	-	0.2	-	1.2
DE	9	7	3.8	3.5	28.4	31.0
DEL	15	6	3.1	2.6	21.1	19.3
DETI	13	10	6.5	6.8	36.6	40.4
DFP	45	38	86.7	87.7	1,039.1	875.6
DHSSPS	-	1	-	0.1	-	1.6
DOE	7	3	0.9	0.2	12.4	3.6
DRD	1	1	1.6	1.3	9.9	8.2
DSD	14	20	0.9	0.8	2.9	2.6
Total	120	104	123.5	127.8	1,304.3	1,134.1

Note:

Number of forms returned and compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Departments' names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

Due to the cyclical nature of some of the larger statutory surveys, compliance cost figures can fluctuate from one year to the next. An example of this is the Census of Employment which is a biennial survey. Also, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimise the financial burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

A summary of the major changes in the costs to businesses for completing surveys issued by NI departments is detailed below for the period 2013/14 to 2014/15 (see table 5 above for figures covering both years).

DARD reported a compliance cost of £150,700 in 2014/15. This was down slightly (£3,200) from the previous year. Part of the explanation for this may be due to a shorter average completion time in 2014/15 for the Horticultural census.

DCAL issued one survey to business in 2014/15, having not issued any in the previous year. The total compliance cost to business was £1,200.

In 2014/15, DE carried out 7 surveys that incurred a burden of £31,000. This was £2,600 less than in 2013/14, when compliance costs were £28,400.

The total compliance cost for DEL in 2014/15 was £19,300, down from £21,100 the previous year. There were 6 surveys in 2014/15 compared with 15 the previous year. Although there was no Employer Skills Survey in 2014/15 (it is biennial, and cost £13,000 in 2013/14) there was an ad hoc Employer Survey in respect of Vacancy Management which totalled nearly £18,000.

The number of surveys carried out by DETI has reduced from 13 in 2013/14 to 10 in 2014/15. DETI has amalgamated a quarterly customer satisfaction survey into an annual return. However, DETI ran an ad hoc Business Innovation Survey (Leadership and Management) which cost £2,900. This partly explains the increase in departmental compliance costs to business from £36,600 to £40,400.

In 2014/15 DFP carried out 38 surveys which amounted to £875,600 in compliance costs. This is a reduction of £163,500 on the previous year. Part of this is because there was no Census of Employment in 2014/15 (it alone cost £365,100 in 2013/14). However, three of the quarterly surveys had boosted samples – the Index of Services, the Index of Production, and the Quarterly Employment Survey, which added £62,000 to the compliance cost for these series. There was also a new Low Carbon Survey which cost £26,800.

DHSSPS had one survey in 2014/15 with a compliance cost of £1,600. This was the triennial Sight Test Survey. There were no surveys of businesses in 2013/14.

There were 3 surveys completed for DOE in 2014/15 costing £3,600, down £8,800 from the previous year when 7 surveys were carried out. This is partly explained by the Councillors Allowance Return no longer being included, which was £5,000 in 2013/14. The Planning Service Customer Satisfaction Survey is biennial and was not carried out in 2014/15.

DRD compliance costs amounted to £8,200 in 2014/15, similar to the 2013/14 figure of £9,900.

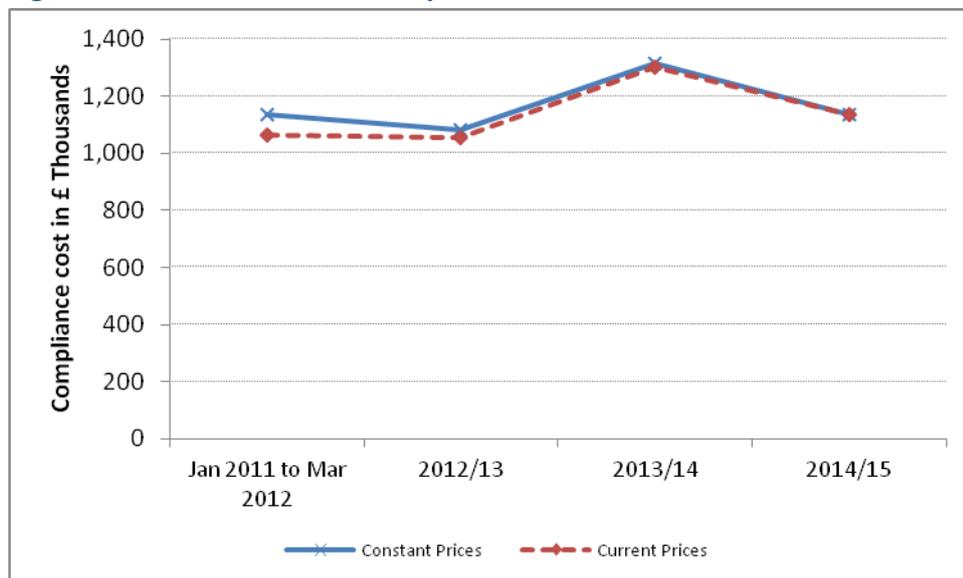
DSD completed 20 surveys in 2014/15, up from 14 the previous year. The cost to business of DSD surveys is relatively low in nature and was £2,600 in 2014/15 and £2,900 in 2013/14.

4. An Examination of the Trend, January 2011 - March 2012 to 2014/15

Figure 3 illustrates the change in compliance costs reported in Northern Ireland from Jan 2011-Mar 2012 to 2014/15. The broken red line shows the cost in terms of current prices: that is, in terms of staff costs at the time without allowing for the effects of inflation. The cost was £1.062 million in the 12 month estimate covering January 2011 to March 2012⁷; it then fell slightly to just under £1.055 million in 2012/13 before increasing by 24% to £1.304 million for 2013/14. It has dropped again in 2014/15 to £1.134 million.

It is useful to summarise the change over time at constant prices, which removes the effects of changes in staff costs. The base year being used is 2014/15⁸. The cost was £1.137 million in the 12 month estimate covering January 2011 to March 2012; it then fell slightly to £1.080 million in 2012/13 before increasing by 22% to £1.314 million for 2013/14. It fell back again for 2014/15 to £1.134 million, a decrease of 14% in constant prices. The constant prices and current price lines in figure 3 are close together over the reference period due to low pay rises in the last few years.

Figure 3: Northern Ireland compliance costs from Jan 2011 – Mar 2012 to 2014/15.



⁷ A 12 month estimate was calculated by calculating four fifths of the 15 month total.

⁸ The equivalent hourly rates of pay for 2014/15 have been applied to 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14.

5. Changes in 2015/16

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that an estimated cost burden on data suppliers is reported annually and that efforts are made to reduce this cost. This applies to surveys issued to businesses, households and individuals. As of the 1st April 2014, surveys to households and individuals are included in the scope of survey control within Northern Ireland. That is, more specifically, surveys whose fieldwork began on or after the 1st April 2014.

Data on individuals and households have been collected for 2014/15 and are being quality assured. Subject to this quality assurance, a further report will be published alongside this report on the NISRA website in Spring 2015 detailing compliance costs for households and individuals in 2014/15. It is anticipated that from 2015/16, compliance costs for businesses and compliance costs for households and individuals will be included in a single report.

The respondent burden for households and individuals is calculated on the basis of time taken, unlike the respondent burden to business which is the financial cost to businesses, and will be reported as the total compliance burden in time (hours and minutes).

6. Measures being taken to Reduce Compliance Costs

A few of the specific initiatives employed by departments in trying to reduce respondent burden include:

Department	Name of Survey	Reduced compliance cost by:
DARD	Raw Milk Producer	Forms amended to take account of changes necessary to collect all data required under Reg 1308/2013 post milk quota environment plus additional companies included. Small operators are only surveyed annually.
	Milk Utilisation Survey	Review of firms and their utilisation practices with a view to simplifying the form for future surveys.
	Aquaculture Production Survey	Forms simplified for ease of completion.
	Farm Business Survey	New IT system.
DEL	All surveys	Professional staff available to provide advice which reduces completion time.
DETI	Business Monitor	Reduced by asking fewer questions in thematic section and reducing overall time for the survey.
	Customer Satisfaction Survey	Reducing frequency of survey from quarterly to annual.
DFP	BRES/QES	Data sharing of employment data between QES and BRES for businesses with single local unit (LU) which are also on QES.
	All surveys	ELMSB has rolled out an electronic data collection (EDC) programme for the Quarterly Employment Survey and work has also commenced to collect email addresses for businesses on the IOP and IOS (over 40% uptake). It is planned to roll EDC out over the coming years for the remaining annual surveys.

Appendix A: Technical notes

Data collection

Data are requested from Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) in each of the Northern Ireland departments, as well as from officials in Arms Length Bodies (ALBS). Respondents are provided with guidance notes and asked to provide details on the government statistical surveys which their department/branch has carried out in 2014/15. This is returned to NISRA Corporate Branch for quality assurance.

Methodology

Compliance costs are calculated using the median time to complete the questionnaire/survey. In instances where completion time is not collected via the survey then an estimated median time is based on a pilot survey, historical data, paradata or survey manager expertise.

Validation procedures may require a re-contact with the business or local authority. The burden due to re-contact is also calculated. If actual re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full questionnaire may be substituted on the assumption that a respondent may need to review the entire questionnaire.

Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) are provided with a choice of 5 rates of pay taken from the appropriate Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). SCLOs must select the most appropriate rate of pay for the person most likely to have completed the survey. The rates of pay used in compliance cost calculations are the median, hourly, gross ASHE rates for the following grades:

Grade	ASHE Code
Chief Executive and Senior Officials	1115
Professional Occupations	2
Managers and Senior Officials	1
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	3
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	4

External costs incurred by businesses (eg. accountants fees) when complying with government survey requests are also included in the calculation of compliance costs.

The Compliance Cost (£) is a simple **addition** of Response Cost (£), Re-contact Cost (£) and External Cost (£), which are calculated as:

$$\text{Response Cost (£)} = \text{No. of responses} \times \text{Median time (hrs)} \times \text{Hourly rate (£/hr)}$$

$$\text{Recontact cost (£)} = \text{No. recontacted} \times \text{Median time (hrs)} \times \text{Hourly rate (£/hr)}$$

$$\text{External cost (£)} = \text{No. with external costs} \times \text{Median external cost (£)}$$

Data is subject to validation and quality assurance by checking the calculated cost for each survey, comparing with previous years return, and by contacting data providers if there are queries on specific surveys.

Main uses of data

The data are used by business and industry, by the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC), by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), by the media and by the general public. Information has been used to investigate the cost to Northern Ireland business in completing government surveys, to respond to MLA questions, and to provide briefing to the Minister for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Data quality

Data are derived from returns provide by other government departments and ALBs. Although the compliance cost is an estimate, the quality of the underlying data is considered to be very good.

Appendix B: Departments and their abbreviations

Abbreviation	Department
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DOE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department of Social Development

Appendix C: Further Information

Access to all the data contained in this report can be found at:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Surveycontrol201415.xls>

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