

## **REQUEST TO DETI FROM THE ETI COMMITTEE**

At its meeting on 16 January 2014 the ETI Committee received briefing on a research paper regarding Northern Ireland Sub-Regional Economic Data.

Members agreed to forward the paper to the Department asking for any comments it may wish to make.

## **DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE**

### **Assembly Research and Information paper on sub-regional economic data for NI**

The data referenced in the paper is collected and published by Government Departments and Arms Length Bodies other than DETI. On that basis, the views and comments of those statistical producer bodies have been sought in preparation of this response.

For all statistical producers, key considerations that impact on making data available at a range of geographies include the need to maintain the confidentiality of respondents, whether individuals or businesses, and to ensure that data made available are robust and reliable. Other issues that impact on the collection of data and its subsequent availability at sub-regional levels include the need to ensure that respondent burden and the cost to the respondent is kept to a minimum and that the cost to the public purse in collecting such data is proportionate and justified.

Discussions and assessments of sources within the paper at times reflect a limited review of some of the sources themselves, their respective purpose, role and associated methodology. This is perhaps understandable given that a considerably more comprehensive exercise would be needed to do full justice to identification and assessment of the availability of the “vast amount of data available from various sources”. Inevitably available data may not be in the format required by users, in such circumstances, and if it is possible to do so, additional analyses can be made available on request from appropriate statistical producers.

Information on the regional economy and sub-regions is available from the Regional Trends<sup>1</sup> section of the DETI website under Statistics and Economic Research. In addition, further UK-wide regional information is available under the

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-regional-analysis.htm>

Regional Accounts<sup>2</sup> theme from the Office for National Statistics. Developments in the dissemination of information are continually ongoing.

The paper highlights the absence of Northern Ireland from inclusion in the 2013 UK Competitiveness Index report produced by Cardiff University with the indication that this absence is due to the lack of available data. However, NISRA have indicated that data is available which would enable Northern Ireland and its localities to be included at the NUTS 3 level. In addition, in June 2013, the Northern Ireland Economic Advisory Group published an economic competitiveness research report which ranked Northern Ireland's competitiveness against 145 countries.

A core issue in the production and availability of data by statistical producers is in meeting the identified and expressed needs of wider users and stakeholders. The consideration of the issue of need represents something of an omission in the paper.

More generally, and not readily apparent from the paper, there is an obligation on producers of official statistics such as NISRA to ensure that official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by Government, public services, business, researchers and the public. Producers of official statistics canvass views relating to their social, economic and labour market statistics in a variety of ways including, general and expert user group meetings, consultations, meetings of the statutory Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC) and through reviews of individual statistical series conducted by the UK Statistics Authority. The existing provision of sub-regional economic statistics for Northern Ireland has been and will continue to be informed in this way. This will include identifying the most appropriate level at which sub-regional statistics should be produced for individual series.

### **Correspondence from Dr John Bradley responding to the Assembly Research and Information paper on sub-regional economic data for NI**

The correspondence from Dr Bradley to the Assembly Research and Information Service follows the forwarding of the paper to him for comment.

Dr Bradley rehearses his view that the availability of sub-regional data is "in a confused and unfocused state" and that data for the whole of the NI economy "are deficient".

Dr Bradley unfavourably compares the availability of Northern Ireland economic statistics with those in Scotland. This criticism may relate to a long term project in which Scottish government statisticians have been involved to produce a series of "national accounts" tables which provide an integrated picture of the Scottish economy to internationally recognised standards. NISRA is currently working with

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Regional+Accounts>

ONS consultants to produce a report on the feasibility of producing such tables for Northern Ireland which is expected to be published by Spring 2014.

Given: the range of data relating to the NI economy that is available; the potential for much of that data either already available, or which could be provided on request at a range of geographies; and the current suite of developments underway to improve data on the NI economy, it is difficult to understand the precise concerns of Dr Bradley.

In practice it is impossible for producers of statistics to prepare and publish analyses to meet all the potential perspectives on the data that potentially could arise. It is very often the case that data published by statistical producers are not quite in the format required by a particular user for a particular purpose. In such instances, users of statistical data are actively encouraged to contact the producers of the statistics to discuss further. It is not clear, either from the Assembly Research and Information paper or from the correspondence from Dr Bradley, the extent to which these avenues were pursued.

**Reply prepared by:** Analytical Services Unit

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