

# **Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

## **Statistics on Northern Ireland Tourism**

*(produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research  
Agency)*

## **Office for Statistics Regulation**

Following an internal review of the regulatory function of the UK Statistics Authority, prompted by the findings of the 2016 *Independent Review of UK Economic Statistics*<sup>1</sup> by Professor Sir Charlie Bean, the Monitoring and Assessment Team within the Statistics Authority became known as the Office for Statistics Regulation in November 2016.

The UK Statistics Authority comprises both the Office for National Statistics, the UK's national statistical institute, and the Office for Statistics Regulation, the independent regulator for statistics in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-uk-economic-statistics-final-report>

# Contents

## **Executive Summary**

- Subject of the Assessment
- Public Value Statement
- Decision on National Statistics Status
- Strategic Perspective
- Key findings

## **Chapter 1: Public value**

## **Chapter 2: Quality**

## **Chapter 3: Trustworthiness**

## **Annex 1: About the statistics**

## **Annex 2: The source data**

## **Annex 3: The Assessment Process**

## **Annex 4: Responding to the Assessment report: what the Office for Statistics Regulation and the producer body should expect from each other**

## Executive Summary

### Subject of the Assessment

ES.1 This report is prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act allows an appropriate authority<sup>3</sup> to request an assessment of official statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>4</sup> in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request.

ES.2 The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) present statistics on Northern Ireland tourism across a number of published reports and through access to data. The reports include:

- *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics*<sup>5</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Quarterly Tourism Statistics*<sup>6</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Domestic Tourism*<sup>7</sup>
- *External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland*<sup>8</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Annual Hotel, Bed & Breakfast and Guesthouse Occupancy Survey*<sup>9</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics*<sup>10</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Statistics*<sup>11</sup>
- *Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Statistics*<sup>12</sup>

### Public Value Statement

ES.3 Tourism in Northern Ireland (NI) is a growth industry which the devolved government sees as important for the local economy. The development of a new tourism strategy<sup>13</sup>, currently ongoing, recognises this and it is clearly important that this is supported by good data on the nature of the industry and how it evolves over time.

ES.4 NI tourism statistics provide a range of measures of the tourism industry in NI including volume of overnight trips and associated expenditure and visits to visitor attractions. These statistics provide users with information to support planning, marketing and target monitoring related to tourism, at a national and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Subsection 12(7) of the Act defines 'appropriate authority' as Ministers of the Crown, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, Northern Ireland departments or the National Statistician

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/annual-and-quarterly-tourism-statistics-publications>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/annual-and-quarterly-tourism-statistics-publications>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/domestic-tourism-northern-ireland-residents>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/external-visitors-northern-ireland>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/occupancy-surveys>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/local-government-district-tourism-statistics>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/other-tourism-statistics>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/other-tourism-statistics>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/tourism>

local level. Policy officials within the Department for the Economy (DfE) used these statistics as a means of monitoring progress towards Northern Ireland's Programme for Government<sup>14</sup> (PfG) targets 2011 to 2015 related to tourism. These targets aimed to increase visitor numbers to 4.4 million and tourist revenue to £800 million by 2015. Tourism Development Officers within local government districts use the statistics to track changes over time and compare visitor numbers across districts.

## Decision on National Statistics Status

- ES.5 National Statistics (NS) status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value and comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. National Statistics status is awarded by the UK Statistics Authority (The Authority) on the advice of the Office for Statistics Regulation. The Office for Statistics Regulation undertakes an assessment which considers whether the statistics meet the required standard.
- ES.6 The Office for Statistics Regulation judges that NS designation for *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics* should be granted once NISRA has demonstrated that it has enhanced the value, quality and trustworthiness of these statistics in the ways described in sections 1 to 3 of this report. NISRA is expected to report back to the Office for Statistics Regulation by 31 March 2017 whereupon the Authority will decide whether to confer NS designation based on the advice of the Office for Statistics Regulation. NISRA is invited to reflect on whether it feels that NS designation would also be appropriate for each of the satellite statistics and the Office for Statistics Regulation will then give its advice on each of those put forward.
- ES.7 Reflecting the importance of NS designation and to provide users with confidence in the direction of travel, the Office for Statistics Regulation expects NISRA to publish its plan of proposed actions to increase public value, quality and trustworthiness as a result of this Assessment.

## Strategic Perspective

- ES.8 NS designation denotes that statistics not only meet the standards of trustworthiness and quality set out in the Code of Practice for Official statistics, but also shine a light on important issues of policy and public debate. This means that statistics producers need to go beyond reporting data on a 'collect and count' basis by publishing statistics in ways that add value with rich analysis, effective use of charts and infographics, good contextualisation of findings and accompanying supplementary data tables. Wide user engagement is important to support this.
- ES.9 While *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics* endeavours to set the policy context including wider economic and international factors, some of the satellite publications, while well packaged for specific users, are much more limited and might be said to amount to 'collect and count' presentations. These

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2011-2015>

factors – as well as quality issues, will be relevant to our judgement on NS designation for the satellite statistics should NISRA continue to present these.

## **Key findings**

### PUBLIC VALUE

ES.10 NISRA engages actively with the key users of the statistics, demonstrating a good understanding of their statistical needs. NISRA also has good relationships with various bodies that provide data as part of the statistical production process. NISRA should explore more frequent formal engagement with its wider user base to better understand how its statistics are used so that it can look to enhance their public value. In particular, engagement which extends beyond its core users on data quality issues would allow NISRA to better judge how its statistics meet users' needs, which would in turn improve both the quality and the value of its outputs.

### QUALITY

ES.11 The NI tourism statistics are compiled using a range of source data, each having different strengths and limitations which have not been sufficiently articulated to guide users in how far they may rely on each statistic. Following initial feedback arising from this Assessment, NISRA has made a promising start towards addressing this by publishing a single document detailing methods and quality information that users should be aware of. We welcome this improvement undertaken as part of this Assessment. NISRA needs to continue to make improvements in this area.

### TRUSTWORTHINESS

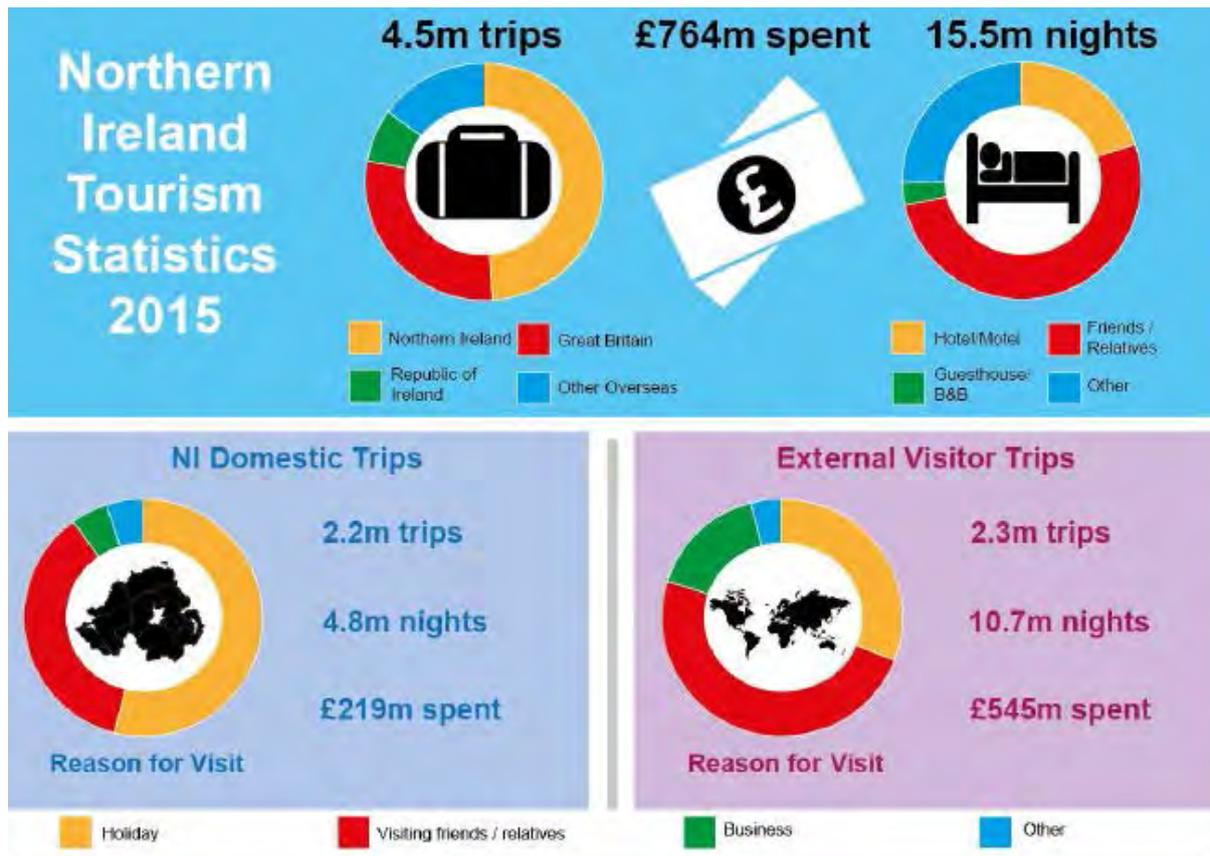
ES.12 Users expressed great confidence in NISRA based on its openness to dialogue, engagement and professional standing. NISRA has demonstrated trustworthiness and professionalism in working with senior officials responsible for policy in the development of the new Draft Programme for Government Framework, ensuring the quality and value of its statistics when used in a policy setting environment.

# Chapter 1: Public value

## Context

1.1 NI tourism statistics, produced by the Tourism Statistics Branch (TSB) of NISRA, provide various measures of the performance of the tourism industry in Northern Ireland. These statistics provide users with information to support planning, marketing and target monitoring related to tourism, at a local and national level.

Figure 1: Extract of Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics 2015



Source: NISRA; Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2015 infographic

- 1.2 Policy officials within the DfE used these statistics as a means of monitoring progress towards Northern Ireland's<sup>15</sup> PfG targets 2011 to 2015 related to tourism. These targets aimed to increase visitor numbers to 4.4 million and tourist revenue to £800 million in 2015. Tourism Development Officers within local government districts use the statistics to track changes over time and compare visitor numbers across districts.
- 1.3 Policy officials, tourism bodies, the tourism industry, local councils, researchers and the public use these statistics to monitor the tourism industry more generally. Tourism Northern Ireland uses the NI tourism statistics, mainly through the micro-data published by NISRA, to produce its own tourism performance statistics<sup>16</sup>. It is interested in both how the tourism industry is

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2011-2015>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.tourismni.com/ResearchIntelligence/TourismPerformanceStatistics.aspx>

performing – the volume of overseas and cross-border visitors – and in, for example, the tourist accommodation occupancy statistics, from an industry perspective.

- 1.4 In response to *European regulation (EU) No 692/2011*<sup>17</sup> and *Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1051/2011*<sup>18</sup>, on the collection and provision of statistical information on tourism, NISRA passes NI tourism data to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which jointly submits data to Eurostat to meet these obligations.

## **Users' Perspective**

- 1.5 As part of this Assessment we invited feedback from NI tourism statistics users about their experiences and views of the statistics; we received only four responses. Those who responded were very positive about their engagement with TSB statisticians and NISRA as a whole.
- 1.6 Users thought the statistics were well-produced and did not highlight any specific issues with quality or accuracy. Some seemed to have a basic understanding of a few of the limitations of the statistics; one user mentioned that they trust that NISRA wouldn't publish data if they were not good quality.
- 1.7 The regulatory team has taken onboard the user comments. However, given the small number of responses received it should be made clear that the conclusions drawn from this Assessment are primarily based on our own view of the statistics in relation to their expected use.

## **Findings**

- 1.8 NISRA has a webpage<sup>19</sup> dedicated to user engagement where it posts minutes of its all-island liaison group and technical subgroup meetings, outcomes of past user consultations, and its query response policy. The all-island liaison group and technical subgroup each meet annually and TSB statisticians told us that attendees come from both users and data suppliers. TSB statisticians use these groups as the primary contact with users and share information on statistical issues such as limitations of the data as well as plans for development.
- 1.9 During the course of this Assessment NISRA has published information on its key users in its *Tourism statistics key users*<sup>20</sup> document, giving details of five user groups and briefly described how they use the tourism statistics. NISRA could do more to add value to its statistics by creating stronger engagement links with a wider range of tourism statistics users beyond the identified groups. NISRA held a wider user meeting in 2013 to update users on progress in response to a public consultation, and it is planning another meeting later this year. NISRA may be able to strengthen its user engagement by making these meetings more frequent. In doing so, NISRA would gain a greater understanding of user needs and be able to suitably document whether the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/legislation>

<sup>18</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/legislation>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/tourism-statistics-user-engagement>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/tourism-statistics-key-users>

statistics, particularly those of lower quality, are sufficient to meet those needs.

- 1.10 The NI tourism statistics publications are engaging to users and in most cases the graphical presentation of key statistics enhances their readability and usability. NISRA uses infographics well, and provides users with a data visualisation tool alongside *Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics*, which is also available in a mobile version. The commentary is generally well written and adequate to support the statistics. However, NISRA could do more to aid interpretation and improve presentation such as using consistent terminology across the suite of reports. The regulatory team highlighted to TSB statisticians a number of specific improvements that NISRA should make for future publications to increase the value of these statistics for users.
- 1.11 The suite of NI tourism publications offers users both a compendium of NI tourism statistics (in *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics*) and further analysis of topics in the satellite publications to meet a wider range of user needs. Across the range of reports, NISRA considers a variety of different measures of tourism and provide users with straightforward analysis and incorporate other relevant information, such as exchange rates and employment figures, in some cases. NISRA could add more value to the statistics by better drawing conclusions from individual analyses to give users a rounded, more informed, picture of NI tourism.
- 1.12 During the course of the Assessment, TSB statisticians made improvements to its website and supporting information to aid users and increase the value of these statistics. TSB statisticians improved navigation through its website by providing access to all its core publications through sidebar web links and consolidated web pages holding supporting information. It released its NI tourism statistics in machine-readable CSV format and made historic statistical reports available to users. We recognise NISRA’s responsive action to address these issues identified during the Assessment process and welcome the improvements made.

**Table 1: Value detailed findings and requirements**

Finding	Examples	Requirement	
NISRA does not have a comprehensive understanding of how its statistics are used or whether its statistics are of sufficient quality to meet user needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within its key users document, NISRA does not fully demonstrate that it has an understanding of how users use its statistics. The user list identified by NISRA is short, which may reflect the niche audience, however it does not capture wider interest in these statistics. The descriptions of use are brief and in some cases</li> </ul>	1	To demonstrate and improve the value of these statistics NISRA should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a fuller understanding of the users and uses of its statistics and document user needs.</li> <li>Consult with its wider user base about data quality issues to better judge whether the</li> </ol>

	<p>describe the user group rather than the use made of the statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outside of its all-island liaison group and technical subgroup, NISRA does not adequately communicate data quality issues to users.</li> </ul>		<p>quality of the statistics is sufficient and to maximise the public value of the statistics.</p>
<p>NISRA does not sufficiently aid understanding of its statistics: information accompanying statistics does not state clearly whether any changes shown are statistically significant; users are not alerted to information that may be relevant to use of the statistics; and NISRA does not always draw out core messages from across the analyses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table 1 in <i>Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics</i> gives statistics on the estimated number of trips, nights and expenditure of tourists in Northern Ireland. The final column shows the % change (2014-15). Figures range from -5% to +7% for different items. Without a clear statement, it is unclear whether all of the changes shown are statistically significant. The background notes state that confidence intervals around the estimates of overnight trips stand at +/-7% for the year and for associated expenditure at +/-11%.</li> <li>• The Northern Ireland self catering occupancy statistics are based on a survey response rate of 27%; the report showing these findings does not state what the implications are for potential uses such as whether the figures are representative of the total stock or not.</li> <li>• In <i>Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics</i> NISRA include statistics from the NI Census of Employment on jobs in the tourism industry. The associated commentary</li> </ul>	<p><b>2</b></p>	<p>To increase the value of these statistics NISRA should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Adopt a clear convention on the reporting of statistically significant differences or changes.</li> <li>b) Provide users with an explicit statement alongside its statistics on whether change reported is statistically significant or not.</li> <li>c) Be clear what can be concluded from the statistics and what cannot be concluded.</li> <li>d) Improve the commentary in its statistical reports to aid user interpretation of the statistics by presenting a narrative that draws meaningful conclusions from the analysis.</li> </ol> <p>In meeting this Requirement, NISRA should consider the Government Statistical Service's guidance for official statistics producers on <i>Communicating Uncertainty and Change</i><sup>21</sup>.</p>

<sup>21</sup> <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/statistics/presentation-and-dissemination/communicating-uncertainty-change/>

	<p>does not link any change in employment to changes in other NI tourism statistics such as number of overnight trips.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland</i> gives expenditure figures and incorporates Financial Times data on monthly exchange rates. The commentary does not help users interpret how the trends identified from exchange rates have impacted on the NI tourism statistics.</li></ul>		
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# Chapter 2: Quality

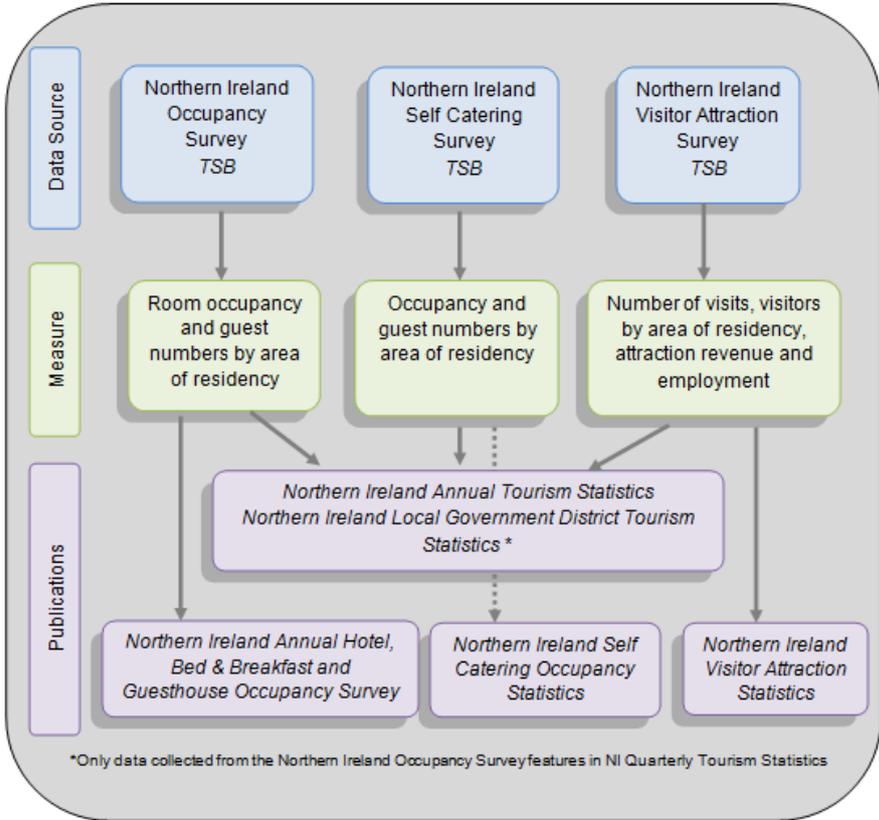
## Context

2.1 Statistical quality is multi-faceted. The European Statistical System identifies five aspects of quality: 'relevance', 'accuracy and reliability', 'timeliness and punctuality', 'coherence and comparability' and 'accessibility and clarity'. The focus is often on 'accuracy and reliability'. The need for statistics to be relevant, accurate and reliable means, in essence, that we are confident that the patterns shown by the statistics reflect real-world phenomena, and are not artefacts of the way that the statistics have been assembled. But these factors also need to take into consideration that without being accessible or timely, statistics fail to add as much public value as they might otherwise.

## Findings

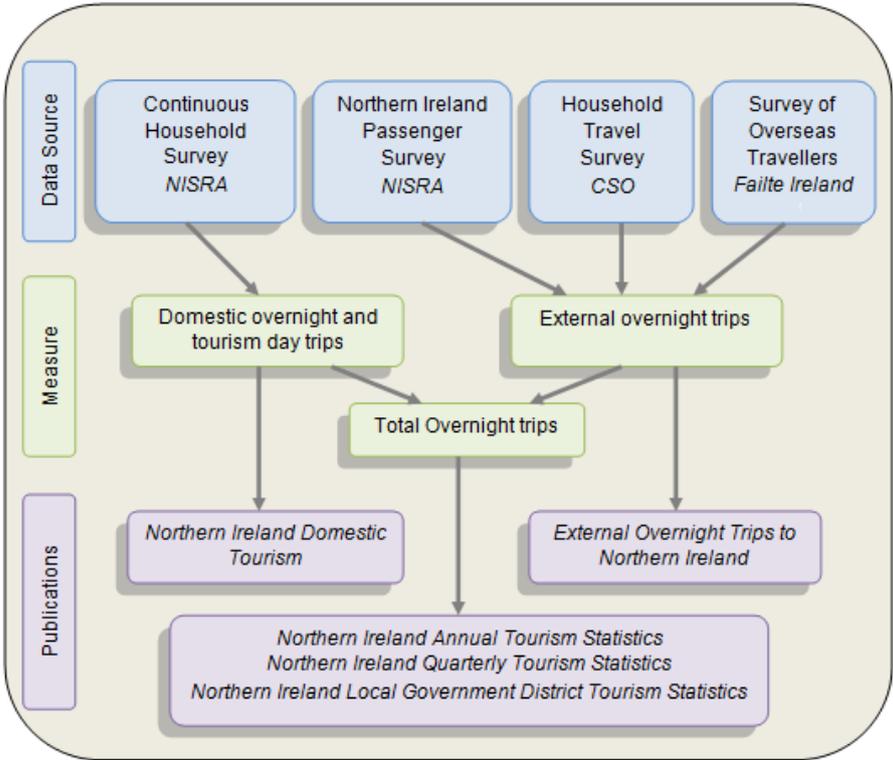
2.2 To produce NI tourism statistics, NISRA uses data from a number of different survey and administrative data sources. These cover both the supply – provision of tourist accommodation and visitor attractions, and demand – requirements for overnight beds. Figures 2 and 3 show the main data sources used.

**Figure 2: Illustration of the supply data sources**



Source: Office for Statistics Regulation

**Figure 3: Illustration of the demand data sources**



Source: Office for Statistics Regulation

- 2.3 With the large range of source data, the NI tourism statistics are more complicated to produce than might be anticipated and there are many technical and quality issues that the TSB statisticians have to contend with. It is our view that TSB statisticians have a sound understanding of the issues with some sources such as differences in visitor counting methods by individual attractions, which impacts on the Visitor Attraction Survey, and poor response rates from the Northern Ireland Occupancy Survey. We found that TSB statisticians were proactive in seeking to address these issues where feasible, and that they had achieved some success in improving response rates within the hotel element of the Northern Ireland Occupancy Survey through engagement with the industry. To try to address existing weaknesses, they have also considered using electronic means for survey response submission and explored opportunities to replace or supplement survey data with alternative administrative data sources although as yet they have not identified an immediate solution. We welcome these efforts.
- 2.4 During the course of this Assessment NISRA developed a consolidated *Tourism Statistics Data Quality Report*<sup>22</sup> to assist users in finding relevant information on quality for the survey data that underlie the suite of statistics about NI tourism. This document gives information on strengths and limitations, survey methods, data validation and quality assurance, and sources for further information, which covers the five aspects of quality identified by the European Statistical System. Quality information is also

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/tourism-statistics-data-quality>

highlighted in the background notes in some cases. The Office for Statistics Regulation welcomes this development and NISRA has provided users with a more complete range of information on surveys than was previously available.

- 2.5 We consider that while changes to information about quality have been made, NISRA could further improve and support users in this regard. Neither in the quality document nor in the outputs themselves does NISRA provide users with its judgement on whether the quality of the statistics is sufficient to meet users' needs particularly in cases where the underlying survey data quality may be low. NISRA should help users interpret quality information, and where it may have concerns about quality issues, provide warnings or guidance on appropriate use more prominently in its statistics to ensure appropriate use of its statistics and prevent users drawing invalid conclusions.
- 2.6 NISRA has also revised its *Quality Reports for Administrative Data Sources*<sup>23</sup> where it provides users with its assessment of level of assurance requirements, and details the quality assurance carried out by both the data suppliers and TSB statisticians. In most cases the quality assurance activities seem appropriate for the level of assurance identified by NISRA and in particular NISRA appears to have strong links and good communication routes with most of its data suppliers. NISRA could strengthen its quality assurance and related documentation for users in some areas and in particular, include information on any implications for the statistics so users can be assured of the quality and be informed of any issues which may affect their interpretation of the statistics.
- 2.7 NISRA produces an array of NI tourism statistics outputs brought together from a range of different sources. TSB has a number of members who lead on different aspects of supply and demand data and the related production of NI tourism statistics. To enhance the quality of the statistical reports themselves, NISRA should consider improvements to its working practices to ensure consistent analysis standards and reporting protocols, and improve proofing and consistency checks across its statistical reports and supporting documentation.

**Table 2: Quality Detailed Findings and Requirements**

Finding	Examples	Requirement	
NISRA has improved its data quality documentation in its <i>Tourism Statistics Data Quality Report</i> and now identifies the strengths and limitations of its	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NISRA states in <i>Quality Report for Administrative Data Sources</i> that it is unsure of any quality assurance carried out by companies supplying seaport data. NISRA does not identify and describe arrangements appropriate to the level of assurance required.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>	To enhance the quality of the statistics NISRA should improve the reporting of quality information for all sources and outputs to ensure appropriate information is available to users. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Providing information in its <i>Tourism Statistics Data Quality Report</i> on its</li> </ul>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/tourism-statistics-data-quality-administrative-sources>

<p>survey sources. NISRA does not however demonstrate its own understanding of the quality of the statistics in relation to user needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NISRA does not include any description of the implications for the statistics of any data quality issues identified in the <i>Quality Report for Administrative Data Sources</i>.</li> </ul>	<p>judgements in relation to any identified quality issues and their implications for the quality of the statistics and a rationale for these in terms of whether the quality of the statistics is sufficient to meet user needs</p> <p>b) Undertaking an appropriate assessment of the quality assurance procedures of its administrative data and suitably documenting this for users</p> <p>As part of meeting this Requirement, NISRA should refer to the Office for Statistics Regulation's <i>Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit</i><sup>24</sup>.</p>
<p>Across the suite of NI tourism statistics there are differences in reporting standards and use of terminology. Within some of the supporting documents, some details have been left incomplete.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Statistics</i> refers to numbers of visitors to different attractions without saying whether they are unique visitors or not. In <i>Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics</i> the same data are reported as 'visits'.</li> <li>• <i>Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Statistics</i> refers to 'self catering units' while <i>Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics</i> refers to 'self catering beds'.</li> <li>• In <i>Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics</i> some horizontal bar graphs present the largest number at the top and some at the bottom.</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>In order to improve the quality and value of the statistical reports NISRA should develop its internal procedures to promote consistency in reporting and improve its review processes for its reports prior to publication.</p>

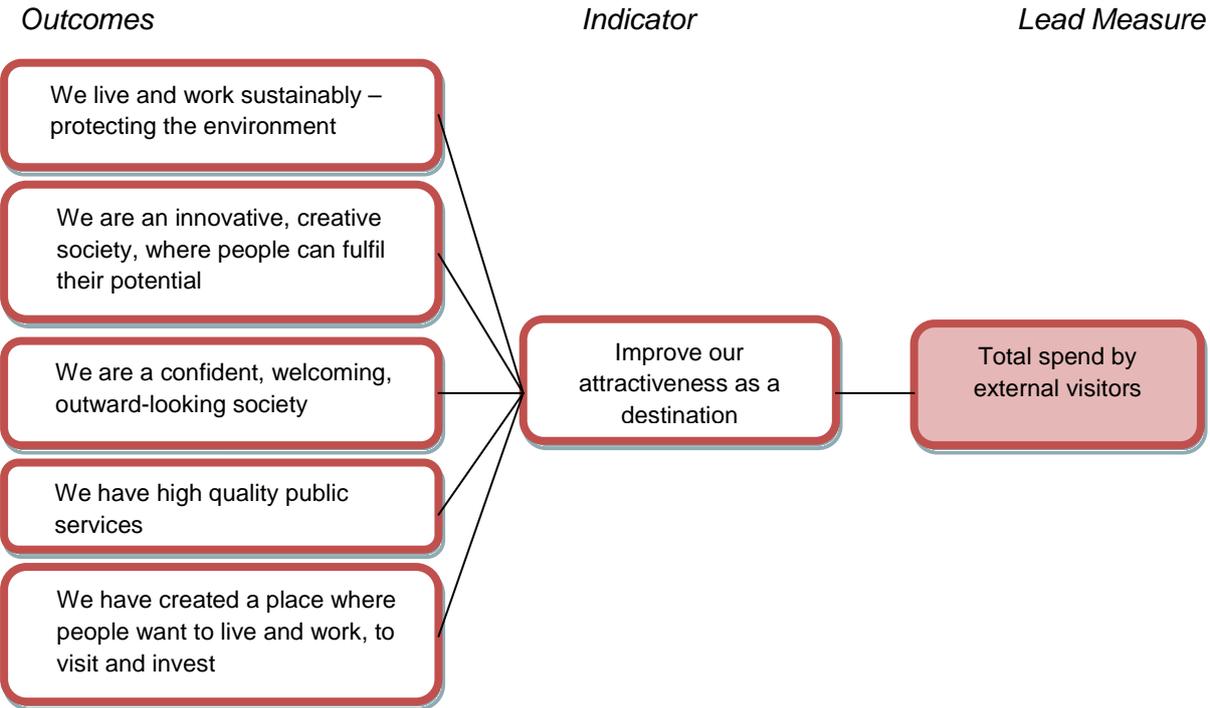
<sup>24</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/>

# Chapter 3: Trustworthiness

## Findings

- 3.1 Policy officials used the NI tourism statistics to monitor progress against Northern Ireland’s PfG targets 2011 to 2015 related to tourism. These targets aimed to increase visitor numbers to 4.4 million and tourist revenue to £800 million in 2015. The NI tourism statistics indicate that the target on visitor numbers was met, while the tourism revenue target was not fully met, which in part may have been influenced by the strength of the pound in 2015.
- 3.2 Policy colleagues alongside TSB statisticians have worked together as part of the government’s revised *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21*<sup>25</sup>, where total spend by external visitors will feature as the lead measure for one of the indicators – “Improve our attractiveness as a destination” – which supports 5 of the 14 new strategic outcomes, see Figure 4 below. The *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21* has been published with the finalised framework planned by the end of 2016.

**Figure 4: Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21 - Outcomes linked to tourism statistics**



Source: Office for Statistics Regulation; Based on Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21

- 3.3 The Office for Statistics Regulation’s *Official statistics, performance measurement and targets*<sup>26</sup> guidance underlines the importance of senior

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-consultation>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/official-statistics-performance-measurement-and-targets/>

statisticians working with senior officials responsible for policy to embed statistical thinking in the development and evaluation of performance measures. The Office for Statistics Regulation recognises the good work and appropriate behaviours exhibited by the TSB statisticians in this regard. It stands as an example of the trustworthiness of NISRA as an organisation which seeks to ensure the quality and value of its statistics when used in a policy setting environment.

- 3.4 During the course of this Assessment, TSB has amended two of its policies. First, its revisions policy<sup>27</sup> to provide clarity on alerting users to unplanned revisions. Second, TSB has set out response times for adhoc queries which can be expected by users and in the course of this Assessment amended its query response policy to include information on charging. The Office for Statistics Regulation welcomes these improvements. However, TSB appears not to have fully complied with its own policy as described in the example in table 3.

**Table 3: Trustworthiness Detailed Findings and Requirements**

Finding	Examples	Requirement	
<p>NISRA revised <i>Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2015</i>, but it did not give sufficient explanation to users of the extent or impact of the revision on the statistics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NISRA states that it will provide users with an explanation as to the nature and extent of any revision to its statistical publication in its revisions policy. The revised <i>Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2015</i> is labeled as such, contains a background note on the reason for the revision, and a link to Central Statistics Office where further information on the change in method for the Household Travel Survey can be found. NISRA does not however provide its users with details of how this change to underlying survey data impacted on its NI tourism statistics.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b></p>	<p>To increase trustworthiness in these statistics NISRA should provide its users with clear and prominent explanations about the nature and extent of any revision as per its revisions policy.</p>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/tourism-statistics-revisions-policy>

## Annex 1: About the statistics

### The Statistics

- A1.1 NI tourism statistics provide a range of measures of the tourism industry in Northern Ireland including volume of overnight trips and associated expenditure and visits to visitor attractions. These statistics provide users with information to support planning, marketing and target monitoring related to tourism, at a national and local level. Policy officials within the DfE used these statistics as a means of monitoring progress towards Northern Ireland's<sup>28</sup> PfG targets 2011 to 2015 related to tourism. These targets aimed to increase visitor numbers to 4.4 million and tourist revenue to £800 million by 2015. Tourism Development Officers within local government districts use the statistics to track changes over time and compare visitor numbers across districts.
- A1.2 In response to *European regulation (EU) No 692/2011*<sup>29</sup> and *Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1051/2011*<sup>30</sup>, on the collection and provision of statistical information on tourism, TSB statisticians pass Northern Ireland tourism data to ONS, which jointly submits data to Eurostat to meet these obligations.
- A1.3 NI tourism statistics consist of a main annual publication, *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics*, which summarises the key features of the five annual satellite publications:
- *Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics*
  - *Northern Ireland Quarterly Tourism Statistics*
  - *Northern Ireland Domestic Tourism*
  - *External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland*
  - *Northern Ireland Annual Hotel, Bed & Breakfast and Guesthouse Occupancy Survey*
  - *Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics*
  - *Northern Ireland Self Catering Occupancy Statistics*
  - *Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Statistics*

NISRA publishes these reports simultaneously in May each year. NISRA also produces *Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics* annually in July; this provides a breakdown of key tourism measures by local government district. Further to these annual publications, NISRA publishes three quarterly sets of data tables reporting on overnight trips, nights and spend of domestic and external visitors – *Northern Ireland Quarterly Tourism Statistics*.

- A1.4 The Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which is now known as Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI), originally produced NI tourism statistics. In 2010, responsibility for these statistics was transferred to the newly established TSB, staffed by

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2011-2015>

<sup>29</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/legislation>

<sup>30</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/tourism/legislation>

NISRA statisticians, based in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), now DfE. The move of responsibilities sought to improve production and survey handling in order for these official statistics to better comply with standards of the *Code*.

- A1.5 From 2011, responsibility for the production of official statistics on the economy and labour market moved to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DfP), now the Department of Finance (DoF). Operational responsibility for statistics production resides with NISRA, an agency of DoF. While responsibility for the statistics production sits with NISRA, and the statistics are accessible through its website, NI tourism statistics are published on the DfE web pages as they are economic statistics.
- A1.6 Since NISRA assumed responsibility for NI tourism statistics improvements in the sampling procedures and data collection methods for which it is responsible (Northern Ireland Passenger Survey and Continuous Household Survey) have been made, with NISRA drawing on the GSS Good Practice Team appropriately. In 2013, as a response to a user consultation NISRA combined available tourism statistics into one timely and complete report.
- A1.7 NISRA told us that the combined cost of producing and publishing the statistics for the financial year 2015-16 was around £585,000.

## **Annex 2: The source data**

### **Data Sources and Flows**

- A2.1 Data used for the production of the set of NI tourism statistics cover both the supply side – provision of tourist accommodation and visitor attractions, and demand side – requirements for overnight beds.
- A2.2 Information on the supply side includes data collected through the Northern Ireland Occupancy Survey, the Northern Ireland Self Catering Survey, and the Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey. The NISRA statisticians in TSB have responsibility for all these surveys.
- A2.3 Demand data, covering the number and length of overnight trips in Northern Ireland and the associated expenditure are collected through four surveys: the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS), the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS), the Household Travel Survey (HTS) and the Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT).
- A2.4 The main data sources of the supply and demand data, the key measures from each and the associated publications are highlighted in Figure 2 and 3 in this Assessment report.

### Annex 3: The Assessment Process

- A3.1 This Assessment was conducted from January 2016 to September 2016.
- A3.2 This report was prepared by the Office for Statistics Regulation and approved by the Regulation Committee on behalf of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Director General for Regulation.
- A3.3 The regulatory team – Marie McGhee and Kerstin Hinds – agreed the scope of and timetable for this Assessment with representatives of NISRA in January 2016. The documentary evidence was provided in February 2016. The regulatory team subsequently met the statistics team at TSB during March 2016 to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the all evidence provided and researched.
- A3.4 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on our website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users’ needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.
- A3.5 We received 8 responses from the user and data supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

**Table 3: Summary of respondents to the assessment consultation**

Users	
Devolved Government	1
Representative body	2
Researcher/Analyst	1
Suppliers	
Representative body	4

#### Key documents

NI tourism statistics and supporting information

NISRA Standards and policies

Other documents provided by TSB statisticians included the following: Organisation charts, communications strategy, process manuals, service level agreement, recruitment documentation, business plans, risk register.

## **Annex 4: Responding to the Assessment report: what the Office for Statistics Regulation and the producer body should expect from each other**

A4.1 The publication of the Assessment report represents a key milestone in the assessment process, but should not be viewed as the end point. The next phase, to meet the Requirements set out in this report, is critical to delivering the value, quality and trustworthiness to achieve and maintain National Statistics status. The next steps are as follows:

- immediately following the publication of the report, the Office for Statistics Regulation will arrange a meeting with the statistics team to talk through the detail of the Requirements and to ensure a common understanding
- the Chief Statistician can follow up with the Assessment Programme Manager about the Director General for Regulation's letter that accompanies this Assessment Report. The letter draws out the key findings and, where appropriate, provides advice about where the statistics team is likely to need senior management support and direction and conveys any findings that have wider implications for the producer body and statistical system
- the Chief Statistician is encouraged to:
  - i) develop an action plan to meet the Requirements to the timetable set out in paragraph ES.6 of this report
  - ii) agree the action plan with her senior management, and confirm that it is appropriately resourced
  - iii) share the action plan with the Office for Statistics Regulation, publish it alongside the statistics, and explain to users and suppliers how it will engage with them in delivering the plan
  - iv) seek out peers and support services that can help in delivering the plan – for example, [the National Statistician's Good Practice Team](#)
  - v) agree with the regulatory team, how often, and in what form, the statistics team would like to engage about progress against the action plan – for example, some teams choose to meet with us once a month
- the statistics team should provide full formal written evidence to the Office for Statistics Regulation by the deadline of 31 March 2017 as set out in paragraph ES.6 of this report. There is no set format for reporting, except that the statistics team should report against each Requirement given in Tables 1 to 3 and provide links to any published or internal documents as support
- we will review the evidence within 10 working days and arrange to provide feedback to the statistics team. As part of this process, we will

talk again to users to establish how their experience of the statistics has changed. When we are satisfied that the Requirements have been fully met, their conclusions will be quality assured by Office for Statistics Regulation's senior management and then presented to the Authority's Regulation Committee to decide on designation. The Director General will then write publicly to the Chief Statistician to confirm the decision

- in the event that Requirements are not fully met within the agreed timetable, the Authority will implement [escalation procedures](#)

A4.2 Based on experience, the Office for Statistics Regulation strongly encourages statistics teams to:

- engage with the detailed thinking of the Assessment report, and revisit it regularly. We will be seeking evidence that the statisticians are demonstrating curiosity and are challenging their own thinking around delivering value, quality and trustworthiness. The Requirements in this report should not be viewed as a simple checklist
- view the responsibility for meeting the Requirements as falling to the organisation as a whole, not just the team that produces the statistics
- engage users early, not just to keep them updated, users can often offer valuable insight and expertise
- contact the regulatory team at any time if there are any questions or concerns

A4.3 Responsibility for complying with the Code of Practice does not end with the award of the National Statistics designation. It is the statistics producers' responsibility to maintain compliance and also to improve the statistics on a continuous basis. The Office for Statistics Regulation encourages statistics producers to discuss promptly any concerns about whether its statistics are meeting the appropriate standards. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated only when standards are restored.