UK Statistics Authority

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland
(produced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland)

Assessment Report 301   May 2015

About the UK Statistics Authority
The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:
1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

Contact us
Tel: 0845 604 1857
Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland

(produced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland)

NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is a producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics, and to improve its statistics on a continuous basis. If a producer becomes concerned about whether its statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, it should discuss its concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Contents

Foreword

Foreword

The Authority initially assessed police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland, produced by Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), in 2012. In January 2014, the Authority cancelled the designation of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales because of concerns about the assurance over the underlying data. As a result of this, the Authority conducted a review of similar statistics in other parts of the UK. The assessment of police recorded crime statistics in Scotland in July 2014 resulted in the Authority also cancelling the designation of these statistics due to insufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with several elements of the *Code of Practice*. In particular, the Authority judged that a comprehensive independent audit of police recorded crime data integrity was an essential pre-requisite before it could confirm National Statistics designation.

This assessment of police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland has not identified the same concerns as those found in England and Wales or Scotland with regards to quality and integrity of the data (in England and Wales) or the lack of assurance of the data integrity (in Scotland). Overall, we have judged that the police recorded crime statistics included within this assessment can be designated as National Statistics.

This decision is based on strong evidence that the statisticians within PSNI have a good grasp of compliance with the *Code of Practice*, and demonstrate this in the published suite of recorded crime statistics, and supporting documentation. The overall decision on *Code* compliance rests on clear evidence of the PSNI statisticians' rigorous approach to analysing and understanding the biases and risks in the crime recording processes; and the implementation and monitoring of appropriate assurance mechanisms to mitigate against these risks. The assurance processes are disclosed fairly, fully and transparently to users of the statistics. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC) recent inspection of crime data integrity in Northern Ireland highlighted a culture within PSNI 'whereby ethical and accurate crime recording is viewed as the "norm"', which is supported by an 'effective crime-recording process including several layers of scrutiny and validation'. HMIC's report did highlight some areas that require PSNI's further attention, and this assessment has reflected those areas that specifically relate to the quality assurance of police recorded crime statistics.

The team that produces the statistics is embedded within PSNI. As a result, the statisticians have a clear understanding of the crime recording processes, and the risks associated with each element of the process. This institutional position is different from that in England and Wales, and Scotland, where the statisticians are based in a different organisation and are not part of the police service(s).

For the avoidance of doubt, we do not advocate either the embedded or the separated model. There are benefits and risks to both models. Rather, we conclude that the embedding of statisticians has enabled them to understand the detailed processes and judgements involved in the recording of crime; and that statisticians who are institutionally separate need to consider how they can replicate this level of knowledge through a close interaction with the police forces who supply them with data. This approach would be consistent with the Authority's expectations set out in our regulatory standard on *Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative*

Data[1]*,* in particular, for producers of official statistics to understand in a detailed way what is going on at the operational level.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation, UK Statistics Authority

---

[1] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html

1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports[2] prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*[3]. The Act gives the Statistics Authority power to re-assess whether the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*[4] continues to be complied with in relation to official statistics already designated as National Statistics. The report covers the set of statistics produced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) reported as follows:

- *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly update*[5] (*Crime Monthly*)

- *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly update to 31 March*[6] (*Crime Annual*)

- *Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland*[7] (*Crime Trends*)

1.1.2 The previous assessment of this set of statistics was reported in Assessment report 214[8]. The Authority has chosen to reassess these statistics due to the nature of concerns raised in our Assessment report 268 *Statistics on Crime in England and Wales*[9] and in response to recommendations made by the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) in its report *Caught red-handed: Why we can't count on Police Recorded Crime statistics*[10].

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Regulation Committee on behalf of the Board of the Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Director General for Regulation.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* are designated as National Statistics, subject to PSNI implementing the Requirements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2015.

1.2.2 During the course of this assessment, PSNI informed the Assessment team that it has addressed two areas of compliance with the *Code of Practice* that

---

[2] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html
[3] http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf
[4] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html
[5] http://www.psni.police.uk/monthly_crime_bulletin_period_ending_feb15.pdf
[6] http://www.psni.police.uk/monthly_crime_bulletin_apr-mar_14_15.pdf
[7] http://www.psni.police.uk/police_recorded_crime_in_northern_ireland_1998-99_to_2013-14.pdf
[8] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-214---crime--road-traffic-collisions-and-the-security-situation-in-northern-ireland.pdf
[9] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-268---statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales.pdf
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/329819/41437_Cm_8910_web_accessible.pdf

would have otherwise resulted in Requirements (see paragraphs 3.45 and 3.52). The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary

1.3.1 In January 2014 the Authority wrote to the Chief Statistician in Northern Ireland to seek reassurance about the quality of police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland, in light of the Authority's Assessment report on *Crime Statistics for England and Wales*. In February 2014, PSNI's senior statistician responded to the Monitoring and Assessment team on behalf of the Chief Statistician, in his role as the responsible statistician for crime statistics. In the letter, he detailed PSNI's quality assurance procedures. He also provided information about an internal audit that the statistics team in PSNI was carrying out at the time, in light of the high profile media coverage of the PASC inquiry into crime statistics. The letter also included the preliminary findings from analysis being undertaken by PSNI of comparisons between trends in the police recorded crime statistics and the Northern Ireland Crime Survey[11] (NICS). The Authority welcomes the senior statistician's professional approach to investigating and reporting on concerns raised about police recording practices in other parts of the UK.

1.3.2 PSNI publishes a range of reports about police recorded crime (summarised in Section 2 of this report), including those within the scope of this assessment. The majority of these are published on a monthly basis, supplemented by more in-depth analysis presented in annual publications. PSNI told us that it produces several regular publications, including *Crime Monthly*, to meet user needs for timely statistics. PSNI engages well with its users and is responsive to their needs.

1.3.3 The statistics covered in this report are generally well presented and informative. Users told us that the statistics team is responsive to data requests and customer enquiries. PSNI has published a range of documents that support the statistical reports, including overviews of aspects of quality that are relevant to the statistics. Comprehensive user guides present more detailed information for each subject area.

1.3.4 The governance of police recorded crime practices in Northern Ireland is different from that in England and Wales and in Scotland, since a senior NISRA statistician is seconded to PSNI and performs the role of the PSNI Force Crime Registrar. In England and Wales, each of the 43 police forces has its own Force Crime Registrar, responsible for overseeing compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime[12] (HOCR) and the National Crime Recording Standard[13] (NCRS). In Scotland, there is one National Crime Registrar working within Police Scotland, supported by three Crime Registrars, each covering a regional area. The Authority considers that the governance of police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland may benefit from the lack of institutional separation between the statisticians responsible for producing these statistics and the operational aspects of crime recording. The senior

---

[11] http://www.dojni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-crime-survey-s-r
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counting-rules-for-recorded-crime
[13] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116269/ncrs.pdf

statistician's dual role as PSNI's Force Crime Registrar and responsibility for the production of police recorded crime statistics has enabled the PSNI statisticians to have a detailed understanding of the crime recording processes and risks to data quality. This allows them to make judgements about implementing and monitoring assurance mechanisms to mitigate against these risks.

1.3.5 The statisticians in PSNI have worked in conjunction with statisticians in the Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI) to develop analysis to compare the police recorded crime data in Northern Ireland with the findings from the NICS. There is however scope for further work, in order to improve the amount of information available for users to aid their interpretation of police recorded crime statistics within the wider context of crime.

1.3.6 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary[14] (HMIC) recently carried out an inspection of crime data integrity in Northern Ireland. HMIC's report on its inspection highlighted a culture within PSNI 'whereby ethical and accurate crime recording is viewed as the "norm"', which is supported by an 'effective crime-recording process including several layers of scrutiny and validation'. HMIC's report did highlight some areas that require PSNI's further attention, relating to its internal audit processes and its audit of crime outcomes.

1.4   Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that PSNI should improve the production and presentation of statistics in *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*. Those which are essential for PSNI to address in order to strengthen its compliance with the *Code* and to enable designation as National Statistics are listed – as Requirements – in section 1.5, alongside a short summary of the key findings that led to each Requirement being made. Other recommended changes, which the Assessment team considers would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation as National Statistics, are listed – as Suggestions – in section 1.6.

1.5   Requirements for designation as National Statistics

1.5.1 This section includes those improvements that PSNI is required to make in respect of its statistics in *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* in order to fully comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, and to enable designation as National Statistics.

Finding		Requirement
HMIC's inspection of crime data integrity in Northern Ireland has identified a strong crime-recording	**1**	Enhance its arrangements for auditing the quality of administrative data used to compile the Northern Ireland police recorded crime statistics in the light of the Authority's regulatory standard on *Quality Assurance*

---

[14] http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/about-us/

accuracy rate within PSNI, but HMIC recommended that PSNI should adopt a more comprehensive approach to its internal audits judging the whole incident from the initial call through to victim feedback and that it should improve the rigour of its audit of out-of-court disposals. PSNI should:		*and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data*, and HMIC's recommendations by: a) publicly stating how it plans to address HMIC's recommendations that are relevant to the quality assurance of police recorded crime data; b) publishing demonstrable evidence that the findings from HMIC's inspection have been considered, and implemented where appropriate, in the compilation of the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*; and c) updating its published quality information for these statistics, making it clear how the Authority's guidance and the outputs from the inspection informed its understanding of the quality of the statistics (para 3.34).
PSNI's analysis comparing police recorded crime data with results from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey does not include detailed analysis of comparable crime by crime type. PSNI should, in updating the analysis comparing police recorded crime statistics and the NICS to include the results of the 2013/14 NICS:	2	Update and expand its analysis by: a) analysing, in conjunction with DOJNI, crime trends in the police recorded crime statistics and the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, to include, where feasible, comparisons by crime types, with suitable caveats about the quality of the estimates; and b) publishing, or clearly linking to, information about the recent changes in the NICS sample size and response rate over time and the impact of these changes on the quality of the statistics (para 3.38).

1.6   Suggestions for extracting maximum value from the statistics

1.6.1   This section includes some suggestions for improvement to PSNI's statistics in *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

We suggest that PSNI:

1	Expand the information that it publishes about revisions to police recorded crime to include information about the scale of recorded crimes that are subsequently 'no crimed' (para 3.10).
2	Clearly outline its plans to report based on the new crime outcomes framework, making clear to users of its statistics the reasons why it

	will be reporting on these different crime outcomes measures, with user guidance on the most appropriate use of each measure (para 3.16).
3	Include in its *User Guide* further information about why it believes the potential effects of policing targets and operational priorities on the police recorded crime statistics are mitigated by its quality assurance processes (para 3.25).
4	Include information about the NICS sample size and response rates in its *User Guide*, to further aid users in their understanding of any difference between crimes recorded by the police and that experienced by the population resident in households, and the resulting impact on how users should interpret crime statistics (para 3.38).
5	Refer in *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* to the different sources of crime statistics across the criminal justice system; and include prominent links to those reports in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual and Crime Trends* (para 3.39).
6	Consider publishing the analyses it carries out on outcome rates in response to FOI requests (para 3.47).
7	Provide more information in *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* about the content of the *User Guide* and include more specific links to relevant sections of the *User Guide* (para 3.48).
8	Consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2 in order to enhance the statistical reports (para 3.48).
9	Label the annual publication more clearly to show that it is different to the monthly publications (para 3.49).
10	Include a link to the NINIS website from *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* (para 3.51).
11	Update its Statement of Administrative Sources documentation if necessary, once it has fully implemented Requirement 1 from this Assessment report (para 3.59).

2   Subject of the assessment

Police recorded crime

2.1   Various factors affect how a crime is recorded by the police after it is reported. Not all crimes are *reported to* the police – *police recorded* crime is a subset of reported crime, which is itself a subset of *total crime*. Police recording practice in Northern Ireland is governed by the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime (HOCR)[15], the National Crime Recording Standard[16] (NCRS) and the National Standard for Incident Recording[17] (NSIR). The rules and guidance cover how crimes should be categorised, and whether or not a reported incident should be considered a crime, a crime-related incident (CRI) or another type of incident. The rules provide a national standard for the recording and classifying of notifiable offences by police forces in England and Wales. Although PSNI does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, the same recording practices are followed and applied within Northern Ireland. However, there are some differences in legislation between the two jurisdictions which impact on the presentation of the statistics and potential comparisons between police recorded crime in Northern Ireland and in England and Wales (see paragraph 3.17 for an example).

2.2   There are a number of ways that crimes can be reported to the police, for example by someone calling 999 or 101, visiting a police station, reporting to a police officer on the street, or making contact by email or letter. Police officers may also identify crime themselves through being on patrol or through proactive operations, and can receive referrals from third parties such as social services. Incidents that are reported to the police are initially recorded on PSNI's Contact Record Management System (CRMS), which is used to filter or flag up repeat victims to the call handler to help inform their decision as to whether a priority police response is required. The preliminary details are recorded on CRMS and, where these details indicate that a crime or relevant incident has occurred, the incidents are then also recorded on the Command and Control System (CCS). Each reported incident automatically transfers from CCS to PSNI's Occurrence Management System (referred to as NICHE, a system that has been designed specifically for police services to record and manage occurrences) where full details of the incident are then recorded. Incidents may also be created directly on the NICHE system.

Governance of the police and police recorded crime

2.3   PSNI is a single police force serving Northern Ireland. It is an Arm's Length Body of the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (DOJNI) and was established in 2001. The senior officer in charge of PSNI is its Chief Constable. There are 11 policing districts in Northern Ireland; each is led by a Superintendent. PSNI publishes monthly and annual statistics on crime in Northern Ireland, which are produced by a statistics team that is led by a senior statistician. Statistical staff in the team are seconded to PSNI from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

---

[15] See footnote 12
[16] See footnote 13
[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116658/count-nsir11.pdf

2.4   DOJNI was established on 12 April 2010 as part of the devolution of justice matters to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Prior to 2010, the Northern Ireland Office was responsible for general justice policy, and the Ministry of Justice, within the UK government, was responsible for the courts in Northern Ireland. DOJNI is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system in Northern Ireland, and supports the Minister of Justice, who is a member of the Northern Ireland Executive.

2.5   PSNI is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board[18] (NIPB), a non-departmental public body which is composed of members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and independent members of the community, who are appointed by the Minister of Justice. The Board's statutory duties are governed by the *Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000*[19] as amended by the *Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003*[20]. These statutory duties include setting priorities and targets for police performance within PSNI; monitoring the work of the police and how well they perform against the targets set by the Policing Board; and publishing a rolling three year annual policing plan each year that reports on police performance. The NIPB is also responsible for appointing PSNI's Chief Constable.

2.6   Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland[21] (CJINI) is an independent statutory inspectorate with responsibility for inspecting all aspects of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland apart from the judiciary, under both the *Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002*[22] and the *Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007*[23]. It also inspects other agencies and organisations that link into the criminal justice system, for example, the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. Each organisation in the criminal justice system is represented on a Criminal Justice Board, which has responsibility for developing strategy for the criminal justice system and ensuring that it works in a coordinated way. CJINI carries out a range of inspections, and uses police recorded crime statistics to inform its inspection work. As part of its published inspection programme, CJINI plans to undertake an inspection of 'the availability and use of management and performance information across the criminal justice system' which will examine the use of police recorded crime statistics by PSNI and other organisations in the criminal justice system. This work is scheduled for 2015, and will be published later in 2015.

2.7   The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) is responsible for providing an audit service to the Northern Ireland public sector. NIAO's Comptroller and Auditor General has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources. Section 28 of the *Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000* requires the NIPB to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The NIPB is required

---

[18] http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/
[19] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/32/contents
[20] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/6/contents
[21] http://www.cjini.org/Home.aspx
[22] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/26/contents
[23] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/6/crossheading/human-rights-commission

to prepare and publish a performance plan for each financial year and a performance summary in respect of the previous year. On 17 February 2015, NIAO published its report on the *Continuous improvement arrangements in policing*[24], which details NIAO's audit of the NIPB's 2014/15 Performance Plan and its 2013/14 Performance Summary. The report presents an unqualified audit opinion along with a series of recommendations for the attention of the NIPB and PSNI. See paragraph 3.35 for further detail about these recommendations.

2.8   The senior statistician in PSNI performs the role of PSNI's Force Crime Registrar, supported by a Deputy Force Crime Registrar within the statistics team, to oversee compliance with the HOCR and the NCRS. These responsibilities include determining whether a 'no-crime' decision can be made (reversal of the decision that an incident was a crime), and in validating the outcomes that can be recorded against a crime in accordance with the HOCR framework for recorded crime outcomes. As set out in the HOCR, the Force Crime Registrar (and the statistics team) conducts a range of checks and internal audits of recording practices within PSNI. These include an internal audit of potential missed crimes, identified through a check of crimes classed as 'incident only'; monitoring the ratio of 'incidents flagged to Occurrence and Case Management Teams[25] (OCMTs) for checking' to 'incidents containing one or more crimes' to provide an indication of the consistency of the automated quality assurance process. The statistics team carries out internal audits of missed crime non-compliance. The statistics team also conducted a more comprehensive audit between December 2013 and February 2014, which focused on the main aspects of the Home Office Data Quality Assurance Manual[26], as well as on key data quality aspects covered by an Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary[27] (HMIC) inspection in Kent[28] which was published in June 2013. This PSNI audit included an assessment of approximately 1,800 incidents that were reported to police in Northern Ireland between 1 April 2013 and 30 September 2013. Paragraph 3.28 contains further detail about the results of this audit.

2.9   PSNI does not fall under the direct remit of the Home Office, therefore is not included in crime data audit programmes run by HMIC. However, in light of the recent crime recording data quality issues in England and Wales, the NIPB invited HMIC to conduct an inspection of crime data integrity within PSNI during September 2014. The inspection was distinct from the inspection programme commissioned by the Home Secretary, covering all 43 police forces in England and Wales earlier in 2014. However, HMIC's inspection was carried out using the same methodology as those carried out in police forces across England and Wales. HMIC published its report *Crime data integrity: Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland*[29] on 19 March 2015, which sets out its findings and recommendation against the themes of Leadership and

---

[24] http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/continuous_improvement_2015.pdf
[25] These teams are centralised support unit of trained staff responsible for ensuring that crimes are identified and correctly recorded through application of the NCRS and the HOCR
[26] This manual is not currently published
[27] See footnote 14.
[28] http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publication/crime-recording-in-kent/
[29] http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publication/crime-data-integrity-inspection-of-the-police-service-of-northern-ireland/

governance; Systems and processes; and People and skills. Section 3 of this report details the inspection's main findings and recommendations that are pertinent to this assessment.

Statistical reports about crime

2.10   PSNI produces statistics on police recorded crime based on an aggregated count of each crime within the notifiable offence list. The statistics present the numbers of police recorded crime by crime type, by offence groups within each crime type and by policing district. The statistics also present the percentage of recorded crimes that have a crime outcome recorded against them (crime outcome rates), by crime type, offence group and by the type of disposal applied to determine the outcome recorded. PSNI publishes police recorded crime statistics in three statistical reports:

- *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly update (Crime Monthly)* is published in 11 months of each year (the March figures are subsumed into the *Crime Annual* release in May). It is released four weeks after the end of the month to which the statistics refer and contains a summary of the latest provisional police recorded crime statistics. The report presents statistics on the numbers of recorded crimes and the numbers of recorded crimes which have been assigned an outcome for the most recent 12-month period, compared with the previous 12 months. Every three months, the report includes statistics on offences involving knives or sharp instruments, in line with the reporting practices in England and Wales.

- *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly update to 31 March (Crime Annual)* is published annually in May. It generally follows the format of *Crime Monthly*, presenting statistics on the numbers and types of crimes recorded by the police in the preceding financial year. The report presents key trends for each type of crime, and statistics for offences recorded and those crimes that have an outcome recorded against them, by type of crime, area and district. The commentary considers changes in the statistics compared with the previous year. The format of *Crime Annual* is very similar to *Crime Monthly*, although it includes some additional content.

- *Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland (Crime Trends)* is published annually in July. It provides an in-depth analysis of trends in recorded crimes by each type of offence and provides overall crime trends back to 1970. It also presents details of the type and age of victims, trends in outcome rates, and a brief overview of geographic patterns of crime in Northern Ireland.

2.11   PSNI also publishes a range of related official statistics to complement the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*:

- *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland: Quarterly update*[30] is published every three months, in February, May, August and November. It presents statistics relating to domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police, and includes comparisons of recorded crimes, incidents and outcome rates between the recent 12-month period and the previous 12-month period.

---

[30] http://www.psni.police.uk/quarterly_domestic_abuse_bulletin_period_ending_mar15.pdf

- *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland*[31] is published each July. It presents analysis of the trends in domestic abuse incidents and crimes since 2004/05 by crime type, type of victim, victim and offender characteristics, and policing district statistics. The report also presents analysis of trends in outcome rates by offence group and method of detection.

- *Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland: Quarterly update*[32] is published every three months, in February, May, August and November. It presents statistics relating to hate motivated incidents and crimes recorded by the police, and includes comparisons of recorded crimes, incidents and outcome rates between the recent 12-month period and the previous 12-month period by types of motivation.

- *Trends in Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland*[33] is published each July. It presents analysis of the trends in hate motivated incidents and crimes since 2004/05 by crime type, type of motivation, victim type, and policing district and areas. The report also presents analysis of trends in outcome rates by offence group and method of detection.

- *Police Recorded Drug Seizure Statistics in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update*[34] is published two weeks after the end of the month to which the statistics refer, and is released in 11 months of the year (the March figures are subsumed into annual report released in May). It presents statistics relating to the numbers of drug seizure incidents recorded and number of drug related arrests for the financial year to date, compared to the previous two financial years. It also presents analysis by drug type and policing area and district.

- *Police Recorded Drug Seizure and Arrest Statistics: Annual Report*[35] is published each May. It presents statistics relating to the numbers of drug incidents, arrests and seizures recorded for the previous full financial year. The report includes an analysis by policing area and district, and comparisons with the previous two years and commentary of trends over the past ten years.

- *Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update*[36] is published three to four weeks after the end of the month to which the statistics refer, and is released each month. The statistics published for the 12-month period to 31 March are published five to six weeks after the end of the period to which they refer, as they include finalised figures for the full financial year. The reports present statistics relating to the numbers of anti-social behaviour incidents recorded by the police for the year to date and

---

[31] http://www.psni.police.uk/domestic_abuse_incidents_and_crimes_in_northern_ireland_2004-05_to_2013-14.pdf

[32] http://www.psni.police.uk/quarterly_hate_motivations_bulletin_period_ending_mar15.pdf

[33] http://www.psni.police.uk/hate_motivated_incidents_and_crimes_in_northern_ireland_2004-05_to_2013-14.pdf

[34] http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_drug_statistics.htm

[35] http://www.psni.police.uk/annual_statistics_report_drug_seizures_and_arrests_2014-15.pdf

[36] http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/update_antisocial_behaviour_statistics-2.htm

include comparisons between the recent 12-month period and the previous 12-month period.

Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS)

2.12   DOJNI publishes *Experience of Crime: Findings from the NICS*[37]*,* which is produced using data collected by the NICS[38]. NICS is a continuous, personal interview survey of the experiences and perceptions of crime on the part of adults living in private households in Northern Ireland. In January 2005, NICS began operating on a continuous basis after previously being conducted as an ad-hoc survey in 1994/95, 1998, 2001 and 2003/04. NICS is an important source of information about levels of crime and public attitudes to crime in Northern Ireland. It closely mirrors the format and core questions of the Crime Survey for England and Wales[39] (CSEW), previously known as the British Crime Survey. *Experience of Crime: Findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey* is published annually (last published on 27 February 2015) and presents statistics on property crime, such as vandalism and domestic burglary, and violent crime, including common assault and mugging. It also presents trends in crime prevalence; comparisons with crimes recorded by the police; and comparisons with similar statistics for England and Wales, produced from CSEW.

Uses and users of crime statistics

2.13   The statistics on police recorded crime in Northern Ireland are used extensively within PSNI to monitor its performance against key performance indicators within the annual policing plan. PSNI has a statutory requirement in the *Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000* to report to the NIPB on its performance on an annual basis; PSNI's Chief Constable reports on performance against the policing plan at quarterly meetings of the NIPB. The Act also requires the NIPB and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships[40] to monitor the performance of the police. PSNI uses the statistics to monitor performance at each of the 11 policing districts against key performance indicators agreed with their local Police and Community Safety Partnerships; and to inform police analysts of ongoing crime trends.

2.14   The police recorded crime statistics are also used by DOJNI to inform its Minister and other members of the Northern Ireland executive, and by members of the Justice Committee in Northern Ireland, of crime trends in Northern Ireland. They are used to inform the NIPB, and members of its relevant committees, on PSNI's performance against its performance indicators; and to inform Police and Community Safety partnerships on the performance of local police commanders against agreed performance indicators in their local policing plans.

---

[37] http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/northern-ireland-crime-survey-s-r/r-s-bulletin-1-2015-experience-of-crime-findings-from-the-2013-14.htm
[38] See footnote 11
[39] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/guide-to-finding-crime-statistics/crime-survey-for-england-and-wales--csew-/index.html
[40] Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are local bodies made up of Councillors and independent people from each council area, who aim to make communities safer

2.15   Police recorded crime statistics are also used by the media to inform the public on relevant trends in crime. Academic researchers use the statistics to assist with related academic research projects. Local and national special interest groups or voluntary organisations have a particular interest in the crime statistics that relate to their policy area. PSNI use the statistics in response to both Assembly and Parliamentary questions, informing public debate and concerns around criminal activity. The statistics are also used by businesses and members of the public to identify crimes that may affect them relating to their business or the areas in which they live or work.

Report formats

2.16   PSNI publishes *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* in PDF format, with supplementary tables published in Excel format. Since 30 October 2014, PSNI also publishes the tables in an Open Document Format (ODF). This equates to a level of three stars under the Five Star Scheme that forms part of the Open Standards Principles proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*[41] and adopted as UK government policy in November 2012[42]. Five stars represent the highest star rating within the Scheme. PSNI makes the crime statistics available on the NISRA neighbourhood mapping site[43] (NINIS), to enables users to download police recorded crime data for low-level geographies. PSNI also submits monthly police recorded crime data to the national Crimemapper[44] website, which is presented as management information.

Costs

2.17   The data for these statistics are sourced from internal PSNI administrative databases which are used to record and investigate crimes reported. A section of PSNI's statistics team is dedicated to overseeing that crimes are recorded in compliance with HOCR and NCRS. The estimated costs for the production of PSNI recorded crime statistics is approximately £277,000 annually and includes input from three statisticians seconded from the NISRA along with six PSNI administrative staff. There is no additional burden placed on the public, or on businesses, in collating these crime statistics, other than the normal paperwork associated with reporting a crime to the police.

---

[41] http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf
[42] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles
[43] http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/
[44] http://www.police.uk/

3   Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

3.1   The senior statistician told us that the statistics team liaises with colleagues within PSNI, providing them with statistical support as requested, and discussing how it can improve its service to better meet internal PSNI needs. The team also liaises with officers and staff in PSNI to provide updates regarding the impact of changes to systems or the national guidelines on how the statistics are collated, for example, changes to the HOCR for recorded crime. The statistics team is also in regular contact with statistical and policy colleagues in other government departments and agencies (such as DOJNI and NISRA) through ad-hoc meetings. These meetings are usually scheduled by PSNI statisticians to communicate any forthcoming changes to national guidelines, the potential implications of these on police recorded crime and the statistics published by PSNI, and to discuss their statistical needs. PSNI told us that minutes are not taken, as these are usually informal arrangements.

3.2   The statistics team gave examples of where it had engaged with users outside PSNI. For example, individuals from a third sector organisation visited the team to learn about crime-recording practices, police recorded crime statistics and their limitations. Senior members of the team also attend regional policy meetings in relation to specific aspects of crime recording, such as the recording of domestic violence. The senior statistician is a member of the UK Crime and Justice Theme Group[45], which discusses strategic police recorded crime statistics matters. The group meets annually and members receive updates three times a year. PSNI's senior statistician and deputy are also members of the North West Regional Force Crime Registrar Group[46], which usually meets quarterly (but sometimes more frequently). A representative from the North West Regional Force Crime Registrar Group attends the NCRS Technical Working Group[47] and communicates outcomes from discussions at these meeting to the statisticians in PSNI. The senior statistician also communicates regularly with the National Crime Registrar in England and Wales, to stay informed of developments in crime recording. PSNI told us that it is also contacted by academics and researchers, and provided an example where they improved information presented in its *User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland*[48] *(User Guide)* in direct response to feedback from these users. However, this user engagement is not fully documented.

3.3   PSNI conducted a user survey in October and November 2011 to gather user views about the statistical service provided by PSNI, such as levels of satisfaction with the content, presentation and timeliness of the crime statistics

---

[45] https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/about/governance-and-structure/themes/
[46] This is a group of Force Crime Registrars and deputies in the North West Region of England.
[47] The minutes of these meetings are not publically available, but can be accessed by police officers and staff via a secure website called Polka
[48] http://www.psni.police.uk/user_guide.pdf

PSNI publishes (the survey included users of *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual, Crime Trends* and other National and official statistics not included within the scope of this assessment). The results of the survey[49] indicated that the majority of users felt that the recorded crime statistics fully or mostly met their needs. In May 2014, PSNI conducted the user survey again. The results of the May 2014 survey[50], published in June 2014, showed that almost all users of recorded crime statistics felt that their needs were fully or mostly met. Users were most satisfied with 'overall data quality' and 'content' of recorded crime outputs and least satisfied with 'ease of finding'. PSNI also published a summary of the user feedback[51] (grouped by common themes) and its response or action taken as a result of the feedback. PSNI uses these views to inform its statistical planning and priority setting.

3.4 PSNI has regularly consulted with its users relating to proposed changes to its statistical outputs or processes. For example, in December 2012, PSNI launched a consultation on the presentation of police recorded crime statistics under two broad categories[52] – 'victim-based crime' and 'other crimes against society' – in order to improve clarity of presentation. The consultation followed a similar exercise conducted by ONS on police recorded crime in England and Wales, which resulted in a change to the previous classification system and was to be implemented from 1 April 2013. PSNI notified users of the proposed change and asked for comments by a specified closing date. PSNI published a summary of users' feedback and the action that it took in response to the feedback it received[53] on the statistics area of its website. As with England and Wales, the change in crime recording classifications became effective from 1 April 2013, with the first set of crime statistics based on the new classifications published in June 2013. PSNI also publishes a summary of the user consultations it has conducted in section 2.3 'User needs and user consultation' of its *User Guide,* which is accessible alongside *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* in the 'Statistics' section of its website.

3.5 PSNI responds to, and keeps a log of, requests received from users for additional data and analysis. PSNI statisticians told us that the team has a good insight into the wider use of the statistics through the high volume of requests and queries sent to the dedicated user email address, which it advertises in the statistical reports and on statistics section of the PSNI website. For example, in 2012/13, the statistics team received 136 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and received 124 requests between April and September 2014. PSNI uses this information, alongside users' responses to its surveys and consultations, to update and extend existing published information about uses, users' needs and users' views of the statistics. PSNI publishes comprehensive information about the groups of users of the statistics in its *User Guide*, which also includes detailed descriptions of the different uses of the statistics. We consider the way in which PSNI has documented users and uses of its statistics as good practice.

---

[49] http://www.psni.police.uk/psni_statistics_branch_user_survey_2011_key_findings.pdf
[50] http://www.psni.police.uk/psni_statistics_branch_user_survey_may_2014_report_for_web_final_2.pdf
[51] http://www.psni.police.uk/recorded_crime_statistics_user_feedback_and_comments.pdf
[52] http://www.psni.police.uk/proposed_changes_to_police_recorded_crime_classifications.pdf
[53] See footnote 52

3.6   The statistics team has established lists of key users of the crime statistics (and for users of its other National and official statistics) and sends them relevant emails relating to the latest bulletins being issued or notifying them of any key changes to the website or consultation documents. The statistics team in PSNI also includes an email link on its website that encourages users to join the user groups and email listings. The senior statistician told us that he is aware of user requirements for crime statistics to be as up to date and as frequently available as possible; therefore, PSNI publishes crime statistics monthly in *Crime Monthly* to meet this user need, and has outlined the balance that needs to be achieved between providing figures that are as up to date as possible with data that are of sufficient quality. PSNI publishes a 12-month publication schedule[54] for *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* on its website and also publishes a User Engagement Strategy[55] which provides details of how users can access information that is not included in regular publications.

[54] http://www.psni.police.uk/crime_publication_schedule.pdf
[55] http://www.psni.police.uk/psni_user_engagement_strategy_final.pdf

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

> Requirements from previous Assessment report 214 (June 2012):
>
> - Publish statements to explain the nature and extent of revisions made, in particular to the provision of monthly statistics, at the same time that the statistics are released and ensure that all earlier releases are made accessible to users on the website

3.7   The commentary within *Crime Monthly, Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* is impartial and factual and includes descriptions of changes in crime over the previous 12 months as well as the longer-term trends. From April 2013, as a result of responses to a user consultation on improvements to the presentation of police recorded crime, PSNI implemented changes to the classifications used to present police recorded crime data. The change related to presenting police recorded crime under two broad categories – 'victim-based crime' and 'other crimes against society' – and was consistent with changes made to the presentation of police recorded crime in England and Wales from April 2013[56]. PSNI consulted users in advance of the changes to the crime classifications being implemented and published supporting information on the impact of these changes[57] on previously published recorded crime statistics for 2010/11 and 2011/12. PSNI has also implemented a revised framework for recorded crime outcomes[58] from April 2015, to improve the amount of information it presents about the outcomes of crimes recorded by the police. These changes will be consistent with those implemented by the Home Office for crime outcomes in England and Wales from April 2014 (section 1 of *Crime Outcomes in England and Wales 2013/14*[59] provides more information about the new outcomes framework). PSNI consulted users on these changes in December 2012[60].

3.8   PSNI publishes provisional monthly crime statistics in *Crime Monthly*, to provide timely statistics to users. PSNI has published a revisions policy[61] which explains that the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly* are provisional and are superseded by the next update of the same statistics during the financial year; the final crime statistics at the end of the financial year are published in *Crime Annual* which presents the 'finalised' crime statistics for the year. The statistics presented in *Crime Annual* are not subject to planned revisions. PSNI told us that work undertaken by the team has demonstrated that the police recorded crime statistics presented in *Crime Monthly* are usually 96 per cent complete when they are first published as provisional, and that their accuracy increases

---

[56] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/presentational-changes-on-police-recorded-crime-in-england-and-wales.pdf
[57] See footnote 53
[58] http://www.psni.police.uk/consultation_on_a_revised_framework_for_recorded_crime_outcomes_in_northern_ireland.pdf
[59] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/331597/hosb0114.pdf.pdf
[60] See footnote 59
[61] http://www.psni.police.uk/revisions_statement.pdf

in the subsequent monthly updates. The revisions policy also includes information about corrections and errors, and the instances when these would be applied to the statistics. PSNI told us that there have been no instances of errors being identified for the police recorded crime statistics.

3.9   In response to Assessment report 214, PSNI now publishes statements in *Crime Monthly* to explain the nature and extent of revisions made to the statistics, in relation to the number of crime records that have been completed in the financial year to date, as well as the percentage of crime records that are incomplete in the latest month to which the statistics refer. The publication also includes the possible reasons why revisions are applied. In addition, all earlier releases of *Crime Monthly* are published in a 'Crime Statistics archive' section on PSNI's website. *Crime Annual* includes information about the extent of revisions for crime statistics published in the monthly update for February, since there is no separate *Crime Monthly* report published for March statistics.

3.10   PSNI's *User Guide* includes a description of 'no crimes', and situations when a 'no crime' decision may be applicable. Crime reports that are subsequently 'no crimed' are removed from the police recorded crime statistics, and are therefore not included within the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*. PSNI's revisions policy states that a revision can be applied to reflect a 'no crime' decision, and a description of this policy is included within *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual.* Although these reports include the scale of revisions applied to the police recorded crime data, the scale of revision does not distinguish between the nature of revision, for example if the recorded crime was subsequently 'no crimed'. We suggest that PSNI expand the information that it publishes about revisions to police recorded crime to include information about the scale of recorded crimes that are subsequently 'no crimed'.

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

3.11   PSNI publishes a statistical press notice[62] alongside the annual police recorded crime statistics presented in *Crime Annual*. The information contained in the press notice is factual and unbiased, and is released separately from related press statements[63] that are also published on PSNI's website. PSNI told us that there have been no instances where a statement about the statistics presented in *Crime Annual* has been made ahead of their publication. The senior statistician monitors media coverage of the police recorded crime statistics and works in conjunction with PSNI's Corporate Communications Department to follow up when misuse of the statistics in the press is identified.

3.12   PSNI's senior statistician is the statistical Head of Profession within PSNI and determines the statistics publication schedule. The statistical reports and any statistical press releases are drafted by statisticians within the statistics team in PSNI who are responsible for determining the presentation and content of the reports. PSNI told us that these are approved by the senior statistician, with no influence from PSNI senior management, which sees the statistics presented in *Crime Annual* only through normal pre-release access arrangements. No pre-release access is granted for *Crime Monthly* or *Crime Trends*. The statistics team told us there have been no instances where it had experienced pressure from other colleagues within PSNI or from Ministers which might influence the production or presentation of the statistics.

3.13   Statistical staff in PSNI's statistics team, including PSNI's senior statistician, are seconded to PSNI from NISRA. HMIC's report *Crime data integrity: Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland* notes that 'there is a unique situation in Northern Ireland with the PSNI not only having a statistics branch, but also with the key posts in that branch being filled by independent personnel employed by the NISRA. This statistical approach is evident in the type and style of audits undertaken'.

3.14   Part of the PSNI senior statistician's role is to advise PSNI senior management on statistical issues and he is often asked to comment or provide statistical advice to the Chief Constable and PSNI senior management team. The senior statistician is often asked to attend meetings between other agencies and the NIPB where relevant statistical matters are being discussed, to ensure that the correct statistical interpretation of the figures is conveyed. The senior statistician also assumes the role of the PSNI Force Crime Registrar, supported by a Deputy Force Crime Registrar within the statistics team. The senior statistician told us that his dual role as PSNI's Force Crime Registrar and the statistical Head of Profession within PSNI enables him to understand the implications of any changes to the HOCR and NCRS on police recording practices and on the statistics PSNI produces. HMIC's report notes that this arrangement adds value, as 'he is able to undertake the role of FCR effectively

---

[62] http://www.psni.police.uk/psni_statistical_press_release_2014_15_final.pdf
[63] http://www.psni.police.uk/index/news-archive/news-2014/may_2014/general_annual_crime_statistics_2013_14.htm

and with total independence but can also add a statistics dimension to any analysis'.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

> Suggestions from previous Assessment report 214 (June 2012):
>
> - Review the range of published statistics on crime and road traffic collisions and casualties with a view to providing a coherent range of releases
> - Provide clear links to equivalent statistics for the other countries of the UK in the releases, and include information about the differences between the statistics

3.15   The methods used to produce the police recorded crime statistics in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* are detailed in the *User Guide*, which is linked from the statistical reports. The *User Guide* also presents the definitions relating to crimes, incidents and outcomes (previously referred to as detections), and a description of the crime types presented in the statistics and the range of crime outcomes that can be recorded against a crime, if a set of defined principles are applicable. *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* all present outcome rates (formerly referred to as detection rates). These are the number of crime outcomes recorded in a given year expressed as a percentage of the total number of crimes recorded in the same period.

3.16   The *User Guide* also presents information on a revised framework for recorded crime outcomes[64] developed by the Home Office and introduced in police forces in England and Wales from 1 April 2014 and notes that its introduction in PSNI is planned for April 2015. In July 2014, the Home Office published *Crime outcomes in England and Wales 2013/14*[65] which presented options for reporting on the new outcomes framework in England in Wales, along with a consultation seeking user views. The Home Office plans to publish official statistics based on the new crime outcomes framework in July 2015. PSNI's senior statistician told us that PSNI has started to implement the new crime outcomes framework into its systems and that it will be monitoring the Home Office's reporting of the new crime outcomes framework in England and Wales in July 2015. PSNI's senior statistician also told us that he expects to publish statistics based on the new crime outcomes, but not until at least 2016/17. PSNI will continue to publish statistics based on the current crime outcomes framework in its *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* publications even once the new outcomes framework is fully implemented, to facilitate the performance monitoring requirements of the NIPB. We suggest that PSNI clearly outline its plans to report based on the new crime outcomes framework, making clear to users of its statistics the reasons why it will be reporting on these different crime outcomes measures, with user guidance on the most appropriate use of each measure.

---

[64] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/157796/consultation-response.pdf
[65] See footnote 61

3.17   As detailed in Section 2 of this Assessment report, police recording practice in Northern Ireland is governed by the HOCR and the NCRS which provide a national standard for the recording and classifying of notifiable offences by police forces in England and Wales. Although PSNI does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, the same recording practices are followed and applied within Northern Ireland. However the *User Guide* states that differences in legislation between the two jurisdictions must be taken into account when making comparisons between police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales and those for Northern Ireland. For example, Sections 4 and 5 of the *Public Order Act 1986*[66], covering offences within the England and Wales classification '9A Public Fear, Alarm or Distress', do not extend to Northern Ireland.

3.18   Incidents that are reported to the police are initially recorded on PSNI's CRMS, and then recorded on the CCS, where the details indicate that a crime or relevant incident has occurred. Details of each incident automatically transfer from CCS to PSNI's Occurrence Management System (referred to as NICHE) where full details of the incident are then recorded. Central support staff in PSNI use defined question lists to prompt officers for key information to ensure sufficient details are obtained to inform the crime recording decision making process. Incidents may also be created directly on the NICHE system. When a police officer attends the scene of a crime, the officer will report details of the crime to the centralised support unit by calling this information into the unit, which will input these details onto NICHE. Police officers in Northern Ireland do not use handheld devices for the purpose of recording details of a crime, as happens in England and Wales. NICHE was introduced in PSNI in April 2007, following a significant period of development and planning. PSNI statisticians told us that the NICHE system was run in parallel with their existing system between January and March 2007, and the use of the system was trialled in several policing areas before this time. The statisticians also told us that there was an initial period of six to eight months where there were some delays to the time it took to validate crimes recorded, but that overall the implementation of NICHE was successful.

3.19   Once the incident details have been input onto NICHE they are passed to the OCMTs within PSNI (see paragraph 2.8 for further detail on the OCMTs). These are a centralised support unit of trained staff that is responsible for ensuring crimes are identified and correctly recorded through application of the NCRS and the HOCR. Incidents containing a range of crime-related and potentially crime-related NSIR codes are automatically flagged with the OCMTs for crime assessment and to identify possible missed crimes to follow up. If there are insufficient details to inform the crime recording decision process, the OCMT staff will contact the relevant officer until either the crime has been recorded or the reasons why a crime should not be recorded have been confirmed in an auditable log. All recorded crimes are checked for compliance with the HOCR, and for completeness and quality of the information captured, before they are classed as validated by staff in the OCMTs.

---

[66] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64/section/12

Quality assurance processes

3.20 Once a crime has been assessed and validated by the OCMTs it is available for inclusion in the crime dataset on PSNI's internal management information system. Figures are extracted from this system on a monthly basis to compile the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*. Section 4 of PSNI's *User Guide* contains a detailed and helpful diagram which summarises the various stages in the crime recording processes within PSNI, and the range of mechanisms that PSNI has put in place at each stage to mitigate against potential risks or errors to the integrity of the police recorded crime data. The guide also describes the quality assurance processes in place to ensure the integrity of the police recorded crime where a range of checks is carried out by staff in the OCMTs and by staff in PSNI's statistics team. The statistics team has developed an automated risk-based approach in the OCMTs' processes and systems to identify potentially missed crimes. This automated process flags incidents which have been opened or closed with specific NSIR codes and for incidents whose details suggest a crime should be recorded, but none have yet appeared. The statisticians in PSNI have demonstrated that they have considered the risks to data quality and have applied appropriate quality assurance mechanisms throughout the crime recording process. HMIC's report notes that 'crime recording in the PSNI is a very structured process with numerous checks and levels of validation undertaken in centralised units. This process, involving occurrence case management teams (OCMT) and the crime management support units (CMSU) with final validation by the statistics branch, delivers accurate crime recording and classifications. We were impressed by the level of knowledge within these units of both NCRS and the HOCR. This process means that operational staff do not need the same understanding of NCRS and the HOCR as officers in police forces that adopt a different process. We found no evidence that the knowledge of NCRS and the HOCR was anything other than appropriate for their roles'.

3.21 The statistics team conducts a range of ongoing quality assurance checks that are built into the crime recording on NICHE (there are 93 checks in total) to identify and correct inconsistencies within the data and to minimise any under-recording or over-recording of crime. The statistics team told us that it has applied a proportionate, risk-based approach to the application of the quality checks with priority given to those that have the most direct impact on the quality of published recorded crime figures:

- Priority 1: Daily checks that maximise the accuracy of figures which are updated daily for internal performance monitoring; examples include checks that identify validated offences with no person or business classified as a victim; this check prompts the member of staff to add a victim classification as required.

- Priority 2: Monthly checks which identify potential missed crimes and outcomes; an example of this is where the check lists all occurrences where one victim has more than one offence recorded about them, and prompts the member of staff to check whether the HOCR are applied correctly.

- Priority 3: Monthly checks which improve data quality, for example:

  − essential checks to ensure that victim age, victim gender or injury level matches the offence that has been recorded;

- desirable checks which identify records where the location, property or weapon details may be inconsistent with the recorded offence;

- non essential checks which may identify missing or potentially incorrect information but which would not have a direct impact on the quality of the published recorded crime figures.

3.22 One of the checks carried out by the statistics team is an 'incident only' check, which relates to incidents that have been checked by OCMTs and identified as having no crimes contained within them. These checks are used to identify potential crimes that may have been missed by OCMT staff, or incidents which contained no indication of a crime at the initial check but information that has been added at a later stage suggests that a crime may have occurred. PSNI told us that the standard quality checks are reviewed on an annual basis to confirm that they continue to be sufficient to cover the range of data quality issues that exist. Once a crime has been validated on the NICHE crime recording system by the statistics team, only staff in the statistics team is able to reclassify the crime, with queries issued to OCMTs if further information is required.

3.23 PSNI told us that only staff within the statistics team are able to validate the outcomes that are recorded for a crime (where this is applicable) in accordance with the HOCR. Outcomes are counted on the basis of crimes rather than offenders. The majority of outcomes recorded will be dependent on the decision made by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland[67] (PPS), if it judges that the evidential test has been met[68]. The PPS decides whether the evidential test is met for most charges and cautions, and all summonses. In 2013/14, approximately 87 per cent of outcomes recorded against crimes related to charges, cautions and summonses. Decisions by the PPS are recorded on a shared system called 'Causeway', which then automatically updates the occurrence on NICHE with the PPS decision. The statistics team is therefore able to check the decision made by PPS in order to validate the outcome recorded. Where there are changes to the decision made by PPS, Dedicated Decision Makers within PSNI[69] review cases where charges are dropped or where an alternate or lesser offence is charged, to ensure compliance with HOCR. For outcomes relating to out-of-court disposals (these are Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND) and discretionary disposals), this decision rests with PSNI officers. In line with national guidance, only certain offenders may be offered out-of-court disposals, for example, previous offending may mean an out-of-court disposal is not appropriate. These disposals are relatively few in number and the statistics team validates each crime outcome, including out-of-court disposals, for compliance with HOCR. A joint group composed of policy colleagues in the PSNI's Service Improvement Department and PPS also conduct dip samples of the use of discretionary disposals to ensure they are being used in line with police guidance. These audits review ten per cent of disposals selected at random. Paragraphs 3.31 and 3.32 describe HMIC's inspection of out-of-court disposals.

---

[67] http://www.ppsni.gov.uk/
[68] This is defined as 'the evidence which can be adduced in court is sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction'
[69] There are 3 Dedicated Decision Makers within PSNI, who are police inspectors that head each of the main OCMTs in PSNI. They are independent of the police investigation related to the crime recorded.

3.24 There are instances where recorded crimes are subsequently 'no crimed', where it is determined by the police that no crime actually took place. The HOCR sets out circumstances under which a crime report may be 'no crimed'. These include situations where a crime is considered to have been recorded in error or where, having been recorded, additional information becomes available that can be verified by the statistics team that determines that no crime was committed. 'No crimes' relate to crimes already recorded and are therefore distinct from incident reports that are not recorded as crimes in the first place. Only the statistics team can amend police recorded crime data to reflect a 'no crime', which would then be removed from the police recorded crime statistics. HMIC's recent inspection of crime data integrity included an inspection of 'no crimes'. See paragraph 3.33 for more detail.

3.25 PSNI told us that it publishes monthly statistics in *Crime Monthly* to meet users' needs for timely statistics on police recorded crime. The 'Notes' section of *Crime Monthly* presents the level of completeness of the recorded crime data (based on the percentage of crime records that have completed the validation process), for both the last complete month and for the financial year to date. For example, the monthly update for February 2015 presented in *Crime Monthly*, published on 26 March 2015, states that 97.0 per cent of crime records are complete (therefore, they have been validated) for the latest month, and 99.7 per cent for the financial year to date. On 12 May 2015, PSNI published its monthly update for the year ending 31 March 2015 (this is PSNI's *Crime Annual* publication), which presents final figures for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015; 100 per cent of crime records are complete for this publication. PSNI has also published a quality report[70] for statistics on police recorded crime in Northern Ireland which is based around the dimensions of the European Statistical System quality framework. PSNI publishes the report on its website and references it in the *User Guide* and in the statistical publications. The commentary in *Crime Trends* presents some contextual information relating to instances where operational priorities may impact on the number of outcomes recorded for specific crime groups, such as drug offences. None of the publications discusses the potential effects of targets or operational priorities on the statistics. PSNI told us that it has developed its crime recording and quality assurance processes with the aim of producing the highest quality statistics it can, regardless of whether a particular measure is included in targets in NIPB's Policing Plan. The statistics team provides technical advice to colleagues in PSNI and to NIPB in relation to the design of targets, which the Assessment team regards as good practice. In its recent inspection of crime data integrity, HMIC indicated that it 'found no evidence of performance pressures of any kind influencing crime recording'. We suggest that PSNI include in its *User Guide* further information about why it believes the potential effects of policing targets and operational priorities on the police recorded crime statistics are mitigated by its quality assurance processes.

Quality assurance checks and internal audits of crime recording practices

3.26 The senior statistician in PSNI assumes the responsibility of being PSNI's Force Crime Registrar, supported by a Deputy Force Crime Registrar within the statistics team. As part of these responsibilities, the statistics team carries out a

---

[70] http://www.psni.police.uk/recorded_crime_statistics_quality_report.pdf

range of quality assurance checks and internal audit of police recorded crime data. In February 2014, PSNI's senior statistician responded to the Monitoring and Assessment team, on behalf of Northern Ireland's Chief Statistician, in his role as the responsible statistician for crime statistics. In the letter, he detailed PSNI's quality assurance procedures and quality assurance checks. A summary of these checks is published in the *User Guide*. Examples of these quality assurance checks include:

- **Conversion rate of incidents flagged to OCMTs into crimes:** The statistics team monitors the ratio of incidents flagged to OCMTs for checking, to incidents containing one or more crimes, to provide an indication of the consistency of the automated checking process and of the consistency of the crime recording practices within the OCMTs. PSNI reports that the ratio has remained relatively constant over the last five years, varying between 48 per cent in 2012/13 and 52 per cent in both 2008/09 and 2013/14.

- **Potential missed crimes identified through statistics team 'incident only' checks:** Between April and November 2013 statistics team staff audited nearly half of the records identified by OCMTs as 'incident only'. PSNI reports that of these, approximately 3 per cent were referred back to OCMTs for further information and to date this has increased the total level of recorded crime by around 1 per cent.

3.27   The statistics team has conducted regular internal audits of missed crime non-compliance, based on audits of record-level crime data. PSNI reports in its *User Guide* that compliance rates in relation to missed crimes between 2004 and 2008 ranged from 94 per cent to 96 per cent. In 2009/10 the average compliance rate was 96.5 per cent, while in 2010/11 the average compliance rate was 97.6 per cent and in 2011/12 it was 91 per cent. The senior statistician told the Assessment team that PSNI did not conduct an audit of missed crimes in 2012/13 due to a combination of factors, but primarily a lack of resource available during that period. The statistics team has designed the checks and internal audits to reflect and expand on those audits conducted by HMIC in England and Wales, in order to provide a level of compliance to which to benchmark against and to identify any new issues that may not be identified by PSNI's existing processes.

3.28   In February 2014, the statistics team completed an internal audit of police recorded crime data. The audit included an assessment of approximately 1,800 incidents that were reported to police in Northern Ireland between 1 April 2013 and 30 September 2013 and where the code used to open the incident on the Command and Control system was crime-related. The aim of the audit was to examine incidents reported to the police, identify whether the report should have resulted in a crime being recorded and, if so:

- whether the crime was recorded within 72 hours (the time limit for recording a crime as stipulated in the Home Office Counting Rules);

- whether the crime was correctly classified; and

- whether the correct number of victims was identified.

Of the 1,800 incidents likely to relate to a crime, 1,327 were identified as requiring a crime to be recorded. The remaining 473 incidents did not require any crime to be recorded. The compliance rates generated from the audit are

summarised in the table below, which PSNI publishes in its *User Guide*. In the *User Guide* PSNI note that the audit was undertaken by PSNI's statistics team and did not incorporate features of the HMIC inspection in Kent, such as listening to the calls for service, directly contacting persons who reported crimes in order to discuss their experiences, or speaking to contact management staff, staff in the crime management support unit, OCMT staff or investigating officers. The statistics team instead conducted the audit by reviewing the details of incidents recorded on NICHE to determine whether the crime recording process complied with the HOCR. HMIC's recent inspection of crime data integrity includes a recommendation relating to PSNI's internal audit procedures, see paragraph 3.30 for further detail on this recommendation.

	Number	%
Crime recording overall compliance (base = 1,327)	1,229	93%
Crime classified correctly (base = 1,229)	1,193	97%
Correct number of victims recorded (base = 1,229)	1,199	98%
Crime'd within 72 hours (base = 1,229)	898	73%

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland

External audit of crime recording practices

3.29   The Authority is clear that regular, systematic published audit of the underlying data is essential to increase both the quality of, and public confidence in, these statistics. The Authority further considers that these statistics are of high public interest and that they should be the subject of independent scrutiny. PSNI does not fall under the direct remit of the Home Office and therefore is not included in crime data audit programmes run by HMIC. However, in light of the recent crime recording data quality issues in England and Wales, the NIPB invited HMIC to conduct a crime data integrity inspection within PSNI during September 2014. The inspection was distinct from the HMIC Crime Data Integrity programme of audits covering the 43 police forces in England and Wales earlier in 2014. However, HMIC's inspection of PSNI was conducted using the same methodology. HMIC published its report *Crime data integrity: Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland* on 19 March 2015. The inspection found that the crime-recording accuracy rate[71] was 97 per cent (with a confidence interval of +/- 2 per cent), based on an audit of incident and crime records for the 6-month period 1 February to 31 July 2014. Of the crimes that were recorded, 98 per cent were correctly classified, and 84 per cent were recorded within the 72-hour limit allowed under the HOCR. Overall, HMIC reported that it was 'impressed with how accurately the PSNI records crime. This is down to strong leadership in this area, and a positive attitude amongst officers and staff. Frequent independent, internal audits on crime recording help the force to comply with the HOCR'.

3.30   HMIC's report included seven recommendations. The first recommendation related to the internal audits conducted by the statistics team in PSNI. HMIC

---

[71] The crime-recording accuracy rate is the proportion of crimes, of those that were checked by HMIC, that were correctly recorded as a crime in accordance with the HOCR

noted that 'the frequency of audits and the number of sample crimes examined are entirely appropriate, based on our findings that there is a low risk of crimes not being recorded. However, the methodology used for checking each crime-recording decision does not cover an assessment of the incident from start to finish and should be more comprehensive. It should include listening to the original call, identifying the number of crimes that should be recorded from that call and then tracking the crime report through to conclusion with subsequent contact with the victim'. HMIC recommended that 'PSNI should adopt a more comprehensive methodology when assessing each crime-recording decision, judging the whole incident from the initial call to victim feedback at the conclusion'. HMIC also recommended that PSNI ensure that the timeliness of crime-recording is considered in its quality assurance checks and audits and in its reporting. The senior statistician in PSNI told us that the statistics team's quality assurance checks already include a check of the timeliness of crime-recording, and that the timeliness did not have an impact on the accuracy of crime recording. PSNI is currently considering how it will address these recommendations.

3.31   HMIC's inspection also included a dip-sample of Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND) and discretionary disposals. These are out-of-court disposals, which are types of crime outcomes. As described in paragraph 3.23, only certain offenders may be offered out-of-court disposals. In PSNI, PNDs and discretionary disposals are the out-of-court disposals which the police have full discretion on issuing. HMIC dip-sampled 25 PND disposals, and found that in all 25 cases the offender had been told the implications of the notice. In 13 cases there was evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered. In all cases HMIC considered that the offender was suitable for this means of disposal. However, HMIC found that although all PNDs examined were given to offenders who met these criteria, it found in some cases that there was no evidence of checks having been undertaken or any action taken to ascertain the offender's criminal record or lack of it.

3.32   HMIC also took a dip-sample of 20 discretionary disposals and found evidence that the wishes of the victim had been considered in 14 out of 15 cases where there was an identifiable victim; the offender was suitable for the disposal in 19 out of the 20 files examined, but found evidence in only 2 of the 20 cases that the offender had been made aware of the implications of accepting the disposal. HMIC judged that in 12 cases the discretionary disposal was appropriate for the type of crime that had been committed. In the eight cases where the discretionary disposal was not considered appropriate, either the file was not clear what the discretionary element of the disposal was or this outcome was not considered suitable for the type of offence committed. HMIC expressed concern that this means of disposal could be used as an informal caution. HMIC recommended that the joint PSNI/PPS group responsible for auditing a sample of discretionary disposals 'should apply more rigour to its process and ensure it looks at all aspects of both PNDs and discretionary disposals to ensure they are being used and applied in accordance with both local and national guidelines. It would also be beneficial if a larger sample was selected'. The senior statistician in PSNI told us that this recommendation is being considered by a colleague within PSNI who has overall responsibility for the administration of discretionary disposals and PNDs by police officers within PSNI.

3.33   HMIC's inspection included a dip-sample of no-crime decisions for rape, robbery and violence. As described in paragraph 3.24, a 'no crime' refers to an incident that was initially recorded as a crime but has subsequently been found not to be a crime. HMIC examined 45 no-crime records for robbery, violence and rape offences and found 44 records to be compliant with HOCR and NCRS. HMIC noted that 'all no-crime decisions are taken centrally by the FCR in the statistics branch. There is a very robust, independent process in place which is highly effective'. For the one record that was found to be not compliant with the HOCR and NCRS, HMIC recognised that the case was a complex one and that PSNI's investigation had been thorough; however the issue related to a mis-interpretation of the meaning of additional verifiable information.

3.34   The Assessment team notes that HMIC's inspection of crime data integrity in Northern Ireland has identified a strong crime-recording accuracy rate within PSNI, and highlights a 'culture whereby ethical and accurate crime recording is viewed as the "norm"' as a result of the acceptance within PSNI for the need for external scrutiny', 'coupled with an effective crime-recording process, including several layers of scrutiny and validation'. HMIC's inspection did, however, recommend that PSNI should adopt a more comprehensive approach to its internal audits, judging the whole incident from the initial call through to victim feedback, and that it should improve the rigour of its audit of out-of-court disposals. As part of the designation as National Statistics, PSNI should enhance its arrangements for auditing the quality of administrative data used to compile the Northern Ireland police recorded crime statistics in the light of the Authority's regulatory standard on *Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data*[72], and HMIC's recommendations by: a) publicly stating how it plans to address HMIC's recommendations that are relevant to the quality assurance of police recorded crime data; b) publishing demonstrable evidence that the findings from HMIC's inspection have been considered, and implemented where appropriate, in the compilation of the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*; and c) updating its published quality information for these statistics, making it clear how the Authority's guidance and outputs from the inspection informed its understanding of the quality of the statistics[73] (Requirement 1).

3.35   As part of NIAO's audit of PSNI's performance plan and performance summary, detailed in NIAO's report *Continuous improvement arrangements in policing*, the NIAO considered the data systems underpinning PSNI's statistics, although it did not include an audit of PSNI's published performance results. NIAO staff carried out an exercise to review the reliability of the statistics underpinning PSNI's Annual Report. NIAO reported that 'there were no significant issues arising from this work'. The report also notes that PSNI's Statistics Branch 'uses information drawn from PSNI's crime recording system, NICHE, to compile the analysis produced in the Annual Report. Where information is sourced from outside Statistics Branch, the Branch produces a Statistics Validation Report to provide assurance on the accuracy and reliability of these figures'. NIAO's report also makes reference to this assessment and to HMIC's inspection of crime data integrity at PSNI, and includes a recommendation that 'PSNI should ensure that all recommendations arising from the current
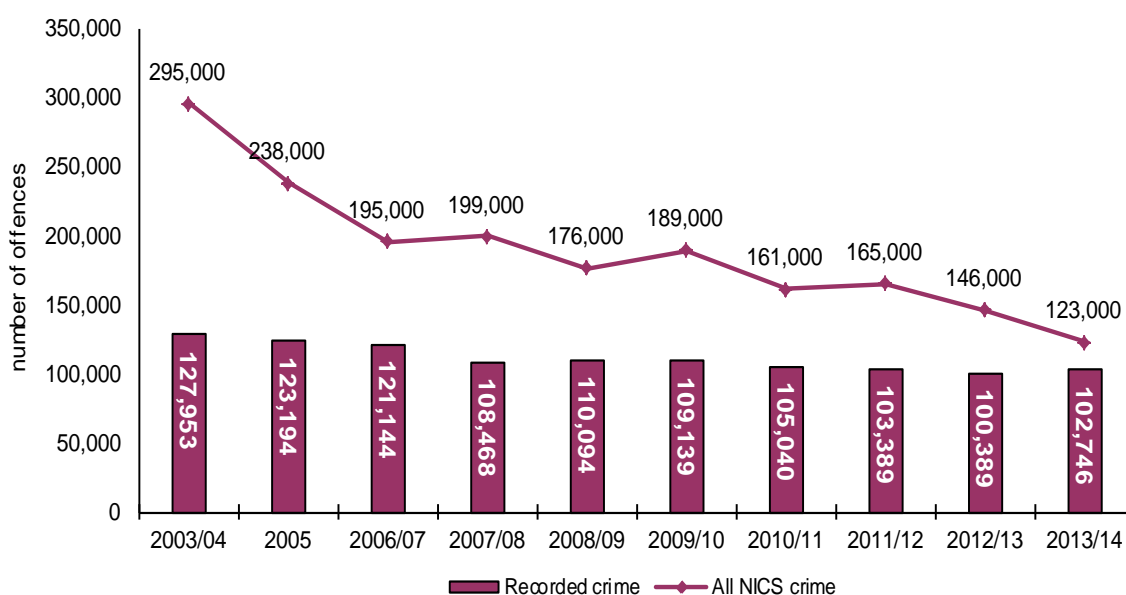
---

[72] See footnote 1
[73] In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Protocol 1, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

investigations being carried out by the UK Statistics Authority and HMIC are considered fully and implemented appropriately in a timely fashion'.

Comparison of police recorded crime and survey results

3.36   In PSNI's letter to the Monitoring and Assessment team in February 2014, the senior statistician presented preliminary results of analysis that PSNI carried out during 2013, comparing the trends in police recorded crime statistics presented in *Crime Trends* with the results of the NICS since 2003/04. PSNI has subsequently finalised the analysis, updated it to include a comparison for 2013/14, and includes details of the results in its *User Guide*. The statistics team has also recently updated this analysis to include a comparison for 2013/14. PSNI noted that the trends between the two sources (presented in the chart below[74]) do not show the same divergence between recorded crime and crime survey trends identified in England and Wales. The results of the NICS appear to show crime falling at a greater rate than the police recorded crime statistics, and that the year-on-year variations in PSNI's recorded crime levels have generally been less pronounced than those reported in England and Wales, subject to sampling variability inherent in survey results. PSNI presents these results in a table in the *User Guide*. The Authority considers that the comparison of estimates using the NICS and police recorded crime in Northern Ireland does not indicate the same concerns that arose when the trends in the CSEW and police recorded crime in England and Wales were analysed.

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland

3.37   The *User Guide* includes reference to the *Findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, which reports that the estimates of the proportion of NICS comparable crime reported to the police since 2003/04, range from 45 per cent in 2003/04 to 52 per cent in 2012/13. PSNI notes that these crime reporting rates 'may in part explain the gap between NICS and police recorded crime

---

[74] It should be noted that the chart is intended to present the comparisons of the trends in police recorded crimes and those reported from the NICS, not to compare the levels of crimes

levels'. The *User Guide* also presents analysis of trends using comparable aggregate subsets of crime in both the police recorded crime data and in the NICS. The analysis was developed in conjunction with statisticians in DOJNI, which is responsible for conducting the NICS and producing and publishing *Findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey*. The analysis was based on the methodology used by Office for National Statistics (ONS) in its publication of analysis of variation in crime trends in England and Wales[75], which was published in January 2013.

3.38 To supplement the analysis, PSNI's *User Guide* highlights the strengths and limitations of both the police recorded crime statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*, and of the statistics presented in *Findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, which provides users with information to aid their interpretation of police recorded crime statistics within the wider context of crime. The analysis does not however include a more detailed analysis of comparable crime by crime type (where the crime type is included in the comparable subset of data for police recorded crime and the NICS). The statistics team in PSNI told us that they would need to explore the validity of carrying out this analysis with the statisticians in DOJNI, and that they understood the relatively small sample size of the NICS may well restrict the level of analysis that can be carried out to compare the two sources of crime data. They also told us that the survey's sample size would be reducing from 4,000 to 2,000 annually from 2014/15, therefore further limiting the analysis that can be carried out in future. As part of the designation as National Statistics, PSNI should, in updating the analysis comparing police recorded crime statistics and the NICS to include the results of the 2013/14 NICS, update and expand its analysis by: a) analysing, in conjunction with DOJNI, crime trends in the police recorded crime statistics and the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, to include, where feasible, comparisons by crime types, with suitable caveats about the quality of the estimates; and b) publishing, or clearly linking to, information about the recent changes in the NICS sample size and response rate over time and the impact of these changes on the quality of the statistics[76] (Requirement 2). The *User Guide* includes a reference to a section of the *Findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey* which details the crime reporting rates in Northern Ireland, but the *User Guide* does not include explicit details of the NICS response rates. We suggest that in updating the analysis comparing police recorded crime statistics and the NICS, PSNI include information about the NICS sample size and response rates in its *User Guide*, to further aid users in their understanding of any difference between crimes recorded by the police and that experienced by the population resident in households, and the resulting impact on how users should interpret crime statistics.

3.39 *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* are the most prominent statistical reports on the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. PSNI produces a set of more detailed official statistics publications to complement certain aspects of the statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*. These include *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in*

---

[75] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/methodological-note--analysis-of-variation-in-crime-trends.pdf
[76] In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Protocol 1, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

Northern Ireland, *Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland*, *Drug Seizure Statistics in Northern Ireland* and *Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents in Northern Ireland*. Section 8 of the *User Guide* includes a reference to these publications and a link to PSNI's statistics landing page. *Crime Trends* includes a reference to each of these publications when presenting related statistics (by these specific themes) but does not include a link the statistical reports. *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* do not include a reference to these publications. We suggest that PSNI refer in *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* to the different sources of crime statistics across the criminal justice system; and include prominent links to those reports in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends*.

3.40   PSNI statisticians told us that they meet regularly with colleagues in the Home Office, ONS and the Scottish Government with the aim of improving the coherence of the statistics across the UK. The *User Guide* refers to, and links to, the equivalent statistics for other parts of the UK. The guide includes a chart which presents trends in overall police recorded crime rates per 1,000 population for both Northern Ireland and England and Wales, since 2002/03. The *User Guide* also includes a reference to a UK statistics comparability report[77] produced by the Government Statistical Service to provide an overview of data comparability issues for theme groups, including crime and justice, across the UK. *Crime Trends* includes some descriptions of similarities or differences in legislation between Northern Ireland and England and Wales where these are applicable.

---

[77] https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Comparability-Report-Final.pdf

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

3.41   The statistics team in PSNI has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes publishing a corporate policy statement *Confidentiality Protection Arrangements*[78], which outlines how the statistics team protects the security of its data.

---

[78] http://www.psni.police.uk/psni_confidentiality_protection_statement_final.pdf

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

3.42   The police recorded crime statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* are based on administrative data sourced from systems within PSNI, collected via the Occurrence Management System (referred to as NICHE), an internal system that was implemented in April 2007 and has been designed specifically to provide data on police services in Northern Ireland. The statistics team told us that the technical team within PSNI that is responsible for maintaining the NICHE system consults with them when any change is made to the system, to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the police recorded crime statistics. The statistics team also told us that it works with colleagues within PSNI to develop new statistical outputs from the administrative data sources as the opportunities arise, and has taken steps to ensure that administrative data are made available to the public in user friendly format. For example, PSNI provides crime data on an annual basis for inclusion in the NISRA neighbourhood statistics[79] NINIS website, which can be downloaded, or used to form interactive maps with other administrative datasets on the website. The statistics team also makes the monthly statistics available through the national Crimemapper[80] website, a police crime mapping website. See paragraph 3.52 for more detail.

---

[79] See footnote 44
[80] See footnote 45

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

3.43   As a result of resourcing reviews within PSNI, the statistics team has reduced in size by eight members of staff over the last nine years, to a total of 23 staff. However, the statistics team told us that despite reduced resources it has been able to continue to produce more regular and detailed outputs in this time due to the introduction of efficiencies in its processes. These efficiencies include a range of automated validations that are carried out on the data extracted from the NICHE system, as well as the transfer of some aspects of the crime validation process to OCMTs. OCMTs had previously only been responsible for ensuring that crime records were complete and querying those that were incomplete. In order to transfer this workload to the OCMTs, the statistics team told us that it provided training for the OCMTs, and it ran dual-validation and dip-sampling for the first few months to ensure that the quality of the crime recording was sufficiently accurate.

3.44   Several of the more senior members of the statistics team in PSNI have been in post for a number of years. In order to mitigate against the risk of loss of expertise and knowledge in the team should a core member of staff leave, PSNI told us that tasks are comprehensively documented to ensure that roles are transferable and each member of staff is able to carry out most of the processes in the production of the police recorded crime data.

3.45   PSNI provided the Assessment team with a statistics team plan for 2014/15, which set out the team's objectives and included a detailed work plan. Due to confidentiality constraints this team plan was not published. However during the course of this assessment, PSNI published a summary version of its statistics work plan[81] on its website. PSNI subsequently published the 2015/16 statistics team plan[82] on the PSNI website on 19 May 2015.

---

[81] http://www.psni.police.uk/statistics_branch__branch_plan_2014-15_for_web.pdf
[82] http://www.psni.police.uk/statistics_branch__branch_plan_2015-16_for_psni_website.pdf

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

<div style="border:1px solid #000; background:#e8eed0; padding:10px;">

Requirements from previous Assessment report 214 (June 2012):

- Improve the information about the known limitations of the statistics included in the releases; so that it describes the impact of known misreporting along with the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to the range of potential uses
- Ensure that all releases include commentary and contextual information which aids user interpretation of the statistics

Suggestions from previous Assessment report 214 (June 2012):

- Provide links in all the releases to the relevant metadata, including the user guides for each set of statistics and the quality reports
- Add links to the relevant Excel tables in each release to support the re-use of the statistics

</div>

3.46   *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* all include analysis of changes in number of crimes over time, differences in types of crimes committed, and analysis by policing district, presented in useful tables and charts, along with helpful commentary. *Crime Trends* is the most detailed of the reports, including in-depth analysis of crime by age, crime type, type of victim and policing district, and analysis of outcomes over time and by crime type. It also includes more contextual information than *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual*, such as explanations of the impact on the statistics of changes in methods, counting rules and legislation. An example of this is an explanation of the discontinuities in the data set due to the introduction of new sexual offences legislation in February 2009. While both *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* include limited contextual information within the commentary, for example, explaining possible reasons for increases or decreases in the numbers of police recorded crimes, *Crime Monthly* does make reference to the additional information available in the *Crime Annual* reports, and *Crime Annual* highlights that more-detailed trend analysis is available in *Crime Trends*.

3.47   *Crime Trends* includes an analysis of outcomes rates and suggests caution in their interpretation, as they do not provide a clear measure of police investigative performance. An example is that some of the offences with the highest outcome rates are the offences most influenced by proactive policing to apprehend offenders, such as for drug offences. PSNI informed us that the presentation of outcome rates is consistent with that made by the Home Office in England and Wales. The statisticians acknowledged that there could be instances where the outcome rates could be greater than 100 per cent for a specific offence group where the number of recorded crimes are relatively low (such as Homicide) and where the outcomes rates are generally high. This is because some crime outcomes recorded in a specific period can relate to crimes that were recorded during an earlier reference period. The statistics

team told us that it is possible for them to also report the number of crimes recorded in a particular period that resulted in a crime outcome. They are sometimes required to carry out this analysis in response to FOI requests or user queries. We suggest that PSNI consider publishing the analyses it carries out on outcome rates in response to FOI requests.

3.48 Each of the statistical reports includes a link to the *User Guide*, which includes more detail on crime recording practices, uses of the data, crime types, data quality, and data audits, including estimates of the under-recording of crime. *Crime Trends* includes references to specific sections of the *User Guide* to inform users of the more detailed information available; however *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* only have one generic link to the *User guide*. We suggest that PSNI provide more information in *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* about the content of the *User Guide* and include more specific links to relevant sections of the *User Guide*. More generally, we suggest that PSNI should consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2 in order to enhance the statistical reports.

3.49 PSNI publishes police recorded crime statistics monthly. For 11 months of the year this is published as part of the *Crime Monthly* series of statistical reports, which contain provisional data for the previous 12 months. At the end of the financial year, PSNI publishes a monthly update for the year up to 31 March, *Crime Annual*, which presents 'finalised' police recorded crime statistics for the financial year. The titles of *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* both refer to 'monthly updates', with nothing to distinguish the annual reports from the monthly reports. We suggest that PSNI label the annual publication more clearly to show that it is different to the monthly publications.

3.50 The statistics team in PSNI has access to individual-level data on police recorded crime and it publishes statistics and supporting data to the lowest level of aggregation possible, subject to disclosure constraints. This includes analysis of victims of crime by age and sex, and by certain type of crime, such as the number of knife crimes. To enable users to analyse the data more fully, PSNI also produces several pivot tables which can be used to produce a more bespoke set of tables to suit users' needs.

3.51 The statistics presented in *Crime Monthly*, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* can be accessed from the NINIS website[83], which includes a range of crime data at a variety of geographies, the lowest being electoral ward. The statistics team submit data for inclusion in NINIS annually. The NINIS website allows users to access data at lower level geographies than are available from the PSNI website, and it enables users to view data in a table, chart or interactive map. The data can also be downloaded as Excel spreadsheets. *Crime Trends* includes a link to the NINIS website but *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual* do not. We suggest that PSNI include a link to the NINIS website from *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Annual*.

3.52 From February 2012, PSNI has supplied crime data to the national crime mapping website (Crimemapper[84]) on a monthly basis. This site allows users to access information about levels of crime in their street or area by crime type. As with the NINIS website, the information can be viewed in tables, charts and

---

[83] See footnote 44
[84] See footnote 45

interactive maps and the data can be downloaded in CSV format. These data are provisional management information, not official statistics, since the data submission deadline for Crimemapper is ahead of the completion of the monthly data validation process for statistics included in *Crime Monthly*; the data is also incomplete because any crime that does not have a grid reference will not be included in the Crimemapper. References to the Crimemapper website from PSNI's website clearly indicate that the data are provisional management information. During this assessment the Assessment team was unable to access the Crimemapper website using the link presented on the 'Crime Statistics' area of PSNI's website – www.nicrimemaps.org – which should redirect users to the national website – www.police.uk. During the course of this assessment, PSNI resolved this issue and the Crimemapper link accessible from PSNI's website has been updated to reflect the correct link.

3.53 The PSNI statistical reports are all published in PDF format and the tables are available in Excel format. During the course of this assessment, PSNI also began publishing the statistical reports in an open document format (ODF). From 30 October 2014 the *Crime Monthly* tables have been published in both Excel and ODF. This equates to a three star rating under the Five Star Scheme.

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.54   The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

3.55   The Authority has agreed with PSNI an exemption from Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the Code in relation to the publication of the name and contact details of the responsible statistician for security reasons[85]. The reports contain clear contact details for the statistics team with an office address, email address, contact telephone and fax numbers and the PSNI website address.

3.56   All the crime reports are published in a timely manner. *Crime Monthly* is published four weeks after the month end and *Crime Annual* is published six weeks after year end to allow for more thorough quality checks on the annual data to be carried out. The more detailed analysis provided in *Crime Trends* is published in July each year.

3.57   PSNI publishes a timetable of statistical releases for twelve months ahead on its website. It also included *Crime Annual* reports on the National Statistics Publication Hub, prior to it being decommissioned, but did not include *Crime Monthly* or *Crime Trends*. This was due to technical difficulties with the security settings within its IT systems, meaning that the process of adding entries into the Publication Hub was labour intensive. With the transfer of the Publication Hub to the GOV.UK release calendar[86], PSNI told us that, during the course of this assessment, it has been able to resolve these issues and a notification of the publication of *Crime Monthly* has been updated monthly on the 'upcoming' section of GOV.UK release calendar since November 2014.

3.58   Fifteen named individuals were given 24 hour pre-release access to the 2014/15 publication of *Crime Annual*. Nine of these individuals are PSNI staff, including the Chief Constable, and the remainder are from DOJNI or the NIPB. Pre-release access is not given for *Crime Monthly* or *Crime Trends*.

---

[85] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/exemption-request---psni---160811.html
[86] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

3.59 PSNI's Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS) includes the NICHE administrative data system, which is specifically designed for police services to record and manage occurrences of crime. The SoAS gives a brief description of the arrangements for auditing the quality of the police recorded crime data, and provides a link to more detailed information available in the *User Guide*. In light of the de-designation of the England and Wales police recorded crime statistics in January 2014 (as set out in Assessment report 268) the Statistics Authority has produced a new regulatory standard on the approach that statistical teams should take in relation to the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. We suggest that PSNI update its Statement of Administrative Sources documentation if necessary, once it has fully implemented Requirement 1 from this Assessment report.

Annex 1: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

A1.1   In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*[87]. While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical reports associated with police recorded crime in Northern Ireland statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards. The comments included in this annex are based on a review of *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update to 31 August 2014*[88], *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update to 31 March 2014*[89] (which contains finalised annual data on police recorded crime), and *Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2013/14*[90].

A1.2   In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical reports, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics

A1.3   The reports contain impartial commentary and highlight key changes in police recorded crime over the last 12 months, as well as considering trends over the longer term to provide a fuller picture of police recorded crime in Northern Ireland and to add some context to the most recent statistics. The commentary is detailed and gives useful information by different crime types and geographies. However, all three statistical reports could benefit from sharper high level key messages, possibly in short bullet points, which highlight the latest data more clearly.

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

A1.4   *Crime Annual* and *Crime Monthly* do not present sufficient information about the impact on the statistics of changes in crime classifications. However, *Crime Trends* and the *User Guide* both provide useful information on discontinuities in the time series statistics that occur due to changes in crime classifications, and the impact this has on the comparability of the statistics. A link from *Crime Annual* and *Crime Monthly* to the relevant sections in the *User Guide*[91] would be beneficial for users.

---

[87] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html
[88] http://www.psni.police.uk/monthly_crime_bulletin_apr-aug_14_15.pdf
[89] http://www.psni.police.uk/monthly_crime_bulletin_apr-mar_13_14.pdf
[90] http://www.psni.police.uk/police_recorded_crime_in_northern_ireland_1998-99_to_2013-14.pdf
[91] http://www.psni.police.uk/user_guide.pdf

A1.5   *Crime Trends* provides some detailed information about the uses and users of the recorded crime statistics. *Crime Annual* and *Crime Monthly* do not mention users and uses of the data, however they do reference the *User Guide*, which gives a lot of information about users and uses of these statistics, what decisions these statistics are used to inform, and a range of other useful background information. There could, however, be more specific reference made in *Crime Annual* and *Crime Monthly* to relevant sections of the *User Guide*, to highlight more clearly what additional information is available.

A1.6   All of the PSNI crime reports and the *User Guide* explain the relationship between police recorded crime data and the NICS including the main differences between them. In particular, the *User Guide* provides useful information on which data source is most reliable for different crime types. The reports also include a link to the NICS report, which gives a fuller explanation of why both the survey and recorded crime reports are needed to present a coherent picture of crime, and the strengths and weaknesses of each data source. *Crime Annual* includes some high level analysis of variations in crime trends between the police recorded crime and the NICS for comparable crimes, but there is no lower level analysis, for example, by specific crime types. PSNI told us that the small sample size for the NICS may limit the quality of the estimates produced during any analysis to compare the two sources of crime data.

Include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential use

A1.7   All the reports contain a section on strengths and limitations of the statistics, which summarises the differences between the police recorded crime statistics and the Northern Ireland Crime Survey statistics, and gives guidance on when to use which data source. They also include a link to *Experience of Crime: Findings from the 2012/13 Northern Ireland Crime Survey*[92], produced by DOJNI, which contains more detail on the comparisons between the two sources of crime data. The *User Guide* also contains some high level analysis comparing the police recorded crime data to the survey data.

A1.8   *Crime Annual* and *Crime Monthly* both contain information about the accuracy of the data, including the percentage of crime records that have been fully validated (and therefore described as 'complete'), and detailed information about the nature and magnitude of revisions.

Be professionally sound

A1.9   The reports include appropriate tables and charts, and changes in recording practices are clearly annotated on relevant charts. Descriptions of changes, trends and patterns are professionally sound and consistent with the statistics.

---

[92] http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/northern-ireland-crime-survey-s-r/nics-2012-13-experience-bulletin.pdf

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A1.10 The *User Guide* provides a link[93] to comparable statistics produced for England and Wales, and Scotland. It explains the similarity between the crime statistics produced for Northern Ireland and those produced for England and Wales, and the reasons why the crime statistics produced for Northern Ireland are not comparable with those produced for Scotland. The *User Guide* also provides links to other websites which contain police recorded crime publications, such as ONS, Scottish Government and Eurostat.

A1.11 *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Trends* are titled appropriately, providing information on the coverage of the statistics and the point in time to which the latest statistics relate. However, it is difficult to distinguish *Crime Annual* from the more regular *Crime Monthly* reports.

A1.12 All the reports have the National Statistics logo clearly displayed on the front page and *Crime Monthly* gives an explanation of what the National Statistics designation means. However, *Crime Annual* and *Crime Trends* do not contain any further reference to National Statistics, other than to reference the de-designation of other sets of recorded crime statistics.

A1.13 *Crime Annual*, *Crime Monthly* and *Crime Trends* are all accompanied by supporting data tables published in proprietary spreadsheet format. They include an index list and a range of additional useful information, such as strengths and limitations of the data, notes on discontinuities due to changes in crime classifications, and links to further information. PSNI also publishes some pivot tables on crime statistics, which allow users to manipulate the data to suit their needs.

A1.14 The coverage, publication date and name of the producer body are clearly stated on the front of all the reports.

---

[93] https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Comparability-Report-Final.pdf

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June 2014 to November 2014. The assessment was then put on hold, pending HMIC's publication of its report into crime data integrity in PSNI, until March 2015. The assessment was concluded in April and May 2015.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Sara James and Donna Hosie – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of PSNI in July. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 8 August. The Assessment team subsequently followed up with PSNI by telephone in September and October 2014 to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence. A member of the Assessment team also met with the senior statistician in April 2015 as part of a wider UKSA meeting with NISRA.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 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 the Authority's 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.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government	7
Regulatory body	2
Third sector	1
Media	1

A2.5 Most users reported the quality of the statistics to be good, with adequate information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics. The level of detail provided was sufficient for most users' needs, though some users would like to see more statistics made available, such as information on suspected offenders, and victims who decide not to proceed with a criminal case. One user told us that a consistent recorded crime dataset across the whole of the UK would be useful.

A2.6 Users told us that they found the commentary in the statistical reports helpful for explaining the data and bringing out the key messages, although a few said they mostly used the graphs and tables. One user felt that the commentary was limited and that they would like more information on changes in crime reporting practices or other issues that may affect the interpretation of the data.

A2.7 Most users found the PSNI website easy to navigate, although one user commented that the annual publication could be more clearly labelled. Users found the regular email alerts informing them of the latest publications very

useful. Those who had direct contact with the statisticians in PSNI found them to be very helpful and approachable, keeping them informed of ongoing progress with any work they were carrying out.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk