NISRA Annual Business Plan
2020 - 2021

Chief Executive's Foreword

The Agency's operating environment continues to change with the advent of the UK Government's decision to leave the EU, the introduction of same sex marriage legislation and most notably, this year the arrival and spread of the COVID 19 global pandemic, which impacted all NISRA activities. Emergency legislation was introduced to change how deaths are registered and this came into force on March 26 2020.

The emergence of the Coronavirus crisis also saw an increased demand for NISRA services in the areas of death reporting, assessing economic and social impact and analysis to support policy and operational decisions on handling the pandemic. NISRA moved swiftly to reshape how the work gets done, moving to remote working as well as responding to demands for new data. Crucially measures were put in place to keep the vitally important registration service operating under new conditions. Business and social survey needs changed and face-to-face interviewing moved to telephone interviews – NISRA demonstrated its responsiveness as an organisation to fast-moving and ever-changing user needs.

However, regardless of these significant and even life-changing world events we will continue to seek to maintain a high quality and responsive service for our customers in the face of greater budgetary pressures and the new challenges set to us by the NI Executive.

In meeting the ever increasing demand for sound evidence, we will take full advantage of the availability of new data sources, enabling legislation and technology, whilst maintaining quality and seeking to do this more quickly and cost effectively

Our Corporate Plan has been designed to accommodate changing priorities, emerging issues and the new political dynamic whilst setting a clear direction of travel. The annual NISRA Business Plan contains the specific steps we will take as an organisation year on year to deliver on our operational tasks and the planned transformation activity contained in the NISRA INSIGHT Programme.

The choice of the acronym INSIGHT is not just novel shorthand, for it is derived from the very values NISRA staff identified for themselves. And by the same token, insight, is fundamentally what we provide to our customers and users.

Our Balanced Scorecard (BSC) continues to evolve and includes an Outcomes-based Accountability (OBA) element. The NI Executive and the NICS is committed to embedding the OBA approach and the Agency hopes to continue to develop this aspect of the BSC going forward.

In meeting the challenges set out in our Plans all staff will need to play a full and active part and I look forward with anticipation to all that we will achieve.

SIOBHAN CAREY
Chief Executive & Registrar General

Our organisation

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which incorporates the General Register Office (GRO), is an executive agency within the Department of Finance (NI) and was established on 1 April 1996.

The administration of the marriage and civil partnership law in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of GRO, along with the registration of births, deaths, adoptions and gender recognition. GRO is also responsible for the maintenance of registration records and the production of certificates in relation to these events on request.

The Agency is the principal source of Official Statistics and social research on Northern Ireland. These statistics and research not only inform public policy but also academic and private sector research, and contribute to debate in the wider community. We provide our services to a wide range of Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, as well as Local Councils to assist the policy development process and the delivery of their business objectives.

NISRA conducts the Census of Population every 10 years which every household in Northern Ireland must complete by law. It is used by central and local government, health authorities and other organisations to plan and provide future services. The next Census will take place in March 2021.

Our statisticians also make an important contribution to the draft Programme for Government (PfG) providing the data underpinning the vast majority of the 49 Population Indicators and assisting policy colleagues and other stakeholders in developing a greater understanding of the data.

Our purpose

Support decision makers in the formulation of evidence-based policy and inform public debate, through the production and dissemination of high quality, trusted, meaningful analysis; facilitate research and deliver the decennial population census and cost effective civil registration services.

Our mission

Provide citizens and decision makers with trusted insight on life in Northern Ireland.

Our vision

We aspire to:

- be the go-to organisation for an accurate and insightful account of life in Northern Ireland, informing decision making and recognising our people are our strength;
- provide comprehensive registration and genealogy services that give our customers what they need; and
- be motivated and valued people doing excellent work together; innovating, growing, proud of our Agency and our impact.

Our values

Key to the Agency's future success will be the extent to which we live up to the standards we have set for ourselves, both individually and collectively. These are encapsulated within INSIGHT, the initiative we will use to give substance to our shared values, provide a focus for planned transformational activities and be a vehicle for the communication and exploration of organisational culture and the projection of leadership behaviours.

I	Investment	in people, technology and learning and development.
N	Network	of specialist staff across the public sector, working within a shared culture of collaboration, supportive team-working and effective communication.
S	Standards	of best practice, professionalism, personal integrity and respect, taking pride in all we do and delivering on our promises.
I	Improvement	through innovation and a challenge mind-set, supporting positive change and adding value in all we do to increase our efficiency, effectiveness and impact.
G	Good governance	of data and our corporate processes.
H	High quality	insight and analysis, outputs, publications and comprehensive service, engendering trust in what we say and the information that supports it.
T	Trust	extended as a sign of our shared responsibility, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

Challenges we face

Our colleagues, customers and stakeholders across the NICS and the wider public sector tell us that we are delivering what they need and to a high standard. They value both our independence and our trusted status and the support we provide to public policy makers. But the context in which we operate has changed.

Legislation: The Digital Economy Act (DEA) provides new gateways to share and link data for the production of statistics and research and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) strengthens the requirements to be transparent about what we do with data and how we protect it.

In the Civil Registration space there is continuing volatility in demand for services and a number of changes from new legislation as well as judgements on specific cases. In the shorter term, the General Register Office is contending with the task of maintaining a death registrations service during the emergency and the new arrangements implemented under the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Evidence: There is increased demand for sound evidence. The draft Programme for Government has data at its centre and our future relationship with the EU opens up new perspectives on what might be more important to measure. Again the impact of the pandemic was felt by the Agency in meeting the demand for increased data collection and analysis, both locally and nationally. Our teams in Health and TEO specifically rose to the challenge when every decision taken by Ministers and senior officials has been data driven.

Information: The rise of fake news requires insightful truths to be communicated. Citizens have become used to having access to instant information so improving the timeliness and accessibility of the information we produce becomes critical if we are to remain relevant. Our Weekly Death Bulletin has been the centre of media attention and never before

has the demand for reliable, trustworthy statistics by the general public been greater.

Census: A mission-critical task for the Agency will be the successful delivery of the 2021 Census, especially in light of the effects of Covid 19 on normal business activity. The results of this work will be used by Government to determine future resource allocations for key public services such as education and most particularly, health.

Data: Access to administrative data will in some instances add to or replace what we currently collect whilst in others it will provide more frequent observations or improve the ability to drill down to lower levels of granularity. In all instances it will be challenging to incorporate these opportunities into existing processes without a longer term NICS strategy that will help create the necessary infrastructure and facilitate the removal of current perceived legal barriers to data sharing.

Demand: Like all areas of government, we are being asked to do more with less. Particularly this year we will have to continuously review our business model to ensure we are cost effective, representing value for money and continue to provide high quality services that are timely, meet user expectations and comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

People: In meeting these challenges we will ensure that our people are fully equipped, materially, professionally and personally, to maintain our position as the lead NI analytical and research body

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Delivering success

To help deliver these outcomes the Agency Board has committed to implementing a Transformational Programme designed to produce the changes our customers, stakeholders and staff have asked for and that are demanded by the environment in which we now work. The Programme will encompass a range of activates grouped under the following headings:

Culture

Create an organisational environment that inspires and empowers our people, and promotes NISRA values.

People

Optimise the NISRA recruitment, development, promotion and progression processes to meet the existing and future needs of the Agency.

Structure

Review how NISRA is organised and develop an operational model that best meets current and future demand.

Collaboration

Develop mechanisms to generate and support opportunities for collaboration across the Agency and respond effectively to both fluctuations in demand or changes.

Data

Develop a standard methodology for how we work with data and identify a standard analytical toolset in support.

Legislation

Establish a clear and consistent approach to cross cutting legislative compliance in relation to data management and usage to ensure NISRA statistics and research activity remains lawful.

Our priorities

Our annual Business Plan in the form of a Balanced Score Card sets out the actions we will take over the next 12 months to make progress against our longer term priorities described in the NISRA Corporate Plan.

Balanced Scorecard 2020-21

The Balanced Scorecards sets out our objectives for the next 12 months, and the initiatives and measures that we will take towards achieving those outcomes

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Metrics	PfG Contribution
Business	• The Agency will remain within allocated budget. • The Agency will optimise its efficiency through revised working practices to meet customer demand. • The Agency will deliver outputs and provide services that support customer business needs.	• Review organisational/ operational models. • Review Agency Board remit and related structures. • Increase Data Protection / GDPR awareness. • FOI Compliance. • DEA (Digital Economy Act) Compliance.	• Underspend to be as close to budget as possible, at least 2% within budget. • % customers indicating they have used NISRA statistics in the policy/ decision making process. • % customers, using NISRA information for: • Educational Purposes • Academic Research • Personnel research • Business decision making • Other • % general public that state they trust statistics produced by NISRA. • Confirmed number of Breaches of DPA / GDPR. • Subject Access Requests (SAR) processed on time (number / %). • FOI requests processed on time (number / %). • Confirmed number of Breaches of DEA. • Development and delivery of related INSIGHT Project objectives.	• We have high quality public services.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Metrics	PfG Contribution
Customer	• Business Areas will be proactive in their engagement with customers and stakeholders in order to enhance the insight and understand the value derived from their services and releases. • The Agency will maintain or improve overall customer satisfaction with its services. • The Agency will improve its level of brand recognition.	• Establish current/ future demand for NISRA products and services. • Project and promote the NISRA brand. • Undertake customer engagement initiatives. • Add value to statistical outputs.	• % customer satisfaction • Agree/ disagree ratings (%): • NISRA staff are knowledgeable. • NISRA staff respond to my query promptly. • NISRA staff are helpful. • It is easy to find/ locate NISRA report/ data. • NISRA reports are easy to understand. • NISRA staff are courteous and treat customers with respect. • In my dealings with NISRA I am made to feel valued. • Likelihood to recommend NISRA products and/ or services to colleagues. • % of awareness of NISRA amongst the general public. • Awareness of NISRA among customers (%). • NISRA staff will be proactive in engaging with their customers and stakeholders. • NISRA releases will aim to enhance insight on Business areas. • Development and delivery of related INSIGHT Project objectives.	• We have high quality public services.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Metrics	PfG Contribution
Processes	• The Agency will seek ways to innovate and improve its service delivery and optimise efficiently. • The Agency will be fully compliant with all relevant legislation, NICS and DoF policy and procedure and technical good practice.	• Optimise recruitment process. • Review opportunity for flexible/ specialist work. • Increase standardisation of NISRA's products & services. • Standardise the statistical toolset. • Develop process and quality assurance documentation.	• Number of approved staff vacancies filled within 6 months of activation (including temporary appointments). • Number of official statistics publications with corrections (including major corrections and minor errors). • Number of official statistics publications. • Number of national statistics publications. • Number of social science research reports published. • % of official statistical outputs with process documentation. • % of official statistical outputs with a documented quality assurance process. • Number of breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics (broken down by IT vs non-IT). • Development and delivery of related INSIGHT Project objectives.	• We have high quality public services. • We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.

Quadrant	Objectives	Initiatives	Metrics	PfG Contribution
People	• We will strive to improve the level of our wellbeing. • All Agency staff will receive relevant, identified training and skills development commensurate with their role and development needs.	• Identify opportunities for collaboration. • Develop our approach to recognising & appreciating our people. • Conduct a cultural survey & action plan findings. • Produce a new staff development strategy. • Review role requirements across NISRA.	• Number of collaborative[1] projects initiated. • Number of collaborative projects completed. • The number of working days lost due to sick absence per staff year. • % Overall staff satisfaction. • % Employee Engagement. • % level of staff wellbeing • % of staff receiving the identified technical training they need to carry out their jobs. • % of all NISRA staff indicating they have deployed training in their day to day work. • % staff with PPA / PDP completed on time. • % of staff exiting within one year of appointment. • Development and delivery of related INSIGHT Project objectives.	• We have high quality public services. • We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity. • We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.

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[1] The definition of collaborative is a project involving a project with participants outside the branch / department, this includes inter-departmental collaboration and all policy analytical support.

Measuring Success

Our approach to performance measurement and improvement arrangements will ensure that we have an appropriately detailed picture of our progress on delivering the desired outcomes described above. The framework we will use throughout the Plan period is set out in Figure 1 below.
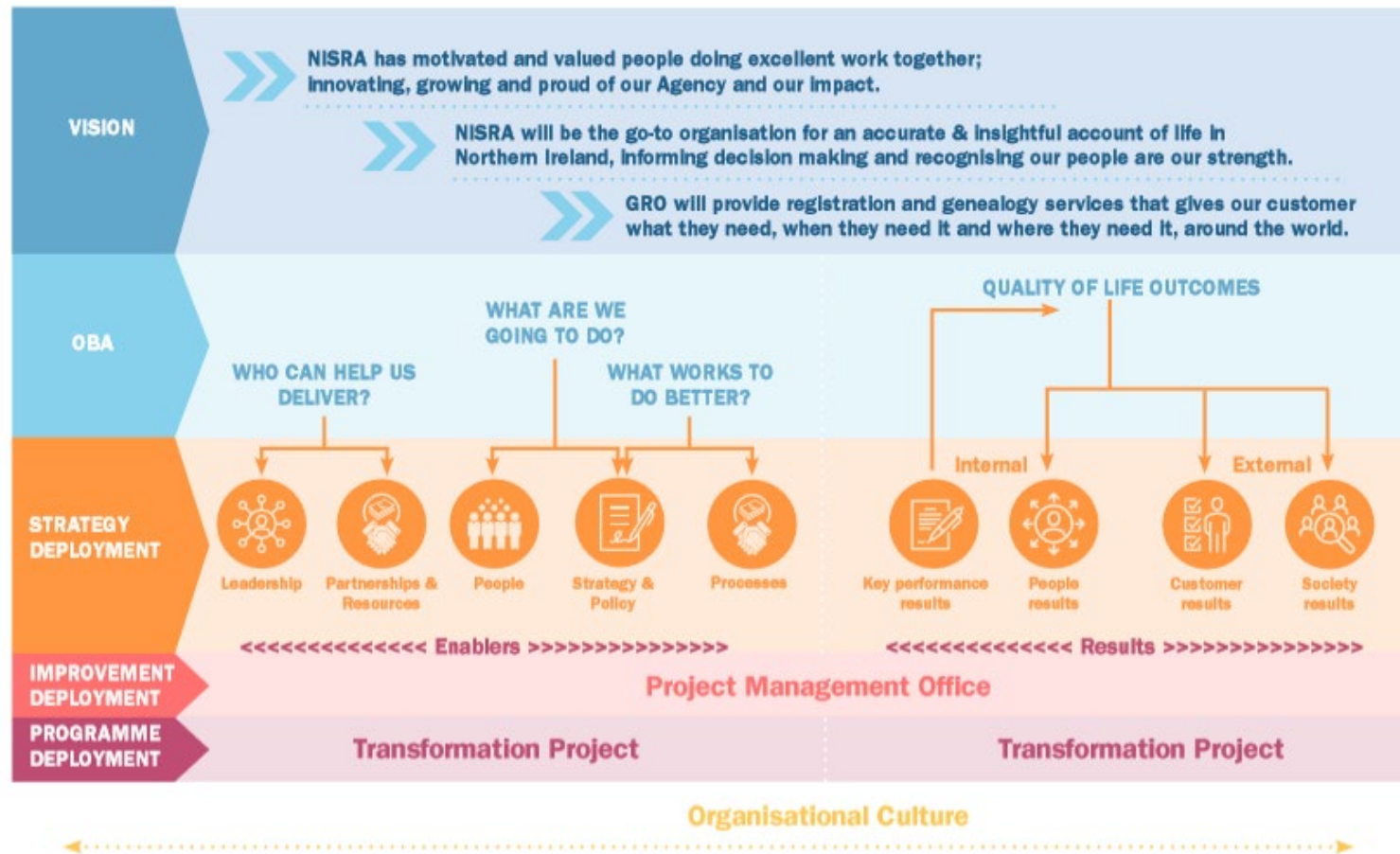

Fig 1: Performance measurement, management & improvement framework

Financial Resources

The Agency's overall draft opening net cash Resource Budget for 2020/21 is £20,313K (2019/20 - £13,037K) and a non-cash allocation of £1,044K (2019/20 - £1,699k). The Agency has received additional funding of approximately £8M for 2020/21 to fund Census 2021.

In addition the Agency has an initial Capital Budget of £1,193K which includes:

- £578K for Reform of Labour Force Survey;
- £150K for continuing work on Economic Accounts;
- £390K for the Data Infrastructure project; and
- £75K for GRO, NIROS replacement.

The Agency's funding position is monitored throughout the year and any emerging pressure or easement is considered at the monitoring rounds. The budget is managed across two distinct business areas; the General Register Office (GRO) and Statistical and Research Services (S&RS). The net Resource allocation includes estimated income totalling £17,386K which will be used to offset the Agency's expenditure. Figure 2 below summarises the opening funding position.

ALLOCATION (£000's)			
	RESOURCE*	CAPITAL**	NON-CASH
GRO			
- Expenditure	3,912	75	
- Income	(3,483)	-	
- Depreciation		-	456
Sub-total (GRO)	429	75	456
S&RS			
- Expenditure	33,787	1,118	
- Income	(13,903)	-	
- Deprecation***		-	588
Sub-total (S&RS)	19,884	1,118	588
Total NISRA	**20,313**	**1,193**	**1044**

Fig.2 NISRA Baselines 2020/21 (Pre monitoring rounds)

* covers all salaries, General Administrative Expenditure (GAE) and council expenses.

** relates to Reform of Labour Force Survey, Economic Accounts and Data Infrastructure (draft Programme for Government), Blaise 5 and various IT projects.

*** covers depreciation associated with the Agency's fixed assets.

Note: The above budget is draft (as at 1 May 2020) and is subject to approval from the Departmental Board.