



Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008

National Statistics Board

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Abbreviations

BOP	Balance of Payments
COP	Census of Population
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ECB	European Central Bank
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
HBS	Household Budget Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFSRA	Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority
ISS	Irish Statistical System
ISSDA	Irish Social Science Data Archive
NCC	National Competitiveness Council
NDA	National Disability Authority
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NSB	National Statistics Board
NSIs	National Statistical Institutes
PCS	Postal Code System
PPSN	Personal Public Service Number
PSMA	Public Service Management Act
QNHS	Quarterly National Household Survey
RIA	Regulatory Impact Analysis
SGSES	Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics
SOGSI	Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion

Glossary

Administrative data sources	Where routine administration creates data as a by-product e.g. numbers signing on as unemployed.
Anonymised data	Data from which categories, such as names or reference numbers, which could identify the individuals or companies concerned have been removed.
Cross-cutting issues	Policy issues that involve more than one government department or public body. For example, the growing number of elderly has implications for pension provision and for the health services.
Institutional network	System of formal links between government departments, under the auspices of the CSO, to coordinate the production of statistics.
Longitudinal	Longitudinal studies involve tracking the same group of individuals over time.
Microdata	Data from the original survey responses rather than grouped data.
Statistical framework	For each general category of information - economic, social and environmental - the set of broad domains and the categories of statistics required within each domain. For example, the statistical framework for social statistics would list the broad domains such as health, housing, education, income, labour market, family, etc. and within each domain would list the sub-categories of statistics required and the cross-classifications required for the different variables.
Time use survey	Survey which collects information about how individuals spend their time.

Preface

I have great pleasure in presenting to the Government the *Strategy for Statistics, 2003-2008*, which has been prepared by the National Statistics Board. This *Strategy* sets out a vision for the future development of the Irish Statistical System covering economic (including financial), social (including equality) and environmental (including energy) statistics. If implemented, this *Strategy* will place the future generation of official statistics in Ireland on a firm footing.

The National Statistics Board (NSB) was set up on a non-statutory basis in 1986 and on a statutory basis in 1994, following the implementation of the Statistics Act, 1993. It has exercised its responsibilities under Section 19 of the Act through the implementation of a series of strategy documents, the latest of which covers the period 1998-2002. When these strategy documents were first conceived some fifteen years ago, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) as an organisation did not report directly on its activities in the public domain, and consequently these documents became a key vehicle for the Office to outline publicly its organisational objectives. Since 1994, under the Strategic Management Initiative, the CSO produces its own three-year *Statement of Strategy* and reports annually to Government on progress made in achieving its objectives. These developments allow the Board the opportunity henceforth to concentrate on the strategic development of the overall statistical system, leaving organisational strategy to the CSO itself.

In recent years, a number of important developments have occurred in public policy-making in Ireland that have combined to place quality data/information at the heart of the process. In particular, the demands of evidence-based policy-making are creating new pressures for data to allow policy-makers to analyse and understand the complex and fast-changing environment. Furthermore, the increasing focus on outcomes, as evidenced most notably in the partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* requires a more coordinated and co-operative approach to information right across both the public and private sectors, in consultation with the user community. Important Government actions underlining this approach have included the recent decision: to develop data/statistics strategies in each government department beginning with the next round of Statements of Strategy; for the publication by the CSO of a set of economic and social indicators; and for the publication by NESC of a periodic Social Report.

The Board argues that these developments, together with the changing and challenging contexts in which Ireland now finds itself, require a new approach to strategy in the statistical arena, so that national needs for statistical information can be met in a more comprehensive and cost-effective manner. In this document, the Board articulates a strategy to support the development of Ireland's statistical system over the next six years to meet this challenge in the years ahead. The key pillars of the strategy proposed are:

- (a) Agreement on detailed frameworks for economic, social and environmental statistics within which all statistical needs can be classified and evaluated; and
- (b) The creation of a network which links the CSO and all relevant government departments and agencies to maximise the effective use of administrative data to generate useful, quality statistics.

The Board sees these developments as the best way that Ireland can ensure that the relevant economic, social and environmental statistics required for evidence-based policy-making are available and that the needs for statistical information by civil society can be met.

The Board believes that by adopting an integrated and co-operative approach it will be possible to underpin effectively the resources required to deliver on this ambitious and challenging agenda during 2003–2008.

Frances Ruane
Chairperson

Executive Summary

Traditionally, the National Statistics Board has primarily sought to develop official statistics through the work of the CSO. However, since the last Board *Strategy* was produced in 1998, there have been very substantial increases in the demand for statistical information. In response, there has been an increase in the number of surveys (of individuals, households and enterprises) being undertaken with funding from government departments and agencies. There has also been a growth in the availability of electronic sources of administrative data in government departments and agencies. In this *Strategy*, the Board responds to these changing contexts and begins the process of dealing more comprehensively and cohesively with the challenge of developing the Irish Statistical System (ISS). Such a systematic approach is timely given the continued expansion in new data requirements, and the growing diversity of users of official statistics.

The Board believes that it is particularly opportune for Ireland to attach priority to further developing the statistical system in order to meet the needs of this broader user community. While policy-makers are key users, there are others in society whose needs must be met to assist the development of an active and inclusive democracy. The Board's view is that it is essential that the approach adopted to meet these needs should be consistent with the opportunities and constraints presented by the Information Society and with the demands imposed by public accountability. In this *Strategy*, therefore, the Board has focused on how to:

- ◆ Ensure that Ireland can meet the demands for new statistics and indicators in an efficient and effective way;
- ◆ Guarantee that all official statistics produced in Ireland are compiled to best international standards and hence comparable with those of other EU and OECD countries;
- ◆ Harness all the potential of existing data sources while ensuring that the burden of data collection on individuals and enterprises is not excessive; and
- ◆ Build datasets (based on individuals and enterprises) that are compatible, capable of longitudinal analysis, and meet data protection standards.

In the Board's view these challenges mean that its *Strategy* needs to take a "whole system" approach, involving all areas of the public sector where administrative records are maintained from which official statistics can be generated. Such a whole system approach will significantly improve our capacity to produce statistics that:

- ◆ Allow us to understand and track structural change in our economy and society;
- ◆ Facilitate us in making international comparisons with a changing Ireland;
- ◆ Permit objective evaluation and monitoring of economic and social progress in Ireland; and
- ◆ Better inform policy-making, especially in relation to cross-cutting issues.

The Board considers that the most effective approach to the development of such a statistical system for Ireland is through the collaboration of the key producers of 'official statistics' and in consultation with the key users. It also notes that two important developments outside of the statistical process are essential in order to realise the full potential of the statistical system. The most important of these is the wider use of the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). The other development that would be of particular use in helping to structure information is the introduction of a Postal Code System (PCS).

The Board believes that the CSO, in line with its remit under the 1993 Statistics Act, should take a lead role in developing this collaborative network. This should involve all government departments and agencies that hold administrative data capable of generating worthwhile statistics. An immediate consequence is that departments and agencies should consult with the CSO when they are undertaking new data collection or changing information technology systems. It is easiest to maximise the statistical potential of administrative records if this is built in at the design stage of IT systems.

In order to progress this *Strategy*, the Board will work simultaneously on a number of strands over the next six years to:

- ◆ Establish a comprehensive set of frameworks for national statistics in Ireland covering the economy, society and the environment;
- ◆ Develop the blueprint for a statistics network across government departments, coordinated by the CSO, to;
 - Generate official statistics from administrative records;
 - Improve access to statistics;
 - Manage departments' own data needs; and
 - Develop their skills in making more effective use of data.
- ◆ Set statistical priorities in conjunction with the CSO, the statistical network and data users; and
- ◆ Foster the development of statistical competence in all government departments and agencies.

The Board is of the view that development of an integrated and comprehensive approach to the production of statistics across the public service should begin immediately. This process will take some time to implement fully but significant progress could be achieved within a few years, if there is cross-departmental support. There are economic efficiencies and information benefits to be gained across the whole public sector.

Chapter

1

**The Irish Statistical System
– A New Challenge**

1.1 *Brief outline of the report*

In this chapter, the National Statistics Board (hereafter referred to as the Board) outlines the context in which it makes its proposals for a *Strategy for Statistics* for Ireland covering the period 2003-2008¹. The circumstances in which the *Strategy* has been developed are considered under three headings – the domestic context, the international context and the ‘information age’ context. The Board argues that these contexts are changing at such a pace that a fundamentally new approach to the strategic development of the national statistical system is required in order to address national needs for statistical information in a comprehensive manner.

Chapter 2 of this *Strategy* identifies what is required of the statistical system and sets out the Board’s proposed approach to achieving the type of statistical system required in a resource-efficient manner. This chapter also outlines the approach proposed to develop a comprehensive set of statistical frameworks covering the full range of economic, social, and environmental statistics. It proposes a broader institutional infrastructure for the collection, compilation, dissemination and analysis of such statistics.

Chapter 3 sketches out the key elements in the proposed approach in terms of four strands:

- ◆ A comprehensive set of statistical frameworks covering three broad arenas - economic, social and environmental;
- ◆ A networked infrastructure for developing statistics within and across departments and agencies;
- ◆ A mechanism for determining statistical priorities; and
- ◆ The development of statistical competence within the public service.

Chapter 4 looks at the progress that has been made in addressing key statistical needs over the past decade and outlines the evolving role for the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in the Irish statistical system in the context of the progress that has been made in addressing key statistical needs over the past decade.

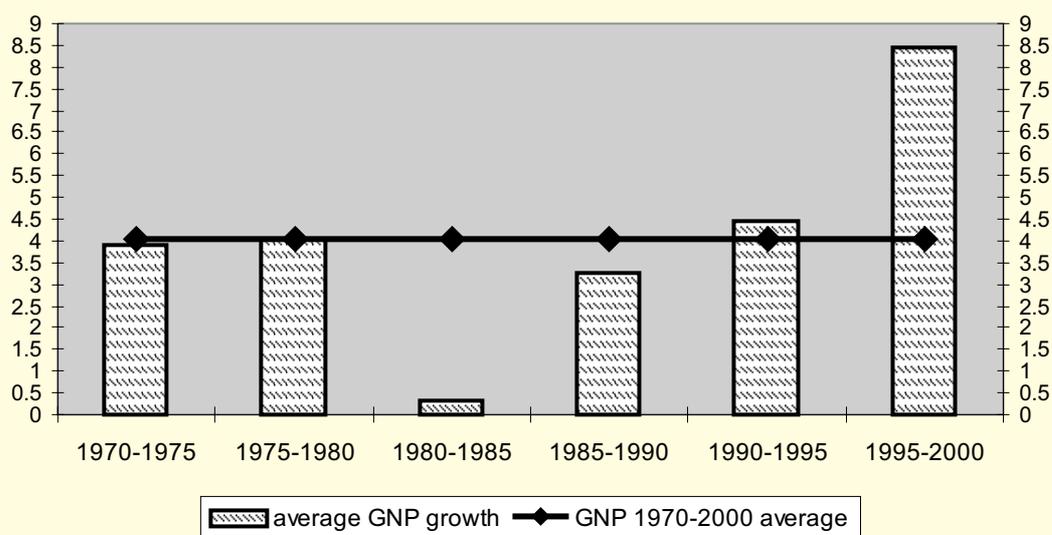
Chapter 5 highlights some of the key issues raised by the new approach being adopted by the Board.

1.2 *The domestic context*

Ireland has undergone and is continuing to undergo a period of very rapid change in both economic and social terms. During the 1990s we experienced high growth rates that were unprecedented in terms of our history (see Figure 1) and well ahead of the growth performances of our European partners. This growth has been associated with exceptional levels of foreign direct investment and with a booming services sector. It has led to massive sectoral shifts in the economy, as it restructured towards high-technology manufacturing and services. Consequently, there have been major changes in the composition of skills required in the labour market and demand for certain skills began to exceed supply. Ultimately, as the economy has continued to grow, we have seen the problem of high unemployment replaced by one of labour shortages. Ireland shifted from net emigration to net immigration, and that immigration has contributed significantly to economic growth. The number of new immigrants and their diverse backgrounds has increased the diversity and complexity of Irish society at a speed that was unimaginable in the early 1990s.

¹ The Board’s functions under the Statistics Act, 1993 are set out in Appendix A.

Figure 1 Irish growth rates 1970-2000



These changes have given rise to increased demands for statistics to help measure and understand what is happening in the economy, and in particular to help monitor cyclical and structural changes which impact on growth.

There is also a demand for the development of a broad range of outcome indicators, in addition to measures of inputs and other current programme indicators, so that official statistics can accurately describe the impact of government policy on society and the economy. For example, pupil-teacher ratios tell us about inputs into the education service, whereas figures on literacy or mathematical competence tell us what is being achieved in schools.

Since the changes in Irish society and the economy are not evenly spread across the country, national averages are no longer enough to understand the economic and social changes in different areas of the country. As a consequence, there are new demands for detailed geographic breakdown of the full range of social and economic data. The publication of the government's National Spatial Strategy² in 2002 underlines the importance attached to the geographical dimension.

Social changes or government policies may impact in different ways on different groups in the population. There is a growing demand for data to be broken down between groups, for example, to be differentiated on the separate grounds set out in Equality legislation³.

Furthermore, the emerging emphasis on evidence-based policy-making, has led to an increased importance for statistics in policy analysis. Where cross-cutting issues are concerned, i.e. those issues that involve several policy areas, it is important that the statistics relating to different facets of an issue are comparable, so that the totality of the issue can be understood.

² Government Publications (2002): "National Spatial Strategy for Ireland 2002-2020 People, Places and Potential"

³ Employment Equality Act (1998) and Equal Status Act (2000): Gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious belief and membership of the traveller community.

The social partnership agreement 2003-2005⁴ contains a number of statistical commitments. These include:

- ◆ The CSO to produce a key national progress indicators report;
- ◆ The CSO and National Statistics Board to develop a framework for social and equality statistics; and
- ◆ The CSO to take a lead role in the development of the potential of administrative records across government departments and agencies in conjunction with the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion.

In addition, a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) will be introduced on a pilot basis in a number of government departments during 2003. RIA is a tool that will help meet the growing demand for evidence-based policy making and greater transparency and accountability. Its introduction will also strengthen analytical competences across the public service.

The Government has also committed itself to making further progress on ten special social inclusion initiatives⁵ to be undertaken during the period of the social partnership agreement. Good quality statistical information will be required to monitor progress on these initiatives.

1.3 The international context

Increasing international co-operation, market liberalisation and globalisation have created a demand for statistics that allow users to benchmark national performance against other countries and other economic regions. A key requirement for national benchmarking is that the national statistical system can produce information of a quality and timeliness consistent with the performance of its counterparts abroad, many of which may be larger, better resourced, and more developed. The EU as a major economic force also wishes to benchmark its performance on various measures. This has led to increased emphasis at EU level on generating rapid statistical results. The production of Irish statistics must be as timely as that of our European partners to facilitate preparation of EU-wide data on the basis of actual and not estimated figures, and so that we can measure our economic and social performance relative to others. Ireland, despite our small scale and relatively limited resources, must maintain a statistical system that can cope with these international competitiveness challenges and demands. A very considerable national effort has been expended by the CSO on meeting these challenges during the 1990s.

Because Ireland is exceptionally open in terms of international trade and has a very high level of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the economy, the international context is especially important for us. Ireland is virtually unique in Europe in the scale of the importance of “new economy” activities in both manufacturing and internationally traded services and in having a strongly dualist manufacturing sector⁶. So the increased fragmentation of global production impacts in a magnified way in the case of Ireland. It is vital that Ireland should continue to incorporate developments in best international practice into how we produce our statistics.

⁴ Department of the Taoiseach (2003): “Sustaining Progress, Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005”

⁵ Housing and accommodation; cost and availability of insurance; migration and interculturalism; long-term unemployed, vulnerable workers and those who have been made redundant; tackling educational disadvantage; waste management; care; alcohol/drug misuse; including everyone in the information society; and ending child poverty.

⁶ Economic dualism refers to the differences between the degree of sophistication in production in activities undertaken in foreign and indigenous plants operating within the same sector. It is a feature of unevenly developed economies.

It is also essential to meet specific EU requirements, such as the data required under the Stability and Growth Pact. Ireland is also required, under what is termed in the EU as “the open method of coordination”, to produce statistics to allow our progress and performance to be measured, an example being the Action Plan on Social Inclusion⁷.

1.4 *The information age context*

The Information Age has created many new and diverse demands and responsibilities for National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) throughout Europe. The European statistical office (Eurostat) and NSIs have been reviewing the appropriate role of statistics in this environment. In the recent past, much of the work of European NSIs has focused on meeting the needs of the European Commission and European Central Bank as well as a number of key domestic users, primarily policy makers. It is increasingly recognised that the users of official statistics today are becoming more diverse. Many see a key role for statistics in the evolution of a more open civil society, and especially in individuals’ relationships with government through the policy process. Reorienting official statistical systems to meet these broader needs is a new key priority for NSIs. Consultative procedures that establish effective user/producer dialogues are now pre-requisites for NSIs to ensure that they are producing the statistics required by users and disseminating them in a format that enhances their usability.

There has been an exponential increase in the quantity and variety of statistical type information that has been made available to users in recent years, as dissemination processes have developed⁸. The role of NSIs has expanded from the basic task of generating statistics. They are increasingly being required to assist users in making full and appropriate use of statistics in their analyses, e.g. in the interpretation of key trends or the assessment of policy effectiveness. NSIs are generally much more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their statistics than users or other intermediary analytical agencies. This expertise should be used to inform and guide users to ensure that they can correctly identify and interpret the fundamental messages in the statistics. Presenting the results of surveys in a format that is readily comprehensible to the “average” user is one of the more challenging tasks facing NSIs today.

In the past decade, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has led to massive changes in all aspects of statistics from collection to compilation to dissemination to analysis. The traditional paper publication is becoming increasingly irrelevant as users of statistics seek data in an electronic form which allows them to undertake more specific analyses in order to address the particular issues they are examining. Furthermore, to address complex issues, users increasingly seek anonymised data on individuals/units in order to understand how particular changes or policies are impacting on different groups/entities. This leads to the need to create longitudinal datasets so that the development of patterns over time can be fully understood, and policy designed and refined accordingly⁹. Thus we need a system that can deal with a very substantial increase in user numbers, many of whom will be dealing with complex and important policy issues without the required statistical skills.

⁷ At the Laeken European Council in December 2001, a first set of 18 common statistical indicators for monitoring social inclusion was endorsed. National Action Plans on Social Inclusion have been developed to ensure that Ireland meets these obligations.

⁸ The CSO has continued to develop its website and has extended the range of data that can be downloaded in usable form. See www.cso.ie.

⁹ The development of statistical packages that can be used by non-specialists has greatly increased the demand for statistics, mirroring how the development of the PC increased the demand for computers.

1.5 Key challenges

Ireland thus faces several key challenges in the coming decade, so as to:

- ◆ Ensure that Ireland can meet the demands for new statistics and indicators in an efficient and effective way;
- ◆ Guarantee that all official statistics produced in Ireland are compiled to best international standards and hence are comparable with those of other EU and OECD countries;
- ◆ Harness all of the potential in existing data sources while ensuring that the burden of data collection on individuals and enterprises is not excessive; and
- ◆ Build datasets (based on individuals and enterprises) that are compatible, capable of longitudinal analysis, and meet data protection standards.

In the Board's view these challenges mean that Ireland requires a strategy that takes a whole-system approach, involving all areas of the public sector where administrative records are maintained from which official statistics are or may be generated. Thus this present *Strategy* contrasts with previous Board strategies which were incremental in approach and focused largely on meeting Ireland's needs for statistics through expanding and developing the statistical series produced by the CSO.

The need for a whole-system approach has already been recognised by Government in a number of important policy decisions that it took in response to the proposals in the report of the *Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics* (See Section 2.5) in April 2003. The Board warmly welcomes the Government decision that henceforth each Department will develop a formal Data/Statistics Strategy as an integral part of its Information Strategy. The Board looks forward to the inclusion of these Data Strategies in the next round of Departmental *Statements of Strategy*, and to annual reports on these data and statistics strategies thereafter in department annual reports. The Board also very much welcomes the Government's decision to ask the CSO to take a lead role in the development of administrative data, and welcomes the proactive approach for the CSO to address confidentiality issues. (A summary of the relevant decisions taken by Government in April 2003 is set out in Appendix D).

Chapter

2

A New Approach to Statistics

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the Board sets out how it believes the Irish Statistical System (ISS) should develop in broad terms. The new approach reflects both the growing need for statistical information and the requirement that the information be produced in a cost-effective manner. The Board believes that the new approach cannot be achieved through a process of small incremental developments centred on expanding the statistical surveys undertaken by the CSO. Accordingly, the Board is proposing a new strategy for the further development of statistics which will bring together all of those involved in the production of official statistics in Ireland, with the CSO at the centre of the network facilitating the broader statistical effort.

2.2 General requirements of a statistical system

In modern democracies, the importance of official statistics to the understanding of economic, social and environmental change is increasingly recognised. Each country requires a statistical system that is:

- ◆ **Needs driven** i.e. addresses the broad and changing range of needs of society for statistical information;
- ◆ **User oriented** i.e. facilitates those who seek to use statistics;
- ◆ **Quality certified** i.e. produces statistics to best international standards (which guarantee that the statistics are internationally comparable, fully trustworthy and meet rigorous confidentiality and data protection standards); and
- ◆ **Cost effective** i.e. produces statistics to best international standards at lowest possible cost.

Such a statistical system must become increasingly focused on the measurement of outcomes so that the statistics produced:

- ◆ Allow structural changes in the economy and society to be tracked and analysed;
- ◆ Facilitate such changes being benchmarked against relevant international measures;
- ◆ Permit objective evaluation and monitoring of economic and social progress; and
- ◆ Better inform policy-making, especially in relation to cross-cutting issues.

Figure 2 pictorially outlines the Board's thinking on how the Irish Statistical System might develop to meet these requirements. The starting point is that the proposed Irish Statistical System should be driven by the information needs of government, other national and international agencies, business, and civil society. These user needs have become considerably more diverse and complex in recent years and the Board believes that in the future the users, the CSO and the other organisations involved in the production of official statistics should work more closely together to meet these demands in an efficient and value-for-money manner. The CSO should aim to add value to related data sources by integrating them. This would be particularly useful to allow more in-depth analyses of cross-cutting issues. For example, if separate datasets on health and housing of elderly people could be integrated (e.g. by linking data via PPS Numbers) this could facilitate analysis and development of policy on the linked needs of the frail elderly for accessible housing and for care.

Before developing this *Strategy*, the Board undertook a consultative process¹⁰ and reviewed the totality of the statistical effort in Ireland in the context of European developments, and the need for statistics to monitor policy. The Board concluded on the basis of these reviews and taking on board the context described in Chapter 1, that it makes sense to adopt an approach to collecting statistics that is integrated across the whole of the public sector. This approach, based on a coordinated, networked system, would have the dual advantage of making more efficient use of existing and potential data systems and developing a closer relationship between data users and producers. The next section sets out the Board's approach.

2.3 *Board's approach to developing the Irish Statistical System*

There is a great deal of potentially useful information collected by government departments and agencies as a by-product of administering their services, which could be harnessed systematically to generate useful and needed statistics. Making greater use of these data is facilitated by the 1993 Statistics Act, which gives the CSO a remit in relation to the use of administrative records to generate official statistics.

In the view of the Board, the future scenario for the production of Irish economic and social statistics must involve all of the key government departments and agencies that currently have data holdings on individuals or households; on enterprises and economic entities; and on economic and social acts (e.g. crimes committed). In effect, the Board sees official statistics as encompassing all of the statistical data produced by, or on behalf of, all government departments and agencies within the state.

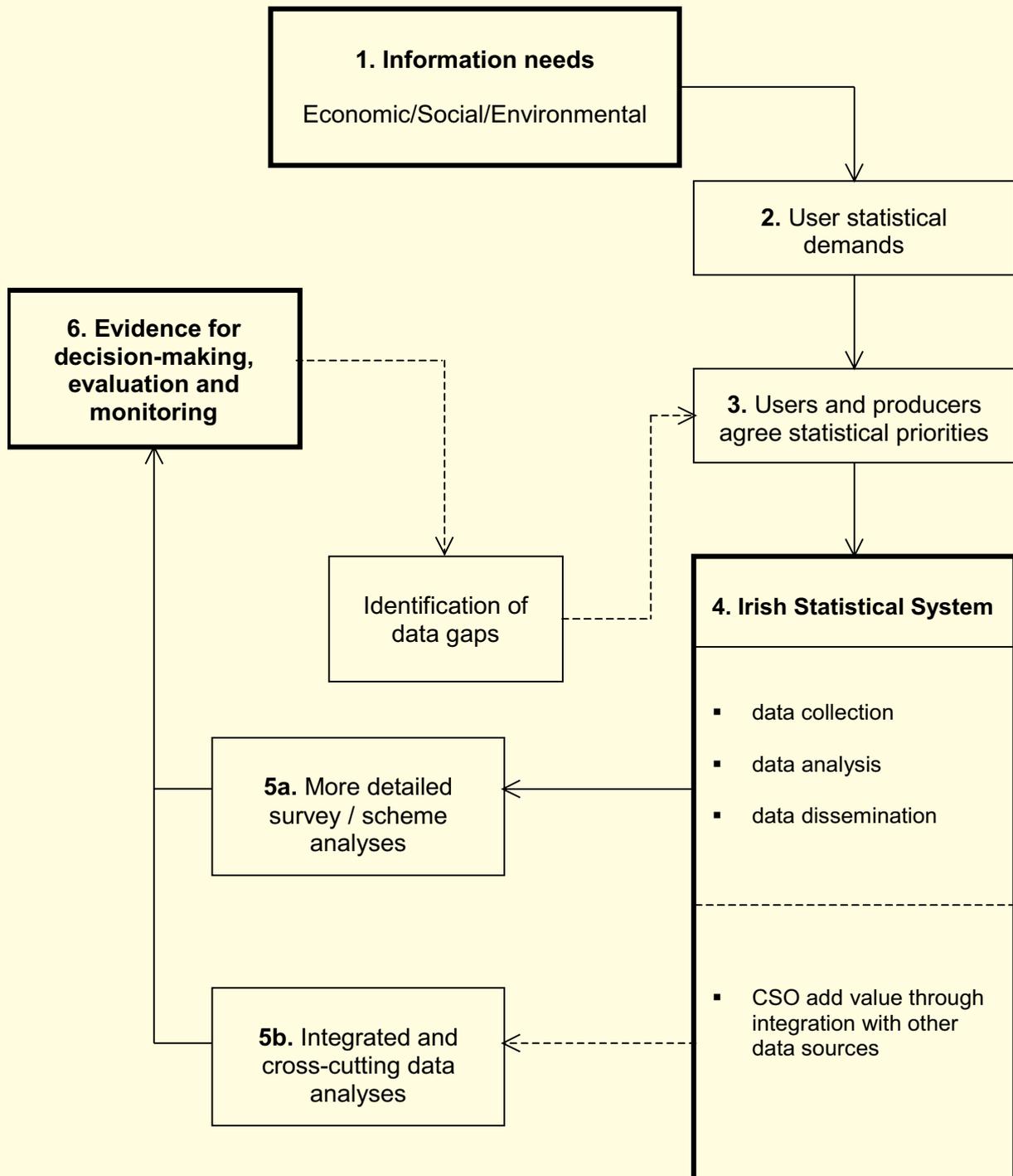
The Board also envisages that all of the demands for statistics in Ireland, from across the full range of users (policy-makers, academics, media, civil society), should be classified and prioritised. To make this happen, a set of statistical frameworks is needed setting out data groups and sub-groups, in which the data produced and the data sought can be matched. This matching will help identify gaps, determine priorities and ensure efficiency in collection, compilation and analysis.

An important part of these statistical frameworks will be to identify the key cross-classifications and disaggregations required for the different statistical variables. There will also need to be agreed definitions of the cross-classifications to be used for different statistics, e.g. the age group that denotes dependent children. The frameworks will have to be agreed between data users and producers – providing a vital structure for the orderly production of data and the articulation of data demands. These frameworks are discussed further in Section 3.2.

With wider use being made of administrative datasets to generate statistics, mechanisms are needed to identify the responsibilities of the different data producers, and to clarify the relationships among data producers. There also needs to be systematic and clear relationships established between data producers and data users. The Board envisages this as a networked system with the CSO at the centre, as the key facilitator of this broader statistical effort. This ***institutional network*** should detail the key roles involved in the production of data series, including the generation of key indicators. The type of network envisaged is discussed further in Section 3.3.

¹⁰ In order to determine the adequacy of the present system from the perspective of users, a postal survey of a representative group of key users of official statistics was undertaken. The users were invited to comment on the present system and on progress made since the last user survey in 1997. They were also asked to identify the changes and improvements they would wish to see implemented over the next three to five years. See NSB (January 2003), *Survey of CSO Users 2002*. The Board also received feedback from users through a number of CSO User Liaison Groups and Advisory Groups. The Board received additional feedback on the need for and availability of social and equality statistics within the policy community from the work of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (discussed in Section 2.5). In addition, the Board reviewed the many government policy initiatives that implicitly or explicitly require statistics for monitoring implementation progress.

Figure 2 Needs driven Irish Statistical System



To realise the full potential of the statistical system, two strategic developments are essential. The most important of these is the wider use of the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN).

The other development that would be of particular use in helping to structure information is the introduction of a Postal Code System (PCS).

The widespread use of the PPSN would allow a linking mechanism for the data gathered on individuals across all those administrative schemes which operated this number as part of their record-keeping. Its use would also reduce the statistical burden of CSO inquiries since certain information relating to individuals could be extracted from the administrative data holdings rather than being generated by surveys.

Outside of the Census, it is difficult at present to gather or compare data at any geographical level lower than a county. In general it is also not possible to link data based on administrative records with the small area Electoral Divisions used in the Census. The absence of a good post code system throughout the country hampers our ability to use statistics to understand what is happening at the level of localities. The widespread use of a good post-code system would facilitate the linking and integration of spatial information. It would be of particular value in informing and further refining the National Spatial Strategy¹¹. Post-coded information would also facilitate the linking of statistics from different data sets, e.g. on health status and educational participation in particular communities.

Strictly speaking, these two developments lie outside the arena of the statistical system but are crucial to realising its full potential. We refer further to the importance of these two developments for Ireland in Chapter 5.

2.4 Implications of the Board's approach

It is important that all the stakeholders – Government and state agencies, social partners and civil society – should participate broadly in the process of developing the Irish Statistical System so that the statistics produced respond to public needs and do not remain the preserve of experts.

The approach adopted here involves several key changes, some of which build on what has been evolving in the statistical arena for the past decade. For example:

- ◆ All surveys funded by government departments and agencies should from now on be planned in partnership with the CSO, should be integrated, where relevant, with CSO surveys and be treated as part of official statistics;
- ◆ Data from administrative sources should be developed in a very conscious manner as part of a total data system; and
- ◆ Data users and producers must take joint responsibility for ensuring that:
 - The data collected are those which meet important information needs; and
 - Serious and substantial analyses of these important data are undertaken so that society gains fully from the endeavour.

¹¹ Arguably spatial change within Ireland is one of the key areas where policy will be active in the next decade, necessitating disaggregated analysis if correct policy decisions are to be reached.

For the public service, this effectively involves moving from departmentally centred thinking to whole-system thinking in regard to statistical information, especially as important policy issues increasingly cut across traditional lines¹². This will mean new cross-departmental links which go right to the heart of each Department's data strategy as the effort put into understanding change will be shared in a more co-operative manner.

It also involves extending the explicit standards for statistics, based on the UN *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* (see Appendix B) to all areas of official statistics, including those based on administrative data. These high standards, which are currently operated by the CSO¹³, are essential if the trust of the public in official statistical information is to be maintained.

In addition, it requires that structured mechanisms be put in place to facilitate collaborative discussions between data producers and data users. These are required to identify major gaps in economic, environmental, social and spatial statistics and where they overlap¹⁴. The new statistics must fully represent the complexity of today's economic¹⁵ and social reality, be timely, usable and well understood. They must also be capable of addressing issues that cut across traditional departmental lines, such as ageing or disability.

Accountability to the general public means publishing comprehensive information on all the key economic, social and environmental issues. Publication in today's age should always be in electronic as well as printed form.

Furthermore, the information must be consistent with international statistical concepts and allow internationally comparable indicators to be generated readily particularly given that international benchmarking has increasingly become the reference point for decision-making in many areas. In this context, Ireland needs an agreed set of key national progress indicators, which have the confidence of the key users and producers. The CSO has been asked by the Board to prepare a preliminary set of national progress indicators by Summer 2003. This initial set of indicators will be a reference point for discussions between the main users and producers of key economic and social statistics with the purpose of the CSO publishing a definitive annual national progress indicators report. During 2003, the NSB and the CSO will propose how consultation with users will be formalised over the course of the strategy period.

The use of integrated datasets, which is the key to adding value to the statistics that can be derived from administrative records, also demands that we deal fully with the issue of data protection. A framework for addressing data protection issues relating to social data on individuals and households was set out in the Report of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (SGSES)¹⁶. There is also a need to address fully confidentiality and data protection issues for enterprises. It is the Board's intention that a systematic approach to addressing data protection concerns should be extended to all official data sources, and that wider use of administrative datasets for statistical purposes would carry full safeguards in respect of privacy.

¹² As such the approach is highly consistent with the stated objectives of the Strategic Management Initiative.

¹³ The establishment of the CSO as an independent agency under the auspices of the Taoiseach in 1949 and the statistical legislation under which it operates has guaranteed adherence to the highest statistical principles.

¹⁴ Many of the key policy issues happen at their interfaces, e.g. environmental concerns and growth; labour force participation and social capital.

¹⁵ In areas such as foreign direct investment and the knowledge society, this involves highly specialised work and co-operation with international statistical networks dealing with these issues.

¹⁶ The SGSES report recommended (i) that the CSO will set out formally how its process of data integration and the subsequent treatment of statistics generated by data integration can be safely employed without data protection problems; (ii) that the National Statistics Board, in conjunction with the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, will set out formally how Departments would use and protect individual data available to them for statistical purposes; and (iii) that each of these documents will be referred to the Data Protection Commissioner for confirmation that these processes do not undermine the data protection rights of individuals.

In the next section, we examine how the Board's proposed use of a statistical framework and an institutional network for examining data needs and data sources has been applied in the case of social statistics.

2.5 Example of the Board's approach in action

Over the past 12 months, the Board has been examining whether it would be possible to operate such a networked system in the context of social and equality statistics. The need to do this arose from the exceptional increase in the demand for social statistics for policy purposes that simply could not be met by CSO surveys. At the same time, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of specific indicators which particular groups identified as being required measures for policy analysis. The Board set out to ascertain to what extent it would be possible to meet many of these demands by the use of statistics derived from administrative records in government departments and agencies.

Under the auspices of the Board, and with the support of the CSO and the Department of the Taoiseach, a Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (SGSES) was established, details on which are set out in Appendix D. The Group was asked to examine both the potential supply and demand for social and equality data. It examined the main CSO and departmental data sources and the requirements of policy-makers for specific data. The members of the Group comprised both data producers and data users from within each department along with some social policy experts from outside the public service¹⁷. The Group, which effectively comprised the key players (in terms of departments) that would have to be engaged in a network to produce social and equality statistics in a system-wide way, explored the various issues that might arise in that context. It carried out an audit of the statistical sources held and classified the data needs articulated by policy-makers in the different departments using a statistical framework proposed by the Group. The framework examined social and equality statistics under twelve different domains¹⁸.

The Board noted that the SGSES report identified close to 200 potentially important data sources for social statistics within the government departments and agencies it reviewed. The report's findings¹⁹ showed the large potential for exploiting administrative records in order to enhance the supply of social and equality statistics for policy purposes²⁰. Hitherto such administrative sources have tended to be under-exploited²¹ for statistical purposes because they suffer from a number of serious shortcomings. These largely arise because the administrative sources have evolved without sufficient consideration given to their information potential for the statistical purposes at the planning and design stages. As a result, the statistics obtained tend to be incompatible across sources and generally fail to provide a comprehensive picture. Another important drawback to an increased use of administrative sources is the effective absence of a means of linking different data sources. The situation is, however, changing with an increased interest in capturing the PPSN in the delivery of a range of public services, partly driven by the priority being given to e-government initiatives. Use of the PPSN has the potential to yield substantial improvements in the quality of policy-making through better use of the statistics obtained from administrative sources. As noted in Section 2.4, the Board views its increased use as being of great significance to the development of the Irish Statistical System.

¹⁷ Brian Nolan (ESRI), Tony McCashin (TCD), Eithne Fitzgerald (Allwrite), and Laurence Bond (Equality Authority). The group was chaired by Frances Ruane (Chair of the National Statistics Board).

¹⁸ The domains used by the group were: Households and families; Housing; Health and access to health care; Labour market and working conditions; Income wealth and poverty; Education and Training; Safety and security; Social relationships and integration; Environment; Transportation; Lifestyles and consumer expenditure; and Population.

¹⁹ The study was restricted to looking at social and equality statistics for policy purposes.

²⁰ NSB (2003): *Developing Irish Social and Equality statistics to meet Policy Needs*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

²¹ In some of the EU countries, especially the Scandinavian countries, extensive use is made of administrative records as a source for social statistics as these countries operate a register system that maintains information on individuals on an ongoing basis.

The Board also noted that policy-makers identified over 1,000 different indicators that they either used or wished to use in trying to provide an evidence base for policy making. While many of these are programme-specific variables, a significant number are broad policy indicators. What was apparent from the SGSES exercise was that many of the indicators in use overlapped with each other and that many were interconnected (e.g. disaggregated versions of the same basic data) but not collected or maintained in a form that reflected these relationships.

The experience of the SGSES confirmed the Board in its view that the required development of the Irish Statistical System cannot be realised through a process of small incremental developments with the focus centred totally on the CSO as the sole responsible agency. The result would be data gaps and significant duplication of effort within and across departments, as well as lower potential benefit from the existing resources expended on statistics across the public sector. It was clear that the gaps could be minimised and the wasteful duplication could be avoided if there was a systematic planning of data management within and across government departments and agencies. In essence the Board is proposing that the spirit of the proposals for social and equality statistics from the SGSES report should be extended to the full range of official statistics in Ireland.

In this context, the Board is happy to record that the Government accepted the report of the SGSES (see Appendix D) and asked that the framework outlined be developed further through the co-operation of interested parties including the NSB, the CSO, the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion and the various departments and agencies. This work is now underway.

Chapter

3

**The Board's Strategy
for Developing the
Irish Statistical System**

3.1 Introduction

The Board considers that the most effective approach for it to adopt over the next six years is to work systematically to develop the Irish Statistical System. It aims to do this by involving the key producers of ‘official statistics’ in Ireland and in consultation with the key users. This will involve the Board working simultaneously on a number of strands over the next three years so as to build up the various elements required in developing the overall national strategy. It will also involve the CSO taking a lead role in working with government departments and agencies to develop the potential of administrative data. In effect, this will mean that from now on departments and agencies will consult with the CSO when they are undertaking new data collection or introducing new IT systems that bear on administrative data. The evolving role envisaged for the CSO is set out in Chapter 4.

In this Chapter, we outline the four strands on which the Board will seek to progress strategically the development of statistics in Ireland.

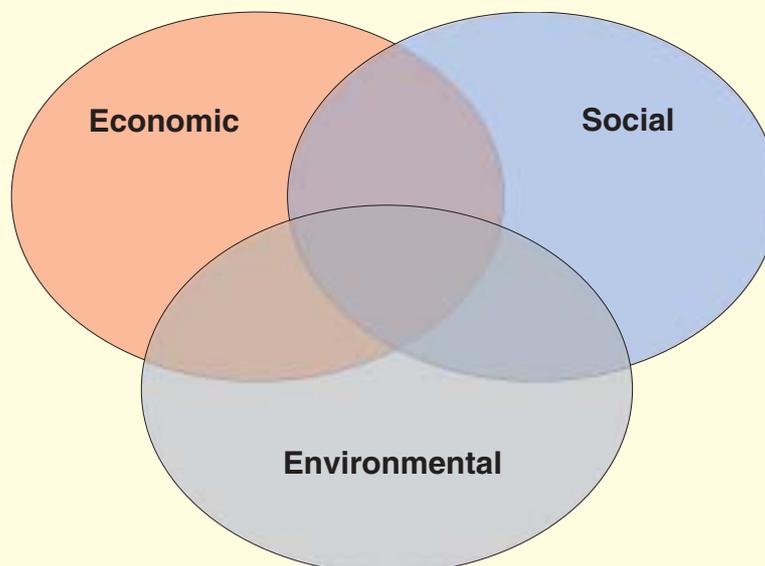
3.2 Strand one – A comprehensive set of frameworks for statistics

The first strand in this process is to put a set of frameworks in place to ensure comprehensive coverage of Irish official statistics. It is proposed that the Board would produce a draft set of frameworks, encompassing the key national statistics, groups and sub-groups of data and indicators that would populate them. An essential part of the process is to ensure that the frameworks adequately address cross-cutting and emerging issues, including those which overlap frameworks, e.g. economic and social.

The Board proposes, following best international practice, that all statistics should be considered within three frameworks: economic (including financial), social (including equality) and environmental (including energy). These are set out schematically in Figure 3, as three overlapping circles, with the overlaps indicating the important and intensive interfaces between the elements in different frameworks.

Each of these frameworks will have a classification system (referred to as a set of domains) that enables the categorisation of sub-groups of statistics within that framework. This process has already begun for social statistics, as set out in the SGSES report, where it was proposed that social data related to individuals and households are classified under twelve different domains. These domains will be finalised following a wide consultation process, which will ensure that the domains proposed are conceptually well-matched to Ireland’s needs.

Figure 3 Set of statistical frameworks



The next stage of this exercise will concentrate on the economic framework. Paralleling the approach adopted for social statistics, this will involve agreeing a set of domains in which data on enterprises can be categorised. It will be necessary to carry out an evaluation of data holdings on enterprises across the administrative and statistical system to assess the potential for adding greater value to this wide range of information by, for example, standardising classifications and, where possible, eliminating duplication. This should enable the development of a more coherent approach to the analysis of these economic datasets. These statistical improvements should allow evidence-based policies to be developed across a range of economic issues.

Improvements in the quality of the underlying enterprise statistics will also help to improve the accuracy and timeliness of macroeconomic statistics, much of which derive from enterprise data. In the case of National Accounts and Balance of Payments, there is a very comprehensive programme of development for these statistics at EU level, which is set out by Eurostat and the European Central Bank (ECB). The bodies involved in providing these data, mainly the CSO and the Central Bank of Ireland, will continue to work together to ensure that Ireland's statistical needs and obligations in this area are met efficiently.

The third stage of this exercise will involve developing the environmental framework. Again a set of domains will have to be developed to ensure comprehensiveness of cover, so that issues such as sustainability and requirements to meet internationally-set regulatory standards can be fully addressed. While it is clear that there is considerable overlap between the individual statistics relevant to the environment and those related to the economy and society, the Board is of the view that the growing importance and complexity of environmental issues in themselves merit this area being analysed under its own framework.

In the case of each framework proposed, the NSB will enter a consultative process with the various stakeholders to ensure that the coverage is comprehensive and that the domains determined are agreed.

3.3 Strand two – Developing an institutional network for statistics

The second strand in the process is the development of an infrastructure for delivering statistics cost-effectively. The Board is firmly of the view that this should be done in a networked manner, with each department and agency having an agreed set of data responsibilities. In order to underpin this approach, it is important that the various organisations that contribute to the statistical frameworks in Strand One are equipped to fulfill their roles. The intention is that each government department would develop the statistical competence necessary to ensure that the records it has can be used to generate statistics to underpin the policy needs of the relevant department/agency. The records developed should also be capable of integration with records in other departments and agencies to deal with cross-cutting issues.

In order to provide the foundation for this approach, it has been agreed by Government that each department develop a formal *Data/Statistics Strategy* as an integral part of its Information Strategy²². This will form part of its *Statement of Strategy* and progress on developments will be reported on in its annual report. In this context the Board, supported by the CSO, will develop best practice guidelines for departments to assist them in the preparation and implementation of a formal Data/Statistics Strategy, so that the quality of official statistics in Ireland will continue to meet the international norms set by the UN, Eurostat, OECD, etc. (see Appendix B).

²² See Appendix D.

In the case of administrative data, the Board's view is that protocols should be developed for these data sources so that:

- ◆ Data in individual departments and agencies are capable of integration across departments;
- ◆ Data in individual departments and agencies are capable of being used for longitudinal analysis; and
- ◆ The burden on users of state services and those delivering the services in respect of generating data capable of statistical analysis is minimised.

A network approach across government departments and agencies is required to manage the process effectively. The Board recommends that the CSO take a central role in the development of the potential of administrative data across government departments and agencies in conjunction with senior cross-department management groups, such as the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI) in the case of social statistics²³. The Board's view is that the provision of adequate statistical information should be regarded as a desired output of administrative data sources generally in the public sector. The statistical potential of each administrative data source should be assessed and the potential fully developed where appropriate. Greater consistency in the statistical management of these administrative data sources should add significantly to their information value.

Individual surveys, undertaken at the behest of government departments or agencies, have become a major feature of the landscape for statistics in Ireland. Because they tend to be undertaken by individual organisations to meet their own particular needs, the Board believes that major opportunities to achieve value for money and synergies with other datasets are being missed. Therefore, the view of the Board is that where statistical surveys are undertaken by, or at the behest of, government departments or agencies, the CSO should have an involvement in survey design and execution. This involvement will help ensure that the surveys are valid in terms of methodology and application and that, where appropriate, the data produced will be capable of integration with data from other surveys and sources. It will also help to avoid overlap/duplication and to ensure greater awareness in the whole public service system of what is being collected. In this way it will be possible to maximise their potential benefits to the overall statistical system. In the Board's view, data from all such surveys conducted at the taxpayers' expense are automatically part of Ireland's official statistics and must be accessible by the CSO.

Figure 4 outlines the main concepts underpinning the development of the Board's statistics strategy, in terms of statistical frameworks and producer networks. Users and producers of official statistics will work together to agree a set of comprehensive set of statistical frameworks. They will then identify critical data gaps and agree priorities for developing the system to fill these. Efficient practices, such as the use of standard classifications and adopting common reference numbers, will be encouraged among data holders. In addition to the existing detailed statistical publications, a new emphasis, arising from being able to integrate related data sources, will be placed on producing key indicators and cross-sectoral reports.

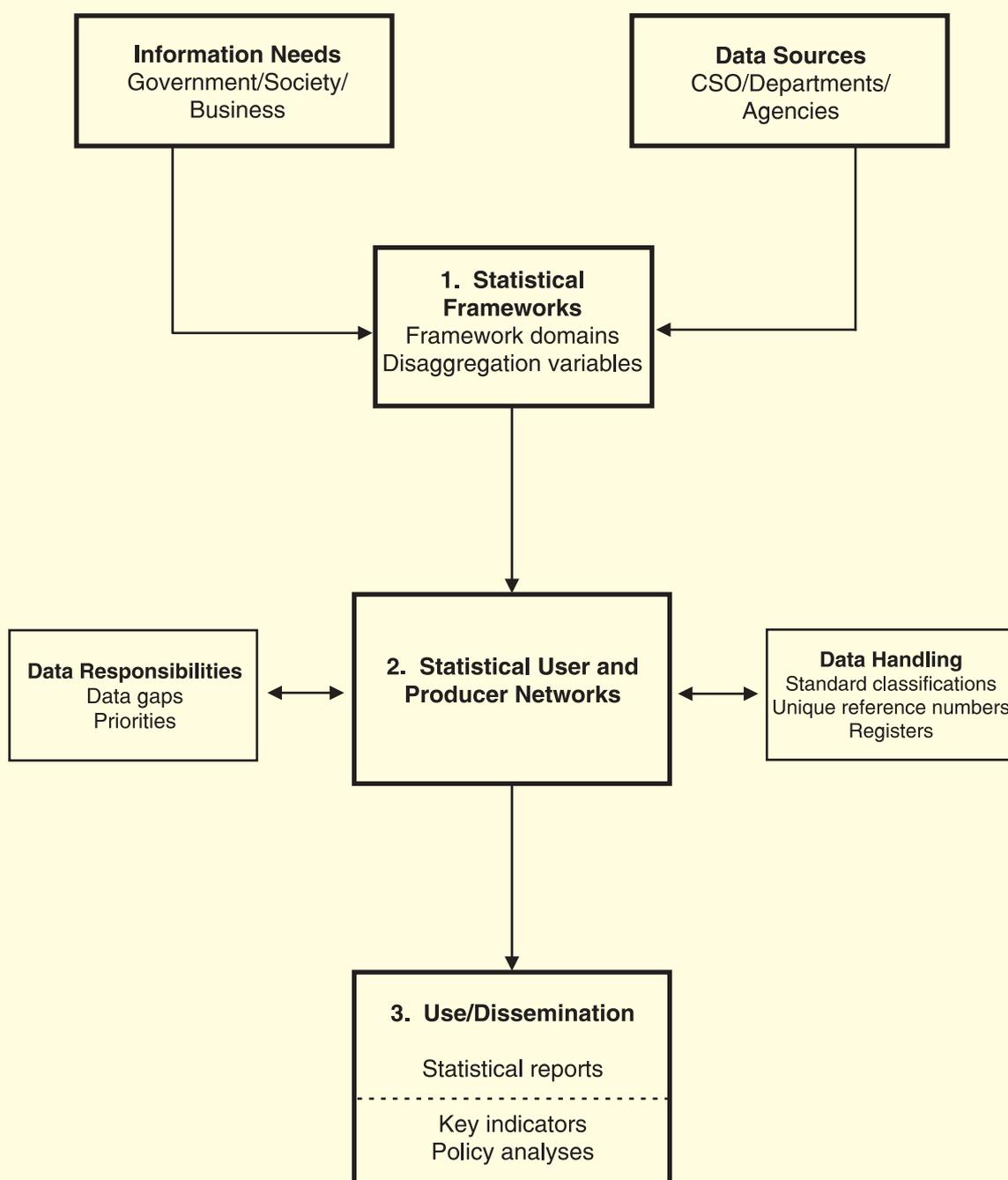
²³ The central role for the CSO in the development of administrative records for statistical purposes is already established in the Statistics Act, 1993.

3.4 Strand three – Making choices

The third strand of the process is about setting priorities for the development of new statistics and series. It is likely that resources will be limited over the coming years and the approach will be to identify crucial data gaps and consider appropriate responses. This would become particularly important in the light of the need to meet the vastly increased demand for an array of statistics arising from major changes to our economic and social environment. Developments such as regulatory reform and an increasing focus on Social Capital are but two examples of areas that are likely to impact on the demand for statistics in the coming years.

The suggested approach here is that the Board will produce a draft priority list for consultation with key stakeholders in the context of available resources. Central to these consultations is the determination of who has responsibility for providing data to produce these prioritised statistics.

Figure 4 Model of statistical frameworks and producer networks



3.5 Strand four – Using statistics effectively

The fourth strand in the process is the development of a statistical competence in data analysis in the public and other sectors, so that the data that are generated can be readily considered and studied by policy makers and analysts. In effect the view of the Board is that while the CSO should seek to function as a “Centre of Excellence” in terms of data analysis, it should certainly not be the sole repository of such competence in the public service. Rather each department and agency should have the analytical competence to meet its primary needs allowing policy-making to be increasingly more evidence-based than has traditionally been the case²⁴. The Board is of the view that the process of developing a statistical strategy within each department, involving the interactions of both data users and data producers, will provide a natural context in which to identify and build up the required competencies.

The SGSES has proposed that the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) should take the lead role in the preparation and dissemination of a periodic overall *Social Report*. It is proposed that the first publication of this Report would be completed in advance of the next cycle of *Statements of Strategy* under the Public Service Management Act (PSMA) so as to assist Departments in formulating their Statements. It is proposed to build on this experience in relation to other areas of statistics.

The role of the CSO is, where requested, to support departments in building up the required statistical competences. This should ideally be done in a context where a statistical resource would be funded by departments and where expert staff would move between CSO and government departments to generate the critical mass of statistical expertise found in countries with a stronger tradition of evidence-based policy making.

3.6 Conclusion

In summary, the Board believes that these four strands taken together will help to:

- ◆ Establish a comprehensive set of frameworks for national statistics in Ireland covering the economy, society and the environment;
- ◆ Develop the blueprint for a statistics network across government departments, coordinated by the CSO, to;
 - Generate official statistics from administrative records;
 - Improve access to statistics;
 - Manage departments’ own data needs; and
 - Develop their skills in making more effective use of data.
- ◆ Set statistical priorities (set by the Board in conjunction with the CSO, the statistical network and data users); and
- ◆ Foster the development of statistical competence in all government departments and agencies.

The Board is of the view that the process of developing an integrated and comprehensive approach to the production of statistics across the system should begin immediately. The groundwork for such an approach has already been undertaken for social statistics in the report of the SGSES. The Board believes that progress on development should start by building on

²⁴ In the absence of strong datasets and well-trained analysts, it is perhaps not surprising that evidence-based policy-making has not always been the norm in Ireland.

the SGSES report, so that the culture of “systems thinking” rather than “departmental thinking”, together with the design of ICT systems, as opportunities arise, can avoid the further development of systems that cannot “talk to one another”. This part of the *Strategy* will take some time to implement fully but the Board believes that significant progress could occur within two years, if there were cross-departmental support for the economic efficiencies and benefits it would generate. The role of the CSO in this new statistical landscape will inevitably have to evolve and the direction of its evolving role is set out in Chapter 4.

Chapter

4

An Evolving Role for the CSO

4.1 Introduction

Earlier chapters have noted the huge explosion in the demand for statistics in recent years. This has been expressed both in terms of the need for much more detailed information from existing statistical sources, and also in the need for the creation of new data sources. Statistics users are becoming increasingly sophisticated and more demanding, but there are also many new users of statistical data, who up to recently would not have actively articulated a demand for more and better information. It is also being increasingly recognised that cross-cutting issues pose the most difficult policy challenges and that a different approach has to be taken to develop better statistics on such issues.

The demand has manifested itself in all areas of statistics and the CSO, under the guidance of the Board, has responded by following a prioritised approach both in developing additional data, and also by making data available electronically in a number of different formats. However, the increasing pace of the new demands, and the particular challenges involved in informing cross-cutting policy issues, will require the CSO to play a different and more wide-ranging role in the future.

4.2 Priority developments in recent years

Before looking to the future, it is useful to briefly take stock of the principal statistical developments that have helped to meet new needs over the past five years where emphasis was on the development of macroeconomic and social statistics and dissemination.

Ireland's membership of EMU, and the period leading up to it, generated significant national and EU demand for additional developments in National Accounts, Balance of Payments (BOP) and business statistics. National Accounts are now available annually for regions and households and BOP information is more detailed and of higher quality than previously. A Quarterly National Accounts series is now available with a publication target of four months. New statistics have been developed for earnings, for the services sectors and for stocks and capital assets. All of these developments should be seen as "work in progress" since the timeliness targets, quality, coverage and level of detail required are continually changing and becoming more demanding. A key target for the European Central Bank and the Commission is that the availability and timeliness of European statistics should match those of the USA.

The national partnership agreements over the past 15 years and the continued development of social and equality policy within a legislative framework have created new demands for social statistics. The most significant improvement in the social statistics area was the change from the annual Labour Force Survey to the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and the development of the QNHS as a flexible, multi-purpose, household survey vehicle to inform many areas of social policy interest of critical concern to Irish society.

Finally, the CSO and the Board have been keenly aware that the value of statistical data will only be realised fully if they are made available to users in a manner that facilitates further value-added use and research. Considerable progress has been made in the web-dissemination of statistical data, which also allows users to download CSO series to their own computers. In addition, anonymised microdata from the Census of Population and a number of social surveys have been lodged with the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA), where they are available to researchers for further detailed analysis.

Notwithstanding all of this progress, the Board has concluded that the continually increasing demand for better statistics cannot be met by introducing new, or extending existing, CSO surveys following a traditional incremental approach. Much greater effort must be made, by both government departments and by the CSO, to maximise the statistical potential of administrative data in government departments and agencies. As outlined above, this will

involve the CSO in a wider network of relationships and partnerships with a range of data producers and users²⁵.

4.3 CSO relationship with other data producers

There are many potential non-CSO data sources within the administrative system - Section 2.5 noted that close to 200 statistics sources were identified outside the CSO in the social area alone²⁶. However, as noted, the current value of the data sources for generating social and equality statistics is severely diminished because, as by-products of administrative systems, they have not been developed from a whole-systems perspective.

In the economic arena, a range of agencies have also become more involved in data collection so that duplication of effort, and resultant less than optimal use of resources, is a real risk. There is a further problem in that some of this data collection imposes considerable costs on enterprises and can adversely affect other enterprise surveys by reducing the response rates²⁷, and hence the quality of data collected. While there may be valid reasons why these data are independently collected, the surveys are frequently conducted without any prior consultation with the CSO and with negative consequences for the value of this work for the overall statistical system.

The Board has been conscious for some time that, while legislation is in place to ensure coordination across statistical efforts, it has not been practice to undertake those steps necessary to achieve such coordination. For example, under the 1993 Statistics Act, public authorities proposing to undertake a statistical survey, or to modify existing systems for the storage and retrieval of existing information, are obliged to consult with the Director General of the CSO. They are also obliged to accept any recommendations that he/she may reasonably make in relation to the proposal. Given the increasing complexity of data collection and data analysis and the potential for placing an undue data collection burden on business and households, the need for such consultation to take place is increasingly obvious.

The Board believes that, in the context of developing supportive and facilitative relationships with other departments and agencies, the CSO can play a strong coordinating role in promoting the use of recognised classifications and standards that would also be essential to better inform cross-cutting policy questions and ensure that the statistics generated are internationally comparable. Furthermore, the Board is of the view that the CSO can also be of considerable assistance in helping departments to develop data strategies, which would ultimately ensure that maximum value would be obtained from investment in data systems.

4.4 CSO relationship with data users

The relationship between national statistical offices and data users has been evolving over time and extends far beyond the mere publication of tables of statistics in paper reports. As a matter of course, the CSO holds media briefings for its more high profile releases. There are several specialist query-handling sections in the Office. For many years, the CSO compiled thousands of special tables for the research and academic world. While this service is still provided, technological advances and the increased sophistication of users have given rise to a number of new developments that are changing this role.

²⁵ This network will include recently created agencies, such as the National Competitiveness Council, the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority, the National Disability Authority and the Equality Authority.

²⁶ It should be noted that the coverage and collection frequency of each data source varies widely.

²⁷ For example, the Board is aware that the response rates of Irish enterprises in manufacturing and services to the Community Innovation Survey were exceptionally low by European standards and that there is some concern of survey fatigue on the part of Irish enterprises.

CSO publications are made available on its website at the time of release - sometimes the first release is via the web²⁸. Furthermore, most CSO data series are available on the web in downloadable form and this allows users to extract the information into their own computers for more detailed analysis. Work is ongoing to put a menu at the disposal of users that would enable them to design their own reports using CSO data on the web.

Following the updated legislation in the Statistics Act, 1993, the CSO has been able to make anonymised sets of microdata available for research purposes. Such social statistics datasets from the Census of Population, the Quarterly National Household Survey and the Household Budget Survey have been lodged with the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) where they are available for use by bona fide researchers. While it is more difficult to anonymise business microdata, it is still possible to allow researchers a level of access under very strict legal conditions, e.g. by making them Officers of Statistics. If circumstances warrant it, the CSO may under Section 11.1 of the Statistics Act, make arrangements, with other agencies to undertake a joint statistical exercise that would allow analysis by all involved. In such circumstances, the intention of sharing the statistics generated would have to be made completely transparent to respondents at the time of surveying.

The views and preferences of users are gathered in a number of ways. The Board has conducted a number of user surveys, usually at the early stages of developing a new Board *Strategy* - the *Survey of CSO Users, 2002* has already been mentioned in Chapter 2. There are also a number of statistics users liaison groups which meet intermittently - the Board has been considering ways to make these more active and effective. Finally, there are very occasional workshops on statistical items of particular importance at the time. Following the publication of the SGSES report, there is a requirement on government departments to devise Data/Statistics strategies. The Board and the CSO will actively support departments in the preparation of these strategies.

4.5 Role of key CSO surveys

While this new Board *Strategy* has taken a whole-system approach to statistics, it is clear that existing CSO business and social surveys will continue to be a key part of the system.

Pressure will have to be maintained to improve the coverage and timeliness of business surveys since these provide the critical basic statistics that underpin the quality of the National Accounts. They are also the key indicators of Irish economic performance. Better information on earnings and labour costs is coming on stream with the expansion of surveys in these areas to meet EU and national requirements. It will also be important to track the impact of the Information Society and e-Commerce on the business sector – these are the types of issues that will come to the fore when the framework for economic statistics is being drawn up. A particular focus must be the continued development of statistics for the services sectors, which are crucial to monitoring the rapid development of this sector world-wide, and the regulatory and competitive policy issues that are most prevalent in this sector.

The Census of Population continues to be a valuable source of social and migration information. The Board considers it essential that a mid-decade Census be undertaken in 2006 and has asked the CSO to prepare a memo for Government decision to this effect. The QNHS has become an extremely important multi-purpose household survey vehicle and the commencement of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) from the middle of 2003 will also provide valuable social information. The Board is also of the opinion that, following similar developments in other countries, serious consideration should now be given to undertaking a Time Use Survey, perhaps every five years. Such a survey would help us to underpin our understanding of a wide range of issues particularly in relation to unpaid work –

²⁸ There is also a special Information Section that deals with thousands of e-mail queries every month arising from data published on the Web.

such as women working in the home, care of the elderly and children and voluntary involvement in the community and sporting bodies. These activities cannot be adequately monitored by any of the existing survey or administrative data sources.

There is increasing demand for social statistics at European level also. Examples of demands for new data collection include: more information on migration; adult education surveys; health surveys; and disability. These are areas of clear importance to Ireland and it is essential that the relevant statistics in these areas be developed in tandem with those for other European countries. While these new demands will require some new data collection, a particular objective of the Board is to ensure that maximum use is made of existing surveys and administrative sources in meeting these new demands.

4.6 Technology and e-Government

Advances in technology have created new opportunities for the handling of data within government. This is particularly true for statistics, which is a knowledge and technology-driven business. It has already been described how technology has created significant new opportunities for the way the CSO interacts with its users. Modern technology has also created new opportunities for (a) the collection of data from both businesses and households, and (b) how these data can be structured and further organised to add significant value. The CSO also needs to position itself not only to take advantage of the e-government effort, but also to lead and support that effort whenever possible.

To take full advantage of these technological developments and the wider e-government effort, the CSO will have to continue to build and maintain its organisational capability from a technology perspective. With Board support, it has been implementing an IT Strategy in a number of phases. Implementation of the IT Strategy will include:

- ◆ A data management system which will allow the collection and dissemination of data from and to a variety of electronic sources as well as the more traditional channels, such as paper; and
- ◆ An integrated survey management system that will identify the surveys each company has been included in.

Having these systems in place will allow the survey areas in the CSO to optimise the burden on individual respondents.

The Board is strongly supportive of the CSO in the upcoming final implementation phase that will continue from the Autumn of 2003 to the Spring of 2006. The Board is also hopeful that as an integrated statistical system develops in Ireland, there will be increasing dialogue and co-operation between the IT functions across government departments and agencies, so that maximum efficiency is achieved in realising the statistical potential of administrative data.

Chapter

5

**Some Implications of the
Strategy**

5.1 Introduction

The achievement of the vision of the future Irish Statistical System outlined in this *Strategy* will require a significant shift in thinking in a number of areas relating to maximising the value of, and use of, administrative data. While these have been alluded to throughout this document, a number of the key issues are highlighted for emphasis in this concluding chapter.

5.2 Principles governing the production of statistics

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 democratic society which seeks to understand itself and to respect the rights of its members (UN *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* - see Appendix B). As Ireland's statistical system develops, these principles must be seen to apply in all areas of official statistics, including those based on administrative data. Furthermore, all legal data protection standards must be adhered to and the burdens on enterprises must be kept to a minimum consistent with developing the statistics we require to understand economic change.

5.3 Outcomes rather than Inputs

Much of the administrative data currently generated derive from the processing of transactions relating to the management and control of particular schemes. Thus by their nature they tend to focus on "inputs" – e.g. the cost of the scheme; the numbers participating; the numbers involved in delivering the scheme; etc. All too frequently it is very difficult to get information on the real impact or "outcome" of the scheme on society. In implementing the new *Strategy*, the emphasis on data gathering relating to economic/social/environmental outcomes must be increased.

5.4 Cross-cutting challenges

Many important societal issues today need to be informed by data combined from administrative sources across a number of government departments. This means that individual departments may have to include in their data systems some extra pieces of data which they may not otherwise immediately require to carry out their own functions, in order to inform wider across-government policy needs.

5.5 Structuring administrative data

From the foregoing it can be seen that there are important issues around the structuring and linking of administrative data. It has previously been mentioned that the CSO will play a central facilitative role in relation to the use of statistical classifications and data standards across the wider administrative system. There are two strategic items to which the Board has drawn particular attention: the introduction of a Postal Code; and the wider use of the PPSN. Government support for these two developments will ensure that maximum value can be extracted from administrative data in understanding spatial and societal change. The Board believes that the positive aspects in relation to the PPSN should be debated, so that any fears about "Big Brother" can be allayed.

5.6 *Future statistical service*

As set out in Chapter 4, the Board foresees that the CSO's role will be broader than it has been hitherto²⁹. In particular, it will play a stronger facilitating, integrating and coordinating role at the centre of the Irish Statistical System. The next CSO Statement of Strategy, covering the period 2004-2006, will outline how the CSO will deliver on its role in the new structure outlined in this Board *Strategy*. The Board will evaluate the CSO's progress (in its annual reports and in a mid-period review) in the context of the overall implementation of the total *Strategy*. Of paramount importance is that CSO corporate/operational planning is fully consistent with the thrust of the *Strategy* that the Board has enunciated here.

5.7 *Role of the Board going forward*

The major role for the Board going forward will be in overseeing the implementation of this new Strategy for Statistics. In particular, the Board will be looking to ensure that progress continues to be made on implementing the recommendations on social and equality statistics in the SGSES report, which received Cabinet approval in April 2003. It will also work with the CSO and relevant departments and agencies in developing the economic and environmental statistical frameworks and reviewing the extent to which administrative data on enterprises can be used to improve the availability and quality of statistics related to these two frameworks. The Board has already asked the CSO to conduct a similar exercise to the SGSES in relation to enterprises at the earliest possible time.

In addition to pursuing these major strategic objectives, the Board will continue its role of monitoring changes in the quality and availability of all key economic, social and environmental statistics in Ireland. Over the period 2003-2008, it will develop new mechanisms for maintaining contact with data users – and particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring that, as far as possible, the statistical needs of civil society are articulated and met. It will also continue to benchmark Irish statistics against those of appropriate reference countries and the standards set by international organisations. In line with its responsibilities under the Statistics Act, 1993, the Board will continue to evaluate any new demands for statistics (e.g. in areas such as time use, social capital, ethnicity, changing lifestyles, globalisation, etc.) that emerge over the period 2003-2008, and advise Government accordingly.

²⁹ For example, it is likely that at least some Departments will develop and fund their statistical resources to a greater extent than is presently the case and that the CSO will have a role in this process. Ideally, statistical personnel should be recruited by the CSO and spend some time in the Office before assignment to individual Departments. If statistical competence is to be well grounded and developed systematically, increasing numbers of statisticians should have career mobility between Departments and the CSO and the Director General of the CSO should be seen as having a key role in providing guidance for the entire public system on professional statistical matters.

Appendices

Appendix A 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 coordinate 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 - Functions of National Statistics Board:

Section 19 of the Statistics Act, 1993 describes the functions 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 coordination of statistical activities.

Appendix B **UN fundamental principles of official statistics**

The Economic Commission for Europe³⁰

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 co-operation 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 honor 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.

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.

³⁰ Decision C(47) adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe at its April 1992 session.

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: Coordination 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 co-operation 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.

Appendix C Social inclusion initiatives³¹

Indicator	Definition
Primary Indicators	
At-risk-of-poverty rate with breakdown by age and gender	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income is below 60% of the national median equivalised total net household income. Age groups are: 1. 0-15, 2. 16-24, 3. 25-49, 4. 50-64, 5. 65+. Gender breakdown for all categories + total
At-risk-of-poverty rate with breakdown by most frequent activity status and gender	Percentage of individuals aged 16+ living in households where the equivalised total net household income is below 60% of the national median equivalised total net household income. Most frequent activity status: 1. employed, 2. self-employed, 3. unemployed, 4. retired, 5. inactives-other. Gender breakdown for all categories + total
At-risk-of-poverty rate with breakdown by household type:	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income is below 60% of the national median equivalised total net household income. 1. 1 person household, under 30 yrs old 2. 1 person household, 30-64 3. 1 person household, 65+ 4. 2 adults without dependent child; at least one person 65+ 5. 2 adults without dependent child; both under 65 6. Other households without dependent child 7. Single parent, 1+ dependent children 8. 2 adults, 1 dependent child 9. 2 adults, 2 dependent children 10. 2 adults, 3+ dependent children 11. Other households with dependent children 12. Total
At-risk-of-poverty rate with breakdown by tenure status	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income is below 60% of the national median equivalised total net household income. 1. Total 2. Owner occupier 3. Paying tenant 4. Other tenant
At-risk-of-poverty threshold (illustrative values)	The value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% of the national median equivalised total net household income) in PPS, Euro and national currency for: 1. Total population 2. Single person household 3. Household with 2 adults, 2 children
Inequality of income distribution S80/S20 quintile ratio	Ratio between the sum of equivalised total net household income of the top 20% of the income distribution to the bottom 20%.

³¹ At the Laeken European Council in December 2001, a first set of 18 common statistical indicators for monitoring social inclusion was endorsed. National Action Plans on Social Inclusion have been developed to ensure that Ireland meets these obligations.

Indicator	Definition
At-persistent-risk-of-poverty rate with breakdown by gender	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income was below 60% of the national median equivalised total net household income in year N and at least two years from years N-1, N-2, N-3. Gender breakdown + total
Relative at-risk-of-poverty gap	Difference between the median equivalised total net household income of individuals below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, expressed as a percentage of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Gender breakdown + total
Regional cohesion	Coefficient of variation of employment rates at NUTS 2 level.
Long-term unemployment rate	Total long-term unemployed population (more than 12 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total active population. Gender breakdown + total
Persons living in jobless households	Persons aged 0-65 (0-60) living in households where none is working out of the persons living in eligible households. Eligible households are all except those where everybody falls in one of these categories: - aged less than 18 years old - aged 18-24 in education and inactive - aged 65 (60) and over and not working
Early school leavers not in education or training	Share of total population of 18-24 year olds having achieved ISCED level 2 or less and not attending education or training. Gender breakdown + total
Life expectancy at birth	Number of years a person may be expected to live, starting at age 0, for Males and Females.
Self defined health status by income level	Ratio of the proportions in the bottom and top quintile groups (by equivalised income) of the population aged 16 and over who classify themselves as in a bad or very bad state of health on the WHO definition. Gender breakdown + total
Secondary Indicators	
Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income is below 40%, 50% and 70% of the national median equivalised total net household income.
At-risk-of-poverty rate anchored at a moment in time	Base year ECHP 1995. 1. At-risk-of-poverty rate for year N calculated using the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for year N (=indicator 1) 2. At-risk-of-poverty rate for year N calculated using the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for base year multiplied by the inflation factor between base year-1 and year N-1
At-risk-of-poverty rate before transfers with breakdown by gender	At-risk-of-poverty rate where total net household income is calculated as follows: 1. Income excluding all social transfers 2. Income including retirement pensions and survivors pensions but excluding all other social transfers 3. Income including all social transfers (= indicator 1) Gender breakdown + total

Indicator	Definition
Inequality of income distribution Gini coefficient	The ratio of cumulative shares of the population arranged according to the level of their equivalised total net household income, to the cumulative share of the total amount received by them.
At-persistent-risk-of-poverty rate (alternative threshold) with breakdown by gender	Percentage of individuals living in households where the equivalised total net household income was below 50% of the national median equivalised total net household income in year N and at least two years from years N-1, N-2, N-3. Gender breakdown + total
Long-term unemployment share	Total long-term unemployed population (more than 12 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total unemployed population. Gender breakdown + total
Very long-term unemployment rate	Total very long-term unemployed population (more than 24 months; ILO definition) as proportion of total active population. Gender breakdown + total
Persons with low educational attainment	Educational attainment rate of ISCED level 2 or less for adult education by age groups (25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64). Gender breakdown + total

Appendix D *Extract from the Government Decision arising from the report of the SGSES*

Decision sought:

1. The Taoiseach requests the Government to agree to the following:
 - (a) The publication of the attached Report of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics *Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to Meet Policy Needs* and accompanying Press Release.
 - (b) The development of a Framework for Social and Equality Statistics to capture a comprehensive set of indicators of trends across the main dimensions of life, which will capture social progress or setback. The Framework to be developed by the CSO, under the guidance of the National Statistics Board (NSB) and Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI) and to focus on the measurement of key outcomes relating to quality of life and on developing the capacity to identify the factors influencing outcomes.
 - (c) The development of a formal Data/Statistics Strategy within each Department as an integral part of its information strategy. This should be included in its *Statement of Strategy* and be reported on in the annual report. In this context the NSB, supported by the CSO, to develop best practice guidelines within *six months* for Departments for the preparation and implementation of a formal data/statistics strategy.
 - (d) The CSO to take a lead role in the development of the potential of administrative data across Government Departments and Agencies in conjunction with SOGSI.
 - (e) To ensure that statistical confidentiality and data protection concerns are met:
 - (i) the CSO will set out formally how its process of data integration and the subsequent treatment of statistics generated by data integration can be safely employed without data protection problems.
 - (ii) the NSB and the SOGSI will set out formally how Departments would use and protect individual data available to it for statistical purposes.
 - (iii) each of these documents will be referred to the Data Protection Commissioner for confirmation that these processes do not undermine the data protection rights of individuals.
 - (f) To take full advantage of the improved social statistics system, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) to take the lead role in the preparation and dissemination of a periodic overall Social Report. The first publication of this Report to be completed in advance of the next cycle of Strategy Statements under the PSMA so as to assist Departments in formulating their Statements.
 - (g) Progress on the development and implementation of the Framework for Social and Equality Statistics to be reported on annually to Government in the annual report of the NSB.

Background

2. At a national level, the system of social partnership and legislation in the Freedom of Information and Equality areas has increased pressure for measurement of the success of national programmes. At an international level, membership of the EU has made particular demands on domestic policy in terms of measuring progress and of meeting new targets and obligations particularly in the social and equality spheres. These developments have substantially increased the demand for statistics and indicators relating to social and equality issues at all levels. Responding to this demand is now a major challenge to public administrations as a whole and to National Statistical Offices in particular.
3. In this context the National Statistics Board (NSB) became increasingly concerned at the implications for the statistical system of the escalating and largely uncoordinated demand for social statistics. In response, in consultation with the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI), a Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (SGSES) was established to undertake a study to determine the scope of requirements for social and equality statistics and the extent to which these are being, or could be met, by existing data holdings in administrative records.
4. Over a six-month period the Steering Group identified and analysed existing social and equality data sources and data needs through a process of consultation with data producers and data users by undertaking an extensive audit. Following on from this process the group has produced a Scoping Report setting out their conclusions and recommendations.

The need for a vision for Social and Equality Statistics

5. The Report highlights the need for developing an integrated approach to social and equality statistics in the pursuance of a vision which includes:
 - ◆ A collectively agreed conceptual framework for social and equality statistics, which delivers a comprehensive picture of Irish society and its diversity.
 - ◆ Systematic identification of data required by the public sector and by citizens both to monitor developments in the essential aspects of life quality and in this context to support policy formulation and evaluation.
 - ◆ Methods, which deliver the required statistics at high quality, least cost and with due regard for data protection.
 - ◆ Effective use of social statistics to inform policy and assist planning.

The main conclusions reached by the Report

6. The main conclusions reached by the Report are as follows:
 - ◆ The process of bringing together data users and data producers across Departments to determine data needs and the potential of existing data was a productive exercise and should be continued within Departments.
 - ◆ In addition, Departments should also consult with outside stakeholders, including their own agencies, independent commentators and representatives of the Department's customers about the collection and development of key indicators.

- ◆ In the context of the public service, effective information sharing involves:
 - Moving from Departmentally-centred thinking to whole-system thinking in regard to information.
 - Providing comprehensive information to meet public accountability needs.
 - The development of the type of framework for social and equality statistics as envisaged in the report to provide the guide for the above processes.
- ◆ In order to aid evidence-based policy making, each Department needs to put in place an information/data strategy, which addresses the current and anticipated data needs of policymakers.

Next Steps

7. The Report proposes that the CSO under the guidance of the NSB and SOGSI, should set out a Framework for Social and Equality Statistics and indicators in each domain, and the key disaggregations required of these statistics/indicators. The proposed main domain areas will include indicators such as health and access to healthcare, labour market and working conditions, income, wealth and poverty, education and training and households and families. Progress on the implementation of this framework will be supported by the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI) in conjunction with the NSB and will be reported on annually to Government in the annual reports of the NSB. The framework will be of benefit to users, particularly those in policy areas, in allowing them to identify and articulate their needs in a more integrated and comprehensive manner than heretofore. The framework also has the merit of ensuring that the development of social and equality statistics is undertaken in a balanced way across all the domains of interest.
8. Accordingly, as a first step in the process of getting consensus on which indicators really determine whether target national economic and social outcomes are being achieved, the NSB has asked the CSO to prepare a preliminary National Progress Indicators report by Summer 2003. This initial Report will serve as a reference point for discussions between the main users and producers of key economic and social statistics. In this context the following key actions will be required:
 - ◆ Each Department should establish appropriate committee(s) bringing together data users and data producers to design and deliver its statistics strategy. The Departmental committees should:
 - Determine how and to what extent the Department's data needs can be met within the Department.
 - Establish what information not internally available is required.
 - Identify the data needs in respect of complex and cross-cutting issues with which the Department is concerned.
 - Identify how the skills of its staff in using data as a tool for policy evaluation and development can be enhanced.
 - ◆ A formal Data/Statistics strategy should be devised within each Department as an integral part of its information strategy and this should be included within its formal Statement of Strategy and reported on in its annual report. To the extent that the achievement of this requires the deployment of skilled statistical resources, the Departments involved should actively pursue this in conjunction with the CSO.

- ◆ The CSO will take a lead role in the development of the potential of administrative data across Government Departments and Agencies in conjunction with the SOGSI. In particular two actions are essential to tap into the potential data resources at both departmental and agency level:
 - Increased standardisation, coordination and classification of data collection and maintenance to be agreed inter-departmentally.
 - Investigation of the expanded use of common identifiers, such as the Personal Public Service Number (PPS Number) or Postal Codes, if developed.
9. Under national and EU data protection legislation, personal data collected for administrative purposes may be used for statistical purposes provided adequate safeguards are in place to protect the privacy of the individual. Under the provisions of the Statistics Act (1993), the CSO has a general right of access for statistical purposes to administrative data held by Public Authorities and procedures are in place to ensure that statistics published by the Office do not involve any risk of disclosure of individual information.
10. The Group believes that the full potential for administrative records cannot be realised without a link between data sets generated from administrative records and data sets generated by CSO surveys. This potential can more readily be realised through the expanded use of the PPSN. However, in order to ensure that this does not give rise to individual data protection problems it is recommended that:
- ◆ The CSO be asked to set out formally how its process of data integration and the subsequent treatment of statistics generated by data integration can be safely employed without data protection problems.
 - ◆ The NSB and the SOGSI should be asked to set out formally how departments would use and protect individual data available to it for statistical purposes.
 - ◆ Both of these documents should be referred to the Data Protection Commissioner for confirmation that this process does not undermine the data protection rights of individuals.

Recent developments in relation to the computerisation of the Civil Registration Service (GRO) and the linked issue of the proposal to allocate a Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.) to a child at birth registration will be considered in the context of the development of the Framework.

Dissemination of information on social and equality data

11. It is essential that Social and Equality Statistics and indicators be widely disseminated. The Steering Group Report recommends that, in line with best practice in other countries, consideration should be given to the periodic publication of a social report. In such a report progress, as measured by key social indicators, would be related to the objectives of social and equality policy, on outcomes relating to life quality aspects and would provide important benchmarks of progress over time.
12. Accordingly, it is proposed that the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) should be asked to undertake this work and to ensure that it is completed in advance of the next cycle of Strategy Statements so as to assist Departments in formulating their Statements.

