



Future Proofing Northern Ireland Business Data For Research

8th November 2023

Summary of Feedback



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1. Introduction

On 8th November 2023, [Administrative Data Research NI \(ADR NI\)](#), as part of the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#) Research Support Unit (RSU), working with NISRA's [Economic and Labour Market Statistics \(ELMS\)](#) branch and the [Department for the Economy \(DfE\)](#), hosted a conference event on the topic of *Future Proofing Northern Ireland Business Data for Research*. The event included the launch of the Business Data for Research 2021 dataset as well as presentations from the research teams involved in the beta testing phase of the BDR project. The event was attended by over 70 colleagues including academic researchers, policy-makers, economists, statisticians and representatives from the business community.

The event was intended to increase awareness of the BDR datasets and their potential uses among researchers and policy makers. It was also aimed at bringing academics, business representatives and policy leads together to consider the future economic and business policy, research and data needs in support of departmental strategies such as the Department for the Economy's [10X Economy - An Economic Vision For A Decade Of Innovation](#). To that end the event concluded with a discussion session where attendees were asked to consider the following three questions:

- Policy needs – what are the current evidence gaps and key areas of research interest connected to the economy theme?
- Data needs – what information are we currently missing and how might we improve our 'data for research' infrastructure in the longer term?
- Bridging the gap between researchers and policy makers – what are the blockers and how do we ensure good relations between organisations to aid data sharing for research?

This paper summarises the information gathered through the discussion session covering these questions and sets out the next steps to be taken by BDR Project Board in response.

2. Policy needs- what are the current evidence gaps and key areas of research interest connected to the economy theme?

The feedback from the discussion session on policy needs is captured in the word cloud below and centered around a number of themes:

- What policy makers want: the need for policy makers to define policy priorities to help researchers plan and design research in support of these. A key requirement here was to define the 10x clusters. It was suggested that ‘show and tell’ events could be used to help policy makers and researchers to communicate and work together.
- Measuring success: the need to be able to evaluate policy initiatives and to have benchmarks in place.
- Comparisons: the requirement to undertake UK wide comparisons and to understand the NI performance in a wider context.
- Productivity: understanding NI’s competitiveness and the drivers for productivity.
- Policy areas: specific policy areas highlighted relating to the labour market (economic inactivity, child-care, disability, pay gaps, poverty, graduate employment, and wages among others), energy, air pollution, and subsidies.
- Engagement: creating links and networks to enhance understanding and collaboration.



3. Data needs – what information are we currently missing and how might we improve our ‘data for research’ infrastructure in the longer term?

The feedback from the discussion session on data needs is captured in the word cloud below and centered around a number of themes:

- Comparability to other sources: including UK and European data sources and the need to address differences in methods to allow comparisons.
- Data access: an ability to exploit existing datasets through a single access point.
- Data linkage: increased linkage capability between existing datasets including those across the UK.
- Data gaps: including areas such as social enterprise, the self-employed, the characteristics of business owners., and country of ownership.
- Income: HMRC, ASHE, benefits and pensions data, and data on disability pay gaps were among the income related data needs reported.
- Geography: analysis at detailed geographic levels including SOA would be beneficial



4. Bridging the gap between researchers and policy makers – what are the blockers and how do we ensure good relations between organisations to aid data sharing for feedback?

The feedback from the discussion session on bridging the gap is captured in the word cloud below and centered around a number of themes:

- Engagement: better communication and further events, such as the BDR one, to share ideas.
- Joint strategies: including greater sharing of information between policy makers, researchers and the business community possibly through a dedicated forum; a longer-term vision for research to enable longer-term research projects.
- Trust: addressing fears over research findings and reluctance to share data; increased openness to share research interests.
- Collaboration: working to align planning timescales and budgetary requirements.
- Resources: dealing with changes in staff and resource pressures.
- Governance: ensuring transparency and consistency in legal advice.



5. Next steps

The BDR Project Board is extremely pleased to have received this very valuable feedback from the range of attendees at the BDR event. It is the Board's wish to advance the BDR project with a focus on delivering for researchers, policy colleagues, the business community and in support of ADR funding commitments. With that in mind and in support of the BDR event aims, the BDR Project Board will seek to:

1. Host an engagement event(s) bringing researchers policy-makers and other interested stakeholders together to discuss areas for collaboration and information sharing. This will be taken forward by NISRA RSU as part of its wider engagement on data acquisition. NISRA will seek views on the best way to maintain ongoing engagement whether through a dedicated forum or other mechanism. It is recognised that, with the return of the NI Executive and Departmental Ministers, there is potential for shifting as well as new priorities to emerge and that this places even greater importance on ongoing engagement.
2. Bring forward work in support of the data needs identified through the discussion sessions. This includes:
 - Exploring the feasibility (resources permitting) of making additional Northern Ireland Economic Trade Statistics (NIETS) exports variables available within the BDR.
 - Commencing work to test the feasibility of including the longitudinal Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) dataset within the BDR; and
 - Investigating the inclusion of the Research & Development (R&D) and Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) datasets within the BDR once the work on ASHE is complete.