



The implementation of Strategy for Statistics, 1998-2002

Progress Report, 1998

National Statistics Board

Pn. 7468

Price: £5.00
6.35

July 1999

© Government of Ireland 1999

Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

ISSN 0791-1947
ISBN 0-7076-1911-4

Published by the Stationery Office, Dublin.

Designed and printed by the Central Statistics Office.

Chairperson's

Preface

This is the third report to Government of the National Statistics Board, which was established by statute in Section 18 of the *Statistics Act, 1993*. The Report covers the calendar year 1998, during which the Board prepared its five-year strategy document *Strategy for Statistics 1998-2002*, launched in September 1998.

The formulation of appropriate economic and social policies requires national statistics that are comprehensive, accurate and timely. Ireland's entry into the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) has enhanced this need, as we strive to reflect Ireland's economic and social position accurately and effectively at European level and to evaluate the effects of the changes that are taking place in the economy at a time of unprecedented growth. EMU membership has greatly increased data requirements facing all national statistical authorities, and in the Irish case this increase is substantial as our national economic statistics have not hitherto been as developed as those of some of our European partners. The Board is satisfied that resources are gradually being made available to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to meet these requirements for Ireland.



Statistics on the labour market are of great importance at a time of rapid change. The Board is pleased that the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is now in place to monitor these changes on a quarterly basis. This new survey uses a rotating panel data system that will enhance our understanding of the processes of change in the labour market. The Board looks forward to the introduction of regular social modules into the Survey questionnaire once the new system is firmly in place, and is pleased that a process of wide consultation will be used to ensure that these social modules provide the most valuable data possible. This process of consultation is a key feature of *Strategy for Statistics 1998-2002* and similar consultation groups are now in the process of being established for all the major areas of statistics.

The Board is conscious of the burden placed on business, especially in small enterprises, in providing data to the CSO. The contribution of business is absolutely vital to the quality of Irish economic statistics and to the speed at which they can be made available. The Board welcomes the fact that, under *Partnership 2000*, the issue of minimising the burden on businesses, in providing information to the State in a whole range of areas, is being addressed. Information technology has potential over the next five years, if properly co-ordinated, to cut the costs of information provision by such businesses, and this broad systemic approach is strongly endorsed by the Board.

On behalf of the Board, I should like to thank our former Board Members Mr Steve Couldwell and Mr David Doyle for their valuable contribution during

their period of membership which came to an end in January of this year. Finally, I should also like to acknowledge the cooperation and support of CSO personnel in providing material to the Board, and to compliment all of the staff for the work that they have done and are doing, in producing official statistics. In particular, along with the Board, I recognise the commitment of time and energy by staff at all levels in implementing the Board's strategic plan and, in particular, in the adoption of new technology, which is so vital to the cost-effective collection and processing of statistical data. The Board is committed to the development of Ireland's official statistics so that they meet the standards required of an economy within the European Union. Central to this commitment is its role in ensuring that resources within the CSO are efficiently allocated and that the overall allocation to the CSO is adequate to meet national needs as we enter the twenty first century.

*Frances Ruane
Chairperson*

Executive

Summary

The main function of the National Statistics Board, as specified in the *Statistics Act, 1993*, is to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office (CSO). In September 1998, the Board published its five-year strategic plan *Strategy for Statistics, 1998-2002* after extensive consultation with the users and suppliers of statistics.

This report describes progress made by the CSO during the year 1998 in meeting the objectives set out in the Board's Strategy.

It is divided into two parts.

Part I gives the perspective of the Board. Chapter 1 (*Background*) explains the functions and work of the National Statistics Board and summarises its 1998-2002 Strategy. Chapter 2 (*Review*) discusses the main topics on which the Board focused during 1998, describes what the Board sees as the most significant statistical developments during this period, and outlines the progress made by the CSO in a range of areas. It also comments on the implications of the continuing increases in EU statistical demands, particularly those arising in the context of EMU.

The key developments in Irish statistics during 1998 include:

- The early completion of the processing of the 1996 Census of Population in January 1998 and the publication of the full set of detailed reports before the end of the year.
- The publication of the results for the first quarter (September-November 1997) of the new Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS); The QNHS results for the second (December 1997-February 1998) and third (March 1998-May 1998) quarters of 1998 were issued in November 1998.
- The publication of the first results of a new quarterly stocks and investment inquiry that was initiated in 1996.



- The initiation, after considerable development work and prior consultations with the sector, of new quarterly Balance of Payments inquiries to the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) to meet EU and EMU statistical demands.
- The publication of early quarterly industrial earnings estimates based on partial survey response.
- The progress being made in the move towards a process-based approach in the business statistics area as recommended in the May 1997 Deloitte & Touche consultancy report.

Part II of the Report details the specific developments made by the CSO during 1998 in *macro-economic statistics* (Chapter 3), *social & demographic statistics* (Chapter 4), and *business statistics* (Chapter 5). *Other statistical aspects* are reviewed in Chapter 6, and *CSO organisational developments*, designed to meet more effectively the increasing demand for statistics, are summarised in Chapter 7.



Table of

Contents

Chairperson's Preface	1	
Executive Summary	5	
<hr/>		
Part I		
National Statistics Board		
Review of Developments	9	
Chapter 1	Background	11
<i>Introduction</i>		11
<i>National Statistics Board</i>		11
<i>Central Statistics Office</i>		12
<i>Board's Five-yearly Strategies</i>		12
<i>Summary of the 1998-2002 Strategy</i>		12
Chapter 2	Review	15
<i>Introduction</i>		15
<i>Board Focus during 1998</i>		15
<i>Statistical Developments in 1998</i>		16
<i>Consultation with Users and Suppliers</i>		17
<i>Increased EU and EMU Requirements</i>		18
<i>CSO Operational Aspects</i>		19
<hr/>		
Part II		
Central Statistics Office		
Statistical & Organisational Developments	21	
Chapter 3	Macro-economic Statistics	23
<i>Introduction</i>		23
<i>National Accounts</i>		24
<i>Timeliness</i>		24
<i>Quality</i>		24
<i>Scope</i>		25
<i>Balance of Payments</i>		25
<i>Timeliness</i>		25

<i>Quality</i>	26
<i>Scope</i>	26
External Trade Statistics	26
<i>Timeliness</i>	26
<i>Quality</i>	27
Price Statistics	27
 Chapter 4	
Social & Demographic Statistics	29
<i>Introduction</i>	29
<i>Quarterly National Household Survey</i>	30
<i>Review of Labour Market Statistics</i>	31
<i>1999-2000 Household Budget Survey</i>	31
<i>Time Use Survey</i>	32
<i>Vital Statistics</i>	32
<i>2001 Census of Population</i>	32
 Chapter 5	
Business Statistics	35
<i>Introduction</i>	35
<i>New EU Business Statistics Regulations</i>	35
<i>Short-term Earnings</i>	36
<i>Improved Timeliness of Business Statistics</i>	36
<i>Census of Agriculture, 2000</i>	37
<i>Other Business Statistics Developments</i>	38
 Chapter 6	
Other Statistical Aspects	39
<i>Environmental Statistics</i>	39
<i>Energy Statistics</i>	40
<i>Innovation and R&D Statistics</i>	40
<i>Statistical Reporting Burden on Business</i>	40
<i>Establishment of Statistical Liaison Groups</i>	41
<i>Access to Anonymised Microdata</i>	42
 Chapter 7	
CSO Organisational Developments	43
<i>Strategic Management Initiative</i>	43
<i>Information Technology</i>	44
<i>Customer Service</i>	44
<i>Organisational Change</i>	45
 Appendices	47
Appendix 1	49
Appendix 2	53

Part I

National Statistics Board

Review of Developments

This part of the report explains the functions and work of the National Statistics Board, summarises the Board's 1998-2002 Strategy, and highlights some key developments during the year 1998.

Chapter

1

Background

Introduction

The main function of the National Statistics Board is to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The functions and work of the Board are detailed in this chapter, which also outlines the main features of the statistical legislation under which both the Board and the CSO operate.

National Statistics Board

The *Statistics Act, 1993* provides the statutory basis for the collection and compilation of official statistics in Ireland.

The Act established an institutional structure comprising the CSO itself, the post of Director General (independent in statistical matters), and the National Statistics Board.

Section 19 of the Act states that the function of the Board, in guiding the strategic direction of the Office with the agreement of the Taoiseach, includes

- a) establishing priorities for the compilation and development of official statistics;
- b) assessing the resources of staff, equipment and finance which 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 coordination of statistical activities.



An interim Board was established in 1986 pending the drafting and enactment of the new legislation. The Board was established on a statutory basis on 1 November 1994 when the *Statistics Act, 1993* came into operation. The current membership of the Board is given in *Appendix 2*.

Central Statistics Office

The CSO is the primary provider of statistical information in Ireland. The Office has been in operation for half a century. Its mandate, as defined in the Statistics Act, covers “the collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State”.

Board's Five-yearly Strategies

The Board operates on the basis of five-year Strategic Plans. A timescale of five years was chosen to allow for the CSO’s cyclical resource requirements: major statistical activities such as the Census of Population and the Household Budget Survey require very large year-to-year variations in its staffing and expenditure levels.

The interim Board prepared two five-year Strategies for Statistics covering the periods 1988-1992 and 1993-1997. The statutory Board’s first Strategy for Statistics covers the period 1998-2002. Progress by the CSO in implementing the strategic plans is assessed in a series of annual or biennial Board reports covering the period since 1998. The most recent of these related to the period 1996-1997.

Summary of the 1998-2002 Strategy



This strategy was developed after detailed consultation with the users and suppliers of statistics, in line with the Board’s concern to ensure an increased user focus and the need to minimise the reporting burden on respondents. It took particular account of developments in the EU statistical system, notably the emerging statistical requirements for managing the EMU.

The main thrusts of the Plan were to provide the high quality statistics required for making and assessing policy, to fill the gap in the underdeveloped area of social statistics, to improve the coordination of the statistics being produced by Government Departments and agencies, to ensure that the statistics are used as widely as possible, and to alleviate the reporting burden placed on respondents.

The Strategy identifies objectives under five headings as follows:

Macro-economic statistics

- ◆ The compilation of the extensive additional Balance of Payments detail required, beginning in 1999, to meet the needs of the European Central Bank (ECB);
- ◆ The publication of quarterly national accounts beginning in 1999;

- ◆ The improvement in the quality of the constant price estimates in the National Accounts in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact;
- ◆ The publication of the Balance of Payments statistics within 12 weeks for the first quarter of 1999;
- ◆ The publication of detailed External Trade statistics within 14 weeks (global estimates in 10 weeks) by 2000;
- ◆ The continued development of the EU Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) in collaboration with Eurostat and other member states;
- ◆ The updating of the CPI and HICP weights in December 2002 (based on the results of the 1999-2000 Household Budget Survey) and 5-yearly thereafter.

Social and demographic statistics



- ◆ The operational consolidation of the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) by 1999 so that its full potential is realised as an invaluable source of information on labour market and social issues;
- ◆ The completion of a comprehensive review of the presentation and coherence of labour market statistics in 1999 once the QNHS results are on stream;
- ◆ The conduct of a Household Budget Survey (HBS) in 1999-2000;
- ◆ The introduction of administrative procedures for the compilation of statistics on divorce to an international standard;
- ◆ The conduct of a Census of Population in 2001 following extensive consultation with users, the advance piloting of any changes, and the full use of modern technology.

Business statistics



- ◆ The implementation of the new EU annual structural and short-term business indicators Regulations, giving priority to the expansion in the range of statistics available for the Services sector;
- ◆ The expansion of short-term earnings series to cover all sectors of the economy;
- ◆ The improved timeliness of business statistics;
- ◆ The conduct of a Census of Agriculture.



Other statistical aspects

- ◆ A more active CSO role in improving environmental statistics in co-operation with the relevant Government Departments and agencies;
- ◆ Collaboration by the CSO with relevant Departments and agencies in the publication of a more comprehensive and coherent body of energy statistics;
- ◆ Continued liaison with Forfás on R&D and innovation statistics;
- ◆ Continued priority on minimising the statistical reporting burden on businesses, especially SMEs;
- ◆ The establishment of user liaison groups for the main statistical subject matter areas by the end of 1998;
- ◆ The finalisation of arrangements to give researchers access to anonymised Census of Population microdata.

CSO organisational developments

- ◆ The full implementation of the Government's strategic Management Initiative (SMI) modernisation programme in the CSO;
- ◆ The development of the CSO IT function to maximise efficiencies and produce added value to statistical products;
- ◆ The implementation of the CSO's Customer Service Plan;
- ◆ The implementation of the organisational change recommended in the 1997 consultancy report commissioned by the Board.

Chapter

2

Review

Introduction

In this chapter, the main topics on which the Board focused during 1998 are discussed. It also describes what the Board sees as the most significant statistical developments during this period, and outlines the progress made by the CSO in a range of areas. While acknowledging that the Office has received resources to meet increased EU-related statistical requirements, it expresses the Board's disappointment that additional resources were not sanctioned to allow the CSO to implement the customer-focused recommendations made in a May 1997 consultancy report commissioned by the Board. Finally, it comments on the implications of the continuing increases in EU statistical demands, particularly those arising in the context of EMU.

Board Focus during 1998

The Board met on eight occasions during 1998, once in the Cork CSO. The main topic discussed in the early meetings was;

- the preparation of the Strategy for Statistics, 1998-2002.

Other topics discussed during the year included:

- selection of social modules to be covered in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS);
- 1999 Estimates for the CSO;
- consultative process for the 2001 Census of Population;
- issues to be faced in organising the 2001 Census of Population;
- establishment of standing Statistical Liaison Groups;
- coverage of income in the UK Labour Force Survey;
- progress in adopting a process-based approach in the business statistics area.



Statistical Developments in 1998



This section highlights some of the key statistical developments during 1998. The CSO continues to strive to make improvements in the range, relevance, quality, timeliness and accessibility of the statistics it produces. Such high-quality statistical information is particularly important for the formation, implementation and monitoring of policy and programmes at national and international levels. The statistics are also extensively used by the business community, trade associations, trade unions, researchers, the media and the general public. The Board is conscious that there is now a wider range of statistical needs, and a growing interest in statistics by a wider range of groups.

Completion of the processing of the 1996 Census of Population

The Board was particularly pleased with the early completion of the processing of the 1996 Census of Population in January 1998 and the publication of the full set of detailed reports before the end of the year.

Planning for the 2001 Census of Population

The challenge now is to achieve additional timeliness improvements for the 2001 Census by the further extended use of modern technology. In particular, the scanning of completed Census questionnaires instead of keying their content would significantly speed up the data capture stage. The Board appreciates that, because of the 5-yearly Census cycle, it is particularly demanding to make such quantum leaps in technology. It is pleased that special resources were sanctioned in 1999 for a Census pilot test to be completed and towards making a start on the adoption of the required new technology. Notwithstanding the greater scope of the 2001 census, the Board expects that the greater productivity achieved for the 1996 census will be maintained and that all results of the 2001 census will be published by the end of 2003.

First QNHS results

The Board welcomes the considerable progress that has been made with the new Quarterly National Household Survey. Fieldwork on the survey commenced in September 1997, and by the end of 1998 surveying had been completed for the first five quarters, and preliminary results issued for the first three. A number of technical and logistical problems have still to be overcome in bedding in the



survey before its full potential is realised. An important feature of the new survey is the introduction of the ILO basis for the presentation of official labour force statistics. The public reaction to the publication of the first results has been positive and the Board looks forward to the realisation of the regular publication target of quarterly results within three months of the reference quarter. In the interest of bedding down the new survey and to assist in meeting the tight publication target, it will be 2000 before further social modules are added.

Divorce statistics

The Board regrets to report that, despite its representations, there was little progress during 1998 regarding the compilation of statistics on divorce in line with international standards. Progress on this front requires a political initiative since the administrative records pertaining to divorce applications are held by the Courts and are not accessible to the CSO under the *Statistics Act, 1993*. The Board is hopeful that progress on this matter will be made during 1999.

Other statistical developments

Other notable statistical developments by the CSO during 1998 included:

- The publication of the first results of a new quarterly stocks and investment inquiry that was initiated in 1996;
- The initiation, after considerable development work and prior consultations with the sector, of new quarterly Balance of Payments inquiries to the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) to meet EU and EMU statistical demands;
- The publication of early quarterly industrial earnings estimates based on the completed returns to hand.

Consultation with Users and Suppliers

In preparing the 1998-2002 Strategy, the Board consulted a wide range of users in an in-depth survey in 1997. The responses to the survey provided very valuable information in preparing the Strategy, and assisted in deepening the liaison with users and suppliers of statistics.

The CSO also maintains contact with its users and data suppliers through a variety of consultative mechanisms. While this liaison is quite extensive and provides useful information for both the CSO and its customers, the Board recommended in its Strategy that the

consultative process be put on a more structured basis by the establishment of standing statistical liaison groups. The Board is pleased to note that the CSO is now setting up four such groups for the following subject-matter areas: macro-economic statistics, business statistics, labour market statistics, and earnings statistics. These are in addition to the Agricultural Statistics Liaison Group, which has existed for some time, and the recently established Advisory Group on the 2001 Census of Population.

Increased EU and EMU Requirements

Mandatory new EU and EMU statistical requirements continue to drive the development of the national statistical system and stretch the capacity of the CSO. Some of these involve the raising of Irish statistics to levels found in other EU countries. Others represent the new demands associated with increased European integration, especially EMU. These demands, in the case of Balance of Payments statistics, have fallen on Central Banks in most other EU member states.

In Ireland, the CSO is the compiler of Balance of Payments statistics. Considerable resources had to be assigned in recent years to improving aspects of the National Accounts methodology and data sources in response to reservations applying to countries generally and reservations specific to Ireland's national accounts; these reservations were placed by the Commission on the GDP estimates of Member States under GNP Directive 89/130 in the context of the funding of the Community budget. The Board is pleased to learn that, on the basis of the developments and improvements that have been made in recent years, the EU Commission is likely to lift formally all but one of the outstanding reservations on Ireland's GNP estimates shortly¹; a number of reservations have already been lifted.

The following new EU statistical legislation:

Council Regulation No 58/97 of 20 December 1997 concerning *structural business statistics*;

Council Regulation No 1165/98 of 19 May 1998 concerning *short-term statistics*;

will place heavy demands on the CSO and on business respondents in the coming years as existing annual structural and short-term indicators inquiries will have to be extended to all sectors of the



¹ The outstanding reservation refers to full coverage of the Financial sector; work on this is to be completed by September 1999.

economy. The need to produce additional statistics for EU purposes for the two new NUTS II regions proposed by Government also means that existing sample sizes will have to be increased to ensure adequate coverage and accuracy at this finer regional level. The Board welcomes the Government's recognition of these new demands by appropriately increasing the CSO's annual budget allocation from 1999 onwards.

The Board is conscious of the need for EU and EMU statistics for economic management and policy purposes at both national and Community level. However, it is concerned about continually increasing demands, their cost in terms of CSO resources, the burden they place on business, and their impact on the level and timeliness of survey responses. The Board is also becoming concerned about the increasing use of statistics for Community administrative purposes (e.g. use of GNP for determining national contributions to the Community budget) at a level of expected precision that they have not been designed to meet. A related concern is the increasing pressure on response rates resulting from the discontinuation of administrative data returned by businesses and the need to replace them by statistical inquiries (e.g. replacement of intra-EU Customs declarations by the Intrastat survey).

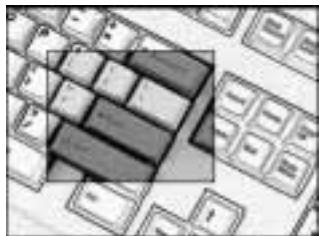
A particular worry in this regard is the Commission proposal that in changing from the existing "interim" to a "final" EU VAT system, the revenue collected should be reallocated to the country of final consumption using macro-economic statistics. This could have significant fiscal implications, and the Board fully supports the concerns that all EU statistical services have expressed about the practicality of this proposal.

CSO Operational Aspects



While this Report concentrates on key developments and objectives in official statistics, the Board recognises that the day-to-day work of the CSO is concerned with maintaining the necessary standard of accuracy and timeliness for the large block of ongoing monthly, quarterly and annual statistical inquiries. A table giving the timeliness of regular releases and publications is given in *Appendix 1*.

The Board was pleased to see the preparation and publication of the CSO's *Statement of Strategy, 1998-2000* in mid-1998 in compliance with the *Public Service Management Act, 1997*. It considers that the annual development in collaboration with staff at all levels of local business plans for the implementation of the strategy will lead to greater organisational effectiveness and staff motivation.



In view of the importance it attaches to customer focus and services the Board particularly welcomed the publication of the CSO's *Customer Service Plan, 1998-1999* at the end of 1997. Although pleased that the Office received resources for improvements recommended in the May 1997 report commissioned by the Board from Deloitte & Touche Consultants, it is disappointed that the necessary resources were not assigned to establish a new Customer Service Directorate as recommended in the report. The Board is fully committed to the establishment of this Directorate, which would have responsibility for customer service, product policy and quality assurance.

The Board is pleased with the progress being made in the move towards a process-based approach in the business statistics area as recommended in the Deloitte & Touche report. It welcomes the steps taken to assess at first hand the operation of this type of approach in other statistical services because of the need to adapt it to CSO circumstances. It also endorses the widespread consultations with staff and their direct involvement in the change process. It hopes that an operational system will be put in place on a pilot basis as planned for some of the main industrial inquiries during 1999.

The Board considers that priority should continue to be given to the upgrading of the CSO computer environment and the integration of IT processes through the completion of a PC-based client server computer network and the use of RDBMS systems. It has confidence that the appointment of the senior IT consultant in January 1999 to drive this upgrading with the IT Director (as recommended in the Deloitte & Touche consultancy report) should expedite matters.

Part II

Central Statistics Office

Statistical & Organisational

Developments

This part of the report describes the progress made by the CSO during 1998 in meeting the Board's objectives set out in its 1998-2002 Strategy, and describes organisational developments in the Office.

Chapter

3

Macro-economic Statistics

Introduction

The Board's priority objectives for macro-economic statistics over the period 1998-2002 are:

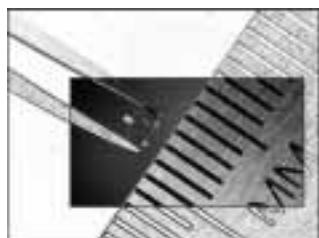
- ◆ The compilation of the extensive additional Balance of Payments detail required, beginning in 1999, to meet the needs of the European Central Bank (ECB);
- ◆ The publication of quarterly national accounts beginning in 1999;
- ◆ The improvement in the quality of the constant price estimates in the National Accounts in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact;
- ◆ The publication of the Balance of Payments statistics within 12 weeks for the first quarter of 1999;
- ◆ The publication of detailed External Trade statistics within 14 weeks (global estimates in 10 weeks) by 2000;
- ◆ The continued development of the EU Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) in collaboration with Eurostat and other member states;
- ◆ The updating of the CPI and HICP weights in December 2002 (based on the results of the 1999-2000 Household Budget Survey) and 5-yearly thereafter.

Progress has been made towards these objectives through

- continuation and consolidation of the development programme for quarterly Balance of Payments (BOP) statistics;
- preparatory work for publication of quarterly national accounts in September 1999;
- continued improvement in timeliness of both BOP and External Trade statistics;



- preparations for the commencement of fieldwork on the 1999-2000 Household Budget Survey in Spring 1999.



Improvement work on the quality (precision and detail) of the national accounts, arising in particular from the demands of EC Directive 89/130 on the harmonisation of GNP at market prices, was brought to a satisfactory conclusion in all but one area during 1998. The results of this programme, in conjunction with corresponding work in all other member states, have recently been examined by Eurostat. While a formal decision has not been made, it is expected that the outcome for Ireland will be satisfactory.

The focus of attention must now turn to the harmonisation of the constant price estimates.

National Accounts

Timeliness

The 1997 accounts were published in mid-June 1998, a similar timescale to that achieved in 1997. These are the earliest dates on which the accounts have been published for many years and, generally, compare favourably with the publication schedules of the detailed annual accounts of other countries. The introduction of the new European System of Accounts (ESA95) in 1999 will militate against further improvements in the timeliness of the annual accounts this year. However, the introduction of quarterly accounts later in 1999 will provide more regular, up to date indicators of the state of the economy.

Quality

In terms of quality, the emphasis during 1998 was on bringing to a conclusion the work on the harmonisation of the measurement of GNP at current prices in compliance with GNP Directive 89/130. The aim of this was to ensure that the estimates for all member states of the absolute level of GNP are comprehensive and comparable.



Resulting from this programme, new GNP estimates for EU administrative purposes were supplied to Eurostat by member states in October 1998. The revisions for Ireland principally related to:

- specific changes to align the Irish methodology fully with the ESA79 standard, including increased estimates to ensure complete coverage of the economy;
- significant increases for recent years in the value of the imputed rent of owner occupied households;

- a decision, in line with a policy objective in recent years, to calculate the definitive estimate of GDP as the average of the income and expenditure measures.



As already indicated, one outstanding issue, concerning improved coverage of the financial sector, remains to be completed in 1999.

The GNP Directive was concerned with improving the quality of the national accounts estimates at current prices. Increased priority at EU level is now being given to improving measurement of the accounts in constant prices and to the harmonisation of the methodologies used to calculate the national growth rates. New standards were recently set out in a Commission decision (98/715/CE) on the measurement of prices and volumes in national accounts and additional criteria are being developed to ensure uniform measurement of output volumes in difficult areas such as non-market services (Education, Health, etc). All member states are required to implement these new standards progressively over the coming years.

Scope

There will be a gradual increase in the level of detail provided in line with the requirements of EU Regulation 2223/96 on the introduction of the European System of Accounts (ESA95). The full reporting requirements of ESA95 are onerous and are currently being met by only a few of the larger member states. However, all countries are committed to introducing the full range of national accounts. In Ireland's case it is intended that this will be done progressively between now and the year 2005.



Development work is continuing on the introduction of quarterly accounts. It is planned to publish estimates on the expenditure basis at current and constant prices as well as an output estimate at constant prices. First results, for the four quarters of 1997 and 1998 and for the first quarter of 1999, will be published in September 1999. The publication schedules will be steadily improved. The goal is that by the year 2002 first estimates will be published within four months of the reference quarter.

Balance of Payments

Timeliness

The timeliness of the quarterly Balance of Payments (BOP) statistics has continued to improve. The publication timelag now stands at 13 weeks compared to 20 weeks in 1997 and 33 weeks in 1993.

The three months deadline was achieved for the fourth quarter 1998 results. The rate of reduction in the timelag has been constrained by increased respondent resistance to shorter reporting schedules, particularly in the context of much more detailed information now being requested to meet EU (Eurostat), EMU (European Central Bank) and International Monetary Fund demands. This conflict between the level of detail requested and its speedy return will intensify if there are continued pressures to improve the timeliness of results.

Quality

Further groundwork was undertaken during 1998 to improve the quality of the data collected in terms of meeting international standards. The redesign of existing survey forms, which was completed in 1997, was followed up by a number of company visits to assist respondents having difficulties in meeting the requirements. Administrative data providers were also requested to provide information on a new basis. The overall quality of the data will be further enhanced with the availability of new information from the surveys of the financial services sector, which were introduced in 1998. These improvements in data collection will result in a new presentation of the BOP statistics in 1999, with limited retrospection.

Scope



The new surveys of the financial services sector introduced in 1998 have greatly extended the scope of the BOP system. In addition, continued expansion in the coverage of manufacturing and non-financial service enterprises will considerably strengthen the BOP statistics. While there have been significant response rate problems throughout 1998 with the new surveys, improvements are expected as systems become more established. The compilation burden has also increased enormously. It is planned to have results from the new system available in late 1999. These results will incorporate an increased level of detail on Direct Investment and on Portfolio Investment, which are particularly important for Ireland in the context of increased globalisation.

External Trade Statistics

Timeliness

One of the Board's priority objectives relates to improving the timeliness of the External Trade statistics. The objective is to publish the detailed Trade statistics within 14 weeks of the end of the month by the year 2000, and to reduce this to 13 weeks by the year 2002. The corresponding deadlines for the global estimates (total imports and exports, published a month earlier than the detailed figures) are 10 weeks by 2000 and 9 weeks by 2002.



The timeliness of the Irish External Trade statistics suffered, in common with all EU member states, from the discontinuation of intra-EU Customs controls and the introduction of the new Instrastat survey system in 1993. The initial publication delays of about 33 weeks were very severe. The CSO and the Revenue Commissioners (who collect the basic data) have been striving to improve the timeliness, and substantial progress has been made in reducing the timelags. For the year 1997, the average interval between the end of the reference month and the publication date was 17 to 18 weeks; this was reduced to 15 weeks (and 11 weeks for the early global estimates) for the first nine months of 1998.

Quality

The quality of the External Trade statistics at the aggregate level is good. However, there continues to be a need to improve the detailed commodity by country detail where errors in trader returns and the need for estimation can affect quality. The Revenue Commissioners, with the cooperation of the CSO, have now rewritten the data editing system, and the quality of the detailed data should improve from mid-1999.

Price Statistics



The main priority here is the compilation of the large-scale national Household Budget Survey during 1999-2000 to allow the updating of the weighting basis of both the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the EU Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) in December 2002 (i.e. after an interval of five years instead of the traditional seven years). As indicated in Chapter 4, the preparations for this survey are on schedule.

On the EU front, the CSO continues to participate actively with other member states and Eurostat in the further harmonisation of the HICP. During 1998 the focus was mainly on the practical aspects of extending the index population coverage to include the private expenditure of tourists and other visitors to the country and of the residents of institutions, as well as on the methodological problems of covering health and owner-occupied housing on a harmonised EU basis.

Chapter

4

Social & Demographic Statistics

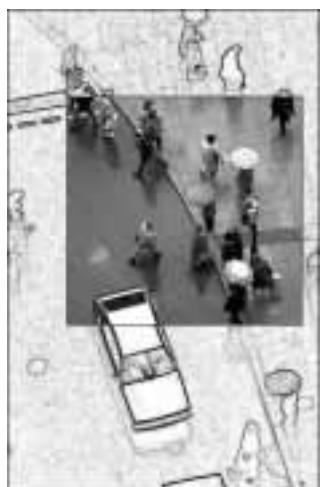
Introduction

The Board's priority objectives for social and demographic statistics over the period 1998-2002 are:

- ◆ The operational consolidation of the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) by 1999 so that its full potential is realised as an invaluable source of information on labour market and social issues;
- ◆ The completion of a comprehensive review of the presentation and coherence of labour market statistics in 1999 once the QNHS results are on stream;
- ◆ The conduct of a Household Budget Survey (HBS) in 1999-2000;
- ◆ The introduction of administrative procedures for the compilation of statistics on divorce to an international standard;
- ◆ The conduct of a Census of Population in 2001 following maximum consultation with users, the advance piloting of any changes, and the full use of modern technology.

Progress has been made towards these objectives through

- the successful completion in 1998 of fieldwork on the first five quarters of the QNHS and the publication of the main labour force results for the first three quarters;
- the imminent establishment of a user liaison group on labour market statistics which will review, as a first priority, the presentation and consistency of the current statistics;
- preparatory work for the commencement of fieldwork on the next Household Budget Survey in May 1999;



- the continued examination of means by which statistics on divorce to an international standard can be achieved;
- the allocation of specific resources in 1999 to facilitate planning for the 2001 Census of Population.

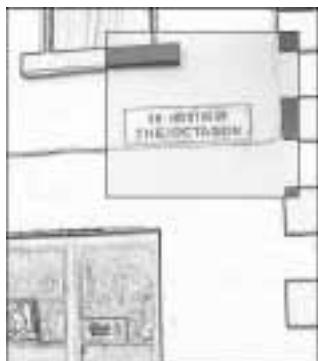
Quarterly National Household Survey



The QNHS was introduced in September 1997 as a replacement for the annual Labour Force Survey. Fieldwork on the survey continued throughout 1998 and five quarters were completed by the end of the year. The target sample of 39,000 households in each quarter was largely realised and a response rate of around 94% was consistently attained over the entire period. Both the interviewers and respondents reacted positively to the use for the first time of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology.

In addition to the standard demographic and labour force questions, which were asked in each quarter, special social modules were covered in the last two quarters of 1998: the June-August quarter had a module on housing while the September-November quarter covered crime and victimisation. Both these modules were prepared by the CSO with the assistance of ad hoc advisory groups of experts on the topics concerned.

The new survey will continue to be very demanding for a number of years until its operations are bedded down. Its dynamic nature (i.e. rotating sample and design, inclusion of ad hoc modules) and the logistics of developing and supporting the CAPI system are particularly challenging. The technical support resources required have been greater than originally anticipated and this has been compounded by vacancies and a high rate of turnover in skilled staff. Since priority has to be given to the fieldwork, progress with the processing and dissemination of results has suffered to some extent and is not as far advanced as initially planned.



Nevertheless, the principal demographic and labour force results for the first quarter (September-November 1997) were released in May 1998 and those for the next two quarters in November. This delay of approximately six months in the availability of results compares favourably with that achieved previously with the Labour Force Survey. However, it is lagging behind the targeted delay of three months set for the new survey. Results for the last two quarters of 1998 are scheduled for joint release in April 1999. The series of quarterly releases will then be established with the objective of reducing the timelag to three months by the end of 1999. First results from the two social modules covered in 1998 should be available towards the middle of 1999.

Viewed overall, it may be concluded that, while a number of teething problems have yet to be overcome, the QNHS is well on the way to realising its potential as a rich source of timely information on the Irish population and labour force. In view of the resource constraints referred to above, it will probably be necessary for some time yet to recognise the need for a trade-off between improving the timeliness of the principal results and widening the coverage of the survey through the inclusion of additional social modules. In the short term, the Board sees the timeliness issue as the greater priority.

Review of Labour Market Statistics



The release of the first results from the QNHS in May 1998 also marked the formal introduction of the ILO standards as the primary means of presenting national data on employment and unemployment. This was overshadowed in the public's reaction by the unprecedented scale of the changes in the labour market disclosed by the figures themselves. However, it would appear that users in general have had little difficulty in adapting to the new concepts — perhaps reflecting the fact that many users were already familiar with the ILO concepts through the availability of the data on this basis in the detailed annual LFS reports over the previous decade or so.

Towards the end of 1998, the Board finalised arrangements for the establishment of User Liaison Groups. The Labour Market Statistics Group will be convened during the first half of 1999 and it is intended that it should focus in the first instance on the Board's priority of examining the presentation and consistency of labour market statistics in general.

1999-2000 Household Budget Survey



Preparations were commenced in 1998 with the objective of starting the fieldwork on the next HBS in May 1999. The questionnaire has been updated to reflect current consumer expenditure patterns while the IT system is being upgraded to facilitate faster processing of the data. With regard to the fieldwork, the sampling scheme has been largely overhauled in order to adapt to the newly designed QNHS sampling structure. This will have the twin advantages of a less clustered sample of households (i.e. a reduction in the sampling error) while also facilitating the use of the QNHS population estimates in reweighting the HBS data to take account of non-respondents.

Time Use Survey



Due to pressure of work in other areas, notably on the QNHS, the finalisation of a report on the pilot survey undertaken in 1997 has been delayed. This survey, based on a small sample of households, was undertaken in response to the commitment given in *Partnership 2000* (paragraph 5.11) that it would be the first stage of the process of developing statistical methods to evaluate unpaid work. All aspects of the work on the pilot, down to the preparation of a test data file, have been completed and a report is expected in April 1999. The main conclusions to be drawn from this work are:

- the methodology developed at EU level can be applied successfully in Ireland;
- the survey is extremely resource-intensive both in terms of field costs and processing resources;
- the CSO can only contemplate undertaking a fullscale Time Use Survey if the necessary additional resources are forthcoming.

Vital Statistics

In the 15-month period to March 1999, three annual reports on vital statistics have been published by the CSO, covering the years 1993 to 1995 inclusive. On the assumption that this rate of progress can be maintained, the target for clearing the backlog in the production of the annual reports by the end of 1999 should be attained.

Discussions are continuing on the best means of resolving the difficulties in obtaining the necessary data for the compilation of statistics on divorce in line with international standards. It would appear that the most likely options would entail either a specific amendment to the *Statistics Act, 1993* or to make provision for the registration of divorce as part of an expanded system for the registration of vital events.

2001 Census of Population

Processing of the 1996 Census of Population returns was completed in the first quarter of 1998 and a summary compendium report, *Principal Socio-economic Results*, was published in April 1998. This publication complemented the earlier *Principal Demographic Results* report (which was issued in July 1997) and thus marked the availability of the full range of census analyses within two years of the census. In the second half of 1998, the publication programme was completed with the issuing of the five remaining detailed reports (Volumes 5 to 9). This was a significant improvement in timeliness compared with the 1991 and earlier censuses, demonstrating the benefits of a more focused use of staff resources and modern technology.



While the improved performance on the 1996 census is welcome, it is quite clear that further significant gains in timeliness can be achieved in the context of the next census in 2001. The key determinant is the availability of adequate time and development resources to exploit new methodologies and technologies. These have been demonstrated elsewhere to yield substantial resource savings and timeliness gains in undertaking a census. In this context, the allocation of specific resources to the CSO for 1999 to undertake preliminary work on the 2001 census is most welcome. The preparatory work in 1999 will include the following:

- a wide-ranging consultation of users to determine more precisely their needs from the census;
- a detailed examination of the possibilities for the more widespread use of modern technology in the processing, analysis and dissemination of census results;
- the conduct of a structured pilot test in September to examine, *inter alia*, the inclusion of new questions, alternative field procedures and redesigned questionnaires.

Compared with other countries this preparatory phase is very short. However, it is felt that if it is used effectively, in particular through building on the experience of other countries, considerable progress can be made in the conduct of the 2001 census.

Chapter

5

Business Statistics

Introduction

In its 1998-2002 strategy the Board recommended as priorities:

- ◆ the implementation of the new EU annual structural and short-term business indicators Regulations, giving priority to the expansion in the range of statistics available for the services sectors;
- ◆ the expansion of short-term earnings series to cover all sectors of the economy;
- ◆ the improved timeliness of business statistics;
- ◆ the conduct of a Census of Agriculture.

New EU Business Statistics Regulations



EU Regulation 58/97 on structural business statistics requires that all business sectors be surveyed on an annual basis. The industrial (census), building (census) and distribution (sample) sectors have been surveyed annually for a number of years and, for these sectors, the Regulation will only require some minor changes to the existing inquiries. The main additional impact has been on the other non-distribution services sectors of the economy, which had been systematically surveyed only over a three-year cycle. Commencing with the reference year 1996 these sectors are now covered annually on a sample basis.

Consequent on the Government's decision to distinguish two NUTS II Irish regions, the sample sizes of all the annual inquiries conducted on a sampling basis have been increased for the reference year 1998 to meet EU NUTS II statistical requirements.

Most of the requirements of Regulation 1165/98 on short-term business indicators relating to industry and construction are being met. In the case of services, the Regulation requires monthly value and volume indicators of retail sales classified on a NACE Rev 1

basis. A major updating of the coverage and weighting of the Retail Sales Index is in hand that will help, *inter alia*, to meet this requirement. The Regulation also requires the compilation of quarterly turnover indices for other services sectors and quarterly employment series for all sectors. The existing monthly retail sales and the quarterly stocks/investment inquiries are being adapted to meet these additional requirements.

Short-term Earnings



The extension of the existing quarterly average earnings series to all sectors of the economy is a Board and CSO priority. The long-standing series for the industrial and building sectors have been extended in recent years to cover the banking, building society and insurance sectors and the public service. Increased information on industrial earnings by size class of firm has also been made available. Quarterly earnings series are being developed for other sectors as part of the work being undertaken to meet the requirements of the short-term business indicators Regulation 1165/98 and it is expected that these will come on stream for most of the two-digit NACE classes in the second half of 1999.

There is an emerging conflict between the developments at national level and those sought at EU level; resolving this conflict will have resource implications. The Community Labour Costs Survey and Structure of Earnings Survey will in future have to be undertaken on an alternating two-year cycle in compliance with an EU Regulation. A quarterly Labour Cost Index will also have to be compiled using the existing quarterly earnings series supplemented by estimates of other labour costs based on the results of these ongoing surveys. Should it proceed, the most demanding EU requirement would be the development of a national Employment Price Index that would involve the direct collection of data on the total cost (wages & salaries and other costs) of employing persons in a representative selection of occupations from a sample of employers. At the outset it is being proposed that member states only be required to provide this information for a small national sub-sample necessary for the compilation of an overall Community-wide index. The collection of this information for the significantly larger sample required to produce national results would be extremely resource-intensive.

Improved Timeliness of Business Statistics

Improving the timeliness of statistical releases and publications is an ongoing CSO priority. This is also a high-level priority for the European Central Bank (ECB), related to the ongoing monitoring of EMU, and also for the IMF, which maintains a WWW bulletin



board (www.dsbb.imf.org) incorporating desired timeliness targets for certain statistical indicators. However, timeliness is largely dependent on the timing and quality of returns made by survey respondents. The CSO has also been focusing in recent years on the publication of provisional global results based on the returns to hand at an early stage.

A methodology has been developed that will allow provisional overall results of the annual Census of Industrial Production (CIP) to be produced within 10 months of the reference year. This approach is being extended to most of the annual services sector inquiries as well. The timeliness of the annual Prodcom results has also been significantly improved, but the requirement in the EU Regulation 3294/91 to produce some estimates within six months is a major challenge currently beyond the reach of the CSO.

Significant progress was made in 1998 in publishing early global quarterly industrial earnings results. These were first produced in November 1998 for June 1998 based on the completed respondent returns to hand at that stage. It is expected that these early estimates will be produced within three months from the first quarter of 1999. Early quarterly employment estimates will be similarly produced. It is also planned to produce early provisional monthly industrial production and turnover indices within six weeks of the reference month during 1999.

Census of Agriculture, 2000



A Census of Agriculture will be conducted in June 2000 in compliance with the Farm Structure Survey (FSS) Survey Regulation 2467/96. This will give valuable information on the changes that have occurred in the structure of the agriculture sector since the last Census in 1991. The Census will also provide critical up to date benchmark information to support the various sample postal surveys to be conducted in the following years.

The last Census of Agriculture was closely integrated with the 1991 Census of Population enumeration of all households in the country. While this was done for reasons of economy, it also facilitated an interesting joint analysis of rural and farm households using data from both Censuses, which was published early in 1998.

Over the past few years the Department of Agriculture and Food has invested heavily in developing a computerised register of farmers participating in the various agriculture schemes. The availability of this register will allow the 2000 Census of

Agriculture to be conducted on a postal basis. This will result in considerable expenditure savings by comparison with the traditional local enumeration approach (which required the temporary employment of a large team of local Enumerators).

Other Business Statistics Developments

Work is continuing to provide additional information on the level and occupancy rates of tourism infrastructure in Ireland, as well as on the demand for domestic and overseas tourism by Irish residents. It is planned to make enhanced information available during 1999.

There are a number of EU Regulations and Directives relating to transport statistics (road, air and maritime) and considerable development work is in progress to improve the statistical information for this important sector.

In the agricultural statistics area, pilot work on the introduction of electronic data interchange (EDI) was successfully completed for the return of data by the livestock marts and this system will go into operation in 1999. Substantial progress was also made in developing a new annual forestry statistics release from existing administrative information. This is due for publication in mid-1999.

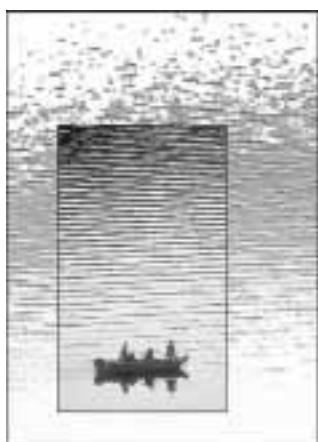


Chapter

6

Other Statistical Aspects

Environmental Statistics



To date the CSO has not been very active in the compilation of environmental statistics because of other demands. In recent years, however, it has organised joint meetings with the Department of Environment and the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure greater coordination and information exchange.

Liaison between the different agencies active in the area has now been put on a formal footing by the establishment of a Steering Group on Sustainable Indicators chaired by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. This group contains representatives of the Department of Finance, Environment Protection Agency, CSO, Forbairt, Irish Energy Centre, etc. Its purpose is to coordinate the activities of the different agencies, exchange information and to build on the work currently being undertaken.

The main role of the CSO is to collect relevant environmental information in its ongoing household and business inquiries and to ensure the use of standard classifications. Internationally, there is increasing interest in the development of Environment Satellite Accounts as part of the system of national accounts. These, still at an early stage of development, are intended to show how economic development impacts on the environment and on the economy as a whole in an objective and systematic way. They allow a comparison to be made between the detrimental effect of business and household activities in monetary or physical terms and the beneficial effects produced by these sectors in terms of the creation of employment and value added. The presentation of the accounts in this way forms part of a system known as NAMEA (National

Accounting Matrix including Environmental Accounts). Eurostat provided funding for the pilot compilation of satellite Environmental Accounts for Ireland in 1997. The CSO contracted this project to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the results are expected to be published during 1999.

Energy Statistics



The CSO collects a disparate range of energy statistics in its various regular inquiries (e.g. Census of Industrial Production, Annual Services Inquiry, Consumer Price Index, Household Budget Survey, Road Freight Transport Survey). Energy-related statistics are also compiled by other public bodies, particularly the Department of Public Enterprise, which has responsibility for energy policy.

The Department has recently established a Working Group to improve the production of energy statistics. The Working Group has identified a number of issues relating to the more efficient coordination of data collection by different agencies. It believes that modifications to the relevant data collection questionnaires would in a number of cases yield information of particular importance, especially on how energy is used within the various sectors with particular emphasis on the assessment of compliance with the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. The CSO will co-operate fully with the Working Group and has suggested that one of its senior officials should become a member to ensure greater coordination in this important area. Some additional questions relating to energy usage have been included in the questionnaires to the larger enterprises in the 1998 Census of Industrial Production; unfortunately, this will add a little to the response burden for these enterprises.

The Department intends that in due course the Irish Energy Centre would prepare an annual analysis of trends in the energy sector based on improved collection and coordination of data.

Innovation and R&D Statistics

The CSO has had little involvement in this area to date. It maintains close contact with Forfás, the Government agency that compiles data to meet existing EU requirements.

Statistical Reporting Burden on Business

The CSO has always been conscious of the burden of its statistical inquiries, particularly on business and SMEs. A range of steps are taken to minimise this burden, such as the conduct of sample surveys instead of complete coverage, use of response thresholds to exclude small businesses, and the acceptance of good estimates if

the actual data are not readily available. The Office has also been very active in speaking at regional meetings and annual conferences of SMEs to explain the importance of statistics for business as well as Government planning purposes and to urge them to co-operate.

To relieve the reporting burden further, the CSO has recently offered to accept monthly management accounts in place of some industrial statistical returns for enterprises with less than 50 persons engaged. Unfortunately, there has so far been a slow take-up of this offer. The use of electronic transmission also offers further prospects for reducing the burden and speeding up the timeliness of response. The CSO is closely monitoring the development of these new electronic reporting techniques. The return of data on diskettes is already extensively used for financial services firms in the compilation of Balance of Payments statistics. The Office also intends to initiate some pilot projects in the use of electronic data interchange (EDI) technology.

The development of a comprehensive central business register in the CSO is nearing completion. This will allow the more structured selection of samples of businesses for inquiry purposes and, thereby, spread the reporting burden more evenly on SMEs.

Establishment of Statistical Liaison Groups

In addition to the ongoing direct contact which the CSO has with statistical users and data providers and the specialist working groups of independent experts established for particular purposes (e.g. labour market statistics, population statistics, social modules periodically covered in the Quarterly National Household Survey) standing Liaison Groups are being established for the following categories of statistics:

- Macro-economic statistics (including external trade and prices)
- Business statistics
- Earnings statistics
- Labour market statistics

in addition to the *Agriculture Statistics Liaison Group* that has already existed for some time. The establishment of a Demographic and Social Statistics Liaison Group is not being considered at present since an Advisory Group has been established for the 2001 Census of Population.

The primary purpose of these liaison groups will be to assess ongo-



ing statistical activities in the relevant areas and to advise both the CSO and the Board on emerging new needs. The groups will be chaired by the CSO and will generally meet once or twice a year. Each will comprise 10-15 experienced persons representative of interests in the particular topics, nominated by Government Departments, state-sponsored bodies, representative organisations, third-level institutions and some individual experts.

Access to Anonymised Microdata

The long-standing method of disseminating the results of statistical inquiries is through the provision of statistical tables either in hard copy publications or, increasingly, in electronic form. While this satisfies the majority of users, a demand has emerged, mainly from the academic and research community, for direct access to samples of anonymised microdata for special analysis purposes.

In Ireland the legal provision to supply such data is covered by Section 34 of the *Statistics Act, 1993*. This legislation allows the CSO to provide sets of anonymised microdata to researchers from surveys of households and individuals under special contractual arrangements. Business microdata cannot be similarly anonymised, but for special analysis purposes researchers can access databases within the CSO that do not contain direct identifying details.

To date samples of anonymised data have been provided to researchers from the Household Budget Survey and the Labour Force Survey. The use of this facility and the feedback from researchers has been very positive. Major value has been added to the results of both surveys through the range of special analyses that have already been undertaken.

The outstanding area where the provision of direct access is under consideration at present is the 1996 Census of Population. Up to now priority has been given to the timely publication of the census results. The provision of samples of anonymised data is now under examination. Careful analysis is required to ensure that no inadvertent disclosure of identifiable information occurs. The issues involved were discussed at a seminar held in University College Dublin in June 1998.

Two separate samples — households and persons — are being considered. It is hoped to complement the anonymised microdata already available from the Labour Force Survey by focusing to a greater extent on finer geographic Census detail. The relevant samples are expected to be available in the first half of 1999.



Chapter

7

CSO Organisational Developments

Strategic Management Initiative

The CSO has been actively pursuing the Government's Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) civil service modernisation programme since its inception in 1994. A major feature of this programme is the preparation of Statements of Strategy by Government Departments and Offices.

The CSO produced its first Corporate Plan/Statement of Strategy in November 1994. In common with all other Departments and Offices it produced its second Statement of Strategy in Spring 1998, following a bottom-up consultative process with staff at all levels. This statement sets out the strategic direction of the Office over the period 1998-2000 and provides both management and staff with a clear guide to its corporate goals and business objectives.

The strategy is being implemented during 1999 through a series of local business plans, which were drawn up in collaboration with staff and agreed by the Directorate at the end of 1998. Progress on the implementation of these plans will be reviewed at divisional level by the Directorate at mid-year and also at the end of the year in approving the business plans for 2000.

A wide range of cross-grade Working Groups also exist covering organisational topics such as staff training and development, work environment, health and safety, customer service, dissemination, etc. With the assistance of an independent facilitator, a Partnership Committee was established in January 1999 in line with the *Part-*



n ership 2000 Agreement. This committee is representative of management, unions and staff and its purpose is to engage staff at all levels in the civil service modernisation process.

Information Technology



Information Technology (IT) is critical to the operational effectiveness of the CSO. There is still considerable scope for improving efficiencies in data collection and capture, in the productivity of statistical processing, and particularly in the electronic dissemination of results where significant improvements are achievable in the short-term.

The Office is currently beginning the process of migrating from a centralised mainframe-based computer network to a PC-based client-server architecture. The appointment of a senior IT consultant on a two-year contract in January 1999, as recommended by Deloitte & Touche consultants in 1987, will help to ensure that this major change is completed successfully, staff are trained in the new skills, and the process of migrating and re-engineering existing applications is commenced.

Priority is also being given to the development of electronic dissemination facilities. The EireStat Data Bank contents have been disseminated on a range of diskettes for some years and most statistical publications are accompanied by diskettes containing their tabular content. The CSO already has a well-regarded WWW site containing a wide range of statistics and other information. This was significantly improved at the beginning of 1999 with the incorporation of electronic copies of all Statistical Releases as they are issued and the full content of the monthly Economic Series publication. The next major development will be the provision of online access to the CSO Data Bank and other databases (e.g. external trade statistics, 1996 Census of Population tables). The Office is closely monitoring developments by other national statistical services in this area.

Customer Service

Customer service is one of the main objectives of the Government's public sector modernisation programme. High priority has been given to improving customer service in the CSO in recent years. Significant improvements have been made, including in particular the introduction in September 1997 of a new corporate image and a more reader-friendly statistical release format designed with the assistance of a media relations consultant. The Office training unit has also designed a customer service course, which many staff have attended.



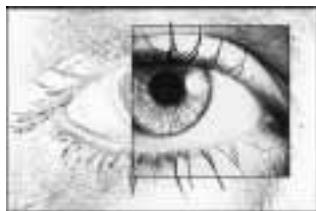
A multi-grade Customer Service Working Group has operated very effectively since 1995. This group monitors the quality of customer service and makes proposals for its improvement and development.

In common with other Government Departments and Offices in the civil service, the CSO published at the end of 1998 a Customer Service Plan covering the period 1998-1999. The implementation of this plan is currently being critically assessed by the Customer Service Working Group.

Organisational Change

One of the major recommendations made by the Deloitte & Touche consultants in their 1997 report commissioned by the National Statistics Board was that the CSO should move from a product-based structure in the business statistics area (under which all aspects of a statistical inquiry from data collection to dissemination are handled by a dedicated unit) to a process-based structure (in which data-collection and editing would be separated from data analysis and dissemination within broad product families). Some of the advantages identified included the coordination of all contacts with a particular business enterprise, the integration of processing systems and improved data analysis.

A CSO team visited the UK Business Statistics Office and New Zealand Statistics to assess the operation of the process-based statistical organisation structure at first hand. Based on this experience a multi-grade Working Group examined in 1998 how this structure might be established for the monthly and annual industrial inquiries. A further working group subsequently considered how the annual Prodcom inquiry could also be integrated as this was closely related to both the monthly and annual industrial inquiries. Following further discussions with staff interests it is envisaged that a process-based structure will be established on a pilot basis during 1999 involving these three industrial inquiries.



Appendices

Appendix

1

Publication Timeliness

The Board's 1995 Annual Report contained a table giving the timeliness (lag from end of the reference period) and the target set for statistical releases and publications issued by the CSO. This information is repeated here along with the general current timeliness level and current target to enable a comparison to be made. Information is given here only for regular surveys that are undertaken annually or more frequently.

Publication	Timeliness In 1995	Target in 1995	Current timeliness	Current target
<i>Industry</i>				
Production (<i>monthly</i>)				
Release	14 weeks	11 weeks	13 weeks	11 weeks
Early global estimates	na ¹	na	7 weeks	6 weeks
Turnover (<i>monthly</i>)	15 weeks	11 weeks	14 weeks	12 weeks
Employment (<i>quarterly</i>)	17 weeks	12 weeks	32 weeks	20 weeks
Stocks (<i>quarterly</i>)	na	na	17 weeks	17 weeks
Capital Assets (<i>quarterly</i>)	na	na	17 weeks	17 weeks
Earnings & Hours (<i>quarterly</i>)	21 weeks	16 weeks	18 weeks	13 weeks
Census (<i>annual</i>)				
Local Units Release	34 months	22 months	18 months	18 months
Enterprises Release	41 months	23 months	18 months	18 months
Publication	31 months	27 months	21 months	24 months
Early broad results	na	na	na	10 months
Prodcom (<i>annual</i>)	na	na	14 months	12 months
<i>Services employment & earnings</i>				
Financial Services (<i>quarterly</i>)	12 weeks	10 weeks	21 weeks	13 weeks
Public Sector (<i>quarterly</i>)	17 weeks	12 weeks	30 weeks	17 weeks

¹ "na" represents "not applicable". This applies to new series introduced since 1995.

Publication	Timeliness In 1995	Target in 1995	Current timeliness	Current target
<i>Building & construction</i>				
Employment (<i>monthly</i>)	4 weeks	4 weeks	9 weeks	6 weeks
Earnings (<i>quarterly</i>)	24 weeks	15 weeks	20 weeks	18 weeks
Quantity Surveyors (<i>quarterly</i>)	10 weeks	10 weeks	16 weeks	10 weeks
Planning Permissions (<i>quarterly</i>)	16 weeks	13 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks
Census Release (<i>annual</i>)	21 months	20 months	19 months	18 months
<i>Services</i>				
Retail Sales (<i>monthly</i>)	8 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks
Advertising Agencies (<i>annual</i>)	19 months	15 months	28 months	15 months
Services Inquiries (<i>annual</i>)	34 months	24 months	20 months	18 months
Tourism & Travel				
Quarterly	13 weeks	7 weeks	9 weeks	7 weeks
Annual	5 months	5 months	4 months	4 months
Road Freight (<i>annual</i>)	18 months	12 months	29 months	12 months
Port traffic (<i>annual</i>)	7½ months	7 months	6 months	5 months
Vehicle Licensing				
Monthly	12 weeks	11 weeks	15 weeks	13 weeks
Annual	7 months	7 months	7 months	5 months
<i>Prices</i>				
CPI (<i>quarterly</i>)	4 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks
WPI (<i>monthly</i>)	4 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks
<i>Labour market</i>				
Live Register				
Statement (<i>monthly</i>)	1 week	1 week	1 week	1 week
Flow Analysis (<i>monthly</i>)	1½ weeks	1½ weeks	1½ weeks	1½ weeks
Area Analysis (<i>monthly</i>)	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks
Age by Duration (<i>half yearly</i>)	11 weeks	11 weeks	10 weeks	10 weeks
Industrial Disputes (<i>quarterly</i>)	17 weeks	9 weeks	9 weeks	9 weeks
Labour Force Survey/QNHS (<i>quarterly</i>)				
Release	6 months	6 months	5 months	3 months

Publication	Timeliness In 1995	Target in 1995	Current timeliness	Current target
Vital statistics				
Release (<i>quarterly</i>)	24 weeks	13 weeks	17 weeks	17 weeks
Publication (<i>annual</i>)	48 months	24 months	40 months	24 months
Population & migration estimates				
Release (<i>annual</i>)	6 months	6 months	7 months	6 months
Agriculture				
Prices				
Release (<i>monthly</i>)	8 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks
Preliminary (<i>annual</i>)	na	na	-5 weeks	-5 weeks
Land Sales (<i>quarterly</i>)	na	na	16 weeks	16 weeks
Fishery Statistics (<i>annual</i>)	na	na	11 months	11 months
Output, Input & Income (<i>annual</i>)				
December Estimates	-1 month	-1 month	-1 month	-1 month
January Estimates	1 month	1 month	1 month	1 month
Final Estimates	7 months	7 months	6 months	6 months
June Survey (<i>annual</i>)				
Provisional	3 months	3 months	3 months	3 months
Final	13 months	10 months	7 months	7 months
Labour	18 months	12 months	11 months	9 months
Crop Production (<i>annual</i>)	35 weeks	21 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks
December Livestock (<i>annual</i>)	2 months	2 months	2 months	2 months
Pig Survey (<i>annual</i>)	6 weeks	6 weeks	7 weeks	6 weeks
Slaughterings (<i>monthly</i>)	4 weeks	4 weeks	6 weeks ¹	6 weeks
Milk Statistics (<i>monthly</i>)	2 weeks	2 weeks	4 weeks ²	4 weeks
Supply Balances (<i>annual</i>)				
Meat	11 months	10 months	9 months	9 months
Milk	na	na	7 months	7 months
Cereals	na	na	8 months	8 months

1 Extended to include cattle and sheep slaughterings.

2 Changed from weekly to monthly, with additional data included.

Publication	Timeliness In 1995	Target in 1995	Current timeliness	Current target
<i>External trade</i>				
Release (<i>monthly</i>)				
Non-EU	10 weeks	8 weeks	7 weeks	6 weeks
Total	20 weeks	16 weeks	16 weeks	14 weeks
Publication (<i>monthly</i>)	32 weeks	25 weeks	18 weeks	17 weeks
<i>Balance of payments</i>				
Release (<i>quarterly</i>)	22 weeks	12 weeks	13 weeks	13 weeks
<i>National accounts</i>				
Summary results (<i>annual</i>)	6 months	5 months	5½ months	5½ months
Publication (<i>annual</i>)	6½ months	6 months	6½ months	6½ months

Appendix

2

Membership of National Statistics Board

Professor Frances P Ruane,
Associate Professor of Economics, Trinity College (Chairperson)

Ms Paula Carey
Research Officer, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Mr Steve Couldwell¹
Managing Director, Smith & Nephew Limited

Mr Ciarán Dolan
Economic Adviser, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association

Mr David Doyle²
Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance

Ms Marian Harkin
Secondary School Teacher, Sligo

Mr Dermot McCarthy
Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr Donal Murphy
Director General, Central Statistics Office (*ex officio member*).

Mr Adrian Redmond, Senior Statistician, is Secretary to the Board.

¹ Resigned in January 1999.

² Resigned in January 1999 and replaced by Mr Cathal O'Loughlin, Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance.