

**12th meeting of the  
Voorburg Group on Services Statistics**

**Copenhagen  
15-19 September 1997**

**Gaps in service sector statistics: Perspective of key users of Irish statistics.**

session 6

by  
Joseph Madden

*Abstract: Not Available*

## Introduction

In Ireland, there has been considerable pressure from many users over a number of years for the further development of statistics relating to the Services sectors of the economy which in 1996 accounted for 62% of total employment. The National Statistics Board has also made it one of its priorities.

The CSO has responded by engaging in statistical development work on a number of fronts:

- continuing its efforts to develop a comprehensive, integrated Business Register to underpin a range of inquiries;
- rotating surveys of the Services sectors with a view to complete coverage over a 3 - year cycle;
- introduction of quarterly stocks/investment inquiries which cover Manufacturing and Construction as well as Services;
- developing a range of new inquiries in Tourism/Transport.

There is however, a perceived need for additional statistics. The requirement for additional statistics on the Service sectors in Ireland has been ascertained through many sources including the surveys of users conducted in 1993 and in 1996/1997. The sources used in this paper are:-

- 1) The 1993 Eurostat survey on user needs for statistics on the Services Sector which was conducted by the CSO.
- 2) The CSO 'Survey of CSO Users', May 1997 which was conducted as part of a consultancy review of the CSO and as input to the Strategic Plan of the National Statistics Board.
- 3) Report of the Task Force on Jobs in Services, December 1993
- 4) Report of the Task Force on Small Business, March 1994.
- 5) Annual report on Small Business in Ireland 1996.
- 6) Consultancy report to the National Statistics Board, May 1997.
- 7) Third report of the Joint Committee on Small Business and Services

## Survey details.

- 1) Survey forms were issued to 132 users in February 1993 and 112 responses were received. The organisations covered in the survey are classified into five categories and the distribution of responses is given below.

Category	Frequency
Government Departments	19
Local Administrations	9
University and Research bodies	9
Trade Associations	21
Other Users	54
<b>All Categories</b>	<b>112</b>

2) Survey forms were issued to 219 organisations at end 1996 and early 1997. Some 151 completed questionnaires were received by 24 April 1997 and the results relate to 130 organisations. The organisations covered in the survey are classified into eight categories and the distribution of responses is given below.

Category	Frequency
Consultants;Market Research	9
Third Level; Research	25
Financial; Stockbrokers	13
Government Departments	19
Media, Political, etc	13
Local Administration	22
Representative bodies	16
State sponsored	34
<b>All Organisations</b>	<b>151</b>

#### **Main findings of the surveys in regard to requirements for additional statistics.**

##### **Survey ( 1 ).**

The analysis of the results yielded :-

- (a) A **requirement** (High, Medium, Low) for the specified Variables by Services sector and broad user category (see appendix 1),
- (b) A **frequency requirement** (High, Medium, Low) for the specified Variables by Services sector and broad user category,
- (a) A **geographical area requirement** (High, Medium, Low) for the specified Variables by Services sector and broad user category.

Other issues covered related to difficulties in supplying data, difficulties in accessing data, confidentiality issues, metadata deficiencies etc.

A problem with the survey was the '**Wish List**' presented which likely resulted in a bias towards the 'High' category.

## Survey ( 2 ).

The **survey (2)** referred to above was much more recent and more comprehensive and covered many topics among which were ‘**Change in requirements** for statistics’ and ‘**Shortcomings** of existing statistics’. Other topics covered included the **Use** of CSO products, **Dissemination** methods, **Satisfaction** with CSO, **Data availability**, **Timeliness**, **Accuracy**, **Formats** of presentation, **Cost** of products, **Data supplied** to the CSO, **Response Burden** issues etc.

Since respondents to this survey were invited to submit a ‘**zero cost**’ **wish list** of proposals, a fairly extensive list of requirements resulted. I have listed some of the requirements below- some of which are very general and others more specific. I have also referred to some other relevant issues.

### **Specific requirements for Service Sector data.**

Up to date Census of Services.

More statistics on **Investment** and specifically indigenous Investment.

More statistics on **Employment** trends in the Services Sectors.  
More statistics on Employment in Tourism.

More statistics on **Earnings** in Services Sectors..

**Price** deflators for Services Sectors.

More information on **SME’s** -  
More information on owner-managed SME’s.

Additional cross-tabulations of **Visitor** statistics.

More details on **Part-time** employees.

More information on the nature and value of **property sales**.

### **General requirements for Services Sector data.**

More statistics on the **Service Sectors**.  
More information on the non-traded sectors.

More statistics on the **Transport Sector**.  
More statistics on private bus operators.

More statistics on the **Tourism Sector**.  
Provide a separate classification for Tourism within Services.

More Statistics on the **Multinational** sector ( employment, inward flows,)

More comprehensive data on the **Software** sector.

Need for more information on the **Financial sector**.

More detailed sectoral breakdown of services from the **National Accounts** (eg, non-market, health, education)

Need for a **Regional breakdown** of results was variously expressed. (County detail, City detail, Local area data etc)

**Timeliness**:- the more timely availability of results was variously requested.  
(One respondent suggested we sacrifice some quality for timeliness.)

Comparable **EU and USA** data.

Competition-specific information, such as Product **Market Shares**.

More **forecasting**: use time series/econometric methods.

#### **Increased use of modern technology.**

Suggestions here included the increased use of **EDI** for both receipt and dissemination of data.

Allow users to **access**\*data bases containing survey results- in particular to institutional users for their analysis.

Development of some type of National **Data Bank** to promote products and to make more information available for use by researchers and interest groups.

Statistics, including historical statistics, should be made available on **CD-ROM and on the Internet**.

More use of **E-Mail** (Send automatic E-Mail to all customers).

#### **\*Constraints.**

The principal constraint in allowing researchers direct access to CSO microdata bases is the statutory obligation to preserve the identity of the data suppliers. The confidentiality of data provided by survey respondents was guaranteed by the Statistics Act 1926 and further reinforced by the Statistics Act 1993 which came in operation in November 1994.

#### **Observation.**

Some users did not appear to be fully aware of all existing data and some expressed a need for more information on **data availability** from all sources including the CSO and Eurostat.

### **Response Burden issues.**

Some of the requirements outlined above would of necessity **increase the burden of form filling** on business and in particular on SME's.

The CSO is very conscious of the burden of statistical inquiries on business in general and on small enterprises in particular. Its policy is to limit the detail requested to what is absolutely necessary and to survey only the number of firms necessary to ensure sufficiently accurate and representative results.

The bulk of CSO inquiries are conducted on a sample basis and all firms in particular sectors are surveyed only in limited circumstances. The **information needs** of policy makers and of businesses themselves must be **balanced** against the **burden** which these inquiries place on business.

In Ireland, there is increasing pressure from Trade Associations to reduce the burden of form filling on business and in particular on SME's. In addition, various interdepartmental and other groups exist which are concerned with issues affecting business including statistical issues and response burden issues. In this regard, the reports ( 3) to ( 7) listed as source documents at the beginning of this paper include the following statements which are pertinent.

#### **Report ( 3 ) :-**

'The administrative burden of compliance procedures should be examined with a view to reducing it',

#### **Report ( 4 ) :-**

'Introduce new size thresholds for administrative requirements, or raise existing ones', 'Reduce the frequency with which forms have to be submitted', 'Consolidate a number of forms into one', 'Simplify forms for small businesses'.

#### **Report ( 5 ) :-**

'The Task Force found that the core regulatory and administrative requirements represented a real burden for small business usurping scarce time and financial resources which could be better spent developing the business', 'The burden imposed by the CSO in statistics gathering was also highlighted by the group'.

#### **Report ( 6 ) :-**

Recommended a new 'Process Based' management system which would help improve customer service in many ways including - minimising the response burden, avoiding duplicate questions etc.

#### **Report ( 7 ) :-**

'The Joint Committee recommends the setting up of an Interdepartmental Deregulation Group for the simplification of business formalities'.

J. Madden.

Sept 1997.