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**Peer review on the implementation  
of the  
European Statistics Code of Practice**

**Central Statistics Office, IRELAND**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Central Statistics Office in Ireland (referred to as CSO in this report) was established in 1949 as a separate Office attached to the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in order to assure its independence on statistical matters. The Statistics Acts, 1926 and 1946 provided the statutory basis for the compilation of statistics up to 1994. The Statistics Act, 1993 (Number 21 of 1993) provides the modern legislative basis for the compilation and dissemination of official statistics in Ireland.

The peer review team gained the impression that the CSO has become a highly respected institution amongst public administration organisations and its statistical and operational achievements seem to be acknowledged throughout the country, by government, the media and by users.

The legal framework of the Statistics Act and the presentation by the CSO of its practices and procedures convinced the peer review team that the CSO is guided by the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice. CSO is 'fully' compliant with a large majority of indicators in principles 1-6 and 15 (those assessed in the current peer review). In some other cases the indicators of the Code are largely or partly met, in particular in the field of quality assurance. Whilst the current quality of the statistical products as well as the quality of staff is recognised as very good, the quality assurance of operational procedures is only in the process of being implemented.

The Statistics Act is considered to be a fundamental asset in respect of several aspects of the Code of Practice. In addition, in terms of governance, it established statutorily the National Statistics Board (NSB), which has been operating since 1986. The Board is a strategic advisory body and it is a link to wider institutional connections for CSO.

The statistical system of Ireland is highly centralised, as the Central Statistics Office accounts for the vast majority of official statistics. The current CSO strategic plan is guided by the NSB strategy for statistics 2003-2008 report. This strategy focuses on developing a "whole system" approach to statistics in order to meet the information and data requirements for evidence based policy making. It lays stress on the requirement for the CSO to play a strong central co-ordinating role in providing guidance for the entire public system on professional statistical matters. It also advocates that the CSO become more involved in the use of administrative data as a complementary source of official statistics. CSO is in the process of developing and co-ordinating this strategy where it has already arrangements in place in a number of areas such as Tax administration data and more recently crime registration information by the Police.

The meetings of the review were well organised and we had the opportunity to meet all relevant persons. In only one case, due to external factors only one representative of respondents attended a particular session despite prior agreement of further participants with the CSO.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.

During December 2005 / January 2006 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and to help build trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

### 3. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

#### **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.*

Overall assessment: The independence of CSO Ireland is strongly supported by the provisions of the Statistics Act, Nr. 21. of 1993 (<http://www.cso.ie/aboutus/statsact1993.htm>). This can be considered as a modern example of a supporting legal basis for statistics in Ireland. The independence of the Director General is specifically determined in the Act, although the conditions of his appointment are not directly regulated there, but within the framework of the “Top Level Appointment Committee” (TLAC) process, that which is generally used for the most senior positions in the Irish public administration. The Director General is the only top level civil servant in Ireland who is appointed directly by the President. The functions of the Central Statistics Office are clearly set out in the Act. The National Statistics Board (<http://www.nsb.ie/>), as a strategic advisory body, is responsible for establishing the strategic priorities for the compilation and development of official statistics, and assessing the resources of staff, equipment and finance which are required for the compilation of official statistics.

*Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The independence of CSO is guaranteed by Article 13 of the Statistics Act which defines the independence of the Director General by allocating to him the sole responsibility for professional decisions relating to methods, data collection and to the timing and content of dissemination. Public confidence in the CSO and its functions seem to be extremely high and as a result the professional independence of the CSO has never been called into question by stakeholders inside or outside the organisation. One indication of the level of public confidence may be the very high response rate in the case of well established household surveys, which never decreased.

*Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/She should be of the highest professional calibre.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Director General is appointed by the President of Ireland on the nomination of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). His ranking is equal to the position of a Secretary General of a department of state (Ministry). The conditions and time frame of the appointment are not regulated in the Statistics Act, but in the so called “Top Level Appointment Committee” (TLAC) process, which establishes the procedures and conditions for the recruitment and appointment of the most senior civil servants in the Irish Civil Service. The Director General is always appointed following a competitive process, as part of the TLAC procedure. The Statistics Act

(Section 14) emphasises the right of the Director General to consult the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) directly concerning any matters affecting the Office or relating to official statistics.

*Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: During the interviews it was made clear to us, that due to the complete public confidence and the sound legal framework on statistics, the professional independence of the Director General is never questioned. The political system does not interfere with the CSO and its outputs and never tries to influence the content or timing of the figures published by the Office.

*Indicator 1.4: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Director General is a civil servant of the state. His responsibility and independence are granted by Section 13 of the Statistics Act. This gives him sole responsibility for and independence in the exercise of the functions of deciding the statistical methodology and professional statistical standards, the content of statistical releases and publications issued and the timing and methods of dissemination of statistics compiled by the Office. The team found no example of any case, where integrity of methods has been called into question. There is no political or other outside influence apparent on release dates either, as these are always scheduled three months in advance, and made available on the CSO website ([http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/release\\_calendar.htm](http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/release_calendar.htm)). There was no evidence that CSO had ever changed a release date as a result of any external influence.

*Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Every public administration organisation in Ireland has to create a statement of strategy. The CSO Statement of Strategy is considered to be the work programme of the Office. This document is rooted in the 6 year Strategy of the National Statistics Board, which establishes the overall strategic direction for the development of statistics in Ireland. The NSB Strategy ([http://www.nsb.ie/pdf\\_docs/StrategyforStatistics2003-2008.pdf](http://www.nsb.ie/pdf_docs/StrategyforStatistics2003-2008.pdf)) and the CSO Strategy Statement are both available in printed and electronic format as well (<http://www.cso.ie/aboutus/csostrategy.htm>). The progress is monitored in several ways. The CSO publishes its Progress Report on the strategy every year, and the CSO's strategy and progress are also validated by an external body, called the Civil Service Performance Verification Group (CSPVG), involving social partners. The objective of this procedure is to determine whether government departments and agencies have met their performance targets as set out in their Statements of Strategy. The NSB publishes every year a progress report on

the implementation of its Strategy statement (currently Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008), which monitor the working plan of CSO.

*Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The interviews made it clear the CSO publications and press briefings present the statistics in an impartial and objective basis and do not contain any commentary that could be viewed as political. Both users and the media clearly identify the distinction between CSO statistical releases and political comments. The review team could see an example of this clear separation in a newspaper the day of the dissemination of crime statistics for the second time (which took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January).

*Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Due to the previously mentioned facts, CSO Ireland is in the position where media criticism and public perception is not a problematic issue for them. One example of the good relationship between CSO and the media are official press briefings/conferences, where the statisticians of CSO, in addition to presenting the latest available results, will also give detailed background information on methods, processes and where necessary an explanation of changes in methodology. In some cases they have reported 30-40 different participants at such events.

## **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.*

Overall assessment: The Statistics Act provides CSO with a clear and broad mandate for the collection of data. The Act gives the CSO the right of access to administrative data. In cases where any difficulty might arise, the National Statistics Board can arbitrate, subject to the final decision of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), 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. There has been no case to date where the NSB has had to intervene. Considerable effort has been made by the CSO to further develop the statistical potential of administrative records (known as "SPAR"). It is nationally recognised that the CSO is the Government Agency responsible for compiling Irish official statistics and it is generally accepted that it performs this function in an objective, professional and independent manner (and that it protects the confidentiality of the information that is provided to it.). The Office is also authorised by law to co-ordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities to ensure, in particular, adherence to statistical standards and the use of appropriate classifications. CSO may make arrangements with other public authorities and persons for the collection, compilation, extraction or dissemination of information for statistical purposes.

*Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act defines the legal mandate of the CSO to collect data, to coordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities and to assess the statistical potential of the administrative records. Section 23 gives the Director General the authority to collect data and to specify the date or period within which the required information should be returned to the CSO.

*Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Section 10(3) of Statistics Act states that the Office has 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. Part IV of the act deals with the possible use of administrative records in detail. One of the principal developments arising from the National Statistics Board Strategy 2003-2008 are two project reports on SPAR (Statistical Potential of Administrative Records) with a view to the further integration of administrative data. There are recent achievements in the field of crime statistics where CSO took over responsibility from the Department of Justice, with assured access to the microdata to ensure publication and analysis.

*Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act contains a sound regulation on the obligations of respondents, while Part VI defines a wide list of cases of offence and penalties. The generally positive public opinion gives the advantage of high response rates for the CSO. In very rare cases CSO successfully used its option to start a legal procedure against some important data provider companies and against some individuals to compel response. This has resulted in an improvement in response rates. These cases are not significant but have a positive side effect on the behaviour of other respondents.

### **Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources**

*The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.*

Overall assessment: The CSO seems to have obtained the resources (both human and financial) that it needs to effectively carry out its current work. The need for improved and expanded statistical information has received support and a real expansion of resources over recent years from all parts of government, in particular from the Taoiseach's (Prime Minister's) Office in support of the "evidence based policy" approach that it has pursued.



There is a certain concern that the continuous development in demand might outstrip the ability of the CSO to meet the needs in the future. Certainly there are a number of areas that have been cited in the interviews where there is a perceived deficit of statistical data, not only by CSO staff but also the external users. The approach towards including new areas in statistics seems to be handled with a reasonable care, though a number of users would expect a more flexible expansion motivated by a rapidly changing Irish economy.

There is also a problem of acquiring specialised skilled staff with the particular competencies that CSO needs (IT experts), despite the fact that it has broadened its recruitment base from academic statisticians to encompass other relevant skills (e.g. economists, social scientists, etc.). This not only affects the CSO but also the other government departments that might like to use the CSO “skills base” to acquire statistical expertise for their own purposes.

*Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Whilst adequate for current purposes, there exists a perceived risk that this may not be sufficient to sustain the rapid increase in demand for statistical data, specially in a context of rapid changes in the Irish economy. A potential future issue is the requirement by the CSO to have the freedom and flexibility to adjust its staff profile to ensure the correct mix of staff with appropriate skills.

*Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.*

For European level reply

*Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.*

For European level reply

*Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.*

For European level reply

#### **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.*

Overall assessment: The quality of CSO statistics has not been called into question. CSO is generally very committed to quality aspects. The Office has put into place a number of instruments and procedures to cover quality issues. This includes a developing set of guidelines and quality reviews of products. These are fairly recent and clearly further development of more formalised quality procedures are currently in hand. The new organisation structure (January 2007) includes the creation of a « quality assurance/audit,

statistical methodology and development division », which should foster the implementation of processes.

*Indicator 4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.*

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Products are monitored but not according to any “regular” schedule. CSO applies national standards and procedures on quality. However, this monitoring does not as yet cover all aspects of the ESS quality components.

*Indicator 4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.*

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: Whilst certain quality monitoring processes are in place they do not systematically cover all processes in the chain. Process descriptions seem to be generally available across the CSO and documentation appears to be in place, but it is not standardised, is of variable “detail” and does not necessarily provide a framework for quality monitoring. An example of a checklist to ensure the quality of publications was presented to the team.

*Indicator 4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments : A corporate planning system (Statement of strategy) exists since 1994. It is reflected into the Divisional Action Plan (DAP), itself reflected in Local Business Plan. Key performance indicators and timeliness for all releases and publications are monitored. In addition the CSO establishes « expenditure reviews » of key statistical domains covering Macroeconomic (1999-2000), Social (2003-2004) and Business Statistics (presently at the final stage). These expenditure reviews are required by Government across the public sector. In the CSO they examine relevance, timeliness and accessibility of the statistical outputs. They comment on the economy and efficiency of the implementation of the programme. The report presents resource allocations (staff and euros) and deal with alternative approaches and possible trade-off between lower cost methods and quality of outputs. A timeless monitor is annexed. The latest review report is on the web site : « the Expenditure Review on Social and Demographic Statistics Directorate ». NSB user surveys were conducted in 2002 and 2006 with questions on quality. They also provided inputs into the corporate planning, in addition to the NSB Statement of strategy.

For new work the quality aspects form part of the project initiation process. A “Project Management Guidance” has been implemented since the beginning of 2003, standard project management documentation (“Lotus notes”) exists to cover this aspect (notably “trade-offs”).

*Indicator 4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.*

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: A first document on quality standards and guidelines exists and further documents are being developed. Staff have received some formal presentation/training courses on quality issues, but this does not appear to have been particularly intense or detailed.

*Indicator 4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.*

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: At present, external reviews are not systematically undertaken although some ad-hoc external consultations appear to be available for specific outputs with main users. These liaison group meetings and extensive consultations with key users have good effects on quality aspects but the area needs further improvement.

### **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.*

Overall assessment:

The confidentiality of the individual information relating to persons and undertakings collected by the CSO is protected under the Statistics Act in Section 21 and Part V entirely. Information relating to people or businesses may only be used for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed to any other agency. A specific Code of Practice guides staff in respecting these provisions. The CSO holds “anonymised” micro-data file from the Census of Population, the Household Budget Survey and the Quarterly National Household Survey with the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA). In May 2005 the CSO published a Data Protocol describing its approach to data linking (<http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/CSODataProtocol.htm>). The CSO also facilitates research based on business microdata, by enabling access for researchers under strict conditions determined by the Statistics Act.

*Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act guarantees statistical confidentiality in Section 21 and Part V. entirely. There seems to be a complete trust on confidentiality, both from the respondents and the users. No complaint has been registered concerning disclosure of confidential information. This guarantee is widely publicized, especially in different documents posted on the web site.

*Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: Confidentiality commitments are signed by staff upon appointment in a format specified in Section 21 of the Statistics Act. During the discussion with them, all the junior staff confirmed this, and were very aware of the importance of the topic.

*Indicator 5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act (Sections 38,42 and 44) sets out a penalty up to 20 thousand Irish Pounds (€25,394) for any breach of statistical confidentiality and outlines the requirement to protect documents of a confidential nature. No case of such a breach could be found.

*Indicator 5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The CSO code of practice on confidentiality is outlined on the CSO website for the information of all stakeholders. Statisticians get training on the subject of confidentiality. Statisticians are continuously improving their methods and software to ensure the protection of confidential data and to guard against the inadvertent disclosure of such information in statistical publications. Questionnaires specifically state the CSO commitment to the confidentiality of data provided by respondents.

*Indicator 5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: All workstations are locked down (external ports are disabled centrally) so that they can only connect to the CSO network. Access to specific databases is restricted to those who need access to the file for business purposes. The CSO employs the latest available security technologies to protect the security and integrity of its computer systems.

*Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Act (Section 34) describes the way by which anonymised microdata may be provided to researchers under strict rules and guidelines. Anonymised household survey data is made available via the Irish Social Science Data Archive ([www.issda.ie](http://www.issda.ie)). For statistical research based on business data, external researchers are appointed Officers of Statistics under Section 20 of the Statistics Act and are bound by the principles of the Statistics

Act.. The protocol for this procedure is very clear. External researchers are obliged to work on data within the CSO premises under strictly defined conditions.

### **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.*

Overall assessment:

The general impression is that CSO is very transparent. Methodological documents are published on the website, although not in complete detail nor covering all domains. The different classes of users we met were completely satisfied with the background notes in the releases. A lot of important corporate documents, posted on the website, inform on procedures, resources, expenditures. The Data protocol (about data matching activity and confidentiality) and the pre-release practice publications are specially relevant concerning dissemination.

*Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments:

Section 13 of the Statistics Act establishes the independence of the Director General on statistical matters:

“The Director General shall have the sole responsibility for and be independent in the exercise of the functions of deciding

- (a) the statistical methodology and professional statistical standards used by the Office;
- (b) the content of statistical releases and publications issued by the Office; and
- (c) the timing and methods of dissemination of statistics compiled by the Office”.

The Strategy Statement of the CSO takes into account the Strategy for Statistics by the NSB. Both are published and have progress reports, posted on their respective website

*Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: CSO has complete autonomy on methods and practices on its own work. For administrative data coming from other departments there is a list on the website on all data matching operations and CSO is progressively reviewing administrative data holdings with a view to enhancing their statistical usability. Junior staff referred to well established and documented methodology which they would not change on their own initiative, without prior validation from senior management.

*Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The new guidelines (Vol 1 ) on Quality in Statistics instructs CSO staff to « describe the main reasons why particular statistics are subject to revision ». Another part of this guide lists the different potential sources of error, which have to be checked and evaluated. Notifying the supervisor is necessarily met when the Statistician has to get the approval of his Senior Statistician (Head of Division) and in many cases the Director with all releases and publications. Such cases seem to be quite rare and of little impact according to CSO and to all the users we met. We were given an example showing the technical details of the way errors were handled. From the users' point of view there was no suspicion it could be for any reason other than technical.

*Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.*

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Background notes are put into statistical releases and they seemed to be completely sufficient to the general users. From the contact name listed on statistical releases, other specialists can easily get more information. Some methodological information are made public but in general not the most detailed version. For significant or complex methodological changes specific briefings are organised with the media and primary users (e.g. chain linking and FISIM in National Accounts). More generally, CSO organizes a lot of consultations through liaisons groups, especially on methodological and dissemination topics. There could be more numerous consultations on the preparation of surveys. Following the recent change of responsibility in disseminating Crime statistics, the team could not find any announcement of this on the statistical release. A press release accompanied the first statistical release three months ago, but nothing was written in the permanent background note.

*Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre -announced.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: A release calendar is put on the website and is well known by the users. On occasion changes to release dates may occur, but they are clearly announced and there is no suspicion that it could be for other reasons than technical. The calendar is not modified taking into account any external events.

*Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments:

The CSO subscribes very strongly to the principle of equal access to data. The official release time for all users is 11 am on the day of release. The pre-release practice

([http://www.cso.ie/aboutus/pre\\_release\\_practice.htm](http://www.cso.ie/aboutus/pre_release_practice.htm)) varies between 1 day to 1 hour prior to official release. We can read on the web-site:

« The CSO gives short advance notice of the results of fourteen statistical releases to a limited number of Government Departments and Agencies.(...°).

The pre-release practice for business and economic statistics is publicised in the CSO Guide to Publications and Information Services (2004) (PDF 388KB) where it states: 'Some short-term indicators are provided to senior policy officials under embargo conditions one hour prior to their public release'.

In respect of National Accounts, the final results are provided to relevant Government Departments one day in advance of the official release time. This is a reduction on the period presently published in the IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standards (links to IMF International Monetary Fund website).

In the case of social and demographic statistics, where a release is the subject of a CSO press briefing at 10.30 am on the morning of release, it is now usual to provide a restricted briefing to Officials in relevant Government Departments commencing at 8.30 am. This is for the purpose of preparing Ministerial briefings and in some cases, policy press statements that may be issued independently by the Government Information Service shortly after the official release time of 11.00 am. »

Leaks in Ireland are almost unknown. The only case the team was made aware of was an inquiry over 20 years ago concerning an alleged leak relating to CPI. It appears it came from a source outside the CSO.

**Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.**

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: There was a general consensus on the image of independence of CSO (see principle 1). Journalists do not seem to attempt to get comments beyond the statistical analysis. Statisticians get training when participating in press conferences and writing statistical reports and press releases. For regular publications there is an established format which does not change. Validation of releases/publications prior to release is made at different levels, usually at least up to the Director level.

### **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.**

Overall assessment: The view of CSO products and services was generally very good. The "Customer services plan" on the web site is a customer charter setting the commitments to quality customer service. The web site was particularly cited as being user friendly and clear. The publication of the names of the responsible official in the CSO is very much appreciated, because it gives the ability to contact directly a statistician to get further information if needed. A review of the dissemination strategy (covering all products) is underway to rebalance the paper and electronic media and to introduce more graphically rich presentation. Care should



perhaps be taken not to undermine an existing well-perceived service. Further developments are required on metadata.

*Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The current paper publications were well regarded, however their format presented a very “table” driven framework whereas most users seem to use the web-site to download the data. It was felt that a more graphically rich format presentation could be considered in the current assessment process such as to encourage more interest from a non-specialist clientele (especially for time series).

*Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The “Guide to CSO publications and information services” presents the different dissemination products (including postal delivery). CSO provides access to a comprehensive database of statistics in a user friendly manner via its website. Users can search, navigate and build their own data tables prior to viewing on screen, graphing or downloading in a format of their choice. Users can also subscribe to receive notifications of updates to the database via RSS feeds. CSO is a member of the PC-Axis Reference Group, a community of NSI's and other organisations focussed on developing and sharing tools and methodologies with respect to data dissemination. CSO has a well presented web-site which received universal approval (quoted as second best in the Irish public service by some!). Hopefully the current review will build on this strength.

*Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The “Guide to CSO publications and information services” on web site informs of the possibility (which is very wide ) of custom-designed analyses: “the specialist requirements of some users may (...) not be met by the published releases and reports. To meet these requirements the CSO provides on a fee basis special series and analyses to individual users tailored to their particular needs. Arrangements also exist whereby the CSO will run computer programs written by specialist users on its computer data files in a manner which preserves the confidentiality of the individual records”. Users requests for customised statistical products were provided very effectively and for the most part free of charge. Such customised analyses sometimes lead to some additional details in the regular publications. In other cases they are not made public because they are not considered of sufficient general interest.

*Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.*

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: There were some echoes (notably from academia!) that the confidentiality constraints were a bit overdone, in particular for business data. There seemed to be some



acceptance by outsiders that a higher level of disclosure risk would be acceptable in the interests of more complete information. Ultimately this responsibility however lies with the CSO.

*Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.*

Assessment: Partly met

Comments: Whilst not particularly criticised by external stakeholders, there was a general feeling from CSO staff at all levels that metadata needed to be standardised and improved.

*Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.*

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: CSO undertook regular briefings for the press (and other users) on methodological and other changes that could affect the understanding of the statistics being produced, and these were roundly appreciated and valued. However, as CSO does not use the ESS Quality framework but its own national governmental one, it was not possible for these to integrally respect all dimensions of the ESS Quality Criteria. Quality marks on the official statistics of other agencies will be a feature of the future web portal being developed by the CSO.

#### **4. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE**

The Irish national statistical system is highly centralised. The CSO produces the vast majority of Ireland's official statistics relating to the economic and social life in the State. Statistics such as those relating to education, health, housing and energy are compiled by other Government Departments or Agencies. Balance of payment statistics are produced by the CSO, the data source is a survey and not bank declarations. Recently the responsibility for the compilation of crime statistics has been transferred to the CSO.

The NSB 2003-2008 strategy is seeking to develop a "whole-system approach" to the collection and dissemination of statistics. The NSB progress report (published in October 2006) on the implementation of this strategy acknowledges the progress which has already been accomplished by CSO, pointing out especially the importance of the two CSO's SPAR reports<sup>1</sup> and listing the CSO participation in Public Sector Committees. This participation aims to check the gaps of information and to work in a co-operative way on data access.

The Statistical law gives a wide mandate to CSO to both co-ordinate the statistical units inside other Departments as well as to use their data. Yet, the general approach towards other Government Departments has been until now, largely an informal one, based primarily upon voluntary actions. However, the potential value of these actions can clearly be seen if one refers to the CSO access to administrative tax data.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Social" SPAR and the "Enterprise" SPAR. SPAR : Statistical Potential of Administrative records

The Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland is also conducting statistical work and various co-operative arrangements exist to get progressively more data from this Authority. However, once again, no official agreement as yet underpins these exchanges.

The current statistical units inside the Government Departments are of a small size (from one to ten people) and they are not considered as statistical officers (i.e. they are not acting under the provisions of the Statistical Law). CSO is pursuing a strategy to promote the level of statistical competence across those Departments: some statisticians from CSO are already seconded to some of these de-centralised units. CSO pays great attention to the profile of such seconded staff, especially with respect to their ability to maintain good contacts with the non-statistical staff of the Department, to better be able to report on their needs for information. CSO is already providing these units with advice on classifications, coding system and dissemination methods.

The CSO is developing a web portal that will contain links to all official statistics including those produced by public bodies other than the CSO, once these have been validated. The calendar foreseen for the availability of this portal is January 2008. The documentation on the portal will include structured metadata describing the statistics and at a later stage, this metadata will also include quality measures.

## **5. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED**

### **Legislative background**

The Statistics Act, being from 1993 is quite recent and was thus able to take into account the evolution of practices in the recent years. It could be used as a model by other countries.

The Act defines the institutional structure of the CSO, the National Statistical Board and the conditions for the appointment of Director General, as well as the status of Officers of Statistics, also ensuring independence and statistical confidentiality. The Act also defines the CSO mandate for collection of information. This mandate is very wide and includes the use of records of other public authorities for statistical purpose (free of charge). The use of non-identifiable data for statistical purpose is also covered under the Act such as to avoid any conflicts with the National Data Protection provisions. It is subject to the conditions and restrictions that the Director General may provide. Offences and penalties are described (comment: it was remarked that unfortunately penalties are specified in fixed amounts and tend to be considered too light in current circumstances in respect of multinational enterprises which do not respond).

**Transparency and accountability through a lot of important corporate documents, posted on the website**

The following documents are on the CSO website ([www.cso.ie/releasespublications/corporate\\_publications.htm](http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/corporate_publications.htm)) :

**Statements of Strategy**

- › [Statement of Strategy 2004 - 2006](#)
- › [Statement of Strategy 2004 - 2006 Progress Report 2004](#)
- › [Statement of Strategy 2004 - 2006 Progress Report 2005](#)

**Customer Service Publications**

- › [CSO Customer Service Action Plan 2004 - 2006](#)
- › [CSO Customer Service Plan 2001 - 2003](#)
- › [CSO Guide to Publications and Information Services](#)

**Human Resources Strategy**

- › [Human Resources Strategy 2004 - 2006](#)

**Other Corporate Publications**

- › [Statistical Potential of Business and Environment Enterprise Data Holdings in Selected Government Departments - Working Report](#)
- › [CSO Data Protocol](#)
- › [Statistical Potential of Administrative Records - Working Report](#)
- › [Expenditure Review Report - Social and Demographic Statistics Directorate](#)
- › [National Statistics Board Policy Needs for Statistical Data on Enterprises](#)

The National Statistical Board has also a clear website ([www.nsb.ie/pub\\_documents.htm](http://www.nsb.ie/pub_documents.htm)) disseminating strategy documents and progress reports over a period of years.

**User-friendly policy**

The website as well as the possibility to contact easily statisticians is highly appreciated by all kind of users including journalists. In particular, a contact name and telephone number are given on each statistical release.

The peer review team could verify that this practice was very effective in Ireland and decided to highlight it as a good practice, although its generalisation may not be appropriate in every country.

**6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM**

**The co-ordination role**

The informal contacts used up to now towards the Government departments gave significant results in the framework of the “whole system” approach. The peer review team recommends that long-standing links should now move towards more formal agreements so as to sustain the process and enhance the quality of statistics. For those government departments or public agencies which will be producers of official statistics (i.e. under the future web portal of CSO), the compliance to the code of practice should be mentioned in the agreement. In addition, the CSO could offer broader access to its training program to these producer units.

### **The use of administrative data**

The use of administrative data will probably extend considerably due to the future use of a common business identifier and a PPS personal identification number for persons, which is part of the 2003-2008 strategy for statistics recommended by the NSB.

CSO already uses Tax administration data, but a complete integration depends upon the existence of a unique business identifier. More generally, for a larger and better use of administrative sources, the team recommends CSO to discuss well in advance with those administrations and agencies the conditions of the introduction of those identifiers in their own records. The team recommends also having a specific detailed plan for the implementation of these registers in CSO.

Accuracy and reliability of statistics issued from administrative data have to be particularly checked before inclusion under the future web portal. CSO has recently published crime statistics using Garda (Police) registrations and it is in the process of conducting a survey on victimisation. CSO intends to check the coherence between the two (April 2007). This will be a good approach to check the quality of this administrative source for statistical purpose and if necessary provide advice to the collecting administration to enhance an unbiased registration process. The team recommends going right through to the completion of this process.

### **Accessibility and clarity**

All classes of users met by the peer review team were perfectly satisfied with CSO dissemination products. However, the peer review team would nevertheless recommend including more graphical presentations relating to the figures, to enhance their readability and accessibility to a wider public. A task force inside CSO is presently working to improve the content of publications and could take this recommendation into account.

### **Quality**

The quality of CSO outputs was not questioned, however the quality assurance approach is quite new inside CSO and a great deal of attention is given to this topic. A new organisation structure (January 2007) was presented to the team, including the creation of a « quality assurance/audit, statistical methodology and development division, Statistical Support and Innovation Directorate». The team recommends implementing a more comprehensive communication and training programme to support this policy among the staff whilst accepting that quality assurance should not be reduced to tick boxes in check lists.

## 7. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

<p><b>note :</b>          Although the review team found some principles were fully met, some improvement actions are nevertheless included in the list for those principles.</p> <p>-some of these actions aimed at ensuring that there is no erosion on the high levels of compliance evident for these principles,          -some actions are related to the future responsibility of CSO to assess the compliance with the ESS Code of Practice for other producers as their products will be accessible via the official statistics portal,          -finally, some are targeted towards future developments in CSO statistics.</p>
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Principle 1: Professional Independence Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop formal agreements with the other producers whose statistics are to be disseminated under the CSO web portal. These agreements must refer to the CoP.	before the inclusion in the web portal (see principle 15)
Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop formal agreements for all exchange of administrative data, with regard to data quality and delivery reliability (related also to principle 12 and 13).	Ongoing
Develop the adoption of a common business identifier in the administrative data: -establishment of interdepartmental committee to examine the feasibility of the introduction of a unique business identifier and associated central business register.	To report by the end of 2007.
Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop a strategic plan for future capacity building to meet new demands in the medium term within the NSB strategic plan. This endeavour shall be reflected in the CSO strategy 2007-2009.	2007

Principle 4: Quality commitment Improvement actions	Timetable
Continue the development of the quality approach formalisation in CSO according to the ESS quality components; in particular: - Publish Volume 2 of Quality Standards and Guidelines – Non-Statistical Office Functions & Processes. -Publish Volume 3 of Quality Standards and Guidelines – Further Statistical Functions & Processes. -Implement a communication and training programme specifically supporting the quality requirement.	2007 2008 2007
Involve external experts to critically review the main statistical outputs of the Office : -Discussion of a plan -Implementation	2007 2007-2012
Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality Improvement actions	Timetable
Conduct an Internal audit of confidentiality in the CSO – office wide audit of compliance with respect to statistical confidentiality.	December 2007
Further develop technical systems to ensure against the inadvertent disclosure of confidential data.	2007/2008
Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity Improvement actions	Timetable
Complete the background note of the crime statistics release.	As soon as possible.
Ensure that administrative records are unbiased and can be used for quality statistical purposes.	April 2007 for the check on crime statistics
Have formal agreements with the other producers whose statistics are to be disseminated under the CSO web portal. These agreements must refer to the CoP (also principle 1).	Before the inclusion in the web portal
Principle 7: Sound Methodology Improvement actions	Timetable
Complete the Business Register Quality Improvement Project.	2008
Enhance the Statistical Methods and Development capabilities of the Office by :	2008
- establishing a dedicated Directorate to co-ordinate Statistical Support activities, including Statistical Methods and Development Division	2007
- Set up new internal structured training programme on specified statistical processing topics.	2008

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures Improvement actions	Timetable
Continue to develop the statistical potential of administrative records based on the SPAR project , which should be extended to cover other areas of potential co-operation.	Ongoing
Increase the use of electronic data capture.	Ongoing
Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents Improvement actions	Timetable
Influence a reduction in EU/ECB data requirements.	Ongoing
Investigate the potential of a unique business reference number to streamline sample selection and minimise respondent burden.	2007
Introduce XBRL, which should also reduce respondent burden.	Ongoing
Continue to co-ordinate statistical data collection by CSO and other agencies.	Ongoing
Make greater use of administrative data for statistical purposes.	Ongoing
Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness Improvement actions	Timetable
Complete the Statistical Potential of Administrative Records (SPAR) project in Social and Business Statistics.	Ongoing
Develop electronic response systems including XBRL.	Ongoing
Continue to improve the database dissemination : - Small Area Population Statistics (SAPs) to be made available on-line - Re-design statistical release processes to give more interactive on-line access when the new data dissemination strategy is in place	Ongoing 2007/2008 2008
Principle 11: Relevance Improvement actions	Timetable
Follow the recommendation of priorities established by the NSB (progress report 2005 and 2006) to the implementation of Strategy for statistics.	Ongoing

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability Improvement actions	Timetable
Continue the existing policy of encouraging Government Departments to fund the placement of CSO professional staff in its operations.	Gradual as Departmental willingness and budgets permit
Ensure the quality of new administrative sources and advice to improve the quality of administrative records for the use of CSO.	Ongoing
Develop revision analyses and use them to inform statistical processes, commencing with National Accounts.	2008
Deliver Quality marks on the web portal as a result of the validation process (also related to principle 15).	2008
Progress on the quality of construction statistics : -CSO to publish its new quarterly survey on construction -CSO to implement the SPAR recommendations on construction	2007/2008

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality Improvement actions	Timetable
Develop formal agreements for all exchanges of administrative data to secure the process (also related to principle 2)	Ongoing

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability Improvement actions	Timetable
The new crime statistics will be compared to the victimisation survey results (also principle 6)	April 2007

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity Improvement actions	Timetable
Further development of metadata – while metadata exists for all surveys further effort is needed to standardise the documentation. This process will be facilitated by the Database Management System, which is currently under development.	September 2007
Implement the result of the existing CSO task-force to improve the presentation and content of the publications (including more graph for time series, for example)	2008
Continue the development of a web portal which will contain links to all validated statistics including those produced by public bodies other than the CSO. The documentation on the portal will include structured metadata describing the statistics.	Phase 1 - Development of portal – Jan 2008
At a later stage, this metadata will include quality measures, such as assessments of the level of compliance with standards. The benefits of this project include.	Phase 2 – Quality Mark – starting in 2008



## 8. ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

<b>Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January</b>		<b>Participants</b>
09.15 – 09.30	Discussion with internal stakeholders Welcome and introduction of programme, organisational matters	D. Garvey (DG), B. Keating, G. O'Hanlon, J. Treacy, D. Jennings
09.30 – 11.00	Meeting with management and senior staff Principle 1 Professional Independence Principle 2 Mandate for data collection Principle 3 Adequacy of resources	G. O'Hanlon, Director J O'Leary, Human resources J Fitzpatrick, BOP analysis and dissemination
11.15 – 12.00	Meeting with management and senior staff Principle 5 Statistical Confidentiality	J. Treacy, Director A. Redmond, data linkage and integrat. S. MacFeely, services
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting with management and senior staff Principle 6 Impartiality and Objectivity Principle 15 Accessibility and Clarity	B. Keating, Director C. Finneran, BOP&Financial Sector J O' Hagan, National accounts
14.00 – 15.00	Interview with DG and Quality manager Principle 4 Quality Commitment	D. Garvey, DG D. Jennings, Stat Methods&developopt M. Cole, Quality Assur &Internal Audit
15.00 – 16.00	Meeting with junior staff – Heads of Unit Principle 1 Professional Independence Principle 2 Mandate for data collection Principle 3 Adequacy of resources Principle 4 Quality Commitment Principle 5 Statistical Confidentiality Principle 6 Impartiality and Objectivity Principle 15 Accessibility and Clarity	see list of participants
16.15 – 17.15	Presentation of strategic master plan Presentation of results of user-satisfaction survey	J. Treacy, Director G. Brady, Social Statistics Integration
<b>Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January</b>		<b>Participants</b>
09.15 – 10.15	Meeting with main users – private sector & universities	J. Power, Friends First M. O'Riordan, ICTU Prof P. Geary, NUI
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with main users & other national data producers Ministries & National Central Bank & ESRI	G. Burke, Dept of Taoiseach F Ruanes, ESRI T. Gallagher, Dept of Finance M. Maguire, Central Bank
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting with the National Statistics Board	see list of participants
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch with the National Statistics Board	
14.30 – 15.30	Meeting with media	B. Keenen, C. Taylor
16.00 – 17.00	Meeting with representatives of respondents	R. Guiney
<b>Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January</b>		<b>Participants</b>
09.30 – 11.15	Conclusions Meeting with management to sum-up and detailed review of list of improvement actions for all principles	D. Jennings, P. J. Crowley J Fitzpatrick, A. Punch
11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with top management: conclusions, recommendations and follow-up (improvement actions)	D. Garvey, DG Directors :B. Keating, G. O'Hanlon, J. Teacy D. Jennings, P. J. Crowley, M. Cole

## 9. ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### Internal

Donal Garvey, Director General  
Bill Keating, Director of Macroeconomic Statistics  
Gerry O'Hanlon, Director of Social Statistics  
Joe Treacy, Director of Business Statistics & Administration  
Dave Jennings, Senior Statistician, Statistical Methods & Development  
John O'Leary, Head of Human Resources  
John Fitzpatrick, Senior Statistician BOP Analysis and Dissemination  
Adrian Redmond, Senior Statistician Data Linkage and Integration  
Steve MacFeely, Senior Statistician Services  
Paul J Crowley, Senior Statistician Business Statistics Integration & International Relations  
Margaret Cole, Statistician, Quality Assurance & Audit  
Catherine Finneran, Senior Statistician BOP & Financial Sector  
John O'Hagan, Senior Statistician National Accounts  
Gerry Brady, Senior Statistician Social Statistics Integration  
Meeting with the Heads of Unit (junior statisticians)  
Kieran Walsh, Statistician Consumer Prices  
Bernadette Cabry, Statistician Labour Costs Survey  
Jennifer Banim, Statistician Statistical Methods & Development  
Claire Hanley, Statistician Trade  
George Hussey, Statistician Industry Results, Analysis and Publications  
Ciaran Counihan, Statistician National Accounts

### External

#### National Statistics Board

Chairperson, Professor Brendan Walsh, University College Dublin.  
Mr. Frank Cunneen, Chairman, Health and Safety Authority.  
Mr. Ciarán Dolan, General Secretary, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA).  
Ms. Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of Taoiseach.  
Mr. Derek Moran, Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance.  
Dr. Pat O'Hara, Western Development Commission (WDC)  
Mr. Paul Sweeney, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).  
Ex-officio member, Mr. Donal Garvey, Director General, CSO.  
Secretary to the Board: Mr. Gerry Brady, Senior Statistician, CSO.

#### Meetings with Main Users – Private Sector

Jim Power - Chief Economist - Friends First  
Manus O'Riordan - Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Prof Patrick Geary - National University of Ireland

#### Meeting with Main Users – Public Sector

George Burke - Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister)  
Frances Ruane - Director – ESRI  
Tony Gallagher - Department of Finance  
Maurice Maguire - Central Bank of Ireland

#### Meeting with Representatives of Respondents

Richard Guiney, Director of Corporate Affairs Chambers Ireland

#### Media

Brendan Keenen, Business Editor of Independent Newspapers  
Cliff Taylor, Editor of the Sunday Business Post

## **Description of organisations**

**Friends First**, has a long financial presence in the Irish market and has built up a reputation as a leading financial services group in the Irish market. It provides a comprehensive range of pensions, investments, protection, finance products and services to more than 250,000 clients. The Group has enjoyed exceptional growth in recent years with total assets in excess of €5.5 billion. Friends First employs over 450 people and has offices in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

**The Irish Congress of trade Unions ICTU** is the largest civil society organisation on the island, representing and campaigning on behalf of some 770,000 working people. There are currently 56 unions affiliated to Congress, north and south of the border. Congress seeks to achieve a just society - one which recognises the rights of all workers and citizens to enjoy the prosperity and fulfilment which leads to a good quality of life. Quality of life embraces not just material well-being, but freedom of choice to engage in the arts, culture and all aspects of civic life. This vision applies in the context of Ireland, Europe and the wider world and challenges the existing economic order.

**NUI, National University of Ireland**, is a federal university comprising the largest element of the Irish University system at the present time. The continuing mission for NUI in modern Ireland is to provide a supportive framework for its confederate institutions, to promote the objects of the University, thus contributing to educational, cultural, social and economic advancement. 'National University of Ireland' currently comprises four Constituent Universities, five Recognised Colleges and one College of a Constituent University

The main role of the **Department of the Taoiseach** is to support and advise the Taoiseach in carrying out the various duties of office. The Department also supplies administrative support to the Government Chief Whip in respect of his duties and provides the Secretariat to the Government. The Department plays a central role in acting as a link between the President, the Taoiseach and other Government Departments. In addition, the Department is involved in a whole range of areas such as the development and co-ordination of policy in relation to Economic and Social Development, Northern Ireland, the European Union and Public Sector Change and Oireachtas Reform.

The **Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)** was founded in 1960 as part of the "Whitaker revolution" in Irish policy-making, its mission is to produce high quality research, with a core focus on Ireland's economic and social development, in order to inform policy-making and societal understanding. ESRI research has been a vital constituent of the national debate for over 40 years. Its in-depth analysis has underpinned many key national decisions, such as joining EMU, undertaking the National Development Plan and embarking on policies to combat poverty.

The **Department of Finance** has a central role in implementing Government policy, in particular the Programme for Government, and in advising and supporting the Minister for Finance and the Government on the economic and financial management of the State and the overall management and development of the public sector. In formulating this advice the Department is guided by its mission which is 'to promote a growing economy which will deliver a high level of sustainable employment, social progress and living standards.'

The **Central Bank of Ireland**, which came into being in 1943, was re-structured and re-named as the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland (CBFSAI) on 1 May 2003. This body carries out all of the activities formerly carried out by the Central Bank of Ireland and additional regulatory and consumer protection functions for the financial services sector.

### **Chambers Ireland**

Chambers Ireland is the country's largest business organisation, with 60 member chambers representing over 12,000 businesses throughout the island of Ireland. It is a company limited by guarantee, owned by its member chambers, which pay an annual membership subscription fee. A chamber of commerce is an organisation made up of local business representatives who join together to promote the economic and social development of their community in order to make it a better place in which to live, work and do business