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Summary of Key Findings

- In 2020/21, the estimated cost to businesses in Northern Ireland (NI) of complying with Government Statistical Surveys was just over £0.77 million. This represents a decrease of around £120,000 (13%) from 2019/20.
- In total, 73% of the overall compliance burden (£564,000) can be attributed to surveys carried out by/on behalf of the Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) Branch, in the Department of Finance, which also includes Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys of businesses in Northern Ireland used to produce UK economic statistics.
- A total of 88% of the overall compliance burden was attributable to statutory surveys. These surveys accounted for 37% of the total number of surveys carried out.
- 58 of the 123 surveys (47%) were used to produce official statistics. These surveys accounted for 94% of the total compliance cost.
- In 2020/21, almost two thirds (66%) of surveys used online/email as their primary data collection method, with around three in five surveys (59%) being solely online/email and nearly four in five (79%) offering an online or email option.
- The use of online/email as the primary method of data collection has increased, from 43% in 2019/20 to 66% in 2020/21. In contrast, the percentage of surveys using paper questionnaires as their primary method has halved between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (from 42% to 21%).

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Background

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)¹ has a statutory basis² 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 policy³.

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.

The burden to businesses due to statutory Government Statistical Surveys is monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)⁴. Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)⁵, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out any new statutory survey of businesses⁶.

¹ <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-code/>

² Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

³ Information on the purposes for which the data are used is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix E)

⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

⁶ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

Useful Links:

- [Previous publications in this series](#)
- [Burden on Households and Individuals](#)
- [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- [NISRA publications and datasets](#)
- [Downloadable data](#)

1. Introduction

This annual report details the cost to businesses of complying with statutory and voluntary Government Statistical Surveys in Northern Ireland. It includes information on the number of surveys commissioned, or carried out, by Departments (including their Arm's Length Bodies) and the cost incurred by businesses in complying with regular and ad hoc government surveys, conducted in the financial year ending 31st March 2021. Department names have been abbreviated as shown in Appendix D.

The compliance cost of a survey is defined as the financial cost incurred by the business in responding to the survey. This is estimated using an agreed Government Statistical Service methodology and includes factors such as the time taken to complete the survey, hourly pay rate⁷ of the person completing the survey and any external costs such as accountancy fees.

Businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included within surveys to businesses.

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 ONS no longer produces a report or data for England and Wales, although some Government Departments publish information for their own department.

This report is published alongside the annual report on the Burden to Households and Individuals of completing NI Government Statistical surveys⁸.

⁷ Hourly rates of pay are median hourly (£) UK rates of pay (excluding overtime), based on the provisional results of [ASHE 2020](#). This ensures direct comparability with compliance costs for 2020/21 published by other parts of the UK.

⁸ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

2. Compliance Cost to Business

In 2020/21, 123 surveys of businesses were issued by government departments, of which 45 were statutory and 78 were voluntary. The total cost to businesses was £772,300, of which £681,400 (88%) was incurred by statutory surveys, while voluntary surveys accounted for £90,900 (12%). Of the total compliance cost, 75% was attributable to DoF and 16% to DAERA.

73% of the total compliance cost (£564,000) can be attributed to Economic and Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) branch⁹ within DoF, which includes surveys carried out by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) on behalf of ELMS. In addition, ELMS surveys accounted for 97% of the total compliance cost within DoF.

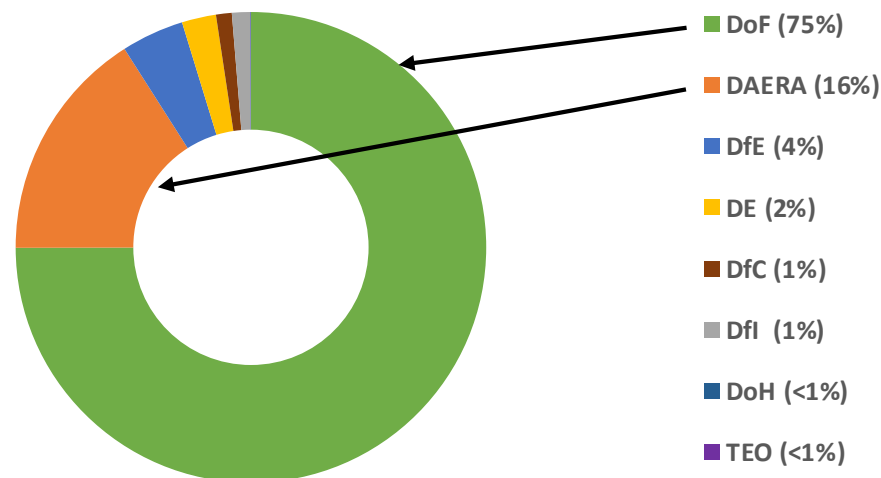
Of the £123,600 compliance cost attributable to DAERA, 96% was incurred as a result of statutory surveys to farms and businesses within Northern Ireland. Similarly, 95% of the total burden attributable to DoF was incurred by statutory surveys.

Of the 20 surveys conducted by DE, only one was a statutory survey¹⁰, which accounted for 25% of the total compliance DE compliance burden.

Table 1: Compliance cost by NI Department, 2020/21

Department	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Total Returns
DAERA	15	123.6	14,650
DE	20	18.2	3,118
DfC	4	8.4	8,627
DfE	32	33.2	5,872
Dfi	1	9.6	1,606
DoF	43	579.0	67,449
DoH	6	0.3	93
DoJ	-	-	-
TEO	2	0.1	82
PPS	-	-	-
Total	123	772.3	101,497

Figure 1: Percentage of total compliance cost by NI Department, 2020/21



⁹ Information on the cost attributable to each area within DoF is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix E)

¹⁰ This is the part of the School Census that is still collected by a paper return and covers voluntary/private pre-school and independent school returns. The rest of the School Census is collected via an electronic return, facilitated through computerised school records using a standard system.

One survey conducted by DfE was a statutory survey while the remaining 31 surveys were voluntary. These voluntary surveys accounted for 99% of the total compliance burden for DfE.

The only survey conducted by DfI was a statutory survey. Surveys conducted by DfC, DoH and TEO were all voluntary.

In total, 63% of the surveys issued by Northern Ireland government departments were voluntary. However, voluntary surveys contributed only 12% of the total compliance burden. Statutory surveys accounted for 88% of the compliance burden, but only 37% of the surveys (Figure 2).

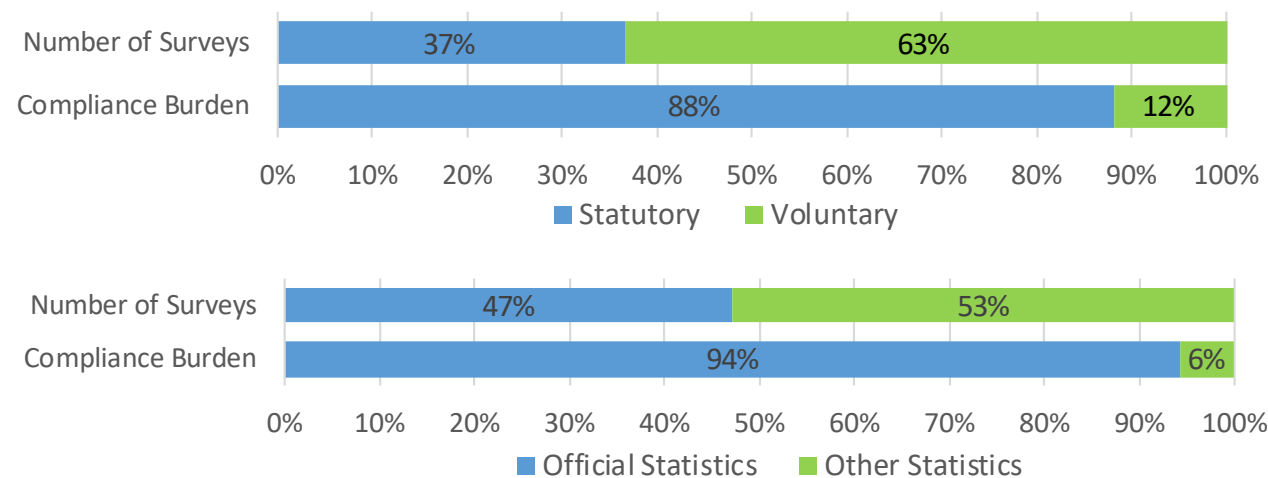
The majority of compliance burden (94%; £728,400) was due to surveys that contribute to official statistics (Figure 2 & Table 3). Of these surveys which contributed to official statistics, 93% (£681,000) of the overall burden was attributable to statutory surveys¹¹.

Table 3 shows the compliance cost for surveys used to produce official statistics, and other surveys by government departments in 2020/21.

Table 2: Compliance cost for statutory and voluntary surveys by NI Department, 2020/21

Department	Statutory		Voluntary	
	Number of surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	7	118.5	8	5.1
DE	1	4.6	19	13.6
DfC	-	-	4	8.4
DfE	1	0.4	31	32.8
DfI	1	9.6	-	-
DoF	35	548.3	8	30.6
DoH	-	-	6	0.3
DoJ	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	2	0.1
PPS	-	-	-	-
Total	45	681.4	78	90.9

Figure 2: Percentage compliance cost for surveys which are statutory or voluntary and which contribute to official statistics



¹¹ Further information on individual surveys is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix E).

All 15 of the surveys conducted by DAERA, 39 of the 43 surveys conducted by DoF and the single DfI survey contributed to official statistics.

In contrast none of the DfC (4) surveys, DoH (6) surveys and TEO (2) surveys contributed to official statistics, and only one of the 32 DfE surveys contributed to official statistics.

While only two of the 20 surveys conducted by DE were used in the production of official statistics, these two surveys accounted for 72% of the total DE compliance burden.

Table 3: Compliance cost for surveys that contribute to official statistics and for surveys that do not contribute to official statistics by NI Department, 2020/21

Department	Official Statistics		Other Statistics	
	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)	Number of Surveys	Compliance Cost (£000s)
DAERA	15	123.6	-	-
DE	2	13.0	18	5.2
DfC	-	-	4	8.4
DfE	1	4.2	31	29.0
DfI	1	9.6	-	-
DoF	39	578.1	4	0.9
DoH	-	-	6	0.3
DoJ	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	2	0.1
PPS	-	-	-	-
Total	58	728.4	65	43.9

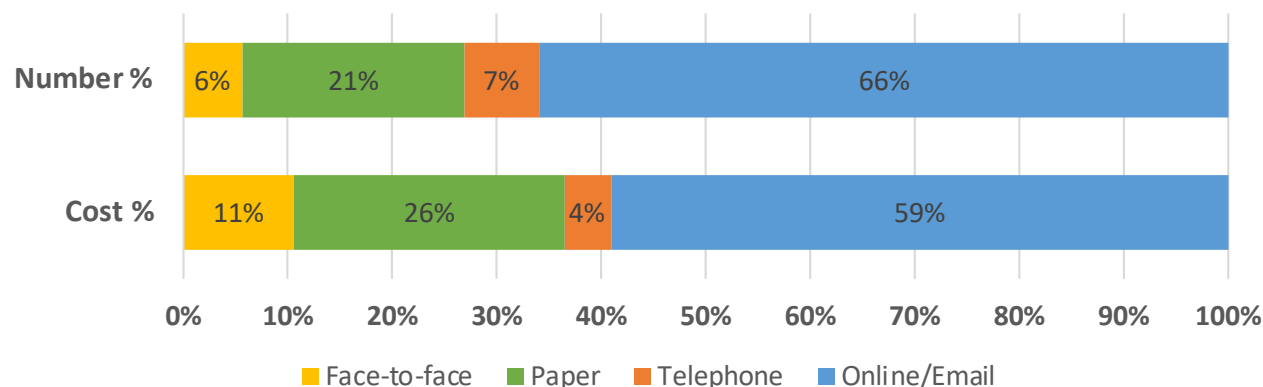
3. Data Collection Methods

The percentage of surveys and compliance cost by primary method of collection is shown in Figure 3, with a detailed breakdown provided in Table 4.

Two-thirds (66%) of surveys used online/email as their primary method of data collection, with 59% of surveys being solely online/email. Furthermore, 79% of surveys offered an online/email data collection option.

Just over one fifth (21%) of surveys in 2020/21 employed paper questionnaires as their primary data collection method (compared with over two fifths (42%) in 2019/20).

Figure 3: Number of surveys and compliance cost by collection method (using primary method)



Please note that any implied relationship between method of collection and compliance cost should be treated with caution, as no account has been taken of the complexity and length of the surveys.

11% of surveys used paper questionnaires exclusively, with just over a quarter (26%) employing paper questionnaires in some capacity.

Telephone methods, i.e. a telephone interview or telephone data entry¹², were used as the primary data collection method for 7% of all surveys, while 13% of surveys used these methods to collect data in some capacity. Around 1 in 20 surveys (6%) used face-to-face methods as their primary data collection method; all of these surveys were exclusively face-to-face.

Table 4: Number of surveys and compliance cost by collection method and NI Department, 2020/21

Dept	Face-to-face		Paper		Paper & Online/Email		Paper, Online/Email & Telephone		Paper, Email & Telephone Data Entry ¹²		Telephone		Telephone & Online/Email	
	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)
DAERA	6	81.1	-	-	4	6.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.3
DE	-	-	1	0.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DfC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DfE	1	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	21.3	2	10.7
DfI	-	-	-	-	1	9.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoF	-	-	12	115.6	5	14.2	2	40.7	1	13.5	-	-	-	-
DoH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DoJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TEO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	81.2	13	116.4	10	30.1	2	40.7	1	13.5	5	21.3	3	12.0

Dept	Telephone Data Entry		Online/Email		Online/Email & Paper		Online & Telephone		Online, Paper, Email & Telephone		Online, Paper, Email & TDE		Total	
	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)	N	Cost (000s)
DAERA	-	-	3	1.1	-	-	1	33.8	-	-	-	-	15	123.6
DE	-	-	17	12.0	2	5.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	18.2
DfC	-	-	4	8.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	8.4
DfE	-	-	23	0.7	-	-	1	0.4	-	-	-	-	32	33.2
DfI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	9.6
DoF	1	0.6	18	58.7	2	197.2	-	-	1	22.2	1	116.3	43	579.0
DoH	-	-	6	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	0.3
DoJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.0
TEO	-	-	2	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.1
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.0
Total	1	0.6	73	81.4	4	202.5	2	34.1	1	22.2	1	116.3	123	772.3

¹² Telephone data entry (TDE) is a data collection method where the requested data are entered using the telephone keypad.

By department, DoF had the most surveys offering an online/email option, with 30 in total, accounting for 70% of all surveys conducted by DoF. All but one of the surveys conducted by DE (19 out of 20) offered an online option, while 26 of the 32 surveys carried out by DfE employed online methods in some capacity. All of the surveys conducted by DoH (6) and TEO (2) were exclusively online surveys.

4. Change in data collection methods over time (2016/17 to 2020/21)

There has been a gradual change in the primary data collection methods used by government since 2016/17. The number of surveys using online/email as their primary method of data collection has increased each year since 2016/17, from 33 (24%) in 2016/17 to 81 (66%) in 2020/21; with over half of the increase taking place between 2019/20 and 2020/21. In contrast, the number of surveys employing paper questionnaires as their primary method has decreased year-on-year. Although there has been some change, the number of surveys employing face-to-face and telephone methods has remained relatively constant.

A similar pattern has been observed in the total compliance burden for each primary method¹³. The overall burden for surveys using paper questionnaires as their primary method was highest in 2016/17, contributing 79% (£881,100) of the total burden in that year. This reduced to 51% (£483,000) in 2017/18 and has continued to decrease each year, contributing 26% (£200,700) in 2020/21.

Figure 4: Number of surveys by primary method employed, 2016/17 to 2020/21

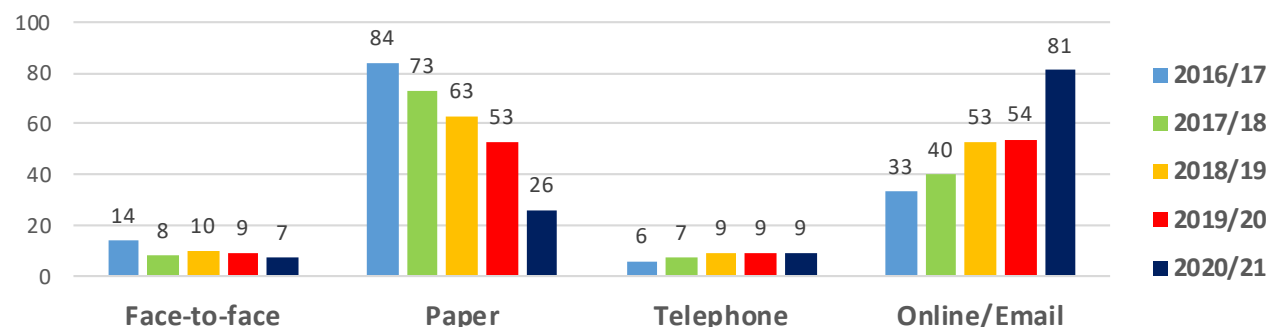
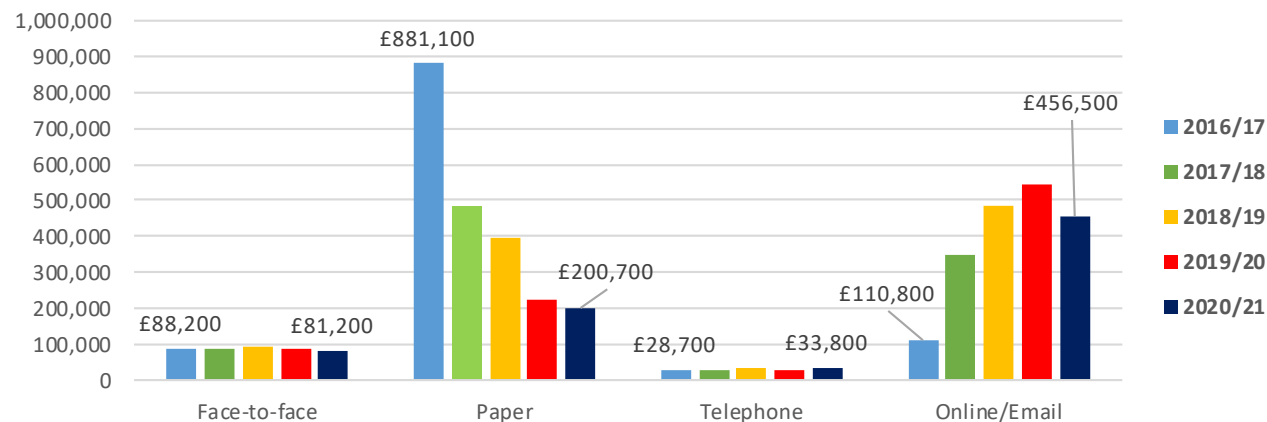


Figure 5: Compliance burden by primary method employed, 2016/17 to 2020/21



¹³ The figures used in Figure 5 do not take into account change in rates of pay (staff costs) over time. However, the pattern is similar when compliance costs based on 2020/21 rates of pay are used (see [downloadable tables and charts](#), details in Appendix E).

In contrast, the contribution to the compliance burden from surveys using online/email as the primary data collection method had consistently increased each year from 10% (£110,800) in 2016/17 to 61% (£547,000) in 2019/20. However, this decreased in 2020/21 to £456,500 (59%) despite more surveys using online methods as their primary data collection method. This was due mainly to the overall decrease in the number of responses between 2019/20 and 2020/21 and also the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) which alternates between a larger and smaller sample (23,496 responses in 2019/20; 10,836 responses in 2020/21). For surveys using online or email as their primary method, the number of responses decreased from 83,587 in 2019/20 to 65,727 in 2020/21 (despite the increase in the number of surveys).

The compliance burden due to surveys using face-to-face and telephone interviews has remained relatively consistent since 2016/17.

Note: As the nature and complexity of the surveys carried out each year varies, with a large number of ad-hoc, multiennial and irregular surveys, it is not possible to establish a relationship between the change in the number of surveys and the change in compliance burden for each primary data collection method.

5. 2016-21 Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes

In 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive released the draft Programme for Government (PfG), which laid out the ambition the Executive had for society in Northern Ireland. The draft PfG was consulted on and refined during 2016/17, and formed the basis for the [2018/19 Outcomes Delivery Plan](#)¹⁴ and subsequently the [Outcomes Delivery Plan \(December 2019\)](#)¹⁵. The draft 2016-21 PfG comprised 12 strategic outcomes outlined by the Executive to represent the society we wish to have. These 12 outcomes were supported by 49 indicators which showed how the Northern Ireland Government and wider public sector were performing in relation to the outcomes, providing a basis to monitor progress and take appropriate action. Details of the 12 outcomes and 49 indicators are provided in Appendix C.

In 2020/21, data suppliers were asked to identify to which PfG outcome each survey carried out by their Department or ALB contributed¹⁶. Figure 6 shows that those surveys of businesses carried out in 2020/21 which contributed to a single outcome contributed to 10 of the 12 PfG Outcomes, with nine surveys contributing to more than one PfG Outcome¹⁷

Figure 6 also shows that surveys of businesses carried out by certain departments often contribute to one specific outcome. For example, DAERA conducted 15 surveys all of which contributed to *Outcome 2: We live sustainably – protecting the environment*. Similarly, 10 of the 13 surveys conducted by DoF which contributed to a PfG outcome, contributed to *Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy*. The

¹⁴ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/outcomes-delivery-plan-201819>

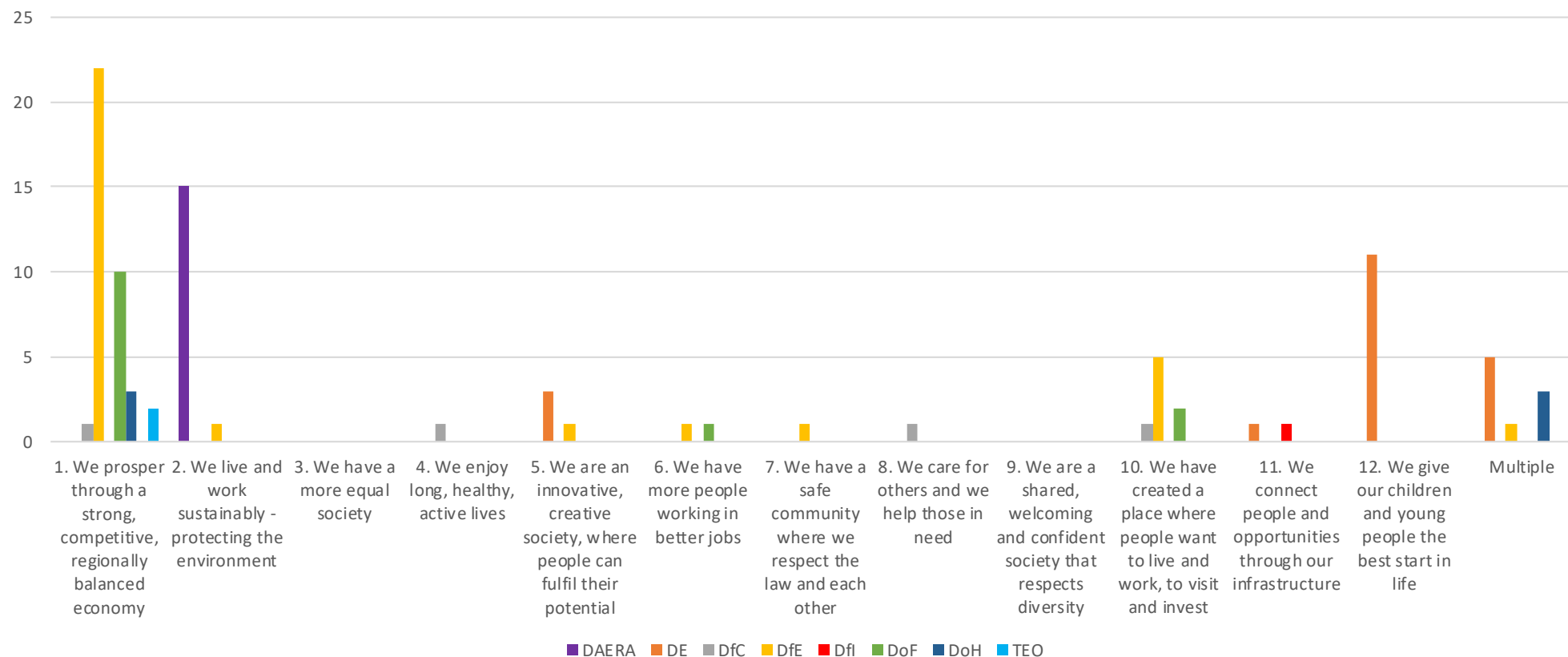
¹⁵ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/outcomes-delivery-plan-december-2019>

¹⁶ Further information on individual surveys is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix E).

¹⁷ Three DoH surveys contributed to Outcomes 1 & 11, five DE surveys contributed to Outcomes 9 & 12, while one DfE survey contributed to Outcomes 1 & 2.

majority of the DfE surveys (23 out of 32), the six DoH surveys and both TEO surveys also contributed to this outcome. DE surveys predominantly contribute to *Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life*, with 16 of their 20 surveys contributing to this outcome.

Figure 6: Programme for Government outcomes for surveys carried out by each NI Department, 2020/21



There were 30 surveys which did not contribute to any PfG outcome. 25 of these surveys were carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), four by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and one by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). These are UK-wide surveys of businesses and the information collected is only used to produce UK Statistics, such as the [Energy Trends: UK electricity](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electricity-section-5-energy-trends)¹⁸, [UK egg statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/egg-statistics)¹⁹, and the [UK national balance sheet estimates](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/datasets/thenationalbalancesheetestimates/current)²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electricity-section-5-energy-trends>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/egg-statistics>

²⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/datasets/thenationalbalancesheetestimates/current>

6. Uses of Surveys

The data collected through government surveys of Northern Ireland businesses are used for a range of purposes including the

- production and development of official statistics (see Figure 2 & Table 3);
- development, monitoring and evaluation of government policy;
- design, monitoring, refinement and evaluation of programmes;
- improvement and refinement of government services.

For example, Analytical Services Division in DfE uses the wide range of [ELMS official statistics publications](#)²¹ to provide briefing and analysis on the local economy to a wide range of stakeholders. This includes a [monthly economic update](#)²² and a more detailed [economic commentary](#)²³ produced three times per year, which are published on the DfE website and disseminated to the Minister for the Economy and senior departmental officials as well as a wide range of interested parties. Figures from the [NI Composite Economic Index](#)²¹, [Labour Force Survey](#)²¹ (a household survey), [Quarterly Employment Survey](#)²¹, [Index of Production](#)²¹, [Index of Services](#)²¹ and [NI Construction bulletin](#)²¹ (collectively known as the *Quarterly Business Survey*) and [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#)²¹ (ASHE) are used to provide a regular overview of the local economy. Analytical Services Division also uses the findings from these surveys to brief the Minister and senior officials on the latest issues affecting the NI economy, providing them with the context required to put more informed policies in place.

To support decision-making during the pandemic, data from the [Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry](#)²⁴, [Business Register and Employment Survey](#)²¹, [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#), [Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics](#)²¹ and [Labour Force Survey](#) were used by Analytical Services Division in DfE to establish the potential scope and characteristics of the impacts of the March 2020 and October 2020 COVID-19 Regulations on those businesses and business activities impacted by the Regulations. In addition, business survey data have been used throughout the pandemic to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of a range of COVID-related business support schemes and the High Street Stimulus schemes. This includes data from those surveys listed above as well as data from the *Index of Services*, *Index of Production*, *Quarterly Construction Survey*, *Quarterly Employment Survey* (collectively known as the *Quarterly Business Survey*), [Farm Business Survey](#)²⁵, [Potato merchants survey](#) and [Raw Milk Producer Price Survey](#)²⁶. Other surveys such as the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\)](#)²⁷, [Survey into the impact of COVID-19 on the NI Construction](#)

²¹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/nisra-economic-and-labour-market-statistics-elms/economic-overview>

²² <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/monthly-economic-update>

²³ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/economic-commentary>

²⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/business-statistics/annual-business-inquiry>

²⁵ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farm-incomes-northern-ireland>

²⁶ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/milk-price-and-production-statistics-2000-onwards>

²⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/thequestionsonthebusinessimpactofcoronaviruscovid19survey>

[Industry](#)²⁸ and *Legacy Report – COVID-19* survey have captured businesses’ and schools’ experience during the pandemic, as well as the impact on them and their future needs. A detailed case study examining the use of government surveys of businesses to assess the impact of COVID-19 and inform decision-making is included in Appendix A.

Another important use of the *Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES)* data has been to support and inform decision-making around EU Exit and understand the impact of the NI Protocol on the local economy. Data are collected on trade in both goods and services within NI, as well as trade between NI and GB, this being the only source anywhere for this information. Exports data are also available for trade to each member state of the EU and to approximately 50 individual non-EU countries. These data have been an invaluable resource for government officials over the last number of years, whereby they have been used by departments to inform important and high level EU Exit policy documents and negotiations/discussions at the highest level, including but not limited to the Cabinet Office paper: [The UK’s approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol](#) (May 2020)²⁹.

Secondary analysis of the Energy purchases questions contained within the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI)* by DfE statisticians working with ELMS, has led to the successful development of a monitoring metric for inclusion in the [DfE Energy Strategy](#)³⁰ relating to energy purchases as a proportion of turnover. This metric will enable the monitoring of change to input pressures faced by businesses represented by their energy expenditure. A survey commissioned by DfE as part of [Research into the Future of Energy Efficiency Policy in NI](#)³¹ also informed development of the new DfE Energy Strategy. This survey provided understanding of stakeholder views on energy efficiency barriers, attained suggestions for future controls and targets and informed decision making on the funding and policies contributing to the UK target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The NIABI provides a number of measures of economic activity, such as business turnover and the value of goods, materials and services covering the multiple industries (such as production and construction), and is used by government to monitor the progress of economic policy and assist in economic decision making. Data from the NIABI is provided to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and feeds into the UK-wide [Annual Business Survey](#)³², which is the primary source of data used by the National Accounts team in the compilation of the [Blue Book](#)³³, a compendium of trends and changes within the UK economy. Within Northern Ireland, data are provided to DAERA to facilitate production of their annual [Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing report](#)³⁴. This provides details of the total sales and imports and exports of food and drinks processing businesses, alongside other information from the NIABI such as gross value added and employment. Furthermore, bespoke NIABI data tables of business turnover at town centre geographies and SIC section level are provided to DfC statisticians for inclusion in the [Town Centre database](#)³⁵.

²⁸ <https://www.citbni.org.uk/News/Survey-reveals-impact-of-Covid-19-on-the-local-con.aspx>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-approach-to-the-northern-ireland-protocol>

³⁰ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/energy/energy-strategy>

³¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/research-future-energy-efficiency-policy-northern-ireland>

³² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/nonfinancialbusinesseconomyukandregionalannualbusinesssurvey/previousReleases>

³³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/compendium/unitedkingdomnationalaccounts/bluebook/previousReleases>

³⁴ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/size-and-performance-ni-food-and-drinks-processing-sector>

³⁵ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/town-centre-database>

The NIABI is a fundamental data source for the [NI Supply-Use tables](#)³⁶ (SUTs) which provide a picture of the flows of products and services in the NI economy for a single year and are used to set the level of annual current price Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They show the composition of uses and resources across institutional sectors and the inter-dependence of industries in order to reconcile the production, income and expenditure approaches to the measurement of GDP. The SUTs form the input to a number of economic modelling tools developed by the Department for the Economy (DfE) NI, namely a [Computable General Equilibrium \(CGE\)](#)³⁷ model and a [Hypothetical Extraction Model \(HEM\)](#)³⁸. Further information on this and other uses of the NIABI can be found in the [NIABI usage – summary](#)³⁹ document.

The quarterly [NI Composite Economic Index \(NICEI\)](#)²¹ uses data from the *Index of Production, Index of Services, Quarterly Construction Enquiry (QCE)* and *Quarterly Employment Survey (QES)* (collectively known as the *Quarterly Business Survey (QBS)*) as well as data from the *Labour Force Survey (LFS)* (a household survey) and unpublished agricultural output data from DAERA.

The NICEI is broadly equivalent to the output measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) produced by ONS and is used to measure the performance of the NI economy. It is used to help monitor progress of a range of key government strategies in NI, notably the [Industrial Strategy](#)⁴⁰ and the [10X Economic Vision](#)⁴¹. The statistics are also used by a broad range of users with an interest in assessing and reporting on the level of economic activity in Northern Ireland such as ONS, economists in the public and private sector, academics, media and the general public.

As part of the [NI Economic Accounts project](#)⁴², NISRA has developed [Input-Output tables](#)⁴³. These tables use data from various business surveys, including the *NIABI*, *QCE* & *QES* (both part of the *QBS*) and *BESES*, all carried out by ELMS; the [Annual Purchases Survey \(APS\)](#)⁴⁴ and [UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product \(PRODCOM\)](#)⁴⁵, carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMSB; and the [June Agricultural & Horticulture Census](#)⁴⁶ (which feeds into the [Aggregate Agriculture Accounts](#)⁴⁷) and *Farm Business Survey*, both carried out by DAERA.

During 2021 ELMS worked with DfE statisticians and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to support the development of a [strategic policy options framework for the Circular Economy](#)⁴⁸ for NI. This is an alternative to a traditional linear economy model (take, make, use, dispose) in which resources

³⁶ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/ni-economic-accounts-project-2016-and-2017-experimental-results>

³⁷ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/research-bulletin-19-6-expanding-analytical-toolkit-with-cge-model.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Research-Bulletin-20-8-hypothetical-extraction-model-ni.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/usage-methods-and-quality-and-revisions-policy-abi>

⁴⁰ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/industrial-strategy>

⁴¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/10x-economy-economic-vision-decade-innovation>

⁴² <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economy/economic-accounts-project>

⁴³ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/ni-economic-accounts-project-2016-and-2017-experimental-results>

⁴⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/annualpurchasesurvey>

⁴⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/ukmanufacturerssalesbyproductprodcom>

⁴⁶ [https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Agricultural Census 2021 Publication_0.pdf](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Agricultural%20Census%202021%20Publication_0.pdf)

⁴⁷ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-review-ni-agriculture-2007-onward>

⁴⁸ <https://sibni.org/project/circular-economy/>

are kept in use for as long as possible, maximum value is extracted from them whilst in use, then products and materials are recovered and regenerated at the end of each service life. To support this project, ELMS had to develop a bespoke set of [Imports Input-Output tables](#)⁴⁹ as a key input dataset to support the model being developed. These tables which were new and niche were created using data from the *BESES*, and the existing Input-Output tables from the Economic Accounts project. The policy options framework is due to be published during 2022. The Circular Economy will support PfG Outcomes towards innovation, investment, and economic growth.

The *NI Cyber Gateway Aptitude Programme Survey* was conducted to identify the actions required in order to enhance recruitment and skills within NI's Cybersecurity sector. This survey assisted in driving and informing decisions relating to cyber skills and the [NI Cyber Gateway Aptitude Programme](#)⁵⁰ and achieving the goals of the [10X Economy Vision](#)⁴¹.

A survey commissioned by the Labour Relations Agency, DfE contributed to [research to inform the development of an employment relations model in Northern Ireland](#)⁵¹. The aim of this new model is to create inclusive workplaces that maximise productivity and innovation capacity.

Information from the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)* is used by the Low Pay Commission as part of its evidence base for recommending to the Government the level of the national minimum wage.

Further information on the purpose of each survey is available in the [downloadable data](#) (see Appendix E).

7. Changes to the Surveys Issued by Departments: 2017/18 to 2020/21

Due to the biennial, triennial or quinquennial nature of several 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. Furthermore, due to the cyclical nature of some of the larger statutory surveys compliance costs can vary significantly year-on-year. An example of this is the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) carried out by DoF, which alternates a larger and smaller sample year to year. In 2019/20, around 33,500 businesses were sampled (23,496 responses; £62,300 compliance cost), while in 2020/21, just under 16,100 businesses were sampled (10,836 responses, £34,300 compliance cost). Additionally, NISRA statisticians are continually working towards improving the efficiency of the statistical process and minimising the burden on survey respondents, in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Details of steps taken to reduce respondent burden are provided in Section 9.

⁴⁹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/ni-economic-accounts-project-2016-and-2017-experimental-results>

⁵⁰ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/cyber-gateway-aptitude-programme>

⁵¹ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/employmentrelationsni#:~:text=Research%20to%20inform%20the%20development%20of%20an%20employment,Agency%20to%20develop%20a%20strong%20employment%20relations%20model>.

Table 5: Number of surveys, forms returned and compliance cost by NI Department, 2017/18 to 2020/21

Dept	Number of Surveys				Number of Forms (000s)				Compliance Cost (£000s) ⁵²			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
DAERA	17	18	17	15	20.7	24.8	20.1	14.7	145.0	162.1	144.1	123.6
DE	16	24	17	20	3.8	6.9	3.5	3.1	52.2	64.9	46.9	18.2
DfC	22	17	15	4	10.3	9.0	8.9	8.6	10.1	9.0	8.8	8.4
DfE	25	26	22	32	7.0	8.3	6.9	5.9	29.4	37.8	35.9	33.2
DfI	1	1	3	1	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.6	8.6	8.9	8.8	9.6
DoF	45	46	44	43	91.1	77.4	83.3	67.4	698.5	715.2	643.4	579.0
DoH	2	2	6	6	0.1	1.9	0.6	0.1	1.7	6.4	3.5	0.3
DoJ	-	1	1	-	-	0.1	0.2	-	-	0.4	0.8	-
TEO	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	0.1
PPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	128	135	125	123	134.5	129.9	125.1	101.5	945.4	1004.8	892.2	772.3

The estimated compliance burden for NI businesses in 2020/21 was £772,300, a decrease of just under £120,000 (13%) on the previous year. This represents the lowest estimated compliance burden since first reported using the current method of calculation in 2012/13, despite an increase in staff costs (see Section 8). Much of the decrease in compliance burden was due to a reduction in the number of issued and returned forms, with 23,606 (19%) fewer forms returned in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20. The number of responses for 2020/21 (at 101,497) was the lowest recorded since the time series began in 2012/13.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic had various impacts on surveys of businesses in 2020/21, with many surveys unaffected. In some cases it affected the number of forms issued, while in others the impact was on the response rate. A number of surveys, such as the *Active Schools Travel Programme Survey* (carried out by DfI), were postponed due to business or school closures. For other surveys, the data collection method was changed to accommodate remote working or restrictions on face-to-face interaction. There were also four new surveys designed specifically to capture the impact of the pandemic and inform or evaluate decisions related to the pandemic.

⁵² In 2018/19, ONS which carries out surveys on behalf of ELMS (in DoF) changed the methodology it uses to estimate staff costs. The corresponding step change in compliance costs (calculated as £16,700 in 2018/19) has resulted in a discontinuity in the time series between 2017/18 and 2018/19. This impacts the overall compliance burden and the compliance costs for DoF but not the number of surveys or number of responses. Further details are provided in Appendix B3.

Table 6 shows a comparison of the 68 surveys that ran in both 2020/21 and 2019/20 and the different ways in which they were affected by the pandemic, excluding BRES (carried out by DoF) which alternates between a smaller and larger sample. The total compliance cost for these surveys in 2020/21 was £711,500, representing an 11% decrease on the previous year.

Table 6: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on responses and compliance cost for returning surveys, 2019/20 to 2020/21

Impact of the Pandemic	Number of Surveys	Forms Returned 2019/20 (000s)	Forms Returned 2020/21 (000s)	% Returns Difference	Compliance Cost 2019/20 (£000s)	Compliance Cost 2020/21 (£000s)	% Compliance Cost Difference
No evidence of impact (or uncertain evidence)	44	26.9	27.3	2%	465.5	441.6	-5%
Confirmed decreased response	3	25.9	21.3	-18%	147.6	118.0	-20%
Suspected decreased response	16	11.6	10.5	-10%	105.8	90.4	-15%
Change in methods used	2	8.3	8.5	3%	7.7	7.8	1%
Change in methods and decreased response	1	14.3	12.6	-12%	38.9	33.8	-13%
Decrease in forms issued	2	5.4	4.5	-17%	30.5	19.9	-35%
Total	68	92.4	84.7	-8%	796.1	711.5	-11%

44 (just under two thirds) of the 68 surveys were determined to not have been significantly affected by the pandemic due to minimal change in the number of forms issued and returned, or a similar pattern to previous years; and no change or unrelated changes in the data collection methods.

There were two surveys where the number of issued forms was directly affected by the pandemic. The first was the monthly *NI Hotel, Guesthouse, Bed & Breakfast Occupancy Survey* conducted by Tourism Statistics and Staff Surveys Branch (TSSSB) in DoF. Due to lockdown restrictions, small service accommodation (Bed & Breakfasts, Guest Houses and Guest Accommodation) were not allowed to operate for periods throughout 2020 and 2021. As a result, there were 66% fewer forms issued to these establishments, with a corresponding reduction of 1,535 in returned forms and £12,900 in compliance cost. The second survey was the *Business Register Inquiry (IDBR)*. Although this survey was suspended in April and May 2020 because of COVID (and no forms issued), there was very little impact on the data collected as these businesses received a *Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)* form instead and the data was then entered for IDBR as well.

20 (just under 3 in 5) of the returning surveys saw the number of responses decrease: this includes three surveys where the survey managers explicitly confirmed that the pandemic had affected the survey in this way. For the *E-commerce Survey* conducted by ONS, the introduction of lockdown restrictions coincided with the period in which the majority of businesses typically make their return, resulting in a decrease of 88% in responses

compared to 2019/20. For these three surveys, there was a decrease of 18% in the number of responses, and 20% in their combined compliance cost. For the remaining 17 surveys, there was an 11% reduction in forms returned and a 14% decrease in compliance cost.

The data collection method was changed in three surveys due to the pandemic. DfC's *UU/NIHE House Price Index* (carried out by the NI Housing Executive) moved from face-to-face interviews to electronic surveys, while DoF's *Annual Coal Inquiry* (carried out by ELMS) moved from a paper questionnaire to email data collection. For these two surveys, the response rate was similar to that in 2019/20. In contrast DAERA's *June Agricultural & Horticulture Census* switched from a primarily paper based survey to an online survey, and saw a reduced number of forms returned (12,600, 1,731 fewer than in 2019/20), resulting in a reduced compliance cost of £33,800 (£5,200 less than last year).

There were four surveys conducted specifically in response to the pandemic. Three of these surveys were relatively small with a combined compliance cost of £421, representing 0.05% of the total compliance cost: DE's *Legacy Report COVID-19 March 2020 to March 2021* (carried out by the NI Council for Integrated Education), DE's *Review of the Home Learning Resource (Teacher Survey)* (carried out by Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and DfE's *Survey into Impact of COVID-19 on NI Construction Industry* (carried out by the NI Construction Industry Training Board). The remaining survey was the *Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)*, conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). While this survey now covers multiple issues, it was originally designed to investigate the impact of the pandemic on businesses. This survey contributed 3,572 forms and a compliance cost of £15,600, representing 2% of the total compliance cost to business.

A more detailed look at the changes in surveys between years at Departmental level follows.

DAERA

DAERA carried out 15 surveys in 2020/21, two fewer than in the previous year, and the lowest number in the time series. Overall, the DAERA compliance cost decreased by £20,500 (14%). While many surveys remained relatively consistent in terms of their compliance burden, there were large reductions seen in the *Farm Business Survey* (£5,470; a decrease of 7%) and the *June Agricultural & Horticultural Census* (£5,170; a decrease of 13%).

Two surveys did not run in 2020/21 that had run in previous years. While one was relatively small in terms of compliance burden (the *Horticultural surveys*), the *December Agricultural & Horticulture Survey*, which has been discontinued, contributed £9,500 of DAERA's burden in 2019/20, which accounts for almost half of the reduction in compliance burden.

DE

DE conducted 20 surveys in 2020/21, three more than in the previous year, however there has been a decrease of over £28,700 (61%) in the total compliance burden. The main reason for the decrease is due to a large reduction in the compliance cost of the *School Census*, which contributed just under £4,600, compared to £32,500 in the previous year – a decrease of 86%. While the number of returned forms for this survey remained consistent,

the average completion time had been revised from 240 minutes (as it has been since 2016/17) to 34 minutes. The time has been revised due to greater use of and proficiency in using the online application to complete the survey, where in previous years respondents tended to complete paper surveys, or were less experienced in using the application.

Since its inclusion in 2016/17, the *School Census* has always been the largest contributor of compliance burden in DE, however due to the revised completion time, it became the second largest contributor in 2020/21. The largest DE contributor in 2020/21 was the *School Meals Census*, an annual survey which runs every year and contributed £8,400 in 2020/21, representing 46% of the total DE compliance burden.

DE consistently has a high proportion of ad-hoc surveys (8 in 2019/20; 11 in 2018/19; and 12 in 2017/18), thus variation in the number of surveys, forms returned and compliance cost year-on-year is to be expected. In 2020/21, there were 15 ad-hoc, one-off surveys, with a combined compliance cost of just over £3,400, accounting for 19% of the total DE compliance burden. All but one of these ad-hoc surveys had a relatively low compliance burden, however the *Stationery and Office Supplies* survey contributed £1,800 (10%) of the total DE compliance cost.

DfC

The number of DfC surveys decreased from 15 in 2019/20 to 4 in 2020/21. DfC typically runs a large number of small, ad-hoc surveys related to revitalisation projects each year (14 in 2018/19; 13 in 2019/20) which contributed £650 of the burden in 2019/20. However only one ran in 2020/21, contributing £60 of the total compliance burden.

The annual *UU/NIHE Quarterly House Price Index* (carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) was the main contributor to the compliance burden due to DfC in 2020/21, with an estimated cost of £7,800 (94%).

The two remaining surveys were one-off ad-hoc surveys: the *Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer in NI Club Survey* which contributed £470 (6%); and the *Charity Commission for NI Board Review*, contributing £10 (0.1%) of the total compliance burden.

DfE

DfE conducted 32 surveys in 2020/21, ten more than in the previous year. Despite this increase in the number of surveys, the total compliance burden was £33,200, a decrease of £2,700 (8%) from 2019/20.

The main reason for the increase in the number of surveys is the inclusion of many one-off, ad-hoc surveys. In particular, of the 15 surveys ran by Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), 13 were one-off ad-hoc surveys, 8 more than were run in the previous year. All but one of these surveys were *Apprenticeship Framework Review* surveys, while the remaining one-off survey was the *Survey into the Impact of COVID-19 on the NI Construction*

Industry. Despite CITB surveys accounting for 15 of the 31 surveys, these were predominantly small surveys. In total CITB surveys contributed £910 (3%) of the total DfE compliance cost, with the annual *Employer Tracking Survey* accounting for £700 of this total.

Consistent with last year, the majority of DfE compliance costs result from large surveys run by Invest NI. These surveys include; the *Purchasing Manager's Index* (£10,400; 31% of the total DfE compliance burden); the *BIS Small Business Survey* (£7,000; 21%); and the *Quarterly Customer Satisfaction Survey* (£4,200; 13%). The compliance burden for each of these surveys was similar to the previous year. The remaining Invest NI survey was the *Longitudinal Small Business Survey* (£4,200; 13%), conducted by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on behalf of Invest NI. This survey was not previously included in the return. The quarterly *All Island Business Monitor* run by InterTrade Ireland was another large contributor to the DfE total, with an estimated burden of £5,200 (16%), which is similar to previous years.

There were several relatively large DfE surveys that ran in 2019/20 but not in 2020/21, which are the primary reason for the decrease in the total compliance burden. Three were one-off surveys: *Disputes and their management in the workplace survey* (£1,900), the *Tracking Study Subsequent to the Launch of the Apprenticeships NI Advertising Campaign* (£1,300) and the *Innovate UK Survey* (£1,200). There were also three regular surveys which did not run in 2020/21: the *Employer Attitudes to Skills and Learning survey*, the *Farm Safety Advertising Evaluation* and finally, the *Tourism Industry Barometer*, which did not run in 2020/21 due to closures in the industry resulting from COVID-19 restrictions. These surveys contributed £2,500 in combined compliance costs in 2019/20.

Dfi

Dfi carried out one survey in 2020/21, two fewer than in the previous year, but consistent with earlier years. While the *Northern Ireland Planning Statistics User Survey* is biennial and was not due to run in 2020/21, the other, *Active School Travel Programme* survey was scheduled to run, but did not due to school closures as a result of the pandemic. The *Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport, Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI)* which runs every year, contributed £9,600 in the current year, an increase of over £1,060 compared to the previous year, resulting from an increase of 163 responses.

DoF

DoF conducted 43 surveys in 2020/21, one fewer than in the previous year. There has been a decrease in the number of forms returned (67,449 in 2020/21, compared to 83,295 in the previous year) and a decrease in the DoF compliance cost. In 2019/20 the DoF compliance cost was £643,400 whereas in 2020/21 it was £579,000 – a decrease of £64,400 (10%).

Economic Labour Market Statistics (ELMS) carried out the same seven surveys as in the previous two years. While the *Annual Coal Inquiry*, a small survey of four businesses, has remained consistent, there were larger changes in the burden arising from the remaining six surveys.

The *Business Register and Employment Survey* alternates yearly between a larger and smaller sample, employing a smaller sample in 2020/21. This meant there was a decrease of approximately 12,700 forms in 2020/21 with a corresponding reduction (of 45%) in the compliance cost, from £62,300 to £34,300. The compliance cost for the *Quarterly Business Survey* also reduced from £141,100 in 2019/20 to £116,300 in 2020/21 (an 18% decrease). This was due to a 17% decrease in returns compared to 2019/20, with the pandemic having an effect on response rates, particularly in the first quarter of 2020/21. Furthermore, there were fewer businesses re-contacted for validation than in previous years, which also contributed to the large decrease in compliance cost. Despite the decrease, the *Quarterly Business Survey* was the second largest contributor of compliance cost across DoF accounting for 20% of the DoF total for 2020/21. There was also a small decrease (2%) in the compliance cost for the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* which dropped from £50,900 in 2019/20 to £49,700 in 2020/21, as a result of 243 fewer responses from NI businesses.

Increased compliance costs were seen in three ELMS surveys: an increase of £2,050 (10%) for the *Northern Ireland Research and Development Survey*; an increase of £2,300 (21%) for the *Business Register Inquiry (IDBR)*; and an increase of £7,100 (5%) for the *Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI)*, which had a compliance cost of £147,500 in 2020/21. This was the largest survey conducted by DoF, accounting for 25% of the total compliance burden.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also surveys NI businesses, on behalf of ELMS, as part of UK-wide surveys. In this analysis, these surveys are included under DoF, as are surveys of NI businesses carried out by the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

BEIS conducted one survey of NI businesses in 2020/21, while DEFRA carried out four surveys. These five surveys are relatively small, accounting for a combined 22 returns and contributing just under £380 of compliance cost, which represents less than 0.1% of the total DoF compliance burden. The biennial *UK Innovation Survey* conducted by BEIS was due to take place in 2020/21, having last been run in 2018/19, however the majority of the data collection took place in 2021/22 and as a result will be included in next year's report.

ONS carried out 25 surveys on behalf of ELMS in 2020/21, two fewer than in the previous year. All but one of these 25 surveys ran in 2019/20. While there was an increase of 1,898 forms returned, there was a decrease of £8,300 (4%) in compliance cost compared to the previous year. Three surveys that had run previously – *Recruitment for Monthly Survey for Index Number of Producer Prices*; *Occupational Pension Scheme Survey*; and the *Financial Institutions Register Survey* – did not run in 2020/21, having contributed a combined £3,700 in the previous year.

There were small reductions (less than £1,000) in the compliance cost for 15 of the surveys conducted by ONS. There were larger reductions seen in the *Quarterly Inward Foreign Direct Investment Survey* (£1,200; 32%); *Monthly Business Survey* (£1,300; 11%), the *Quarterly Acquisitions and Disposals of Capital Assets Survey* (£2,000; 8%); and the *UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product* (£3,400; 19%). The largest reductions were seen in the *Annual Survey of Goods and Services* (£4,100; 21%) and the *E-Commerce Survey* (£4,000; 88%). The large reduction in burden for the *E-Commerce Survey* is a result of the large reduction in the number of forms, where only 24 forms from NI businesses were returned in 2020/21, compared to 203 in the

previous year. This was a result of the majority of NI respondents making their return in 2019/20 (i.e. between January and March 2020). The remaining responders completed their return from April 2020, which was further disrupted by the pandemic, resulting in only 24 forms returned for NI businesses.

There was one new survey conducted by ONS in 2020/21 which was developed initially in response to the pandemic, but has since become a crucial survey enabling rapid response to issues impacting UK businesses and the economy. Formerly known as the *Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey*, the *Business Insights and Conditions Survey* is a large fortnightly survey, with 3,572 forms returned from NI businesses in 2020/21, contributing £15,600 of compliance cost. This was the third most burdensome ONS survey of NI businesses in 2020/21.

Of the six remaining surveys, three were conducted by Land & Property Services (LPS), two by Tourism Statistics and Staff Surveys Branch (TSSSB) and one by Business Consultancy Services (BCS). The surveys carried out by LPS and BCS were all small, one-off surveys which in total contributed £920 compliance cost and had 265 forms returned. One of the surveys carried out by TSSSB, the monthly *NI Hotel, Guesthouse, Bed & Breakfast Occupancy Survey*, was impacted by the pandemic. Due to restrictions in place, small service accommodation such as Bed & Breakfasts, Guest Houses and Guest Accommodation in NI was forced to close throughout much of the 2020/21. Although the survey was carried out for all months that tourism establishments was permitted to be open, there was a 67% reduction in forms issued with a similar reduction in returns (762 compared to 2,297 in 2019/20) and a corresponding reduction in compliance burden from £19,300 in 2019/20, to £6,400 in 2020/21. The other survey conducted by TSSSB, the annual *NI Self Catering Occupancy Survey* had a compliance burden of £7,700 in 2020/21 (an increase of £420 compared to 2019/20).

DoH

DoH ran six surveys of businesses in 2020/21, however five of these surveys were new, including three biennial customer satisfaction surveys. All six surveys were conducted by Business Services Organisation (BSO), contributing just under £300 in compliance cost, with the largest contributor being the *Supplier Engagement* survey, which accounted for £266, 90% of the total DoH compliance burden.

This represents a reduction of £3,200 from the previous year, where two larger biennial surveys ran; the *Dental Working Patterns Survey* (£1,050) and *2020 Northern Ireland Sight Test and Ophthalmic Public Health Survey* (£2,300); which did not run in 2020/21.

DoJ

DoJ did not conduct any surveys of businesses in 2020/21. The *Access NI Customer Survey* carried out by DoJ in 2019/20 is a biennial survey. The survey carried out in 2018/19 was a one-off survey.

TEO

TEO do not typically run surveys of businesses but in 2020/21 commissioned two small surveys of organisations that were applicants to and recipients of the *Good Relations Fund* and *Minority Ethnic Development Fund*. These two surveys contributed 82 forms and had a compliance burden of £140.

PPS

PPS did not conduct any surveys of businesses during the period presented in Table 5.

8. Examination of the Trend, 2012/13 to 2020/21

Figure 7 illustrates the change in the estimated cost to businesses of complying with Government Statistical Surveys from 2012/13 to 2020/21⁵³.

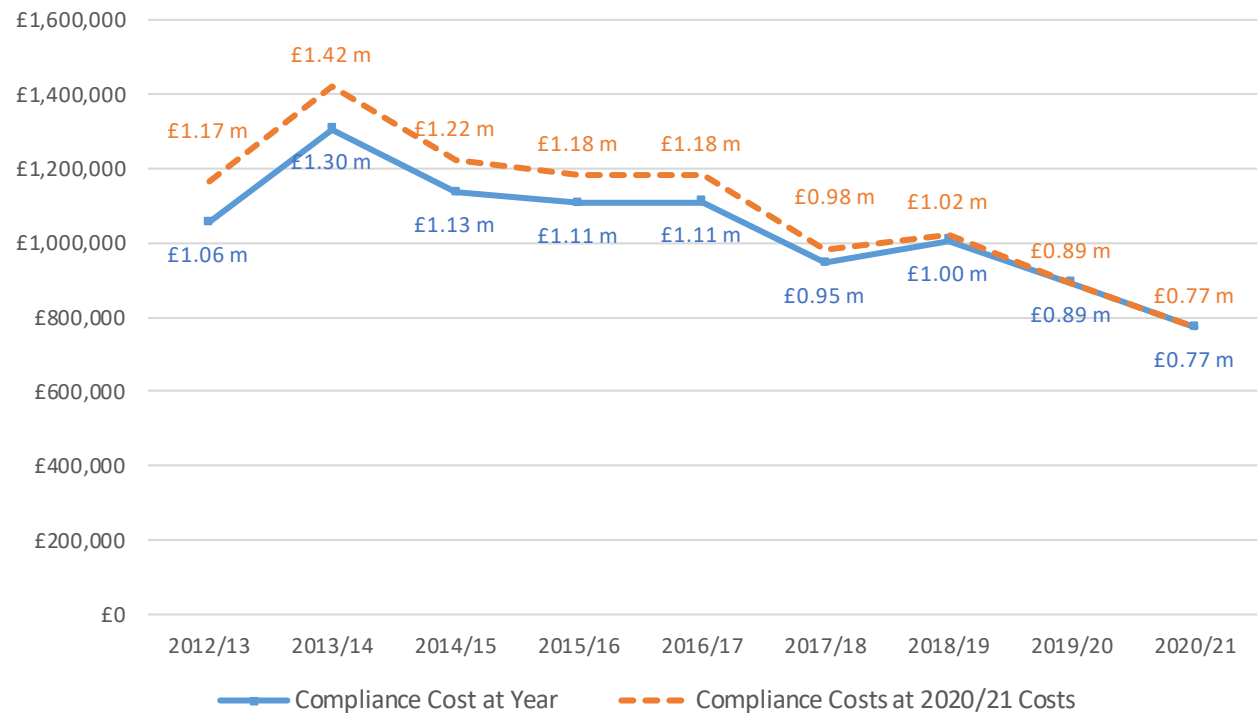
The blue line shows the cost in terms of raw or current prices; that is in terms of staff cost at the time of the survey, without allowing for the effects of changes to levels of pay. The dashed orange line shows the cost after wage growth has been taken into account. External costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted. The base staff cost are the *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* (ASHE) costs used for 2020/21.

Aside from a slight increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19⁵⁴, the estimated compliance cost to business based on staff costs at the time of the survey has gradually reduced from a peak of £1.30m in 2013/14 to a new low of £0.77m in 2020/21⁵⁵. This is the lowest value recorded in the time series, 13% lower than 2019/20, and 41% lower than the peak value seen in 2013/14.

When the impact of changes in staff costs is removed (i.e. compliance costs are based on

2020/21 costs), a more pronounced trend is observed between 2013/14 and 2017/18. However, the decrease in compliance costs between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (based on fixed staff costs) remains at 13%.

Figure 7: NI compliance cost from 2012/13 to 2020/21



⁵³ The figures in the time series have not been adjusted for the discontinuities introduced in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 due to the inclusion of additional surveys (improved coverage) and ONS methodology changes. See notes 41 and 42 below (and Appendix B3).

⁵⁴ Over a quarter (1.8%) of the (6.3%) increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19 was due to a change in the way compliance costs were estimated for surveys carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on behalf of ELMS.

⁵⁵ The absence of a decrease between 2015/16 and 2016/17 was due to the discontinuity in the time series (i.e. the inclusion of additional surveys, and an increase in compliance costs for ONS surveys). There was also some over-estimation in the compliance costs for 2016/17 which was removed in 2017/18. Further details are provided in Appendix B3.

9. Measures being taken to Reduce Compliance Cost

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

Department	Survey	Steps taken to reduce compliance burden
DAERA	June Agricultural & Horticulture Census	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesign of online survey to reduce the length of the survey. Encouraged more people to use the online system. Use of administrative sources.
DAERA (AFBI) ⁵⁶	Pesticide Usage Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased usage of email and digital technologies, as well as recording software when available.
DfC (NIHE) ⁵⁷	UU/NIHE House Price Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey burden is kept to a minimum by using electronic data submission and interfaces where possible.
DfI	Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport, Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For 2021/22 the survey will be moved to an online collection platform which should reduce burden for businesses going forward.
DoF (ELMS) ⁵⁸	Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased usage of web-forms.
	Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses encouraged to use web-forms.
	Business Register Inquiry (IDBR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data share with Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) 2021 for businesses who did not receive a IDBR form in April and May when the survey was suspended due COVID-19. Increased usage of web-forms.
DoF (ELMS, BEIS) ⁵⁹	Quarterly Survey into Electricity Generated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switched from paper to email survey. Email survey is quicker to complete.
DoF (TSSSB) ⁶⁰	Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This used to be a census of all self-catering accommodation but it was decided to do a sample instead.

⁵⁶ AFBI (Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute)

⁵⁷ NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive)

⁵⁸ ELMS (Economic and Labour Market Statistics)

⁵⁹ BEIS (Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

⁶⁰ TSSSB (Tourism Statistics and Staff Surveys Branch)

Appendix A: Case Study – The use of government surveys of businesses to assess the impact of COVID-19 and inform decision-making

There were four surveys of businesses conducted in 2020/21 specifically on the impact and other effects of the pandemic, while data from multiple surveys were used to inform decision-making and the development of schemes to mitigate against the impact of the pandemic on businesses.

Within DE, the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) carried out the *Legacy Report – COVID-19* survey in order to gather information and feedback on the experiences of integrated schools during the pandemic and how school leaders overcame the challenges imposed during the pandemic. In addition, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) conducted a survey to review the *Home Learning Resource* (set up to provide parents and teachers with curriculum support to ensure children could continue to learn at home). This survey, issued to teachers in Primary and Irish Medium Primary schools, aimed to measure the effectiveness of the resource and aid decision making in future resource provision⁶¹.

In DfE, the Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB) carried out a [Survey into the impact of COVID-19 on the NI Construction Industry](#)⁶² in order to gauge the impact of the pandemic on the construction industry and the critical training needs moving forward. This included measures of site closures, redundancies, furlough and training needs. CITB used these data to inform decision making on training interventions and help businesses grow and develop the workforce to meet client needs. One of the measures in the survey was the number of apprentices employed by businesses. Apprentices and their training are supported by CITB in order to sustain the future of the construction industry. Alongside this survey, CITB conducted a further thirteen *Apprenticeship Framework* surveys in order to gauge the demand within multiple sectors and inform further decision making.

The fourth survey, the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\)](#)⁶³ was a voluntary fortnightly survey, conducted in order to provide qualitative information on turnover, workforce, prices and trade. This survey was developed in response to the pandemic, and was originally called the *Business Impact of Coronavirus Survey*. Survey questions were reviewed and updated as part of each fortnightly wave. The results from the survey provided further insights around these business dynamics to complement the official estimates, while offering users a closer-to-real-time view of the UK economy. The results of the survey were published in the fortnightly bulletin [Business insights and impact on the UK](#)⁶⁴ statistical bulletins and flash headline figures were presented in the weekly [Coronavirus and the latest indicators for the UK economy and society](#)⁶⁵, these [real-time turning point indicators](#)⁶⁶ helped policymakers and economists track economic impacts in a timely manner, and provided insight into how the economy was evolving in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶¹ Similar surveys were issued to parents and to pupils. These two surveys are included in the [Burden to Households and Individuals 2020/21](#) report.

⁶² <https://www.citbni.org.uk/News/Survey-reveals-impact-of-Covid-19-on-the-local-con.aspx>

⁶³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/thequestionsonthebusinessimpactofcoronaviruscovid19survey>

⁶⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/coronavirusandtheeconomicimpactsoneconomyandpreviousreleases>

⁶⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandtheeconomyandsocietyfasterindicators/previousreleases>

⁶⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/articles/realtime turningpointindicatorsukfocus/2020-04-27>

Data from BICS was also analysed to produce the [Business Impact of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Survey, expectation responses over time](#)⁶⁷, which compared the turnover expectations of businesses with their outturn, and the [Business insights and impact on the UK economy](#)⁶⁸ bulletins, which used BICS data to provide detailed information on a large range of issues affecting businesses in order to assess the impact of the pandemic on the UK economy and society. This included, but was not limited to, price rises, furlough, home-working, energy costs, wages and supply chain disruption. These data and analysis were also available at [regional level](#)⁶⁹. Additional analysis of businesses' financial performance, resilience, and monthly GDP estimate comparisons are published in [Coronavirus and the economic impacts on the UK](#)⁷⁰.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to great demand for NISRA data to inform local government's reaction and how it has supported local businesses. This included providing detailed business and employment data at low level [Standard Industrial Classification \(SIC\)](#)⁷¹ codes to establish the number of businesses in a certain SIC code/industry that would be eligible for specific support mechanisms, and also helping policy colleagues to understand the impact of local lockdowns of certain industries and the overall NI economy.

A number reports were published by DfE during 2020/21 and early 2021/22 on the impacts of the [COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy](#)⁷². They were heavily informed by NISRA business surveys conducted by ELMS or by ONS on their behalf. These included:

- [Economic Recovery from COVID-19 and Restrictions](#)⁷³ this paper examined the consequences of the pandemic on economic output, businesses, labour market and wider society, along with predictions of recovery within current and upcoming risks. The report made use of quarterly construction output data from the [Quarterly Construction Survey](#)⁷⁴, quarterly service sector output data from the [Index of Services](#)⁷⁵ and quarterly service sector output data from the [Index of Production](#)⁷⁶. It also used the [NI Composite Economic Index \(NICEI\)](#)⁷⁷ which is based on these three surveys and the [Quarterly Employment Survey](#)⁷⁸. These surveys are all part of the *Quarterly Business Survey*.
- [Research on Short and Long Term Impact of COVID-19](#)⁷⁹ this examined the short and long term implications of the impact of COVID-19 and the potential for recovery in the local economy. This report also made use of output data from the Index of Production and Index of Services, along

⁶⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/datasets/businessimpactofcoronaviruscovid19surveyexpectationresponsesvertimeuk>

⁶⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/businessinsightsandimpactontheukeconomy/previousReleases?page=3>

⁶⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/articles/businessinsightsandimpactontheukandsubnationaleconomy/previousReleases>

⁷⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/coronavirusandtheeconomicimpactsoneuk/5november2020#business-impact-of-coronavirus-covid-19-survey-data>

⁷¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/ukstandardindustrialclassificationofeconomicactivities>

⁷² <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/covid-19-analysis>

⁷³ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/research-economic-recovery-covid-19-and-restrictions>

⁷⁴ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economic-output-statistics/construction-output-statistics>

⁷⁵ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economic-output-statistics/index-services>

⁷⁶ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economic-output-statistics/index-production>

⁷⁷ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economic-output-statistics/ni-composite-economic-index>

⁷⁸ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/quarterly-employment-survey>

⁷⁹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/research-short-and-long-term-impact-covid-19>

with data from the [Business Register Inquiry \(IDBR\)](#)⁸⁰ on the number of businesses (broken into different sectors) directly impacted by the restrictions imposed during 2020/21, and data on the number of businesses trading during the period, from the *Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)*.

- [Economic and sectoral impact of eight weeks of autumn 2020 restrictions](#)⁸¹ this examined the economic and impact by sector (such as hospitality and sport) of the eight week restrictions during autumn 2020. Data from the *Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)* 5-Digit SIC, prior to COVID-19 lockdowns, was used to estimate the number of jobs impacted by pandemic regulations, by comparing recent figures calculated by DfE using [HMRC COVID-19 statistics](#)⁸². Recent data for the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\)](#)⁸³ was used to compare earnings between 2019 and 2020, highlighting how earnings from different sectors were affected differently by the pandemic, while financial data from *BICS* was used to identify sectors with high numbers of businesses with low cash reserves.
- [Economic impact of four-week circuit breaker](#)⁸⁴ this report analysed the economic impact of the four-week circuit breaker (i.e. the closing of businesses in certain sectors from mid-October 2020 for four weeks). It also made use of the surveys mentioned above: 5-Digit SIC from *BRES* 2019 and *ASHE* data was used to examine earning by sector during and before the pandemic and *BICS* data to examine business cash reserves.
- [Coronavirus and the NI Economy](#)⁸⁵ this paper assessed the economic impact of the Coronavirus, examining the NI economy along with that of the UK and wider European and Global economies and recovery possibilities. Data from various sources were used, however notably the paper used economic output data from the NICEL to assist in evaluating economic recovery towards pre-COVID levels.
- [The impact of COVID-19 on the NI economy modelled results for Q2 2020 \(August 2020\), Q3 2020 \(December 2020\) & Q4 2020 \(April 2021\)](#)⁸⁶ The Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) created three papers, on behalf of DfE, which examined the potential impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Northern Ireland economy, modelling effects by sectors and regions. These reports primarily utilised *BICS* to calculate regional impacts, such as the number of operation businesses, and the FAI Analysis of [monthly GDP data](#)⁸⁷ from ONS.

Business survey data from annual surveys, such as the [Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry \(ABI\)](#)⁸⁸, [Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics](#)⁸⁹ and [Business Register and Employment Survey](#)⁹⁰, and short-term quarterly surveys such as the *Index of Services*, *Index of Production*, *Quarterly*

⁸⁰ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/business-statistics/inter-departmental-business-register>

⁸¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/economic-and-sectoral-impact-eight-weeks-autumn-2020-restrictions>

⁸² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics#coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

⁸³ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/annual-survey-hours-and-earnings>

⁸⁴ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/economic-impact-four-week-circuit-breaker>

⁸⁵ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-and-ni-economy>

⁸⁶ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/impact-covid-19-ni-economy-modelled-results-q4-2020>

⁸⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gdpmonthlyestimateuk/latest>

⁸⁸ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/business-statistics/annual-business-inquiry>

⁸⁹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/business-statistics/broad-economy-sales-and-exports-statistics>

⁹⁰ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/annual-employee-jobs-surveys/business-register-and-employment-survey>

Construction Survey and *Quarterly Employment Survey* (which collectively form the *Quarterly Business Survey*) have been used to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of a range of COVID-related business support schemes and the High Street Stimulus schemes.

In addition, economists in DfE worked in conjunction with NISRA ELMS to produce a paper and slide pack on the Labour Market impacts of COVID-19 for the new Head of Civil Service (HOCS). This paper provided analysis of pay from *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)*, jobs and the job industry itself from the *Quarterly Business Survey (QBS)* and the *Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)*, and labour market composition from the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#)⁹¹ (a household survey carried out by ELMS). The paper provided compelling evidence of the impacts of COVID-19 and has led to additional research being commissioned in order to understand how other countries have reacted to reduce labour market scarring.

The *Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI)* was used by the Invest NI Executive Leadership Team to gauge business confidence throughout the pandemic and influenced their decision making.

Finally, data from multiple DAERA surveys influenced the execution of the [£25m COVID Support](#)⁹² fund for NI agricultural sectors, which provided financial support to farms in order to recover a percentage (based on sector) of their losses due to the impact of the pandemic on trading in the sectors. The initial case to implement the scheme made use of farm income forecasts based on data from the [Farm Business Survey](#)⁹³, highlighting the impact of the pandemic-induced downturn in the trading ability of the agri-food industry, and the resulting effect on farm incomes. Under the scheme, the beef and sheep sector received support equivalent to 100% of their losses, whereas the dairy, potatoes and ornamental horticulture sectors received support equivalent to 80% of their losses as they were identified as having alternative support measures available. Payment rates were based on market price information collected through the [Raw Milk Producer Price Survey](#)⁹⁴ and information published in the [Agricultural Market Report](#)⁹⁵ which uses data from a range of sources including the *Potato merchants* survey. In order to minimise application burden on farmers, DAERA contacted eligible farmers and applications made use of pre-existing data sources.

⁹¹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/labour-force-survey>

⁹² <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/agriculture-minister-outlines-ps25m-covid-19-fund>

⁹³ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farm-incomes-northern-ireland>

⁹⁴ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/milk-price-and-production-statistics-2000-onwards>

⁹⁵ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/agricultural-market-reports>

Appendix B: Methodology, Quality and Use of Publication

B1. Rationale for publication

The collection of data by government departments and their arm's length bodies (ALBs) causes a burden on data suppliers. It is important to keep this burden to a minimum and hence the practice of survey control has been developed and practiced within Northern Ireland since the 1980s.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)⁹⁶ 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.

V5.4 Voluntary participation in statistical data collection should be sought, rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible.

The burden to businesses due to statutory Government Statistical Surveys is also monitored by the [Statistics Advisory Committee](#)⁹⁷ (SAC). Under the [Statistics of Trade and Employment \(NI\) Order 1988](#)⁹⁸, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult this committee before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses due to NI Government Statistical Surveys⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/statistics-advisory-committee>

⁹⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595/data.pdf>

⁹⁹ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

B2. 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 the Government Statistical Surveys which their department/ organisation had commissioned or carried out in 2020/21. This information was returned to NISRA Survey Control Unit for quality assurance.

Coverage

All statistical surveys to businesses 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.

A separate [Burden to Households and Individuals report](#)¹⁰⁰ is produced for surveys to households and individuals and is published alongside this publication. The scope of survey control was extended to households and individuals in 2014/15. For surveys of households and individuals, survey burden is calculated on the basis of the time taken to respond to the survey.

Definition of Business

For Survey Control purposes, businesses include commercial businesses (including self-employed persons surveyed in the context of their business), schools, universities, colleges, voluntary organisations, non-profit bodies, mutual associations etc. Surveys of local councils are also included under surveys to businesses.

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/email data collection etc.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

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.

Compliance Cost

Compliance costs are the estimated financial burden placed on businesses as a result of completing government statistical surveys. Where the actual or estimated completion time is not available for each business, an overall completion time for the survey is estimated using the median time to complete the survey. The median time to complete the survey is estimated based on: information from the survey, paradata, historical data (within the last five years), a pilot survey, reviews or survey manager expertise. Only those completing the survey are included; nonresponse is assumed to place no burden on respondents. Any time spent establishing eligibility for businesses that are subsequently deemed out of scope is included.

Where a business survey uses a number of different form types, or data collection methods e.g. electronic/postal, and these vary in terms of completion time then the calculations may be conducted separately for each form type/ data collection method and summed for an overall compliance cost.

Similarly, if there are different types of businesses with different completion times then the calculations for each type of business may be carried out separately and summed.

Validation procedures may require a re-contact with the business. The burden due to re-contact is also calculated. If actual or estimated 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.

SCLOs are provided with a choice of five rates of pay taken from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)¹⁰¹. 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 UK median hourly pay (excluding overtime)¹⁰² for the following grades:

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

Any external costs incurred by businesses (e.g. accountant's fees) when complying with government survey requests are also included in the calculation of compliance cost.

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

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

$$\text{Re-contact Cost (£)} = \text{No. re-contacted} \times \text{Median time (hrs)} \times \text{Hourly rate (£/hr)}$$

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

¹⁰¹ The provisional 2020 ASHE results have been used for 2020/21. These figures have been used to ensure direct comparability with 2020/21 compliance costs published for other parts of the UK (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/regionbyoccupation4digitsoc2010ashtable15>).

¹⁰² Table 15.6a: Earnings and hours worked, region by occupation by four-digit SOC: Hourly pay - Excluding overtime 2020

If a survey is carried out on behalf of a number of government departments, then each government department will only include the compliance costs for the questions/ modules commissioned by them¹⁰³.

Compliance costs at current year staff costs (constant prices)

The method used for calculating compliance costs at current year staff costs (or constant prices) is to use the rates of pay for the current, or base year, instead of the rates for previous years. This removes the effect of wage growth (changing staff costs) and adjusts the overall cost making it directly comparable to the current year. Any external costs incurred by businesses have not been adjusted as these represent a small proportion of the overall total.

Grade ¹⁰⁴	2012 (for 2012/13)	2013 (for 2013/14)	2014 (for 2014/15)	2015 (for 2015/16)	2016 (for 2016/17)	2017 (for 2017/18)	2018 (for 2018/19)	2019 (for 2019/20)	2020 (for 2020/21)
Chief Executives and Senior Officials (1115)	£42.50	£43.17	£41.35	£42.42	£43.82	£45.83	£46.00	£44.08	£40.71
Managers, directors and senior officials (1)	£18.57	£19.04	£19.25	£19.42	£19.71	£20.51	£20.60	£20.95	£20.89
Professional occupations (2)	£18.99	£19.23	£19.31	£19.45	£19.71	£20.00	£20.44	£21.08	£21.30
Associate professional and technical occupations (3)	£14.53	£14.74	£14.81	£15.00	£15.00	£15.33	£15.63	£15.73	£15.59
Administrative and secretarial occupations (4)	£9.92	£10.00	£10.12	£10.28	£10.51	£10.71	£11.07	£11.44	£11.56

Statutory and Voluntary surveys

Where the status of a survey is statutory there is a legal obligation on the respondents to provide the information that will be collected, for example, under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. The Code of Practice for Statistics encourages official statistics producers to seek voluntary participation in statistical data collection rather than using statutory powers, wherever possible.

Official Statistics and Other Statistics surveys

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.

Data collection method

The data collection method is recorded for each survey. Prior to 2016/17 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. In 2016/17, this was replaced with a drop-down menu (Paper questionnaire; Paper diary¹⁰⁵; Telephone interview; Face-to-face interview;

¹⁰³ The number of forms however will be the same as for the complete survey, which means that the forms and surveys will be counted more than once in aggregated figures.

¹⁰⁴ Hourly rates of pay are (median) Hourly (£) UK rates of pay (excluding overtime)

¹⁰⁵ This option was first introduced in 2017/18. As paper diaries usually accompany face-to-face interviews, these have been grouped with face-to-face interviews in the analysis. This maintains consistency with what was done in 2016/17 and earlier years. Online/electronic diaries have been grouped with online questionnaire/data collection.

Email data collection; Online questionnaire/ data collection; Online/electronic diary¹⁰⁵; Telephone data entry; and Digital Voice Recognition Survey). SCLOs are asked to identify the primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. method of data collection. As a result, groupings and analysis from 2016/17 onwards will be more accurate than in previous years.

Rounding

In the tables, compliance costs have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Thus figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Compliance costs of less than £1,000 included in the commentary have been rounded to the nearest ten.

B3. Discontinuity (affecting 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19)

The application of the survey control methodology was reviewed prior to the 2016/17 data collection and improved guidance was produced. This has resulted in a discontinuity in the time series as some surveys, and types of surveys, which were excluded prior to 2016/17 are now included.

The methodology used to calculate compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS, on behalf of ELMS, was also revised in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the estimated compliance costs for some surveys in 2016/17, a smaller decrease for 2017/18 offsetting some of the 2016/17 increase, and a relatively small increase for 2018/19.

These discontinuities are noted when presenting the between year comparisons and examining the trend over time.

Reason for Discontinuity – Improved Coverage

Prior to the 2016/17 data collection exercise, a review was conducted of the guidance provided to Survey Control Liaison Officers (SCLOs) to provide greater clarity around the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of surveys. As a result of this review, a number of surveys that were not included in previous years have been included from 2016/17, specifically surveys carried out by 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 are primarily participant evaluation surveys, customer surveys and surveys which have a secondary operational purpose.

Due to these coverage changes, from 2016/17 there is an increase in the total number of surveys, forms and compliance costs. There was a small re-adjustment in 2017/18, as some surveys had been incorrectly included in 2016/17 and these were subsequently removed from 2017/18.

Assessment of Impact of coverage changes

In 2016/17, including those surveys and types of surveys that were not previously included potentially increased the number of surveys by 46, the number of forms by around 17,000 and the overall compliance burden by around £61,000. While these figures gives an indication of the potential size

of the discontinuity, it is difficult to say with certainty what surveys would have been included had the guidance not been reviewed and additional training provided.

In 2017/18, surveys of teachers which had been incorrectly included in the 2016/17 data for DE were removed¹⁰⁶. These surveys were mostly ad-hoc training or event evaluation surveys and accounted for 18 of the additional 41 DE surveys in 2016/17, around 1300 of the additional forms and £2,100 of the increase in compliance costs¹⁰⁷. For DfE, surveys carried out by the Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB NI) were included for the first time in 2017/18. These 13 surveys accounted for 235 forms and compliance costs of £1,600.

Reason for Discontinuity – Change in Methodology used by ONS

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) also carried out a major review of its methodology in 2016/17, with further improvements in 2017/18 and 2018/19. This resulted in a large increase in compliance costs for ONS surveys in 2016/17, a smaller decrease in 2017/18 which offset some of the earlier increase, and a relatively small increase in 2018/19. This change in methodology impacts the compliance costs but not the number of surveys or number of responses.

In 2016/17, ONS moved away from calculating stratified compliance costs based on business size; included an estimate of re-contact burden and reviewed median completion times in conjunction with survey managers.

In 2017/18, median completion times were reviewed for a further ten surveys and median re-contact times (which had been assumed to be equal to median completion times) were revised. This assumption, while allowable under the survey control methodology (see Section B2), inflated the compliance cost estimates for these surveys in 2016/17.

In 2018/19, ONS revisited the staff costs used in calculating compliance burden and moved away from a single occupation code applied to all surveys (ASHE Code 1) to a weighted calculation based on the breakdown of the profession of respondents obtained from survey compliance reviews¹⁰⁸

Assessment of Impact of ONS methodology changes

The change to the methodology used by ONS in 2016/17 resulted in a large increase in the compliance costs for surveys carried out by ONS on behalf of ELMS. While the total number of responses remained approximately constant, at around 12,000, for the 27 surveys carried out by ONS that were common to both 2015/16 and 2016/17, the compliance costs increased by 61% (from £213,100 to £342,600).

¹⁰⁶ Surveys of teachers are excluded from survey control as the majority of teachers are employees of the Education Authority (EA) or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) which are both ALBs of the Department of Education and surveys of government employees are excluded from survey control (see Section B2).

¹⁰⁷ This has been estimated based on the information returned for CCEA (and other DE) surveys in 2016/17.

¹⁰⁸ Compliance reviews of ONS surveys are carried out every three or five years (depending on the frequency of the survey). A subsample is sent a separate survey, asking questions to more accurately calculate respondent burden. Questions are also added to the end of a new surveys or survey with substantial changes to allow ONS to assess the impact.

The impact of the ONS methodology change in 2017/18 has been assessed by applying the revised median completion and re-contact times to the 2016/17 data and re-calculating the compliance costs for those surveys where comparable information is available for both years. Applying the revised median re-contact times to the 2016/17 data, reduces the compliance costs by £81,900; this equates to 62% of the increase observed between 2015/16 and 2016/17 for these 22 surveys. This over-estimation of compliance costs is only present in the 2016/17 data. The review of median completion times affected ten surveys in 2017/18. Applying the revised medians to the 2016/17 data would have reduced the compliance costs by £57,500 and reduced the compliance costs in 2017/18 by £59,300.

The change in the methodology used by ONS in 2018/19 to estimate staff costs has resulted in an increase of £16,700 in the estimated compliance costs for 2018/19. This has been assessed by comparing compliance costs for ONS surveys calculated using the revised approach (a weighted calculation based on all five ASHE Codes) with compliance costs calculated using the previous approach (a single ASHE Code 1).

B4. Main uses of these statistics

These statistics 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. Under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988, a Northern Ireland Department is required to consult SAC before carrying out a statutory survey of businesses¹⁰⁹. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) also consults SAC before carrying out voluntary surveys of businesses. This publication is provided to SAC annually and provides an overview of the overall cost to businesses of completing NI Government Statistical Surveys¹¹⁰.

Information in this publication has previously been used to investigate the cost to Northern Ireland businesses in completing government surveys; to respond to MLA questions; and to provide briefing for the Minister of Finance. The information has also been used by NISRA branches to identify their contribution to the overall burden on businesses, and to assess the impact of alternative methods of data collection on the compliance burden resulting from their surveys.

B5. 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 has improved greatly since the pre-2016/17 review, and is now considered to be of a high standard. The improvements include:

¹⁰⁹ Under this Order, a business is defined as any person(s) carrying out an undertaking by way of trade or business, whether or not the trade or business is carried on for profit; and any other undertaking providing employment in respect of which Class 1 contributions are payable under the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 1975.

¹¹⁰ Previous feedback from SAC indicated that the report meets their needs both in terms of coverage and content. In particular, the feedback from SAC identified that the breakdown of survey costs for statutory and voluntary surveys was particularly useful. The most recent feedback has acknowledged improvements in the coverage of surveys from ALBs and non-NISRA branches, in training provided to SCLOs and the quality assurance methods undertaken prior to the release of the report.

- Improved coverage of non-NISRA branches within Departments; and improved coverage of ALBs.
- Better application of the criteria to determine whether surveys should be included or excluded from the return.
- Better estimation of median completion times, re-contacts and median re-contact times.
- More use of separate calculations for different subgroups where the compliance costs vary across different modes of data collection and/or type of business.
- Improved quality assurance, with the introduction of local quality assurance by SCLOs.

There have also been improvements in the coherence and comparability of the returned data, both within and between departments, due to improved and expanded SCLO guidance, annual training for SCLOs and an improved data collection workbook, including standardised options for e.g. data collection methods; automatic calculation of compliance costs; built-in guidance and basic validation checks.

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 carried out by Survey Control Unit 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.

Changes in the methodology used by ONS - as well as the data quality improvements outlined above - have resulted in a discontinuity in the time series, which are discussed in section B3 above.

Further information on the quality of the data used to produce these official statistics can be found in the [Background Quality Report – Cost to Business of Completing Statistical Surveys issued by Northern Ireland Departments](#)¹¹¹.

B6. User Engagement

User engagement is on-going between the publication of one report and the production of the next. Following the pre-2016/17 review of the guidance and methodology a specific programme of engagement was carried out. This has resulted in some minor changes to the publication e.g. referencing the Statistics Advisory Committee and Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988.

¹¹¹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/background-quality-report-cost-business-completing-statistical-surveys-issued-by>

An engagement exercise is also planned for Summer/Autumn 2022 looking at the content of this report and the accompanying [Burden to Households and Individuals of Completing Statistical Surveys](#) report. Details will be posted on the [Survey Burden page](#)¹¹² on the NISRA website or can be obtained from Garbhan.McKevitt@nisra.gov.uk. The consultation exercise will also be publicised through the NISRA social media channels.

In the interim, we would welcome your feedback, on what you use this report for, any tables/ charts or commentary you find particularly helpful and any additional analysis you would like to see. Feedback can be provided by emailing Garbhan.McKevitt@nisra.gov.uk.

¹¹² <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

Appendix C: Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes

The 2016-21 draft Programme for Government (PfG) comprised 12 strategic outcomes outlined by the Executive to represent the society we wish to have. These 12 outcomes were supported by 49 population indicators, which were accompanied by measures (derived from statistics) which monitored performance in relation to the outcomes¹¹³. The table below lists the 12 outcomes and the indicators used to monitor performance against each outcome.

Detailed descriptions of each of these strategic outcomes can be found in the [Outcomes Delivery Plan \(December 2019\)](#)¹¹⁴, including why each of the outcomes matters; what the issues were and how these would be addressed; the relevant indicators for that outcome (with a link to the data sources); and the proposed actions along with the rationale and associated benefits.

A revised draft PfG outcomes framework (Programme for Government (PfG) 2021¹¹⁵) was consulted on in early 2021. This builds on the previous outcomes-based approach and contains nine strategic outcomes.

OUTCOMES	INDICATORS
1 We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector NI Composite Economic Index • External sales • Rate of innovation activity • Employment rate by council area • % change in energy security of supply margin
2 We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % all journeys which are made by walking/cycling/public transport • Greenhouse gas emissions • % household waste that is reused, recycled or composted • Annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration at monitored urban roadside locations • Levels of soluble reactive phosphorus in our rivers and levels of Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen in our marine waters • Biodiversity (% of protected area under favourable management)

¹¹³ Detailed Measurement Annexes provided further details of each measure, how they were calculated and the data sources used.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/outcomes-delivery-plan-december-2019>. This replaced the 2018/19 Outcomes Delivery Plan (<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/outcomes-delivery-plan-201819>)

¹¹⁵ <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government-pfg-2021>

<p>3 We have a more equal society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap between highest and lowest deprivation quintile in healthy life expectancy at birth • Gap between % non-FSME school leavers and % FSME school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above including English & Maths • % population living in absolute and relative poverty • Employment rate of 16-64 year olds by deprivation quintile • Economic inactivity rate excluding students • Employment rate by council area
<p>4 We enjoy long, healthy, active lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy life expectancy at birth • Preventable mortality • % population with GHQ12 scores ≥ 4 (signifying possible mental health problem) • Satisfaction with health and social care • Gap between highest and lowest deprivation quintile in healthy life expectancy at birth • Confidence of the population aged 60 years or older (as measured by self-efficacy)
<p>5 We are an innovative, where people can fulfil their potential creative society,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate of innovation activity • Proportion of premises with access to broadband services at or above 830Mbps • % engaging in arts/cultural activities • Confidence (as measured by self-efficacy) • % school leavers achieving at least level 2 or above including speeds at or above English and Maths
<p>6 We have more people working better jobs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic inactivity rate excluding students • Proportion of the workforce in employment qualified to level 1 and above, level 2 and above, level 3 and above, and level 4 and above • Seasonally adjusted employment rate (16-64) A • A Better Jobs Index • % people working part time who would like to work more hours • Employment rate by council area • Proportion of local graduates from local institutions in professional or management occupations or in further study six months after graduation
<p>7 We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rate (% of the population who were victims of any NI Crime Survey crime) • A Respect Index • % the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society • Average time taken to complete criminal cases • Reoffending rate crime

<p>8 We care for others and those in need we help</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % population with GHQ12 scores ≥ 4 (signifying possible mental health problem) • Number of adults receiving social care services at home or self directed support for social care as a % of the total number of adults needing care • % population living in absolute and relative poverty • Average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities • Number of households in housing stress • Confidence of the population aged 60 years or older (as measured by self-efficacy)
<p>9 We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Respect Index • % who think all leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres in their areas are “shared and open” to both Protestants and Catholics • % of the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society • Average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities • Confidence (as measured by self-efficacy)
<p>10 We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rate (% of the population who were victims of any NI Crime Survey crime) • Total spend by external visitors • % of the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society • Nation Brands Index • A Better Jobs Index
<p>11 We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average journey time on key economic corridors • Proportion of premises with access to broadband services at speeds at or above 30Mbps • Usage of online channels to access public services • % of all journeys which are made by walking/cycling/public transport • Overall Performance Assessment (NI Water) • Gap between the number of houses we need, and the number of houses we have
<p>12 We give our children best start in life and young people the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % babies born at low birth weight • % children at appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year • % schools found to be good or better • Gap between % non-FSME school leavers and % FSME school leavers achieving at Level 2 or including English and Maths • % school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above including English and Maths • % care leavers who, aged 19, were in education, training or employment

Appendix D: Departments and their abbreviations

Abbreviation	Department
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DE	Department of Education
DfC	Department for 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 E: Further Information

Downloadable data

The data used in this report can be downloaded from the 'NI Statistical Surveys - Assessment of Cost Burden to Business 2020-21' page, which can be accessed from <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>.

Information is provided for each individual survey, including the name, purpose of the survey, 2016-21 PfG outcome, frequency, statutory/voluntary status, official statistics status, data collection methods (primary, secondary etc.), issued sample, achieved sample, median completion time, number of re-contacts, median re-contact time, compliance cost, Department and ALB/branch. The survey contact and a link to the published statistics (or survey) is also included. This allows more detailed analysis to be carried out for individual surveys and/or additional information sought.

Tables and charts

The tables and charts in this report, including the data used in the charts and some additional analysis, can be downloaded from the 'NI Statistical Surveys – Assessment of Cost to Business 2020-21' page, which can be accessed from <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

Other linked publications

Previous publications in this series, and the equivalent publications for the Burden on Households and Individuals can be accessed at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/government/ni-statistical-surveys-assessment-burden>

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