



Strategy for Statistics 2009-2014

National Statistics Board

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Chairperson's Preface

I have great pleasure in presenting to the Government the National Statistics Board Strategy for Statistics 2009-2014. This strategy seeks to achieve the Board's vision for the Irish Statistical System over the coming years by building on the work achieved during the period of the 2003-2008 Strategy, while taking account of current conditions. The Strategy is built around five priorities and nineteen recommendations which, if implemented, will ensure that the Irish Statistical System's potential to underpin evidence-informed policy is fully realised.

The pace and scale of the economic and social transformation experienced in Ireland over the past two decades has been staggering. The importance of objective, reliable, relevant, and timely statistics to support policy responses and to inform political and public debate has been clear. It is certain that demand for statistics will increase, and this will present particular challenges in a time of contracting public finances. However, the Board is conscious that this Strategy covers a six years period and we have tried to adopt a longer-term and balanced perspective on what is realisable over this period.

A priority for the Board is accelerating the development of a coherent whole-system approach that links CSO generated statistics with administrative data holdings. While considerable progress has been made thus far, the Board strongly believes that one of the keys to further development, while ensuring cost-effectiveness and efficiency, is the achievement of greater ownership of the system by relevant government departments. Major progress on data integration could be achieved if such bodies regard themselves as key partners with the CSO in the compilation of official statistics. In this Strategy, the Board has set out the ways in which major advances could be made and identified the critical infrastructural issues that are impeding progress. The Board is optimistic that, even in resource-constrained conditions, investment in data integration will yield significant benefits.

As Chairperson, I would like to thank the members of the Board for their support and interest, and the CSO for their commitment to delivering the priorities of the Board and their assistance in preparing this Strategy.

Patricia O'Hara
Chairperson

Executive Summary

Context

This National Statistics Board Strategy 2009-2014 is focused on the strategic development of the Irish Statistical System. In this document the Board reviews progress made over the period of the last Strategy, identifies the challenges and priorities for 2009-2014 and sets out a series of recommendations about how they should be achieved.

The NSB regards the availability of high quality, independent statistics as a fundamental element of Ireland's information infrastructure. Objective, reliable, timely, and relevant statistics play a key role in underpinning national policy formulation and also inform the decisions of businesses, international investors, the social partners, and individuals. They provide indicators of Ireland's economic status and are used to benchmark our performance internationally. Thus, it is vital that official statistics are of the highest quality and integrity and are readily available to users.

The period of unprecedented economic growth, and associated economic and social transformation, that Ireland experienced for more than a decade stimulated greater demand for statistics to help measure, understand and respond to the changes that were occurring in the economy and society. These included: sectoral shifts associated with growth in high technology manufacturing and services; huge increases in employment leading to labour and skill shortages; the shift from net emigration to immigration, and spatially uneven population growth.

The recent global recession and downturn in the Irish economy has brought a new set of challenges. The failures in the banking and regulatory systems have raised questions about the nature and quality of data available to policy-makers and the public. There are serious resource constraints on public finances due to the decline in taxation revenue and increases in expenditure requirements associated with the downturn. This situation forms the backdrop for the 2009-2014 Strategy.

Progress 2003-2008

The central objective of the NSB Strategy 2003-2008 was to develop a whole system approach to the Irish Statistical System. Over the period, considerable progress has been made towards this achieving this objective through:

- An assessment of the Statistical Potential of Administrative Records (SPAR) carried out by the CSO via a series of in-depth examinations of data holdings in government departments and agencies, each of which contained detailed recommendations to increase the statistical value of administrative data.

- Development of formal data strategies in government departments including the prioritisation of data needs and identification of critical data gaps. This work is continuing as not all departments have made significant process.
- Development of a set of statistical frameworks and their use in a series of thematic reports as well as other initiatives that add value to existing data collections and/or integrate data sources.
- Development of the Irish statistical system through the placement of professional staff in government departments, CSO participation on inter-departmental and advisory committees, and greater use of standard classification and coding systems in surveys and administrative data sources.

These developments have underlined the need for government departments to continue to commit to working with the CSO to make the statistical system more efficient through the integration of administrative data. Given the constraints on public finances, it is imperative that existing data are used to best advantage in a cost-effective and strategic manner. The identification and prioritisation of data gaps by government departments are also an essential input into the NSB deliberations on future data collection priorities.

The advances made in recent years have highlighted a number of critical infrastructural issues that are impeding progress and must be addressed if the NSB's vision for the Irish Statistical System (ISS) to provide objective, reliable, relevant, and timely official statistics is to be realised. These are the need for:

- A unique business identifier and a central business register;
- Unique personal identifiers; and
- Spatial and geographic data capture.

Further development of the ISS over the period 2009-2014 also requires particular attention to a number of key areas which are detailed in Chapter 3. These are: improving capacity; ensuring trust and confidence; data management and security; easing the response burden; and addressing areas where new statistics are needed.

Strategic Priorities 2009-2014

The NSB Strategy 2009-2014 seeks to respond to contemporary conditions and to build on the progress made during 2003-2008. This will require a focus on the following five strategic priorities:

1. Ensure that the Irish Statistical System is coherent, and that the potential to produce relevant, impartial, and reliable statistics to inform policy and fiscal decisions is fully realised.
2. Increase value for money and efficient use of resources by prioritising investment in statistics (including data processing, sharing, storage

and protection) across government departments and agencies, and by ensuring that official statistics can be used in all aspects of government decision-making.

3. Develop systems to ensure that the burden of response on businesses, households and individuals is minimised and that the statistical value of existing survey and administrative data is maximised through the addition of consistent classification variables and data matching identifiers.
4. Ensure that official statistics are 'fit for purpose' by balancing relevance, timeliness, cost, and quality of data so that critical gaps are filled and new demands are met.
5. Build on the progress of recent years by continuing to prioritise availability to users by improving access channels and promoting use of CSO statistics.

The Board believes that pursuing these strategic priorities for official statistics will require the Irish Statistical System to build on the achievements of the past six years by addressing the issues outlined in Chapter 3, while responding to evolving policy needs and operating within a resource constrained environment. This will also require continuing close cooperation between the CSO and other parts of the Irish Statistical System.

Priority Actions

The Board has identified the following seven priority actions for the period 2009-2014.

1. Complete Statistical Frameworks

Much progress has been made in developing a comprehensive set of statistical frameworks with the economic and social elements well developed. However, there is a need to accelerate development in the environmental area, particularly the construction of a consistent time series of environmental data and sustainable development indicators.

2. Strengthen Institutional Commitment

The continued development of the statistical infrastructure led by the CSO is of paramount importance. Government departments and agencies need to take ownership of the statistical system and their role in it. This should be reflected in their data strategies and in their networking and co-operation with the CSO.

3. Maintain Quality and Integrity

Ireland has an excellent reputation for high quality, objective official statistics. The continued quality and integrity of the statistical system will be assured by strengthening and adhering to protocols and confidentiality procedures. Constant vigilance in relation to data protection and confidentiality must also be maintained.

4. Urgently Address Data Integration Issues

The issues that are impeding data integration are the lack of unique identifiers (business and personal), geocoding, and underdevelopment of standard classification and coding systems. These issues must be resolved in order to continue progress on the whole system approach to the ISS. Resolving these issues will also help minimise the burden on respondents, which is a policy priority.

5. Fill Critical Data Gaps

The Board has prioritised six areas in which there are critical data gaps (Energy and Environment; Transport and Travel; Health; Integrated pupil data; Short-term indicators; and Housing and Construction). These gaps must be addressed to ensure the availability of appropriate data to inform policy-making.

6. Improve Access and Response to User Needs

It is imperative that the CSO build on recent gains in improving user access to statistics and in raising user competency by continuing to assess and respond to user needs and improve access to data. The use of interactive web-based systems to provide data tailored to user needs should be considered. The NSB Survey of CSO Users, which was last undertaken in 2006, should be repeated during the period of this strategy.

7. Cross-border Co-operation

CSO should continue to engage with its counterparts in Northern Ireland with a view to ensuring as much compatibility between official statistics as possible, particularly in relation to greater interoperability between large-scale surveys such as the censuses, and to issues of spatial scale to facilitate inter-jurisdictional data analysis.

List of Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recommendation 11: The Board recommends that the CSO:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 1 Background and Context

1.1 Background

The National Statistics Board (NSB) was set up as a non-statutory body in 1986 and put on a statutory basis in November 1994, following the implementation of the Statistics Act 1993. The main function of the NSB is to guide the strategic direction of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) by developing priorities for the compilation and development of official statistics and ensuring that the necessary resources and co-operation from other public authorities are available to the CSO. Therefore, the NSB concentrates particularly on the strategic development of the overall system of Irish official statistics, rather than purely on the CSO.

The NSB regards the availability of high quality, independent statistics as a fundamental element of Ireland's information infrastructure. Objective, reliable, timely and relevant statistics play a key role in informing national policy formulation by, for example:

- Allowing robust monitoring of economic and social trends on an ongoing basis;
- Informing decisions about public expenditure and service provision;
- Facilitating assessment of policy outcomes and value for money in government spending; and
- Enabling assessment of Ireland's economic and social progress and understanding of the dynamics of changing conditions.

Official statistics inform the decisions of businesses, international investors, the social partners and individuals. They provide indicators of Ireland's economic status and are used to benchmark our performance internationally. Thus, it is vital that official statistics are of the highest quality and integrity and are easily available to users.

The NSB Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008 provided the framework for the strategic direction of the CSO and the context for the Board's work for the past six years. That strategy represented a significant departure from those that preceded it, in that it set out a vision for the Irish Statistical System (ISS) that stressed the development of a coherent whole system approach that would link CSO generated statistics and administrative records and establish a comprehensive framework for economic, social and environment statistics. The need for a strong focus on users was emphasised in terms of statistical priorities, minimising the burden on individuals and businesses, and providing easy access to the CSO outputs. The NSB published a Progress Report on the strategy in 2006.

In the next chapter we review developments over the period 2003-2008 in more detail. First, we briefly set out some of the contextual issues which frame the 2009-2014 Strategy.

1.2 The context for the present strategy

The period of unprecedented economic growth, and associated economic and social transformation, that Ireland experienced for more than a decade stimulated greater demand for statistics to help measure, understand and respond to the resultant changes that were occurring in the economy and society. These included: sectoral shifts due to growth in high technology manufacturing and services; huge increases in employment leading to labour and skill shortages; the shift from net emigration to immigration; and spatially uneven population growth.

Impact of economic growth

The social transformation that accompanied the economic boom was considerable. Greater social diversity and more affluence altered values and aspirations so that, among other things, social inclusion, equality and quality of life issues such as a clean environment, personal safety, and access to technology have become more significant public and policy issues. Demand increased for more and better social protection and public services and was related to the perception of Ireland as one of the world's most prosperous economies. Greater personal and occupational mobility, more buying power, and developments in information and communications technologies widened personal choices and transformed access to, and exchange of, information. These developments increased demand for statistics from a growing and diverse group of users and brought the need for producer-user dialogues into sharp focus.

Public policy during the boom period had to adjust to an unprecedented scale of growth and speed of change. Strategies developed to manage the challenges of a lagging economy with limited resources had to be transformed to manage the demands of rapid economic growth and greatly increased exchequer resources. The National Development Plan 2007-2013 and its predecessor set out major public investment programmes in economic and social infrastructure, enterprise, science and innovation, human capital and social inclusion. Various other policy initiatives continue to generate demand for statistics.

Engagement between policy-makers and interest groups intensified through the social partnership process and the development of civil society generally. The partnership agreement *Towards 2016* adopted a lifecycle framework based on ideas put forward in the NESC Report *The Developmental Welfare State* whereby Children, People of Working Age, Older People and People with Disabilities are the main focus of social policy development. This approach places a strong emphasis on monitoring outcomes, and stresses the importance of the availability of data in order to do this effectively.

There have been substantial developments in geo-computing and mapping as well as an increased awareness of the limitations of national level data in addressing the geography of economic and social change. At the international level, globalisation, energy security, climate change, migration, and disease control are major issues to be addressed on a transnational basis.

Data collection has also become part of what businesses perceive as an 'administrative burden' and a Government appointed High Level Group on Regulation identified it as a priority area to be addressed. The *Report of the Task Force on Public Service* and the follow-up *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services*¹ stressed the importance of information sharing to create greater citizen engagement with the public service and the need to empower the public service to re-use the significant amount of data already in the system.

As well as stimulating demand, these developments have underlined the importance of reliable, fit for purpose statistics to inform policy and planning, and decisions about public expenditure, and to facilitate the construction of indicators to monitor progress and outcomes in a national and international context.

Impact of the recession

The recent global recession and downturn in the Irish economy has brought a new set of challenges. The perceived failures in the banking and regulatory systems have raised questions about the nature and quality of data available to policy-makers and the public. There are serious resource constraints on public finances due to the decline in taxation revenue and increases in expenditure requirements associated with the downturn. The large drop in tax revenues in 2008 and 2009 has led to significant expenditure pressures and a consequent rise in the level of public debt.

The contraction in the domestic economy and the significant decline in living standards mean that the landscape for future Government expenditure has changed considerably. This situation is particularly relevant when considering the NSB strategy for the coming six years. The socio-economic impact of the recession has intensified the demand for regular and timely statistics and monthly indicators such as the Live Register, Consumer Price Index, and the Retail Sales Index have become increasingly important to assess the performance of the economy.

The turmoil in the financial markets is posing considerable problems for statistics offices across the world. While the scale and nature of the effects vary by country, there are common features and similar statistical problems. A significant difficulty is ensuring consistent statistical treatment across time, and across countries, of bank and other financial support operations by public authorities with particular emphasis on the measurement of government debt and deficit. More generally, the scale of the financial crisis and the complexity of some of the factors underlying it, as well as drawing attention to the

¹ http://www.onegov.ie/eng/Publications/Transforming_Public_Services.html

inadequacy of existing data, make compilation of series such as the balance of payments and financial accounts significantly more problematic.

The Government's 2008 programme for economic renewal *Building Ireland's Smart Economy*² set out a framework to address the economic challenges of the downturn, and outlined a way forward based on building a smart economy as the means of returning to sustainable growth in the medium-term. The successful implementation of this and other Government programmes, such as public service reform are heavily dependent on the availability of adequate data to support targets and measure outcomes.

The developments outlined above present key challenges for the Irish Statistical System (ISS) and for the work of the CSO. The CSO has made considerable progress in meeting demanding international standards over the past decade, and it is vital that this momentum be maintained and built upon. The great majority of the CSO's work is driven by European statistical requirements which are statutorily based. Thus, in order to respond to domestic policy requirements, it is essential that priority be given to maximising the value of existing data holdings both for statistical purposes and also for the wider Government agenda of providing better services to Irish citizens. The constraints on public finances for the coming years will also require institutional adjustments to ensure that that this can be achieved.

² http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2008/

Chapter 2 Review of Progress 2003-2008

2.1 Whole system approach

A central objective of the NSB *Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008* was to develop a more integrated approach to the Irish Statistical System. This involved the development of a whole system approach that could respond more effectively and efficiently to the increasing demand for statistics, best capture the potential of existing data resources and build more effective datasets, while ensuring the continued high quality of Irish official statistics. To achieve this, four strands of work were envisaged as follows:

- ◆ Establishing statistical frameworks;
- ◆ Developing a statistics network across government departments, coordinated by the CSO;
- ◆ Setting statistical priorities in conjunction with the statistics network and data users; and
- ◆ Fostering the development of statistical competence in government departments and agencies.

Over the period 2003-2008, significant progress towards developing a whole system approach has been made in each of the four strands. This work involved:

- An assessment of the Statistical Potential of Administrative Records (SPAR);
- Development of formal data strategies in government departments including the prioritisation of data needs and identification of critical data gaps;
- Development of a set of statistical frameworks and integrated dissemination; and
- Raising statistical competence across government departments and agencies.

2.2 Statistical Potential of Administrative Records (SPAR)

The Statistics Act 1993 gives the CSO the authority to assess the statistical potential of the records maintained by other public authorities and to ensure that this potential is realised. The Board considers it essential that the statistical value of administrative data sources held across government departments and agencies is fully realised in official statistics. In practice, this means that:

- ◆ Surveys funded by departments and agencies should be planned in partnership with the CSO, integrated with existing CSO surveys as far as practicable, and treated as part of official statistics;
- ◆ Data from administrative sources are developed in a structured manner as part of a total data system; and
- ◆ Data users and producers take joint responsibility for ensuring that data collected are those that meet important information needs, and that substantial analyses of these data are undertaken so that society gains fully from the endeavour.

It should involve the CSO, working closely with government departments and agencies, to ensure that existing data collections are fully integrated with CSO survey methodologies, and that new data collections are initiated only after careful evaluation of available alternative data sources.

In order to advance this approach, CSO teams conducted a series of in-depth examinations of data holdings in government departments and agencies over the period 2003-2008. The first phase (Social SPAR) involved CSO teams examining the social and economic data holdings held by six government departments³. The report from this exercise was published on the CSO website in 2003⁴. The second and third phases (Enterprise SPAR and Revenue SPAR) involved a similar examination of business data needs and data holdings in a further eight government departments⁵ and in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. In the case of Enterprise SPAR, the NSB also established an Expert Group to look at the issues concerned. Their report *Policy Needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises*, which included a summary of the findings of the CSO teams that undertook Enterprise SPAR, was published in 2005⁶. The Recommendations from each of the SPAR exercises are included in Appendices 5, 6, and 7.

These exercises identified a set of recurring problems that were found to limit the development of a whole system approach. In essence, most administrative data are not organised in a way that facilitates their integration into a total data system for all official statistics. In order to achieve this, priority would need to be given to the integration of individual data sources; the use of standard classification and coding systems; the development of common core sets of indicators; and regular reviews of information requirements.

³ Education and Science; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Health and Children; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Social and Family Affairs; Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

⁴ CSO (2003): *Statistical Potential of Administrative Records*.

⁵ Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland; Departments of: Agriculture and Food; Arts, Sport and Tourism; Communications, Marine and Natural Resources; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Transport.

⁶ A more detailed report on the CSO findings, as well as an examination of data holdings in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, are available on the CSO website. CSO (2006): *Statistical Potential of Administrative Records: An Examination of Data Holdings in Government Departments*; CSO (2009) *Statistical Potential of Administrative Records: An Examination of Data Holdings in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners*.

The development of unique individual and business identifiers is the key to achieving data integration so as to facilitate efficiencies in data collection and linkage, ease the response burden, and improve administrative competency. These issues are dealt with in more detail in Section 2.6.

One of the many positive outcomes of the compilation of the SPAR reports has been strengthening of the interactions between the CSO and the data providers. Each team worked closely with the data owners and in some cases this has led to improvement in collection and dissemination methods. An example of this is the collaborative work between the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland and the CSO on rationalising collection and compilation arrangements of certain financial data (see text box for further information).

The Board believes that it is necessary to optimise the use of administrative data holdings for both statistical and practical purposes. This should lead to cost savings and greater efficiency by avoiding duplication and facilitating cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis. It is clear from the SPAR exercise that achieving this will require substantial reform of both the architecture and operation of data holdings within government departments and agencies, but would lead to their enhancement and to improved data management.

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

CSO and Central Bank Data Collection

The CSO's examination, in March 2005, of the data holdings of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland (CBFSAI) identified some overlaps and this led to joint collaborative work on rationalising the data collection and compilation arrangements of both organisations. As both the CSO and the CBFSAI collect a considerable volume of statistical data from those financial enterprises that are subject to the Bank's supervisory and regulatory requirements, one of the main purposes of this initiative was to reduce the burden of data provision on these businesses. Another objective was improving consistency between the statistical outputs of the two organisations.

A single collection mechanism operated by the CBFSAI was established to capture the raw data. The Bank share the data with the CSO, and the CSO compile the relevant specific statistical information required by both organisations from these data. The CSO return aggregate statistical data as well as microdata to the CBFSAI to facilitate the Bank to meet its national and international Investment Fund and Financial Account statistical requirements, and to enhance its analytical and statistical outputs.

The new collection systems are operated under the Central Bank's legislation which guarantees confidentiality of the data collected. To allow exchange of the data with CSO, legal mandates were signed in advance by all the relevant data providers to allow the unrestricted exchange of the information collected in the CRS1 and OFI1 forms between both institutions.

As a result of this initiative, the following CSO surveys were discontinued: BOP45 (IFSC banks), BOP50 (non-IFSC banks) and BOP41 (investment funds). In addition, two CBFSAI surveys were discontinued. One of these related to banks' interest receipts and expenses, the other concerned data on banks' assets and liabilities as required by the Bank for International Settlements.

The new system meets the requirements of the ECB Investment Fund Regulation. Therefore, while these arrangements initially involved significant investment by data providers to extract the raw data, it is clear that there has been a reduction in their overall statistical reporting burden. The availability of information on a security-by-security basis will also strengthen the analytical capabilities of both institutions.

2.3 Data Strategies

In April 2003 following the publication of the NSB report *Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to meet Policy Needs*⁷, the Government recommended that each government department develop a formal data/statistics strategy. The Board then published guidelines to assist departments in this process⁸. Each department was asked to establish an appropriate committee bringing together data users (including appropriate outside experts) and data producers to design and deliver its statistics strategy. This broadly involved four tasks to: determine how, and to what

⁷ NSB (2003): *Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to meet Policy Needs*.

⁸ These guidelines were published on the NSB website in March 2004 as "Best Practice Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of formal Data/Statistics Strategies in Government Departments", http://www.nsb.ie/pdf_docs/Data_Strategy_Guidelines.pdf.

extent, the department's data needs can be met from 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; and identify how the skills of its staff in using data as a tool for policy evaluation and development can be enhanced.

The completion of data/statistics strategies has been slow and uneven. Although some departments and agencies have made considerable progress, only the following have been published:

- Department of Social and Family Affairs;
- Department of Education and Science;
- Office of the Revenue Commissioners; and
- Department of Transport

The Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) was the first to complete the process. This was a most welcome development as it has a key role in maintaining databases related to the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN), and maintains comprehensive national data holdings. Indeed the Department published an updated strategy in mid-2009⁹.

The Department of Education and Science undertook a similar formal approach to the development of their strategy and included the CSO as an external representative on their Data Strategy Group. Their data strategy was published in early 2008¹⁰ and an implementation group was set-up on which the CSO is represented.

The Office of the Revenue Commissioners published their data strategy¹¹ in February 2008. As part of the process Revenue carried out an in-house survey to identify their data needs and data gaps. As discussed above, Revenue SPAR was completed earlier this year, and further bilateral progress has since been made with the CSO.

The Department of Transport published a 2009-2011 data and statistics strategy¹² in March 2009. As part of this process, they identified the need for more statistics on the transport and the travel requirements and current usage patterns of individuals. Acquiring such data would effectively require the undertaking of a national household travel survey. The need for such a survey was also identified in the 2005 SPAR report on enterprises referred to earlier¹³.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform produced a draft data strategy in March 2008. In developing the strategy, they initially undertook a high level review of data needs across the Department. The review identified the need for a more cohesive approach to the management of its data holdings. The final strategy will include a more detailed examination of data

⁹ <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/HowWeWork/Pages/corpinfostrat.aspx>

¹⁰ http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/des_dst_intro.html?language=EN

¹¹ <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/other.html>

¹² <http://www.transport.ie/viewitem.asp?id=11400&lang=ENG&loc=1512>

¹³ NSB (2005): Policy needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises.

requirements and gaps. The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has also made considerable progress in gathering data needs and identifying data sources. The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has adopted a very comprehensive approach to the preparation of their data strategy including the secondment of a CSO statistician to assist them in this process.

Other departments are at various stages in the preparation of data strategies. The engagement between data users and producers in departments, and the consideration of the needs of external users, are very valuable benefits arising from the process.

The Board regards the completion of data strategies to be of vital importance. These strategies allow identification and prioritisation of unmet data needs and provide essential input into how existing datasets can be used to best advantage in an efficient, cost-effective and strategic manner. It is essential that administrative data are collected efficiently using standards and protocols agreed with the CSO, with minimum burden on users, avoidance of duplication and optimum use of information technology. Given the constraints on public finances, new surveys can only be initiated in situations where existing data sources cannot be enhanced to provide necessary data.

The identification and prioritisation of data gaps by government departments provides a critical input into NSB deliberations on future data collection priorities. The CSO has an important lead role in facilitating networking between departments in relation to data matters, so as to ensure that existing data are used to best advantage and that new data needs are identified.

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

2.4 Statistical frameworks and integrated dissemination

Statistical frameworks have been developed that cover the economic and social domains, and to a lesser extent the environment. These frameworks were built initially on the domains recommended by the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (SGSES)¹⁴ and in the NSB report *Policy Needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises*,¹⁵ and further developed as part of the roll-out of a series of CSO thematic indicator reports. Ten domains were used to present the indicators in the annual report *Measuring Ireland's Progress*¹⁶. Variations of this framework were used in thematic reports across the social

¹⁴ NSB (2003): *Developing Irish Social and Equality Statistics to meet Policy Needs*.

¹⁵ NSB (2005): *Policy Needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises*.

¹⁶ Economy, Innovation and technology, Employment and unemployment, Social cohesion, Education, Health, Population, Housing, Crime, and Environment.

and economic domains to provide a better and more balanced fit to the data. These reports include:

Measuring Ireland's Progress	Construction and Housing in Ireland
Women and Men in Ireland	Small Business in Ireland
Equality in Ireland	Information Society Statistics
Ageing in Ireland	Family Business in Ireland
Children and Young People in Ireland	Tourism Trends
Regional Quality of Life in Ireland	Transport In Ireland

These reports have been very favourably received and widely used as they link data from disparate sources, and enable benchmarking of Ireland's performance relative to other EU countries across a wide range of key indicators.

The CSO, in consultation with other environmental agencies, is examining options in relation to developing an integrated report on environment and sustainable development statistics and indicators that would cover areas such as water, waste, energy, air quality and climate change. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for the compilation and publication of many of the environment indicators.

The CSO has also developed a new web portal *StatCentral* that provides a one-point access to official statistics produced by government departments and their agencies. This was launched in 2008 and has been welcomed by users. For each statistic (such as Life expectancy, Air quality, or Energy indicators), *StatCentral* provides a separate web page of standard documentation, which includes a summary of the contents of the statistic, the organisation involved, frequency, start date, timeliness, and who to contact for further information. *StatCentral* does not itself contain the statistics, but provides web links to where they may be found¹⁷.

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

¹⁷ The portal currently covers statistics produced by the CSO, several government departments, the Central Bank, the EPA, Teagasc, the Health Protection Surveillance Centre, the Higher Education Authority, Sustainable Energy Ireland, the Irish Prison Service, and the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

2.5 Raising statistical competence

Apart from the SPAR exercises and the development of data strategies, one of the key elements of the whole system approach is to raise statistical competence in data management and analysis across the public sector.

Data quality and classification

The CSO has worked closely with a number of organisations to assist them in improving the usability of their statistical holdings through quality improvements. This has helped these bodies to use the same toolkit, data standards and classifications, and methodologies to manage and disseminate their statistics with resultant cost savings and added value. The CSO has also undertaken more direct collaboration with government departments by providing statistical support and advice for particular projects.

Considerable value can be added across surveys and administrative data sources through the use of standard classification and coding systems. The development of international classification systems for variables such as education level attained, occupation and employment status are core to being able to compare data across countries. These classifications can be further tuned to increase national relevance while retaining international comparability. An example of the successful implementation of this approach was the transfer of the compilation and publication of crime statistics into the CSO.

Placement of statistical staff

The objective of enhancing statistical competence has also involved the placement of professional statisticians in government departments, spearheading the establishment of statistical units in a number of instances. In most cases the staff member is seconded by the CSO, but some direct recruitment by departments has taken place. The arrangements have benefitted the CSO in that seconded statisticians gain from the experience of working with policy makers. The process has also done much to increase the use made of statistical analysis within these departments. The creation of an Administrative Data Division within CSO should ensure further progress in the process of developing the statistical competency of department staff engaged with administrative data.

The increased level of engagement between the CSO and government departments and agencies has also resulted in the CSO becoming considerably more active on inter-departmental committees. This participation has brought about more regular interaction between data users and data producers. It has also facilitated a consideration of data needs and availability at an early stage of these committees' deliberations.

The Board regards the placement of professional statistical staff in government departments as a very welcome development and believes that it is essential that it continue. There are now greater opportunities for data

analysis and enhancement because of the increased availability of data in electronic format, and there is a clear need for evidence-informed policy. The mix of disciplines is a vital element in the development of relevant data and indicators to develop and underpin sound and sustainable economic, social and environmental policies.

While the improvements in data quality and enhanced statistical competence are important, the Board is concerned that there is, as yet, limited commitment and capacity in some departments and agencies to ensuring that the data they generate are 'fit for purpose' and, in particular, to ensuring that they can be integrated easily into the wider statistical system. In more straitened economic circumstances, it is important that the potential of existing and new data generated be utilised to the greatest possible extent. Consequently the Board considers that attention to these issues will need to remain a priority in the 2009-2014 Strategy for Statistics as substantial progress is needed to facilitate the development of an integrated data collection system across the public sector.

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

2.6 Critical issues

The Board believes that the developments already outlined will further increase the usage made of administrative data systems as envisaged in the whole system approach to compiling official statistics in Ireland. However, there are a number of infrastructural inadequacies that are impeding progress and need to be addressed if the NSB's vision for the Irish Statistical System to provide objective, reliable, relevant and timely official statistics is to be realised.

These relate to:

- Unique business identifier and central business register;
- Unique personal identifiers; and
- Spatial and geographic data capture.

Unique business identifiers (UBI)

In order to facilitate the more efficient collection of business data, the Board has advocated strongly for the need for a public-sector wide unique business identifier and central business register¹⁸. This is a priority for the CSO who believe that a well structured register system supported by a clear system of business reference number identifiers is needed to ease the response burden on businesses. In many EU countries, a UBI and Central Business Register (CBR) already play a central role in strategies to achieve the EU agreed 25%

¹⁸ This was a key recommendation in the 2005 NSB report: Policy Needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises.

reduction in response burden, a target which has also been adopted by the Irish Government.

The NSB is strongly supportive of the need to develop a UBI given its potential to:

- Maximise the information available from data holdings and therefore provide a mechanism through which the administrative burden on business can be reduced; and
- Allow new types of analysis to support evidence based policy making without increasing the burden.

In considering the issue of a UBI, the Board are also conscious of some of the issues referenced in the *Report of the Task Force on the Public Service - Transforming Public Services* and the *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services*. Both refer to the establishment of a central data store for use by public bodies of, amongst other things, *key information on business entities*. It is difficult to see how such an objective can be achieved efficiently without the existence of a UBI.

In 2007, the Government agreed to the establishment of a cross-department working group to examine the feasibility of introducing a unique business identifier and of creating a central business register. The progress made by this group has been slow partially arising from the lack of a lead project or department as is the case with a unique personal identifier where the PPS Number has provided a model on which to build further developments. Accordingly, the CSO has engaged bilaterally with the Revenue Commissioners in a project to increase the use of revenue business data in the compilation of CSO business statistics.

Following the publication of the SPAR Revenue report¹⁹ in 2009, the CSO and the Revenue Commissioners signed a memorandum of understanding. This provides a structure for enhanced data cooperation between the CSO and Revenue, and for advancing the recommendations of the SPAR report. A CSO/Revenue Liaison Group was established as a formal, high-level mechanism for consultation and communication between the two organisations. The memorandum listed the development of a single business registration process, the adoption of a common business identifier, and cooperation on NACE coding as the priorities to pursue from the SPAR report recommendations. The Liaison Group set up a working group to investigate the matter of the development of a common (CSO-Revenue) business identifier.

In order for the CSO to utilise Revenue data efficiently, it is vital that the business identifiers in use in Revenue are linked to those in the CSO. The CSO has, over the last number of years, been developing the matching between its own unique identifier and the identifiers used by Revenue. The SPAR report recommended that, in the absence of a system-wide unique

¹⁹ Statistical Potential of Administrative Records - An Examination of Data Holdings in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

business identifier and central business register, the development of a common identifier between Revenue and the CSO should be pursued. This would help to reduce the overall administrative burden placed on businesses and would enable enhanced statistical outputs in support of evidence-based policy making. However ultimately for an identifier to be used widely across the system, it must be publicly known and available and must be sufficiently robust to operate at the levels of both statistical and taxation business units.

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

Unique personal identifiers (UPI)

As is the case for the UBI, unique personal identifiers would enhance the value of existing data while reducing the need for new data collections. By linking CSO survey data to administrative data held in government departments, the CSO could reduce the response burden placed on individuals and households. For example, this approach is being used in the CSO Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey whereby the respondents provide the CSO with their Personal Public Service (PPS) Numbers to allow the CSO to have required survey data extracted from the records of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. For this purpose, the CSO were given PPS Numbers by around 85% of respondents.

The PPS Number is the obvious starting point as all citizens in Ireland are issued with a PPSN and immigrants to Ireland are generally issued with a PPS Number for taxation and social welfare purposes. The PPS Number is supported by a Public Service Identity (PSI) dataset containing socio-demographic data²⁰. While data protection laws in Ireland strictly protect the rights of citizens in regard to data-sharing based on PPS Number, the Board believes that there is considerable potential to reduce duplication and simplify the citizen's engagement with the system by wider use of the PPS Number.

In anticipation of any public concerns regarding the potential threat to privacy from such data matching, the CSO prepared a protocol governing its work in this area. The Board endorsed the protocol and it was subsequently referred to the Data Protection Commissioner who approved it as being in line with best practice. In the protocol, the CSO also offered to provide assistance to other public authorities, where no CSO data holding was involved, provided all such activity complied fully with data protection legislation. An inventory of data matching projects undertaken by the CSO is maintained on the CSO website²¹.

²⁰ Surname, Forename; Date of birth; Place of birth; Sex; All former surnames; Mother's former surnames; Address; Nationality; and Date of death (in the case of a deceased person).

²¹ <http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/CSODataProtocol.htm>

The Health Information and Quality Authority examined the issue of a unique health identifier (UHI) in a report published in 2009²². They concluded that the PPS Number was not appropriate for use as a healthcare UHI and opted for the development of a new healthcare focused UHI based on international best practice. The Department of Health and Children has established a representative group of key stakeholders to finalise policy in relation to the UHI including governance arrangements and detailed costings.

It is the view of the Board that the connection between any UHI and the PPS Number should be strong enough to allow for the linkage of health and other data for research or statistical purposes.

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

Spatial and geographic data capture

The 2006 NSB User Survey showed that there was an unmet user demand for sub-national data across all levels of geography. While the Census of Population provides county and Electoral Division data, the design and sample size of most CSO surveys does not permit publication of results even at county level. Moreover, even where administrative records are available at much lower spatial scales, they are not integrated with existing CSO datasets or geo-coded.

There have been a number of developments in the capture and coding of small area data. Two developments are of particular interest. The Government established a National Postcodes Project Board (NPPB) to examine issues in relation to the possible introduction of a system of postcodes into Ireland. In September 2009, the Government approved the introduction of a national postal code. Postcodes will provide an excellent basis for aggregating data from surveys and, perhaps more importantly, from administrative sources.

The second development is the collaboration between the CSO, the Ordnance Survey and the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis at NUI Maynooth on the development of a new set of small output areas for the publication of basic population data. The CSO has agreed to organise the 2011 census geography using these small areas and plans to incorporate them into publication of the 2011 census.

²² www.hiqa.ie/media/pdfs/Unique_Health_Identifier_Report.pdf

There have also been some interesting developments in relation to mapping census and administrative data at Small Area level (see example for Dublin City in text box).

The Board is very supportive of the decision to introduce a postal code system for Ireland and also greatly welcomes the commitment by the CSO to code the 2011 census data into the new Small Areas. These developments will address user needs for more statistics at sub-national level as expressed in the NSB Survey of CSO Users 2006.

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

Mapping Social Inclusion in Dublin City

In March 2008, PLANET – the Partnerships Network, together with Dublin City Council (DCC) engaged the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM) to carry out a pilot project to explore new ways to spatially analyse and map social inclusion data in two areas in Dublin city. Working with data from the CSO, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and DCC's public facility database, and in close consultation with the Data Protection Commissioner regarding issues of confidentiality, the project team were able to map and monitor data at a very local scale in two Partnership areas in Dublin, using the new Small Areas as the unit of analysis.

In particular, the project showed that it possible to:

- analyse and map data already publically available (Census, PoWCAR) to explore local labour markets;
- create and map new data from the Live Register, and from other databases that show access to services such as GPs, and schools;
- provide more timely analysis at a local scale by using data other than the five-yearly Census data; and
- make data available in a user-friendly and interactive format accessible across a secure internet connection.

Assembling and analysing data in this way opens up important new possibilities for understanding socio-economic conditions at a local scale and for monitoring and analysis of area-targeted policy initiatives. It also powerfully demonstrates the potential of administrative data to inform policy formulation and monitoring.

Chapter 3 Further development of the Irish Statistical System

In this chapter, the Board draws on the discussion of developments outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 to identify priorities for the 2009-2014 Strategy. These relate to: improving the capacity of the statistical system; ensuring trust and confidence in the system; data management and security; response burden; and areas where new statistics are needed.

3.1 Improving capacity

Very considerable strides have been made in developing the capacity of the Irish Statistical System over the past five years but much remains to be done. The Board is conscious of the constant challenge for the CSO of trying to meet increasing demands for new data from both national and international users, such as the Central Bank and the European statistical office. The Board is also very aware of major gaps in data to underpin policy development and strongly conscious of the limitations on public finances and the need to achieve value for money.

The international recession and the downturn in the Irish economy have highlighted the issue of timeliness of official statistics as well as data gaps, and these present considerable challenges. When such rapid adjustments are taking place in the economy, policy makers need to have quality up to date statistical information to inform their decisions. The global financial crisis has resulted in major difficulties in the valuation of assets. This can give rise to issues such as asymmetries between sectors and between countries in regard to corresponding counterpart liabilities, and call into question traditional estimation procedures. A particular problem is the variety of the interventions made by governments in response to the financial crisis and how these can be recorded in order to maintain the consistency and comparability of debt and deficit measures. The Board recognises the progress that the CSO has made in developing economic and financial statistics in recent years and stresses the importance of achieving further improvements in timeliness.

The Board strongly believes that one of the keys to developing the Irish Statistical System, while ensuring better value for money, lies in government departments and agencies achieving greater ownership of the system, and their role in it. Departments and agencies need to regard themselves as partners with the CSO in the production of official statistics. Prioritising the organisation of their data holdings, and rationalising and streamlining data collection will ensure better use of administrative data.

3.2 Ensuring trust and confidence

Ireland has an excellent reputation for high quality, objective official statistics. The CSO are actively involved in European statistical affairs and contributed to the development of the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCP) which was adopted in 2005. The ESCP is aimed at:

- ◆ Improving trust and confidence in the independence, integrity and accountability of both National Statistical Authorities and Eurostat, and in the credibility and quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate (*i.e. an external focus*);
- ◆ Promoting the application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of European Statistics to enhance their quality (*i.e. an internal focus*).

The Code is based on 15 principles which are primarily related to users' needs: knowing that the statistical outputs are based on a sound institutional environment (Principles 1-6); statistical practices (Principles 7-10); and quality procedures (Principles 11-15).

Principles of the ESCP

Institutional environment	1. Professional Independence
	2. Mandate for Data Collection
	3. Adequacy of Resources
	4. Quality Commitment
	5. Statistical Confidentiality
	6. Impartiality and Objectivity
Statistical practices	7. Sound Methodology
	8. Appropriate Statistical Procedures
	9. Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents
	10. Cost Effectiveness
Survey Quality Procedures	11. Relevance
	12. Accuracy and Reliability
	13. Timeliness and Punctuality
	14. Coherence and Comparability
	15. Accessibility and Clarity

As part of the implementation of the ESCP, the CSO has undertaken a self-assessment of its own procedures as well as being the subject of an independent Peer Review which gave a very positive assessment.

The ESCP applies both to the CSO and to other producers of European Statistics. Hence the procedures supporting the compilation and dissemination practices in other government departments and agencies are also subject to the Code of Practice insofar as they contribute to the production of European Statistics.

The Board believes that all of these principles are important in order to ensure the continued quality and credibility of official statistics. Quality will be enhanced by the adoption of agreed protocols and credibility by actions to improve transparency and provide information to users.

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

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

3.3 Data management and security

Trust and confidence in the CSO and other producers of official statistics can be severely compromised by any real or even perceived security breaches or data losses. Procedures have been put in place by the CSO in relation to the encryption of files containing personal data with direct identifiers. These rules and procedures are being applied to data being received or issued by the CSO in electronic formats, and to the protection of data held on laptop computers. These procedures ensure that the CSO protects statistical files in line with the requirements of the Statistics Act 1993 and Data Protection legislation.

Secondary analysis of CSO data has increased, particularly among members of the academic community. The CSO examines each of these requests before granting access and has published a document on the Rules, Policies and Procedures associated with access to data for research purposes²³. There has also been a considerable increase in the amount of data lodged in the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA) by the CSO. These files are provided in a form whereby the information related to an identifiable person cannot be directly or indirectly identified. Files relating to household surveys are provided to the ISSDA under Section 34 of the Statistics Act 1993.

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

²³ http://www.cso.ie/aboutus/res_microdata.htm

3.4 Response burden

The ongoing obligation on the part of statistical producers, to balance the reporting burden on respondents against the needs of the users requiring the statistics, is a priority for Government as part of its commitment to reduce the administrative burden on business by 25% by 2012. In June 2009, the CSO published an analysis of the response burden placed on Irish business by CSO inquiries²⁴. The survey showed that the total number of CSO surveys to business in 2008 was 31, and the average number of forms received by an enterprise was 1.3 compared with 30 surveys and an average of one form in 2007.

Recommendation 11: The Board recommends that the CSO:

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

A recent example of the application of these principles in practice can be found in the joint data collection being undertaken by the CSO and Forfás in research and development expenditure. Discussions are also taking place between the CSO and Sustainable Energy Ireland in relation to reviewing the needs of users, and the respective roles of both organisations in the development and collection of energy data.

3.5 Need for statistics in emerging domains

Identifying and responding to critical data gaps is an ongoing challenge for the Irish Statistical System. The 2005 Enterprise SPAR Expert Group was comprised of key users of enterprise-based data from the public and private sectors. The group identified five priority areas for statistical development: Construction; Transport and Travel; Energy; Environment; and Research & Development and Innovation. The NSB 2006 Survey of CSO Users also identified areas where users required further information such as: transport; more county and Electoral Division level data; immigration; taxation; housing; small and medium enterprises; culture; sport; and crime statistics. Some of these areas are already covered routinely in well-established statistics series. The Board considers that priority should now be given to the following areas for the compilation of new statistics:

²⁴ CSO (2009): Report on Response Burden placed on Irish Businesses by CSO inquiries, 2008.

- Energy and Environment;
- Transport and Travel;
- Health;
- Integrated pupil data;
- Short-term indicators; and
- Housing and Construction;

3.5.1 Energy and Environment

Climate change and energy security have become major policy concerns as advanced economies confront the depletion of fossil fuels and the impact of energy consumption on the ecosystem. Traditionally energy and environment statistics have had lower priority in official statistics compared with economic and social statistics more directly related to measurement of economic and social well-being. Considerable work is needed to improve harmonisation of data collection methodologies and data definitions. A standard international energy classification has yet to be developed which would be the basis for the consistent collection of data on the production, flows, consumption and stocks of energy products. Units of measurement and conversion factors also need to be standardised.

Energy and environment statistics also need to be fully brought within the ambit of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and organisational arrangements between the CSO and other national bodies need to be formalised so as to ensure the availability of ongoing high quality data that are consistent with international standards.

There is a need to develop energy balance sheets for the various main fuel types classified by usage sectors, and for a longer period of consistent energy price series. The Board welcomes the discussions that have taken place between the CSO and Sustainable Energy Ireland in relation to Ireland filling the data requirements of the new EU Energy Statistics Regulation.

As with the energy sector, there is a need to prioritise the development of environment statistics particularly from a sustainable development perspective. There is an urgent need to develop consistent time series data on areas such as expenditure on the environment, wastewater and solid waste plants, recycling, material flow accounting, and emissions to air.

The CSO using the powers conferred on it by the Statistics Act 1993 to engage in joint data collection exercises will be required to efficiently and effectively meet these new data obligations. It will be particularly important to engage with local authorities in relation to environment statistics, since they have significant responsibilities and data holdings in relation to water, waste disposal and recycling in particular.

Progress on the development of sustainable development indicators (SDI) in Ireland has been slow with significant gaps compared with those that have been developed within the EU. These include indicators relating to production and consumption patterns, management of natural resources, transport, and public health.

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

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

3.5.2 Transport and Travel

There have been improvements in the amount of transport and travel statistics disseminated by the CSO. A Census of Population Place of Work (PoWCAR) anonymised microdata file containing the main mode of travel to work (based on distance) is produced every five years from the Census of Population data and this allows analyses of commuting patterns and labour catchments. In 2006, this file covered all persons aged 15 and over rather than a sample, as in the previous census.

While these data are valuable and being widely used, the Board considers that a significant data gap remains, particularly in relation to multi-mode travel and travel for purposes other than to work. A pilot National Transport Survey is being tested within the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey. The pilot has been partially financed by the Department of Transport. This survey could potentially be expanded to collect additional travel and transport related data.

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

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

3.5.3 Health

Health issues are becoming increasingly important in modern Ireland. The Board welcomes recent work by the CSO in this area including:

- The first detailed disability survey undertaken in Ireland. This survey covered both private households and non-private households such as nursing homes. While disability is an issue affecting all age groups, the health and disability status of older people is of particular interest given the increasing life expectancy in Ireland;
- Involvement in a pilot study on the System of Health Accounts; and
- A survey module on participation in sport and exercise. The results showed that almost 63% of persons aged 15 and over participated in exercise and sport. Regular exercise is likely to lead to further increases in life expectancy and also to contribute to people's general health and well-being.

The System of Health Accounts (SHA) is an extension of the core National Accounts and consists of a family of interrelated tables for reporting final expenditure on health and its financing. The SHA contains common concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules to enable comparability over time and across countries. It provides a basis for uniform reporting by countries with a wide range of different models of organising their national health systems. The set of core tables in the SHA addresses three basic questions²⁵:

- Where does the money to finance the health system come from (source of funding);
- Who does the money go to (provider of health care services and goods); and
- What kinds of services are performed and what types of goods are purchased.

A pilot study which was conducted by the Department of Health, the Health Research Board, the CSO and the HSE to assess the feasibility of compiling a system of health accounts is nearing completion (see text box for further information). A draft report has identified a number of gaps and shortcomings in the data currently available. The development of a sound system of health accounts would greatly facilitate analyses of the outcomes from expenditure on health care.

²⁵ See chapter 2 of SHA Manual 1.0 for a list of the standard tables, www.oecd.org/health/sha

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

Further data are needed on lifestyles and their relationship to health status. The longitudinal studies underway on children, and being prepared on elderly people, will provide much needed information on these topics. Further complementary information on the lives of adults, such as that collected by the disability survey and the module on exercise, will be needed to inform the development of health service delivery policies.

System of Health Accounts

A feasibility study on the implementation of the System of Health Accounts (SHA) in Ireland is currently underway. The SHA is an extension of the core National Accounts and consists of a family of interrelated tables for reporting final expenditure on health and its financing. The SHA contains common concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules to enable comparability over time and across countries. It provides a basis for uniform reporting by countries with a wide range of different models of organising their national health systems. The SHA also draws a commonly defined boundary around what is health care and to distinguish it from related social care services. This is particularly important for international comparisons given the diversity in health and social care services provision and their funding across Europe and the rest of the world.

The purpose of this study is to produce a pilot set of tables outlining health expenditure in Ireland according to the SHA framework. The study will identify data sources, data gaps and the resources required to implement an annual production of the SHA tables. The results of this study will be available around the end of 2009.

The implementation of the SHA in Ireland would improve the reporting of health expenditure data, ensure the availability of comprehensive data that meets international standards for the purpose of comparability, and facilitate more in-depth analysis at national level.

3.5.4 Integrated pupil data

In the education sector, the post-primary pupil database provides a very rich source with considerable statistical potential. At third level, the Higher Education Authority has developed a student record system, covering all students in HEA institutions (including all universities and institutes of technology). Its usefulness is currently somewhat limited because not all records have a PPS Number, although the aspiration is to increase PPSN coverage to virtually 100%. At primary level, unfortunately, no pupil database exists. The existence of comprehensive data at first, second and

third levels would, through linkage, provide useful statistical information on progress through the educational system, on the effects of leaving school early, and on the relationships between educational participation and attainment, and subsequent events such as employment.

The Department of Education and Science, in their data strategy published in 2008, gave high priority to the development of a Learner Database encompassing primary and post-primary level (which would replace the existing Post-Primary Pupil Database), with the intention to develop the primary pupil component in the initial stage. It was noted that such a learner database would provide clear advantages from the policy, administrative and statistical perspectives. Progress on these plans has been adversely affected by resource constraints.

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

3.5.5 Short-term indicators

The Board considers that the CSO should develop a web-based short-term indicators report of mainly monthly and quarterly data series. These would be a small set of around 10 to 15 leading indicators from both CSO and non-CSO data sources. These key indicators would be regularly updated and made accessible to users in an integrated format through a series of tables and graphs. The selection of a small set of leading indicators, their integration into a user friendly dissemination format, and a web based dissemination medium will meet some of the unmet needs expressed in the 2006 NSB Survey of CSO Users.

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

3.5.6 Housing and Construction

During the recent construction boom in Ireland, it became obvious that there were insufficient statistical indicators on construction. The five-yearly Census of Population is the main source of data on housing vacancy rates. The Department of the Environment has been involved in the compilation of a house price index but this has not yet resulted in a regular and reliable series of price indices being published.

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

Chapter 4 Strategic Priorities and Actions 2009-2014

Strategic Priorities

The NSB Strategy 2009-2014 seeks to respond to contemporary conditions and to build on the progress made during 2003-2008. This will require a focus on the following five strategic priorities.

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

The Board believes that pursuing these strategic priorities for official statistics will require the Irish Statistical System to build on the considerable achievements of the past six years by addressing the issues outlined in Chapter 3, while responding to evolving policy needs and operating within a resource constrained environment. This will require further close cooperation between the CSO and other parts of the Irish Statistical System.

Priority Actions

The Board has identified the following seven actions which are priority for the period 2009-2014.

1. Complete Statistical Frameworks

Much progress has been made in developing a comprehensive set of statistical frameworks with the economic and social elements well developed. However, there is a need to accelerate development in the environmental area, particularly the construction of a consistent time series of environmental data and sustainable development indicators.

2. Strengthen Institutional Commitment

The continued development of the statistical infrastructure led by the CSO is of paramount importance. Government departments and agencies need to take ownership of the statistical system and their role in it. This should be reflected in their data strategies and in their networking and co-operation with the CSO.

3. Maintain Quality and Integrity

Ireland has an excellent reputation for high quality, objective official statistics. The continued quality and integrity of the statistical system will be assured by strengthening and adhering to protocols and confidentiality procedures. Constant vigilance in relation to data protection and confidentiality must also be maintained.

4. Urgently Address Data Integration Issues

The issues that are impeding data integration are the lack of unique identifiers (business and personal), geocoding, and underdevelopment of standard classification and coding systems. These issues must be resolved in order to continue progress on the whole system approach to the ISS. Resolving these issues will also help minimise the burden on respondents, which is a policy priority.

5. Fill Critical Data Gaps

The Board has prioritised a number of areas in which there are critical data gaps (Energy and Environment; Transport and Travel; Health; Integrated pupil data; short-term indicators; and Housing and Construction). These gaps must be addressed to ensure the availability of appropriate data to inform policy-making.

6. Improve Access and Response to User Needs

It is imperative that the CSO build on recent gains in improving user access to statistics and in raising user competency by continuing to assess and respond to user needs and improve access to data. The use of interactive web-based systems to provide data tailored to user needs should be considered. The NSB Survey of CSO Users, which was last undertaken in 2006, should be repeated during the period of this strategy.

7. Cross-border Co-operation

CSO should continue to engage with its counterparts in Northern Ireland with a view to ensuring as much compatibility between official statistics as possible, particularly in relation to greater interoperability between large-scale surveys such as the censuses, and to issues of spatial scale to facilitate inter-jurisdictional data analysis.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Board Functions under the Statistics Act 1993

Section 10 - Functions of Central Statistics Office:

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

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

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

Section 19 - Function of National Statistics Board:

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix 2: Membership of the Board

Board Members (current membership)

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

Ms. Mary Doyle
Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. Michael McGrath
Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance

Professor Philip Lane
International Economics, Trinity College Dublin

Mr. Con Lucey
Irish Farmers Association

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

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

Mr. Gerry O'Hanlon
Director General, Central Statistics Office (ex officio member)

Secretary: Mr. Gerry Brady (Senior Statistician, CSO)

Appendix 3 : European Statistics Code of Practice

adopted by the Statistical Programme Committee on 24 February 2005

Preamble

The Code is addressed for implementation to:

- *Governance authorities* (i.e. Governments, Ministries, Commission, Council) - to provide guidelines for them to ensure that their statistical services are professionally organised and resourced to produce credible European Statistics in a manner that guarantees independence, integrity and accountability;
- *Statistical authorities and their staff* - to provide a benchmark of statistical principles, values and best practices that should help them in producing and disseminating high quality, harmonised European Statistics.

It is addressed for information to:

- *Users* - to show that European and national statistical authorities are impartial and that the statistics they produce and disseminate are trustworthy, objective and reliable;
- *Data providers* - to show that the confidentiality of the information they provide is protected, and that excessive demands will not be placed on them.

The Code of Conduct is based on 15 *Principles*. Governance authorities and statistical authorities in the European Union commit themselves to adhering to the principles fixed in this code and to reviewing its implementation periodically by the use of *Indicators of Good Practice* for each of the 15 Principles, which are to be used as references.

Principle 1: Professional Independence - *The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.*

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection - *Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.*

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources - *The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.*

Principle 4: Quality Commitment - *All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.*

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality - *The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.*

Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity - *Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.*

Principle 7: Sound Methodology - *Sound methodology must underpin quality statistics. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.*

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures - *Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented from data collection to data validation, must underpin quality statistics.*

Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents - *The reporting burden should be proportionate to the needs of the users and should not be excessive for respondents. The statistical authority monitors the response burden and sets targets for its reduction over time.*

Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness - *Resources must be effectively used.*

Principle 11: Relevance - *European Statistics must meet the needs of users.*

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability - *European Statistics must accurately and reliably portray reality.*

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality - *European Statistics must be disseminated in a timely and punctual manner.*

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability - *European Statistics should be consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it should be possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different sources.*

Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity - *European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.*

Appendix 4: CSO Statement of Strategy 2008-2010

The CSO identified eight priority areas in their Statement of Strategy 2008-2010 (see below). These goals have been informed by discussions at Board meetings, and are in line with achieving Board priorities over the period of this strategy.

4.1 CSO priorities 2008-2010

1. Developing the Irish statistical system

CSO will advise on and support statistical work across Departments and Agencies, and continue to promote greater use of statistics in evidence-based policy. We will advance the work already under way to make greater use of administrative records for statistical purposes – as a means of producing new statistics while keeping the burden on respondents proportionate to needs.

2. New statistical needs

There is a growing demand for statistics, nationally and internationally. Key issues include globalisation, migration, the environment, transport, health and education. *Towards 2016* identifies specific needs in relation to labour market, prices and the lifecycle approach to policy. The sectoral plans in *Towards 2016* and other policy initiatives will also generate new demand for statistics. Departmental data / statistics strategies will also give rise to new statistical needs.

3. Managing Response Burden

This statement of strategy includes a coherent set of actions to minimise response burden in the context of the growing needs for statistical outputs. These include measurement of the burden placed on business, the use of electronic reporting methods, better sampling techniques, greater co-ordination between surveys, and greater statistical use of administrative records.

4. Information Technology

Building on the CSO's new data management system, we are developing a new IT strategy for the next five years, 2008 to 2012.

5. E-Government

As a specific part of our IT strategy, we will further develop effective solutions for the electronic collection of survey data and for the dissemination of user-friendly statistical tables and reports.

6. Skills and training

We are implementing comprehensive training programmes for our staff – in statistics, IT, management and other disciplines – to support the range of high-level skills and competencies necessary to a modern statistical service.

7. European Statistics Code of Practice

The Code of Practice adopted in 2005 is an integral part of our operating environment. It provides an important reference framework for quality and standards in official statistics.

8. Efficient work practices

We will continue to implement work practices which achieve greater efficiency and contribute to improved outputs. For example, the use of scanning has vastly improved the speed of publishing the details from the Census of Population.

Appendix 5: Social SPAR²⁶ Recommendations

General recommendations

These recommendations are of a cross-cutting nature largely directed towards the development of an integrated and comprehensive approach to the production of statistics across the public service. Implementation of these recommendations will greatly facilitate the undertaking of cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses that explore more fully the complexity of society in Ireland.

Recommendation 1: Departments should ensure that related data sources are capable of being integrated at the individual record level.

Recommendation 2: There should be greater collaboration between government departments and the CSO to ensure that the statistical potential of administrative records is realised efficiently, and that duplication within the system is minimised.

Recommendation 3: Departments should establish mechanisms to regularly review their information needs as the statistical information available from official data sources develops.

Recommendation 4: Some social statistics are more meaningful at the individual, family or household level. Where relevant, data holdings should be structured so that case-level or event-based information can be aggregated to compile individual, household and family statistics.

Recommendation 5: All official data sources should use standard classifications and coding-systems. The CSO should take a lead role in promoting, maintaining and disseminating these classifications.

Recommendation 6: The CSO should work with departments to develop a core set of demographic and socio-economic variables. These could either be independently collected in administrative schemes and surveys or preferably, subject to meeting data protection restrictions, available via a central repository such as the CRS. Spatial information and nationality should be included in this core set.

Recommendation 7: Individual departments should develop a common look and content in the design of their administrative scheme application forms. This will ensure that the core information is collected in an identical manner across all schemes.

Recommendation 8: Departments should give priority to developing the data holdings that have information on persons not living in permanent households, i.e. the homeless and persons living in institutions, as these are outside the coverage of the CSO sample household surveys.

Recommendation 9: All statistics compiled in government departments should adhere to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. In addition, where statistical reports are published from department data holdings, these should be published in a consistent format and adhere to a defined publication timeliness.

Recommendation 10: All departments should be aware of the emerging SDI initiative and take it into account when organising the spatial elements of their data. The ISDI should examine the policy needs for postcodes.

²⁶ Statistical Potential of Administrative Records – report available on www.cso.ie.

Recommendation 11: Departments should increase the level of statistical competency in data processing and analysis among their staff.

Recommendation 12: Departments should ensure that all statistical information of use to policy-making, collected in administrative schemes, is computerised.

Specific recommendations

Although each of these recommendations is specific to an individual department, implementation of them would have cross-cutting benefits in many cases.

Recommendation 13: DES should take measures to develop an integrated individual pupil database covering first, second and third level cycles of education. The PPS Number should be included in the State examination databases.

Recommendation 14: The inclusion of the PPS Number in the Register of Electors should be considered.

Recommendation 15: The computerisation of the GRO should be completed as soon as possible, and the GRO should resume providing CSO with the data required for disseminating detailed statistics on marriages.

Recommendation 16: DHC should review the methodology of the Hospitals Waiting Lists, and in particular the definition of waiting time. The data should be captured at an individual level to allow analyses by age, gender, average waiting time, and other key characteristics. The DHC should examine whether waiting times could be captured in the HIPE system.

Recommendation 17: DJELR should urgently address the statistical quality and access issues identified with the Garda PULSE System.

Recommendation 18: Statistical information relating to the issue of visas should be computerised. This information could give an early indication of future immigration patterns.

Recommendation 19: The DSFA should give priority to addressing the statistical limitations of the CRS, with respect to local area statistics and full coverage, in order to improve its register value for statistical purposes.

Recommendation 20: Revenue should agree a mechanism with DSFA which would enable them to extend the coverage of low income earners in their income tax statistics and to present these statistics according to the key demographic and socio-economic variables.

Recommendation 21: The CSO and Revenue should jointly examine how the P35 records could be used to produce additional employment statistics.

Appendix 6: Enterprise SPAR²⁷ Recommendations

Construction

Recommendation 1: Current information on housing completions, which are derived from ESB connections, should be supplemented by:

(a) Use of the application form for electricity connections to indicate if the property is a first or second/holiday home; and

(b) Monitoring of terminations to identify obsolete dwellings; the potential of information on planning permission applications that involve the demolition of existing housing should also be investigated for this purpose.

Recommendation 2: The group welcomed the use being made of planning information on commencements and completions and recommend that this analysis should be continued.

Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to asking an appropriate question on ownership of second homes at regular intervals in the QNHS or the EU-SILC although this will not capture information on houses owned by persons living outside the State.

Recommendation 4: Potential sources for more detailed house price indices should be examined by the Department of the Environment.

Transport and Travel

Recommendation 5: The establishment of a regular National Travel Survey should be a priority for the CSO.

Recommendation 6: The possibilities for collecting and publishing regular information linking place of residence and place of work should be investigated by the CSO.

Energy

Recommendation 7: CSO and Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) should have discussions with the energy regulator to ensure that data continues to be provided by utilities (generators/suppliers) with an emphasis on its further development, especially in the context of energy balance sheets.

Recommendation 8: Consideration should be given by the CSO to annual surveying of industry and commercial sectors as these data are the basic information source for annual sub-sectoral analyses of energy usage.

Recommendation 9: Energy price series by sector and by type of fuel should be compiled; a special exercise to produce a long run consistent price data series should be undertaken by the CSO.

²⁷ Statistical Potential of Administrative Records – report available on www.cso.ie.

Environment

Recommendation 10: Information on environmental performance and environmental expenditure should be compiled in a time series format and spatially referenced.

Recommendation 11: Detailed data on the operation of wastewater and solid waste plants should be compiled.

Recommendation 12: The CSO should publish an annual regional indicators report using variations in quality of life as a central theme to guide the selection of indicators.

Research & Development and Innovation

Recommendation 13: The EU Innovation and R&D surveys should be jointly conducted by the CSO and Forfás.

Unique business identifier

Recommendation 14: In order to reduce the burden on respondents and to add significant value to data collection, a cross-Departmental group should be established to investigate the introduction of a unique business identifier and registration system.

Access to Business Register

Recommendation 15: The cross-Departmental group dealing with the unique business identifier should also consider the best solution for the ongoing maintenance of a central business register.

Rationalisation of data collection

Recommendation 16: For efficiency and respondent burden reasons, the CSO should examine the issue of shared data collection and get appropriate advice on any legal impediments. A particular issue to be investigated is whether there would be any adverse effect on data quality or response rates.

Recommendation 17: The appropriate business groups should be consulted on the issue of sharing enterprise data.

Geography

Recommendation 18: The postcode system should be sufficiently detailed, flexible, and spatially structured, to meet the needs of Government, business and society for economic, social and environment regional and spatial data.

Appendix 7: Revenue SPAR Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Revenue and the CSO should bilaterally agree on the adoption of a common business identifier.

Recommendation 2: There should be an ongoing review of data transmission mechanisms between the two Offices.

Recommendation 3: The CSO should continue to avail of, and expand the use of, Revenue tax registration data as its main source of business registration information for the Central Business Register.

Recommendation 4: The CSO and Revenue should liaise on the registration of businesses. This might require the adding of a number of questions relating to ownership structure to the TR2 and 11F CRO forms. The capture of such data by Revenue, which is subject to resources and priorities, could obviate the need for the CSO's Business Register Inquiry, so reducing the administrative burden on business. The discussion should also cover how the CBR can avail of updates to the CRS for existing records (in addition to receiving births data).

Recommendation 5: Following the current cooperation on assigning NACE Rev. 2 codes, the two Offices should explore ways in which the CSO and Revenue can work together on assigning and maintaining NACE codes into the future.

Recommendation 6: The CSO should conduct analyses of CT —Extracts From Accounts data to determine their value in imputing missing fields, or for deriving scaling-up factors, in CSO structural survey data. This could allow certain questions to be dropped from these surveys, or make it possible to decrease the sample sizes, thus reducing the administrative burden placed on businesses.

Recommendation 7: The CSO should conduct a more detailed analysis of CT data to determine whether this source can be exploited further in the compilation of the national accounts.

Recommendation 8: The CSO and Revenue should review the list of compulsory reporting fields in the —Accounts Menu, as there may be benefits here in managing the overall administrative burden on respondents.

Recommendation 9: VAT3 —VAT on sales data could be a useful indicator of sales for short-term surveys, and perhaps even for the structural surveys; this should be investigated by the CSO. If Revenue were also to collect —Total Sales on the VAT3 form, such information would be much more relevant for the processing of these surveys; it could allow for a decrease in sample sizes, which would mean a reduction of the response burden on Irish business. It is therefore recommended that the two Offices liaise on the feasibility of doing this.

Recommendation 10: The CSO should investigate how complete RTD turnover (in addition to Corporation Tax turnover) could be utilised in the processing of structural surveys.

Recommendation 11: The CSO should continue with its investigations into using VAT3 and RTD data to provide up-to-date turnover for the Central Business Register, and should discuss with Revenue the frequency with which up-to-date (rolling accounting period) RTD data can be supplied.

Recommendation 12: As Form 11 and Form 1 (Firms) are analogues of Form CT1 (Corporation Tax), the CSO should investigate the use of such data in supporting the processing (through imputation, scaling-up, etc.) of structural surveys.

Recommendation 13: The CSO should use Form 11 and Form 1 (Firms) turnover and employment data in updating non-company enterprise information on the Central Business Register.

Recommendation 14: Form 1 and Form 1 (Firms) —Extracts From Accounts data, once these become available, should be considered for the compilation of the national accounts.

Recommendation 15: The CSO should consider the feasibility of using P35L data for quality checking purposes in the National Employment Survey.

Recommendation 16: The CSO should continue to investigate the potential for processing efficiencies by linking household survey data with P35L and P45 data.

Recommendation 17: The potential use of monthly P30 data should be explored.

Recommendation 18: CSO should proceed with plans to produce monthly series on the number of vehicle registrations and on the value of such registrations (or, alternatively, average price per vehicle), based on Revenue VRT data. It should also be investigated whether a regional breakdown of vehicle purchaser could be produced from the —Owner Particulars fields.

Recommendation 19: The CSO should consider whether RCT35 data could be employed as an indicator of national expenditure in construction or for identifying foreign principal contractors and sub-contractors.

Recommendation 20: The CSO should consider whether IT38 and CA24 data could be utilised for national accounting purposes.

Recommendation 21: The CSO should consider whether the disposals of capital assets data in the CGT data holding can be utilised in the compilation of the national accounts.

Recommendation 22: The CSO should investigate whether ST21 transaction level data can be utilised in a house price index, and also whether such data have value for national accounting purposes.

Recommendation 23: The CSO should consider whether ST21 data can be used to derive estimates on property held by foreign-domiciled persons in Ireland.

Recommendation 24: The CSO should consider the national accounts value which might be extracted from company-level DWT data, and, in particular, whether *gross amount of distribution* could be used in deriving estimates for income from dividends.

Recommendation 25: It is a general recommendation that there be an overall review of the various tax heads from the point of view of drawing greater statistical value from the data which Revenue collect, with a focus on Corporation Tax, VAT, and Income Tax.

