
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Siobhan Carey
Chief Executive and Registrar General
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
(by email)

13 February 2019

Dear Siobhan

STATISTICS ON NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING

As you are aware, we recently completed our check of the compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) of Department for Communities' (DfC) [Northern Ireland Housing Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

We initiated this check following our [public commitment](#) in our 2018/19 Regulatory Work Programme to review the most important statistics on housing. We considered the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value of the statistics in relation to the *Code*. We appreciate the positive and constructive way that the team has engaged with us during our compliance check.

National Statistics status brings with it a commitment to the Code of Practice for Statistics. Complying with this framework ensures statistics are of public value, are high quality and are produced in a way worthy of trust.

We found many positive examples around DfC's production and presentation of the latest Northern Ireland Housing Statistics annual report and quarterly bulletin. These include:

- The clear steps taken to assure users of the trustworthiness of these statistics, including a clear publication schedule, an up to date published pre-release access list, and evidence of compliance with the *Code*. These provide transparency around the processes followed by DfC to ensure trustworthiness.
- Introducing a new format from late 2017 for both the annual and quarterly reports to improve the presentation with the aim of drawing out the key messages in a more visually appealing way to aid users' understanding; improving accessibility by presenting the supporting guidance and quality information in dedicated reports; and being proactive by seeking ongoing user feedback around these changes.
- Publishing comprehensive information about the quality of the statistics and quality assurance of the data in [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data – Northern Ireland Housing Statistics \(QAAD\)](#). Overall, this presents detailed information about the data sources, collection methods, and quality assurance for the large number of data sources used to produce Northern Ireland Housing Statistics. We welcome the publication of the QAAD document and appreciate the work done to produce it.
- Demonstrating innovation by incorporating three new data sources, for example New Dwellings Starts and Completions, and being transparent through publicly reviewing them and publishing decisions made following user feedback, to present a fuller picture of the housing market in Northern Ireland.

We would also like to highlight DfC's continued collaborative working with housing statisticians across the UK as part of the Cross-Government Housing Statistics Working Group to improve coherence across, and deliver a range of wider improvements to, housing and planning statistics. We are pleased that DfC told us that its involvement has helped improve awareness and understanding of the information that exists elsewhere, as well as helping the statisticians there to recognise what mutually beneficial opportunities there are.

We identified some areas where we consider DfC should enhance the clarity and insight presented by these statistics, and improve the accessibility of information about key assumptions made, to meet the high standards required of National Statistics:

- Given the high profile of housing, more analysis and narrative could be provided that reflect key areas of interest, and that could be used to monitor and evaluate housing policy. This would help give an understanding of a broader picture across different aspects of housing in Northern Ireland and help explain how the measures presented – such as supply and demand – relate to each other.
- There is scope for DfC to increase insight about the extent of comparability and coherence between key Northern Ireland Housing indicators and the rest of the UK and other Devolved Administrations, where they are not already provided. More support could be provided to users to explain these differences and provide guidance on the extent of comparability. Housing policy is devolved across the UK and there can be differences in policies. Despite this, some users will want to understand trends in housing across the UK. This issue was also raised more widely in the recent [Systemic Review](#) of Housing and Planning Statistics.
- Accessibility to the associated data tables and appendices could be improved in line with examples of other statistical releases we have seen that contain hyperlinks to aid users' experience of navigating the releases.
- There is scope for DfC to strengthen its justifications within the QAAD document on the assurance of the data sources in the context of their riskiness. Some of the statements within the QAAD document could be more descriptive and we have highlighted to DfC those where its judgements could be explained more clearly and fully; and where a fuller account of examples of checks carried out could be helpful. In line with the Authority's [QAAD toolkit](#) we would expect producers to have knowledge of suppliers' quality assurance checks and publish a brief description alongside a description of its own checks on the administrative data.

We have shared a set of more-detailed suggestions with the statistical team at DfC, and we thank them for engaging effectively with us during this review. Our Housing, Planning and Local Services domain lead will continue to engage with them on progress in the coming months.

Please let me know if there is any aspect of this letter that you wish to discuss.

I am copying this letter to James Sampson, the responsible statistician and Michelle Crawford at the Department for Communities Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead