



**UK COLLABORATIVE
CENTRE FOR
HOUSING EVIDENCE**

UK private rented sector data

Briefing paper

Prof Scott Orford (Cardiff University) and Dr Jennifer Harris (University of Bristol)

3 September 2020



About the authors

Professor Scott Orford is the Data Director for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE). He is a Professor in Geographic Information Science and Spatial Analysis at Cardiff University and is the Research Data Manager and Data Integration Co-ordinator of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD).

Dr Jennifer Harris is a Senior Research Associate for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE), and is based in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

Acknowledgements

This is part of the third project carried out as part of the collaboration between CaCHE, the TDS Charitable Foundation and the SafeDeposits Scotland Charitable Trust. Through this collaboration we are undertaking a diverse programme of research on issues relating to developments in, and operation of, the UK private rented sector. The broad objective of the programme is to contribute to raising standards in the UK private rented sector.



Contents

Background.....	4
Key datasets on the UK PRS	4
Data Type.....	4
Data Content	5
Geography.....	5
Time period.....	5
Other Key Datasets	6
UK Wide.....	6
England.....	6
Wales	6
Scotland.....	7
Northern Ireland.....	7
Discussion	7
Recommendations	8
Statistics on the UK Private Rented Sector.....	9



Background

The UK private rented sector (PRS) has evolved substantially over the past 15 years and has been the focus of significant policy change. Adequate data availability is key to understanding the sector, the way in which it is changing and the impact and effectiveness of different policy measures. A wide range of surveys and other statistics provide a considerable amount of information on the sector. However, concerns have been raised about several key data gaps which hinder our ability to understand the impact of recent legislation and develop effective regulatory responses.¹ This briefing paper identifies and provides a critical commentary of the main data sets which are available across the UK.

Key datasets on the UK PRS

The best quality information on the PRS comes from data drawn from large scale national surveys or large-scale administrative datasets. The Appendix summarises nearly 30 key datasets that could be used to estimate the size of the PRS in each jurisdiction.² These data sets give an indication of the size of the sector and other details regarding the experience and characteristics of people living in the sector (e.g. demographics, rent payments, moves within the sector). These statistics also give an indication of standards and several charities and pressure groups have expressed alarm at the extent of disrepair within sector.³

There are however certain limitations associated with these statistics. They do not include information on landlord behaviour regarding management of the property, for example, whether a deposit has been protected. This can pose significant challenges for policy makers and regulatory agencies. Disaggregated data and granular geographical information are key if local authorities are to develop strategies that exert effective leverage on the various types of landlords and local housing market conditions. A sufficiently disaggregated picture of the private rented sector is necessary to give precise estimates of compliance with different legislative requirements and allow enforcement action to be targeted accordingly.

Data type

The majority (19) of the datasets are cross-sectional surveys of a sample of the population taken annually (a small number are quarterly). This means that although we can get a yearly snapshot of the PRS, it is difficult to produce trends over time because the sample, and therefore the mix of PRS characteristics, will change each time. The only longitudinal survey that can allow us to understand how the PRS is changing is the Understanding Society study which is produced by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. It includes various questions relating to respondent's housing situation and other areas of their lives – income, wealth, partnership, fertility, education, employment, and health. Most questions are asked every year of the same set of persons which provides insights into how people's housing experiences change over time and how they inter-relate with other aspects of their lives. The survey is representative of the UK and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population. This information is especially useful in following individual and household's housing pathways in and out of the PRS. It is less useful in understanding how the PRS housing stock is changing.

¹ Livingston, M., Berry, K., Gibb, K. and, Bailey, N. (2018) [Private Renting Reforms: how to evidence the impact of legislation](#). (Accessed: 30/4/20).

² Office for National Statistics [UK Private Rented Sector 2018](#)

³ Citizens Advice (2017) [It's Broke, lets fix it](#) (Accessed: 23/4/20); Generation Rent (2017) [FOI local government enforcement 2017-18](#) (Accessed: 23/4/20);

Administrative datasets are collections of statistics that are compiled by government departments and agencies during their day-to-day activities. Administrative datasets covering the PRS (9) can provide more detailed information on the housing stock, including basic information on average rents and some information on property characteristics. Administrative datasets can also be more complete in terms of the number of PRS properties because they are not necessarily based on samples. However, the completeness of both survey and administrative datasets in capturing the PRS is dependent on the criteria used to determine inclusion in the dataset and quite often this means that certain sections of the PRS will be missing. The national decennial Census of Population is the most complete dataset to capture the numbers in the PRS, but this is a 10 yearly snapshot so has limitations in understanding how the PRS is changing.

Data content

The datasets vary on the topics and variables they contain. The majority of the large government household surveys have a wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables including information on tenure and the PRS. They tend to have limited information on landlord or tenant behaviour, characteristics of the physical stock and financial data. Information on rents can be obtained from administrative data although this can be limited to simple averages.

Geography

The datasets identified are all national in scope although only 7 have a whole UK focus. It is more typical for survey and administrative datasets to be for a devolved nation - England (6), Wales (4), Scotland (5), Northern Ireland (5), and England and Wales (1). This limits the ability to undertake UK-wide analysis because definitions and methodologies tend to vary between nations, as does the type of data collected, and this is especially the case for administrative datasets. The ability to make housing law and policy has been devolved to the UK nations so some divergence in how housing is monitored and measured is to be expected. However, increased comparability between different nations would be helpful because it would facilitate policy learning.

In terms of geographic granularity, all the datasets allow national figures to be produced with Regional and Local Authority (15) breakdowns available for the majority of datasets (6). Very few datasets allow breakdowns below the level of Local Authority area due to sample size restrictions, although some of the larger government surveys do allow access to finer geographies via secure access agreements. The Census is the only large dataset that provides robust numbers at small scale geographies, but the currency of the data limits its use. This lack of low-level geographical data has significant implications for local authorities' ability to analyse their local housing markets and develop an evidence-based approach to managing the sector.

Time period

Nearly all the datasets are current; a small number are no longer being updated but have been included because they still contain data of interest. Some datasets date back over twenty years or more so can provide a picture of long-term changes in the PRS, bearing in mind the limitations of using cross-sectional data in analysing trends and the possibility of changes in definitions, methodology and data categorisation.

Other key datasets

UK wide

Family Resources Survey (UK wide): is a continuous household survey that collects information on a representative sample of private households in the UK and includes information on tenure. In 2017/18 over 19,000 households were interviewed.

Annual population survey (UK wide): is a continuous household survey based on the Labour Force Survey covering the UK which includes questions on housing. Available at Local Authority level.

Census of Population (England and Wales; Scotland; Northern Ireland): provides details about all people and households who lived in the PRS. Data is available at very low-level geographies. Samples of micro-data and longitudinal data are available through special licenses. However, it is only collected every 10 years and it is 2 years or more before it is made available. The size and nature of the PRS has changed rapidly over recent years. Census is therefore unlikely to provide an accurate picture, or if so, only for a very limited period of time.

Understanding Society (US) / British Household Panel Survey (BHPS): is a continuous UK household longitudinal study. Built on BHPS which ran from 1991-2009 and had 10,000 households. US started in 2009 and has around 40,000 households / 100,000 individuals including 8,000 households from the BHPS. Includes data on housing, has an immigrant and ethnic minority boost sample, allows low level (below local authority) geographical analysis, and can be linked to administrative data. Allows the investigation of short- and long-term changes to tenure.

Index of Private Housing Rental Prices: experimental index for prices paid for renting property from private landlords in the UK. Breakdown for four nations, English regions, 4 dwelling types and furnished / unfurnished accommodation.

Buy to Let: survey undertaken with a sample of Council for Mortgage Lenders (CML) members (banks, building societies and other lenders) from 2013. Includes information on Lending to First time buyers and home movers. Information available for English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

England

English Housing Survey (ENS): a continuous online survey taken with approximately 13,300 households.

Labour Force Survey (LFS): estimates of the PRS in England are taken from the LFS and smoothed. This survey only covers occupied dwellings. To prevent vacancy rate biasing the PRS estimate, data on vacancy from the ENS is used to make adjustment.

English Private Landlord Survey: a national survey of nearly 8,000 landlords and letting agents who own and/or manage privately rented properties in England. Uses data from the tenancy deposit protection schemes and therefore does not include data on landlords who are not protecting tenancy deposits.

Private Rental Market Statistics for England (Scotland and Wales have similar data): annual release of mean, median, lower quartile and upper quartile total monthly rent paid, for a number of bedroom/room categories by English Local Authorities. Data collected by the Valuation Office Agency to support Local Housing Allowance. As sample of properties change each year, not possible to directly compare statistics to infer trends over time.

Wales

National Survey for Wales (including Welsh Housing Conditions Survey): a continuous survey of around 12,000 people a year across Wales. Includes a range of questions on people's housing. Allows local authority level analysis. WHCS based on physical inspections of a sample of 2,500 properties in the NSW 2017-18. Allows national level estimates of the condition and energy efficiency/performance of the housing stock in Wales.

Energy Performance of Buildings Certificates (England and Wales): data are drawn from two datasets on the Energy Performance of Buildings Registers covering England and Wales. Data (including floor area) of domestic and non-domestic buildings which have been constructed, sold or let since 2008. Available at local authority level.

Scotland

Scottish Household Survey (including Scottish House Condition Survey): collects data from a randomised representative sample in Scotland from all local authorities since 2012. Sample size is approximately 10,000. It provides data to a local authority level but not at lower geographies. As discussed above there may be different housing markets at a very small and local level. A compliance problem may exist in certain areas but not in others.

Other surveys (Scotland): These have been identified as possibly increasing our knowledge of the sector: Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, the Scottish Health Survey, Scottish Household survey.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2017-18:⁴ a compendium of the latest statistics drawn from a wide range of mainly Government sources including national surveys (eg NI Continuous Household Survey).

Discussion

Whilst there are several data sets which provide an indication of the size of the private rented sector, there are still several gaps in what we know about the sector. There is very little information on landlord behaviour and their compliance with different regulatory requirements and a lack of geographically specific data. The PRS is not a homogenous market and people's experiences of living in the sector are driven by relatively small local markets. It is not possible to understand what is going on at a geographically specific area without more granular data.

The issue of poor data availability on a low-level geographical basis has particular implications for the role of local authorities in encouraging adherence to the regulation. Developing interventions to address non-compliance depends on the ability to i) determine if a compliance problem exists in their area, and ii) identify the reasons for this behaviour. Where non-compliance is the result of ignorance or inadvertence this would require less interventionist measures such as education or awareness raising. If non-compliance is the result of intentional criminal behaviour, formal enforcement will be a more appropriate response. None of the key datasets identified above provides information on landlord behaviour that could support local authorities in developing effective and appropriately targeted regulatory strategies.

⁴ Department for Communities (2018) [Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2017-18](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

⁵ Office for Statistics Regulation (2017) [Systemic review of public value: Statistics on housing and planning in the UK](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2018) [UK private rented sector: 2018](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

Data gaps in the private rented sector were highlighted in the Office for Statistics Regulation report on Statistics on Housing and Planning in the UK⁵ and the ONS UK Private Rented Sector: 2018 report⁶. Both reports concluded that existing data only presents a partial picture and more is needed to be done on providing coherent and robust statistics that can be compared over time, across geographies and at the local level; issues which have also been highlighted here.

Government statistical agencies are working towards addressing some of these gaps as part of a wider programme of harmonising statistics across the UK, including providing improved access to existing data on housing statistics including the PRS.⁷ The recent Digital Economy Act 2017⁸ has also allowed government statistical agencies access to private rental data which was previously constrained due to legislation around taxpayer confidentiality. The ONS is also looking at using more experimental approaches such as Big Data (e.g. using data from the property website Zoopla)⁹, using supplementary micro-data, and linked administrative data to produce rent statistics and dwelling stock information for small areas (e.g. Welsh Government's Housing Stock Analytical Resource for Wales (HSAR) programme)¹⁰.

Provision in the Digital Economy Act 2017 should allow analysis of micro-rental data alongside Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme data whilst also linking this data to administrative and micro-data to provide a more complete picture of the PRS. The continuing data harmonisation programme is important to allow comparisons across geographies and joined-up working between different agencies, for example in relation to the tenancy deposit schemes, is crucial here. There needs to be more dialogue between data custodians and data users on different needs and requirements – there has already been some important in-roads here in relation to the PRS in general, but it appears that the full potential to address some of the data gaps has yet to be realised.

Recommendations

Although this report highlights some encouraging developments, there needs to be continued and sustained emphasis on the development of private rented sector data by UK government statistical agencies.

UK and devolved governments need to improve the accessibility and quality of data which is available to local authorities on the private rented sector. As discussed in a separate report, we believe that appropriately designed national systems of registration or licensing are key in providing local authorities with the data they need to regulate the sector effectively.¹¹

UK and devolved governments should explore how aggregate administrative data sets such as national registration scheme data could be made available on a lower geographical level. In England, a national system of registration should be introduced.¹²

UK and devolved governments should continue to explore opportunities to improve harmonisation and comparability of data between nations to facilitate learning from different policy developments. Data sets also need to be improved to allow comparisons over time so we can better understand the nature of the sector and how it is changing.

As explored above, there are gaps in our understanding of the stock of the private rented sector, what it looks like and how it has changed over time. UK and devolved government should ensure adequate statistics are available to measure the sector both at an aggregate and at a local housing market level.

⁷ Government Statistical Service [UK Housing and planning statistics landscape: Interactive Tools](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

⁸ The National Archives (2017) [Digital Economy Act 2017](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

⁹ Office for National Statistics (2018) [Research Outputs: Rent price statistics for small areas, Great Britain: 2012-2016](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

¹⁰ Welsh Government (2018) [Housing Stock Analytical Resource](#) (Accessed: 27/8/20)

¹¹ Harris, J., Cowan, D. and Marsh, A. (2020) [Improving compliance with private rented sector legislation](#)

¹² See accompaniment briefing on the role of national registration schemes in developing understanding about the sector – Harris, J. and Orford, S. (2020) Assessing compliance with deposit protection requirements.

Statistics on the UK Private Rented Sector

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
UK WIDE											
1	Buy to Let	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Information on buyers	Council for Mortgage Lenders (CML)	UK	Regional	2013	On-go- ing	Quarterly	Varies	Parts of the data are available but full access only available through membership of CML
2	Census Aggre- gate Data	Census	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables	UK Data Service - Census Support	UK	Census Output Area	1971	On-go- ing	Other	Total Population	Freely available to download from UK Data Service

3	Family Resources Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition and socio-economic variables including income and financial circumstances.	DWP	UK	Regional (LSOA/ Datazone special License)	1992	On-going	Annual	20,000 households interviewed	Regional data freely available. Sensitive versions via secure setting
4	Labour Force Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional / quasi-longitudinal	Wide range of demographic and socio-economic variables	ONS	UK	Regional	1992	On-going	Quarterly	41,000 household/ 100,000 individuals	UK Data Service: Registration; terms and conditions apply
5	Living Costs and Food Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Diary records of daily expenditure for two weeks. Wide range of demographic and socio-economic variables	ONS	UK	Regional	1957	On-going	Annual	4,761 households	Free to download from the ONS and UK Data Service

6	UK Construction Market Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Expert opinions about the state of the residential sales and lettings markets	RICS	UK	Regional	1994	On-going	Quarterly	Varies	Data available to download after (free) registration but only as PDF report
7	Index of Private Housing Rental Prices	Administrative	Change in price of renting residential property from all private landlords.	Valuation Office Agency	UK	Regional	2013	On-going	Monthly	500,000	Freely available datasets
8	UK Construction Market Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Expert opinions about the state of the residential sales and lettings markets	RICS	UK	Regional	1994	On-going	Quarterly	Varies	Data available to download after (free) registration but only as PDF report
9	Understanding Society (prev. British Household Panel Survey)	Sample survey Longitudinal	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic, dwelling and neighbourhood variables	UK Data Service	UK	LSOA/ Datazone (special License)	1991	On-going	Annual	40,000 households /100,000 individuals	UK Data Service: Registration

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
ENGLAND											
10	Dwelling Stock (including vacants)	Administrative	Limited information on dwellings	MHCLG	England	Local authority	1994	On-going	Annual	All dwelling stock	Live tables are freely available on MHCLG website
11	Private Rental Market Statistics	Administrative	Mean, median, lower quartile and upper quartile total monthly rent paid, for a number of bedroom/room categories.	Valuation Office Agency	England	Local authority	2011	On-going	Annual	Varies	Freely available datasets
12	English Housing Survey/ Household Dataset	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables	MHCLG/ DECC	England	National (secure access for smaller geographies)	2008	On-going	Annual (physical survey 2 years)	13,300 households	Anonymised English Housing Survey data sets via End User Licences at UK Data Service.

13	Anonymised English Housing Survey data sets via End User Licences at UK Data Service.	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Stock profile; amenities; services and the local environment; dwelling condition and safety; energy performance; energy-inefficient dwellings.	MHCLG/ DECC	England	National (secure access for smaller geographies)	2008	On-going	Annual (physical survey 2 years)	6,200 dwellings	Anonymised English Housing Survey data sets via End User Licences at UK Data Service.
14	English Housing Survey/ Private Landlords Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Respondent characteristics; landlord's portfolio; nationality/ethnicity; licensing; letting practice; acquisition of the rental property; current letting; financial information about current letting; tenancies that ended in last two years; repairs; neighbourhood; landlord problems.	MHCLG/ DECC	England	National (secure access for smaller geographies)	2001	2018	Other	7,823 landlords and agents registered with TDP scheme	Anonymised PLS dataset via UK Data Service. Additional geographic identifiers are available via Secure Access

15	Quarterly revenue outturn for local authorities	Administrative	This dataset contains administrative data on quarterly revenue outturn for local authorities in England.	MHCLG	England	Local authority	2011	On-going	Quarterly	All revenue outturn	Freely accessible quarterly datasets are provided for 2011-present via the MHCLG website.
----	---	----------------	--	-------	---------	-----------------	------	----------	-----------	---------------------	---

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
ENGLAND AND WALES											
16	Energy Performance of Buildings Certificates	Administrative	Energy efficiency rating, environmental performance rating, floor area, CO2 emissions and fuel costs	MHCLG	England and Wales	Postcode	2008	On-going	Quarterly	All Certificates	Live tables are freely available on the MHCLG website

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
WALES											
17	Welsh House Condition Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Physical stock characteristics	Welsh Government	Wales	Local authority	1997	On-going	Other	2,500 properties in 2018	Free to download as a PDF report from the Welsh Government Website
18	Living in Wales Survey	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables	Welsh Government	Wales	Local authority	2004	2008	Annual	7,700 individuals	Free to download data as excel spreadsheet from the Welsh Government webpage.
19	National Survey for Wales	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, socio-economic, dwelling and neighbourhood variables	Welsh Government	Wales	Local authority	2012	On-going	Annual	12,000 individuals (660 per LA)	Free to download data as excel spreadsheet from the Welsh

20	Private Sector Rents	Administrative	Simple averages based returns from individual private landlords and letting agents via Rent Officers Wales (excludes payment by housing benefit)	Welsh Government	Wales	Local authority	2013	On-going	Annual	Transactional data only where rent has been paid	Free download from Welsh Government webpage
----	----------------------	----------------	--	------------------	-------	-----------------	------	----------	--------	--	---

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
SCOTLAND											
21	Houses in Multiple Occupation (Housing Statistics for Scotland)	Administrative	Information on Housing in Multiple Occupation licences.	Scottish Government	Scotland	Local authority	2001	On-going	Annual	All HMO licenses	A full freely accessible data table
22	New House-building in Scotland (Housing Statistics for Scotland)	Administrative	Data on starts and completions across different tenures and Affordable Housing supply	Scottish Government	Scotland	Local authority	1996	On-going	Quarterly	All starts and completions	Full freely accessible data table via the Scottish Government website.

23	Private Sector Rent Statistics 2010-2015	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Rent levels for different property sizes. Average rents as well as rents at the higher and lower end of the market	Scottish Government	Scotland	Other	2010	2015	Other	c25,000 to 28,000 individual rents	Freely accessible data tables from the Scottish
24	Scottish Household Survey (including Scottish House Condition Survey)	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables	Scottish Government	Scotland	Local authority (two-year basis).	2003	On-going	Annual	Around 14,500 households per annum	Annual published tables freely accessible. Request for LA identifiers.
25	Scottish Survey Core Questions	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition and socio-economic variables	Scottish Government	Scotland	Local authority	2012	On-going	Annual	21,000 individuals	Freely accessible data tables are provided via the Scottish Government website.

ID	Dataset	Data type	Content/ variables	Owner	Geography	Smallest Geographic Unit	Time start	Time end	Frequency	Indicative sample size	Data access
NORTHERN IRELAND											
26	Living in the Private Rented Sector (Northern Ireland)	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Topics covered included housing history, future intentions, rents, housing benefit, landlord-tenant relationships and attitudes to living in the private sector.	Northern Ireland Housing Executive	Northern Ireland	National	2014	2014	Other	138 individuals	Report free. Raw data not provided on the website.
27	Family Resources Survey (Northern Ireland)	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition and socio-economic variables including income and financial circumstances.	Department of Social Development (DSD)	Northern Ireland	Regional	2003	On-going	Annual	3600 addresses	National data free to download

28	Northern Ireland Housing Statistics	Administrative	Wide range of data on Housing supply, Energy, Social renting demand, Private renting demand, Owner occupier demand and household characteristics	Department of Social Development (DSD)	Northern Ireland	Local authority	1999	On-going	Annual	Varies	Data free to download from DSD website
29	Continuous Household Survey (Northern Ireland)	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Wide range of demographic, household composition, socio-economic and dwelling variables	CSU	Northern Ireland	National	1983	On-going	Annual	9,000 addresses	Excel data sheets can be downloaded from NISRA
30	Private Rented Sector (Northern Ireland)	Sample survey Cross-sectional	Commercial rental data has been combined with NIHE rent data	Northern Ireland Housing Executive	Northern Ireland	Local authority	2013	On-going	Other	Varies	Free to download from the NIHE website