



Department of
Justice

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Analytical Services Group

Review of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey

March 2017



Northern Ireland
Statistics and Research Agency

Review of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey

SUMMARY

The Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) is an annual survey commissioned on behalf of the Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJ) and is an important source of information about levels of, and public attitudes to, crime. Amongst other things, the NICS also measures public confidence in the police and the wider criminal justice system and collects sensitive information, using self-completion modules, on people's experiences regarding crime-related issues, such as domestic violence. Its results play an important role in informing and monitoring government policies and targets, including those contained within the Programme for Government and the Northern Ireland Policing Plan.

The purpose of this note is to advise users of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey that the Department of Justice intends to undertake a review of the survey, more specifically with regards to the scope of the survey and content of the questionnaire.

BACKGROUND

Conducted on an ad hoc basis since its inception in 1994/95, the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) began operating on a continuous basis in January 2005 with the aim of achieving a representative sample of 4,000 adults per year. In recent years, however, increasing financial pressures and the requirement to make mandatory efficiency savings led to a review of NICS expenditure as the funding level required could no longer be sustained. After considering the cost saving options available, it was decided to retain a continuous survey with a reduced target sample size. A moderate decrease to the sample size was first made in-year 2013/14, from 4,000 to 3,500, with the full sample reduction to 2,000 first being implemented in NICS 2014/15 (see paper ['Change to Northern Ireland Crime Survey \(NICS\) sample size'](#)).

The primary driver behind the move to a continuous survey in 2005, together with an accompanying increase in sample size, from 3,000 (pre-2005) to 4,000, was the Department's decision, in line with National Audit Office requirements, to utilise the NICS as a performance measurement tool in order to monitor progress against the then Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. The use of NICS in performance targets has continued over recent years and was used to monitor progress against, and measure the final outturn of, three outputs in the DOJ's 'improve community safety by tackling anti-social behaviour' commitment within the Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15.

More recently, within the Draft 2016-21 Programme for Government (PfG), the Department of Justice will lead on Indicator 1 which reports the 'Any NICS crime' victimisation (prevalence) rate derived from the NI Crime Survey. In support of this, and as part of a more general assessment of user requirements, the Department is undertaking a comprehensive review of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) to determine whether the current survey collects the most appropriate information relevant to user needs and is aligned with key departmental priorities.

REVIEW

The overall aim is:

“To review the scope and content of the NI Crime Survey to ensure it meets customer requirements in alignment with Departmental and Programme for Government priorities.”

The specific objectives in support of the overall aim are:-

- To establish whether the current content will collect the necessary data required by DOJ in support the of the draft 2016-21 Programme for Government and other Departmental strategies;
- To assess the need for, and level of use of, current questions/outputs; and
- To identify, and assess the feasibility of, any new potential changes to the scope or content of the survey.

Discussions will take place with key stakeholders across the department in respect of the aims above. To inform the review at this initial stage, we would also welcome views or comments from other external users who have an interest in the survey, particularly regarding the NICS findings used and the level and nature of use. Any feedback should be sent to Analytical Services Group by Friday 28 April 2017. Contact details are given below.

NEXT STEPS

Following engagement with policy officials/stakeholders, consideration of any additional comments received and assessment of the feasibility of any suggested amendments, a further paper will be published outlining any proposed changes to the survey. Feedback on these will again be sought at this time.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this paper or would like to provide feedback, please contact:

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