



National Statistics Board

Ireland

**Implementation of Strategy for Statistics
2009-2014**

Mid-term Review

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Abbreviations

ADC	Administrative Data Centre
AES	Adult Education Survey
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DSCH	Data Sharing Clearing House
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
DTTAS	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
EHECS	Earnings Hours and Employment Costs Survey
EHIS	European Health Information Survey
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU-SILC	EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions
GGD	General Government Debt
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
HSE	Health Services Executive
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
ISS	Irish Statistical System
ISSDA	Irish Social Science Data Archive
LCU	Large Cases Unit
LSS	Lean Six Sigma
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NSI	National Statistics Institute
NTS	National Travel Survey
ORP	Organisational Review Programme
PBOD	Plan for Business and Organisational Development
PPSN	Personal Public Service Number
PSR	Public Sector Reform
QNHS	Quarterly National Household Survey
SASU	EU Safety and Security survey
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SHA	System of Health Accounts

Chairperson's Preface

The main function of the National Statistics Board is to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office in meeting Ireland's needs for official statistics in economic, social, environmental, and other areas. The Board has sought to develop official statistics through a series of strategies, which established priorities for official statistics in Ireland. This report is a review of the progress that has been made since 2009 in implementing the Board's 2009-2014 strategy¹.

International and national developments over the past three years have had a significant impact on the environment in which the CSO operates and this provides the context for assessing what has been achieved. Considerable progress has been made towards the realisation of the Board's vision of the Irish Statistical System (ISS) and on some of its specific recommendations. The Government has given the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform a lead role in accelerating development of the ISS, including it as part of the wider process of public sector reform. Despite significant resource challenges, the CSO has maintained an ambitious programme of work, while dealing with numerous new demands and engaging in a significant restructuring of its businesses processes. The Board welcomes these developments and hopes that the momentum generated can be maintained.

The Board's overarching priority is the full realisation of an effectively functioning Irish Statistical System i.e. the development of a coherent whole-system approach to statistics that would link CSO generated statistics with administrative data holdings so as to maximise the statistical potential of all available data sources. This would enable much greater scope and depth of information to be provided on a broader range of issues for all users of official statistics. It would support evidence-informed policymaking and better assessment of policy effectiveness, as well as facilitating the development of targeted policy interventions.

The imperative for the whole-system approach is even more urgent at a time when resources are constrained, as it is considerably more cost effective. Applying the concept of 'Collect Once – Use Often' by re-using administrative data whenever possible, reduces the need for costly direct survey data collection while easing the response burden on businesses and individuals.

As Chairperson, I would like to thank the members of the Board for their support, and the CSO for their commitment to the Board's vision and to ensuring that high standards are maintained in very challenging circumstances.

Dr. Patricia O'Hara
Chairperson

¹ National Statistics Board (2009). *Strategy for Statistics, 2009-2014*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Chapter 1

Background, Context, and Recent Developments

1.1 Background

In this review the National Statistics Board (NSB) examines the progress made on the implementation of its 2009-2014 strategy which is focussed on the development of the Irish Statistical System (ISS)². In developing the strategy, the Board sought to ensure the continued development of the ISS, in the context of evolving policy needs and a resource-constrained environment, by focusing on the following five strategic priorities for the period 2009-2014.

1. Ensure that the Irish Statistical System is coherent, and that the potential to produce relevant, impartial, and reliable statistics to inform policy and fiscal decisions is fully realised.
2. Increase value for money and efficient use of resources by prioritising investment in statistics (including data processing, sharing, storage, and protection) across government departments and agencies, and by ensuring that official statistics can be used in all aspects of government decision-making.
3. Develop systems to ensure that the burden of response on businesses, households, and individuals is minimised and that the statistical value of existing survey and administrative data is maximised through the addition of consistent classification variables and data matching identifiers.
4. Ensure that official statistics are 'fit for purpose' by balancing relevance, timeliness, cost, and quality of data so that critical gaps are filled and new demands are met.
5. Build on the progress of recent years by continuing to prioritise availability to users by improving access channels and promoting use of CSO statistics.

In the following sections, the Board reviews initiatives and developments that have occurred since the publication of the strategy in 2009 and considers progress to-date in implementing the nineteen specific recommendations.

In light of these, key strategic priorities for the Irish Statistical System in the period up to 2014 are identified.

² The National Statistics Board's Strategy covering the period 2003-2008 recognised the need to exploit administrative data sources in conjunction with statistical sources to meet the ever-growing demand for information. The exploitation of administrative data was set in the context of a new vision for official statistics namely the Irish Statistical System (ISS).

1.2 The Changing Context

Since the publication of the Strategy for Statistics 2009-2014 in November 2009, the environment in which the ISS and particularly the Central Statistics Office (CSO) operates has changed considerably. The global economic downturn is still very much in evidence and associated with a range of economic and social outcomes; the banking crisis in Ireland has necessitated a Programme of Financial Assistance from the European institutions and the International Monetary Fund; there has been a change of Government and subsequent restructuring of government departments; EU powers of monitoring and surveillance in the statistical world have increased, and the demand for statistics has grown at all levels.

Impact of the economic crisis

The global economic crisis has highlighted the importance of high-quality statistical information for both national and international decision-making. Consequently, the quality and reliability of official statistics and the usefulness of conventional indicators of progress have come under scrutiny.

At EU level, concerns about the quality and timeliness of statistical information being produced by some countries have led to increased surveillance of national statistical systems and the compilation of economic indicators in particular, as part of the so-called 'Six-Pack'³ of legislative measures to reform the Stability and Growth Pact, which came into force in December 2011. Eurostat have doubled their staff in the GFS\EDP⁴ area and also convened a full working group to consider quality management in GFS\EDP statistics. This has resulted in a heightened level of scrutiny of economic indicators, requiring additional statistical outputs in some cases and including a number of scheduled EU audits. There is also work underway at European level to strengthen the legislative framework for the production of official statistics (Regulation (EC) No 223/2009) including widening the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice across national statistical systems.

At a national level, the ongoing reviews of the Programme of Assistance to Ireland by the members of the Troika⁵ are crucially dependent on high-quality and timely economic indicators being produced by the statistical system. The memorandum of understanding⁶ which accompanies the Programme of Assistance, outlines a comprehensive set of indicators and reports that must be submitted to the Troika in accordance with prescribed timelines.

³ The 'six-pack' are five EU regulations and one directive designed to strengthen the Stability and Growth pact. http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/governance/2012-03-14_six_pack_en.htm

⁴ Government Financial Statistics (GFS) and Excessive Deficit Procedures (EDP).

⁵ The Troika consists of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

⁶ Ireland Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality (3 December 2010). Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/eu_economic_situation/pdf/2010-12-07-mou_en.pdf

New and emerging demands

Apart from the additional data needs and quality assurance work necessitated by the increased oversight of macroeconomic indicators, a significant number of other data needs have emerged in recent years. At international level, following the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi⁷ report, there has been considerable discussion of the need for more data on well-being and sustainability indicators, in addition to the more traditional economic indicators. At EU level a number of new household surveys are being activated by regulation, for example the Adult Education Survey and European Health Information Survey. These are resource-intensive projects and have the potential to impact on the CSO's programme of household surveys and ad-hoc national modules attached to the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS).

At national level demand has also increased. The CSO's 2011 invitation for proposals for ad-hoc survey-modules attracted 25 proposals which is considerably more than previous canvasses. These user demands are competing for space on the QNHS with other surveys required under legislation, ad-hoc national economic modules, as well as the CSO practice of repeating well-used modules every five or so years.

As well as new data demands, recent years have also seen an increased appetite among users for faster data turn-around and greater access to survey microdata. At the same time there has been a significant emphasis on maintaining and improving, where possible, the quality of outputs.

1.3 Recent Developments across the Irish Statistical System

Public sector reform

In late 2011, the newly established Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) published the Public Sector Reform Plan. Under the plan, DPER takes responsibility for the development of a coherent statistical infrastructure that will facilitate service planning and delivery across the public sector, while the CSO has responsibility for the development of a public sector code of practice and standards for data for statistical use, and a review of legislative environment governing official statistics (see Appendix 5, p. 45).

The *eGovernment 2012 - 2015*⁸ policy document, which is based on the Public Sector Reform Plan, identified three priority action areas of particular relevance to the goals of the Board: the availability of public sector data for re-use, a standard approach to mapping and geographic information systems and the more efficient use of individual and business identifiers to facilitate data matching.

⁷ Stiglitz, J.E., Sen, A., and Fitoussi, J.P. (2009). *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*. Paris: The Commission.

⁸Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012). *Supporting Public Sector Reform: eGovernment 2012 - 2015*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

These objectives also complement some of the specific recommendations in the NSB 2009-2014 strategy and will provide an additional impetus to ongoing work on developing the ISS and maximising the potential of administrative data. A whole-system approach to statistics and data collection is a central element of the drive for a more efficient and cost-effective public sector.

Central Statistics Office

During the period since the publication of the Board's strategy, the budgetary situation has had an inevitable effect on the resources available to CSO, in common with all public sector organisations. The public-sector recruitment embargo coupled with retirements has resulted in a net reduction of almost 15% in core staff numbers since the end of 2007. In the same period the number of senior managers has fallen by a quarter and a number of experienced staff in key areas have left the organisation.

However, the CSO has kept pace with the increasing demand for statistics; maintaining an ambitious programme of work, while also producing a number of new and innovative products using administrative data sources. This has been achieved through a combination of organisational re-structuring, a rolling programme of Business Process Improvement projects, a number of IT innovations and the development of the Administrative Data Centre (ADC).

One significant driver of organisational change in this period was the Organisational Review Programme (ORP) analysis of the CSO conducted during 2009 and 2010 by a team from the Department of the Taoiseach. This review involved extensive consultation with internal and external stakeholders who responded that the greatest strengths of the CSO are its independence and the competence, professionalism and customer ethos of its staff. There is a high degree of trust in the reliability and accuracy of its products which is the primary reason why the CSO is held in such high regard by data users.

The report did however, identify a number of challenges in the areas of data needs, respondent burden and process efficiency for the CSO to overcome in order to further develop and maximise its potential as an organisation. CSO has responded by carrying out a number of significant business process improvements and restructuring some operations to achieve efficiencies. For example, in 2010 the National Employment Survey was discontinued, which reduced respondent burden and data collection costs. At the same time, by using administrative data and econometric modelling the CSO was able to generate an equivalent dataset to meet national user and EU reporting requirements for the same period. CSO has also achieved improved timeliness of certain publications and has developed an ongoing programme of internal audits and reviews which have delivered savings. For example, a review of the Retail Sales Index halved the time lag between the end of the reference period and publication. Significantly, it is now produced with a 50% reduction in payroll costs.

Another important engine for change was the Plan for Business and Organisational Development (PBOD), which the CSO produced in 2009 as part of its own wide-ranging internal review. This review aimed to re-focus the organisation as an agent for change across the ISS and also to achieve better internal coherence and operational synergies. The process led to a major re-structuring of the organisation, in particular the establishment of the ADC with responsibility for the receipt, cleaning and processing of all administrative data received by the CSO (Administrative Data Holdings).

A common theme in both of these review processes has been the imperative to seek efficiencies in existing processes and to maximise the quality of outputs within available resources. In response, the CSO has committed to three substantial organisational developments in recent years: the application of a formal business process improvement methodology (Lean Six Sigma) to a number of survey areas, the establishment of a Large Cases Unit to handle the data of large multi-national corporations more effectively, and a project to transform the system of household surveys within CSO.

The Lean Six Sigma (LSS) reviews have resulted in considerable improvements in efficiency, timeliness and quality across a number of survey areas (e.g. EHECS; Quarterly National Household Survey; and the Retail Sales Index). In addition, a joint CSO/Revenue LSS review was undertaken in respect of the data collection and processing of international goods exports and imports.

The Large Cases Unit (LCU) was established in 2010 to exploit synergies within the CSO and it has responsibility for ensuring data consistency across the Office in the returns of the largest multi-national corporations. The unit compares and reconciles returns to enquiries such as Monthly Production, Balance of Payments surveys, and data on international trade in goods and services. This has resulted in better quality CSO publications and reduced the burden on these organisations by providing them with a single CSO point of contact.

The Household Survey Transformation Project was initialised in 2012, and is the CSO's response to a significant number of new demands for household surveys, some driven by EU regulation and some by national user demands. CSO has concluded that a radically transformed household survey system is required to meet these new demands while maintaining the key outputs from the QNHS and SILC surveys. This will mean a far-reaching, but phased, reorganisation of the system of household surveys and perhaps, most significantly, require the introduction of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) for the first time.

These initiatives have, and will continue to deliver, more efficient use of resources. However, the future budgetary situation represents a considerable challenge for CSO, not only in maintaining the existing programme of statistical outputs but also in maintaining the high quality standards required by national and international users.

Other Developments

There have also been a number of other developments across the public sector that again emphasise the importance of high quality statistical indicators for policy and evaluation; and that highlight the importance of joined-up data strategies.

In March 2012 the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) was established to support better policy-making across the system, through enhanced economic and policy analysis expertise. The work of the Unit will support Departments in evaluating policy and expenditure options; value for money exercises; cost benefit and regulatory impact analyses; and regulatory and competition issues. The work of this new Service will clearly benefit from a coherent data infrastructure across all public sector organisations, which would be based on common data classifications and linkable administrative data using unique identifiers.

In 2012 the Government's Cloud Computing⁹ and eGovernment strategies were published. These place cloud computing and shared services at the heart of future ICT development across the public sector. The development of a more centralised ICT infrastructure for the public sector will provide both challenges and opportunities for the use and standardisation of administrative data. For example, one of the goals of the Cloud Computing Strategy is to create ten primary data centres from the myriad that exist across the public sector.

The economic potential and inherent value of developing data for decision making was identified as one of fourteen priority areas by the Report of the Research Prioritisation Steering Group¹⁰. The "Data Analytics Management, Security and Privacy" priority area of this report is focused on turning data into information that can be exploited to benefit both economic and social decision-making. One of the key actions listed under this heading in the report was the development of a national knowledge management strategy for Ireland and improved accessibility to data. The report stated that there is "a policy gap in terms of open accessible data, particularly in the public sector, that needs to be addressed" (p.49).

Comment

In the years since the publication of the Board's 2009-2014 strategy the environment in which official statistics are produced has changed considerably. It is fair to say that the level of scrutiny of official statistics has never been higher, nor has the importance of maintaining high quality and trustworthy statistical indicators. At the same time, policy-makers are faced with an ever-growing body of statistical information from a variety of non-official sources, with varying degrees of quality and reliability. Even within the public sector, although the volume of statistics being produced is increasing, policy-makers are often reliant on data produced as a by-

⁹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012). *Supporting Public Sector Reform: Cloud Computing Strategy*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

¹⁰ Research Prioritisation Steering Group (2012). *Report of Research Prioritisation Steering Group*. Dublin: Forfás.

product of very specific administrative functions or data produced by specially-commissioned but limited ad-hoc surveys.

In this context the need to maintain high quality official statistics, make better use of administrative data and to improve the systems underlying these data across the public sector is clear. Not only will an integrated system of 'joined-up' and more complete data facilitate better decision-making, it will also represent a more efficient use of resources for generating statistical indicators. The central role given to DPER in developing a National Data Infrastructure has the potential to bring a new impetus to the ISS and to expand on the work already being undertaken by CSO with some government departments and agencies.

The CSO has evolved considerably in recent years; developing new analyses through the innovative use of administrative data, expanding its work programme to meet new demands and restructuring processes internally to gain efficiencies. However, as the CSO faces the same restrictions in its resources as other public sector organisations, it must be considered to have a finite capacity to continually expand its work programme.

Chapter 2

Progress on 2009-2014 Recommendations

Progress on 2009-2014 Recommendations

As part of the 2009-2014 strategy the NSB listed 19 specific recommendations for the CSO to complete, or make substantial progress on, during 2009-2014. The Board is satisfied that much has already been achieved on many actions including the completion of a number of them. A summary analysis of progress on the 19 recommendations is given in this chapter along with the NSB commentary on the progress made. The recommendations are listed in detail in Appendix 3 (p. 38).

Development of Irish Statistical System (Recommendations 1-4)

Recommendations 1 to 4 of the 2009-2014 strategy focus on the role of the CSO in supporting developments across the ISS in line with the goals of the Board. This includes reviewing departmental data strategies, supporting data integration projects and advocating the standardisation of data holdings and statistical processes across the public sector.

Administrative Data Centre

An Administrative Data Centre was established within the CSO in 2009 to maximise the statistical potential and use of administrative data. The focus of the new unit was on the development of an internal portal for storage of, and access to, administrative data holdings. A data warehouse was developed to document and manage the administrative microdata being received by the CSO. Metadata relating to each file is included in the warehouse.

This centralised system for the receipt and storage of such data permits more efficient access to these files and has also facilitated new statistical analyses. Some of the projects undertaken include employment turnover and school leaver analyses. The potential to use administrative data to replace survey data is also being explored in the ADC.

The CSO held Administrative Data Seminars in 2010, 2011 and 2012 which were attended by a broad range of producers and users. These seminars offer users an opportunity to update themselves on CSO activities in relation to increased usage of administrative data, as well as providing those involved in producing administrative data with an input into the future work of the ADC.

There are a number of projects underway at the moment where staff in the CSO are working with other public sector departments and agencies to develop new analyses using existing administrative data sources (e.g. jobs churn analysis using Revenue Commissioners and Department of Social Protection data; recidivism analysis using Department of Justice and Equality data; supplementing Census of Agriculture using data from Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine).

Data Sharing Clearing House (DSCH)

In late 2011 a high-level group was established by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to advance data sharing across the public sector. The DSCH provides a mechanism for the discussion and resolution of data-sharing issues,

whether these arise due to legal constraints or other reasons. It has a remit to review legislative provisions in relation to data sharing, particularly legislative obstacles to better data sharing, and to progress any necessary legal changes. The DSCH also provides a forum where interested parties can be informed of ongoing developments in the data-sharing area and ensures that their concerns feed into the development of central policy and legislation on data-sharing.

Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs published a National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016)¹¹ in November 2011. The development of this strategy included a forensic analysis of existing data sources on children's lives and the identification of data gaps. One of the key cross-cutting issues that emerged was the need for improvement in administrative data systems. Problems identified included the limitations of administrative datasets (e.g. too few classificatory variables); the need for linkage of administrative datasets; the lack of harmonisation of key classificatory variables; the need for centralised analysis of locally held data; and the need to bridge the gap between data production and use through improved methods of communication and dissemination.

***NSB comment:** Some very good progress has been made on recommendations 1, 3 and 4 through the work of the Administrative Data Centre and as illustrated by the administrative data projects being undertaken by CSO in cooperation with other government agencies. The success of the ADC illustrates the value and potential of sharing and matching administrative data across the statistical system, within a strong data management and security framework. This should serve to drive further development of the ISS in the area of administrative data. In addition, the seminars hosted by the CSO have provided a useful forum for wider engagement with the CSO.*

The National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives once again emphasised the value and potential of administrative data for evidence-informed policy-making. Its review of existing data sources, relevant to children's lives, also highlighted critical weaknesses that are common to many administrative data sources across the system, such as limited usage of unique identifiers and harmonised classifications. Another important issue highlighted in the strategy was the importance of developing organisational cultures within relevant agencies that prioritise the collection and use of data in order to develop better data systems.

There remains a lack of uniformity across Departments in their interaction with the Irish Statistical System and this is clearly reflected in difficulties in linking together important life data files due to dataset limitations and an incomplete set of departmental data strategies (Recommendation 2). The role assigned to DPER in the Public Service Reform Plan, to develop an integrated approach to the collection of administrative data and to promote data sharing across the public sector, represents an opportunity for significant new developments in the ISS. The Data Sharing Clearing

¹¹ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011). *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016)*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

House will also play an important role in navigating the legal obstacles to data sharing within the public sector, and provide a useful forum for resolving data sharing issues.

Unique identifiers (Recommendations 5 and 6)

Recommendations 5 and 6 call for the development and widespread adoption of unique business and personal identifiers across the public sector.

The obvious importance of unique identifiers is as a means of linking data sources. While stand-alone data sources have specific business and statistical uses, these can increase exponentially when they are linked to other data sources. This enables greater use of administrative data and can reduce the need for new data collection as well as lessening the burden on respondents.

There are a number of legislative and data protection concerns that are delaying progress on these recommendations. Initial work was undertaken by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise, and Innovation on the introduction of a Data Sharing Bill which would enable Government bodies to share business based data. The Revenue Commissioners business register was to be the basis for the development of this register. However progress on the Bill has slowed and there is no proposed date for it to be brought to Government.

In relation to the use of a unique person identifier across the public sector, some data protection issues have been raised. These have led to the curtailment of the collection of the PPSN (or other personal identifiers), unless fully justified by the primary purpose for which the data is collected. In turn this serves as a constraint on secondary or further processing of data, including data matching, for statistical purposes.

NSB comment: *Comprehensive national registers, based on unique identifiers, linking persons, businesses/institutions and buildings/dwellings are the norm in many countries, and are a primary source of the information used to inform policy. The absence of such registers in Ireland limits the capacity for joining-up government policies. This was well-illustrated by the recent difficulties encountered when rolling out the household charge and septic tank registration schemes. Both of these schemes were hampered by the absence of a comprehensive register of dwellings linked to specific persons and locations.*

The Board is concerned at the lack of progress in relation to the usage of unique identifiers across public sector data sources. The Board considers unique identifiers a prerequisite for the optimal use of all data sources and the lynchpins of a national data infrastructure. Although some data protection issues have been raised, the Board believes that these must be overcome in order to maximise the potential of public-sector data from both a statistical, and crucially, an administrative perspective.

Postcodes (Recommendation 7)

Ireland is the only country in the EU and the OECD which does not have a national postcode system. In July 2009, the then Government approved the launch of a procurement process for a national postcode. In 2010, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources established a postcode steering group. The procurement process is well advanced and it is expected that it will result in a postcode that will be unique at least at building level and thus Electoral Area and other boundaries will be respected.

Beyond their usefulness to the delivery of public services (e.g. mail, emergency services), postcodes could add significant value to the economic, social and environment statistics required by Government, business, and society. Use of postcodes would significantly increase the availability of regional statistics, and the electronic mapping of such data. Both of these developments would be of particular value to planners and policy-makers.

***NSB comment:** Although progress on the introduction of a postcode system has been slow, the Board views it as a key part of the data infrastructure of the ISS. A fully spatial postcode (using X,Y coordinates and not just covering address points) would enable environmental infrastructure such as pylons, bus stops, and accident black-spots to be coded using the same format as for address points and mapped using the software developed for buildings.*

The facility to spatially tag administrative and statistical data in a consistent manner, and to subsequently map it, would greatly enhance users understanding of the geographical trends in various data. Their introduction would greatly facilitate a broad range of statistical tasks such as register maintenance, sample selection, grossing, and travel/commuting origin/destination coding. Postcodes would allow more detailed analyses of the geographical distribution of income, poverty, education, ill health, housing, urban expansion, and physical infrastructure which would facilitate policy analysis and service delivery.

Quality standards for data collection and dissemination (Recommendations 8 and 9)

In these recommendations the Board suggests that the CSO takes the lead in developing more formal data collection, processing and dissemination standards for all producers of official statistics. It also recommends that all producers of official statistics document their procedures and make them publically available to ensure transparency.

Transparent, consistent and common data quality standards are essential to maintain public trust in official statistics, no matter where in the public sector they are produced. The adoption of a common code of statistical best practice across public sector organisations is necessary to ensure high quality and reliable data.

In the Public Sector Reform Plan (2.10), the CSO was assigned a lead role in ensuring consistent practices were being used across the Public Service in the gathering and dissemination of data. The CSO is currently preparing a draft code of practice and standards which will cover data gathering and use for statistical purposes. This code will incorporate the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (see Appendix 4, p. 41) and the European Statistics Code of Practice (p. 43).

A statistical liaison group comprising statisticians involved in the compilation and dissemination of official statistics in Government Departments has also been formed. This group has discussed the extension of the code of practice in relation to official statistics to other government departments, and their findings will inform the draft code of practice.

***NSB comment:** The Board welcomes the work being done by the CSO to develop a code of practice that will inform data collection and statistical production across the public sector. Indeed this extension of a statistical code of practice to all public sector bodies is already envisaged in the European Statistics Code of Practice. Furthermore, forthcoming EU regulations¹² will extend the definition of 'statistical authorities' beyond the traditional national statistical institutes to the wider system. These regulations will also incorporate a mechanism for measuring the compliance of national statistical systems with the European Statistics Code of Practice.*

The value of such a code is evidenced by the trust and confidence placed in CSO statistics by users, who recognise that CSO statistics adhere to the principles of independence, impartiality and objectivity. As it is extended, the Code will play a central role in ensuring the quality and integrity of all official statistical outputs.

However, despite its obvious long-term benefits, implementing the code of practice may present significant challenges for some departments and agencies. CSO and DPER must work together to ensure its widespread adoption, by illustrating its practical benefits for administrative as well as statistical purposes.

Research microdata files (Recommendation 10)

In this recommendation the Board advocates that CSO and other producers of official statistics continue to support legitimate researchers seeking to access microdata, and that an option to access data remotely be developed.

Recent years have seen increased user-demand for access to microdata and the CSO has put in place a comprehensive policy to facilitate access to both anonymised microdata files and research microdata files (RMF).

The Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) and the CSO system of research micro files (RMFs) are the two main mechanisms by which researchers can access data files for very detailed research. The Board has supported the idea of a more coordinated

¹² Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council

cross-university management approach to ISSDA that could be more proactive in relation to promotion of and use of the ISSDA data holdings.

The CSO also established a Remote Access Working Group to examine the issues (including costs) associated with the development of a remote access facility. The Group's main recommendation was to proceed with a move towards the introduction of a remote access solution and this has been accepted by the CSO.

NSB comment: *It is encouraging to see increased usage of CSO microdata both by researchers and by organisations such as the ESRI. Indeed the Board is aware that the demand has increased to a significant extent and urges the CSO to compile structured statistics on the number of applications being received classified by applicant type and datasets being accessed. Such analyses would be a useful input into optimising the relationship between the use of CSO microdata research files and the more anonymised Irish Social Science Data Archive files.*

Data collection efficiency (Recommendation 11)

This recommendation calls on CSO to make greater use of administrative data, to seek efficiencies in collecting data from company accounts and to liaise with other public authorities to avoid overlaps in data collection.

The 2011 Response Burden Barometer¹³, found that the total administrative burden placed on Irish businesses by CSO surveys, has reduced by 19.3% since 2005 and by 28% since 2010. The reduced burden on enterprises has been achieved through the greater use of administrative data, resulting in smaller sample sizes for some surveys, and the development of payroll software to enable enterprises automate their statistical reporting requirements.

The CSO is working directly with the Revenue Commissioners to examine the potential of XBRL¹⁴ for the purposes of automatic extraction of data from company accounts, with a view to reducing the need for survey data. This should provide a platform for Revenue to collect data using XBRL in future years.

The number of small and micro enterprises sampled for Structural Business Statistics was reduced by around 20% in 2011 by combining the available administrative data with econometric modelling.

The CSO is continuing to broaden the usage of the eForms application and will consider other potential web data collection applications on an ongoing basis.

¹³ The Response Burden Barometer (RBB) is a measure of the total administrative burden placed on Irish businesses by Central Statistics Office (CSO) surveys.

¹⁴ eXtensible Business Reporting Language: a standard way to communicate and exchange information between business systems.

NSB comment: *The Board welcomes the work being done to maximise the use of administrative data sources and the subsequent reduction in respondent burden being achieved.*

Further progress on this recommendation will be greatly facilitated by the implementation of Actions 2.6 and 2.10 in the Public Sector Reform Plan (Appendix 5). An integrated public sector data infrastructure, based on unique identifiers and standard data protocols, will provide considerable scope for increased data sharing and reduce the burden imposed on respondents by ad-hoc surveys.

Environment statistics (Recommendations 12 and 13)

These recommendations urge the CSO to treat environmental statistics as a high priority using a collaborative approach, and to produce a new annual environment statistics report.

Environmental data is becoming increasingly important in the policy development context, not just within the environmental policy area itself but across a range of complex and often cross-cutting areas including sustainable development and energy security, efficiency and diversity.

A new EU Environmental Economic Accounting Regulation¹⁵ was passed in 2011 covering three modules: Air emissions; Material flows; and Environmental taxes. Legislation proposing three further modules will be prepared by the Commission during 2012 covering: Energy accounts; Environmental goods and services; and Environmental protection expenditures.

The CSO has made progress in extending its coverage of environment statistics. A new environment indicators report was published in March 2012 and preliminary work has commenced on the preparation of a new report for 2013 on sustainable development indicators.

An EPA/CSO Liaison Group has been formed and an SEAI/CSO energy statistics working group has continued its work. The CSO and SEAI jointly carried out a Business Energy Use survey in 2009 and this has been repeated annually since then. The CSO is in consultation with the EPA with a view to increasing the level of assistance it provides regarding the selection and weighting of enterprise samples for waste generation surveys.

The CSO is becoming more involved at Eurostat level in relation to environment, energy, and waste statistics and working closely with the EPA/SEAI and other bodies to ensure there is consistency and efficiency in data collection and compilation.

NSB comment: *Good progress is being made in this area which the Board identified as a priority in the Strategy 2009-2014, but the demands are also increasing. The scope of the proposed legal modules is very wide and will require the CSO to develop its own*

¹⁵ Regulation (EU) 691/2011 on European environmental economic accounts

subject-matter knowledge while also making full use of the technical and data expertise in organisations such as the Environment Protection Agency and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

The CSO should also engage proactively with key end-users of its environmental and sustainable development publications, to ensure that the statistics that are compiled and published provide a relevant and timely input to the performance monitoring and policy development processes within Government, and facilitate further in-depth analysis by Government departments and statutory agencies such as the EPA, SEAI, Teagasc and NESAC.

National Travel Survey (Recommendation 14)

This recommendation calls for the development of a full national travel survey.

In August 2011 the CSO published the results of a pilot National Travel Survey, which was carried on the QNHS in Q4 2009. Reaction to these new data was very positive. A comprehensive review of this pilot made a number of recommendations around the definitions and methodology used with a view to improving the quality of data collected in future Travel surveys. The CSO agreed to the majority of the recommendations in that report. A second, but reduced, National Travel Survey, is being collected on the QNHS during October-December 2012, and this is due to be repeated in 2013 and 2014.

In early 2012 the National Transport Authority also commissioned a Household Travel Survey to obtain information about day-to-day travel behaviour and to gain an understanding of people's travel needs. This survey is specifically designed to update the Authority's statistical models to help it plan for transport infrastructure and improvements to transport services.

CSO and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) have had some discussions about how best to coordinate CSO, agency and DTTAS activity, in order to ensure value for money while at the same time meet user needs.

NSB comment: *Although the 2011 Census of Population provided detailed information on travel to work and school, there remains a requirement for more frequent and more comprehensive data on travel patterns. The Board supports the work being undertaken by CSO through the QNHS to meet this data need, but recognises that this is an interim solution. The Board believes that the CSO should continue to explore the options for developing a full national travel survey on an annual basis.*

The Board encourages the CSO, through the Transport Statistics Liaison Group, to continue to engage with relevant stakeholders in this area to ensure the prioritisation of data needs and the coordination of efforts and resources.

Census 2011 - Travel to work and school (Recommendation 15)

This recommendation concerns the inclusion of travel to school and college in the 2011 Census of Population and Place of Work Analysis.

As part of the Census 2011 processing programme the place of work, school or college details were geo-coded. That is, each place was given a specific geographic reference point. All workers resident in Ireland on Census night were coded to their place of work and all Irish resident students from the age of 5 and upwards were coded to their place of school/college. A detailed file¹⁶ containing the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these residents along with information on the origin and destination of their journeys has been made available for analysis.

***NSB comment:** The Board welcomes the geo-coding of the travel to work, school or college data and the timeliness of its availability. The geo-coding of this data will permit more complex analyses to be undertaken with detailed X,Y coordinate data. The CSO should examine whether useful analyses could be undertaken at household level of the relationships between home and place of work and education for all persons in the household.*

System of health accounts (Recommendation 16)

This recommendation calls for the development of a robust system of health accounts for Ireland.

The European Commission is currently developing a Commission regulation with a view to implementing the provisions of Framework Regulation 1338/2008 on public health statistics. The regulation will impose a legal requirement on member states to report health care expenditure according to three core classifications of the OECD System of Health Accounts (SHA). The classifications will distinguish health care functions, health care providers and health care financing schemes. It is intended that the requisite data will be transmitted to Eurostat on a voluntary basis in March 2015 in respect of the year 2013 and on a legally binding basis in March 2016 in respect of the year 2014.

The CSO and Department of Health have decided to set up a project team comprising CSO, HSE and DoH personnel to undertake the necessary work to ensure compliance with the implementing regulation. A project board is being set up with representation from the Department of Health, CSO and the HSE along with other key agencies in the health sector and interested parties from the academic and research communities. The Board will be jointly chaired by the Department of Health and the CSO. CSO are currently drafting terms of reference and other project documentation for agreement with Dept of Health, with a view to initiating the project in Q1 2013.

¹⁶ Place of Work, School or College - Anonymised Records (POWSCAR)

NSB comment: *Progress in this area has been disappointing. Health policy and planning is one of the key areas of government. Given the size of the health budget, the potential impact of cutbacks and the need to understand the relationship between spending and outcomes, integrating health accounts in a system consistent with the national accounts would provide much needed data for policy-makers.*

However, the Board notes the opportunity presented by the Framework Regulation to achieve more complete and harmonised data on health expenditure across the system. The Board hopes that the work of the new project team can bring significant and timely progress to this important area.

Learner database (Recommendation 17)

The importance of developing an integrated learner database was identified in the Department of Education's Data Strategy in 2008 and again in the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016)¹⁷ published in November 2011.

Some work towards an integrated learner database has commenced. The Centralised Post-Primary Pupil On-line Database (P-POD) is currently in development by the Department of Education and Skills. This is due to be rolled out to all schools for 2013/14 and will replace the existing post-primary pupil database. Phase two of this project is the development of a primary pupil database in the overall context of an integrated pupil database. The development of such a database is contingent on the availability of resources.

NSB comment: *This is another area where progress has been disappointing. The absence of a comprehensive integrated education database covering all stages of education is a major gap in developing person-based life-cycle analyses. An integrated learner database, documenting student progression from preschool through primary, post-primary, higher and further education would allow analysts to identify critical factors affecting student progression, learning pathways and educational outcomes.*

Key short-term economic indicators (Recommendation 18)

The CSO prepared an initial set of indicators which were approved by the Board. CSO staff subsequently consulted with external stakeholders on the proposed list of key short-term economic indicators, and a small number of changes were made to the indicator set arising from these consultations.

A set of 27 key economic indicators went live on the CSO website in June 2012. The data for the indicators are generated automatically from the CSO StatBank. The information available for each indicator comprises:

- Latest value
- Period of latest release

¹⁷ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011). *National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016)*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

- Monthly/quarterly/annual changes
- Link to an indicator page containing a graph, a table of data, a link to the series on Statbank, and a link to the latest release

NSB comment: *This set of short-term indicators is a very welcome addition to CSO output and complements the existing sets on measuring progress and on environment. The web based electronic data capture and dissemination ensures that the indicators are always fully up-to-date.*

Improvement in quality and availability of house prices (Recommendation 19)

The monthly national House Price Index was launched by the CSO in May 2011 and has quickly become a very-widely used series as well as a key economic indicator. This index is based on mortgage data which the CSO receives directly from the lending institutions. The methodology used in the construction of the index was peer reviewed by international experts prior to the first publication of results.

Work has begun, in cooperation with the ESRI, on producing additional analysis (such as an examination of negative equity) from the monthly mortgage datasets supplied by the mortgage lending institutions.

In July 2012 the Property Services Regulatory Authority released the new Residential Property Prices Register based on stamp duty returns to the Revenue Commissioners. The CSO is also working on a project to match these data (stamp duty returns) from the Revenue Commissioners with building energy rating certificate data from SEAI, to provide an analysis of the relationship between price and the physical characteristics of the property. However, this project is hampered somewhat by the reliance on address strings for the matching exercise and the lack of a postcode.

NSB comment: *The Board very much welcomes the rapid progress made by the CSO in the development of a house price index. The Board is encouraged to see further work being undertaken to make full use of the data files being provided by the financial institutions and the wider use of administrative data being held across the public sector.*

Chapter 3

Key Strategic Issues for the ISS to 2014

In this chapter the NSB highlights what it considers to be some critical issues for the Irish Statistical System in the context of the progress made to date on the 2009-2014 Strategy and the changed environment since its preparation.

3.1 The Irish Statistical System (ISS)

The Board acknowledges that progress has been made in some areas of the ISS since the publication of its 2009-2014 strategy document. In particular, the establishment of formal relationships between CSO and a number of key data custodians has resulted in the development of new analyses and outputs that are of significant importance in the context of policy and evaluation. However, a lack of uniformity in engagement with the ISS, restrictions on the use of some administrative sources and the absence of formal protocols around statistical work in many departments and agencies, remain persistent challenges to the development of the ISS.

In two papers published in 2011¹⁸, the Board outlined the various ways in which the ISS, and in particular 'joined-up data' can support the achievement of government reform objectives. For instance, linking administrative data sources can lead to more effective policy evaluation and more informed decision-making than using traditional stand-alone surveys or unconnected data sources. In these papers the Board also re-emphasised the fundamental importance of developing three comprehensive national registers of people, businesses and buildings, that are founded on unique identifiers and which, when linked, would allow wide-ranging analyses.

The Board called for a strategic initiative from government to integrate the Irish Statistical System, suggesting that a national cross-government data strategy was central to meeting government reform objectives. Such a strategy would not only maximise the utility of administrative data for statistical purposes, but would also facilitate policy objectives such as more efficient service targeting and delivery, cost savings, and effective policy-monitoring.

3.2 Public Sector Reform and the ISS

The role assigned to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) by the Public Sector Reform Plan, of promoting data sharing and statistical best-practice across the public sector, is an important development for the ISS and very much welcomed by the Board. Similarly, the inclusion of a public sector code of statistical practice, a strategy to develop an integrated system of administrative data and a review of the legislative environment in the Plan has the potential to bring significant positive change to the ISS.

¹⁸ National Statistics Board (2011). *The Irish Statistical System: The Way Forward*. Dublin: Stationery Office
National Statistics Board (2011). *Joined Up Government Needs Joined Up Data*. Dublin: Stationery Office

Public Service Statistical Code of Practice

The development of a code of practice and standards for the gathering and use of data for statistical purposes in the Public Service is being led by CSO (PSR initiative 2.10(i)). The development of this new code is necessary to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of statistics published by the public sector, given the increasing reliance on such data for evidence-based decision-making.

There is no doubt that the adoption of the new code will be challenging for some organisations, whose primary focus is on using data for their day-to-day administrative functions, before considering their status as official data. Both CSO and DPER must work together to encourage public sector organisations to recognise the inherent value of a code that ensures professionalism, independence and transparency.

The Board's view is that the European Statistics Code of Practice should apply to all statistics produced by public sector organisations.

Development of statistical infrastructure

The Board welcomes the fact that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has been assigned the lead role in the development and implementation of an integrated approach to the collection of administrative data across the public sector. This, national data infrastructure (NDI), requires standardisation of data collection and processing methods and the use of unique identifiers to facilitate data linking.

The key to optimal usage of data sources in the public sector, whether for administrative or statistical purposes, is the capacity to link different datasets (i.e. connect the 'data silos' that exist across the public service). While individual data sources have significant administrative and analytical potential, it is when they are combined or "linked" at unit record level that the analytical potential increases very significantly. The Board believes that an effective infrastructure to underpin the linkage of data requires:

- Mandatory usage of the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) in interactions between the individual and the public sector
- Development and mandatory usage of a Unique Business Identifier (UBI) for interactions between businesses and the public sector; and
- Implementation and use of a standard approach to geo-spatial coding across all public data holdings (ideally a location indicator using x, y coordinates).

While good progress has been made towards an integrated statistical infrastructure, this progress has largely been of a bilateral nature between the CSO and individual departments. In order to make a national integrated system a reality all government departments and agencies need to recognise the inherent administrative and statistical value of linked data and commit to the principles outlined above.

Departments and agencies need to be aware of potential external linkages when developing new data systems or surveys. Every new system should be reviewed for

the extent to which it overlaps or complements existing data sources, thereby adding value across the whole system. Indeed, Section 31 (2)¹⁹ of the Statistics Act, 1993 requires public bodies to consult with the Director General of the CSO in relation to their data handling and statistical surveys. While this statutory provision has not been actively pursued to date, it is the Board's view that the CSO may need to be more robust in the exercise of its legal powers in this regard so as to ensure consistency and to promote integration.

It is clear that in the absence of a fully integrated system the opportunities to provide insight and analyses at a macro level are limited.

Legislative Review

The work that has been done on the ISS over the past few years has highlighted the need for a review of the legislative framework covering the collection and usage of official statistical information. There is uncertainty about the various legal instruments that dictate the collection, dissemination and sharing of official data across government departments and agencies. Data protection concerns and perceived restrictions in the usage of PPSNs across the system are examples of common issues that may need to be clarified by legislative change.

The Statistics Act 1993 and EU Regulation 223/2009 already assign a significant statutory role to CSO in relation to the co-ordination and production of official statistics. However, the former dates from 1993 and needs to be re-evaluated in the context of the current diverse range of producers of official statistics and the high priority being given to collecting statistical data only once (either through an administrative form or a survey).

There are also developments at a European level which may extend the responsibilities of National Statistics Institutes (NSIs) further, through amendments to existing statistical legislation. The Commission has proposed a comprehensive set of amendments to Regulation 223/2009 (the EU "Statistical Law") which would, amongst other things, strengthen the co-ordinating role of the NSI and extend compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice. Many of the amendments, relating to independence and co-ordination of the national statistical system, are already enshrined in the Statistics Act 1993. These changes are currently being discussed under the EU co-decision process. The amendments to Regulation 223/2009 reflect the perceived need for increased scrutiny at European level of the governance of official statistics. Similarly in the context of the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) reporting, Eurostat has been empowered if necessary to examine the source administrative data held by Public Authorities that are used by NSIs and Ministries of Finance for the compilation of macroeconomic statistics.

PSR initiative 2.10 (iii) reflects this changing legislative environment and specifically targets a review of the legal framework for the ISS to ensure that it maximises the use

¹⁹ 31(2) – “If any public authority proposes to introduce, revise or extend any system for the storage and retrieval of information or to make a statistical survey it shall consult with the Director General and accept any recommendations that he may reasonably make in relation to the proposal.”

of available data, while maintaining public trust. CSO is currently conducting a review of the legislation that applies to official statistical information. This review will take stock of where the ISS is at the moment, outline the challenges that exist within the system from a legislative perspective and identify key long-term objectives.

3.3 Data Protection issues

As outlined above, the Board strongly believes that the mandatory usage of unique identifiers by all public sector organisations in their interactions with the public is critical for the development of an integrated statistical infrastructure. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are some data protection concerns associated with the implementation of a national data infrastructure, as outlined above.

In particular the broader usage of the PPSN has been identified as an area of concern in the past, and there would appear to be some confusion regarding the exact legal position surrounding the use of PPSNs by public organisations for administrative and statistical purposes. However, it is clear that the widespread use of the PPSN across all public sector databases is an essential element in maximising the statistical potential of administrative data.

Given the concerns that exist, it is now imperative for all stakeholders to consider how these issues might be resolved. For example, it may be possible to develop a protocol or suite of procedures, agreeable to the Data Protection Commissioner, that would provide the required safeguards to support the mandatory usage of the PPSN across the public sector thus facilitating the usage of all relevant administrative data sources for statistical purposes in support of evidence-based policy-making.

3.4 Capacity of system

The importance of reliable and trustworthy official statistics has been highlighted through the economic crisis, and this period has seen official statistics gain significant prominence. The value of high quality statistics for evidence-based decision-making is clear, and there is an ever-growing demand for additional statistics and more sophisticated analyses. The data needs of the Troika in the area of macroeconomic statistics, the new social surveys being proposed at EU level and growing national user needs represent a significant additional workload for the system of official statistics.

While the CSO must continue to seek efficiencies to meet as many of the new data needs as possible in spite of resource constraints, it is essential that the quality and integrity of its statistical outputs are not compromised. The reviews which followed the General Government Debt (GGD) error show how, inter alia, increased workloads, analytical complexity, time pressure and multi-agency involvement can create a situation where quality may be compromised. This highlights the challenges being faced and acts as a reminder of the risks that need to be managed in the context of increased user demand while resources are diminishing.

Therefore, given the finite capacity of its resources, and the likelihood of future budget reductions, the CSO must carefully gauge the importance of developing new statistical outputs against any potential implications for the quality of the existing programme of work. The introduction of new analyses or surveys should not undermine the quality of existing indicators, which should maintain the high standards of all CSO outputs. Data quality and public trust in official statistics must be the guiding principles in any new programme of developments.

By the same token, the interrelationship between the data underlying key national indicators means that the option to reduce sample size, change survey frequency or discontinue collection of certain data must be seen as a last resort. The Board also notes the necessary priority given to new EU and Troika data requirements but believes that the CSO must try to retain the capacity to respond to urgent national data priorities.

The Board recognises and encourages the work being undertaken by CSO to develop statistical outputs and meet user needs through the innovative use of administrative data, rationalisation of business procedures and the re-organisation of existing survey processes to achieve greater efficiency. However, it is unlikely that CSO can continue to absorb all of the new data demands in this way, given that the resources available to maintain the existing statistical programme have been reduced, and are likely to face further reductions in the coming years given the prevailing economic climate.

The quality and scope of the system of official statistics in Ireland, has been established incrementally over a long number of years, and has been internationally recognised. The value of a strong system of official statistics to government, the economy and the public is recognised in both the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice. In this context, the NSB would have concerns about further cuts to the CSO's budget and the negative impact this would undoubtedly have on the quality and breadth of official statistics, and more specifically on some of the key national economic indicators produced by the Office.

3.5 Irish Statistical System – Next steps

As stated in the NSB publication *The Irish Statistical System: The Way Forward*²⁰ the Board regards the development of a statistical system that can link all relevant available data (statistical and administrative) as being crucial to Ireland's ability to understand and respond to current national and international challenges.

The development of an integrated statistical system is contingent on the cooperation and engagement of all public sector organisations. DPER now has an important role in providing leadership and CSO continues to have an important role in highlighting the statistical value of high quality administrative data. However, it remains the responsibility of all departments and agencies to become more outward-looking in their collection and use of data and consider how their data might fit into a broader statistical framework.

In order to achieve an integrated statistical system, the NSB believes that the following are urgent priorities:

1. Ensure the maintenance of strong institutional commitment to the development of the ISS led by policy makers and implemented by government departments and agencies in partnership with CSO;
2. Create a national data infrastructure to facilitate data-sharing for statistical purposes, lessen response burden, and provide an efficient and customer-centred public service through the adoption and use of unique identifiers;
3. Professionalise the ISS by introducing standards based on agreed Codes of Practice and protocols;
4. Address data protection concerns in consultation with the Data Protection Commissioner.
5. Ensure that the legislative framework in which the ISS operates is fit for purpose.
6. Improve progress in line with the Board's recommendations in the following key areas: the system of health accounts, the integrated learners' database and environment statistics.

²⁰ National Statistics Board (2011). *The Irish Statistical System: The Way Forward*. Dublin: Stationery Office

Appendices

Appendix 1 Board Functions under the Statistics Act, 1993

Section 10 - Functions of Central Statistics Office:

(1) The functions of the Office shall be the collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State.

(2) The Office shall have authority to co-ordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities to ensure, in particular, adherence to statistical standards and the use of appropriate classifications.

(3) The Office shall have authority to assess the statistical potential of the records maintained by public authorities and, in conjunction with them, to ensure that this potential is realised in so far as resources permit.

Section 19 - Function of National Statistics Board:

Section 19 of the Statistics Act, 1993 describes the function of the Board:

(1) The function of the National Statistics Board in guiding, with the agreement of the Taoiseach, the strategic direction of the Office shall include in particular –

(a) establishing priorities for the compilation and development of official statistics;

(b) assessing the resources of staff, equipment and finance that should be made available for the compilation of official statistics;

(c) arbitrating, subject to the final decision of the Taoiseach, on any conflicts which may arise between the Office and other public authorities relating to the extraction of statistics from records or to the co-ordination of statistical activities.

Appendix 2 Membership of the Board

Board Members (current membership)

Dr. Patricia O’Hara (Chairperson)
Adjunct Professor, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth

Mr. John Callinan
Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. Ciaran Dolan
Agri-Business and Food Policy consultant

Mr. Michael McGrath
Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance

Professor Philip Lane
Whately Professor of Political Economy, Trinity College Dublin

Mr. Fergal O’Brien
Senior Economist, Irish Business and Employers Confederation

Mr. Paul Sweeney
Economic Advisor, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Mr Pdraig Dalton
Director General, Central Statistics Office (ex officio member)

Mr. Donal Kelly
Secretary to the Board (Statistician, Central Statistics Office)

Appendix 3 2009-2014 Strategy Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Board recommends that the CSO review progress on the recommendations in the SPAR reports and identify what steps need to be taken to organise administrative data in a strategic framework that can inform policy and assist monitoring.

Recommendation 2: The Board recommends that the CSO undertakes a formal engagement with government departments to review progress to-date with data strategies and identify a way forward so that the NSB objectives for the Irish Statistical System can be realised as expeditiously as possible.

Recommendation 3: The Board recommends that the CSO continues to give priority to statistical integration projects and initiatives that are primarily aimed at adding value to existing data collections and to enhancing independent data sources through data matching and analysis. The Board also recommends that the CSO considers the possibility of extending the StatCentral portal to include links to data held by regional bodies and local authorities.

Recommendation 4: The Board recommends that the CSO and government departments and agencies continue to liaise and work to enhance and standardise important administrative data holdings.

Recommendation 5: The Board reiterates its support for the development of a Unique Business Identifier as a matter of priority. The ongoing collaboration between the CSO and Revenue, which involves the use of a common identifier, should be carefully monitored with a view to using it as a template for wider application.

Recommendation 6: The Board continues to support the development of a Unique Personal Identifier for Ireland for use across the public service. In the event of an independent Unique Health Identifier being developed, the Board is firmly of the view that it should be designed in such a way that a one to one link with the existing PPSN can be achieved for analytical purposes.

Recommendation 7: The Board recommends that the areas represented by the new postal codes should fully respect the small output area boundaries so that postcodes can be aggregated to the level of these areas. The Board also recommends that the register of postcodes should be publicly available and should identify larger area units such as the Electoral Division and administrative counties associated with the postcodes.

Recommendation 8: The Board recommends that the CSO take the lead in drafting more formal quality procedures for the collection, processing and dissemination of official statistics by all national producers. These should be based on the Code of Practice, developed at EU level, for the production of European Statistics.

Recommendation 9: The Board recommends that to ensure transparency all producers of official statistics, particularly those meeting EU requirements, should be required to: prepare advance calendars of publications; document their procedures and processes; and to make them publicly available.

Recommendation 10: The Board recommends that the CSO and other data producers in the Irish Statistical System continue to facilitate requests for access to microdata files for legitimate research purposes, including the development of a remote access option, subject to all the necessary security arrangements being in place to ensure full compliance with the data protection provisions of the Statistics Act.

Recommendation 11: The Board recommends that the CSO:

- ◆ Uses information from administrative sources wherever possible thus increasing the statistical value of such data;
- ◆ Works with other public authorities in order to avoid overlaps in data collection;
- ◆ Optimises the automatic extraction of data from company accounts and standard reports; and
- ◆ Permits online questionnaire completion where appropriate and feasible.

Recommendation 12: The Board recommends that the development of environment statistics should be treated as a high priority. The adoption of a collaborative approach is recommended using the strengths of the various organisations involved in the measurement and collection of environment and energy statistics.

Recommendation 13: The Board further recommends that the CSO develops a new annual environment statistics report that would incorporate a range of data and complement Measuring Ireland's Progress which is more focused on economic and social indicators. Such a new report would facilitate more in-depth analyses, by bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and Comhar, on the implications of the statistics for government policy.

Recommendation 14: The Board welcomes the use of the Quarterly National Household Survey to pilot the collection of basic travel information from households. However, the Board considers that a full National Travel Survey (which would collect detailed information on: journeys made using all modes of travel: combinations of modes; purposes of travel; and daily flow patterns) should be conducted at the first available opportunity.

Recommendation 15: The Board recommends that the 2011 Census of Population Place of Work analysis be extended to include travel to school and college.

Recommendation 16: The Board recommends that the gaps identified in the feasibility study on the implementation of a System of Health Accounts for Ireland are addressed, and that a suitably robust system of health accounts be compiled.

Recommendation 17: The Board recommends that the Department of Education and Science give high priority to the development of a Learner Database so that progress through the educational system and subsequent linkages to the labour market can be monitored in a comprehensive manner.

Recommendation 18: The Board recommends that the CSO develops a new web-based report that brings together timely and accessible key short term economic indicators.

Recommendation 19: The Board recommends that the CSO continues its work with the Department of the Environment to improve the quality and availability of data on house prices.

Appendix 4 : UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe²¹

Bearing in mind that official statistical information is an essential basis for development in the economic, demographic, social and environmental fields and for mutual knowledge and trade among the States and peoples of the world.

Bearing in mind that the essential trust of the public in official statistical information depends to a large extent on respect for the fundamental values and principles which are the basis of any society which seeks to understand itself and to respect the rights of its members.

Bearing in mind that the quality of official statistics, and thus the quality of the information available to the Government, the economy and the public depends largely on the cooperation of citizens, enterprises, and other respondents in providing appropriate data needed for necessary statistical compilations.

Recalling the general provisions and standards adopted to this end by the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention of the Council of Europe of 28 January 1991 for the Protection of Individuals with regard to automatic processing of personal data, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe,

Recalling the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organisations active in statistics to establish standards and concepts to allow comparisons among countries:

Recalling also the International Statistical Institute Declaration of Professional Ethics,

Having taken cognisance of the consensus reached within the Conference of European Statisticians on the need to define the principles governing the activities of the official statistical agencies in the region and in the member States,

Adopts the present resolution:

Principle 1: Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a society, serving the government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information.

Principle 2: To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.

²¹ Decision C(47) adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe at its April 1992 session.

Principle 3: To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics.

Principle 4: The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.

Principle 5: Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.

Principle 6: Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

Principle 7: The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.

Principle 8: Co-ordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.

Principle 9: The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods promotes the consistency and efficiency of statistical systems at all official levels.

Principle 10: Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.

The conference of European Statisticians, at intervals of not more than three years, will discuss these principles, consider ways to contribute to their application and report to the Commission.

European Statistics Code of Practice (2011)²²

Principle 1 – Professional Independence

Professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Principle 2 – Mandate for Data Collection

Statistical authorities have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Principle 3 – Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities are sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Principle 4 – Commitment to Quality

Statistical authorities are committed to quality. They systematically and regularly identify strengths and weaknesses to continuously improve process and product quality.

Principle 5 – Statistical Confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes are absolutely guaranteed.

Principle 6 – Impartiality and Objectivity

Statistical authorities develop, produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Principle 7 – Sound Methodology

Sound methodology underpins quality statistics. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.

Principle 8 – Appropriate Statistical Procedures

Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented from data collection to data validation, underpin quality statistics.

Principle 9 – Non-excessive Burden on Respondents

The reporting burden is proportionate to the needs of the users and is not excessive for respondents. The statistical authorities monitor the response burden and set targets for its reduction over time.

²² See full code here:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-32-11-955/EN/KS-32-11-955-EN.PDF

Principle 10 – Cost Effectiveness

Resources are used effectively.

Principle 11 – Relevance

European Statistics meet the needs of users.

Principle 12 – Accuracy and Reliability

European Statistics accurately and reliably portray reality.

Principle 13 – Timeliness and Punctuality

European Statistics are released in a timely and punctual manner.

Principle 14 – Coherence and Comparability

European Statistics are consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it is possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different sources.

Principle 14 – Accessibility and Clarity

European Statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Appendix 5 : Public Sector Reform Plan²³ – Actions 2.6 and 2.10

2.6 Improve sharing of data on businesses across the Public Service.

i. Introduce a common vocabulary for identifying businesses using the Revenue Commissioner's Business Register. This should be done by all public bodies.

ii. Introduce legislation to allow public bodies to collect one of the business identifiers included in the Revenue Business Register and match these identifiers against that Register.

iii. Provide technology solutions to allow public bodies to match data against the Revenue Business Register and/or synchronise with it.

2.10 Develop a code of practice for data gathering and its use for statistical purposes across the Public Service, to facilitate improved usefulness of the data gathered for decision-making, planning and service delivery and the reduction of the potential for fraud.

i Assign the lead role for the development of a code of practice and standards for the gathering and use of data for statistical purposes in the Public Service.

ii Develop an integrated approach to the collection of administrative data across the Public Service, including a strategy to promote consistent approaches to, and systematic uses of, data (including identifiers, classifications and geo-spatial/postcode data) in service planning and delivery.

iii Assess the legislative environment with a view to identifying the scope for additional and greater uses of statistical data, including any potential legislative changes where necessary.

²³ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2011). *Public Service Reform*. Dublin: Author.