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Burden to Households & Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments 2016/17

Summary of Key Findings

- There were 158 surveys or parts of surveys¹, issued to Households and Individuals by Northern Ireland Government Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) in 2016/17 and 278,528 responses to surveys were collected².
- The total burden to NI Households and Individuals in 2016/17 was 48,647 hours, or 2,027 days. The Department for Communities (DfC) was the Department responsible for the single highest proportion of this burden (22%) and face-to-face methods accounted for the highest proportion of burden by data collection method (36%).
- In 2016/17, the average time taken to complete a survey, or part of a survey, was nearly 11 minutes³. However, there was a wide variance in completion times across surveys, with the shortest survey taking on average less than half a minute to complete, and the longest survey taking on average around five and half hours per respondent.
- There were three surveys with a compliance burden over 3,000 hours (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 (Pupil) [DE]*; *Health Survey Northern Ireland [DoH]*; and, *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey [DfI]*) which accounted for 26% of the total compliance burden to Households & Individuals.

¹ When several NI Government Departments share a survey, such as the NI Omnibus Survey or the Continuous Household Survey, each module (or part of the survey) is counted separately. This means that these surveys, and the respondents to these surveys, will be counted more than once. The compliance burden however, is based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

² The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the series, as surveys which were previously excluded have now been included. This means that the 2016/17 data are not directly comparable with previous years. Further details are provided in Appendix A.

³ The average time taken to complete a survey has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the total number of responses.

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1. Background & Definitions

The Burden to Households and Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Government Departments in 2016/17 is the second report in this series. The previous report, published in August 2017, covered both 2015/16 and 2014/15. This report complements the more established annual report on the cost to businesses of complying with NI Government Statistical surveys⁴.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)⁵ has a statutory basis⁶ 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:

V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

It is on this basis that NISRA produces an annual report detailing the burden placed on Households and Individuals as a result of completing statistical surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments.

This report includes information on the number of surveys, or parts of surveys, issued by NI Departments (including their Arm's Length Bodies) in the financial year ending 31st March 2017, and the time spent by Households and Individuals in complying with these regular and ad-hoc Government surveys. Department's names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix B.

In this report a survey refers to a single survey, or part of a survey, carried out by or on behalf of a NI Government Department. When a survey is shared by a number of Departments, each part of the survey will be treated as a separate survey. This means a survey could be counted multiple times.

⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

⁵ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

⁶ Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

Useful Links:

- [Previous publications in this series](#)
- [Cost to Business publications](#)
- [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- [NISRA publications and datasets](#)

- [Downloadable data](#)

The number of responses is based on the achieved sample for the survey, or part of the survey. When a survey is shared by more than one Department, each single respondent will be counted as a response to each part of the survey. Thus when responses are aggregated across Departments, some respondents will be counted multiple times.

The compliance burden due to a survey is defined as the **time spent** by the Household or Individual in responding to the survey, or part of the survey⁷.

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

The average time to complete a survey has been calculated as the total compliance burden for the group of surveys (or parts of surveys) divided by the total number of responses for the group of surveys (or parts of surveys).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Quality Centre, Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not produce a comparable report for England and Wales. Instead they produce an [On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys \(OLGSS\)](#)^{8,9}. Information on Northern Ireland Household and Individual surveys is available within this list.

The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the series, as surveys which were previously excluded have now been included. Further details are provided in Appendix A.

⁷ While the survey and respondents to the survey, will be counted more than once, the compliance burden is calculated based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

⁸ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/quality/compliance/#online-list-of-government-statistical-surveys-olgss->

⁹ The On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys (OLGSS) is currently being reviewed. Therefore the latest available data are currently for 2015/16. These data may be updated once the review is complete.

2. Compliance burden to households & individuals

In 2016/17, there were 158 surveys, or parts of surveys¹⁰, issued to households and individuals by Northern Ireland Government Departments. The total compliance burden to Households and Individuals was 48,647 hours or 2,027 days.

In this report a survey refers to a single survey or part of a survey, carried out by or on behalf of a NI Government Department. A survey which is shared by a number of different Government Departments will be counted multiple times.

One quarter of all surveys were conducted by DfC (25%), followed by DoJ with one fifth (20%), and DE with one seventh (15%). The remaining departments were each responsible for around one tenth or fewer of the surveys to households and individuals carried out.

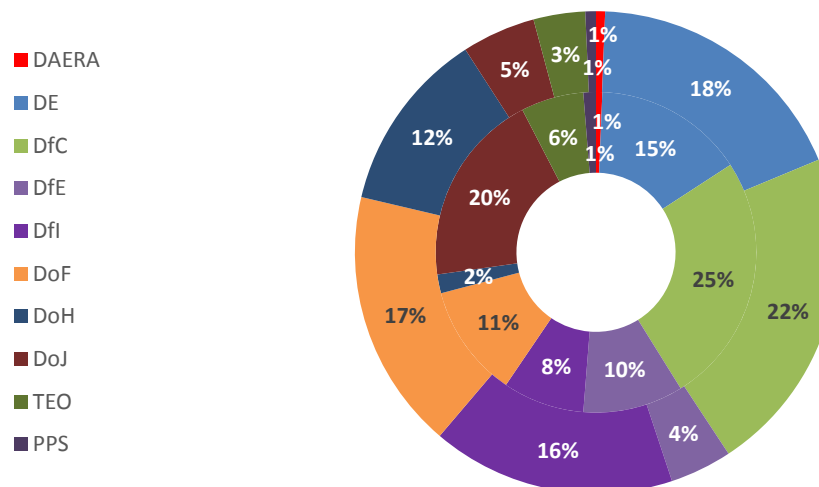
Over a fifth (22%) of the compliance burden to households and individuals can be attributed to DfC surveys, while just under one fifth (18%) can be attributed to DE surveys. This is followed closely by DoF (17%), DfI (16%) and DoH (12%) (Table 1 and Figure 1).

While DoJ accounted for 20% of the total number of surveys, only 5% of the overall

Table 1: Number and Burden (Hours) for Surveys by Department

Department	Number of Surveys ¹¹	Percentage of Surveys	Compliance Burden (hours)	Percentage of Burden
DAERA	1	1%	295	1%
DE	24	15%	8,816	18%
DfC	40	25%	10,707	22%
DfE	16	10%	2,021	4%
DfI	13	8%	7,944	16%
DoF	18	11%	8,494	17%
DoH	3	2%	5,939	12%
DoJ	31	20%	2,400	5%
TEO	10	6%	1,686	3%
PPS	2	1%	346	1%
Total	158	100%	48,647	100%

Figure 1: Percentage of Surveys (Inner) & Percentage of Burden (Outer) by Department



¹⁰ When several NI Government Departments share a survey, such as the NI Omnibus Survey or the Continuous Household Survey, each module (or part of the survey) is counted separately. This means that these surveys, and respondents to these surveys, will be counted more than once. The compliance burden however, is based on the module and is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey.

¹¹ This includes 20 modules within 2 runs of the NI Omnibus; 7 in the Continuous Household Survey; 6 in the Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey; 3 in the NI Life & Times survey; 4 in the Young Life & Times and 1 in the Kids' Life & Times. Each of these modules is counted separately. Information on the surveys carried out by each Department is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

compliance burden to households and individuals resulted from these surveys.

A relatively small number of surveys were responsible for a disproportionate amount of the overall compliance burden to Households and Individuals. Figure 2 groups surveys by their compliance burden. The blue bars show the percentage of surveys in each category and green bars show the percentage of the overall compliance burden due to those surveys.

Figure 2 illustrates that although only 14% of surveys had a total survey burden of over 500 hours, these surveys were responsible for 77% of the total burden. In contrast, 51% of surveys had a burden of 49 hours or less and contributed only 4% of the total burden to Households and Individuals.

In fact, during 2016/17 there were three surveys with a compliance burden over 3,000 hours. In total, these three surveys accounted for 26% of the total compliance burden to households and individuals. The three surveys with a compliance burden over 3,000 hours were: *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 (Pupil) [DE]*; *Health Survey Northern Ireland 2016/17 [DoH]*; and, *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey [Dfi]*.

Figure 2: Number of Surveys by Compliance Burden, and Contribution to Overall Compliance Burden

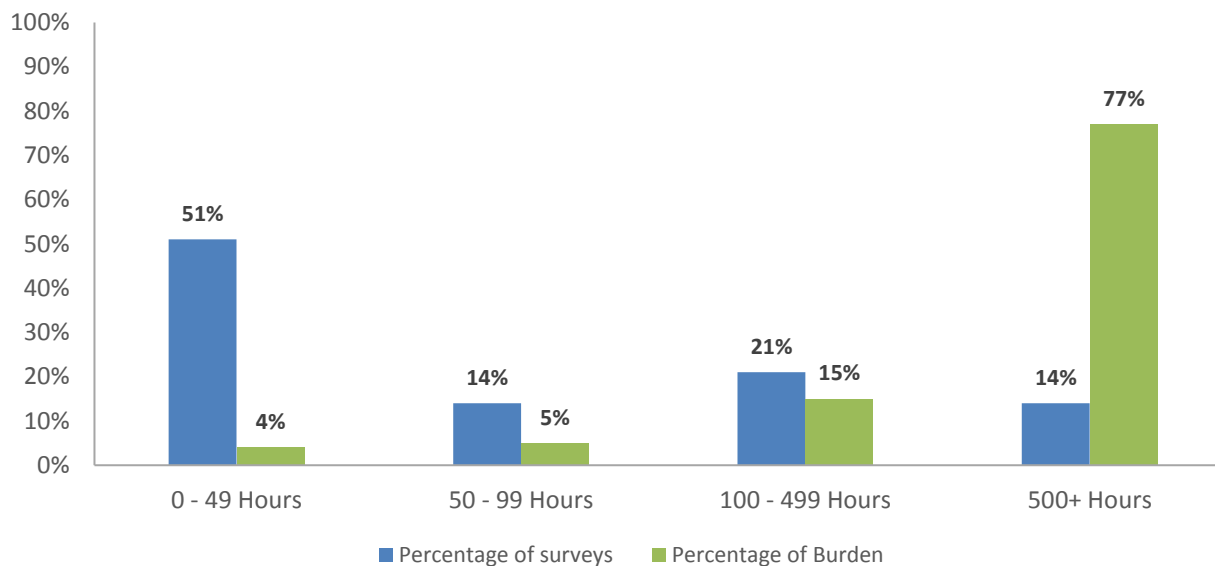
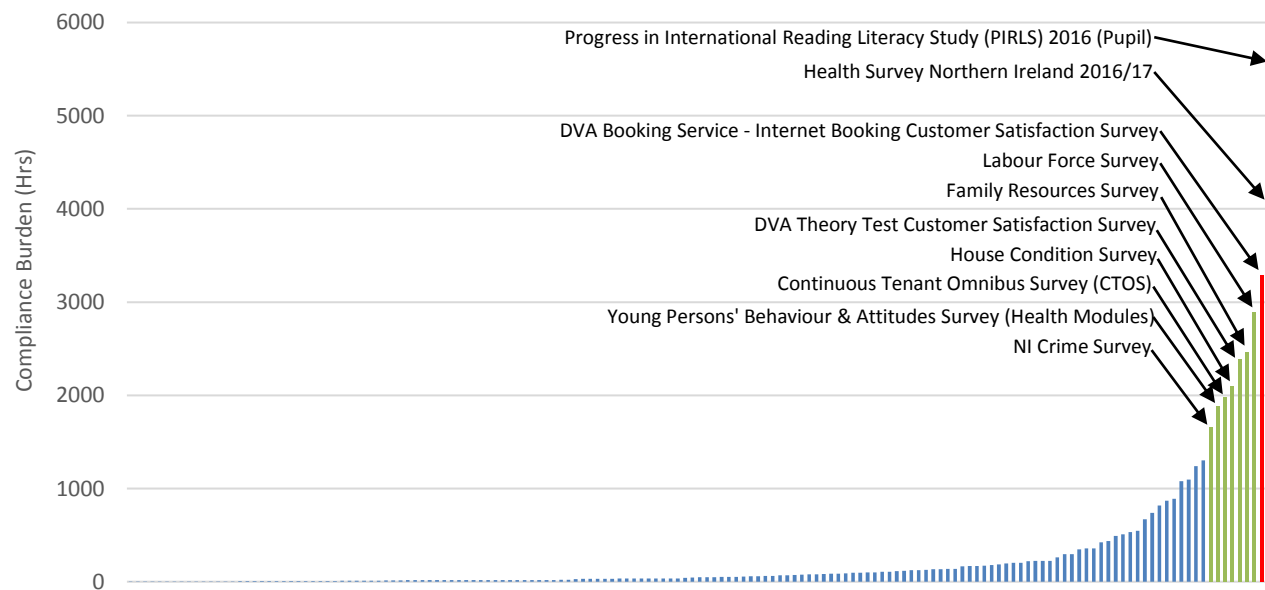


Figure 3: Distribution of surveys by total compliance burden



A further seven surveys had a compliance burden of 1,500 hours or more, and account for 32% of the total compliance burden. These seven surveys were: *Labour Force Survey [DoF]*; *Family Resources Survey [DfC]*; *House Condition Survey [DfC]*; the *DVA Theory Test Customer Satisfaction Survey [DfI]*; *Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey [DfC]*; *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey (Health Modules) [DoH]*; and, the *NI Crime Survey [DoJ]*. These seven surveys are highlighted in green in Figure 3.

Six of the ten surveys with an overall compliance burden of greater than 1,500 hours contributed to Official Statistics¹².

Table 2 shows the average completion time 'per response' by NI Government Department, alongside the total number of responses and total compliance burden. Overall the average completion time 'per response' was just under 11 minutes¹³.

However, there was a wide variance in completion times across surveys, with the shortest survey taking on average less than half a minute (24 seconds) to complete (the *Northern Ireland Passenger Survey*) and the longest survey (the *National Diet and Nutrition Survey*) taking on average around five and half hours (329 minutes) per respondent.¹²

Table 2: Average Completion Time¹³, Number of Responses and Burden by Department

Department	Number of Surveys	Average Time to Complete Surveys (mins)	Number of Responses	Compliance Burden (hours)
DAERA	1	6.99	2,532	295
DE	24	16.81	31,477	8,816
DfC	40	18.90	33,984	10,707
DfE	16	9.25	13,112	2,021
DfI	13	5.85	81,540	7,944
DoF	18	6.83	74,603	8,494
DoH	3	31.64	11,262	5,939
DoJ	31	15.39	9,354	2,400
TEO	10	5.38	18,801	1,686
PPS	2	11.14	1,863	346
Total	158	10.48	278,528	48,647

The average time to complete a survey was highest for DoH (31.64 minutes). This reflects the *Health Survey Northern Ireland* which had an average completion time 'per response' of 62 minutes and 3,900 responses while the two other DoH surveys were much shorter.

TEO had the shortest average completion time 'per response' at 5.38 minutes. This reflects a number of short modules within larger surveys, for example, the *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey* (1.75 minutes), and the *Social Investment Fund* module (1 minute) and the *Perceptions of disability and attitudes towards disability* module (1 minute) both in the NI Omnibus.

¹² Further information on the compliance burden for individual surveys can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

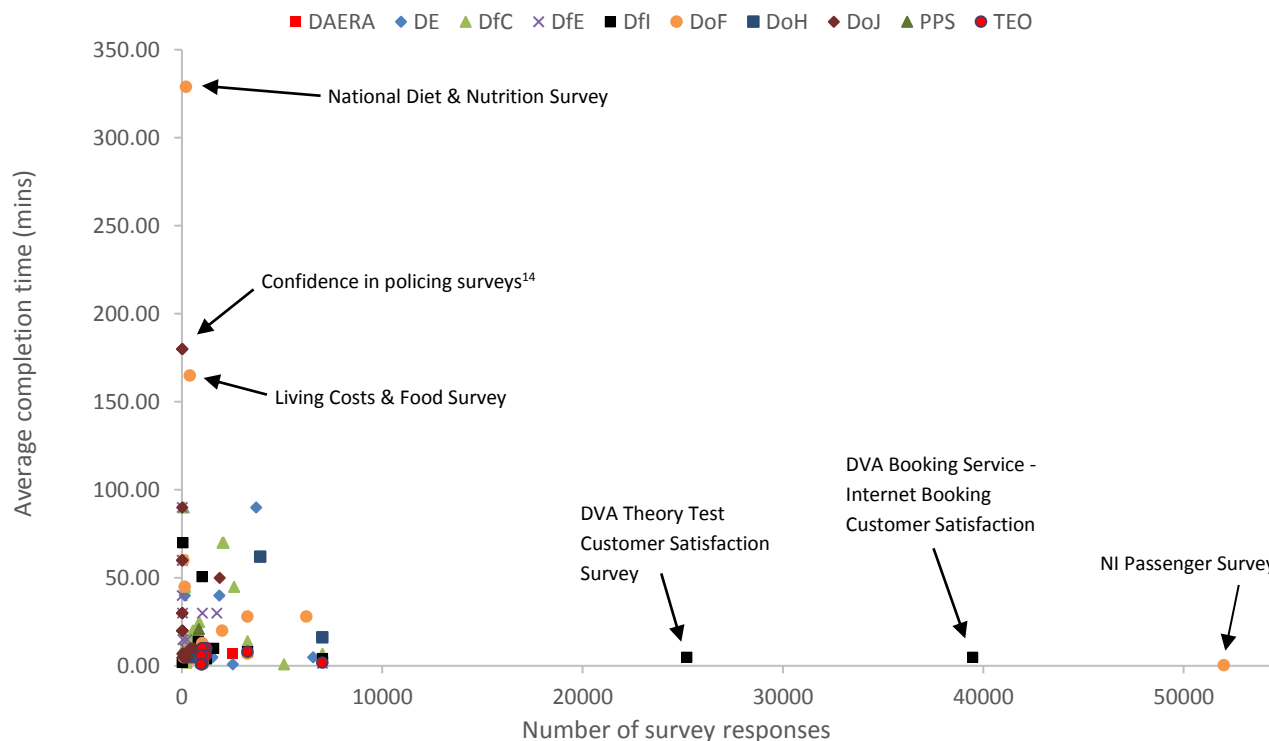
¹³ The average completion time has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the number of responses.

The total burden due to each survey depends on both the number of Households and Individuals responding and the time taken to complete the survey, or part of the survey. Figure 4 shows the relationship between these two factors.

There were three outliers in terms of high numbers of responses with low average completion times. The *NI Passenger Survey* had 52,000 responses and an average completion time of 40 seconds. The *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey* obtained 39,468 responses and had an average completion time of 5 minutes. Likewise, the *DVA Theory Test Customer Satisfaction Survey* had 25,185 responses and an average completion time of 5 minutes.

In contrast, the *National Diet & Nutrition Survey* obtained 200 responses, but had an average completion time of 329 minutes. There were also three surveys carried out by PSNI, looking at community confidence in policing¹⁴, which had very small samples (6-11) but an average completion time of 180 minutes. Finally, the *Living Costs & Food Survey* which obtained 389 responses had an average completion time of 165 minutes.

Figure 4: Average Completion Time¹³ by Number of Responses to the Survey



¹⁴ The three surveys which looked at community confidence in policing were: *Measurement of community confidence in policing* (Sample size: 11), *Gauging community voice* (Sample size: 6), and *Measurement of young person's confidence in policing* (Sample size: 6).

3. Official Statistics & Other Surveys

In 2016/17, a little over a quarter (27%) of surveys of Household and Individuals contributed towards Official Statistics (see Figure 4). Some of the surveys which did not contribute to Official Statistics contributed to research publications; others were used for the evaluation of schemes and programmes.

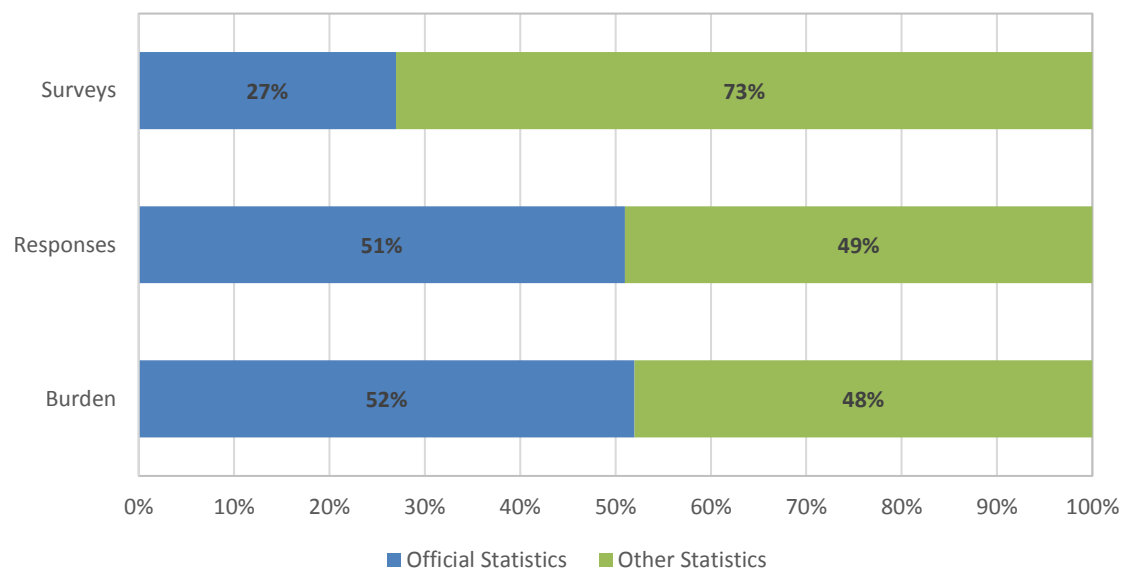
Surveys which contributed to Official Statistics made up 51% of all survey responses and 52% of the total compliance burden.

In the previous section, it was identified that DfC, DoJ, and DE conducted the highest number of surveys. Table 3 overleaf, identifies how this varies when looking at the production of Official Statistics and Other Statistics.

Of the 5,939 hours compliance burden attributable to DoH, over 99% of this was incurred by Official Statistics surveys. Similarly, of the 2,400 hours compliance burden attributable to DoJ almost 88% of this was a result of Official Statistics surveys.

In contrast, of the 8,816 hours of compliance burden attributable to DE over 99% of this was incurred by 'Other Statistics' surveys. Likewise, of the 2,021 hours of compliance burden

Figure 5: Percentage of Surveys, Responses and Compliance Burden by Whether Surveys Contribute to Official Statistics



attributable to DfE, 92% of this was as a result of 'Other Statistics' surveys.

Table 3 shows that average¹⁵ completion times tend to be higher for surveys which contribute to Official Statistics. There was however a good deal of variation between departments. For example, the average completion time for DoF 'Official Statistics' surveys (at 5.68 minutes) was only two fifths of the average completion time for 'Other Statistics' surveys (13.82 minutes). In contrast, the average completion time for DfC 'Official Statistics' surveys (at 22.63 minutes) was much longer than the average completion time for 'Other Statistics' surveys (at 13.54 minutes).

¹⁵ The average completion time has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the number of responses.

Table 3: Compliance Burden by Official Statistics and Other Statistics, by NI Department

Dept.	Official Statistics							Other Statistics						
	Number of surveys		Number of Responses		Compliance Burden		Average Time to Complete Survey ¹⁶	Number of surveys		Number of Responses		Compliance Burden		Average Time to Complete Survey ¹⁶
	N	%	N	%	Hrs	%	Mins	N	%	N	%	Hrs	%	Mins
DAERA	1	2.4%	2,532	1.8%	295	1.2%	6.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DE	1	2.4%	2,532	1.8%	42	0.2%	1.00	23	19.8%	28945	21.3%	8,774	37.8%	18.19
DfC	11	26.2%	20,058	14.1%	7,565	29.8%	22.63	29	25.0%	13926	10.3%	3,142	13.5%	13.54
DfE	1	2.4%	7,000	4.9%	163	0.6%	1.40	15	12.9%	6112	4.5%	1,858	8.0%	18.24
Dfi	4	9.5%	12,284	8.6%	1,889	7.4%	9.22	9	7.8%	69256	51.0%	6,056	26.1%	5.25
DoF	7	16.7%	64,017	44.9%	6,056	23.8%	5.68	11	9.5%	10586	7.8%	2,438	10.5%	13.82
DoH	2	4.8%	10,900	7.6%	5,908	23.2%	32.52	1	0.9%	362	0.3%	30	0.1%	5.00
DoJ	8	19.0%	8,068	5.7%	2,104	8.3%	15.65	23	19.8%	1286	0.9%	295	1.3%	13.78
TEO	5	11.9%	13,420	9.4%	1,047	4.1%	4.68	5	4.3%	5381	4.0%	639	2.7%	7.12
PPS	2	4.8%	1,863	1.3%	346	1.4%	11.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	42	100.0%	142,674	100.0%	25,416	100.0%	10.69	116	100.0%	135854	100.0%	23,231	100.0%	10.26

4. Statutory & Voluntary Surveys

All Statistical Surveys of Households and Individuals carried out by NI Government Departments in 2016/17 were Voluntary Surveys¹⁷.

The use of Voluntary Surveys for Official Statistics reflects the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) which states that ‘*Voluntary participation in statistical data collection should be sought, rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible*’ [Principle V5: Efficiency and Proportionality, Practice 4].

¹⁶ The average completion time has been calculated as the total compliance burden divided by the number of responses.

¹⁷ Although completion of the survey is voluntary, there may be a regulatory requirement for the Department to carry out such a survey.

5. Data Collection Methods

Face-to-face surveys (including face-to-face plus a diary) remained the most popular method of data collection, making up 49% of all surveys, 40% of all responses and 36% of the total compliance burden (see Figure 6).

Online methods were the next most popular making up 18% of all surveys, 44% of responses and 22% of compliance burden.

Postal/ paper methods, made up 14% of surveys, 6% of responses and 16% of burden. Telephone methods were the fourth most popular data collection method making up 11% of surveys, 3% of responses and 5% of compliance burden.

Finally, mixed methods were least popular, making up 9% of all surveys, 7% of responses and 22% of total compliance burden. These mixed methods primarily used face-to-face methods combined with a paper questionnaire (6 surveys) or paper/ postal methods combined with either online (4 surveys) or post, online and telephone methods (3 surveys). One survey combined face-to-face and telephone methods¹⁸.

The difference between the number of surveys, number of responses and higher levels of compliance burden (e.g. multiple/ mixed

Figure 6: Percentage of Total Surveys, Responses and Compliance Burden by Method of Collection¹⁸

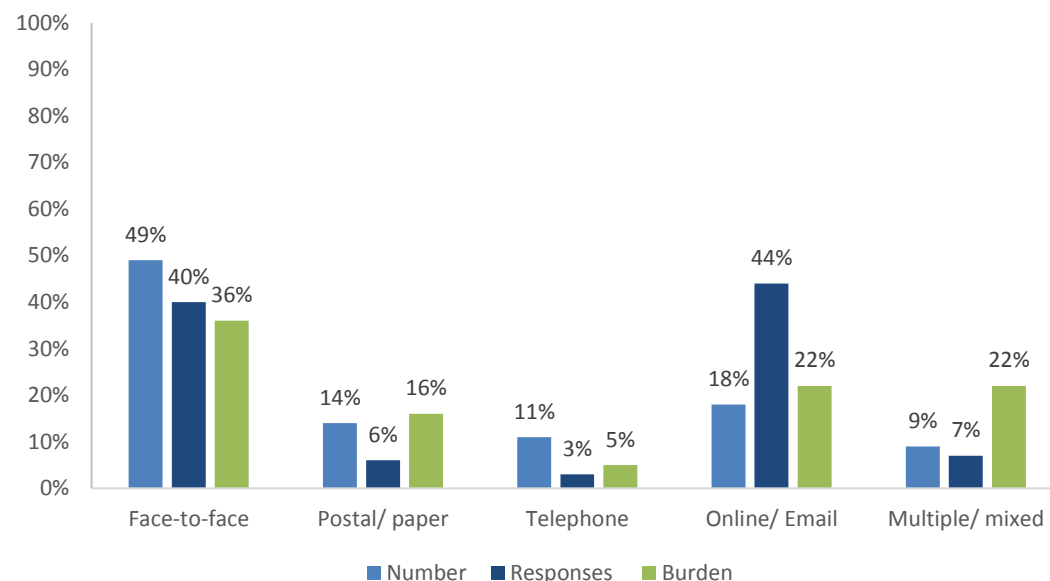


Table 4: Issued sample size, achieved sample size, response rate and average completion time by data collection method

Method	Number of surveys	Issued sample size (average)	Achieved sample size (average)	Response rate (average)	Average completion time (mins)
Face-to-face	77	2,166	1,488	67%	9.29
Postal/ paper	22	1,704	698	41%	30.83
Telephone	17	1,488	529	36%	15.93
Online/ email	28	32,288	4,400	14%	5.14
Multiple/ mixed	14	4,653	1,394	30%	32.51
Total	158	7,719	1,763	23%	10.48

¹⁸ Further information on individual surveys can be found in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix C).

methods) or lower levels of compliance burden (e.g. online/ email) can be explained by differences in the average survey completion times (see Table 4).

Table 4 also shows that online/ email methods tended to be used for the largest surveys. This was followed by mixed methods, face-to-face, postal/ paper and telephone.

Face to face surveys were used for around half of all surveys of household and individuals, and had the highest average response rate and the second lowest average completion time at 9.29 minutes.

In contrast, multiple/ mixed methods were the least used methods to conduct surveys. However, they had the highest average completion time of 32.51 minutes. This is a result of these methods being used for large surveys with higher than average completion times.

During 2016/17, face-to-face surveys achieved a 67% response rate which was 26 percentage points higher than the next most effective data collection method (postal/ paper).

Online/ email data collection methods had the lowest average response rate at 14%. However,

this was skewed by the low response rate for the *DVA Booking Service - Internet Booking Customer Satisfaction Survey* which had an issued sample size of 722,362 and obtained 39,468 responses (a response rate of 5%).

Table 5 below shows how different NI Government Departments used the various data collection methods to conduct surveys.

DfC conducts the most surveys of households and individuals overall and the majority of these are conducted using face-to-face methods. DoJ conducted the second highest number of surveys and the most popular method was face-to-face. DE, which conducted the third highest number of surveys, used online/ email methods more than any other department in 2016/17.

Table 5: Collection Methods for Surveys by Department: Number of Surveys and Compliance Burden (hours)

Dept	Face-to-face		Postal/ paper		Telephone		Online/ email		Multiple/ mixed	
	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden	N	Burden
DAERA	1	295	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DE	1	42	8	7,130	2	12	9	1,304	4	327
DfC	26	8,575	2	187	4	678	5	921	3	347
DfE	8	758	2	96	1	869	5	297	-	-
DfI	2	481	3	347	3	302	4	5,926	1	890
DoF	12	3,741	-	-	2	102	1	8	3	4,644
DoH	-	-	1	30	-	-	1	,1878	1	4,030
DoJ	19	2,164	6	94	4	128	2	14	-	-
TEO	7	1,145	-	-	-	-	1	204	2	336
PPS	1	51	-	-	1	295	-	.	-	-
Total	77	17,252	22	7,884	17	2,385	28	10,553	14	10,573

6. Between Year Comparisons

Due to the biennial, triennial or quadrennial nature of some of the surveys, as well as the large number of ad-hoc and programme-specific surveys, the number of surveys and resultant compliance burden fluctuates from one year to the next. Additionally, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and thus minimising the burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Furthermore, NISRA revised its guidance for Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) in advance of the 2016/17 data collection process.

A key element of the revised guidance was a focus on clarifying the inclusion/ exclusion criteria of surveys which contribute to compliance burden. As a result, there is a discontinuity in the data with surveys that were excluded in previous years now included; specifically surveys carried out by several Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and some surveys which were omitted due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service. These were primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which had a secondary operational purpose¹⁹. This means it is not possible to draw between year comparisons. Nevertheless, Table 6 displays the annual data for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 in terms of the numbers of surveys, number of responses and the overall compliance burden.

Table 6: Changes between 2014/15 and 2016/17

Dept	Number of surveys			Number of responses			Compliance burden (hours)		
	14/15	15/16	16/17	14/15	15/16	16/17	14/15	15/16	16/17
DAERA	2	1	1	2,549	2,495	2,532	153	125	295
DE	6	6	24	7,562	19,023	31,477	933	4,881	8,816
DfC	29	26	40	13,865	18,365	33,984	4,785	4,545	10,707
DfE	9	9	16	14,077	6,519	13,112	3,156	1,331	2,021
DfI	15	12	13	70,513	16,096	81,540	5,665	2,097	7,944
DoF	12	8	18	66,859	64,675	74,603	7,074	6,549	8,494
DoH	4	4	3	15,963	5,343	11,262	7,470	3,916	5,939
DoJ	16	27	31	18,645	14,018	9,354	3,693	3,473	2,400
TEO	8	8	10	12,116	10,067	18,801	1,374	1,902	1,686
PPS	1	-	2	1,114	-	1,863	106	-	346
Total	102	101	158	223,263	156,601	278,528	34,409	28,819	48,647

¹⁹ Further details are provided in Appendix A.

DAERA

DAERA carried out the same number of surveys in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16 in terms of running a module in the Continuous Household Survey. The reason behind the increase in the overall compliance burden was a result of a longer module with a greater number of questions.

DE

DE carried out 24 surveys in 2016/17 compared to six in 2015/16. These additional 18 surveys can be attributed to the inclusion of CCEA (Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessments), the Education Authority, and Customer Satisfaction Surveys carried out by the Teachers Pay Team. These surveys accounted for the increase in the number of forms and over a third of the increase in compliance burden. The remainder of the increase in compliance burden can be attributed to the three quinquennial *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* surveys: *parent, teacher and pupil* which had a larger compliance burden than comparable surveys run in previous years.

DfC

There has been an increase in the number of DfC surveys from 26 in 2015/16 to 40 in 2016/17. Of the additional surveys, seven can be attributed to Arm's Length Bodies that were not included in previous returns: the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and National Museums NI (NMNI). These additional surveys accounted for 6,232 of the increase in responses and 4,719 of the increase in compliance burden. Most of the remainder of the increase in the number of responses and compliance burden can be attributed to the DfC questions in the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS)* which had an achieved sample of 7,000.

DfE

DfE conducted 16 surveys in 2016/17 compared to 9 in 2015/16. The main reason for this change is a result of the inclusion of surveys which would not previously have been included. The inclusion of these surveys and the DfE part of the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YBAS)* accounted for the increase in the number of forms and compliance costs for DfE.

DfI

DfI conducted 13 surveys in 2016/17 compared to 12 surveys in 2015/16. The decrease in ad-hoc surveys in 2016/17 was offset by the three biennial *DVA Booking Service Customer Satisfaction* surveys and the DfI questions in the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS)*. These surveys accounted for the increase in the number of forms and compliance burden.

DoF

DoF carried out ten more surveys in 2016/17 (18) compared to 2015/16 (8). Three of these were surveys which would not have been previously included, three were ad-hoc surveys and the core questions in the *Northern Ireland Omnibus* (two surveys) were allocated to Central Survey Unit (DoF) instead of being split across the modules. There were also two biennial surveys which took place in 2016/17: *Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics, Northern Ireland* and the *European Social Survey (NI element)*. It is these additional surveys that account for most of the increase in the number of forms and compliance burden attributable to DoF.

DoH

DoH conducted one fewer survey in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. This was a result of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service merging two of their surveys and conducting one survey (*Operational Incident Survey*) in its place. In addition, DoH did not run a module in the Northern Ireland Life & Times in 2016/17. Instead, DoH had a module in the *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey (YPBAS)* which has a much larger sample size and a higher median completion time. In addition, the *2016/17 Health Survey Northern Ireland* also had a higher median completion time. As a result of these changes, DoH experienced an increase in the number of forms and compliance burden in 2016/17.

DoJ

DoJ conducted four more surveys in 2016/17 (31) when compared to 2015/16 (27). Arm's Length Bodies of DoJ have typically been included in the returns so the increase in surveys is not a result of including organisations not previously included, although an additional survey conducted by the Office of the Police Ombudsman was included for the first time in 2016/17. Rather, DoJ conducts several ad-hoc surveys each year and in 2016/17 carried out three more than in previous years. While there were three more ad-hoc surveys, there is a great deal of variation in the size and scope of these surveys each year. In 2016/17 there were more surveys, but these surveys generally had much smaller sample sizes. Consequently, there was a reduction in the number of forms and compliance burden for DoJ.

TEO

TEO carried out two more surveys in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. These were the Common Metrics module in the triennial *Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey (YPBAS)* and also a pilot exercise on PfG outcomes on the *Northern Ireland Omnibus*. These two surveys account for the increase in the number of forms. TEO has kept all its surveys under review and reduced the median average completion times across most of its surveys. As a result, despite the increase in the number of forms, there was a decrease in the compliance burden.

PPS

PPS carried out two surveys 2016/17 compared to none in 2015/16. The annual *Awareness of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service* survey didn't take place in 2015/16 due to a delay, but was carried out at the start of 2016/17. The biennial *Northern Ireland Victims and Witnesses Survey (NIVAWS)* also took place in 2016/17.

7. Measures to Reduce Compliance Burden

A few of the specific initiatives employed by NI Government Departments in 2016/17 to reduce respondent burden include:

Department	Name of Survey	Burden Reduced by
DE	Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey	The 2013 DE questions were reviewed and a number were removed as they were no longer required
DfC	Child Maintenance Choices Survey	As part of the legal requirement to review CMS 30 months after the introduction of charging, all 3 surveys had to be completed within a 10 month period. Steps were taken to ensure customers were not contacted regarding more than one survey. Also a routing process was set up in the Questionnaire so respondents were only answering questions relevant to them.
	Child Maintenance Service Customer Satisfaction Survey Report	
	Child Maintenance Service Survey of the Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Population	
	Front Office Trial Post Implementation Customer Survey	A routing process was set up in the Questionnaire so respondents were only answering questions relevant to them.
DfC (Sport NI)	Kids Life & Times Survey - Sport Module	Questions reduced within module from previous year
	Young Life & Times Survey - Sport Module	
DfI	Cycling Proficiency Scheme	In 2015/16, pupils completed an individual paper survey. Teachers then had to input all results in to one overall class sheet. This year, teachers conducted a face-to-face "hands up" exercise, which made it a lot easier for a class return to be made.
DoF (CSU) ²⁰	Continuous Household Survey	Reduced number of core questions
DoH	Health Survey Northern Ireland 2016/17	Ongoing review of questionnaire design and content to maximise the volume and quality of information collected whilst paying due cognisance to the length of the questionnaire and the resultant burden on respondents. The 2016/17 health survey involved two versions of the questionnaire with topics split across the versions to reduce interview time.
	Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey (Health Modules) 2016	Ongoing review of questionnaire design and content to maximise the volume and quality of information collected whilst paying due cognisance to the length of the questionnaire and the resultant burden on respondents. The 2016 survey involved two versions of the questionnaire with

²⁰ Central Survey Unit (NISRA branch)

		topics split across the versions to reduce completion time.
DoJ (PSNI) ²¹	PSNI Victim Call Back	Reduced from monthly to quarterly
DoJ (PBNI) ²²	Reset Evaluation Mentee Focus Groups	At the end of the first year, data collection was identified as being an administrative burden on Mentees, Mentors and Probation staff. The Mentor logs and the baseline, exit and case closure questionnaires were scaled back at this stage.
	Reset Evaluation Mentor Focus Group	
	Reset Evaluation Stakeholders Interviews	
	Reset Probation Officer Focus Group	
TEO	NI Life & Times Survey - Community Relations module	Annual checks are undertaken to ensure only needed questions are included. Consideration is also given to the removal of questions if new questions are included.
	NI Life & Times Survey - Minority Ethnic Groups module	
	NI Life & Times Survey - Respect half module	
	Young Life & Times Survey - Good Relations module	
	Young Life & Times Survey - Minority Ethnic Groups module	
	NI Omnibus - Social Investment Fund module	

²¹ Police Service of Northern Ireland

²² Probation Board Northern Ireland

Appendix A: Methodology, Quality and Use of Publication

Rationale for publication

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)²³ 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. It emphasises the importance of **transparency**, ensuring respondent **burden is proportionate to benefits** and making **use of existing data** before undertaking a new data collection:

V5.5 Statistics producers should be transparent in their approach to monitoring and reducing the burden on those providing their information, and on those involved in collecting, recording and supplying data. The burden imposed should be proportionate to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

V5.3 The suitability of existing data, including administrative, open and privately-held data, should be assessed before undertaking a new data collection.

V5.1 Opportunities for data sharing, data linkage, cross-analysis of sources, and the reuse of data should be taken wherever feasible. Recognised standards, classifications, definitions, and methods should be applied to data wherever possible.

V5.6 Statistics producers should analyse the impact of new data requirements or extending existing collections on those involved in the collection, recording and supply of data, against the potential value of the statistics in serving the public good.

The burden to businesses due to surveys conducted by government departments and their arm's length bodies (ALB's) has been monitored within Northern Ireland since the 1980s. As of the 1st April 2014, surveys to Households and Individuals were included within the scope of Survey Control and this information is now published alongside the [Survey Burden on Business information](#)²⁴.

Methodology

Data Collection

Data were requested from Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) in each of the Northern Ireland departments, as well as from officials in Arm's Length Bodies (ALBS). Respondents were provided with guidance notes and asked to provide details on Government Statistical Surveys of Households and/or

²³ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

²⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

Individuals which their department / organisation had commissioned or carried out in 2016/17. When surveys are shared by more than one Department, Arm's Length Body or NISRA branch within DoF, the relevant survey is included on each return and the respondent burden for the survey is proportionately split across the Departments / ALBs/ branches.

Surveys are included under the commissioning department(s) / ALB(s) which may not be the same as the department or branch which carried out the survey. Any surveys carried out by NI departments/ ALBs, on behalf of GB departments / ALBs, where the data are only collected to facilitate the production of UK statistics (and not used by any NI government department) are included under the department or branch carrying out the survey.

Coverage

All statistical surveys to households and individuals carried out by, or on behalf of, Northern Ireland Government Departments (including Arm's Length Bodies) are included, as well as statistical surveys carried out by NI Departments (or ALBs) on behalf of GB Government Departments (or ALBs) where the data are used directly by the NI Department (or ALB) or feed into UK Statistics.

Definition of Statistical Survey

A statistical survey is any structured inquiry designed to obtain aggregated data (which may be qualitative or quantitative) where the individual or corporate identities of the respondents are in themselves of little significance.

This includes both regular and ad hoc surveys; both voluntary and statutory surveys that may be required to determine, evaluate or monitor policy and/or action, provide social or economic indicators or measure customer satisfaction. Statistical surveys conducted by, or on behalf of, non-departmental public bodies are also covered. Arm's length bodies are included under their parent departments.

Statistical surveys in scope are not limited to those conducted by statistics branches and include all modes of data collection: completion of a questionnaire; telephone data entry; face-to-face interview; online, etc.

Surveys that contribute to official statistics and those that do not are both in the scope of survey control.

The following are examples of statistical surveys **covered** by these controls:

- Surveys designed to obtain aggregated data;
- Surveys where responses are solicited by means of a direct approach to potential respondents;
- Surveys carried out for departmental sponsors by consultants or private organisations;

- Customer satisfaction surveys designed to identify overall success of a product or service.

The following are examples of surveys **excluded** from survey control:

- Surveys where there is no direct approach made and where respondents clearly select themselves (e.g. web sites, readership surveys, some types of consultation exercises where there is an invitation to comment);
- Where information is required as an integral part of the operational management of a public service. Such returns will often be regulated under specific departmental controls;
- Surveys relating to the contractual obligations of potential respondents to the department or agency concerned;
- Surveys to respondents in central government and its agencies.

Where part of a survey falls outside scope, the part of the survey within scope has been included where possible.

Respondent Burden

For surveys of Households and Individuals, respondent burden is calculated on the basis of time taken for each respondent to complete the survey (or part of the survey). Where a Households or Individual is re-contacted as part of the validation or quality assurance procedures, the burden due to re-contact is also included. The time taken to complete the survey includes any time taken to establish eligibility (e.g. time spent by the interviewer on the doorstep determining household eligibility). Total compliance burden will also include time taken to establish non-eligibility for respondents or households that are subsequently deemed out of scope. Only those responding to the survey are included; non-response is assumed to have zero burden.

If actual survey completion times (and re-contact times) are available then these are used. Otherwise estimated median completion times (and estimated median re-contact times) are used. These estimated median times may be based on a pilot survey, historical data, survey reviews, paradata or survey manager expertise.

The calculation of compliance burden requires the following:

- Number of responses to the survey (include full / partial and invalid)
- Number of respondents re-contacted (if applicable)
- (Actual or) Median time to complete the survey (or part thereof)
- (Actual or) Median re-contact time for validation purposes (or part thereof)

If estimated median re-contact times are not available then the median time taken to complete the full survey will be used on the assumption that a respondent may need to review their entire response.

The Compliance Burden (mins) is a simple **addition** of Response Burden (mins), and where applicable, Re-contact Burden (mins)

$$\text{Response Burden (mins)} = \text{No. of responses} \times \text{Median time (mins)}$$

$$\text{Recontact Burden (mins)} = \text{No. recontacted} \times \text{Median time (mins)}$$

Compliance Burden is calculated in minutes but has been changed to hours (or days) in this report.

The calculation of compliance burden will include all questionnaire or interview types. If different questionnaires or interviews are used (and these vary in terms of completion time), then the compliance burden may be estimated separately for each questionnaire / interview type and then summed for an overall compliance burden. Similarly, if there are different groups of respondents with different completion times (e.g. main and proxy respondents) then the calculations for each subgroup may be carried out separately and summed.

Shared Surveys

For those surveys which are commissioned by several branches within DoF/ Departments/ ALBs, each part of the survey is treated as a separate survey. The compliance burden for each part of the survey (or module) is estimated by apportioning the total compliance burden for the survey. The number of responses is the same as for the complete survey (unless those questions were only asked of a subgroup of respondents).

This approach allows the burden for individual Departments, ALBs (or branches) to be calculated, but means that some surveys and respondents will appear more than once when the 'number of surveys' and 'number of responses' is calculated across branches / Departments / ALBs. For this reason, the number of responses is not a good proxy for the number of respondents (or Households and Individuals responding to NI Government Statistical Surveys). In addition, some Households and Individuals may also respond to more than one NI Government Statistical Survey. As the compliance burden has been apportioned based on the time taken to answer each part of the survey, there is no 'double counting' of compliance burden.

The use of an existing or combined survey (such as the NI Omnibus Survey, the Continuous Household Survey or one of the Life and Times Surveys) is an effective way of reducing respondent burden as the overall contextual questions don't need to be repeated for each module, and the initial stages / survey introductions only need to be carried out once.

Average completion time (or average burden per response)

This has been calculated as the total compliance burden (for the group of surveys or parts of surveys) divided by the total number of responses (for the group of surveys or parts of surveys). This may differ from the median completion time.

Rounding

Please note that figures for compliance burden (hours) have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Figures for average completion time (minutes) and percentages have been rounded to one decimal place. Figures may not add exactly to totals due to rounding.

Review of Methodology & Discontinuity

Prior to the 2016/17 data collection exercise, the guidance provided to Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) was reviewed, to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys conducted by NI Government Departments, Arm's Length Bodies and other public sector organisations. Any areas of ambiguity were also clarified and mandatory training was provided to all SCLOs. As a result of this review, a number of surveys conducted by Arm's Length Bodies that were not included in previous years were included in departmental returns. In addition, some surveys and types of surveys which in previous years had been excluded due to being considered part of the operational management of a public service were included in this year's return due to the clarification of the inclusion criteria. These are primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose.

This discontinuity is noted in Section 6 when presenting the between year comparisons and highlighting the increases in the number of surveys, number of forms and resulting compliance burden placed on Households & Individuals as a result of completing NI Government statistical surveys.

Excluding from the 2016/17 return, those surveys and types of surveys that were not in previous years would have potentially had the effect of reducing the overall number of surveys by 40, reducing the number of forms by around 27,000 and reducing the compliance burden by around 7,000 hours. The effect of this discontinuity is most notable for DE and DfC who provided returns for Arm's Length Bodies that had not been included in previous years and in DfE where a number of surveys that would previously have been considered to be part of the operational management of a public service were included.

There have also been some other minor changes to the methodology. In particular, actual completion times (rather than estimated completion times based on the median) have been used where these are available. There have also been some changes to the methods used by individual branches to calculate compliance costs (e.g. more accurate allocation of burden to departments for split surveys, improved estimation of medians and use / non-use of strata).

We would therefore advise readers against making direct comparisons between the figures contained in this publication (Section 2 and Key Findings) and those quoted in previous publications.

Data collection method

In previous returns, SCLOs were asked to write-in the data collection method(s) used for each survey. This meant that there was substantial variation in the descriptions used and it was not always easy to identify the primary data collection method and group the methods used. In 2016/17, this was replaced with a drop-down menu²⁵ and SCLOs were asked to identify the primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. method of data collection. As a result, groupings and analysis from previous years will be less accurate than for 2016/17.

Main uses of data

The data are used by NI Government Departments, by the Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC), by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), by the media and by the general public. Information can be used to investigate the burden on Households and Individuals resulting from Government Statistical Surveys, to monitor changes over time, to respond to MLA questions, and to provide briefing to Ministers.

Data quality

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

The data collection process means that individual SCLOs are the key decision makers in terms of including or excluding surveys from the returns. While there is communication between SCLOs and NISRA Survey Control Unit to clarify any queries, there is the potential for individual interpretations of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to lead to small inconsistencies in individual returns.

The quality assurance checks focus on ensuring that the data returned are complete and internally consistent for the current year, and also consistent with returns from previous years. Where data are missing or there are large changes or inconsistencies explanations are sought from the data supplier, and if necessary the data are re-supplied.

²⁵ Paper questionnaire; Telephone interview; Face-to-face interview; E-mail data collection; Online questionnaire/ data collection; Telephone data entry; and Digital Voice Recognition Survey. 'Face-to-face interviews' include 'Face-to-Face interviews combined with a Diary'.

User Engagement

User engagement is on-going between the publication of one report and the production of the next. Following the review of the guidance and methodology (prior to the 2016/17 publications) a specific programme of engagement is planned in advance of the 2017/18 publications.

We would welcome your feedback, on what you use the report for, any tables/charts or commentary you find particularly helpful and any additional analysis you would like to see. Feedback can be provided via the [online questionnaire](#) or by emailing Alexandra.Pauley@nisra.gov.uk

Appendix B: Departments and their abbreviations

Abbreviation	Department
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DE	Department of Education
DfC	Department of Communities
DfE	Department for Enterprise
DfI	Department for Infrastructure
DoF	Department of Finance
DoH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
TEO	The Executive Office
PPS	Public Prosecution Service

Appendix C: Further Information

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

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

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