

Review of the Quarterly Employment in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Bulletin

Background

The financial challenge facing public services in Northern Ireland has been well publicised. Resource expenditure across the NICS is falling at a time of rising cost pressure, putting departmental budgets under pressure. NISRA has been developing strategies to meet this shortfall including tailoring our outputs and activities to align with available resources while continuing to produce high quality statistics.

As part of the wider effort to operate within these financial constraints, the Human Resource Consultancy Services (HRCS) team within NISRA, has reviewed the content and format of a number of publications in 2023. This included the quarterly [Employment in the NICS](#) bulletin which has provided information on staffing numbers in its current format since 2011. There are two main elements to this bulletin – a set of excel tables, and a written report which contains the same tables, an indexed graph and descriptive commentary.

A formal consultation with users opened on Monday 4 September 2023 and closed on Sunday 1 October 2023. Notice of the consultation was placed on Departmental Intranets, the NISRA website, Twitter and Facebook feeds. In addition, an email was sent to those on the Employment in the NICS bulletin user mailing list. Users were invited to complete our online [questionnaire](#) to provide feedback on :

- their usage of the bulletin and particular sections within it, including reasons for use, the element used (written report or tables) and frequency of use;
- how the bulletin meets their needs; and

- the impact of proposed changes to the bulletin – specifically proposals to suspend or scale back the written report.

Summary of Responses

Users

We received ten responses to the consultation, nine of which were from internal NICS users and one from the wider public sector.

The main reasons for use were identified as:

- To facilitate research (5)
- Policy making/monitoring (3)
- To aid decision making on resource allocation (3)
- Statutory/Legislative requirement (2)
- Responding to information requests (2)
- Personal interest (2)

Elements Used

Nine users responded that they used the written report, and eight used the Excel tables. Each section of the report was used often or occasionally by at least five users.

Meeting Needs

When asked to what extent the current quarterly Employment in the NICS bulletin met their needs, four said fully, five said mostly and one said partly.

When asked about each section of the output, most users (at least six) reported the corresponding section fully or mostly met their needs.

Proposals

Nine users indicated that the impact of stopping the written report would be high or medium, while one said it would be low. Similarly, when asked about the impact of scaling back the written report, seven users indicated high or medium impact and three a low impact.

Four users provided written comments on the proposed changes and how the report could better meet their needs. A summary of their feedback is provided below with HRCS' response.

	User Response	HRCS Response
Proposed changes - Written Report stopped / scaled back	Users generally found the narrative useful in providing an explanation and context for the data.	While HRCS recognises the value that users derive from the commentary, we note that it is purely descriptive. The commentary describes the information in the tables and does not provide additional analysis. Suspension of the written report would not represent a substantive loss of analysis to users.
	Availability of data relevant to the S75 characteristics should be maintained.	HRCS will continue to publish the S75 information.
Report better meet user needs	Addition of information on movement between departments, internal promotion figures, and secondments etc.	Financial constraints mean that it is not possible to provide more detailed information on a quarterly basis. HRCS will review the output on an ongoing basis and provide additional information if there is a clear demand and resources permit.
	Further breakdowns of departmental statistics.	

Proposed Action

HRCS is grateful to all the users who took time to provide detailed responses to the consultation. The collective feedback paints a positive picture of the importance which users derive from this particular output. While we recognise the value that users place on the written report and the commentary provided, we have decided to suspend publication until further notice to ensure continued delivery of wider analytical priorities, in the face of constrained resource. We will continue to publish the data tables on a quarterly basis as normal. This position will be kept under review.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this update, please contact:

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